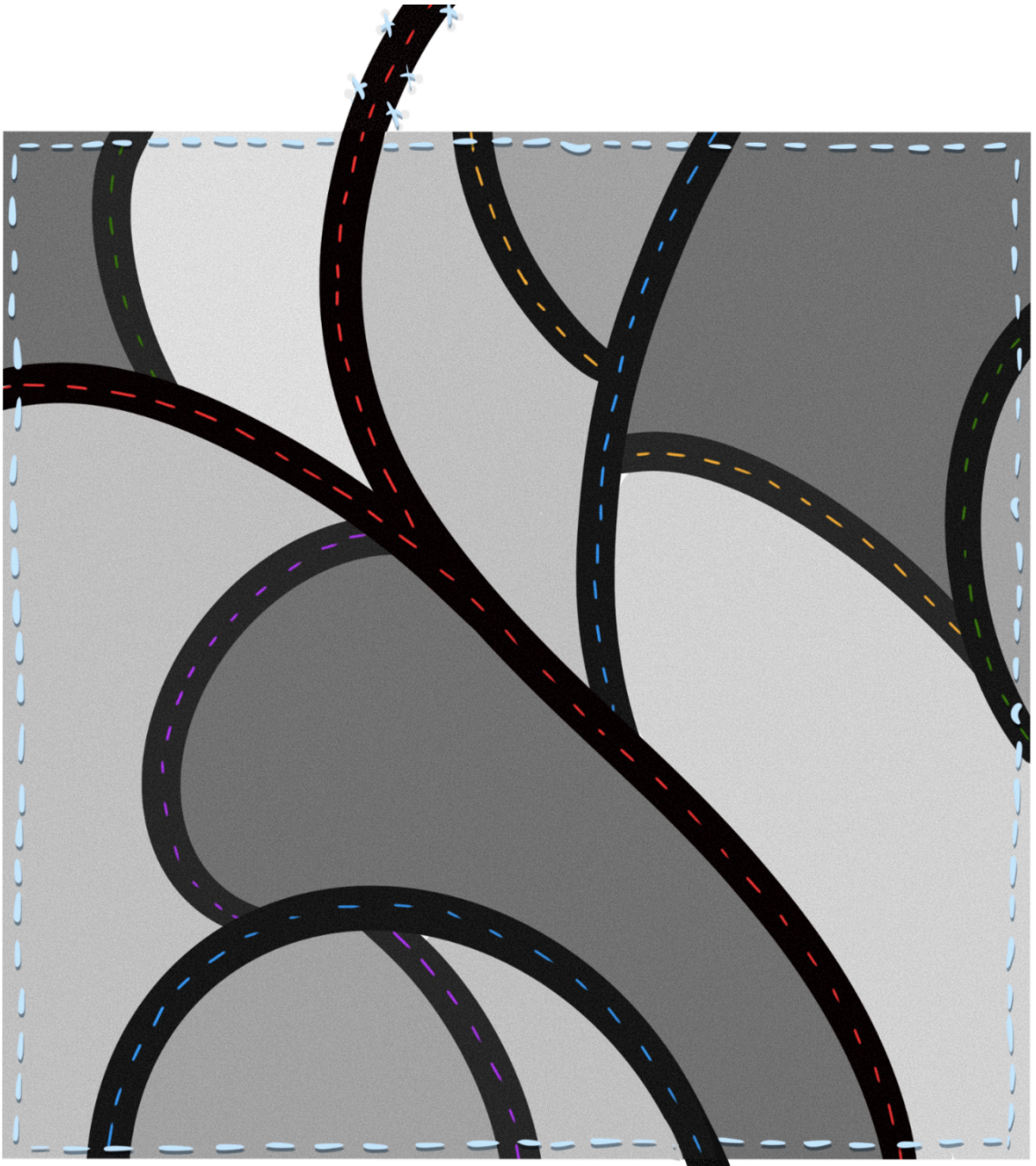


INTERSECTIONALITIES WOVEN

An Anthology of Undergraduate Research



PONTIFICIA
UNIVERSIDAD
CATÓLICA
DE CHILE



PROYECTO ANILLO ATE220025

DESPATRIARCAR Y DESCOLONIZAR DESDE EL SUR DE CHILE: GÉNERO E INVESTIGACIÓN EN LA FORMACIÓN INICIAL DOCENTE

The collection *Subjectivity and Writing in Undergraduate Studies* aims to promote the academic work carried out in the Bachelor's Degree in Literature programs at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, the Universidad Austral, and the Universidad de Chile through the publication of a book derived from semester-long research projects or research conducted toward an academic degree. In addition to the disciplinary content learned in the courses, students engage in collaborative work, which involves conceptualizing and designing a collective book, as well as exploring their own lines of research. The collection seeks to ensure that students, from the very beginning of their studies, experience the possibility of becoming professionals who are aware that words live beyond the classroom, in active engagement with society.

The collection was created and is directed by Rubí Carreño as part of the Anillo Project ATE220025, *Decolonizing and Depatriarchalizing from the South: Gender and Research in Initial Teacher Education*, in which Professor Carreño serves as Principal Investigator.

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Prologue I

The papers found in the following anthology were written by a group of female undergraduate students with an interest in social issues applied to literary studies. We hope the papers will be useful for teachers of English -and other disciplines- who wish to incorporate intersectional readings into their classrooms. The anthology consists of ten essays, organized according to the themes they address: women and feminism, knowing oneself and one's body, female empowerment, oppression, colonization, and identity. The essays are connected by a feminist perspective and intersectional ideas in relationship to multiple types of oppression. In this way, they come as a response to the need to study a wide variety of pieces from the media and portray the struggles of different oppressed groups around the world.

Each participant in this anthology took it upon themselves to carefully research topics of interest to them, demonstrating passion and eagerness to delve deeper into their subjects in the context of the course "Research in Literature". Writing about the topics addressed in this collection was, many times, exhausting and unpleasant since it involved thorough observation and questioning of our surroundings as well as self-discovery. This process was filled with anger, discomfort and concern at times. At others, we felt bursts of power, enthusiasm, and hope.

Our purpose is to communicate the importance of listening to oftentimes unheard voices and disclosing the particular ways in which each of them experiences oppression to this day. We believe that each paper managed to teach and expand the mind and soul of each researcher and hope that it will do the same for the readers. Please regard this anthology as an opportunity to see one another, to help our words reach out further.

Viviana Rojas, Anita Fuentes, Catalina Cuevas, and Sofía Lalut, 4th year students of Literature in English, Faculty of Letters, PUC, Santiago de Chile*, April 27, 2023*

Prologue II

The anthology "Intersectionalities Woven: An Anthology of Undergraduate Research" marks a first in my career. I was fortunate to have been assigned the "Research in Literature" course, in the Literature Department within the Faculty of Letters, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, three semesters in a row (one semester in 2021 and both semesters in 2022). The choice to focus on "Intersectionalities" reflects my own journey as a researcher of indigenous literatures and histories and my interest in creating spaces for students to spend time with texts that apply both to literature and their lives, inside and outside of the classroom.

Each semester began with Kimberlé Crenshaw's groundbreaking scholarship, exploring the numerous ways researchers have expanded upon her work. Mid-way through the semester students chose a literary or cultural artefact to focus on and analyze. The process of researching critical articles and drafting their essays was facilitated by peer review and small-group sessions. We kept in mind the call made by material feminist scholars Stacey Alaimo and Susana Heckman, among others before them, to pay attention to our emotional and body responses to the texts we were reading.

The three groups of students were exceptional. During the process they worked on naming their positionalities and on identifying the topics that were important to them and for which intersectionalities was helpful. For some of the authors here, intersectionalities was a useful tool for thinking about class, race, and gender in literary texts. For others, it was a platform

from which to explore a variety of other theoretical and cultural areas including affect studies, disability studies, representations of normativity in Disney and Pixar, and more.

The motivation, hard work and collaboration put into this anthology is truly remarkable. Not all of the students whose work is included knew each other, and yet, they managed to carve out time to help each other create the final product. Thank you to the dedication and commitment of the Editors of the anthology: Viviana Rojas, Anita Fuentes, Catalina Cuevas, and Sofía Lalut. And to the imaginative Creative Team: Sofía Aranda and Karen Bravo.

You are all such incredible people, and I am so grateful for our class sessions, your creativity, your wit ("pop academia") and the many moments where you shared your passions, concerns, your anger, and your hope. The expression and exploration of these emotions was crucial to the critical work which is your writing. Congratulations! May the readers enjoy and learn from the unique voices found in "Intersectionalities Woven: An Anthology of Undergraduate Research."

Allison Ramay, Associate Professor of English Literature, Faculty of Letters, PUC, Santiago de Chile, *April 27, 2023*



"SHE MUST BE SEEING THINGS": SENSE OF SELF AND UNRELIABILITY IN *THE DROWNING GIRL: A MEMOIR'S NARRATOR*

by Catalina Paz Paris Ibarra

Introduction

There is something about reliability, as a character trait, that seems unfathomable when it comes to the public perception of schizophrenia. The stereotype of severe symptomatology (such as the perceived connection between acute hallucinations and violence) has played an important role in this regard — unsurprisingly, any person could, solely based on the information that they receive through the media, wonder: how can a person who sees and hears things that are not there, who remembers things that are not factual be, in any situation, reliable? However, this seemingly reasonable question relies on a particular fallacy: anything that is not factual cannot be, apparently, part of a *real* experience. The unreliability of the schizophrenic person is not defined, in the public eye, by the capacity that any person has of lying, but by the certainty that any experience that they voice is, to some degree, a construction of their ill mind, riddled with hallucinations, delusions, intrusive thoughts, and fictitious events. Yet, the memory of any individual human being is tinted by subjectivity, and alongside perception, it can create "fictitious" remembrances in any mind, ill or not. For instance, we will notice that in visiting a place we only knew as children, one of the first things to come to mind will be surprise at its size ("it's much smaller than I remember," we may say). Furthermore, anything that the senses contribute to the human experience is interpreted subjectively, and it may be said that it is impossible for anyone to see what the other sees, or hear what anyone else hears. None of these things make us question whether a healthy mind's experience is true or not. This is a privilege that is denied to those with schizophrenia.

This situation may be extrapolated to the world of literature and the fiction genre: narrators may be deemed unreliable due to their distance from the events, or to their

consumption of drugs—in short, unreliability is explained by external factors. The unreliability of narrators with schizophrenia is not explained in the same manner; contrarily, the incongruencies in their narration are perceived to be bound to their illness. With these ideas in mind, in this paper, I will analyze the narrator in the novel *The Drowning Girl: A Memoir* by Caitlin R. Kiernan. India Morgan Phelps (Imp), the narrator of the story, is described (both within and outside the novel) as an unreliable narrator, someone who will misremember and lie due to her illness. But is she really unreliable? Or, does she think she is because she is expected to be so? In this paper, I will argue that Imp's perceived unreliability as a narrator is informed by the stereotype of schizophrenia; to do this, I will analyze her sense of self, as understood by John and Paul Lysaker. Additionally, I will argue that the function of this depiction of unreliability lies in the representation of a realistic character who shows complexity of thought. Within the narrative, Imp is more than her diagnosis of schizophrenia; this has implications for us, the readers.

Biographical Context

The Drowning Girl: A Memoir, written by Caitlin R. Kiernan, is a novel that tells the story of India Morgan Phelps (nicknamed Imp), a diagnosed schizophrenic who writes down her life in the hopes of figuring out her recent past. In the novel, Imp states that she aims to write without lying in order to riddle out two of her memories, which are mutually exclusive or otherwise factually impossible: meeting a person (Eva), for the first time, *twice.* Throughout this journey, she also writes about Phillip George Saltonstall's painting titled *The Drowning Girl*, which she states is crucial for her story—later on, other important symbolisms such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Little Mermaid*, and L'Inconnue de La Seine play a role in framing her experience of the world. As the story progresses, Imp challenges her own memories and questions her assertion of reality, all with the objective of understanding how it is that she acquired two different memories of one single event.

The novel contains autobiographical elements, as it is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth Tillman Aldridge (1970 - 1995); in her online journal, the author published an entry originally written in 2004, where she talks about her overall feelings and experience in regards to Aldridge and her death. On August 3rd, 1995, Elizabeth, who Kiernan admits to having loved deeply and strongly, took her own life. As it seems, there are many parallels between the author's experience and that of the novel's main character, Imp: Elizabeth and Eva both take their own lives, and their lovers, Caitlin and Imp, learn about their deaths a week after the fact. It is safe to say that there may be many more similarities; however, details regarding Caitlin and Elizabeth's personal relationship remain, overall, unknown, and thus confidently stating such other parallels would be inaccurate and inappropriate.

Theoretical Considerations

What is Schizophrenia?

"Dementia Praecox" is a term that Doctor Emil Kraepelin popularized in the medical field in 1893. As the Latin name suggests, Kraeplin regarded the disorder as premature dementia, characterized by a "loss of cognitive function and mental integrity, accompanied by progressive deterioration, loss of will, and abnormalities in attention and interest, memory and affect" (Lukens 160). In this sense, schizophrenia was first conceived as a degenerative disorder that mainly manifested during youth.

Fifteen years later, Eugen Bleuler introduced a different denomination for dementia praecox: "the Group of Schizophrenias," later on abbreviated to the term we know and use today, "schizophrenia." For Bleuler, schizophrenia was characterized by two types of symptoms: fundamental and accessory symptoms, which presented themselves through disturbed behavior (Lukens 160). While most of the symptoms Bleuler regarded as part of the disorder are now considered "cognitive" symptoms, the so-called accessory symptomatology

included the first-ever registry of "positive" symptoms in the history of schizophrenia: mainly, hallucinations and delusions.

This brief history of schizophrenia brings us to today's conception of the illness. Schizophrenia, as defined by specialists in the 21st century, is an illness that is characterized by continuous or repeated psychotic relapses of episodic nature; these relapses are accompanied and/or replaced by cognitive and emotional impairment. This means that schizophrenia is a disorder with three underlying types of symptoms: positive symptoms (which are linked to psychosis and include hallucinatory and delusional experiences), negative symptoms (an example being affective flattening) and cognitive symptoms (which are, as their name suggests, related to cognitive functioning; in the case of schizophrenia, cognition is impaired. For instance, memory may be negatively affected in those with schizophrenia). It is important to consider that the main difference between positive and negative symptomatology lies in how they interact with the person's reality: positive symptoms *add* elements, while negative symptoms *take them away*.

The Stigma of Schizophrenia

Despite having been part of public knowledge for more than a century, schizophrenia is still not fully understood, a fact that has a gruesome consequence for those who suffer from the illness: the stigma that arises from either the illness' symptoms or its diagnosis often results in social rejection. And while schizophrenia's most typically known symptoms, such as acute positive symptomatology (e.g. extremely severe hallucinations leading to violent behaviors), are the building blocks for the way in which schizophrenics are viewed by society at large, many secondary symptoms (which lend their "helping hand" to build stereotypes) often escape the public's eye. According to Jill M. Hooley, schizophrenia is accompanied by impaired social functioning, as she points out that "patients with schizophrenia seem relatively less aware of the rules that govern social situations and that facilitate smooth and

effective personal exchanges" (239); this symptom is often overlooked or unknown by the general public, yet it causes severe social consequences for those with schizophrenia.

An impaired social functioning, as Hooley claims, underlies impaired social skills and thus is expressed through behavior. This means that patients with schizophrenia have trouble with particular tasks in social interactions—for example, schizophrenics tend to have difficulty with problem-solving strategies in social situations and with understanding subtle social cues. Additionally, they tend to lack assertiveness when faced with a challenge and appear to be unable to recognize emotions as expressed by facial gestures. According to Hooley, this makes it so people with schizophrenia are perceived as strange and avoided by others, and those who share a living space with a patient experience a feeling of rejection towards them—as it is hinted by research, the stigma that people with schizophrenia face is engaged in a recursive space, where impaired social functioning feeds rejection and negative attitudes fuel behaviors such as isolation in patients. However, it seems that "gender differences in social skills may be specific to schizophrenia" (240), as female patients have been proven by extensive research to fare better than males when it comes to social functioning. Regardless of gender differences, though, all schizophrenic people are met with rejection and stigma.

Considering schizophrenia as a category within the broader scope of "mental illness," there is another aspect regarding stigma that needs to be addressed: clinical diagnosis and the ways in which it may contribute to the stereotype of schizophrenia. According to Patrick W. Corrigan, "the use of diagnostic terms can sometimes worsen the stigma of mental illness" (31). This stigma, in turn, will severely and negatively affect the quality of life of those with mental illness; Corrigan mentions, for instance, the fact that job positions and housing opportunities may be held from mentally ill people due to said illness—and, as Corrigan

points out, these negative consequences could potentially be aided by the clinical terms used for diagnosis/the definition of the disorder.

Corrigan affirms that the public perceives mentally ill people as a homogeneous group, characterized by their "differentness"; in other words, mental illness is outside of normalcy. Additionally, due to the perceived homogeneity and "groupness," generalizations are the norm: if one person with a mental illness reacts violently, then it is safe to assume, based on the perception of "groupness," that all of them will be violent. The author recognizes three main directions where this stigma may lead those with mental illness: rejection of treatment and diagnosis to avoid a label that is attached to stigma, blocked life goals, and self (internalized) stigma.

All this stated, it is important to contemplate Corrigan's definition of stigma, which takes into consideration both social and cognitive aspects and recognizes four main stages: firstly, there is a perceived cue. This may be a physical trait, or a label (a diagnosis). Following this, the cue conjures a stereotype about the group perceived, which leads to prejudice (the endorsement of the stereotype) and, finally, devolves into discrimination. The diagnostic label and criteria, he states, are part of the prejudice, as symptomatology is used to endorse the fixed beliefs about the mental illness. Impaired social functioning in schizophrenia, as explained by Hooley, would be considered perceived cues—however, these cues are not linked to the label "schizophrenia," and as such remain a mostly silent ingredient for the recipe that is stigma. This definition is relevant as it breaks down the concept of stigma and organizes it as a process where the prejudice and the stereotype may not have the same source; in other words, those who endorse a stereotype could acquire it somewhere other than the cue.

(Un)reliability of the Narrator

According to Tamar Yacobi, reliability and unreliability in narration are not definitive markers; one moment of unreliability, for instance, will not define the narrator, as it is stated that "one must not, [therefore], confuse even typical or plausible configurations in literature with categorical rules" (223). Patterns in a narrative, considered as Yacobi does, do not lead to so-called "package deals," and we cannot draw generalizations from them.

Yacobi states that a reader may draw two generalizations (or package deals) based on the information given by a narrator. On the one hand, if there are congruences in the narration, we will conclude that the narrator is reliable; contrarily, inconsistencies will point to overall unreliability, unawareness and untrustworthiness. The narrator, as a figure, is placed in either extreme, and every element within the narrative is regarded as part of that extreme; with this kind of consideration, the narrative and its narrator become "package deals." For Yacobi, however, the narrator should be considered within a spectrum of (un)reliability, where congruences and inconsistencies serve a particular purpose within the narrative (e.g. irony). (Un)reliability is not a fixed, inherent feature of the narrator in a fictive text, but rather a fluid, movable and purposeful source within the narrative.

A Dialogical Theory of the Self

All of the elements previously explained (schizophrenia, its social consequences, the disadvantages of diagnosis and a narrator's (un)reliability) will come together through the analysis of the novel, which will be done within the broader frame of "sense of self." John and Paul Lysaker propose that the self is constructed through dialogue between different first-order positions (roles) and metapositions (judgment of those roles) that are determined by the self and by societal demands. The authors use this theory to analyze the schizophrenic condition, taking three particular symptoms into consideration: hallucinations, delusions, and diminishment of will and desire. As the authors point out, "persons with the illness [schizophrenia] often describe themselves as having been inextricably damaged" (11)—rather

than feeling like different people altogether, patients with schizophrenia report that the illness and its symptoms have made them lose a fundamental part of themselves. In other words, schizophrenia brings about an overall loss of the sense of self. This, the authors state, is due to a profound change in the experience of the world and a fragmentation of the self (where aspects of the self no longer seem to fit; e.g. going from being outgoing to practicing constant self-isolation). The sense of self is damaged because the illness brings forth a perceived experience of self-destruction.

General Considerations Before Analysis

Reliability, as a general concept, can be defined as the quality of being able to be trusted or believed because of working or behaving well; with this definition taken into consideration, it is reasonable to understand reliability as a conditional quality: if its conditions are violated at least once, then reliability is lost. In other words, reliability is a quality defined by the extremes: one either *is* or *is not* reliable, with no in-betweens. This is the topic (or rather, its opposite—unreliability) that will be dealt with when analyzing the narrator of the novel *The Drowning Girl: A Memoir.*

In the story, Imp constructs her sense of self through the use of many different first-order positions and metapositions (roles and their self-evaluations). For the purposes of this paper, however, this analysis will dive into the main positions "self-as-crazy" and "self-as-a-schizophrenic-person" (the distinction of which will be explained later on, with the novel's content in mind), while considering the positions "self-as-narrator," "self-as-unreliable" and "self-as-reliable"; other roles and metapositions will be mentioned (e.g. "self-as-daughter"), yet the focus will not be on them. It is important to consider that, while the roles and metapositions aforementioned will be scrutinized individually, since sense of self is built off a dialogical relationship between its elements (Lysaker 4), the center of this research will be placed on the interaction between them and not on their individual

understanding. Additionally, the novel contains two short stories, both written by the main character; given that this paper's objective is tied to Imp's sense of self, these stories will not be considered in-depth for this analysis.

The Self as a Schizophrenic Person

John and Paul Lysaker define a *metaposition* as the judgment that the self draws on themselves when it comes to a particular role (or first-order-position) (5); in order to understand the narrator's self-assessed unreliability, it is relevant to dive into the main first-order positions and metapositions Imp uses to characterize herself, as they are a tool that will help recognize the different cues and stereotypes that inform this vision. One such position is "self-as-a-schizophrenic-person."

The story begins with Imp relating her family's history with schizophrenia; her mother and grandmother, both diagnosed schizophrenics, committed suicide. Furthermore, she states that there is strong evidence to suggest that a great-aunt of hers could have had the illness as well. Yet, even with this hinted genetic trait in her bloodline, her own diagnosis catches her by surprise; indeed, she states that "it simply hadn't occurred to me that the way I saw the world meant that I had inherited 'the Phelps Family Curse'" (19). From this one quote, we can begin to understand the way she regards herself as a person with schizophrenia (in other words, this quote hints at a *metaposition*). Firstly, she had never connected her experience of the world with her family's mental health record; as she says, it *simply hadn't occurred to her*. The easiest, most simple way for her to interpret her vision of the world was to regard it as something "normal", outside of the bounds of schizophrenia. This interpretation, however, is quickly broken once she learns of her diagnosis. By contrast, what she regarded as her vision of the world becomes part of a *curse*, one that is seemingly linked to her mother's bloodline. And this *curse*, given the details she relates, leads to death, to suicide. Everyone in her family who has been *cursed* with schizophrenia (her mother,

grandmother, and possibly her great-aunt) has ended their own lives; it may be that she expects her life to end in the same manner — as Imp states herself, she told her mother that she "wouldn't be angry if that's what she had to do, if she had to die" (18-19) prior to her suicide at hospital; the *curse* within her family, in Imp's own words, leads to a life experience that ends in a death that *has* to happen, to an act (suicide) that *has* to be done unavoidably. Given that Imp discloses that she has tried to kill herself twice before, this is not an unthinkable scenario; not only that, her words reveal a belief that suicide is an inevitable course of action for a schizophrenic person.

And, indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Imp feels identified with her diagnosis, at least to a certain extent (in other words, she identifies, to a degree, as a schizophrenic person). Imp states that she was at first, when she was younger, diagnosed with disorganized schizophrenia, also known as hebephrenia[1]. While the particulars of said diagnosis are not relevant in this context, she says something about hebephrenia and her final diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia that is crucial:

> Hebephrenia is named after the Greek goddess of youth because it tends to manifest at puberty. I didn't bother to point out that if the way I thought and saw the world meant I was schizophrenic, the crazy had started well before puberty. Anyway, later, after more tests, the diagnosis was changed to paranoid schizophrenia, which isn't named after a Greek goddess, or any god that I'm aware of. (19)

Here, the most important detail lies in the word *goddess/god*. The first diagnosis Imp was given did not make sense to her, as it did not relate to her reality (symptoms of schizophrenia, as she points out, started *before* she hit puberty); thus, the fact that disorganized

[1] Hebephrenia is a subtype of schizophrenia that is characterized by the loss of cognitive functions; some of its symptoms include disorganized speech and behavior and flattened affect. Unlike paranoid schizophrenia, prominent positive symptomatology is uncommon for those with hebephrenia, although it may be present. It is important to note that subtypes of schizophrenia, as of 2022, are no longer considered in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual), due to the inaccuracy and unreliability that they produced in the diagnostic process; in other words, professionals deem subtypes of schizophrenia useless when it comes to diagnosis. (Mental Health UK, Verywell mind).

schizophrenia, which she cannot make sense of in her experience of the world, is named after a deity is important to her because, like a goddess, it is unreachable — deities experience the world differently, and so her fixation on this piece of information about hebephrenia is key: she does not identify her view of the world with this diagnosis, as hebephrenia hints at a worldview other than her own, like a god's. Contrarily, paranoid schizophrenia, which is her final diagnosis, is *not* named after any god; in other words, it is accessible for her, and thus she can make sense of her reality through the label of paranoid schizophrenia. This means that the way she connects a diagnosis of schizophrenia with an inevitable and untimely death due to suicide also applies to herself, at least to some degree.

Additionally, there is seemingly a direct link between her position of self-as-daughter (as a role, a *first-order-position*) and her perception of schizophrenia and some of its symptomatology (the symptom in question being intrusive thinking). As she states in the novel, she keeps a "list of various unpleasant ends that may have befallen my father" (18), which concludes with her hoping that "my father lost his mind and died alone and frightened" (18), just like she believes her mother did. Here, we are in the presence of an intrusive thought (an unwelcome, unexpected thought or image that may lead to/confirm a delusion): her father dying in an untimely and horrible manner will lead to retribution for her mother's (and her own) suffering. Her father, as she understands, abandoned her and her mother because of the latter's illness, and given that she believes, to a certain degree, that she will meet her end in a similar fashion as her mother did, there is a perceived desire for retribution; in her eyes, her father is responsible for her mother's suicide. This worldview, like any delusion, is confirmed by the list, the intrusive thought. At first, this embarrasses her, and she hides the list in a suitcase under her bed; later on, she displays it on a bookshelf. This marks a clear shift from a negative to a somewhat positive perception of schizophrenia and some of its symptomatology; yet, the reason behind this change is unclear.

It also appears that the way she regards schizophrenia is directly dependent on *who* has it and *how* exactly it makes itself known. For example, while both she and her great-aunt are somewhat linked to the label of schizophrenia, she states “I have my amber bottles of pills, my mostly reliable pharmacopeia of antipsychotics and sedatives, which are not half so interesting as my great-aunt’s bottles of mice and sparrows" (20). Both of them have a collection of bottles, but only her great-aunt’s are *interesting*; hers, as she later relates, give her weight gain, fatigue and acne. Her great-aunt’s possible schizophrenia is worthy of interest, while her own confirmed diagnosis is not. So, she marks herself negatively as a subject in either group: when compared to those without schizophrenia, she is *cursed,* yet when compared to others with schizophrenia she is *uninteresting.* The *metaposition* of “self-as-a-schizophrenic-person”, where Imp regards herself negatively, yet judges some symptoms positively, creates a backdrop for the rest of the story. Additionally, it provides a layer of complexity for her character, as opposing positions and self-assessments regarding schizophrenia are interwoven in Imp’s narrative. This, understanding that John and Paul Lysaker state that first-order-positions and metapositions may be contradictory yet coexist within one individual—a fact made possible by the separate activation of each (2).

The Self as Crazy

Closely related to the negative perception of schizophrenia and the self, Imp uses, throughout the novel, the words “schizophrenia/schizophrenic” and “crazy” interchangeably. This last word, particularly, she uses to try and explain her behavior as a narrator and writer. “Am I dragging my feet because I’m a crazy woman who knows damn well she’s crazy, but who doesn’t want to be reminded just how crazy she is by having to tell two stories that are true, when only one can be factual? I feel as though I’m doing just exactly that. [...] Am I a crazy woman only transferring her delusions and disordered consciousness into the written word?” (56); in this context, *crazy* is used as an encumbrance, an impediment, and thus

creates an even more negative connotation for the illness (schizophrenia) than the one carried in the word “schizophrenia” and “schizophrenic”. “Schizophrenia” is tied to her family’s *curse*, whereas “crazy” is related to the impediments that directly affect her in certain roles (such as that of narrator/writer). One thing to note is that this quote shows us a glimpse of one positive aspect to the word “crazy”: Imp states that she *knows she is crazy*, which means that she is aware and can, presumably, draw judgment upon her own words and thoughts by following logic—she can recognize the lack of logic in her thoughts and actions, and admit them accordingly. For brief moments, she can look at herself from the outside rather than from within. This is an ability that everyone has, and makes Imp something more than just a person with schizophrenia.

In what ways, exactly, do we see this ability within the novel? She manages to step in and out of her role as a narrator and writer, making judgments upon the story she is telling; she questions the pace and content of her own writing, and attributes it to her “craziness” (as shown in the previous quote). Throughout the novel, she regards herself in different ways and moments as an unreliable narrator. For example, when it comes to the story she is writing she states that she will try to depict the events without lying, yet it “is not to say every word will be factual. Only that every word will be true. Or as true as I can manage“ (21). Here, she draws a distinction between *fact* and *truth*; facts, she says, are perceived equally by all, whereas truth is subjective. With this quote, then, she is stating that she will retell events as she remembers them, drawing them from her own subjectivity[2].

However, she also admits to the presence of an obstacle, since she will tell the truth as much as she *manages* to; there is an active force that will be on the way between the page she

[2] Interestingly, the fact that she will retell the events subjectively is used to depict Imp as an unreliable narrator, yet this only makes her human. The implication here is that one can only be reliable by retelling or considering facts, and that truth alone (subjectivity) is an indication of unreliability. If we were to draw this conclusion, however, we would be in the presence of a package-deal, characterizing the narrator outside of the spectrum of (un)reliability that Tamar Yacobi argues for (224). Given that there is evidence to suggest that Imp falls within this spectrum, the conclusion she draws about her own unreliability is arguable.

is writing and her truth. As later on she reflects on the impediment her memory proves to be when it comes to her writing the truth, and given that there is a clear connection between her impaired memory and schizophrenia, it is safe to assume that she deems herself as an unreliable narrator precisely due to her illness: schizophrenia will make it so she has to put a conscious effort in trying to riddle out her memory, and thus there are bits of truth bound to be lost. Her self-regard as an unreliable narrator, then, engages directly with her negative self-positions when it comes to schizophrenia.

Also important in relation to the information given in the previous quote is that Imp is aware of the authorship of the ideas she uses: indeed, she says that she cannot take credit for the distinction between fact and truth, and says that it is an original idea by Ursula K. Le Guin. Additionally, throughout the story, she admits many times to specific lies. For example, at the beginning of the novel she states she has a girlfriend, yet later says that this is not true. Moreover, she is also explicit in her decisions as a narrator: she directly states many times that she will leave certain details out (for instance, she never writes the question Abalyn asked her after reading her short story *The Mermaid of the Concrete Ocean*, and she explicitly says that she will not include it), and she provides her reasons for including others (such as her mother and grandmother's history with schizophrenia, which she states are unavoidable to understand her ghost story). This provides enough evidence to suggest that, even though she regards herself as an unreliable narrator, she still actively tries to be reliable (or, at the very least, truthful).

The Purpose of the Narrator's (Un)reliability in The Drowning Girl: A Memoir

It begs the question, why does she put so much effort into being reliable if she is convinced she will never be able to do so fully? For an answer to this, one must go back to the very beginning of the novel. Imp opens up the story by saying that she will write a ghost story. About the idea of a ghost, she states that

> "[h]auntings [ghosts] are memes, especially pernicious thought contagions, social contagions that need no viral or bacterial host and are transmitted in a thousand different ways. A book, a poem, a song, a bedtime story, a grandmother's suicide, the choreography of a dance, a few frames of film, a diagnosis of schizophrenia, a deadly tumble from a horse, a faded photograph, or a story you tell your daughter". (26)

In other words, a ghost is a thought that refuses to leave; intrusive. The entirety of the novel, as we learn by the end, is an effort to try and figure out a riddled memory that she cannot stop going back to (meeting Eva Canning for the first time *twice*); in other words, to try and make an intrusive thought vanish from her mind.

Imp is unable to let go of everything that comes with the label of schizophrenia (as she states, a *diagnosis* is one of the ways through which a haunting can happen) and with everything that she has learned to tie it to (*a grandmother's suicide*) — these stigmas, thus, act like any intrusive thought would. Writing the story down is an exercise to get rid of her intrusive thoughts; by extension, this means that, in order to figure out her overlapped memory, she must somehow challenge the intrusive idea that she is an unreliable narrator. The *truth* of the events is that she met Eva Canning for the first time twice; the *fact* is that she only met her once, and there is something altering her memory. To figure out the fact, and go beyond the truth, which is required for her to understand her riddled memories, she has to challenge whatever force is getting in the way (and, as was stated previously, said force is schizophrenia). In other words, she must, at the very least, defy the expectations that come with the label and symptoms of her illness. The paradox of her attempts at being reliable, even if she deeply believes it is a difficult task, serves this purpose.

Whether this objective is fulfilled or not remains unclear by the end of the novel. In one version of her first-meet with Eva, Imp characterizes her (and her own insanity) as a siren— a figure drawn from Greek mythology and Homer's Odyssey; in other words, as a

ghost, a haunting that seeks to lead her to her own destruction. “There’s always a siren, singing you to shipwreck. [...] My siren [Eva] came from the Blackstone River in Massachusetts, a river with the same name as the street that runs past the hospital where my mother died” (244 - 245). Unraveling her intrusive thoughts, the memories she has of Eva, means that she will be able to avoid the *shipwreck*; the purpose of her writing, on a deeper level, is a gesture towards salvation. Yet, “[w]hatever it was, or wasn’t, it’s done” (270), “I know that [she’ll never be sure what happened]” (278); she remembers assisting, in one way or another, Eva’s suicide, however, by her own admission, this memory becomes questionable. Even if her deeming herself unreliable serves a purpose, the expectation given by the label of schizophrenia weighs more: her memory, as a cognitive function, is impaired, and thus truth will never be a certain fact for her.

Previous Conversations Surrounding the Novel

While the concept of “unreliable narrator” and Imp’s characterization as such is a detail that most (if not all) readers have picked upon, it is an element that has only been dwelt on as a source of two layers within the narrative: one that depicts what the narrator wants the reader to think happened, and the other representing what *actually* happened (“The Drowning Girl: An Analysis”). And while this is a fair point to argue for, it seems that most analytical focus has fallen on the symbolisms created by the different figures and stories mentioned within the novel: the paintings *Fecunda Ratis*, *The Drowning Girl* (which gives the novel its title) and *Girl on a River*, as well as the symbolism of L’Inconnue de la Seine and the stories *The Little Mermaid, Little Red Riding Hood, Werewolf Smile* and *The Mermaid of Concrete Ocean* (the latter two being stories originally written by the main character) are the primary concern of previous reflections on Kiernan’s story. Other analyses have drawn focus on the novel’s structure, stating that its disorganization, chapter division and overall appearance may be an attempt at representing mental illness (Snyder), depicting schizophrenia beyond plot.

Yet, the construction of the self when it comes to the unreliable narrator is not a primary topic of analysis when it comes to the conversation surrounding the novel: it is either mentioned as a source of narrative complexity (stating that it creates *layers* in it) or merely by passing, as an adjective used to describe the main character that is not explored further. The way in which Imp constructs her own identity and sense of self within the narrative, it would seem, has not been a primary concern, but rather the figures and mental representations that she conjures with the many references she provides and their possible symbolisms have taken the center of the stage; albeit these certainly hold meaningful information, the representation of a main character, a *narrator*, diagnosed with schizophrenia has been of secondary importance.

Discoveries and Final Thoughts

Reliability is understood as a conditional quality that lies on the extremes: one either *is* or *is not* reliable. However, as proposed by Tamar Yacobi, reliability (and its opposite, unreliability) ought to be understood differently when it comes to fiction and narrators: in narrative, reliability is a continuum, a quality that may be defined by degrees and that, at large, has a purpose. Reliability or unreliability in a narrator cannot be used as a definitive trait, a package-deal. It was with this idea in mind that, through the use of John and Paul Lysaker's theory of the self, I analyzed *The Drowning Girl: A Memoir*'s narrator.

In this novel Imp, the main character, tells her story in order to make sense of two memories that have become tangled with one another. From the very beginning, it is clear that Imp's diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia is a key element and, as she struggles to relay past events, we learn that she questions her own ability to be reliable. For these reasons, I set out to explore the connection between the way she regards herself as a schizophrenic person and her estimation of her own reliability. To do this, it was necessary to understand Imp's subjective construction of schizophrenia and the way she incorporates it as part of her

identity; John and Paul Lysaker's theory of the self was useful for this purpose. As an additional objective, I also aimed to discover the function of the use of unreliability and its implied connection to schizophrenia, which I stated was to depict a realistic representation of a character (Imp) that showcases complexity of thought and is not reduced to a diagnosis.

The first and most important discovery, throughout the analysis, is that Imp's evaluation of herself as a person with schizophrenia is multi-layered and complex. She draws a parallel between a diagnosis of schizophrenia and a *curse*, an idea that may connect with Corrigan's arguments regarding diagnosis and stigma: Imp only began thinking of the way she experienced the world as a *curse*, as something imposed on her that could lead to harm, once she learned it had a name in the realm of psychiatry; as Corrigan proposes, the diagnosis of a mental illness can result in negative experiences due to social and self-stigma (33). She also thinks that an inevitable, natural development for her is to commit suicide, just like her fellow *cursed* family members. And yet, this diagnosis makes sense for her—she can identify with it. As much as a *curse* is something that most, if not all, would seek to avoid or repel at all costs, Imp incorporates her diagnosis as part of her identity, rather than fight it or avert it. However, the way she regards herself as a person with diagnosed schizophrenia is much more complex than just accepting it as part of her identity or not. Schizophrenia, in her worldview, is something that may be evaluated on a scale, where she inevitably lies at the bottom; others' behavior, when compared to hers, is either healthy (non-schizophrenics) or interesting (her great-aunt). These elements are evidence that Imp's thoughts regarding schizophrenia are multi-layered and compounded: schizophrenia is not black or white, positive or negative, nor is it something that she either is or is not. As John and Paul Lysaker state, sense of self is constructed through different roles and evaluations that may contradict each other; the explanation for this is that they are not active at the same time, as only a few will acquire predominance depending on the context (4). This makes Imp's character realistic, as she is

shown to be multidimensional: the way she regards schizophrenia changes depending on the nuances of the context.

These complex thoughts do, indeed, inform the way she regards herself as a narrator. Imp draws a distinction between truth and fact, certain that the latter will never be reachable in her storytelling due to her illness—this, with the underlying understanding that reliability and trustworthiness are defined by the ability to state facts, even if they are not part of her perceived reality and experience. Imp's definition of reliability is conditioned, however, by drawing a distinction between truth and fact, by committing to relay the truth at all times, and by admitting and correcting lies, she engages in an attempt to be reliable. In other words, her unreliability is not a package deal. She moves in a continuum of reliability; to reconcile the common understanding of reliability as a conditioned quality with Yacobi's theory, we may say that Imp, moving in this continuum, manages to remain truthful rather than reliable.

Schizophrenia pulls Imp towards the extreme of unreliability, either by its symptoms, the stigma or self-stigma that arises from them, while she actively moves towards the extreme of reliability and truthfulness. As stated in the body of this paper, and with the support of Yacobi's statements regarding (un)reliability, a narrator that moves fluidly in this scale serves a purpose: in *The Drowning Girl*, the purpose is to directly challenge the force (schizophrenia) that impedes Imp to access and distinguish her memories. However, the fulfillment of this objective remains unclear: while Imp clearly and actively attempts to defy the impaired cognitive functioning that her memory has suffered due to her illness (as well as the stigma and self-stigma attached to it) she acknowledges that she will never be certain about the facts of the past—not only that, but also the truth becomes uncertain; as she was unable to unravel her memories, she begins to question them.

While the purpose of such representation of unreliability and schizophrenia serves a clear purpose within the narrative and its fictional events (albeit seemingly unfulfilled), its

implications for the world outside it (that of the readers) is not so distinct. It may be said that, given Imp's complexity of thought, its function could be to procure a realistic and nuanced representation of a person with schizophrenia; however, the effects and impressions it caused on readers hint otherwise: while they recognize the character's self-depiction as unreliable, there is no particular nuanced discussion regarding this. "Unreliable" is used as a word to define the character, to contextualize the novel, rather than a bone of contention. The novel's depiction of a character that describes herself as unreliable yet procures no package-deal for the reader does indeed serve the function of representing complexity of thought and realism; however, this is something that, sadly, does not go beyond the written page, as previous conversations surrounding the novel show a focus on symbolisms drawn from figures such as paintings and stories interwoven within the narrative.

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GREATER THAN OURSELVES: THE POWER OF KINDNESS IN MARÍA TERESA BUDGE'S *OUR SHADOWS*

by Roxana C. Álvarez

Introduction

"Our shadows are greater than ourselves" (7). This is the first line that greets the reader upon opening María Teresa Budge's 1940 novel *Nuestras Sombras* – "Our Shadows" in English – almost as though it were a question that the rest of the story will spend every page trying to answer. I was twelve or thirteen years old when I first read this novel, but that one line at the very beginning remained with me well into adulthood; it seemed to serve as a reminder of something important, though I was never quite sure of what. Perhaps it was in part a subconscious desire to better understand this feeling that led me to choose *Nuestras Sombras* as the novel I would be working with for my final research project.

Summary: Patricia Valdés is a young Chilean girl who is sent to live in the countryside with a distant relative named Aunt Melania while, unbeknownst to her, her parents work separately through their divorce. Patricia and Aunt Melania do not get along, and Patricia feels increasingly isolated until she befriends Juanito, a young invalid boy whose family lives next door. Soon after, Patricia's older sister Nora arrives to keep her company and ease her tense relationship with Aunt Melania, who takes a liking to Nora. Patricia learns the truth about her parents' situation, and further discovers that, due the social repercussions of these circumstances, Nora is unable to marry Miguel, the man she loves. Determined to make her sister happy, Patricia runs away to Santiago to find Miguel and brings him back to talk to Nora. The two agree to get married, and eventually, with the help of Marcelo, Patricia's godfather, they convince their various relatives to approve of their union. Patricia and Nora leave Aunt Melania and meet up with their mother to arrange the wedding, which unfolds perfectly, save for the fact that the girls' father is unable to leave his work in Europe and does not show up. Once the wedding is over, Patricia is horrified to learn that, instead of

staying with her mother, she will be sent to live with her Aunt Melania once again. Deprived of Juanito, who has moved away, and Nora, who has gone to live with her new husband in the south of Chile, Patricia has no choice but to make her peace with Aunt Melania, and the two begin to develop a closer relationship. Shortly after, Aunt Melania catches a deadly pneumonia and Patricia helps to take care of her until her passing. She then goes to live with Nora and Miguel until her father's return from Europe. Upon going back to her old house and staying with both her parents once again, Patricia seeks to help them reconcile their differences, but to no avail. Soon after, Patricia falls gravely ill with typhus; while nursing her through her illness together, Patricia's parents finally manage to mend their relationship. The story ends with a recovering Patricia celebrating Christmas with everyone she loves.

At first, I approached "Our Shadows" from the perspective of intersectionality; my original purpose was to discern what could be gained from analyzing Patricia's gender, race and social class so as to glean what such an analysis revealed about Chilean society at the time. However, after weeks of dissecting the novel, of poring over feminist studies and historical recollections, of picking apart everything I loved about this story, I realized that such an approach was not getting me anywhere. My head was immersed, but my heart was not in it. About halfway through my research, I was forced to stop and ask myself why that was. Why was analyzing a book I loved so much proving so incredibly difficult? It was only after racking my brains for days on end that I realized – by trying to focus on the story through the lens of intersectionality, by trying to pick apart the social and historical context of the time and factoring in components of race, gender and class, I was stripping Patricia's story of its heart, its warmth, its humanity – of everything, in short, that had made me fall in love with it in the first place. I had become so focused on what could be criticized and

what could be praised about the novel's handling of social issues that I had lost sight of what made it so deeply touching in the first place.

As I began consciously searching the novel for that element in it that had made Patricia's story stay with me all these years, I realized that, at its core, *Nuestras Sombras* was a tale about the deeply transformative power of human kindness. This was what resonated with me so profoundly as a child, though I did not fully recognize it at the time; it was only upon re-reading the novel as an adult and truly *seeing* the impact of Patricia's kindness, both in her own life and in those of others, that I became overwhelmingly aware of it. Suddenly, I knew how to approach the novel on its own terms. I realized that what I really wanted to do was take a closer look at how kindness was portrayed in the book, mainly through the character of Patricia herself.

Kindness, I believe, is a quality that is easily overlooked. In their essay "Feminism, Pedagogy and the Politics of Kindness", published as recently as 2014, Magnet, Mason & Trevenen argue that "[k]indness in the contemporary moment continues to be an under-researched emotion even in the midst of a surge of work in emotion and affect theory" (2). Citing both Phillips & Taylor's "On Kindness" and Rowland's austerely titled "Kindness", the authors propose that perhaps the reason kindness as a concept has been so underestimated both in theory and in practice – by feminist and non-feminist thinkers alike – is due to its historical association with vulnerability and self-sacrifice (2), in a manner perhaps reminiscent of Derrida's concept of *hostipitality* – that is, the notion that opening oneself up to another is allowing for the possibility of being damaged by that very other. When viewed in this light, kindness becomes a liability, an opening for anyone – especially the most vulnerable members of society – to be taken advantage of.

However, throughout the entirety of *Nuestras Sombras*, kindness is treated again and again, not as a source of weakness, but as a source of strength. With every opportunity

Patricia has of showing kindness to another person, she becomes a more driven, less passive character. Phillips & Taylor define kindness as "the ability to bear the vulnerability of others" (8), and this is precisely what Patricia does throughout the novel. It is this capacity of hers to bear others' vulnerability that gives her strength, that propels her to change the world around her, to make decisions of her own and act on them. The more I delved into how *Nuestras Sombras* portrays the character of Patricia and her relationship with other people, the more I realized that the novel could truly be read as a vindication of kindness, and I wished to expand upon that. It seemed – and still seems – absolutely fundamental to me to do so.

Nuestras Sombras was published at a critical time for women's rights – and politics as a whole – in Chile. In her work *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920-1950*, Karin Rosemblatt explores the sociopolitical context of the feminist movement during the three aforementioned decades, and notes that tensions were running particularly high in 1940, when the Second Congress of the MEMCh (Pro-Emancipation Movement of Chilean Women) was held. The feminist movement was deeply divided at the time, in large part due to its conflicted relationship with the political Left, which in turn was becoming more firmly established (33). At the same time, the political Right was losing ground, having "failed to amass enough votes to hold on to the presidency" by the 1938 election (33). The nation as a whole was reckoning with a complex political tug-of-war between increasingly radicalized fronts, and the feminist movement in particular was torn between advocating for its own interests – suffrage, equal pay, maternity rights, etc – and focusing instead on those of their Communist allies. Within this deeply divisive context, *Nuestras Sombras* feels almost out of place – there is not so much as a trace of the sociopolitical situation at the time within its pages. Yet, the novel's focus on the coming-of-age of a female protagonist – on the growth and development of a young woman,

of her thoughts, feelings, dreams and aspirations – written, furthermore, by a female author, should establish it undoubtedly as an important addition to the history of Chilean literary feminism.

So how is it, then, to be explained that there is little to no information available about either the novel or the author herself? María Teresa Budge was not only a published author as early as 1930, but she also founded and directed the first female magazine in Chile, *Margarita*. Despite this, the information I found online amounts to a passing mention of her in the website *memoriachilena.gob.cl* – where, curiously enough, she is referred to solely by her husband's surname (Escobar) rather than her maiden name – a title on the website *prensademujeres.cl* with a biography section still in progress, and an online review of *Nuestras Sombras* on the website *leerenelsur.blogspot.com*. Interestingly enough, several of the comments on the review mention that many users had never even heard of the book before. It seems astonishing to me that a work such as this could go unnoticed by the general Chilean public – and by the feminist sphere in particular.

Perhaps it is the very fact that Budge did not take a political stance in her main novel (*Nuestras Sombras* is referred to as such in the very same edition) that led to it being so easily overlooked in the national turmoil of the time. Perhaps it was the fact that the novel was aimed at young girls which doomed it to be taken less than seriously, relegated to mandatory reading in a few schools such as mine and nothing more. Perhaps its focus on the lives of the Chilean upper-class distanced it from the radically left-leaning feminist circles of the time – as well as from those of the present day. Perhaps it is precisely its stance on kindness – kindness, not aggression – as a tool for change that makes it so easy to dismiss. In any case, the point of the following study is not to pick apart Budge's novel, but rather, to vindicate its vision of kindness as an unconventional – yet undoubtedly effective – source of empowerment.

With this vindication, the following paper aims to add to the corpus of literary theory – specifically, to the field of affect theory. In his 2019 essay "Hardy and Affect Theory", Hewitt defines this concept as "a poststructuralist movement that conceptualises the non-linguistic, pre-cognitive aspects of experience by reference to the power of bodies to affect each other and bring about change in individual and collective existence" (111), and cites Massumi, Sedgwick and Frank as the authors of key texts that helped materialize affect theory as such in the mid-1990's. Affect theory examines the emotional dimension of human relationships in all their forms and representations – one of them being the way such a dimension is explored in literature. It is to this particular branch that I would like to contribute with the following research project. I believe the relevance of how kindness is represented in literature has been little studied, and I believe *Nuestras Sombras* in particular is a brilliant place to start. It is a novel that emphasizes the power of kindness without weaponizing it, and praises it without preaching about it. Moreover, it portrays kindness through the eyes of a young woman in a way that does not diminish her strength or her worth as a person – that does not demand that she make herself smaller for the sake of others.

In her 2017 work "Living a Feminist Life", Sara Ahmed states that "[o]ur emotions can be a resource; we draw on them" (246). She describes being a feminist as being a killjoy, someone who points out things that make others uncomfortable, who makes visible those aspects of reality that the rest of the world would prefer be quietly swept under the rug. She notes that "[t]o be a killjoy is often to be assigned as being emotional, too emotional, letting your feelings get in the way of your judgment", and goes on to add that "feelings can be the site of a rebellion. A feminist heart beats the wrong way; feminism is hearty" (246). Emotion, then, is at the core of feminism – a driving force for change, beating steadily beneath every push and pull of the sociopolitical tide. However, the

emotions most commonly associated with change are precisely those that provoke discomfort; anger, pain, sorrow, outrage, frustration, resentment, grief, desperation. It would seem as though there is no place for kindness in the killjoy's repertoire – and yet, kindness, too, is driven by emotion. It is driven by empathy, love, compassion, care and concern for another human being. Indeed, many of the kindest decisions that Patricia makes throughout the novel are very much driven by emotion, by a desire to care for and protect the people she has chosen to love. The following analysis, therefore, explores this very concept: how kindness – and the emotions that motivate it – can thus become a resource in its own right, a force for change in the most feminist sense of the word.

Analysis

Patricia, the protagonist of *Nuestras Sombras*, is a kind person. This might seem an unusual claim to make, but it is actually fundamental to our understanding of Budge's novel. Through the character of Patricia, the story explores the complex ways in which kindness can manifest as *change*, *agency*, and *empowerment*. That is to say, through her genuine care and affection for other people, Patricia becomes capable of changing the lives of those around her, of gaining agency in her own right, and of empowering both herself and others. In order to better develop this idea, I will take a look at three instances throughout the novel in which Patricia's kindness makes a difference. The first of these instances is Patricia's friendship with Juanito, the little boy who lives next door to her aunt and who is paralyzed from the waist down; the second is Patricia's relationship with her sister Nora – specifically, the moment in which Patricia runs away from her aunt's house in order to bring back Nora's estranged fiancé; the third is Patricia's evolving relationship with her Aunt Melania, especially throughout the latter's illness. Each of these moments, I believe, demonstrates the ways in which kindness – as seen through Patricia's eyes, and in each of her actions – can be the most subversive and transformative quality of all.

…

Patricia's friendship with Juanito is established early on in the novel. Having recently arrived at her aunt's house, Patricia has no one to play with; one day, she peers over the garden wall into the neighboring house out of boredom, and sees a young boy sitting in a wheelchair in the yard. Patricia then jumps over and begins talking with him, naively unaware of his condition, until he painfully admits he cannot so much as stand up. When he lifts the blanket on his lap and reveals his thin legs, Patricia describes her reaction in the following manner:

> I felt as though the emotion were drowning me. I came closer and opened my arms; the little blond head leaned on my shoulder as I stroked it.
>
> –This is nothing, Juanito –I said after some time–; I'll tell you my father's a doctor, and a great doctor, and I am going to ask him to make you better (Budge 34, trans. Álvarez).

Upon realizing that Juanito cannot be her playmate, Patricia immediately takes it upon herself to comfort him and promises she will find a way to help him. Though it is her loneliness which first drives her to seek out Juanito's companionship, it is her affection for him that leads her to maintain and nurture their friendship throughout the novel, even once she is no longer "in need" of doing so. This is evident not only in Patricia's constant visits to Juanito long after her sister arrives to keep her company, but also in the way she herself perceives these visits; when Juanito's mother thanks her for keeping her son company while he is ill, Patricia writes in her diary: "Why does she thank me, when I love that boy so much too?" (147) For Patricia, caring for Juanito is a completely selfless act; it is out of affection for him that she goes to see him, not for any gratitude or recognition that she may receive.

Furthermore, it is this very same degree of selfless action that leads to Juanito's eventual recovery. Throughout the novel, Patricia insists that her father will heal him – she

not only promises this to Juanito and his mother, but wholeheartedly believes it herself: "Dear God, when will father get here so he can make [Juanito] better!" (147) she writes when the little boy is particularly weak with the flu. Indeed, Patricia's first words to her father when she finally sees him again are: "Father (...) you can't make any engagements, I need you. (...) I have given [Juanito] my word, you hear me? My word, that you will go and see him before leaving for Santiago. You can't refuse me this, it's the first thing I ask of you" (240). The first thing she asks of her father after not having seen him for nearly a year is to help her friend – that is the extent to which Patricia cares for Juanito. At her request, her father indeed goes to see him that very same day, and arranges to perform a surgery in the hopes of giving the little boy a chance to walk again. As we learn later on, the surgery is successful, and by the end of the novel, Juanito is shown leaning on crutches and standing upright. Patricia's kindness, therefore, not only gives Juanito companionship and hope all throughout the novel, but by the end of it, actually allows him to stand on his own two legs once more.

Juanito is not the only person whose life Patricia changes; her own sister, Nora, also finds happiness she previously thought was impossible thanks to Patricia's actions. In the first part of the novel, Nora is torn apart by the fact that she is unable to marry the man she loves – Miguel – because "neither his father nor his mother consent to his marriage to the daughter of divorced parents" (94). Upon learning of this predicament, Patricia concocts a plan to escape her aunt's house and bring Miguel back to talk to Nora, stating in the note she leaves for her sister that "[t]here is one thing I cannot stand and that is to see you suffer. When I saw you cry the other day, I made the firm resolution to try and solve your affair (...) I love you so much, that I wish to see you happy and that is why I do this" (99-100). Here, Patricia is completely driven by emotion; she thinks little of the danger she is putting herself in by traveling to the city on her own, or of the trouble she might get into should her plans go

awry. Instead, she thinks only of her sister, of how much she loves her and how happy this plan will make her, should it succeed. It is not a rational decision, and certainly not one the people around her would encourage, but Patricia does not doubt herself for one moment – and her confidence pays off in the end. She effectively manages to run away to Santiago; once there, she finds Miguel and convinces him to come back with her. Miguel and Nora ultimately decide to get married regardless, and eventually manage to persuade Miguel's parents to consent to the wedding, upon which Nora is overjoyed. Patricia's kindness, once again, becomes manifest as *change* – real, tangible change – in someone's life. As a direct result of her actions, her sister's life changes for the better.

Interestingly, in this particular instance, kindness also serves another purpose: it manifests as *agency*. Patricia had been dreaming of escaping from her aunt's house from the moment she arrived there; however, she only actually follows through with it when her sister's future is on the line. Her own desire for freedom is not a strong enough motivator for Patricia to directly disobey her aunt's rules, but her sister's happiness certainly is. At one point in the novel, Patricia tells Nora "for you I am capable of letting myself be eaten alive" (140). However, instead of passively surrendering herself – as this line would seem to foreshadow – Patricia channels this powerful sentiment of sisterly affection in order to make a decision for herself and follow through with it, even if it means going against what others expect her to do. Altruism, then, is *empowering* for Patricia – it manifests as change, not only in others' lives, but also in her own.

These notions of kindness as change, agency and empowerment are perhaps most strongly present in the evolution of Patricia's relationship with her Aunt Melania. At first, the two women start out bitterly opposed: Aunt Melania is mourning the loss of her brother and resents Patricia's boundless energy and optimism, a resentment which manifests itself in the many restrictions she imposes upon Patricia. Patricia, in turn, challenges these

restrictions openly by speaking her mind and questioning her aunt at every turn. However, though the young girl does manage to get away with some of her behavior, her relationship with her aunt – and thus, her situation – does not improve.

It is only when Patricia begins to try and get to know her – and once Aunt Melania allows her to do so – that the two begin to gain a sense of mutual understanding and respect for each other. Towards the latter part of the novel, when Patricia is once again left in the care of Aunt Melania – this time, without the company of Nora or Juanito – she makes an effort to be kind to her: she makes sure to run around outside for a while every day in order to be less riotous inside the house, keeps her aunt company as they knit and play cards, and indulges her in their shared interest of stamp collecting. Thus, the two slowly begin to develop a warmer connection. One particular night, Aunt Melania unexpectedly thanks Patricia for her company, and the girl notes in her diary that she feels "something very sweet and comforting, a sense of peace and joy" (194) at the thought of it. It is curious to note also that Patricia is surprised at first by her aunt's gratitude, and asks "What do you thank me for?" (194), echoing her reply to Juanito's mother earlier on. This shift in their relationship thus changes their environment for the better, as the two begin to genuinely enjoy each other's company. Once again, kindness serves here as a vehicle for change, which is achieved through empathy and affection rather than rebellion and opposition.

This newly developed bond between them becomes fundamental towards the end as Aunt Melania grows increasingly ill, and it falls upon Patricia to take care of her medical needs. It is important to note here that Patricia is entrusted with Aunt Melania's health because of her amateur medical knowledge: Patricia's father had often employed her as his assistant and taught her some of the basic skills of his trade, which is why Patricia is capable of giving Aunt Melania her daily shots, contacting the doctor, and so on. At first, Patricia is exceedingly nervous; she recounts: "I was so afraid! (...) Before

preparing the injection I went into my room and kissed my father's portrait. Then I calmed myself thinking I just had to do it as though he were watching me. Everything went wonderfully. [Aunt Melania] said it hadn't hurt; the doctor, that I could be trusted" (199). It is worth noting that it is not only Patricia's kindness that plays a role here, but also her *knowledge*. As the daughter of a doctor – and furthermore, one willing to share his work with her – Patricia has privileged access to knowledge that was perhaps out of reach for most people, especially other women, at the time. However, precisely because she is a kind person, Patricia uses this privilege for the benefit of someone else. In other words, through kindness, *knowledge* becomes both a tool for change and a source of self-confidence for the protagonist.

This confidence grows to the point that Patricia notes a fundamental change in herself. She observes at one point: "I am so absorbed in trying to ease the pain of the ill woman, that I don't have time to wonder whether I am capable or not. It seems to me that I am another person" (204). In fact, Patricia goes so far as to prove herself capable of taking command of the house one night when Aunt Melania is particularly sick. Upon seeing that her aunt has fainted, Patricia does not hesitate; she prepares an injection, leaves orders for what should be done in her absence, and goes out into the pouring rain to find the local doctor. Patricia is thus once again given agency by her altruism; her concern for Aunt Melania is what leads her to make decisions of her own, to trust those decisions and act accordingly. Patricia's kindness becomes manifest, once again, in the form of agency and empowerment.

It could be argued that there is a gender component to Patricia's selflessness – that her kindness may be attributed to the social expectation for women to be caretakers, to sacrifice for the sake of others. However, this reading does not take into account the fact that Patricia's kindness usually takes the form of defiance, rather than conformity. Patricia defies

the odds, refusing to believe that Juanito will never walk again and pushing until something can be done to help him; she defies, not only her aunt and her parents, but the very notion that young girls are supposed to be obedient, by running away to find the man her sister loves; she defies the very weather and the fear of falling ill herself for the sake of her aunt – "*Señorita* Patricia (...) don't go getting sick" (208) begs the housekeeper, Eduvigis, right before Patricia goes out into the stormy night to fetch the doctor. Over and over, Patricia's kindness is what gives her courage, strength, and – recalling Ahmed's words – the *heart* to face these considerable odds.

In the case of Juanito and Nora, Patricia is perhaps still too naive to truly comprehend the scope of those odds; her absolute faith in her father's ability as a doctor and the light-hearted tone with which she recounts her journey to Santiago to find Miguel reveal an almost childish sense of optimism, which might make it easy to dismiss the magnitude of her courage. However, by the time Aunt Melania falls ill, Patricia has grown enough to understand the true extent of her present danger. Her desperate drive in the midnight rain is permeated by a sense of urgency, of terror, even; "The trees, my good friends the trees, seemed to be enormous, menacing giants; the branches shook like huge arms. Not a being on the street, and not a single light to be seen in the houses. (...) "So long as we make it in time!" I thought" (209-210). Patricia still feels very much like a child in this passage, afraid of the dark and the rain and the menacing trees, but her care for her aunt reveals how much she has matured – and this very same care is, once again, so much stronger than her fear. She understands the danger that the storm poses, but she understands also that the danger her aunt's health is in is far more pressing, and her greatest concern is making it to the doctor's in time. Her capacity to understand the odds that she and her loved ones are faced with may have increased, but her kindness and courage have not diminished– if anything, they have only grown greater with this understanding.

It is likewise worth noting that, in two of the three examples studied above, Patricia's kindness is aimed towards other women. There is an element of sorority in these instances, a sense of one woman helping another. In a letter to her father detailing her escapade to Santiago in search of Miguel, Patricia writes: "You will say to me: why didn't Nora go? But, dear dad, are you forgetting that *Perfecta* is the lamb type? She never would've done it" (104). Indeed, Nora is shown, again and again, to be the voice of reason, to seek to appease and defuse tense situations, and to yield rather than cause conflict. In fact, Patricia's very nickname for her sister – *Perfecta*, meaning "perfect" – implies that Nora is everything she is expected to be, everything a socially acceptable young woman should be[3], and everything that Patricia, in her own opinion, is not. Indeed, the very first time she mentions this nickname to Aunt Melania, it is by saying "Perfecta is very different [from me] (...) I call her that because she doesn't have flaws, she is… simply perfect" (16). Patricia thus draws a line between herself and her sister; Nora is not willing to make trouble, but Patricia is. She does not judge her sister for it – on the contrary, she admires Nora enough to call her perfect in the most genuine sense of the word – but she is still very much capable of recognizing when stirring up trouble is necessary to achieve change. However, Patricia is also wise enough to know that her sister is incapable of stirring up this trouble on her own, and so she seeks to do it for her. Patricia thus uses her own courage, her own capacity to be defiant of social expectations, to help another woman who is unable and/or unwilling to do so.

In a similar manner, Patricia's kindness towards Aunt Melania allows both of them to change for the better. As mentioned earlier, the two women start out bitterly opposed, but neither of them is any happier because of it. It is only when they both allow themselves to

[3] It might be interesting to further analyze this point in another paper: how Patricia's conception of perfection implies fulfilling society's expectations of womanhood (being quiet, obedient, respectful), which she sees embodied in her older sister, and which she continuously refuses to live up to. Patricia acknowledges that she is not the "perfect" young woman, but simultaneously shows little inclination to be so; this, paired with the fact that it is her, and not her sister, who is presented as the heroine of the story, could make for a compelling feminist reading of the novel.

open up to each other that their relationship – and consequently, each of their lives – improves. For Patricia, her relationship with Aunt Melania becomes an instance of growth; she becomes more self-assured, gains the confidence to use her knowledge for the benefit of someone else, takes on a certain amount of responsibility and finds herself equal to it. In addition, this relationship changes her perspective of people in general: as Aunt Melania's health worsens, Patricia makes her peace, not only with her aunt, but also with the housekeeper, Eduvigis, whom Aunt Melania cares for deeply and whom Patricia had always antagonized. One particular day, when Aunt Melania is nearing her death, Patricia hugs Eduvigis in front of her, assuring her the two of them will get along after she has passed. Patricia later observes in her diary how much she has grown to appreciate these women she once despised, noting: "I have convinced myself that there are no bad beings in life. What happens is that each one has their own different way of being good. (...) It must be something like having a black or blonde head; the hair is the same, the color is different" (206). Patricia's worldview is thus changed through her bond with other women: not only does she become more self-assured, she also becomes wiser and more open-minded as a result.

Aunt Melania, on her part, also grows thanks to Patricia's kindness, which allows her to live out her final days with a much greater sense of serenity than she'd had in a very long time. Towards the end of her life, Aunt Melania tells Patricia: "I feel so calm and blissful. I owe this peace to you (...) I was always afraid of death, now I'm not. I think there I will start being happy with the beings I loved here. Patricia, you are still a child, but you have in your favor the conquest of a heart as difficult as mine" (202). Through Patricia's company and cheerfulness, Aunt Melania learns to cherish life and find peace before her death.

Finally, it is fundamental to note that, through the continuously evolving relationship of these two women, change is portrayed as a *collaborative* effort. Kindness cannot be

shown to someone who is unwilling to receive it: it takes both Patricia *and* Aunt Melania opening up to each other to improve matters between them. Change, then, can only be achieved once women actively cease to be hostile towards each other, and choose instead to be vulnerable and seek to truly understand one another.

Conclusion

It is only towards the end of the novel that we as readers receive what feels like the full realization of the answer we have been expecting since we first read that opening quote – *our shadows are greater than ourselves*. While Patricia lies recovering from a nearly deadly bout of typhus, her father writes in her diary:

> How proud I am to see that in my life there is a shadow of goodness and beauty that redeems and exalts me! What a noble satisfaction I feel upon ascertaining that you, my Patricia, have already achieved what others take an entire existence to do! Your shadow grows and grows; look, for you have traced with it the path your parents must follow (...) they walk step by step down that road carved with your love! (253)

It is upon reading this final line that we realize the entire book has indeed been an answer to the question posed at the very beginning. Our shadows are what we leave behind – the impact we make on others' lives – and the story we have been following so closely has been an outline of Patricia's own shadow, of the legacy she has made for herself in the short time we have had the pleasure of knowing her. Patricia's shadow is one defined by kindness – by the capacity she has not only of bearing others' vulnerability, but of turning that vulnerability into a source of change and empowerment, both for herself and everyone around her. Through her kindness, Patricia grows into a better, wiser, more confident and self-assured version of herself – kindness does not make her less, but rather, it makes her *greater than herself*. It furnishes her with agency, pushes her to make decisions and act on them, to defy

odds and expectations alike, to support and care for other women, and to broaden her understanding of other people. Above all, Patricia's kindness drives her to actively make a difference in the world, to leave in her wake a society that is a little bit better than it was before. Kindness, through Patricia, becomes empowering – a force for change akin to the emotionally-driven, "hearty" feminism suggested by Ahmed, and one that, much like the protagonist herself, is not to be taken lightly.

In a world that appears increasingly divisive and radicalized – not unlike Chile itself in the 1940's – kindness might seem easier to underestimate than ever. Yet, this is precisely why an analysis such as the one presented here seems absolutely fundamental to continue exploring further. The message of *Nuestras Sombras* – that kindness is not a liability, but rather a force to be reckoned with, one capable of making us greater than ourselves – appears more crucial than ever before. If we have a say in what our shadows are made of, then perhaps the best thing we can do in order to affect change, to gain agency, and to empower both ourselves and everyone around us, is to make sure first and foremost that those shadows are kind ones.

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ROOTED IN:

EXPLORING POROUS FEMININITY IN *THE VEGETARIAN*

by Sofía Aranda Ramírez

Historically, the human and the non-human have been set in opposition. Human and nature have been regarded as part of a static hierarchical duality; human is the active, generating foreground and the natural world our background that passively waits to be exploited by humanity. This binary division and its hierarchical implications are explored in Han Kang's 2007 novel *The Vegetarian*. In this novel we follow Yeong-hye, a middle-aged woman who is attempting to leave everything that makes her human behind as she attempts to become "vegetal". This transformation begins in a simple way: she refuses to eat meat. This reluctance to eat any animal product transforms itself throughout the novel until Yeong-hye affirms that she is able to survive from sunlight and water alone and therefore refuses to consume any type of food or nutrient. The novel is divided into three parts: "The Vegetarian", which is narrated by Yeong-hye's husband in first person, "Mongolian Mark" which is narrated in third person and focuses on Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, and "Flaming Trees" still narrated in the third person, but this time focused on Yeong-hye's sister, In-hye. In this essay I will mostly focus on the last section of The Vegetarian "Flaming Trees", because Yeong-hye's latest stages of transformation as well as the relationship between the sisters will be the main focus of analysis.

The focus will be put on the relationship of the sisters because this is the only instance in the novel where any sort of understanding is reached, not only between the sisters but also between them and the non-human sphere. In the sisters we see how women, in order to enter any sort of masculine space, need to lose and repress their own femininity. Women, just like nature, have been constantly backgrounded and instrumentalized throughout history. Both subjects have been externalized and excluded from the spheres of rationality and humanity. What is natural is irrational and what is irrational is female as well, women and the non-human have been left stranded outside the male construction of the world. In an attempt to provide women access to power in male-generated spaces, early waves of feminism

attempted to sever any possible connection between women and nature. Women can only access male spaces through the elision of "their own corporeal specificity or [be] able to juggle both their traditional role in the private sphere and their newfound 'equality'" (Gatens 64). Women need to become something else or a two-in-one to be able to enter the "productive" sphere, leaving crucial parts of their femininity behind. Women need to lose something to comfortably enter the human realm and one of those things is any link that can be made between them and the non-human realm.

Han Kang's novel plays with all the aforementioned notions: first we encounter a submissive and passive woman in Yeong-hye that chooses to stop eating meat as what could be read like her first ever act of resistance. This leads her into an attempted and perhaps successful metamorphosis whilst at the same time causing mayhem in the lives of those around her. Secondly, in the last part of the novel we encounter In-hye, her older sister, a woman that is inserted into the public male sphere or a "superwoman" (Elfving-Hwang 66) a concept used to describe women that are able to juggle both their domestic and working lives. In-hye, although unable at the beginning to comprehend her sister's situation, manages throughout "Flaming Trees" to gain a better understanding of what she is going through and even sees them as interchangeable at some point: the woman who changes and the woman who seemingly stays the same. Here lies the importance of In-hye's character, she becomes a bridge between the different types of understanding and knowledge that we find throughout the novel. That is why, although she only makes a significant appearance in the last section of the novel, her importance to the development and conclusion of the story is just as much as Yeong-hye's.

In this essay, I will argue that the relationship between the sisters represents and presents to us the necessity and possibility for a new way of finding and generating knowledge; knowledge that cannot exist completely separated from nature and the feminine.

In *The Vegetarian* the need for a new way of interacting both with female bodies and nature is highlighted. A way of generating knowledge that can take into account both women and nature, but that at the same time must be able to take into account the differences that make up the female and non-human experience. Yeong-hye's body, in coalition with nature, this "witty agent" (Haraway 593), comes with her metamorphosis like a wave to destroy and question every thread of her sister's life, and through this process prompts her sister to look for a new space where a new definition of what it means to be female, of what it means to be human can be created.

Material Feminisms and ecofeminism cast matter as "variously, material-semiotic, inter-corporeal, performative, agential, even literate" (Alaimo 259). It is through this theoretical lense, therefore, that we will read "Flaming Trees". We will make use of Material feminism and ecofeminism because these are theoretical perspectives that will be able to take into account all the models of extension, interconnection, atrophy, exchange, and incorporation that can be found throughout the novel. It is also extremely important to take into account that *The Vegetarian* is a Korean novel, and therefore we need to know about the strict relationship that exists between the feminine and the domestic in both the traditional and the contemporary Korean imaginary. Elfving-Hwang in her book *Representations of Femininity in Contemporary South Korean Women's Literature* explains that traditionally in Korean media "femininity is exclusively represented through roles and ideals that are always linked to male genealogies. Moreover, they are by and large understood in terms of passivity and absolute complementarity" (13). This has carried out into more contemporary literary production, for example in the use of the domestic space as a place "for rewriting and contesting male-imaged femininity" (92). Elfving-Hwang explains as well that there is a tradition of literature "being considered as a vehicle for political and social critique in Korea"

(13) and therefore it is important to take into account the different interpretations that can stem from a single literary piece.

Yeong-hye and the Female Excess

As mentioned before, *The Vegetarian* follows the experience of Yeong-hye, a middle-aged married woman who, after a strange dream, decides to stop eating meat. Yeong-hye's actions seem to start a series of reactions from those around her, countless incidents steaming out of her sudden vegetarianism and later refusal to consume any sort of food. This refusal to consume is directly linked and intertwined with her attempt at becoming something else, a sort of metamorphosis that throughout the novel we notice aims towards something vegetal. This attempted transformation is not only interesting in a literal sense, but also if one takes into account what she is attempting to change into. Historically females have been connected with the natural realm, this serving as a tool in their oppression: women and nature traditionally regarded as opposing forces to that of the rational and, in consequence, the human. The idea of a connection between the feminine and the non-human brings into most people's minds the idea of women "as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life" (Plumwood 20). But Yeong-hye's connection with nature is what breaks apart the ideas of domesticity and submission that she had been living by. In this sense, her relationship with the vegetal realm seems closer to what Donna Haraway proposes: to see the world and nature "as an active subject, not as resource to be mapped and appropriated" (593). Although earlier feminist theory has worked to disentangle woman from nature, Stacy Alaimo explains how:

> rather than fleeing from this debased nature, associated with corporeality, mindlessness, and passivity, it would be more productive for feminist theory to undertake the transformation of gendered dualisms—nature, culture, body, mind,

> object, subject, resource, agency, and others—that have been cultivated to denigrate and silence certain groups of humans as well as nonhuman life (240).

Ecofeminism and material feminisms provide, therefore, not only a new perspective to Yeong-hye's transformation but also a new purpose to her metamorphosis that could be lost in other readings. In an ecofeminist reading "the walls of domestic enclosure that would separate human from nature and define the human as such are nowhere to be found, as human corporeality and textuality effortlessly extend into the more-than-human-world" (Alaimo 256), and therefore so does Yeong-hye.

The third part of the novel is the only one narrated by a woman: it is her older sister In-hye who recalls different instances and episodes surrounding Yeong-hye, her husband, and even her own life as she visits her sister for the last time before she gets transferred to a general hospital because of her critical condition. To be specific, "Flaming Trees" focuses mainly on what happened after In-hye admitted her sister into a rural mental hospital near mount Ch'ukseong and her constant visits, as well as how this has impacted her own life. The most important aspect, and what sets "Flaming Trees" apart from the other chapters is not only that it is narrated by another female voice, but that also for the first time the perspective we are getting of Yeong-hye's situation is that of someone who is trying to understand what she is going through; trying to help her, and in the process, also helping herself. During this fraction of the novel, we see how Yeong-hye's "condition" has gotten increasingly worse, the doctor at the mental hospital seems to be unable to make Yeong-hye eat since, as he explains that they are "still not sure exactly why it is that Kim Yeong-hye is refusing to eat, and none of the medicines we've given her seem to have had any effect" (Kang 225). Yeong-hye's refusal to eat seems to escape any sort of logical explanation that the medical personnel can provide, and she seems to be quickly deteriorating. As Val Plumwood explains in her text *Feminism and Ecofeminism* the human "is a model of domination and transcendence of

nature, in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature, necessity and the feminine" (23). Therefore, medical experts would be unable to comprehend or make sense of Yeong-hye's condition since it escapes this same model of domination in which they are immersed.

It becomes clear in this section that Yeong-hye's vegetarianism —that in the first part of the novel often tends to be interpreted as an act of resistance—is no longer so. At the beginning of the novel, even her husband explicitly claims that her behavior "was nothing but sheer obstinacy for a wife to go against her husband's wishes as mine had done" (Kang 19). But as we approach the final part of the book, we become aware that if we were to interpret her vegetarianism as a bodily act of resistance, it loses every ounce of purpose. Here we find out that everyone in Yeong-hye's life has left her except for her older sister. This would mean in a way that if her Vegetarianism is read as an act of resistance, it is a failed one. Her husband did not change, and even though he left, she continued to be abused now by her brother-in-law. So, one cannot help but wonder exactly against what she is resisting, and what exactly is the point of this resistance if it only has managed to get her into a mental hospital. It was so easy for every man that had ever abused her —her husband, her father, her brother-in-law— to just discard her and leave her behind as if she was just a minor inconvenience. If this was her resistance, then what was the point of it? Was this a fruitless attempt at revealing her body against patriarchal violence or was it something else?

Yeong-hye's metamorphosis recovers its meaning if one *reads it* as not an act of resistance but as pure female excess. Joanna Elfving-Hwang explores Luce Irigaray's concept of the female excess applied to literature in her text "Contesting the Symbolic: The Feminine in the Fantastic". She explains how in order to enter male discourse women have to renounce their own imaginary to "conform to the existing male-imagined symbolic order" (Elfving-Hwang 177). It is in this context that the term of excess appears, feminine or female

excess is a femininity that is so exuberant that it escapes male rationality, it becomes something that "the masculine logic rejects as excess" (177). In this sense what I find in Yeong-hye's actions is the acting of a witty nature, the act of a body with a sense of humor, of sarcasm. In a way to acknowledge female bodies and their agency as well as that of the world "makes room for some unsettling possibilities, including a sense of the world's independent sense of humor" (Haraway 593). Yeong-hye is complete female excess, an excess that does not resist, but like a wave, pounds against every boundary set not only upon her but also her sister. Through the chapter we see how Yeong-hye's body seems to break every single rule that is imposed upon it: it feeds from itself, stands upside down, gets lost in the rain, and penetrates the earth. She seems to be equipped with incredible strength, as one of the nurses stated it is "impossible to know where such strength is coming from" (Kang 225). Yeong-hye's condition exacerbates every aspect of female domesticity until it seems almost satirical.

Yeong-hye is this excess, her body exuberates not only feminine but also non-human excess, she is an excess of everything that escapes the masculine-rational symbolic order. She slowly becomes more "difficult to read" (Kang 187) for her sister and everyone around her, because she is slowly escaping the symbolic order in which her body is represented. Her own sister recalls how she had become so quiet that "any sort of meaningful communication was impossible" (196). Yeong-hye's excess completely baffles even the doctors at the mental hospital that she resides in during the third part of the novel. They are unable to find the reason for her refusal to eat because they are looking for a rational explanation, and reason is not able to comprehend excess. A nurse remarks in one of In-hye's visits how she is "different from the other catatonic patients" (212). That same nurse, when referring to Yeong-hye's newfound obsession with doing handstands, also states that they "can't even force her to stop" (212). This implies that the staff that works at the hospital is unable to stop

an anorexic patient from doing handstands. Yeong-hye's excess is a force to be reckoned with, unstoppable, unchangeable, and incomprehensible for those that are still enclosed in the symbolic.

Yeong-hye's excess severs any possibility of communication with her sister, or any other human for that matter. She clearly states at one point that "No one can understand me" (Kang 228). She is surrounded by people that force her to eat, people that are unable to understand that she only needs water and sunlight to live. But even though she is unable to be understood by those around her, she can, in her state of excessive femininity, arrive at a different kind of understanding, of knowledge, unattainable for anyone else. For example, when she tells In-hye, excitedly, during one of her visits that "all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters" (209). She tells her that the reason for her obsession with doing handstands comes from her newfound knowledge about how trees are all "standing on their heads" (214). She gets to know this after a dream she has, where she realizes that trees stand "with both arms in the earth, all of them" (214), just like she is attempting to do in her small hospital ward. On another instance when In-hye asks her sister why she escaped towards the woods a few months ago Yeong-hye says that she just "heard something" (234). She explains how she heard something calling to her, luring her into the woods: "I heard something calling me…I don't hear it anymore now…I was just standing there waiting" (234). Yeong-hye in her excess becomes someone without boundaries, someone that resides outside the symbolic order and therefore is also able to interact with everything else outside this order. This can be seen through her interactions, both in her dreams and real life, with the trees and nature that surrounds her. When Donna Haraway proposes a feminist objectivity she explains how this would make "room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production" (594). Yeong-hye seems to see things in this way, she takes into account not only the production of knowledge that comes from her interactions with the vegetal but also the knowledge that is

produced in her dreams. She seems to be boundless, able to communicate through those imaginary boundaries that male reason has set in place. For her, there is no hierarchy or difference between the knowledge produced in dreams or reality, between the human and vegetal. She is pure porosity, overflowing and absorbing things endlessly.

The problem that arises with Yeong-hye's body becoming excess is that by being unable to interact with those inside the symbolic order, she is also unable to change or produce any direct alterations in it. Irigaray's female excess is unable to "put up any resistance against the consuming powers that eat her into invisibility" (Sjöholm 109). As Yeong-hye's own mother claims, "stop eating meat, and the world will devour you whole" (Kang 71). Yeong-hye ends up secluded in a mental hospital, constantly prodded and attempted to be force-fed by medical experts. Her only goal is to change. She claims, excitedly, how she is "not an animal anymore" (224) and how soon her words and thoughts would disappear as well.

Moira Gatens also explains how any attempt at speaking outside the space created for women in this masculine body politic, to speak from excess is usually "not recognized as human speech" (24). This happens to Yeong-hye in several instances, her speech often described as "mangled, inaudible, a distorted animal sound" (Kang 183). Yeong-hye "howled like an animal" (197) and even when she enunciates clearly for her sister "her voice still sounds like the roar of some savage beast" (254). Yeong-hye's attempts to communicate from her female excess seem to be nothing but animal sounds for those around her. She is unable to be understood in this symbolic order.

Yeong-hye is not looking to resist the male dichotomy between the human and the non-human, she is trying to escape it. Although Sjöholm sees in excess a form of resistance in the sense that excess cannot be contained and through "not ceasing to elude us under the categories of alterity" (109), this same elusion makes it very difficult for the female excess to

cause any mayhem inside of the symbolic order. As seen in Yeong-hye's case, female excess is reduced and interpreted as pure insanity, and it becomes easily contained inside a mental facility along with everyone else who is unable to perform in the public sphere. But, in her attempt at escaping the symbolic order, the wave created by Yeong-hye's excess manages to shake the boundaries present in her sister's life, In-hye.

In-hye and Repression

In-hye is the narrator of the third and final part of the novel. She is four years older than Yeong-hye and ends up being the only one who sticks by her sister's side throughout the story. In-hye describes herself as having been someone that "had always done her best. Through the sheer inertia of a life lived in this way, she would have been able to conquer anything, even time" (Kang 201). She has managed to become a part of this male fabricated public sphere. She is both the main provider for her family as business owner and, at the same time, the mother of a young boy named Ji-woo.

To further understand In-hye's character it is important to take into account certain theoretical concepts though. If the concept of humanity is masculine in its essence, this means that it was constructed through the exclusion of both women and nature. Moira Gatens clarifies that if bodies were granted a history "then traditional associations between the female body and the domestic sphere and the male body and the public sphere can be acknowledged as historical realities" (69). Therefore, for women to become fully human, fully rational, and to be allowed to participate in the public sphere, they have to be molded, atrophied, so that they can enter this space initially built for masculine bodies. In-hye seems to be caught in this process, as a working woman and a mother, she balances between the masculine and the feminine, the public and the domestic.

To reject the connection between women and nature, as it is seen in In-hye's character, would mean to exclude every aspect of femininity that does not fit into this patriarchal

structure. In In-hye's case that would mean her body and its sufferings. As Val Plumwood explains in her text "Feminism and Ecofeminism," the human "is a model of domination and transcendence of nature, in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature, necessity and the feminine" (23). For Plumwood the only feminism that could exist in this model would be a shallow one that would rest upon the exclusion of the feminine. In-hye has managed to inhabit both the private/domestic sphere traditionally thought for women and at the same time the public male-designed working sphere. But to be able to proliferate in the public sphere In-hye has had to repress any sort of femininity that could be perceived as irrational or inhuman. When it comes to this issue, therefore, a simple strategy of role reversal would not be sufficient. Plumwood further explains how to attribute women's closeness to nature to their powerlessness and lack of access from culture, and to make use of means through which they could separate themselves from nature (technology, medicine) "will not provide a genuine liberatory alternative. Rather, it reactively preserves and maintains the original dualism in the character of what is now affirmed" (32).

If Yeong-hye is pure excess, then In-hye is pure repression. Throughout her narration, we get glimpses of all the things that she regrets not doing, all the moments where she had repressed her desire to act. She often muses in the 'what ifs': "was there really nothing else she could have done?" (Kang 198), what if she had stopped her father, stopped Yeong-hye's husband, stopped her own husband? She often became just a spectator to the violence that her sister was subjected to, always unable to move, always staring "stiff as a ramrod" (197). Yeong-hye is an excess of activity, of movement, like a tree, it is alive and always transforming. In-hye, on the other hand, is artificial and stuck like a stiff ramrod; man-made and unable to act.

Moira Gatens further explains how women can indeed proliferate in the public-working sphere, but only "provided that they either elide their own corporeal specificity or are able to juggle both their traditional role in the private sphere and their newfound 'equality'" (64). In-hye juggles her traditional motherly role as well as her working life. She is what, according to Elfving-Hwang, can be described as a 'superwoman'. This concept stemming from when work for women was still perceived in Korea as something that was coming from a place of necessity rather than a natural disposition. Therefore, being a working woman was only a temporary addition to their most natural habitat; that of the domestic. The concept 'superwoman' is therefore attributed to those women "who either gave up the idea of having a family or tried to juggle to maintain some kind of balance between family life and a career" (66). This way of life leads In-hye to a sort of denial of her own female body and this is reflected in the way her own sister's excess directly affects her corporeality. In-hye is unknowingly trapped between dualist notions, her body atrophied and artificial. The only way to separate herself from this dichotomy is through pure subversion and a re-thinking of femininity, through not only becoming aware of her own body and its struggles but how her body acts upon and interacts with the bodies of others. This is achieved through the tidal wave of her sister's excess.

For In-hye her sister had "shuck off social constraints," and left her behind, "still a prisoner" (Kang 207). Yeong-hye breaks through the bars that had imprisoned In-hye her whole life, bars that until then "she'd never even known they were there" (207). In-hye existed atrophied, alienated, and imprisoned her whole life, stuck in a symbolic order that forced her to shuck off the feminine. Almost a mirror to how her husband and sister had seemed to be "trying to shuck off the human" (263) when they had slept together, both of them painted in flowery designs.

Throughout In-hye's narration, we learn that during the spring after she found her husband recording himself having sex with her sister, their bodies pained over with flowers and branches, she had "bled from her vagina for close on a month, on and off" (Kang 235). Instead of immediately seeking any sort of medical attention or help In-hye constantly postpones her visits to the hospital. This vaginal bleeding, this palpable reminder of the existence of her body, makes her vividly aware of the kind of life that she has led. In-hye realizes that, in fact, "she had never lived. Even as a child, as far back as she could remember, she had done nothing but endure" (236). This sudden realization hits In-hye on her way to the gynecology department, once she had finally mustered the courage to pay attention to her own body. After finding out that her bleeding had been caused in fact by nothing more than an easily removed polyp, "nothing but a minor niggle" (237),-In-hye's own corporeality becomes almost impossible to bear.

The small cut made by the doctor after removing the polyp heals throughout the following weeks, but In-hye recalls how "she felt as though there were still an open wound inside her body" (Kang 197). Her body never stops throbbing, and therefore it cannot be ignored anymore. In fact, this wound, inflicted, as I would like to purpose, by the expansive wave of her sister's lack of boundaries, seems to grow "bigger than her" and she starts to feel as if her "whole body was being pulled into its pitch-black maw" (238). In-hye's sudden bodily call into awareness makes her unable to keep ignoring the fact that she has lived her whole life "from the body of another: an actress, still a body bit, a mouthpiece" (Gatens 25). She realizes suddenly that her life "had never belonged to her" (Kang 241), and this becomes too much at some point for her to bear.

In-hye's body, just like her sister's, tells us a story. One day she hikes up a mountain early in the morning, the cord of a mobile that she had decorated with her son Ji-woo in her pocket, and feeling as if her pain was "a hole swallowing her up" (Kang 243). Although

never explicit, it is clear in the novel that In-hye had gone out that morning with the intention of ending her own life. The reason why In-hye turns back home and does not go through just putting an end to her impersonal existence is never explored in the text, but her adamant insistence towards her younger sister and how she is "not trying to die" (227) showcases that there is a direct connection between her sister's existence and In-hye deciding to endure for a bit more.

Stacy Alaimo in her text "Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature" introduces the concept of "trans-corporeality", which she defines as "the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from "nature" or "environment"" (238). This concept is useful when analyzing both In-hye and Yeong-hye because they themselves along with the trees throughout the novel interact and change whenever coming in contact with each other. As Alaimo explains, a trans-corporeal space in which bodies "are always acting and being acted upon, human bodies and non- human natures transform, unfold, and thereby resist categorization, complete knowledge, and mastery" (253). Moira Gatens explores the malleability of bodies according to how they interact with their contexts, she further develops how "the ways in which the typical spheres of movement of men and women and their respective activities construct and recreate particular kinds of body to perform particular kinds of task" (69). If human and non-human bodies can affect each other, deconstruct and build each other up again, it makes sense that Yeong-hye's metamorphosis was able to shake the foundations of her sister's life to the core.

After Young-hye's disappearance in mount Ch'ukseong during one afternoon, In-hye starts to dream as well, she sees her sister and she sees the dark woods. In these same woods where Yeong-hye seems to find comfort, seems to find a welcoming presence, In-hye only finds trees that "are frighteningly chill form of life" (Kang 248). In-hye recalls how in her dreams she is unable to find a tree that would take "her life from her. Some of the trees had

refused to accept her" (248). In the same nature that her sister finds comfort, finds a place for her uncontainable excess, In-hye finds nothing but silence and rejection. In-hye is far too human for them, existing in two completely opposite spheres, able to hear them but unable to understand them. Another one of her recurring dreams is one of herself in a mirror, blood oozing out of her left eye, whenever she tries to reach up to wipe the blood away though her reflection does not move an inch, it only stands "there, blood running from a staring eye" (184). This recurrent dream further showcases In-hye's inability to act upon her own instincts, her own desires, constantly trapped in a symbolic order that rejects her female body. In-hye's body has been shaped and deformed by her context and is attempting to regain its form by making itself present through a throbbing wound, through blood-filled dreams.

Throughout the novel, In-hye endures and represses, she represses the anger she feels towards her sister, represses the urge to completely confront her husband, she even represses her desire to embrace Hee-joo because of the "guilt she feels over having had Yeong-hye incarcerated here" (Kang 261). In-hye's body is atrophied, could be called what Alaimo describes as a "toxic body", a body that is "produced and reproduced, simultaneously, by science, industrialized culture, agribusiness, capitalist consumerism, and other forces" (261). In-hye's body is intoxicated, configured to repress and to excel. The only time that In-hye acts upon her wishes is when she is witnessing doctors and nurses attempting to insert a feeding tube through her sister's nose as she vividly screams how she does not want to be fed, how she does not like eating. In In-hye's ears her sister's voice "still sounds like the roar of some savage beast" (254). As she watches the violent scene unfold in front of her and as she hears one of the nurse's scream, In-hye escapes out of another nurse's grasp and runs towards her sister who is coughing up blood. In-hye screams as the doctor attempts to take the tube out of her sister's throat and, after biting one of the nurse's arms, manages to stop them from injecting more tranquilizer into her sister. In-hye takes Yeong-hye "in her arms, soaking her

blouse with the blood her sister has vomited up" (257). This incredibly graphic and violent scene is the first time that In-hye stops violence from being carried against her sister.

After this, In-hye retires to the bathroom and as she looks into the mirror mentions how "it's your body, you can treat it however you please. The only area where you're free to do just as you like. And even that doesn't turn out how you wanted" (Kang 259). Whether these words are directed towards herself or her sister is not clear, what is clear is that even she was surprised by her reaction as she stares at herself in the mirror. Her face "like always, betraying not even the faintest hint of emotion" but asking herself how "the wailing cry that tore at her ears a little while ago was so raw, so full of anguish, she finds it difficult to believe it came from her" (260). In-hye, perhaps in a more subtle way, is also metamorphosing.

The Sisters

The ripple effect from Yeong-hye's metamorphosis breaks through everything In-hye had known. Her sister's excess, although unable to directly communicate with the symbolic order, managed to shake it up enough for In-hye to open up her eyes to a reality she had before not been able to see. As she herself explains.

> If her husband and Yeong-hye hadn't smashed through all the boundaries, if everything hadn't splintered apart, then perhaps she was the one who would have broken down, and if she'd let that happen, if she'd let go of the thread, she might never have found it again. In that case, would the blood that Yeong-hye had vomited today have burst from her, In-hye's, chest instead? (Kang 293)

The question here remains, though, if there can be any change in the symbolic order produced by Yeong-hye's excess, and what it would imply for her and her sister's future. When analyzing "The Merry-go-round Circus Woman" by the Korean author Kyongnin Chon, Elfving-Hwang touches upon the issues presented by the female excess. She explains how in this story the main character is "perceived as so removed from it that she will, from now on,

be associated with the animal world" (Elfving-Hwang 182). Chon's female character, through her female excess, manages, just like Yeong-hye, to escape the symbolic order. The question raised by Elfving-Hwang mirrors Sjöholm's worries that the female excess will result in women inhabiting "the non-visible cavity of the 'flesh,' where she disappears from language, history, and politics" (Sjöholm 109). In this tale by Chon, "the circus woman does not find subjectivity as such, but simply exists in a state of excess in which, in Geraldine Meaney's words, 'the "not me" has not yet stabilized into an Other'" (Elfving-Hwang 182). This "failed attempt to gain agency" (182) in the symbolic order would in a way signify the "impossibility of any act of authoritative speech and action for women within the existing symbolic order" (182). In *The Vegetarian* though, this impossibility is reverted through the addition of In-hye, this character that manages to oscillate between the symbolic order and her sister's feminine excess. In-hye can understand her sister's words: "I have dreams too, you know" (Kang 268) she tells her, but at the same time she manages to keep her hold onto "the slender thread that had kept her connected with everyday life" (245).

The Dreamland of a New Femininity

Yeong-hye and In-hye's experiences outside of the symbolic order begins with dreams, the one that Yeong-hye has one night in the beginning of the novel and the one that In-hye narrates at the beginning of "Flaming Trees". Elfving-Hwang also explores how because of the difficulty that it presents to entertain the ideas of other types of femininity in such a closed-off patriarchal symbolic order, Korean female writers have turned to fiction since "fiction written in the realistic or mimetic mode can be a particularly uncompromising platform for reimagining femininity" (165). For her, fantasy would therefore become the space where one can escape the archetypal imageries that seem to reign over our symbolic order, fantasy would allow us to expand "the boundaries of perceived 'reality'" (167). This can be seen both in In-hye's and Yeong-hye's characters through their dreams, the feminine,

and their own femininity in relation to the nature explored in their dreams. At some point, as she stares at her sister, even In-hye wonders to what "other dimension might Yeong-hye's soul have passed into, having shrugged off flesh like a snake shedding its skin?" (Kang 248). Fantasy can in this sense also remind us of that "which cannot yet be represented" (Elfving Hwang 191); those blank spaces that seem to be left in our symbolic order can be filled and explored through the use of the fantastic.

At the same time, the exploration of death also plays an important role in the search for a feminine subject outside of the symbolic realm according to Elfving-Hwang, and this is also thoroughly explored in *The Vegetarian*. At one point in the novel, as In-hye is attempting to make her sister eat, scared that her sister might die, Yeong-hye directly confronts her and asks her: "Why is it such a bad thing to die?" (Kang 229). If for Elfving-Hwang the "feminine defined in terms of docility, passivity and domesticity, signifies only death and end of fluid and open subjectivities" (188) then for Yeong-hye's fluid subjectivity the only way out is death. For In-hye on the other hand, to die signifies to give up. For her, her sister's acceptance of the fact that she might die is to give up on attempting to change the way that they have been living. She stares at her and tells her: "You're lying there in that bed, and dying. Nothing else" (Kang 249), nothing else, to die for In-hye, to leave the symbolic order completely, is to give up. To give up the idea that there might be something more, something else to their existence, to give up the idea that through excess other forms of being cannot only be explored in dreams but also brought to life.

When she tells her sister that she dreams too, she also adds: "And I could let myself dissolve into them, let them take me over…but surely the dream isn't all there is?" (Kang 268). In-hye is not content with just giving up, with just dreams, she wants something more, something real. What Yeong-hye wants is to not even be able to think or speak as a human does, she tells her sister how "soon now, words and thoughts will all disappear" (224).

Yeong-hye wants to leave the symbolic order to which she has belonged her whole life, and she does not care if she dies in the process. On the other hand, In-hye stares at her sister incredulously and says: "if all you want to do is become a tree, you still have to eat. You have to live" (227). What In-hye wants is to keep her sister alive, not necessarily human, but alive. Karen Barad reminds us how "practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather, they are mutually implicated. We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because 'we' are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming" (147). If Yeong-hye were to die, if her goal from the beginning was that of putting an end to her life, this would mean that no meaning, no new knowledge could come from her metamorphosis. There lies In-hye's fear that all of her sister's actions had been aiming towards death, that her metamorphosis, her excess, would become meaningless. In-hye's fear becomes "hot anger that is boiling up inside her like spume" (226), she reassures herself though, looks at her sister as she silently repeats: "you're not trying to die" (227).

At this point it is important to bring back the concept of "toxic bodies". For Stacy Alaimo, toxic-bodies, although not something positive, can serve as "a particularly vivid example of trans-corporeal space, toxic bodies insist that environmentalism, human health, and social justice cannot be severed" (262). Toxic bodies, just like In-hye and Yeong-hye's bodies, serve as proof that they are in a constant interchange with the environment, and the spaces that they inhabit. If the feminine excess can become "the guardian of an open space" (Sjöholm), then In-hye's body could become the flexible boundary between this open space that happens to be "continuously threatened" (106) and the human-rational sphere. Toxic bodies are "volatile, emergent, and continually evolving, in and of "themselves,"" (Alaimo 261) and therefore would be able to mutate and change to understand and create a dialogue not only with female excess but also the non-human realm.

This same porosity, this capability to absorb and mutate "often does not discriminate against that which can kill us" (Tuana 198), because of this In-hye's adamance in not letting her sister die is so crucial in *The Vegetarian*. That porosity had allowed Yeong-hye to absorb "all her suffering inside her, deep into the marrow of her bones" (Kang 230), but it had also allowed In-hye to absorb the dew that morning in the mountains after having decided not to end her own life. In-hye recalls how at the time "she hadn't understood what that cold moisture had been trying to say, as it drenched her battered body and spread through her dried-up veins. It had simply leached through into her flesh, down to her very bones" (230). What she manages to understand at the end of the novel is never verbalized, we never get access to that knowledge. Maybe it is left for our own porosity to find, what we do get to know though is that this porosity has allowed In-hye to communicate with nature. This porosity in In-hye generates a "space that allows for both the unpredictable becomings of other creatures and the limits of human knowledge" (Alaimo 262) to be explored. In-hye can now communicate with her sister and with the non-human realm, and as the novel comes to an end she quietly breathes in as "the trees by the side of the road are blazing, green fire undulating like the rippling flanks of a massive animal, wild and savage" (Kang 231).

Conclusion

In the last section of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, we find ourselves not only concerned with Yeong-hye's dream induced vegetarianism and consequential anorexia, but also highly involved with the consequences that this has on her sister, the only character who stays with Yeong-hye until the end of the novel. It is through this relationship that we manage to finally get a deeper understanding not only of Yeong-hye's condition but also of how her excess is finally attempted to be understood. The figure of In-hye is as important as that of her sister in *The Vegetarian*, since she is the only one that stays alongside this person that seems adamant about escaping the symbolic order.

Yeong-hye's body breaks free from the symbolic boundaries, attempting to become something more vegetal, and even attempting to die. Her metamorphosis, her excess, is unable to be interpreted or understood by those around her; therefore, it evades the category of resistance. There is no resistance in her transformation, it is only an overflow of excess, a flood of something unknown and uncontrollable for those around her. This wave of excess is what manages to trigger a change in her sister In-hye, who although at some point also attempts to escape this symbolic order where her feminine body finds no place through her suicide, is able to resist this impulse, hoping that "she could put up with it" (Kang 239) for a bit longer. In-hye's character manages to oscillate between her sister's excess and the symbolic order that has been repressing her for so long. In-hye can both understand her sister, but also keeps herself connected to "everyday life" (245). In the sisters we find the possibility of change through the porosity of their bodies, through a trans-corporeal understanding of their experiences. In *The Vegetarian* we not only find Yeong-hye's metamorphosis, but In-hye's own body changes drastically as well.

In this essay I interpreted Yeong-hye's transformation as a manifestation of female excess, at the same time this is only one of the multiple readings that can be given to the sister's relationship and their transformations. It is important to highlight as well that this is a reading that was carried out using mainly western feminist theories, therefore there is a Korean cultural aspect that I could not completely account for from my outsider's perspective. There are as well, some unexplored questions and ideas that this essay could not fully delve into, for example In-hye's relationship with her son Ji-hoon and the importance that her role as a mother has throughout the chapter, as well as to carry an analysis of Yeong-hye's treatment inside of the mental hospital and the role of medicine in her attempt at escaping the symbolic order.

In “Flaming Trees”, we find a new way to challenge the symbolic order, to challenge what it means to be human, what it means to be nature and most importantly, what it means to be female. In In-hye’s last scene, when we find her staring “fiercely at the trees. As if waiting for an answer. As if protesting against something” (Kang 268), we not only find a challenge for nature, but an invitation to dialogue; to start anew from this equal footing that exists between them. If “crucial ethical and political possibilities emerge from this literal ‘contact zone’ between human corporeality and more-than-human nature” (Alaimo 238), the experiences of the sisters in *The Vegetarian* showcase the importance of a trans-corporeal understanding of knowledge and of femininity. In-hye asks for an answer from the trees, from nature, not from the paramedics that are riding alongside her in the ambulance. This gesture, turning her back to humanity and asking for an answer is extremely significant. She does not turn to the paramedics because in them, in that symbolic order directed by male-developed medical institutions, she will not find an answer. In-hye is finally aware of how “the boundaries between our flesh and the flesh of the world we are of and in is porous” (Tuana 198). At the same time, In-hye also recognizes the differences between her, her sister and nature. She knows now that boundaries can be broken, and because she sees them, she is able to choose which ones to break and which ones to keep, she sees differences but also recognizes the repression that unites the three of them; her, her sister and the trees.

For Moira Gatens the importance of difference inside the feminist discourse comes from the fact that “these different stories or narratives will map, or represent, the social body in quite different ways, resulting in the emergence of different tools of political analysis and disparate political agendas” (96). There is a need to see differences inside feminist discourses because in this multiplicity of ways of being, in all these different bodies that have been formed through different types of repression, can be the key to finding or shaping a new symbolic order. In the last part of Han Kang’s novel, we find ourselves exploring a

"multiplicity of differences" (Gatens 96) but it is through this exploration of the different struggles that we find a hope of something else, something that is not one or two but multiple. These differences intertwine with each other, exchange with each other; their bodies mutate, their bodies change, their bodies absorb. And most importantly their bodies get to know each other and themselves.

In-hye's final look towards the passing trees opens up the discussion to not only different female struggles but also to those who have been excluded from all discussions. In-hye engages with the human and the non-human from an equal footing, she demands of nature an explanation because she has not been able to encounter one in the human realm. The interactions between the sisters and nature, both positive and negative, open up a trans-corporeal space where "because they are always acting and being acted upon, human bodies and non-human natures transform, unfold, and thereby resist categorization, complete knowledge, and mastery" (Alaimo 253). When reading "Flaming Trees" along with ecofeminist theories the importance of modern critical theories on how bodies and meanings get made, just as Donna Haraway claims, open the possibility to "build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (580). Yeong-hye and In-hye together resist categorizations, and In-hye resists the possibility that her sister may die through opening herself up in an attempt to generate a space where her sister may have a chance for life. She turns to the trees for an answer because she knows that in the human realm, she will find none, and she knows that "surely the dream isn't all there is? We have to wake up at some point, don't we?" (Kang 268).

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INTO THE UNKNOWN:
THE PROCESS OF MATURATION IN FEMALE ANIMATED CHARACTERS ELSA AND MEI

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Introduction

Animated female characters have evolved positively and progressively over the years. From Snow White to Mei from *Turning Red*, there have been potentially significant changes from physical traits to their ways of thinking and ultimate goals from what they were in pre-feminist times. However, does this make the new characters more or less complicated? Years ago, female characters were subjected to silencing their voices and fulfilling expectations of them. For example, it was most notoriously the case with Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, the first princesses before Walt Disney's death. They were seen mostly only because of their beauty and their role as a woman homemaker according to some scholars (Maio qtd. in Yzaguirre 12), and I am interested in demonstrating that this has changed and is no longer the current situation.

Nowadays, we have many examples where female characters no longer base their whole life depending on someone or finding love: it is rather secondary, as seen in the case of Merida from *Brave* and, most recently, Mirabel from *Encanto*, for example. What is really important now for them is to be able to find their true ‘‘self’’, as also occurs with characters like Moana in her film, or Raya in *Raya and the Last Dragon*. Nevertheless, finding one's true self is not as easy as it seems. Expectations are imposed on everyone. Especially if you are a queen or if you are a 13-year-old teenager, as in the case of Elsa from *Frozen* and Mei from *Turning Red*. Although from different worlds, a fantastic one full of magic where the future of Arendelle depends on her, to the realistic world where the protagonist is in the process of adolescence in which she must know how to do her best to feel good about herself, both films deal in their own way with psychoanalytically complex characters according to their different stages of development. Identity crises, the pressure put on them, the pasts that haunt them, the influences that impact them; all of this is a process and a difficult journey they must travel. What makes these characters different is that they undergo a moment of

revelation in which they face different struggles in order to find themselves. In the end, this is important because getting to know themselves is the aim of these characters.

It is really important to analyze how the journey of self-discovery in animated female characters is different today than it was before: now they move through a moment of revelation which will lead them to form a stable personality. By closely studying specific films such as *Frozen* and *Turning Red*, with specific theories such as Wright's and Jung's, we will appreciate the complexity of the individuation process and why it is so relevant.

The Movies: *Frozen II* and *Turning Red*

The representation of women and female characters has changed much in the world. As far as this paper is concerned, we have two female characters that, while very different, are both complex, innovative, and engaging, as their narratives are still new in this shift in thinking about what a female character means; for example, they are more ''real'' women, as they are shown as vulnerable and resilient each concerning their problems. Although they suffer in the process of individuation and finding themselves, the reward is worth it for it helps others see them as the empowered women they truly are.

On the one hand, we have Elsa from *Frozen* and *Frozen II*. The first film deals with Elsa's quest to end the eternal winter she unwittingly produced, while the second follows Elsa's search for the voice she hears to eventually reveal the hidden past of her kingdom and her family while dealing with the magical spirits of the Enchanted Forest. The films revolve primarily around the evolution of this princess/queen of Arendelle. Elsa is a woman we first see at the age of 21 in the first film, where we learn a little about her childhood, how she discovers her powers, and how she is imperfect and self-conscious about the way she is; different from the rest as she has powers she cannot control. In the second film, we see her at the age of 24, still with a problem to solve. Although she literally lets herself free in the first

film, in the second one, we can see how she is still not completely happy with her identity; this is where individuation will take place.

On the other hand, we have Meilin, or Mei, from *Turning Red*. The film is about the passage of adolescence and the maturation of the main character, who must choose between continuing to strictly obey her mother's demands or being a typical teenager who goes through all the ups and downs of this stage. Mei is a girl who is now 13 years old and has reached adolescence, a stage that makes her feel like an adult already, but that really shows her that she still has a long way to go to become the responsible adult she thought she was. Moreover, Mei's family, more specifically the women in Mei's family, have a curse/blessing; they contain a panda that comes out when their emotions are too strong. All this interferes with what is a typical adolescent process in films and shows the reality of what teenagers go through in real life. Mei must choose well how to continue leading her life after encountering that little big detail.

Both films have a lot in common even if it is not apparent at first glance. In both of them, we have engaging female characters struggling with finding their paths, that is, individuation; both follow the maturation process of each. Both characters reflect in an enchanted forest on who they want to be when they leave. Both are young women with generational traumas/wounds that must be healed in order to move forward. Both are vulnerable to collapse and then find peace, and it is this that makes it important to analyze them together. Because they both struggle, suffer, and challenge themselves in their different cultural contexts, which entails their own conflicts and expectations. It is important to see how these complex characters manage to find their paths. In the end, both represent a complex process that we as human beings, and especially women, experience and can see reflected in them in different ways; we are imperfect beings that make internal journeys to know ourselves and find our place in the world. Therefore, what I want to show is how the

construction of the new Disney female characters is built through different processes of recognition and identification of the self, making these more complex.

Evolution

Concerning their internal and difficult processes, these are very different from ‘‘the traditional’’ processes of previous animated female characters. According to some scholars, ‘‘(...), the large majority of Disney heroines end up marrying their significant others at the conclusion of the film, (...)’’ (Yzaguirre 18). In the case of Elsa and Mei, this does not happen in the end and neither is it among their close goals. Elsa is never romantically interested in anyone, and as for Mei, although she is at a stage where she falls in love easily, like falling for the boyband she is a fan of, marriage is not her ultimate goal either. Moreover, ‘‘(...) older heroines are not only passive in nature, but also helpless, dependent and in need of protection’’ (Henke qtd. in Yzaguirre 19). Elsa and Mei are not passive, not helpless, not dependent, and do not need the protection of any man or other person. They need their loved ones emotionally to be complete and happy with themselves. In this case, they fit with the idea of the newer heroines, the ones who ‘‘neglect societal expectations of them and long for the freedom to make their own choices’’ (Do Rozario qtd. in Yzaguirre 20). Thus, challenging the stereotypes established about the old heroines, these new ones fight for their goals, for living in peace without fulfilling the expectations imposed on them, and for being their true selves.

Elsa and Mei’s internal processes are difficult for several reasons; they do not talk about their problems with others, they do not ask for help because they believe they can solve them alone, and they face difficulties that involve situations that only affect themselves. By the way, this often happens to us in real life as well. In these cases, only Elsa has powers in Arendelle, and only Mei becomes a red panda concerning the rest of her friends. All this is

part of their personal growth process, but it is more challenging than for the rest of the characters due to these difficulties.

Walt Disney continued to create characters that perpetuated patriarchal values by showing the old characters as beautiful and obedient only (Colby O'Brien qtd. in Yzaguirre 23). Now, in the 21st century, characters such as the protagonists of *Frozen I* and *II* and *Turning Red*, show that feminism has progressed and eradicated this retrograde idea of portraying stereotypical female characters. According to Roberta Seelinger Trites, feminism is the movement that ‘‘relies on a belief in the worth of all individuals’’ (2), taking this into consideration, Elsa and Mei in their narratives can be considered exponents of this. In their films, they are the protagonists, who live on equal terms to the male characters, who have little relevance here.

The Portrayal of Female Characters

As to how the female animated characters are portrayed, the older ones, such as Cinderella and Aurora, were portrayed as the beautiful heroines who have the looks and shape of a Barbie doll, with a tiny waist and beautiful hair (Bell qtd. in Yzaguirre 28). Elsa and Mei, in turn, are not the case, since it can be inferred from the figures of the last films with female characters and with the modern times of today that are post-feminist and not governed by this idea, to have the perfect body; they change their look with every ‘‘mental breakdown’’ and both physically and mentally are always changing and evolving without trying to fit in the idea of being ‘‘perfect’’ as the older female protagonists. Even though in Elsa’s case she does have the perfect body as she reflects a beauty standard that has existed for several decades. In the case of Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* and Snow White, they had very tight waists, and their problems were solved by men, while, in the case of Moana and Mirabel from *Encanto*, for example, their bodies are not tight, they are simply ‘‘normal’’, and their problems, also complex, are solved by themselves. Especially in Mei’s case, she has

neither the shape of a Barbie doll nor the hair. She is a kid, and she is one of the few animated representations of girls who actually have girls' bodies. She is different in every way and that is what matters for the representation and evolution of new kinds of animated female characters. These new female characters have a more important role than just being pretty; they have agency.

Both of the films in question reject gender roles and feature empowered characters regardless of their gender. The protagonist's agency is fundamental in the evolution of female animated characters; ''The feminist character's recognition of her agency and her voice invariably leads to some sort of transcendence, usually taking the form of a triumph over whatever system or stricture was repressing her'' (Seelinger Trites 7). This way, through the power of their agencies, both Elsa and Mei can move forward, evolve, and transcend, until they reach a state of peace with themselves, their lives, and their identities, as will be seen in the revelation moment section later on.

Identity Crisis, The Past & Stages of Development

Elsa and Mei suffer from an identity crisis. In Elsa's case, she is afraid of herself. She represses herself for fear of the chaos and destruction she may cause, and for fear of the unknown or what is beyond her knowledge, in this case, the voice that calls her. In Mei's case, she feels pressure from her mother and the family problem (of having a panda), and she discovers that throws her out of a typical adolescent process. Both are afraid of failing and not fulfilling the expectations that others have of them, and this is what causes them internal crises in the process of searching for their identities. In *Frozen II*, Pabbie, the wisest troll, says ''I hope you're prepared for what you have done, Elsa'' (22:22), and then he says ''We have always feared Elsa's powers were too much for this world. Now, we must pray they are enough'' (23:40). After a few scenes, Elsa even feels responsible for the death of her parents, and Anna then says to her ''I just don't want you dying... trying to be everything for everyone

else, too'' (57:01). Regarding Mei, in *Turning Red*, she says ''Mommy, I'm so sorry'' (14:40), and ''You are her pride and joy, so act like it!'' (14:44), after feeling guilty about drawing a boy and being shamed by her mom for it. These are all clear evidence of the pressure they both felt at times in the stories. They feel pressure not to disappoint others.

Although both have different approaches, the two films perfectly portray the characteristics of human development. We know this thanks to the work of Carl Jung, who takes the concept of individuation in John Pennachio's article ''Gnostic Inner Illumination and Carl Jung's Individuation'' that ''the goal of human striving is the quest for wholeness through inner knowledge'' (237). Although separating the gnostic and religious ideas of the article, it exposes relevant psychological information for a personal analysis. The journey toward the self that highlights the importance of the self is called individuation (237). Individuation is the path to the ultimate truth of the self that is achieved through the inner journey of each person, which is relevant to the approach in these films since it is the path of self-knowledge that characters as complex as the ones that are being analyzed must go through. The concept of individuation is taken with the idea that reaching it is fundamental in life and the maturation process. Through this process, we can become fully integrated and know who we really are. This article exposes how such a process is fundamental for the development of people, and in this case for this paper, for the development of complex female characters who must understand how they grow throughout the movies. We need to use this theory to understand the individuation process of Elsa and Mei in their respective films. We need to use this theory because it manages to show an evolution from incompleteness to completeness, from ignorance to knowledge, and from the dark to the light, that is, from the beginning of their identity problems to their resolution. In addition to Jean Ann Wright's theory from her book *Animation writing and development: From script*

development to pitch, to identify the characteristics of the stages of human development of these protagonists.

It is necessary and important to understand the stages of human development to understand how each person feels at specific times in their life. Therefore, the age of 13, Mei's age, and 21 and 24, Elsa's age, will be taken into account in both films to demonstrate the maturation process concerning those stages. Both stages are significant since they are the most relevant stages at the moment of beginning to recognize and identify the self. On one side, adolescence begins, and on the other, adulthood begins to be established.

In *Turning Red*, Mei is a more realistic and relatable character, ''these characters have feelings and attitudes just like real people, [w]e can see what motivates them, [and] they act like people we know'' (Wright 65). Meiling is really the child who strictly follows her parents' expectations of her, in this, and in some cases, her mother's expectations of her. It is this whole relationship with reality that confirms to us that her situation with her mother totally influences her identity crisis. The film is especially about the passage of adolescence and self-discovery, and it is in this sense that, from the very first moment, Mei becomes a character already quite complex.

Mei is at the beginning of her teen years. That is a complicated stage; teenagers want to think for themselves and do what they want, but they also still need love, acceptance, and success. ''Many thirteen-year-olds think they are fully mature'' (Wright 53), and this is completely the case for Mei, which can be seen at the beginning of the movie when she starts saying that ''[a]nd ever since I turned 13, I've been doing my own thing'' (*Turning Red* 1:38:28) and later is interrupted by her mother, thus showing that even though she thinks she is mature, she still needs her mother's acceptance. It is also important to note that at this age ''Both girls and boys are easily embarrassed by their parents and arguments are more likely to occur with Mom'' (Wright 53). This is what the film is mostly about. Mei is embarrassed by

her mother's unrestrained actions, like embarrassing her with the guy at the store who did not even know Mei existed, or following her around, and in turn, the arguments with her mother as they have different stances on what Mei's identity should be.

All this mess about who Meilin should be now that she has reached adolescence has an explanation. That is also Elsa's case, but as for Mei, she discovers a family secret that directly affects her: the panda problem. This produces a series of worries in the young girl who is not yet ready to decide what she wants to do with her life, as she has just turned 13 and although she thinks she is mature, she really is not.

Turning Red fully embodies Wright's idea that ''Most of us humans struggle to be normal, to be perfect children or parents, to be the ideal student or employee, and fail at these things every step of the way. Much current television is based on these failings'' (67). Considering that the word ''normal'' is a social construction, Wright here refers to the idea of being ''typical''. In any case, it is precisely the idea of being ''the perfect daughter'' that the film exposes the problem that ends up crumbling the stability of the women in Mei's family. This pattern of trying to be perfect and failing was repeated so much in Mei's family that it ended up affecting both her and her mother. Mother and daughter struggled with trying to deny who they really are; in the mother's case, she denied her likes and happiness by fulfilling being the perfect daughter, while Mei managed to accept who she is. Eventually, the truth is, we probably know people who have gone through the same bad luck of having to deny who they are for the sake of meeting the expectations of others or who have fought against others for that very reason.

It is complicated for Mei to find herself and who she is at her age and the pressure she is under. What happens to Mei then? If she gives herself, will she lose herself? That is her biggest fear and problem. Mei is afraid of failing her mother and friends, either not being the perfect daughter or not being the friend her friends need, so she loses herself and explodes

with strong emotions, thus releasing the panda. As it was mentioned, at that age, teenagers want to do what they want, but they also want acceptance, especially considering Mei's culture and how the movie starts with the idea of honoring your ancestors, it is quite complicated for the protagonist to make her way without losing something in the journey. Therefore, she must decide which Mei wants to be; the obedient one who honors her family or the fun-loving one who is fun with her friends.

On the other hand, Elsa, like all fantasy characters, ''often they live in a magical world with powers that can be used for good or evil. (...) They may look different, and these physical characteristics might extend to their personalities'' (Wright 66). Indeed, Elsa, our main character of a more fantasy type in these contexts, corresponds to the characterization of a complex character in the sense that she has powers that can be used for a specific purpose and that her physical appearance is different, all this affecting her internal crisis. Elsa in the first film is between the ages of 17 and 21 years, the stage in which the transition into adulthood begins (55). Elsa has lost her parents, has had to become the queen at a young age, and is still not in control of her powers, the ice powers that nature gave her but no one taught her to use. At this stage of human development, from 17 years old, women may be vulnerable (55), and we can see this in both movies, for example in the second one when she sings ''I'm afraid of what I'm risking if I follow you into the unknown'' (*Frozen II* 17:57). Thus, her saying that she is afraid expresses her vulnerability.

At the stage from 18 to 45 intimacy becomes important: ''If I give myself, will I lose myself?'' (55). This is precisely the main fear of the protagonist at that time of her life and again at the age of 24. Elsa finds herself vulnerable, afraid of being her true self. She is afraid of not fulfilling the external expectations of being a good queen for Arendelle, that is, keeping the kingdom stable and undisturbed, and keeping the weather under control, among others. As she is also afraid of being ''a monster'', in this sense; losing control again and

again subjecting her people to the consequences of her failures, and not managing herself. Therefore, what happens if Elsa gives in to what she desires? In the first film, she struggles with herself and her own consequences after turning herself in and freeing herself. Even though the liberation brought her closer to what she wanted to be, it implied a serious problem for everyone else as it creates an eternal winter and she had to repress herself again, as she even says in a song after her sister told her what had happened ‘‘Oh I’m such a fool! I can’t be free!’’ (*Frozen I* 57:09). Regarding a supposedly more mature Elsa, more in touch with herself, in *Frozen II*, Elsa again gives herself away, this time to the unknown, and again loses herself to finally find herself. In young adulthood, which occurs between 18 and 45, ‘‘young adults are establishing new life patterns’’ (Wright 55). Therefore, at this stage and after the end of this film, Elsa manages to find the true path of her life; living in nature.

However, not everything is easy for a 24-year-old queen. In *Frozen II*, Elsa discovers something that strongly affects her persona and her internal crisis to recognize herself. We know that Elsa’s past involves a childhood repressed by her powers, but now we meet an Elsa who was not mentally prepared to discover that her family had a hidden past. On the one hand, her mother belonged to a native tribe called Northuldra[4], which is very significant for the path the queen will choose for her life at the end of the film. On the other hand, she also discovers that her white and military grandfather had betrayed the already mentioned people by tricking and killing their leader and starting a war that should never have existed just because he thought the indigenous group was practicing magic. To maintain the good relationship between the people and the kingdom, a gift of a dam was to be given to the people to strengthen them, but a betrayal by Elsa’s grandfather ruined everything. It is shown that it is Elsa’s responsibility to make peace with the people and free the Enchanted Forest in

[4] Fictitious indigenous people but inspired by the Sami people, an indigenous people located north of Scandinavian nations (according to Frozen Wiki). The producers contacted Sami people like Anne Lajla Utsi for consultation and adaptation of the people for proper representation (FilmQuest). However, some critics and media believe that the inclusion of these people is because the film was ‘‘too white’’ (slate.com).

which they had imprisoned themselves, while in the process she must face the unknown and find her inner peace.

Revelation Moment

‘‘If I give myself, will I lose myself?’’ (Wright 55) reflects the idea that if the protagonists give in to their desires they may risk losing what they have and believed themselves to be. This leads them to a moment of revelation that will lead to maturation. On the one hand, in *Frozen II*, Elsa, inside the Enchanted Forest, finds herself trapped on her way to Ahtohallan in search of the voice that calls her. There, in the sea, she finds in the water a moment of revelation that will make her realize who she is and who she wants to be. It is when she sings the song ‘‘show yourself’’ that her worldview changes. In the connection with nature and water, after having found her voice, she finds peace. She now knows what she has to do, and even changes her appearance (such as her hairstyle and her clothes, as well as a noticeable change in her attitude) showing again a change in her life: she decides to leave her sister as queen and goes to live in nature. She finds her home. It is relevant to note that the voice calling her all the time officially belonged to her mother. This is confirmed by the producers in the episode 3 ‘‘Journey to Ahtohallan’’ of the documentary *Into The Unknown: The Making of Frozen II* (11:54). However, in the film, it is never clear, so it can also be interpreted that Elsa herself was the voice calling to find herself and who she really is. The voice finally leads her to realize who she is and that she is the fifth spirit[5].

On the other hand, in *Turning Red*, Mei, also trapped but in a bamboo forest, is debating whether to keep the panda or not. This situation is evidenced when one of her aunts says: ‘‘Mei Mei’s keeping the panda?’’ and another says: ‘‘It’s her life. Now move’’ (*Turning Red* 1:24:22). Then, Mei meets Sun Yee, the ancestor who inherited the panda to her family,

[5] At the beginning of *Frozen II*, King Agnarr, Elsa and Anna’s father, tells them that there is an Enchanted Forest in Arendelle protected by the magical spirits of nature; air, fire, water, and earth. Elsa and her concern about the voice that called her to find the fifth spirit awaken these spirits. She, upon arriving at Ahtohallan and finding the answers, finds that she is the fifth spirit (magical powers of ice) who connects and must right the wrongs of the past. Anna says ‘‘You are the fifth spirit’’ (*Frozen II* 1:25:27), confirming it at the end.

and there she asks her if she will regret her decision (which she already made, and that was to keep the panda). Finally, after leaving the forest, she decides to change and not follow the same pattern as the previous generations. In that place, at some point, she realized what she wanted for her life and came out of there sure of what she was. Mei decides in that forest, at that moment, to stay with the panda. This also meant keeping the orange hair and accepting the process of adolescence so that she could keep her loved ones close to her true self.

The moment of revelation is quite remarkable as it is another sign of progress in the process of creating animated female characters. As seen with these two protagonists, thanks to this moment, it is evident that they are the important ones, and it is their decisions regarding their own lives that matter. Not that this moment is surprising, but it leaves us thinking that in movies like *Little Mermaid* or *Beauty and the Beast*, it is the men who fight to reach the ultimate goal of ‘‘and they lived happily ever after’’. However, now these moments of revelation are the ones that are focusing and giving attention to the real protagonists. I also find it curious how it used to be that the names of the movies matched the name of the protagonist of the movie, who was not really fighting for her future. Now, however, not all films are named after their protagonists, as in these two films for example, but we are left with the idea that it is about them fighting for themselves and their progress.

The Endings & Individuation

One thing that does not change with these animated movies is that the ending is a happy ending. On one side, at the end of *Frozen II*, after the movie was about the search for the voice and the hidden truth of Arendelle, with Elsa almost dying in the process, what happens is that she finally manages to get the truth out, free the Enchanted Forest, unite Arendelle leaving her sister as queen, and she goes with the Northuldra to live in the wild. On the other side, concerning Mei, after she struggled to control the panda and fought against her mother’s giant panda, Mei manages to keep the panda, keep her friends and family, and be a

happy teenager with a typical life without pressure. However, what does it all mean for these complex characters?

Pennachio states ‘‘Failure to know oneself and to confront inner impulses is responsible for living in illusion and is the precursor for destruction’’ (240). This relates to what Jung says in the same text that the unconscious, that is, those who live unaware, live an unpleasant life: in terror, instability, doubt, and division but that although unpleasant, tension provides the necessary energy for transformation (242). Both lived in fear, and doubt, and almost fell to destruction because of an identity crisis. Not knowing each other or who they really were, led them into danger; in one case risking their lives in an Enchanted Forest while in the other risking their lives in a fight with their giant panda mother that perhaps could have been avoided if they had made things clear earlier. This has to do with the fact that ‘‘tension and the shadow [being in the darkness] are necessary for individuation, as the integration of opposing forces is a fundamental aspect of wholeness’’ (243). In other words, both characters needed to face that tension and shadow to integrate their contradictory feelings and reach self-knowledge.

To achieve both endings, both characters had to go through an internal journey that allowed them to reach that level of happiness. Individuation includes a duality (Pennachio 239) and knowledge, which is necessary for the self-discovery and salvation of each person (240). It is for this reason that both characters are not as simple as other female characters; they go through the bad to get to the good and through the process of knowing themselves to free themselves and try to complete themselves. In Elsa’s case, she goes from the bad, which is the process of coming to terms with the hidden past that influenced her, to the good, which is her new life in peace and tranquility. Her process of knowledge is seen in the song ‘‘show yourself’’ and she finds wholeness as she says ‘‘And it feels like I am home’’ (*Frozen II* 1:03:15). In Mei’s case, she goes from being the obedient child her mom’s demands to the

happy child she is with her friends. In this case, her process of getting to know herself happened in the bamboo forest from which she came out confident about keeping the panda, and at the end, she says ‘‘I’m changing, Mom. I’m finally figuring out who I am’’ (*Turning Red* 1:25:26), and at the very end, she finalizes the movie by saying ‘‘We’ve all got an inner beast. We’ve all got a messy, loud, weird part of ourselves hidden away. And a lot of us never let it out. But I did(...)’’ (1:28:46). Thus, demonstrating her process.

Furthermore, ‘‘[t]he shedding of illusion and the confrontation of the inner world of the unconscious are certain to be painful, but the end result is potentially beneficial’’ (Pennachio 243). Certainly painful are the processes that both Elsa and Mei go through. Both are emotionally vulnerable. Elsa suffers from remembering her past and learning more about it. Mei suffers from the changes she is experiencing. However, it is all necessary and, in the end, for the greater good. It is all part of the process.

Another idea that makes these two characters unique is that they are resilient in their own way. On the one hand, Elsa dies symbolically in the film. When she discovers her grandfather’s secret in Ahtohallan, we can see how she literally freezes after sending the message to her sister. Elsa dies, almost literally. However, after everything is fixed, she thaws and falls into the sea, from where she rises and is reborn. Elsa dies only to be reborn stronger and more determined than ever. She saves Arendelle from the water and then arranges everything for the future of her reign. She is strong, determined, and mature. This makes her special, even evident when we see her in her new look at the end of the movie. Elsa has progressed and found what she searched for, harmony. On the other hand, Mei symbolically breaks patterns. We are shown throughout the film that, generation after generation, Mei’s family suffers from the panda problem. However, by the end of the movie, Mei decides not to suffer anymore and integrate the panda into her life in another way. All this has to do with the pressure that was passed from the mothers to their daughters. The mother, as Mei’s other

aunts, was pressured to be a certain way, and so they struggled with getting rid of the panda. However, Mei is the one who breaks through this generational trauma symbolically by making her own decisions and being the first one in her family to keep and accept the panda. The resilience that comes out after she has suffered through the changes she had to go through because of her family heritage is what makes her unique. Not only her but in reality, this resilience can be evidenced in real life when we cut patterns or old family traditions that today only harm.

Finally, it is mentioned that ‘‘(...) individuation involves recognition of the shadow and the ability to use this aspect of the self for growth’’ (Pennachio 244). Thus, both Elsa and Mei used their shortcomings to mature. Elsa finally managed to free herself from all that was wrong with her and found peace. In her case, Elsa realized that her place as a fifth spirit was not in Arendelle, it was in nature, as we can infer she realized after her whole journey through the Enchanted Forest and especially from her moments in Ahtohallan. Elsa, at the age of 24, in an already adult stage, achieves the inner stability she needed. As for Mei, she managed to integrate the negative of the panda and turned it into her advantage and part of her in her process of maturing and growing up. Although she will have many more emotional ups and downs throughout her adolescence, at least she already knows how to deal with the biggest problem that the women in her family have. In this way, they both try to complete themselves and recognize their identities. Unlike other female characters, this is something that makes them unique. However, it also makes them unique that they are more relatable to audiences, that they have changing looks that reflect their new personas, and that they are both the real protagonists of their own movies.

Conclusion

The representation of animated female characters today is much more complex than in the past. Due to the process, stage by stage in the life of human development, these new

characters in these new narratives that are appearing in the last few years allow us to recognize and identify ourselves as real women. We are women who are allowed to feel and grow. Thanks to Elsa and Mei, characters so different but so human at the same time, we can see how the female characters differ from the characters of the past, both in their personality, physique and goals, and move along with the new mentality of our society. The idea of the perfect body or being the perfect woman is no longer as important as it was in the past. Although one can still find characters that fulfill those characteristics; now, the latest animated films try to show that we have our own voice, that we have relapses, and that we need to fall to be reborn and find our way again.

Elsa is a 24-year-old woman who has lived through many stormy problems and serious responsibilities at a young age. However, she is the example that after going through the bad we find the good, going from ignorance to knowledge and from darkness to clarity. She ‘‘died’’ to be reborn and connect with nature, which was her true home. Mei is the teenager we all were or could have been. Filled with intense emotions and social pressures from a generational trauma, which I would argue most of us women go through, this young woman represents in her fullness that the struggle for our place and recognition in society is a complicated but gratifying process in our lives. Thus, both in their different contexts and stages of life they struggled to find themselves and not get lost in the process.

Both films and protagonists are an example of progress. The future of Disney’s upcoming films will hopefully follow in this line of animated female protagonists who fight to become themselves. The stereotypical idea of having marriage as the ultimate goal is gone; now happiness or inner finding oneself is expected. In the coming years, more advances of this type will likely be achieved, such as the inclusion of a heroine belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, if the company is not afraid of success. However, the important thing now is that we are finally managing to gradually leave behind gender roles, stereotypes of the perfect

life, and female characters that only served to be homemakers. Even though these films still comply with certain patterns of normativity, in the aspects already demonstrated, this continues to be a point in favor of progress.

Life is an important journey, and its representation in films must be adequate. It is of great importance to show reality as it is, with relatable protagonists rather than protagonists that act as prototypes of beauty we aim to reach. In the past, we were urged to be part of a false reality, that is, to be perfect when we are not, or to comply with what society demanded, which at that time implied torture if you were a woman. Now we are approaching the reality of the 21st century where we are allowed to be free and false expectations are not created. The new generations do want to see how it is a normal process to not feel comfortable in one place or to not feel ready for the next stage of life. Now we have a voice and agency. The heroines of today are like the generations of today, and that is the way it should be. We relate nowadays with characters who struggle, suffer, and find themselves. We identify today with a woman who lived in isolation and out of control for not being able to know herself, and with a girl who adores her friends, gets excited by a boyband, and who had to heal a generational trauma to find her true self. In this way, it is the situations they face and the perseverance with which they face them that make people and characters complex. In the end, that is what life is all about, living a journey full of experiences that will shape us as individuals.

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EXPLORING DISCOMFORT IN HAN KANG'S *THE VEGETARIAN*

by Javiera Isidora Castro Acevedo

Alone, sitting at her kitchen table, she holds, and is held by, the book in her hands. She listens to the voice in her head, her eyes chasing the words, and when she finally reaches the end, she stares at the page in silence. “As if waiting for an answer. As if protesting against something. The look in her eyes is dark and insistent” (Kang 296).

No other words, nothing but the three last sentences of Han Kang’s acclaimed 2007 novel, *The Vegetarian,* could better describe the way I felt when I finished this book. Sitting at my kitchen table, a deep sense of discomfort, of hope battling against hopelessness, that was forever present throughout the reading reached its peak at that very moment, and I just wanted to know, why? Why am I feeling this way?

The Vegetarian is a contemporary novel narrated from three different perspectives, none of them belonging to the main focus of the novel: Yeong Hye, a south Korean housewife, avid reader, and part time graphic artist, who stops eating meat after her nights have become haunted by blood chilling nightmares, “dreams of murder” (Kang 44) she is unable to comprehend. Yeong Hye’s decision to change her eating habits brings terrible consequences for both herself, and those around her; as her nightmares keep her away from sleep, Yeong Hye’s behavior becomes more extreme, and eventually, she stops eating at all in hopes of becoming a tree, which leads her to be locked up in a mental institution by the end of the novel.

The following paper aims to do a feminist reading of *The Vegetarian,* focusing on Yeong Hye’s journey and the effect of her behavior on other characters. I will argue that Yeong Hye’s physical and psychological deconstruction of herself reflects a manifestation of her trauma, and a way of escaping the vicious cycle of systemic violence that rules the oppressive patriarchal society she was born and raised in. In her search for freedom, Yeong Hye’s actions lead her body to be perceived as a weapon by her family and even by herself, threatening to disrupt the so-called peace by bringing up to the surface the underlying pain

and suffering that has been suppressed for many years. Ultimately, this paper aims to analyze the sense of discomfort forever present throughout the novel, and the importance of this emotion in connection to feminism.

It was around 4:00 AM on a winter morning when Yeong Hye's husband found her standing barefoot in front of their open fridge. Yeong Hye had been woken up by a dream (the first of many), and later that day, instead of doing her usual chores, such as ironing her husband's shirt and preparing breakfast for him, she dedicates herself to emptying their fridge, putting parcels of meat into rubbish bags, "beef and pork, pieces of chicken, at least 200,000 won worth of saltwater eel" (Kang 14). "You're insane! You've completely lost it" (Kang 16), was her husband's enraged response to her unusual behavior, as he crammed his feet into a recently purchased pair of shoes, "which were too narrow and pinched uncomfortably" (Kang 16), before leaving their apartment in a rush. Just like his new shoes, Yeong Hye's actions "pinched" him uncomfortably; they made him visibly angry, but where does this anger come from?

Yeong Hye's sudden change to vegetarianism corresponds to the catalyst of the whole novel, the one action that sets the plot in motion by disrupting the status quo of her married life. Even though vegetarianism tends to be associated with a kinder, more ecological or environmentally friendly way of living, that is not how it was perceived by Yeong Hye's husband: "Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way" (Kang 3). There is a lot to unpack from this, the very first sentence of the novel. Yeong Hye's husband first introduces her as something of his, "my wife". Her name is not important, only her function and what she is to him matters. But then, the use of the word "turned" suggests that a transformation has taken place. She was no longer his, no longer unremarkable, but rather, she had morphed into this alien thing that did

not belong to anyone, this other strange species called “vegetarian”. Not only was she strange to him, but “the vegetarian” quickly became somewhat of a threat to him.

At the beginning of the novel, Yeong Hye’s husband explains that, despite not being particularly attracted to his wife, the reason why he decided to marry her was precisely because of her dullness and passive personality. “It was only natural that I would marry the most run-of-the-mill woman in the world” (Kang 5), he states. “As for women who were pretty, intelligent, strikingly sensual, the daughters of rich families — they would only have served to disrupt my carefully ordered existence” (Kang 5). When it came to Yeong Hye, who he perceived as inferior to him and easy to control, there was no need for him to even make an effort, or to fret about his inferiority complex regarding his ordinary looks and the size of his penis, which he used to be insecure about (Kang 4). That is why, when Yeong Hye changes in this way, he lashes out; this is not what he had signed up for.

“Spring came, and still my wife hadn’t backed down” (Kang 23). Her husband saying that she “hadn’t backed down” (referring to her choice to become a vegetarian) makes it seem like she has not backed down from a fight. This shows how Yeong Hye’s husband sees his wife’s behavior as some sort of attack directed at him, even though she has only changed her eating habits, and that shouldn’t concern him. Furthermore, the fact that he mentions how she “still” hadn’t stopped being vegetarian suggests that he expects her to quit, but since she did not do what he expected (or wanted) her to do, he felt personally attacked; his patriarchal mindset makes him perceive her behavior as defiant. According to Kim Seung-Kyung and John Finch´s article tackling Confucian patriarchy in Korean society and the IMF Economic Crisis, “Confucian ideas continue to pervade contemporary Korean culture” (43) especially when it comes to Korean families which are considered “a microcosm of society” which “organizes political and economic life along a model of harmonious family relationships” (43). “Contemporary Korean Confucianism persists in family rituals practiced by many

Koreans, but even more importantly in values and ethics that emphasize social stability and hierarchy (...) which continue to structure important aspects of gender relations, work and family life" (Seung-Kyung & Finch 43). In fact, and as Seung-Kyung and Finch explain, Confucianism begins by focusing on establishing how family relationships and hierarchies within the family should function, ascribing "different roles and responsibilities to various family members" (43), and separating the roles of husband and wife, which relegates "the wife" as a "subordinate position within the family" (43), a notion which persists until today. In this way, Yeong Hye's small "defiance" by not doing what her husband would like her to do would represent a major violation in terms of the patriarchal order, especially if Korean family life is considered a "microcosm of society". Her not taking her husband's wishes into account breaks with the hierarchical order, and it challenges the master-subordinate relationship between husband and wife.

Taking this into consideration, even the smallest acts such as, for example, Yeong Hye not wanting to wear a bra, can be seen as an act of rebellion and deemed "inappropriate" or "defiant" by her husband, which is exactly what happens in the following passage:

> She tried to justify herself by saying that she couldn't stand wearing a bra because of the way it squeezed her breasts, and that I'd never worn one myself so I couldn't understand how constricting it felt. Nevertheless, considering I knew for a fact that there were plenty of other women who, unlike her, didn't have anything particularly against bras, I began to have doubts about this hypersensitivity of hers. (Kang 8)

In this fragment, we could interpret Yeong Hye not wanting to wear a bra as an allegory of patriarchal oppression and its effect on her. In her essay, "The Good Wife? Sibling Species in Han Kang's The Vegetarian", Caitlin Stobie discusses female embodiment in *The Vegetarian*, and comments on Yeong Hye's husband's opinion on her not wanting to wear a bra. Stobie points out the husband's hypocrisy, since despite worrying about others noticing

she was not wearing a bra, “he admits that the visibility of her nipples aroused him before they were married” (793). In his eyes, her breasts had a sexual connotation, a mindset that aligns with “many patriarchal cultures” which “dictate that women, who are stereotypically cast as natural caregivers, must wear (often uncomfortable) undergarments to de/sexualize mammary glands which would nurture their children” (Stobie 793). In this way, the bra that constricts her and makes Yeong Hye feel uncomfortable stands for the oppression she faces every day as a woman in a patriarchal system; and like the act of wearing a bra, her husband cannot understand what it is like to feel the same type of patriarchal oppression that she experiences. In addition to this, he mentions that other women do not seem to have a problem with it (wearing a bra), and since most conform to this practice, women who do not are perceived as “hypersensitive”, just like Yeong Hye. In this way, he invalidates her choice by making a common generalization.

The fact that Yeong Hye’s husband perceives her actions as an active rebellion against him is also due to the fact that he is unable to rationalize her change of behavior. “I was aware that choosing a vegetarian diet wasn’t quite so rare as it had been in the past” (Kang 21) he admits, however, in his eyes, “the only reasonable grounds for altering one’s eating habits were the desire to lose weight, an attempt to alleviate certain physical ailments, being possessed by an evil spirit, or having your sleep disturbed by indigestion” (Kang 21), and since Yeong Hye did not fit in any of those categories, he just assumed she was being “difficult”, and so he determined that “it was nothing but sheer obstinacy for a wife to go against her husband’s wishes as mine had done” (Kang 21). This mindset allows him to “other” her, which in his mind justifies his sexual abuse towards her later in the novel, as he feels she owes him something for not performing her duties as a wife properly. Evidence of this can be found in the following passages: “I thought I could get by perfectly well just thinking of her as a stranger, or no, as a sister, or even a maid, someone who puts food on the

table and keeps the house in good order" (Kang 44) Yeong Hye's husband states, and according to him, "it was no easy thing for a man in the prime of his life, for whom married life had always gone entirely without a hitch, to have his physical needs go unsatisfied for such a long period of time" (Kang 44), which better illustrates the reasoning behind his abuse.

Nevertheless, Yeong Hye's intention was not to rebel against her husband in particular, but rather, what she wanted was to find a way out, to escape the pain that was coming from within herself. Evidence of Yeong Hye's inner suffering due to her trauma can be found in her dreams, and the rare chances in which we get to "hear her voice" by reading other characters' recollections of her talking to them. However, before delving into the analysis of her unconscious, let us take a look at the event which most probably triggered the beginning of her nightmares in the first place: "The morning before I had the dream, I was mincing frozen meat — remember? You got angry" (Kang 29), Yeong Hye tells her husband, and then proceeds to narrate how she cut herself with a kitchen knife: "The hand holding the knife was working so quickly, I felt heat prickle the back of my neck. My hand, the chopping board, the meat, and then the knife, slicing cold into my finger" (Kang 29). Afterwards, Yeong Hye mentions how sticking the bloody finger inside of her mouth calmed her, it left her "strangely pacified" (Kang 29). I believe this event awoke an unconscious realization connected to a traumatizing memory of her past, especially her past with her father.

While growing up, Yeong Hye was repeatedly beaten by her father. This is something both her family and husband were aware of: "According to my wife, he had whipped her over the calves until she was eighteen years old" (Kang 47). However, nobody ever really commented on it. The physical abuse inflicted on her from a very young age scarred her deeply, and we can find evidence of that when Yeong Hye mentions how the clearest thing she can recall about her nightmares is the violence in them, a violence that is "vivid enough

to stick" (Kang 44). This choice of words has a more physical connotation. The violence "sticks" to her body, just like the memories of her father whipping her with a stick when she was younger. However, the fact that she does not dream of her father hitting her explicitly, but still preserves a vivid sense of the violence that "sticks" to her is significant because it shows how deep her wounds are; this is evidence of her trauma, considering that she blocks the exact memory but keeps the pain with her, haunting her through her nightmares. This notion coincides with what Cathy Caruth postulates in her book "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History": "In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 3). However, the "wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body" (Caruth 4), but rather "an event that (...) is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth 4), which is precisely how Yeong Hye experiences her trauma.

Nevertheless, there was a time in which her father's violent abuse was not directed at her, but rather, towards an animal. "The dog that sank its teeth into my leg is chained up to Father's motorcycle" (Kang 67), Yeong Hye recalls. "The motorcycle engine starts, and Father begins to drive in a circle. The dog runs along behind. (…) Blood drips from its throat, which is being choked with the rope" (Kang 68). At the time, Yeong Hye did not think anything of it. She was mad at the dog for biting her leg, so she did not care, and even ate some of the dog's flesh as "the saying goes that for a wound caused by a dog bite to heal, you have to eat that same dog" (Kang 68). However, years later, after cutting herself and putting her finger inside her mouth, tasting her own blood, Yeong Hye might have made an unconscious connection between the dog and herself, both brutally abused by her father. In a

way, any of the two could be over the chopping board. Evidence that she made this unconscious connection between herself and the dog can be found in another recollection of her dreams, where Yeong Hye says: “The thing that hurts is my chest. Something is stuck in my solar plexus. I don’t know what it might be. It’s lodged there permanently these days. Even though I’ve stopped wearing a bra, I can feel this lump all the time” (Kang 72). According to Yeong Hye, this “lump” exists because of the meat she ate. She states:

> Yells and howls, threaded together layer upon layer, are enmeshed to form that lump. Because of meat. I ate too much meat. The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there. Blood and flesh, all those butchered bodies are scattered in every nook and cranny, and though the physical remnants were excreted, their lives still stick stubbornly to my insides (Kang 72).

The way she describes (human) yells and (dog or animal) howls “threaded together” hints towards the idea that there is a connection between the two. Additionally, but she is clearly conscious of the lives she took; she has not forgotten them. The lives of the animals she ate are “sticking” to her insides (just like the violence in her dreams), and this can be connected to the traumatic episode regarding the dog she ate in her past. The fact that she ate the dog’s meat connected her to it on a deeper level, and this could be the reason why blood imagery is mentioned constantly throughout the description of her dreams: “familiarity bleeds into strangeness, blood-chillingly nightmares, slightly cooled blood” (Kang 44). Blood connects her and the dogs experience like siblings in their suffering, and since the dog literally became a part of her, their pain intertwined inside of her body as well.

This unconscious connection between her and the dog’s suffering was precisely what triggered Yeong Hye’s dreams. She starts by saying that these are “Dreams of murder” (Kang 44), but we never get a clear answer as to who is being killed – or by whom. “Murderer or murdered….hazy distinctions, boundaries wearing thin” (Kang 44) she says, implying that

the murderer and the murdered are intertwined, that they might even be the same person. Following this same line of thought, I argue that Yeong Hye's dreams show how she views herself as both the murdered and the murderer (victim and oppressor). For instance, if we look at the following quote: "Familiarity bleeding into strangeness" (Kang 44), this can be connected to another one of her dreams in which she sees her reflection in a lake but is unable to recognize herself. Her own face, which should be the most familiar thing in the world to her, becomes blurry, strange, and unrecognizable. Her reflection merges with the dark and violent scenery of her dreams, which mirrors her oppressive reality and paints a disturbing picture of her inner suffering and turmoil suppressed for many years. As her face merges with this violent scenery, it becomes a part of it, and therefore, she also becomes a part of that violence.

In this way, Yeong Hye is both the victim and the oppressor: victim of a patriarchal society, but also an oppressor, as she has willingly conformed to this abuse for many years and has inflicted violence on other innocent living creatures by killing them and eating them. As her husband points out, ever since they got married "she had proved herself a more than competent cook (…) Tongs in one hand and a large pair of scissors in the other, she'd flipped rib meat in a sizzling pan while snipping it into bite-sized pieces, her movements deft and practiced" (Kang 21). This makes it difficult for her to "face" that truth; to face herself. All this time, she had been an accomplice of society´s abuse by eating meat. Murdered and murderer. And when she says: "Intolerable loathing, long suppressed" (Kang 44), that might be referring to the hatred she feels not only towards her abusers, but towards herself for also taking part in the abuse, which might be one of the reasons why her first instinct is to change herself in order to escape her suffering. The guilt won't let her sleep, she can't forgive herself for inflicting violence on other beings while knowing all too well how it feels to be the victim of such violence.

This dichotomy of Yeong Hye as both a victim and a perpetrator of violence is one of the first aspects of the novel which creates a sense of uneasiness and discomfort, apart from the more obvious abuse displayed in the novel, which is mainly directed at Yeong Hye (such as her father's and husband's physical and sexual abuse). What is uncomfortable about this dichotomy is that there is not an easy way to define Yeong Hye as either good or bad, because she is not entirely innocent, and that also makes us question how that might relate to ourselves to some extent.

In addition to this, it is also very interesting to consider the following passage: "Loathing I've always tried to mask with affection" (Kang 44), because it shows that despite the hatred she feels towards herself, her abusers and the violent system they are all a part of, she is still conditioned by the patriarchal system to try and hide her true emotions to comply with and fulfill the role that was assigned to her. This can be seen in how, despite being a victim of child abuse, Yeong Hye ends up pursuing a relationship and then marrying a man who has the same strict patriarchal views as her father, and who ends up inflicting violence on her as well. The labels of "good daughter" and "good wife" obligate her to put up with the abuse, they grip her wrists like cuffs. Therefore, she pretends to love and respect her father and husband, since that is what she is expected to do as a devoted daughter and wife; however, that is all a lie, a mask… but now that she has become a vegetarian "the mask is coming off" (Kang 44).

Yeong Hye's trauma manifests itself in her dreams as a blurry but painful sensation that helps her remember, but not comprehend. Evidence that Yeong Hye has difficulties rationalizing her trauma can be found in the "darkness" and lack of clarity of her dreams. She constantly mentions that the "violent acts" are "perpetrated by night" (Kang 44), that "it's dark" and that "everything is being snuffed out in the pitch-black darkness" (Kang 45). If we consider the general notion of seeing as understanding or knowing something, then we could

say that her not "seeing" anything clearly because of the darkness in her dreams suggests that she does not understand them, she does not know where they are coming from or what they are trying to tell her. Yeong Hye's struggle to rationalize her dreams is relevant because it shows how she has suppressed her suffering so deeply inside of herself that she now struggles to recognize it as it comes to the surface. As Yeong Hye mentions when referring to her nightmares, it is only now that she is coming "face to face with the thing that has always been here" (Kang 45). Her pain and suffering, which have always been there, bottled up and about to burst, a product of the violence and abuse inflicted on her by the men in her life has remained "shut up behind a door without a handle" (Kang 44), a door that was never meant to be opened in the first place, because it was too unbearable.

Yeong Hye's trauma manifested through her dreams are like a wake up call which hurts her, but it is this pain that motivates her to move and make a change in her life. She wishes to escape this cycle of violence she is a part of, however, how could she possibly achieve this through her vegetarianism? No matter how hard she tries, it is impossible for Yeong Hye to change a whole system of violence and oppression on her own. She cannot control other people's actions, and she cannot by any means change their minds through words considering she does not have a voice throughout most of the novel, and the rare moments in which she actually says something, nobody listens or even tries to comprehend her. Yeong Hye's absence of voice in the novel is connected to her absence of power and absence of freedom to say what she really wants to say, to share her unique experience with the world on her own terms, not through the eyes of others. Because of this, Yeong Hye does not aim to change the world around her, but rather, she strives to change herself. Therefore, she uses the only thing she has control over: her body. By becoming a vegetarian, Yeong Hye searches to regain control of her life, by transforming herself and pursuing arboreal life.

In her essay "Willed Arboreality: Feminist Worldmaking in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*", Rose Casey argues that *The Vegetarian* establishes "a philosophical account of non-masterful feminist life through Yeong- Hye's willed arboreality" (348), which basically means that Yeong Hye's wish to become a tree is a sort of "reaction and rejection to patriarchal violence" (348). This subversion follows the pacifist route, meaning that she is renouncing the domineering human mentality and anthropocentric worldview. She does not wish to control or be controlled; she desires to give life instead of taking it from other beings to survive. She knows she cannot stop the violence inflicted on her by others, but at least she can prevent herself from inflicting that same violence on other beings with whom she shares a sense of kinship, being a victim of similar abuse.

As it has already been mentioned, Yeong Hye has a deep sense of self-hatred, as she blames herself for taking part in the abuse of other living creatures despite being a victim of abuse herself. What she has seen in her dreams has altered her perception of her own body, and so Yeong Hye has come to believe that she is dangerous. "Shuddering awake, my hands, need to see my hands. Breathe. My fingernails still soft, my teeth still gentle" (Kang 54) Yeong Hye says after waking up from another of her nightmares tainted with blood. She seems desperate to check she has not become a monster, that she has not hurt anyone like she has in her dreams. "I become a different person, a different person rises up inside me, devours me, those hours…"(Kang 53) she states, referring to her nightmares, which she describes as: "Dreams of my hands around someone's throat, throttling them, grabbing the swinging ends of their long hair and hacking it all off, sticking my finger into their slippery eyeball (…) my resolve falters, my fingers flexing to kill" (Kang 53). At night, Yeong Hye becomes this unrecognizable, violent version of herself which she desperately tries to run away from while she is awake. "Can only trust my breasts now" (Kang 54) she says one night after being woken up by another one of these night terrors. "I like my breasts, nothing can be killed by

them. Hand, foot, tongue, gaze, all weapons from which nothing is safe. But not my breasts. With my round breasts, I'm okay. Still okay" (Kang 54). This quote shows us how Yeong Hye perceives her body as a weapon, a threat to other beings which she fears she cannot control. The only part of her body she likes about herself are her breasts because of her softness and roundness; however, after becoming a vegetarian and losing weight, her body became sharper and more angular. "So why do they keep on shrinking?" (Kang 54) she states, referring to her breasts after months of not eating meat. "Not even round anymore. Why? Why am I changing like this? Why are my edges all sharpening — what I am going to gouge?" (Kang 54). Yeong Hye is puzzled. At first, she believed not eating meat anymore would stop her gruesome nightmares and appease the guilt she felt inside, but instead, her body changed its shape into a sharper, more "dangerous" weapon than before, and her dreams have not stopped haunting her. Unable to sleep and worried she might turn into the woman she was in her dreams, Yeong Hye's desperation grows stronger, and eventually she decides to stop eating anything at all, finally committing to an arboreal way of life by surviving on water and sunlight alone, just like a plant.

Here is where we find a second aspect of the novel which makes it quite discomforting to read. How should we understand Yeong Hye's "transformation"? Her "willed arboreality"? It is a fact that Yeong Hye's wish to become a plant is impossible… unless she dies from starvation. In that way, "her body, as it decomposes into biochemical matter, will mix with the soil, provide nutrients for all vegetal life, and become one with her beloved trees" (Casey 350). Therefore, in order to achieve her goal, Yeong Hye is planning on basically committing suicide, as it seems to be the only way in which she can truly escape, not only from the violence inflicted on her by others, but from her own body which she despises because of its need to kill in order to survive. "Why, is it such a bad thing to die?" (Kang 162) Yeong Hye asks her sister by the end of the novel, and this is truly an unsettling

question, not only because of the moral conflict one might have with the concept of suicide, but also because it makes us conscious of the violence of our own existence. Like Yeong Hye, we also need other beings to die in order for us to live, whether it comes to animals or plants. In this way, not even vegetarianism or veganism, which are considered to be "kinder" diets, can help us escape the brutality of our nature as human beings. Therefore is it really such a bad thing to die, if it will bring good to others? If it brings life to others?

Yeong Hye's desire to die in order to give life is truly discomforting essentially because it is difficult to define as a hopeful or hopeless act. In her essay: "Hopeful Reading: Rethinking Resistance in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*", Yu-Chen Tai makes a hopeful reading of *The Vegetarian*, despite it being a rather dark novel touching on a lot of delicate subjects such as mental illness, trauma, and sexual and psychological abuse. Tai intends to identify resistant forms or manifestations of hope in Yeong Hye's actions, offering a non-pathological reading of Yeong Hye's behavior (her veganism and anorexia). In this way, the author shifts the perspective and instead of seeing Yeong Hye only as a victim of a mental illness, she can be recognized as an agent that is capable of effecting change in her world rather than just being a hopeless and powerless victim (Tai 638). As Tai sees it, Yeong Hye "attempts to empty out her old self to birth something new through her refusal to consume meat and her ultimate refusal of food. Changing her relation to food is one of her ways to liberate her body" (640). Nevertheless, we cannot forget that ultimately Yeong Hye is pushed to choose this path in order to escape her suffering; an excruciatingly painful existence that is worse than death.

Despite the fact that Yeong Hye's intention is not to harm anybody, her actions do have an effect on others. Just like herself, her family also starts perceiving her body as a weapon, but for a different reason. It is not because they consider her physically threatening, but rather, because her visible transformation and the progressive deterioration of her health

becomes something impossible to ignore. Yeong Hye's pain and suffering suppressed for many years and hidden under a veil of apparent normality has come to the surface, revealing itself in the form of mental illness.

After months of Yeong Hye not wanting to eat any meat, her husband finally decides to tell her family about the situation in hopes of "solving" the problem. They then gather at Yeong Hye's parents' house for a family dinner, which quickly turns into chaos as Yeong Hye's father and brother try to violently force her to eat meat. "Don't you understand what your father's telling you? If he tells you to eat, you eat!" (Kang 62) Yeong Hye's mother yells at her after she refuses to eat what was on the table. Clearly, Yeong Hye's behavior is seen as an act of rebellion not only against her father, the patriarchal figure of their household who was ordering her to eat, but a rebellion against the oldest institution of tradition. According to Stobie: "Some incorrectly believe that Oriental dishes are mostly vegetarian, but the diet is actually fairly uncommon in the Sinosphere" (788). In fact, "the diet is normally only associated with Buddhist monks, and many traditional dishes contain meat-based broth or other animal derivatives" (788). Therefore, we can safely determine that under these standards, Yeong Hye's vegetarianism can be considered something out of the ordinary, which defies Yeong Hye's family tradition of eating meat. This is corroborated by Yeong Hye's husband when he mentions that he "couldn't think of her family without also recalling the smell of sizzling meat and burning garlic" (Kang 28).

But according to Cornelia Macsiniuc's essay: "Normalising the Anorexic Body. Violence and Madness in The Vegetarian, by Han Kang", something that is essential to understand Yeong Hye's choice to stop eating meat and then to abstain herself from eating any type of food altogether, is the idea of "eating" as not a simple act of nutrition, but as a complex symbolic action through which certain values and beliefs are asserted (103). Food,

then, is never a neutral necessity, but a means of symbolically organizing and reinforcing a social reality (Macsiniuc 104).

Taking this into account, the author further analyzes Yeong Hye's sudden interrogation of these cultural food "texts", and how this creates an understandable anxiety among her family members who are not aware of these subtexts, or simply prefer to ignore them (Macsiniuc 110). In this way, refusing to eat meat and to cook it for her husband means that Yeong Hye is rejecting the prevailing texts of meat which consolidate the patriarchal meat-eating tradition in which she was born and raised (Macsiniuc 110). This act of rebellion is then considered intolerable and perplexing to those who couldn't or wouldn't read the ideological script, which is what explains their hostile and violent behavior towards Yeong Hye, "the other", the face they refuse to accept as their own (Macsiniuc 110).

Yeong Hye's behavior is therefore a "threat" to the order of things, and so her father reacts violently to the perceived attack. He slaps her and then forces a piece of pork inside her mouth which she quickly spits out while "an animal cry of distress burst from her lips" (Kang 65). I would argue that this is one of, if not the most uncomfortable scene to read in the whole novel, not only because of the violence depicted, but also because of the passage that precedes the violence: "The fatherly affection that was almost choking the old man made a powerful impression on me, and I was moved to tears in spite of myself. Probably everyone gathered there felt the same" (Kang 63). Here, Yeong Hye's husband mentions how he perceived his father-in-law's intentions to be "affectionate", however, what results shocking is how right after this comment, the father physically assaults Yeong Hye. It is uncomfortable to think that the violent acts perpetrated against Yeong Hye can be justified or confused for acts of love in her family's eyes. This mindset protects them through their blindness, not letting them see the damage they are causing Yeong Hye. Her father wounded her physically

for many years, and her mother, sister and brother hurt her by not doing anything to stop it. But now, the mental and physical deterioration that they have caused her is perfectly visible. Yeong Hye has stopped masking her pain under a veil of normality, because that pain has come to haunt her every night, climbing to the surface and showing itself through her malnourished and weak body, affected by lack of sleep and nutrients. Her psychological wounds have become visible as Yeong Hye's body brings awareness to their faults, exposing everything that is wrong with the patriarchal system of oppression they are a part of.

An example of this can be found in a reflection taken from the last chapter of the novel narrated by Yeong Hye's sister, In Hye. While remembering how a long time ago, she and Yeong-hye got lost on a mountain, Yeong-hye thought about what her sister had told her: "Let's just not go back" (Kang 229). As In Hye mentions, only after Yeong Hye's drastic transformation "was she able to understand why Yeong-hye had said what she did. Yeong-hye had been the only victim of their father's beatings (...) Only Yeong-hye, docile and naive, had been unable to deflect their father's temper or put up any form of resistance" (Kang 229). Understandably, Yeong Hye wanted to escape her father's abuse; her "reality" at the time. She would rather get lost in the woods with her sister, but that could not be, and since she was not allowed to escape, Yeong Hye "absorbed all her suffering inside her, deep into the marrow of her bones" (Kang 229). In Hye therefore blames herself for remaining silent back then as she admits that "the role that she had adopted back then of the hard-working, self-sacrificing eldest daughter had been a sign not of maturity but of cowardice. It had been a survival tactic" (Kang 229).

Despite the fact that her attempt to physically and psychologically deconstruct herself from a human to a tree is focused solely on herself, Yeong Hye's metamorphosis deeply affects those around her on various levels. As it has been already discussed, after her dreams began, Yeong Hye developed a negative perception of her own body, seeing it as a weapon,

as something that could threaten another being's existence. However, Yeong Hye is not the only one who sees herself that way. The perception of her body as a weapon, the transformation of her body as something harmful is shared by all her family members, because it exposes what has been concealed underneath the surface: the violence of abuse, and the violence of doing nothing to stop said abuse. This is another fundamental aspect of the novel which makes it extremely discomforting, as it makes us question our own role and the different ways in which we might also be complicit in the violence ruling our existence. Even if we might not fall into the category of abuser, if we limit ourselves to being mere witnesses, not doing anything regarding the oppression ingrained in the system, then we are also part of the problem.

Finally, all of what has been said brings me back to what pushed me to analyze this novel in the first place: my original sense of discomfort, and the question "Why am I feeling this way?" Beyond all the violence which plagues Han Kang's novel, my discomfort resides in something different. It is connected to the fact that this book makes me question what I was taught to see as simple. Even if there are no clear answers, *The Vegetarian* encourages you to ask questions until the very end. As a manifestation of her trauma and as an escape from the vicious cycle of systemic violence that rules the oppressive patriarchal society she was born and raised in, Yeong Hye's physical and psychological deconstruction of herself leads her body to be perceived as a weapon by her family and even by herself, threatening to disrupt the so-called peace by bringing up to the surface the underlying pain and suffering that has been suppressed for many years. In this way, *The Vegetarian* challenges our most basic assumptions of what is good and bad, who is the victim and who is the oppressor, whether there is hope or not in Yeong Hye's pursuit for her freedom. In the end, that is precisely what feminism is about: questioning the pre-established rules and striving to change ourselves in order to change the world. It is therefore very important to come to terms with

the fact that it is not that simple, nothing is completely white or black; and more importantly, we should embrace the discomfort of asking ourselves questions without a clear answer. Do not push it aside, and instead, strive to look at the world through a feminist gaze, a gaze that is unsettling, “that is dark and insistent”. “As if waiting for an answer. As if protesting against something” (Kang 296). A gaze that threatens to change the world. Let yourself feel the discomfort in your gut, and ask yourself why? Why are you feeling this way?

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SPEAK UP:

THE AWARENESS PROCESS IN *KIM JIYOUNG, BORN 1982*

by Karen Bravo Rencoret

Introduction

While numerous women from developed countries have started and joined crucial moments in the history of feminism, there are still women brought up in chauvinist and patriarchal societies that neglect their freedom of choosing their lifestyles and imposing certain gender roles on them. These women sacrifice crucial aspects of their lives, such as their education, their financial independence and even their bodies. This type of society and its effects on women are explored in *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*, Cho Namjoo's 2016 novel that caused a huge controversy in South Korean society as it raised the topic of gender discrimination in a very graphic and straightforward way. The novel presents Jiyoung, a 33-years-old woman who suddenly starts to behave strangely, both physically and mentally. It seems to her family and her relatives that she is not herself as her voice and manners make it seem that she is another woman, as if different voices were taking over her. Once this situation is settled, the novel begins to narrate Jiyoung's life from the very beginning so the reader can get a better understanding of what are those voices speaking from her and why they took over Jiyoung's. The moment that this narration from her life begins, the novel presents different situations that formed Jiyoung to fit and follow the gender roles that she faces during her lifetime, and how, once present time comes closer, these situations can give an idea of the internal and external fight that Jiyoung's has battled her entire life.

These situations inside the novel are divided into four different stages of her life: childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and marriage. Each stage presents a different Jiyoung, one that grows up both physically and mentally, while at the same time is exposed slowly to the norm that the society dictates for South Korean women –the system that she lives in. This exposure grows gradually as the novel advances, starting with her close family circle in her childhood, until her work environment during her marriage. Through each stage Jiyoung's mentality evolves and her critical thinking gets sharper, by making questions such

as why her male classmates have more comfortable clothes, why club presidents are always men, or why her children using her surname would be irresponsible. All of these events, happening one after another, influence her coming to awareness of both herself and the system that surrounds her.

In this essay I will discuss how Jiyoung's life experiences serve as a representation of the fight against gender roles in Korean society. This discussion will be divided into two parts: the first one will focus on the experiences that Jiyoung had in her childhood and young adulthood in which these gender roles were imposed, as being a child makes her unaware of what these norms might involve in her future. This part of her life will serve in this analysis as a representation of the oppressed Korean women that suffer under the gender discrimination that derives from the imposition of Korean traditions and Confucianism, which result in the loss of their independent beings as individual selves and bodies. The second part of the discussion will focus on the analysis of Jiyoung's adulthood as a working-class woman and a mother, who, after slowly realizing the oppressed system that she lives in, begins to criticize her society and her family. While in the beginning Jiyoung's life represents the oppression and the suffering of Korean women, in her last years narrated in the novel she also becomes the representation of the Korean woman who questions and breaks down this system by becoming self-conscious of both her mind and body.

The novel presents this story as one that is so common in South Korea that most of the criticisms against the society –in terms of gender– are quite implicit. These are written in order for the reader to understand that this is the norm, and if something sounds unfair then it is because the South Korean society is, not the book. However, this could be amplified as a situation that is not only common to South Korean women, but women around the whole world that might be in the same situation that Jiyoung is. The novel itself is written for it to be read as a mirror of the society, so seeing the flaws would become clearer eventually, even

if it is not explicitly mentioned most of the time. Recognizing these flaws, and applying them to our own reality is an exercise that the novel gives to the reader. Hence, in this analysis, seeing Jiyoung's experiences as a South Korean woman will become crucial in order to recognize her process in the lives of thousands of women around the world.

Women in Korean Society

While the present time in the novel is in 2016, most of the narration occurs in the previous three decades, that is starting from her childhood during the 80s, then her teenage years during the 90s and finally her early adulthood and marriage during the 2000s until 2015. In her book *Representations of Femininity in Contemporary South Korean Women's Literature,* Joanna Elfving-Hwang gives a small recap of these decades, mentioning the political and social context of the society in which new women writers began to tell stories. While the 80s were marked by a heavy political influence after decades of severe dictatorships, most of the literature and cultural production from that time dealt with topics such as democracy and new politics rather than discussing issues of gender roles. Only when the new decade arrives and the democratic movement fulfills its purpose, the space for women to challenge the traditional gender roles finally appears (47). The 90s were all about new opportunities and heavy foreign cultural influences, so stories about the role of the individual outside of tradition started to rise heavily. During this time, women's literature began to question the symbolic representation of women in the traditional society and "represented tentative but simultaneously powerful efforts to create new discourses of femininity" (58). These first interactions with topics of femininity in a context in which feminism is rising in other parts of the world might be influenced by the global feminist movements from Western countries, however, it is important to notice that most of the authors were not writing from a politics perspective, as Cho Namjoo later on does do on her

novel. Nevertheless, this new women's literature could be considered as a heavy influence on the author, and many other female writers from the 2000s.

An important point that Elfving-Hwang does is that these women writers were mostly writing from the expectations they had of the gender relations in their society, however, most of it stayed only on paper as the society itself did not change its traditional mindset, as the author states "the Korean symbolic order had not caught up with the vast economic development and social change in society (…), the old myths about the feminine proved incredibly difficult to overcome" (27). Elfving-Hwang also mentions that society even believed there was a sort of 'beauty' in the suffering of a woman, one that had to be embraced and was reinforced by the cultural artifacts of that time, such as books, movies and dramas. One example of this is motherhood, a topic that she discusses in large part because of the representations and importance that it has in Korean society. In this case, the beauty of suffering is connected with the sacrifice of becoming a mother: devoting their lives to their kids and forgetting about an 'independent self', as now they have power and responsibility over another life.

Confucianism in Korean Society

Most of the traditional Korean mindset and the role of women comes from the role of Confucianism in the society. While Confucianism was developed in Ancient China, it expanded mostly through East Asia and Southeast Asia, reaching its peak in countries such as Korea. Currently, South Korean traditions and moral rules inside the society derive mostly from Confucianism or what is left of it in the Korean political system. Eunkang Koh, in her text "Gender issues and Confucian scriptures: Is Confucianism incompatible with gender equality in South Korea?" discusses how Korean feminists argue that the root of gender inequality in the country lies in the Confucian system that the country possesses. She mentions, for example, that there is a hierarchical order inside the family. The head of the

family is always the father, then the mother, followed by the oldest sibling. In case the oldest sibling is a woman, she is expected to take care of her younger siblings, especially if she has a younger brother. Once the daughter is married to a man, then she belongs to his family, and most of the traditional celebrations, such as *chuseok*, are spent with his family, not hers. Of course, there are cases in which this last part is not a rule and rather an option, especially for the new generations. However, when talking about the hierarchical positions inside the family, this is still the norm. This heavily influences how gender roles are seen in South Korean society, in which women are expected to help the family by remaining submissive, passive, and obedient.

This gave Korean society power over women's bodies as well. As long as they kept having children to keep the system working, there was not a lot of input into Korean laws that would regulate gender equality. In "Feminist Philosophy in Korea: Subjectivity of Korean Woman" Kim Heisook discusses this topic, stating that most of the changes in the constitution and the creation of laws were done only during the last decade and most of it because of the growing feminist movement. However, whether it was to maintain a system in which they believe in or only to keep an image, many women saw in the feminist movement a misrepresentation of what they wanted to be in the South Korean lifestyle. Hence, for the rest of the society, the attitudes towards gender roles remained the same.

The Generational Issue

Throughout the novel, we can see how the problem of "being a girl" has been an issue transmitted through several generations before Jiyoung's. One of the first examples is Jiyoung's mother, Oh Misook. She is presented as the fourth kid in a family of five, having two older brothers, an older sister and a younger brother. When she was young, she had to work instead of focusing only on school, same as her sister, only for her older brothers to pursue their careers. Once the eldest could earn enough money to pay for their youngest

brother's education, he was the only one praised for it, as if the sisters' effort were not of importance even if they had to sacrifice their own education. They were ignored once their older brothers could provide their help, directing everything for the youngest. As we can see in "Oh Misook and her sister realized only then that their turn would not come; their loving family would not be giving them the chance and support to make something of themselves" (16), this is a problem that has been present during so many generations that it became the norm. This also repeats more explicitly in "this was a time when people believed it was up to the sons to bring honor and prosperity to the family, and that the family's wealth and happiness hinged upon male success" (16), in which the success of the male children would depend not only on themselves but also on the family. If the son (or sons) were successful, then the family would be too.

This pattern is also present once Misook becomes a mother. Koh Boonsoon, her mother-in-law, hopes Misook will have a boy during her first pregnancy, "you should have a son. You must have a son. You must have at least two sons…" (12) she says, putting pressure on Misook's shoulders. However, her first child is Eunyoung, a baby girl. Misook reacts by saying sorry to Boonsoon, and instead of comforting Misook, she answers "it's okay. The second will be a boy" (12), showing that there is much more than deception from her, there is also shame of not being able to fulfill her only job. This happens again once Jiyoung is born, "I'm sorry, little girl" (12), she says to Jiyoung, probably because her birth did not mean happiness and she was already suffering the consequences of being born a girl. Misook by this time is sad, depressed, traumatized and afraid that this might happen once again. This is the only moment in the novel that belongs to her and it is mostly there to exemplify the role that she—and other women back then—had. She is not being supported by any familiar, neither a friend or even her husband. Misook is completely alone.

After this, Misook gets pregnant again and, suspecting that the child will be another girl, she aborts it. She goes through it without the support of a family member and suffers immense emotional pain. During this period of time, and also as mentioned in the book, once the sex of the fetus was known, it was common for Korean women to have abortions if it was a girl (Cho 13). The author makes it clear that, while this practice is not common anymore, it was something possible, and even normalized at a certain point.

These experiences reflect the pressure that South Korean women have in terms of supporting the family and becoming mothers, ideally if they have sons. Being a woman becomes a burden as these responsibilities fall directly into them—such as not being able to bear sons or helping the male part of the family to reach success. And later on, once they have daughters, they probably pass this experience and pressure onto them, continuing the cycle and perpetuating the negative responses once a woman does something that she should not, or simply did not have control over.

Kim Jiyoung's Absorbing Phase: Childhood and Adolescence

Jiyoung faced, since she was born, the norms that her society imposed onto girls and women. By being an initial disappointment for not being born a boy, she crossed several episodes during her childhood and adolescence in which her actions were shaped by how girls at her age should behave: quiet, well-mannered and obedient. A great deal of the episodes during this period of time in which she could have spoken up about her ideas and critiques over things she thought were unfair were managed by other girls around her, not Jiyoung. Most of the time, these girls were punished or ended up with more negative consequences than positive ones. This part of her life was dictated by what she learned about keeping appearances and doing a tremendous effort by ideally not causing any trouble.

It starts during her childhood, as the novel describes how Jiyoung was brought up acquiring the gender roles and her position in front of men with her father and her brother as

the first male figures in her life. As during this period of time she is not independent or responsible for other beings, her position in front of these male figures is seen mostly in common practices of her daily life, such as her family meal times:

> It was a given that fresh rice hot out the cooker was served in the order of father, brother and grandmother, and that perfect pieces of tofu, dumplings, and patties were the brother's while the girls ate the ones that fell apart. The brother had chopsticks, socks, long underwear and school and lunch bags that matched, while the girls made do with whatever was available. If there were two umbrellas, the girls shared. If there were two blankets, the girls shared. If there were two treats, the girls shared. It didn't occur to the child Jiyoung that her brother was receiving special treatment, and so she wasn't even jealous. That's how it had always been. (11)

This excerpt helps us to clarify two things: one is the description of her normal lifestyle, the positions of the family with a hierarchical order even for eating, and the invisibility of the mother, Jiyoung's closest idea of a woman with power. While the father, the brother, the grandmother and the daughters are put in a position in the family —whether it is of power or submission they still exist—, the mother is not even mentioned in this excerpt, as if she is being silenced. One reason for this could be that the mother figure is something so present that it is not considered when hierarchy is mentioned, hence Jiyoung's first ideas of an adult woman supposedly in power begins to be seen as irrelevant. The mother is just there because in a family she has to be, she is not counted when talking about hierarchy, especially if there are male figures present.

The other thing that it lets us know is that Jiyoung does not question the hierarchy in which she lives. She just accepts it by not speaking out and considering it normal that the only thing that a mother can do is being a mother, as in "Jiyoung burst into laughter. She found the idea outrageous, because she'd thought until then that mothers could only be

mothers" (17). Same as the favoritism that her younger brother has, which is mostly perpetuated by the father and the grandmother. Jiyoung accepts that this is how life is, and, as she does not have social interaction with people of her age yet, for her this becomes the norm. Expressions from her grandmother such as "how dare you to take something that belongs to my precious grandson!" (10) and her father's actions such as "suggested that the girls share with the grandmother as before and give the boy his own room" (23) made Jiyoung normalize even more this behavior. Further on during her first years of school she finds herself without being able to express her discomfort, especially when it comes to issues related to gender.

This is a pattern that is present throughout Jiyoung's entire childhood. Her state of passiveness over gender positions is not only due to a lack of critical thinking, but it is also due to the small period of time in which she has been exposed to her culture and lifestyle: until now, she knows nothing else.

It is during this period that Jiyoung enters school for the first time, interacts with both boys and girls of her same age, and begins to face the problems that a kid in elementary school would face in South Korea, such as strict teachers and pranks from her classmates. She is described in the novel as someone that "had a hard time voicing her complaints because she wasn't used to expressing her thoughts" (21), hence obstacles were not usually overcome by her but by her classmates. One of these is the issue with her desk mate, who would bully her through pranks and occasionally hit her, and only would be scolded because a girl in her class spoke about it. The answer that she used to get from the responsible adults near her was usually one that diminished her experience, such as saying that he was just "messing around because he wanted to play" (18). By doing this Jiyoung would assume that her male classmates would get away with things, and complaining in the future would not bring any solution. Even more important is the answer that the teacher gives to her once Jiyoung cries to her that she wants to change desk mate: "you know what Jiyoung? Let me

tell you something I've known for a while that you haven't noticed: he likes you" (19), by saying this the teacher admits that she has seen how Jiyoung has been harassed during the past weeks, while also normalizing violent behavior from her male students. Besides, until then, there is no moment in the novel that reflects a similar act in which the person—usually a male figure—is held responsible for it.

During this period, Jiyoung dedicated mostly to observing. She observes that her class had a male monitor and that "teachers were in the habit of saying that girls are smarter. Students also thought that girls were smarter, more mature, and better with detailed work, but they somehow always elected boys to be class monitors" (22), making this one of the first times in which she observes positions of power while making a relation with gender. Jiyoung's goals were never connected with being in a power position such as class monitor or a boss, even when later on it is mentioned that she was actually a model student in both grades and behavior. Probably one of the reasons for this is that she internalized that idea since the very beginning of her school life: why would she try if the position was going to be given to a man anyways?

Most of the observations during her childhood are present again during her adolescence. While in the past she was beginning to interact with the opposite gender, in this period she is immersed in a reality in which boys and men are always present. There is no mention of her body going through the process of becoming a teenage girl, but the experiences that she faces make the reader realize that she and her classmates are growing up and changing. The first one has to do with the dress code that she has to follow: no T-shirts, long skirts, no sneakers and more. This would affect her during the cold months, as well as it would make it incredibly difficult for the girls to do physical activities during the school hours. A female student protested that "it was unfair to allow T-shirts and sneakers to male students only" (25-26) and that the reason why those male students were physically more

active was merely because through their clothes they were allowed to be so. After a while the student was punished and the teachers overlooked girls that broke the dress code. Jiyoung sees this entire process with indifference. Not because she does not care, but because, at this point in her process, she dedicates most of her time to observing rather than acting over the issues that could also affect her.

During this period, Jiyoung sees in her female classmates an example of what she should do if she sees herself in an act of injustice. It is through them that she knows she can defy authority and that both girls and boys should be treated equally. While most of the experiences during her teenage years are mostly suffered by her classmates, she is still present in those processes, whether it is a viewer in the same room, or as the final link of a school gossip. Somehow, Jiyoung, who usually stands still and does not interfere, is still part of those experiences, gaining little by little a voice that she later might use to speak up.

It is not until a male student tries to follow her home that she begins to suffer in her own body the consequences of 1) normalizing favoritism and success only in men, and 2) the society holding accountable women for the actions committed by men. One of her classmates, by thinking that she tries to flirt with him, convinces himself that she likes him. As a consequence, he talks to her and purposely follows her by taking the same bus as her. Jiyoung finds herself panicking and asking for help from a woman that was near her. She messages her father and, after a small confrontation with the boy in her bus stop, she finally sets free from his presence and finds herself safe once the woman from the bus and her father arrive.

The biggest issue in this situation is the reaction of her father, who, instead of consoling her from what had happened, he decided to scold her,

> But that night, Jiyoung got an earful from her father. “Why is your cram school so far away? Why do you talk to strangers? Why is your skirt so short?” Jiyoung grew up

> being told to be cautious, to dress conservatively, to be "ladylike." That it's your job to avoid dangerous places, times of day and people. It's your fault for not noticing and not avoiding. (33)

By doing this, once again the responsible adults give Jiyoung the idea that it is her fault that boys cannot control themselves and she should be the one acting over it, not them. Here the father ends up presenting himself before Jiyoung as someone that would judge her even when she did nothing wrong. She can only find support in her own gender, that is her mother and the woman that helped her in the bus, as she says to her "there are far too many crazy men in the world (...) and the problem was with them, not with the women" (33).

Kim Jiyoung's Reactionary Phase: Early Adulthood and Marriage

As the novel develops, so does Jiyoung's critical thinking. During her early adulthood she attends university and goes through different processes that would shape her personality and mentality. Some of these are gaining independence and friends, immersing herself in an atmosphere with women having a similar reality as hers and, most importantly, understanding even better how the system under which she lived had different expectations for her and her friends as women versus the rest of her male classmates and colleagues.

One of the first things that the novel makes explicit is that Jiyoung's personality changes. Her experiences at the university help her to develop both her academic field and her personal life. She finds herself liking hobbies, making friends and participating in a numerous of recreational activities,

> Jiyoung discovered that she wasn't as introverted as she'd thought she was when she didn't have the opportunity to think, or form and express opinions. In fact, she turned out to be surprisingly friendly, sociable, and fond of being in the spotlight. And she met her first boyfriend at the college hiking club. (41)

It is of huge importance to notice that she knows that she "didn´t have the opportunity to think or form and express opinions" (41), probably connected to the idea of hierarchy and how in South Korean schools it is not well seen to rise against authority or to even question them. Jiyoung during her school years was an observer, and more than one time she could see how her classmates would be punished if they decided to act against the norms. However, in university she found a new independence that was not present in her adolescence, and with that an awareness of herself, the person she was becoming and her surroundings.

Of course, part of her independence also comes hand in hand with finding a new job while she is in her last year of university. Jiyoung gets into study groups in order to raise her GPA and at the same time to share job opportunities, internships or any help that a college student might need. Once she formed a solid study group, she met Hyejin, a girl who was majoring in business management. According to Jiyoung, Hyejin was much smarter and skilled than her, however a small conversation made her realize how in disadvantage they were in comparison to their male classmates, as Hyejin herself had said that she did not think that she was going to be hired by a decent and large company,

> "Why do you say that?"
>
> "Because we didn't go to SNU, Korea U or Yonsei."
>
> "What about the alums who come to the job fairs? People from our college do pretty well."
>
> "The alums are all guys. How many women have you seen at the job fairs?"
>
> The scales fell from Jiyoung's eyes, and finally she saw. Hyejin was right. Jiyoung had made it to most job fairs or "meet the alums" events since the beginning of senior year, and she hadn't seen a single female alumnus, at least not at any of the events she attended. (47)

This exchange helped Jiyoung to realize that no matter how much she tried, she would still have to try much harder than her male peers if she wanted to be considered at the same level as them. SNU (Seoul National University), Korea University and Yonsei University are the top three universities in South Korea. While for the male students these universities might mean a secured spot in any company, whether it is large or small, for women is considered a minimum if they want to work in a large company, according to the novel. This set an incredible high standard for South Korean women if they want to pursue a successful career, in comparison with male workers. And, besides that, for Jiyoung the invisible representation of women in the job fairs that she attended makes it harder to see herself in that position. Again, the system does not only oppress Korean women through minimum job opportunities, but also through severe symbolism that is present almost in every stage of their lives; they do not see themselves as student council presidents at school, as club presidents or vice presidents in university, or as successful employees in their future career paths.

Jiyoung reinforces this idea as she gets to do interviews. It passes a long time before she gets called back or even to be considered for a job position. She keeps questioning the system and the different attitude that she gets in comparison with the other gender. In one episode she is questioned what would she do if a male client "gets handsy. Squeezing your shoulder, grazing your thigh" (50), to which she responds thinking of what the interviewer would like to hear, "I'll find a natural way to leave the room. Like going to the toilet or getting research data" (50). This makes her feel uncomfortable and she finally does not get the job. Jiyoung's reaction, however, is of anger, and she speaks to herself out loud in her house of how dejected she felt, "'I would break his fucking arm!' Jiyoung shouted later at the mirror. 'And you! Your question is sexual harassment! And to ask that during a job interview? Would you ask the same question to male candidates?'" (51). With this, she realizes that the normal behavior during her job searching would be similar, and later on it is

mentioned that “interviewers made references to her physical appearance or lewd remarks about her outfit, stared lecherously at certain body parts and touched her gratuitously” (51), again setting an standard idea of what South Korean women would have to face just because of their gender, as Jiyoung herself questioned that those type of interviews would probably not be done to male candidates.

Most of these complaints are done by Jiyoung only when she is alone, or, in the previous case, in a safe space like her room. While she clearly thinks there is injustice in these decisions, she does not try to do something else. She is just mad, and left “in bed frustrated and indignant, kicking off the blankets that clung to her legs” (51), not letting her anger lead to any action other than complaining and then trying to calm herself.

As the novel advances we can see that Jiyoung can finally get a job at a small marketing agency. While she settles with her new job, she slowly digests how her adult life would be from now on. She focuses on things like housing, her new relationship and working as best as she can, as “work was fun and she liked her colleagues” (57). However, she again faces inequality once she discovers that she was not selected in the new planning team –a higher job position– because of her gender. The reader is aware of this once she gets an explanation from the people inside the team during a night the employees spent drinking. She is told that this new and better position demanded a lot from the employees, and the head of the company did not choose a single woman for the team because “the nature and intensity of the marketing agency job made it difficult to maintain a decent work—life balance, especially if childcare came into play, and therefore he did not think of female employees as prospective long-term colleagues” (62). This showcases that, in a system that demands time and independence, women are immediately scratched out from this type of opportunities. And, considering that the prospect of married life in South Korea is to have children, women are immediately selected as the ones that would be in charge of them if the opportunity appears,

giving the male workers an advantage: they do not need to take care of their kids, so they can be eligible for higher job positions and higher wages.

Taking into account all of the processes that she has gone through in which her gender is a factor at the moment of decision making, she is not angry anymore, just disappointed and tired. After a small period of happiness with her job, Jiyoung "found herself heading to the office as if out of habit. She handled the tasks she was given as usual. But her drive and faith had undoubtedly been weakened" (63), showing that she was slowly falling into what later on in the novel is a severe depression.

It is during her married life that this depression begins to take form. This does not happen because there were specific problems in her marriage or because of her job, but because Jiyoung slowly realized the position that her life was taking. During this time, she faces two episodes in which her reaction shows a shift in her mentality. Her mindset has changed from the passive Korean woman to someone that can speak up for herself, even if she could not stop the outcome.

The first one happens when the couple has to legally register their marriage after their one-month anniversary, as it is the norm in South Korea. Usually this register needs to be filled with information such as the place of origin of their families, their properties, the report of their marriage and more. One section deals with the surname that the child's couple will have if they decide to become parents. When Jiyoung asks her husband what does he think about their child her surname, he answers simply "I think 'Jung' is a decent surname" (66), making reference to his surname, and stating without saying it out loud that their child should be named after him and his family of origin, not hers, even though at that time in South Korea it was legally allowed for children to take their mother's surname. This part of the novel makes reference to the implications of applying the *hoju* system for decades. The author

Eunkang Koh describes this system as an outdated one, and that many feminists protested for it to be abolished,

> The Korean *hoju* system, introduced in 1953, was a family registration system under Civil Law. All members of a family were registered under *hoju* or "the family head", thus "family" consists of the family head and the other members. Korea's patriarchal system means that male members of the family are generally *hojus*. When a father dies his first son inherits the position of family head while younger sons usually establish separate families on marriage. Daughters become members of their husbands' families when they marry and women only inherit the position of family head when there are no surviving males. (Koh 346)

While nowadays this *hoju* system does not exist in the South Korean constitution as it was abolished in 2008, the remains of it as what the society understands as gender roles are still present in South Korean society. The novel makes it clear that Jiyoung thinks that the *hoju* system is completely absurd and outdated. At this time in the novel this system was already abolished almost ten years ago, and Jiyoung was able to see the possibility that her children might take her surname. However, even if in her mind she does not agree completely with her husband, she fills the registration as he requested. Jiyoung understands that “the world had changed a great deal, but the little rules, contracts and customs had not, which meant the world hadn’t actually changed at all” (Cho 66), so she does not even try to speak up about it again. While it was accepted by law, the society itself had yet to adapt to it, meaning that despite having changed in theory, in practice it remained the same.

As exemplified by Jiyoung’s case, the imposition of this registration system heavily affected the lifestyle of South Korean women, and decisions such as having children and forming a family were mostly taken by the society to keep it alive as a collective, instead of giving the chance to women as individuals to decide what to do with their lives. This

showcases that most of the mindset influenced by the *hoju* system is something still alive, even a decade after its abolishment. Jiyoung, by seeing herself treated unfairly, could not compete against something that was supported by the law –the system itself– for so long.

The second episode revolves around the pressure that the couple begin to have for Jiyoung to get pregnant. In a family reunion she got targeted over and over again as to why the couple did not have a baby yet, and while she was quite uncomfortable, her husband did not defend her in front of his family and, once they were alone driving back home, he said that she was overreacting. Jiyoung saw this as another reason to think of her husband as someone that was not supporting her, as it can be seen in "she was saddened that he was dismissing her feelings as an overreaction, and the explanations he came up with turned into more ammunition for her to criticize him" (67). He later on insisted on having children as it was not harmful and they would have one anyways. This is the moment in which Jiyoung, for the second time, begins to question his words in her mind,

> But having a child was not so casual a decision for Jiyoung (...). She couldn't gauge what about her body would change and to what degree. Most important, she wasn't sure if she could take on both childcare and her career. Daycare centers and babysitters would not be enough, as the couple always worked late and on weekends (...). Then she felt awful that she was already thinking about putting her child in someone else's care when it wasn't even born yet (...). Jiyoung explained to the best of her ability how she felt: anxious as to whether she'd be able to keep her career after having a baby, guilt over already thinking about having someone else look after their child. (68)

While the couple kept arguing about the topic, Jiyoung's mentality would still be the same: sad because her husband would not understand her feelings, and disappointed because she

knows she would lose much more than what her husband would ever lose. She thinks about the present, her future, her freedom and her body.

Until now, Jiyoung's connection with her body experiences are in big part repressed or simply not mentioned. She was brought up and influenced in order to follow a submissive lifestyle with the goal of growing a family of her own, and once she begins to question it her body becomes something present. The authors Sabala and Meena Gopal in their text "Body, Gender and Sexuality, Politics of Being and Belonging" discuss the importance of the imposed notions of the body, especially the ones done in patriarchal societies such as Jiyoung's in which "girls are taught to acquire gender roles and qualities that are feminine which are supposed to compliment men's superior masculine traits" (Gopal 44). They make emphasis on the dual work of patriarchy and capitalism over this imposed notion of body and its effects both in the society and on the individual, eliminating the options for women to define themselves. The authors mention that the control over women's bodies is done in order for women to be "always under the pressure to conform to family, society and community expectations" (Gopal 44), hence individual decisions become a threat to women's close circle—such as their family's legacy—as well as to the whole of the society itself. In this moment in which she is discussing with her husband decisions about her body, Jiyoung realizes what her pregnancy actually means. She begins to question the entire system that tries to control her body, besides her relatives or her husband. While having a baby would be the decision of both of them, pregnancy was still a process that her husband would never go through on his own. Once Jiyoung realizes that she is the one at a disadvantage, for the first time she speaks up and questions her husband out loud,

"And what will you be giving up, *Oppa*?"

"What?"

> "You said don't just think about what I'll be giving up. I'm putting my youth, health, job, colleagues, social networks, career plans, and future on the line. No wonder all I can think about are the things I'm giving up. But what about you? What do you lose by gaining a child?" (Cho 69)

This moment is what makes a difference from not only the surname episode mentioned above, but also all the other episodes in her life in which other people were taking decisions over her and dictating how she should live her life. She knows this is a problem that men do not discuss, and an issue that women from older generations were not sympathizing with. While for women such as her mother-in-law working was not something they would pursue, it became obvious for Jiyoung that they would not understand how she might feel. She is being pressured to sacrifice her job, her body, her time and her independence, and while it was the norm for the past generations, it was not something that Jiyoung looked forward to in this one.

Both of these episodes represent how much Jiyoung's consciousness changed and evolved. While at the beginning she kept following the norm and the gender roles that were imposed onto her during her entire life, at the end she realized that there is much more to lose rather than to win in these situations. She finds for the first time a voice and a reason to speak up, especially now that her body and her independence were being the center of discussion. Even if the results are still her doing what a South Korean woman is supposed to do –that is, becoming a mother–, now she knows that there are things that need to be questioned, that, even if her husband does not understand completely her situation, she should still voice it and make him question the system in which both of them were imposed to live under.

Consequences of the Norm: Decadence and Survival

Later on, and even after discussing the topic again with her husband, Jiyoung eventually becomes a mother. During her pregnancy she questions herself if the decision was

the right one to take as she begins to suffer what she feared the most, which is losing her independence and her free decisions. First the couple decides that it would be better for one of them to stay at home to raise their daughter, which, of course, was going to be Jiyoung, as she was the one carrying the baby and, most importantly, her husband's wage was way higher than hers. It is in this decision that it is mentioned that Jiyoung feels depressed, as slowly she is being detached from all her experiences as an independent person. When he mentions that he would help out and she should take this as a new chapter in her life, she voices her worries gain,

> "Help out? What is it with you and 'helping out?' You're going to 'help out' with chores. 'Help out' with raising our baby. 'Help out' with finding me a new job. Isn't this your house, too? Your home? Your child? And if I work, don't you spend my pay, too? Why do you keep saying 'help out' like you're volunteering to pitch in on someone else's work?" (73)

She, again, understands that her husband would never understand her feelings, not only because he was a man, but because the system and the society would always put her in a position where she is useful, in order to keep things as they are and helping only those that have always sought the benefit of the norm. Considering this, she is not useful by having a job of her own or not getting married. She is useful by settling down, having children and taking care of them so they can keep the system working. Of course, Jiyoung sees in her husband how her own desires are not taken into consideration, so he is the first person that she screams at and questions directly. This works as a call out against her husband, and also as a general overview against the society that she lives under. Jiyoung is tired and depressed, and is slowly realizing that now for everything she has to take into consideration that she now has a daughter, and going back to her old life—that is working in a marketing company and using her time for her own—would be impossible.

It is due to these episodes that by the end of the novel Jiyoung has a melt down and cannot stop crying about how her life turned out to be. This is the moment in which the novel reaches present time and Jiyoung for the first time begins her abnormal behavior, going back to the beginning of the novel that starts in 2015. Now that the reader has passed through all of the stages of her life, it becomes easier to understand why she became this person. The first time she used someone else's voice was during a *baengno*, a seasonal change during September in which for the first time in the year the temperature is below dew point. She makes a comment about the weather while imitating her mom, and her husband believes it is humor as he sees her as a "cheerful person, full of laughter, who often made Daehyun laugh by doing impressions of celebrities" (4). At the beginning, her impressions are not so questioned by her husband, and he believes that it is her way of coping with being exhausted from taking care of the baby. However, the next time this happens she imitates her own daughter, by sleeping next to her "sucking their thumbs, looking cute but absurd. Jiyoung's tongue stuck out a little, and she smacked her lips, just like a baby" (5). While the first time her imitation could have been a way of coping with her tiredness, this time she sees in her daughter a freedom and peacefulness that she probably has been looking for a long time.

The next time this happens, Jiyoung does it in order to seek help from her husband. She presents before her husband as Cha Seungyeon, her old friend from university that was part of the same club as her, who always made sure for the women in the club to feel comfortable. She uses Seungyeon's voice to say to her husband "Hey, Jiyoung is having a hard time. Raising a toddler is emotionally draining. You should tell her every chance you get: *You're doing great! You're working so hard! I appreciate you!*" (5). Through Seungyeon, a woman that Jiyoung considered strong and brave, she tells her husband something that he denied to listen to from her in the past: she is not fine, she needs help and support.

The last time she uses another woman's voice is during *chuseok*, a Korean festivity in which families reunite and celebrate the harvest. Women are supposed to cook for the family, and wives usually spend this holiday with their husband's families. It is during this celebration that Jiyoung is questioned by them, as the topic rises thanks to her sister-in-law in which she mentions that Jiyoung must be exhausted. When the attention is on her, she does not answer directly, but uses her mother's voice: "Oh, Mrs. Jung, to tell you the truth, my poor Jiyoung gets sick from exhaustion every holiday!" (8). The entire family is left speechless. Not because what Jiyoung said was insulting, but because she had never spoken like that to them. She always behaved obediently, following traditions and staying at a side when her husband's family questioned her. This gets worse when Jiyoung continues, using her mother's tone and vocabulary:

> "As you know, the holidays are a time for families to gather. But they're not just for your family. They're for my family, too. Everyone's so busy nowadays and it's hard for my children to get together, too, if not for the holidays. You should at least let our daughter come home when your daughter comes to visit you" (9)

This time she is direct. Now she is not only expressing how she feels, but also what she wants. Jiyoung is putting herself first, and that is something that she never did in front of this family. She could not do it in the past, and now it is only through her mother that she can face the consequences of speaking up. Of course, this does not mean that everything changed after that, but it did light a bulb in her life. This made her husband act quickly, taking her to see a psychiatrist to seek for the help that she so desperately needed. He could see that Jiyoung has been for a long time looking for support, to be understood. She finds in those voices a way of speaking up that might actually work. This time, she is not involved directly in the process, but she is still there, asking to go home during the holidays or speaking out about how affected she is by taking care of her daughter.

The only way in which she can compose herself and keep speaking up her mind like she did with her husband is by using the voice of other women that passed through her life. By going back to these voices that mattered to her, she can set free from the "sentence" of being a South Korean woman, she can speak up and find the meaning of her voice and herself again. As the past times in which she spoke up did not work, her mind and body decided to set free of that burden and make her become a different woman, so what once was an individual fight could now become a collective one. This gives the reader a final stance of hope. The most important part is to recognize the injustices, and next is trying to voice them so they are not forgotten. Jiyoung passes through this process without succeeding at a great level, but knowing that at least she tried to question the system. She sets a first step that for so many women in both South Korea and the rest of the world is almost impossible to take.

Conclusion

Jiyoung's final stage is a collision of both her submissive and her active self. While during most of her marriage and early adulthood she began to criticize the system that was pressuring her to be and act in a certain way, she also realized that fighting against it would be impossible, especially if she is alone. Hence, finding her voice in other women's voices also relates to the collectivity of Korean society, and what she wanted from it since the very beginning: to be supported, to be understood. She uses the voices of her mother, her daughter and an old friend, all of them from different generations but having in common the support and care that she needed. She takes these voices from the past, present and future and makes them her way out of the system that for so long oppressed her to the point of physical and mental collapse.

In this essay I analyzed Jiyoung's life focusing on how the gender norms usually present in South Korean society affected her and what she did in order to act against them. While half of her life Jiyoung dedicated herself to absorbing the norm remaining as an

observer of her society, she spent the other half realizing that these norms were actually part of a bigger system that needed her to stay still in a position of submission and silence, finally reaching a point of awareness by questioning it. Of course, this view is quite general as it does not deeply focus on each aspect of the Korean society that affects Jiyoung, but rather the responses and the development that she has during her life and how this explains what is to be expected in the society that she lives in. Korean tradition goes back to a history that has been present for thousands of years, influenced by the countries that are near and later on by strong world powers, however, most of its tradition remains intact or can be reflected in many aspects of today's Korean society, one of them being the role that women have had to play during those long years of traditions.

Min Wonjung discusses this aspect of Korean women, in which they are affected by the current norm, and how the ideal of a good wife changes depending on how society changes, exemplifying how normative assumptions seem to be presented as static when they are actually quite fluid. Around the 90s, marriage and family was not a good factor for women's decision-making freedom in the country, and only around 2007 novels began to discuss the development of Korean women and the significant changes that the concept of family had (Min 111). This can be perfectly applied to Jiyoung's life and her expectations, in contrast with her mother-in-law and grandmother's expectations. The generational gap represents the different ideals, as well as a lack of support from their own gender, making it even harder for the new generations to change the norms or act against the system, as one generation might have a completely different set of ideals than the previous one. Jiyoung's lack of action is mostly explained by this factor.

Cho Namjoo, through this novel, puts into perspective how the continuity of these norms affects Korean women heavily in all stages of their lives. It is not only in her marriage that Jiyoung realizes that her gender affected directly how people treated her and what they

expected for her. It was a process that took all her life, since she was not even born and became already a deception for part of her family. Then, passing through her childhood and the different expectations that her teachers had about her male classmates versus her female classmates. Followed by adolescence, in which she experienced firsthand what could have been a sexual assault. Then, in her early adulthood, in which she realized that the working world was designated for men, and finally reaching her marriage in which she was pressured to sacrifice her mental health, her body and all that she worked for in order to have a child. All of these episodes in her life represent a type of collective suffering, as Jiyoung is only one of the millions of women that are pressured to follow a set ideal, with rules and expectations that eventually do not fit in the lifestyle that they are trying to pursue. Hence, finding in the collectivity of the voices her way out comes as a full cycle: all (of us) suffer, so in all (of us) there is a way to heal.

Jiyoung, by speaking up and challenging in her own way the norms that were imposed onto her, becomes a fictional representation of real life South Korean women that opened the dialogue about gender equality. The process of becoming aware of her situation makes the reader realize that, while she suffers all of the consequences of an unequal system, she is also setting a starting point for herself that represents all of those women that cannot see any change at all. Throughout the entire novel there are informational paragraphs about South Korean law and the Confucian system, and how the fight for gender equality helped to change those laws and put into perspective how deeply rooted inequality was —and is—in South Korean society. In the novel there are also several specifications pointing out that most of the time the changes or elimination of these laws and systems did not mean for people to change their own perspective.

While this analysis focused mostly on the fictional life of a South Korean woman, it is still a representation of real life cases that until today, six years after the publication of this

novel, still affects women from all over the world. It is true that in both South Korea and many other countries from the globe changes in laws and in society have been made in order to reach new levels of equality, but that does not stop injustices from still happening. Issues such as normalizing the step out of boundaries in the work environment, or continuing making it difficult for mothers to find jobs are factors that slow the process of developing as a responsible society in terms of gender equality. For a future in which this is part of everyday normality, experiences such as Jiyoung's would have helped to build a base in which her suffering will stop being normalized, for the well-being of both women and the entirety of society.

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PATRIARCHAL VIOLENCE IN *THE BOOK OF X: A WARPED LEGACY*

by Catalina Cuevas

Introduction

The present research project is inserted in a social context in which there is still a very well-established system that oppresses different societal sectors in ways that continue to be internalized and perpetuated. How we perceive ourselves, for instance, is determined by detrimental social ideals, as well as the relationships we develop and the spaces we inhabit. The novel that will be dealt with thereupon proposes a still necessary discussion on the oppressive establishments that have always ruled our behaviors. The story, however, is not a hopeful one: it just is the story of a woman who has carried a burden her whole life, which she can never completely get rid of—making her story the story of many.

Published in 2019, the novel *The Book of X,* written by the North American author Sarah Rose Etter, narrates the story of a girl named Cassie, who was born with a physical and visible knot in her abdomen—just like her mother and grandmother before her. The story, which is told in three parts, takes the reader through Cassie's journey from childhood to adulthood. *The Book of X* depicts the process of a girl growing up in a patriarchal system in which most aspects of her life have been determined by the fact that she is a female and by her physical condition. For instance, the perception of herself, the spaces, and places she interacts with, her sexuality, and interpersonal relationships, among others.

Through Cassie's knot—which is what the protagonist's life revolves around the most—Etter's novel deals with topics that transcend time and brings issues such as negative body perception to a visible level, making a necessary discussion possible. The main claim of the present research project then is that the knot is a device that helps explain the diverse ways the patriarchy works on the female body. Nevertheless, this inquiry will go beyond the idea of the knot since I also aim to explore how life works for Cassie without the physical presence of it and the possible meanings that underlie her fatal ending.

This research project will be complemented by theory that approaches, in the first place, the concept of embodiment which Niva Piran defines as "the lived experience of engagement of the body in the world" (2). The author's ideas developed in the text "The Developmental Theory of Embodiment" about how one can attain either a positive experience of embodiment or a negative one will be employed. Embodiment comes as an important piece of theory from which the analysis of this research project will be tackled, since much of what will be dealt with hereunder, concerns the way the protagonist experiences the world through her body which most of the time does not result positively. A negative body perception may result in a negative experience of embodiment, which Arroyo et al. attribute to the influence that mothers have on their daughters' body image. In their text, "Feminist Embodiment, Body Talk, and Body Image among Mothers and Daughters", the authors provide insight into how mothers' negative perception of their body and their body talk negatively influence their daughters' self-image, in addition to highlighting the importance of social circles in the process of engaging with the world, which for the analysis of Cassie will be essential since she lacks a support network on which she can rely. Moreover, as stated by Arroyo et al., mothers are a major influence on daughters' body image, and when it results in a negative body perception it is due to the detrimental patriarchal behaviors and conceptions about gender and body that are passed down onto the newer generations. "Becoming and Being Gendered through the Body: Older Women, Their Mothers, and Body Image" by Laura Clarke and Meredith Griffin deal with this issue and provide insights into the generational factors that allow these conceptions to be internalized. The relevance of this text also relies on the authors' explanation of the system that not only oppresses the newer generations, but also the older ones. They acknowledge how mothers were also influenced in their time by the system that focuses on women's appearance as a moral duty (703), providing the understanding that patriarchal oppression comes in a

never-ending cycle, which in turn is an essential aspect to analyze due to Cassie's perception of herself is to a great extent determined by her mother.

Another crucial aspect to analyze in the novel is the geographical element to understand the protagonist's spatial contexts which she develops in different moments of her life. Men's presence and their role significantly influence Cassie's image, not only of her body but also of her place in the world as a female. In this regard, Jo Little's "Rural geography" focuses on how traditional gender roles are developed in terms of rural labor, which to understand part of the protagonist's early years is essential, as well as to propose specific patterns of behavior that have been developed around Cassie, for instance, the fact that she has been prohibited from going to certain places do to her gender, which also comes as an expression of the oppression she suffers from.

Positionality

One of the things that the novel achieves is that it makes one feel empathy because it is reminiscent of a society ruled by a system that exerts oppression through different types of violence. The novel achieves this through its narration, which makes the issues it deals with transcendental of time and makes it possible to go beyond the fictionality character of the novel. I have found myself in a position where I have witnessed and, at times, have been a victim of much of the violence Cassie endures. I would like to state then that this research project will be written from a place of solidarity and sensitivity.

Moreover, one of the main points to analyze in the novel is body image and how it is depicted throughout Cassie's life. As it will be possible to see, Cassie's body image is influenced by a myriad of situations that all interconnect at some point, ranging from the influence of the media—and the societal expectations that it transmits—to Cassie's interpersonal relationships. In this regard, Cassie's story evokes my own story in that I, too, have been the target of what feels like unrealistic expectations that are put on the female

body, expectations which I have internalized and inherited—just as Cassie does—mostly from my family. I have also learned that the self-perception of those we look up to as children can affect our self-image, making it a seemingly never-ending cycle. Cassie's narration of self-loathing towards her body—a body that seems to allow the world to treat her with hostility—resonates with me, and I know it would resonate with those from my closest circles and those farther away from me as well.

The Novel – First Part

Cassie's coming-of-age story starts when she is a pre-adolescent girl living in The Acres—the family farm where meat is harvested from earth. Certain aspects of this period in Cassie's life can be identified as determining for her growth, which in turn is determined by the patriarchal system in which she and the other characters are immersed. In this first part of the novel, it is possible to witness how Cassie's perception of her body is shaped, which comes mainly from the ideas shared by her mother, as well as the hostile reactions of others to Cassie's visible physical condition, both which will be exemplified and thoroughly dealt with in this first part of the analysis. Moreover, the oppressive system that the novel is settled in is presented in this first part of the story, mainly through the depiction of Cassie's interpersonal relationships. In this way, the patent gender roles and the ways violence are exerted on Cassie in terms of her body are exhibited.

This first piece of analysis will then be made regarding her physical condition—the knot—body image, interpersonal relationships, space, and sexuality. Considering that the situations and topics to be analyzed also determine most of what comes next in Cassie's life as an adult, which will be analyzed afterward.

Cassie and The Knot

Cassie's physical condition has determined her interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal aspects. Her self-perception and the ways she inhabits her body are primarily

negative and come to be in terms of her knot. Cassie experiences her body in a way that does not allow herself to detach from her knot. In fact, the opening line of the novel is "I was born a knot" (Etter 12), which lets the reader see that she has embodied her physical condition; she equals herself to the knot and everything rather negative that comes with it.

Regarding the experience of embodiment, in the context of analyzing body image, Arroyo et al. claim that a mind-body connection is essential to have a positive experience of embodiment (355). As it is shown in book, the issue in Cassie's embodied experience is not that there is not a mind-body connection but that it is a negative one in that she rarely detaches her identity from the knot or her appearance—nor do the people around her.

"I feel so sad some days," I whisper.

Pain has been welling up inside of me: My knot makes me other.

"What do you mean?" she asks.

I run a hand over my stomach. I feel as if I am from another planet (Etter 32).

In this conversation with her school friend, Sophia, Cassie is explaining the way she perceives her existence: as if it was alienated from the rest of the world. Cassie is attributing the reasons for said alienation to the knot, yet she lacks the awareness of the fact that the knot is not precisely what makes her an other but what is established in terms of female appearance and behaviors.

Since Cassie often sees herself in terms of her body which she perceives as inferior because of the knot, she has constant wishes to make repairs and improvements. A demonstration of this is the *Visions* that Cassie narrates throughout the whole book.[6] In her *Visions,* she depicts images of a reality that never gets to be—usually, they are more positive images than what she is actually living. The *Visions* range from bitter illusions about a warmer relationship with her father (Etter 29) to grotesque fantasies about removing the knot

[6] These are narrated in vignettes, and oftentimes interrupt the progression of the story.

with pliers (Etter 31). There are more ways in which Cassie's need for physical change is demonstrated throughout the story, which will be tackled in the following section of the analysis.

Body Image and Cassie's Mother

A myriad of different situations portrayed in the novel help elucidate the elements that have influenced Cassie's negative perception of her own body; the first one is the influence of the media, which is first portrayed through Deborah—Cassie's mother. In one of Deborah's first appearances, the idea of the expectations put on the female body is depicted in a short passage. Said scene provides insight into Cassie and Deborah's perception of themselves and their relationship. In this vignette, Cassie describes the magazines that her mother is showing to her as "bright portals to new worlds" (Etter 15)—they show women with white teeth and plastic nails whose hands are "…more perfect than anything [Cassie] has seen…" (Etter 15). As the scene progresses, it is possible to notice that they perceive said world as a world they do not belong to but could if they changed their appearances. As Cassie is narrating what she sees in the magazines, she is comparing it to her mother's looks, grasping the superiority of those bodies shown in the magazines:

> "This season, women need whiter teeth."
>
> I look at her teeth, their yellowing from years of smoke.
>
> "Another trend is plastic fingernails. Now would you look at these?"
>
> I look at her hands, their nails, which are short, unpainted, best for working lemon against wall (Etter 15).

Here, Cassie is also receiving from her mother the message that there are appearances/bodies that are superior to theirs and that what these magazines portray is something they need to aspire to, which later becomes Cassie's need. In fact, Cassie says that she invents her mother and herself like the women in the magazines: "Our teeth gleaming, our nails red. I picture us

beautiful, unknotted" (Etter 15), making it clear that being beautiful and "knotted" are opposites.

After this scene, there are acts of body surveillance in which Cassie's descriptions of her body are done negatively, in addition to more drastic and dangerous acts such as changing her diet, an idea that comes from her mother, who read it in a magazine. Cassie's wishes for removing the knot grow to a point in which death seems a better option than living with a condition thanks to which she is made an outcast. Cassie's behaviors may reflect current societal violence since, as Clarke and Griffin state, "the heavy emphasis on feminine beauty is a form of patriarchal oppression that devalues women's social worth and impels constant 'self-surveillance'" (703) among other dangerous practices.

Furthermore, at this point, the knot could be understood as an analogy to how the expectations that are put on the female body are also passed down from generation to generation—making the knot an inheritance. Those who are in the position of a caretaker—in this case, Deborah—take part of the responsibility for the negative body image of those who have in charge could have, since it is through the "mother-daughter relationship that women learn about and internalize the social construction of femininity and patriarchy" (Clarke and Griffin 702). However, it is necessary to keep in mind that not only daughters are constrained in a system that emphasizes female appearances but also mothers (Clarke and Griffin 703). They are not only the ones that perpetuate harmful patterns but are also the victims.[7]

Moreover, it is necessary to mention that the perception Cassie has about her body is the result not only of her relationship with her mother but also of the ways the world around her interacts with Cassie—which frequently comes to be in terms of her body. Outside her family, she does not have meaningful relationships of any kind with anyone; the ways others

[7] While there is a need for us to be aware that these expectations that are put onto us come from an oppressive system that is timeless, there is only so much we can justify. We should all be aware of the place we and others stand in the world, and how we affect said world around us.

relate to her are mostly to harm her and make her an other. The most explicit way in which she is made an outsider is portrayed in the novel is in a scene at school in which she is being surrounded by students that keep yelling at her "'LOOK AT HER! LOOK AT THE FREAK'" (Etter 20); she is separated from the rest in a successful attempt to demonstrate to her that her body and existence is inferior. These types of situations are what eventually shape Cassie's perception about her own body and turn it into a "problematic site from which to engage with the world" (Piran 6), which in turn becomes an excruciating thing for her to do.

Cassie's negative body perception grows to the point in which she is willing to sacrifice her wants, needs, and well-being for a future of not being the target of "new disgusts" (Etter 13). In fact, when her mother takes her to a doctor that will help remove the knot with a painful procedure, Cassie states that the multiple needles injections will help "the knot loosening into a future flat body" (Etter 55)—her appearance will have changed, and the knot could be gone at last. Although the present is painful, there is hope that the future is not, and that seems to be worth it.

Interpersonal Relationships

Cassie's interpersonal relationships demonstrate how the violent patriarchal system she is immersed in subjugates her, not only in terms of her body but also of her gender, this being portrayed through her relationship with the males in the story. Firstly, there is a clear difference between the roles Cassie's father and brother play and her mother's and hers. In the first place, the economic activity that sustains their household—the meat farm—is only a male business. Actually, the men in the family are the ones that inherit the Meat Quarry—while women inherit the burden of the knot—they are the providers, and they are praised for that, whereas the roles that Cassie and Deborah play, which relate mostly to house chores, are overlooked and taken for granted; a social order that is assumed should be like

that and that resembles a long established tradition that persists in diverse sociocultural spaces.

Secondly, something worth mentioning in terms of the binary division between males and females portrayed in the novel is how their bodies are perceived—or how the author portrays them. For instance, Cassie narrates that to find where the most abundant harvest of meat could be found, the men use their bodies as an instinct tool—they literally feel it in their guts—and they also make use of their bodies to harvest the meat; they become *slick machines* as Cassie calls them (Etter 33). In their guts, men have the instinct, and women have the knots. What could summarize how male and female bodies are portrayed in the novel is what Clarke and Griffin have stated: while the female body is perceived—and treated—as an object, "the male body is viewed as a tool for action and achievement" (703). In fact, the female body in the novel is portrayed not as a tool but as an object that carries children and knots, which despite the latter, the opportunity of giving birth is intact: "the womb is located at the base of the deformity, providing a clear path for birthing" (Etter 17). The men in the novel were given the instinct and the land, and women were given the burden. This is an issue well acknowledged by Cassie and her mother since when Cassie asks her if men ever get knots, Deborah answers: "A man has never had a knot. That is a woman's burden" (Etter 19).

Finally, another crucial interpersonal relationship in Cassie's life is with the only girl she has a friendship with—her school friend Sophia. Arroyo et al. state that social circles that do not focus on the value of women's bodies but on their experiences promote a better body perception among women (356). However, it is rarely found in Cassie and Sophia's relationship—there are only a few heartwarming moments of shared complicity and warm sympathy. From the beginning, their relationship seems to be determined by an emphasis on physical appearance. As a matter of fact, the first time the reader is presented with Sophia is

in terms of her body and the comparisons Cassie makes: "[the] body of Sophia is my favorite…long brown hair which shimmers where mine is dull… no knot where I am knotted" (Etter 24). As Cassie's narration progresses, her wishes to be Sophia become explicit, and lets Sophia know, yet what she says to Cassie says it all: "[it's] all the same no matter how you look" (Etter 27). In this quote, the character of Sophia is explicitly answering Cassie's wishes to be similar in appearance to her; there is no hint whether Sophia refers to something more specific, however, she may. Once the story progresses towards Cassie's adulthood, Sophia's words acquire another meaning and become a foreshadowing of Cassie's impossibility to escape the violence that she is constantly enduring, which in turn comes as a reflection of current social patterns. It seems that women have to tolerate violence, day after day, in which their bodies are oftentimes the target, just as it is portrayed in the novel through Cassie. Thus, Sophia's voice comes as the voice of those who have resigned to the impossibility of escaping said violence, but her words also come as a general, seemingly unchangeable truth that we are all a part of.

Space and The Meat Quarry

The characters' interactions with space, just as interpersonal relationships, are extensively influenced by the patriarchal system. For instance, the Meat Quarry is experienced differently by the males in the family and by Cassie. For Cassie, her interactions with that space have been determined by her father—there have been physical boundaries set for her due to the sole fact that she is a female. In fact, when Cassie expresses her wishes to see the Meat Quarry for the first time, her father states that "[she is] not meant to be there…Some things, a woman should not see" (Etter 14). She can finally interact physically with the place after stealing her father's keys to the quarry; thus, Cassie's relation with the place begins furtively and out of a need to interact with a place she had always been kept

away from. In this first contact, the quarry provides Cassie with a long-yearned freedom—this time, she does as she likes, with no restrictions.

One of the breaking points in this part of the novel is the night Cassie discovers her father eating—devouring wildly—the meat that had already been harvested, so it does not rot and go to waste, something he forces Cassie to do as well.

> Low sounds of grunting and panting through my open window wake me in the night. Inside, my father is shirtless, covered in blood, bottle by his side. Piles of meat surround him. He shoves a handful of the red into his mouth. His eyes glint with some level of madness.
>
> We eat all night, the bottle between us, an endless midnight dinner, eating until it feels we might split open (Etter 49, 50).

Firstly, this scene provides insight into the patterns of behavior that have been developed in Cassie's surroundings: the need for men to exert domination and control over nature. In fact, according to Jo Little, "the hegemonic masculinity within farming rests on an ability to tame the forces of nature to maximize production" (qtd. in Bryant 666); thus, the scene comes as a demonstration of the traditional roles men often play, according to Little. The father is seen trying to go against a natural course and is exerting his dominance through his physical strength and ability—in this case, to endure grueling labors—which seem to be a constant practice in current society.

It is worth noting that it is after this scene that Cassie is allowed to work in the quarry. This can be attributed to the fact that the moment she started eating with her father, she equaled him, i.e., she demonstrated "masculine" qualities of strength and physical ability to endure the demanding tasks. Little states that one of the ideas that are very present in rural life is the need for strength to undertake heavy work (667), an ability that in the novel is very much attributed to men. Cassie, then, is allowed to become part of the order because she

ended up complying with the system, just as women sometimes need to change their behaviors to be respected and to be considered on the same level as men.

Finally, as it progresses, the Meat Quarry becomes a place Cassie is empowered by—she is able to affect that place through the work she does with her body, and said place affects her in return, physically and inwardly: "The quarry makes me stronger. The fat falls from my body, the knot gets smaller…I work fast as my brother, I become the slick machine" (Etter 65, 66)—she has also equaled him—something she is happy with and to which she receives approval. The quarry also becomes a safe space, a place of comfort where she goes when she is treated with hostility. For example, after the boy she likes makes cruel comments about her body not fulfilling his expectations, she is filled with rage and chooses to go to the quarry to express physically said rage. "[In the quarry] I let the walls close in on me ... Rage puts me in motion: … I rip the flesh from the walls, screaming and sobbing against the red" (Etter 69). This scene evidences how the quarry had become a place she made her own and in which she did not feel constricted, however, that space that was given to her for her compliance with the establishment is later taken away violently, making it explicit that it was never hers.

Jarred – The Love Interest

The process of sexual awakening in Cassie is determined by consensual boundaries being trespassed, in which Cassie's first love interest—Jarred—plays a crucial role; the ugliest face of patriarchy is embodied in Jarred. For instance, he enacts non-consensual sexual activities in front of Cassie, making these approaches her first encounters with sexuality. Cassie has no awareness about consent; he hurts her and crosses her boundaries, yet she still obsesses over Jarred; she longs for his touch, but more importantly, his love. This is not an observation made to judge Cassie; I firmly believe it demonstrates the consequences of a flawed system. The book illustrates this through a short but very telling passage in which

Cassie and her classmates are supposed to learn about sexuality: “They’ve taken all the boys away. It is time for sexual education. ‘Today,’ the teacher says, ‘we’re going to learn about sex’” (Etter 39). The lecturer delivers a message that puts the responsibility of sex and pregnancy on women, even when it is acknowledged that men are an active part of it as well. In this way, the system failed adolescent Cassie; it provided her with no information or tools to protect herself.

Moreover, Cassie’s process of sexual awakening is tightly interconnected to that of space because, as stated, not only does her body become a place where boundaries are constantly being trespassed, but her own physical spaces are also violated. There are many times when she is assaulted—even when she does not realize it—yet the final part of the novel's first section is crucial because her safe space—the quarry—is also trespassed by Jarred. Cassie takes him there, putting herself in a vulnerable position by showing him a place she has adopted as her own. There, Jarred ignores the multiple times Cassie tries to stop his sexual advances, and Cassie becomes a victim of rape; her space and agency taken away from her. This is a successful attempt to exert power by Jarred since, as Piran claims, “violence serves as a strong reminder about social privilege: who has and who does not have the privilege of safety in the public sphere” (18)—and in Cassie’s case, private as well.

The *Vision* she has next is about a different first sexual experience (Etter 74), and it comes as a heartbreaking demonstration of how even basic human decency sometimes gets only to be wishful thinking. Here she imagines how it would have been if that first experience had been based on consent, her body being hers, and the place she thought was her own had never been taken away from her. After this fateful event, she returns to the house chores with her mother and does not return to the quarry again; patriarchy once again is determining the spaces Cassie inhabits. The quarry is now a place that has become reminiscent of danger, and her childhood—the first part of the novel—ended here.

The relevance of Jarred in this analysis relies on that many ways in which patriarchy does harm to Cassie are portrayed through his character, and the relationship he has with Cassie, yet it also reflects patterns of behavior that are possible to encounter in society. Female bodies tend to be treated as territories that need to be conquered and subjugated, and no matter the boundaries that are established they are oftentimes ignored and trespassed, even from early ages which as Piran states, disrupts the process of gaining agency in the "physical domain" which is an "important domain of agency for girls" especially in adolescence (7,12). The loss of agency then affects the relationships with our bodies and the ways we engage with the world through them, contributing to the inhabitance of the body as if it is a problematic site from which to exist. This loss of agency also affects experiences in adulthood which will be tackled in the next part of the analysis through the situations that Cassie undergoes as an adult.

The Novel – Second Part

The novel's second part shows Cassie's established life as an adult in the city. This section is far more centered on her inner world—there is a focus on her longings and desires which mostly revolve around her wishes for a love experience. This is a wish that does not come true, and she tries to compensate with casual sex, yet the void is never filled. Regarding the knot, it is still a presence she wants to eliminate and still affects the perception she and others have about her, yet now it adds something else to her life—unbearable physical pain and suffering.

Community

One of the things worth noting in this section is that she does not have a community to which she belongs and can interact with other women, which in the long term negatively affects her—she finds herself entirely alone in this part of her life. Cassie lacks what, according to Arroyo et al., is essential to overcome the negative perception of one's body:

“Supportive spaces and relationships for women and girls help promote a positive embodiment, reject social discourses and expectations regarding the body” (354). For instance, her few interactions with her colleague revolve around Cassie’s body: “In the break room, Brenda looks at my green soup. ‘Maybe you want to try a diet or something’” (Etter 147). Conversations in which Cassie must endure comments about her body that she did not ask for are frequent and continue to influence her.

Relationship with Men

Cassie’s longings are primarily about physical contact that she has never experienced as she wishes. As there is more about her inner world, her loneliness is way more noticeable. Here, she shelters in casual sex, yet it does not provide the emotional satisfaction she yearns for, in fact, she gets humiliated somehow every time men see her knot and then run away. The situation does not change after she undergoes surgery to remove the knot; she is now humiliated because of how her body looks after the procedure; this is how she realizes nothing will change. Knotless is still not enough: “There is no photograph of my new body yet. There is no one to take the picture” (Etter 145).

Despite the unfortunate encounters Cassie has with men, it is crucial to notice that these are a demonstration of her somehow regained agency; she is the one who decides if they can have sexual advances on her. According to Piran, when agency is lost in puberty, it later comes as compulsive joyless activities in which women are agents (7), which would apply to Cassie’s need to fill her voids with sexual encounters. Thus, Cassie reclaims the agency she lost and was robbed of in her adolescent years—her mother controlling her body and Jarred assaulting her.

The Knot

The following analysis will conclude the idea of the knot and its significance in the novel. In this part of the novel, the knot does not only comes with the emotional burden; now,

physical pain is added, which she witnesses her mother suffering from first: “I can feel it coming for me” (Etter 89). Cassie’s body then becomes a “ticking bomb” of pain (Etter 109), and when it finally explodes, she undergoes surgery to remove it, with the promise of the knotless future she had wished for the longest time. After the procedure, Cassie was able to “walk knotless” (Etter 141) and felt that she was finally “part of the throbbing city” (Etter 141); she finally got rid of what made her an outsider. The confidence did not last for much longer though since she soon realized that it would still be the same, no matter what her appearance was. Despite Cassie removes the knot, it is still a presence—an intangible one—that enables people to treat her body with hostility, thanks to which she realizes that the knotless future she had always wished for was only an illusion, a situation that adds more significance to Sophia’s words—“[it’s] all the same no matter how you look” (Etter 27)—the improvements she thought were necessary for her to be treated decently were not enough. Piran claims that there is an ongoing discourse in society about the deficiency of women’s bodies, in which all aspects of the body require repairs, however, no matter the repairs we get, they will never suffice (22). A war that should unfold against harmful social ideologies then unfolds against our own bodies instead (Piran 22). Cassie removed the knot, yet she could not escape the violence and the loneliness; nothing about her interpersonal relationships changed, and nothing about the way she thought of herself was different. The joy did not come.

Secondly, Cassie referred to the pain that was coming for her as her “terrible ancestor” (Etter 89), restating the idea of the knot as an inheritance. The event that rounds up this idea would occur by the end of this part when she becomes pregnant, yet she has only negative feelings towards the situation. Cassie places herself in the position of the one who perpetrates and perpetuates the burden: “I have made a new knot…I have warped my own story again” (Etter 146). She has made a knot in two senses: the first, she considers the child

she carries as a new burden for her: “The knotted girl bursting through me, splitting me open like my mother and her mother before her” (Etter 146). The second, her daughter will be born with a knot; therefore, she is the responsible for continuing the lineage of suffering and violence. Thus, the idea of the knot as an inheritance does come as the physical condition, but also as the burden that as females the women in the book are meant to carry, which in turn comes as a reflection of a long-established system that continues to exist today. Said burden is the expectations that are put on the female body since we are kids, the violence with which our bodies are attacked in different senses, and the ways the patterns are constantly being repeated through the generations. This turns out to be also an expression of the patriarchy because just as the patriarchy does on the female body, the knot is something that constricts, causes pain, and affects Cassie’s life in every sense.

The Novel – Third Part

In the final part of Cassie’s story, she returns to her hometown. This time, she falls intensely in love with a man who treats her the way she always wanted, finally fulfilling her wishes to experience tender and respectful love. However, the relationship does not flourish because her life crumbles when her father dies. Then, a painful progression toward her death starts in which she experiences suffering bigger than the one the knot ever brought to her. Cassie’s life now centers upon death, the one which occurred and the one that is about to happen—her own. Some moments foreshadow and hint at her wishes and plans to die; for instance, she steals her mother’s pills and claims that she is “saving again” (Etter 181). This phrase refers to her return to her hometown, for which she saved money with the hope of once again living differently, yet now she is saving to end any life left on her.

Her death proceeds in the following way: she starts digging the land to bury not only her father’s urn but to rest herself as well. As we get closer to the moment of her death, her life passes in front of her, as a recollection of all the *Visions* she once had:

VISION

> We are eating dinner around the table in the white house on The Acres. We are selling the meat in town. We are riding in the truck to the river. We are shouting out the years from the tombstones in the cemetery. We are walking in the cold light of the full moon. We are singing happy birthday to my brother. We are harvesting the meat from the quarry. We are eating Circus Peanuts. We are laughing at my father's joke. We are gathered around my daughter's crib where she is dreaming. We have no knot among us. We are laughing from deep in our bellies. We know joy (Etter 191).

This last *Vision* was not a recollection of her life but what it could have been; it is a reminder that she never had the life she wanted.

She spent her whole life trying to find somewhere she was respected and loved, where she could feel at peace with others and with herself. It seems then that digging for her spot to die was the ultimate desperate way of reclaiming a place on earth that was never given to her. In Cassie's excruciating life, there was never a space that entirely belonged to her, only the earth to which she returned to once she died.

Conclusion

Throughout the present research Cassie's life was explored with the intention to inquire into the system that Sarah Rose Etter depicted in the novel, a system that turned out to be closer to current social reality than was at first expected. The critical texts that were employed to unveil the issues that Etter deals with in *The Book of X* provide an explanation of said current social reality and its effects on the female experience of engaging with the world through our bodies. Piran's reasons for negative experiences of embodiment—the loss of agency, the focus on the improvement of female bodies, and the experiences that are lived since early childhood, among others—represent much of what Cassie lived as both a female and a female with a physical condition that marked her as well as representing and unveiling

much of what I have witness and experienced throughout my life. Arroyo et al. and Clarke and Griffin thorough analysis shed light on the importance of understanding the ways we interact with others, where those "others" stand in the world, and how it affects how we perceive ourselves, a matter that through Cassie's character and her experiences regarding body image is possible to establish discussions about topics that keep affecting people in current society. Moreover, there are ways in which oppression works that are not as noticeable as I thought they were, and it is essential to reclaim spaces that we have never had to be at peace with ourselves. In this sense, Cassie's death portrays the imperative need to find places in which we cannot be constricted.

The novel is Cassie's story but can be the story of many. It is empowering at times, but most of all it is enraging, since it comes as a reflection of the cruel system we are immersed in, in which how we perceive ourselves is determined by detrimental social ideals, as well as the relationships we develop and the spaces we inhabit. I have realized that there are low possibilities of ending with a system that continues to be perpetuated day after day, however, I have also realized that the perpetual fight that is necessary to put up has rewarded me with an environment that little by little has helped break up knots that I thought were never going to untie.

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CURING VERSUS AIDING:
OPPRESSION AND EMPOWERMENT OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN *THE ORACLE CODE*

by Michelle Clemente

Introduction

Despite the pervasiveness of disability in any cultural context and age, the topic of disability has been constantly plagued by unchallenged and ubiquitous ableism as well as other forms of discrimination, such as heterosexism, misogyny, homophobia and racism, among others. Although the term "disability" is a very broad one, which might include all sorts of mental and physical conditions, they have in common intrusive, dehumanizing and sometimes violent interactions not only with abled people, but also with institutions, media and cultural artifacts. In this unequal exchange, disabled people are regularly deemed by Western society as lesser, damaged and in need of saving (Morris 16), and these views have very severe effects not only in the way disabled people see themselves, but also in medicine, social policies and academia.

As a way to respond to this, the field of disability studies has established several new concepts and theories across the years, always following the starting point that we are all differently body abled (Waldschmidt 19). The social model of disability, developed in the 1970s, is one of these major theories, which establishes that disability is a social construct, in opposition to the medical model of disability, a biomedical, more individualistic perception of disability. With the social model, new ways of seeing the disabled person were established in academic circles, allowing for deeper interpretations, interaction with other areas of study, and more comprehensive social policies, although it has been criticized in recent years.

In the graphic novel *The Oracle Code*, Barbara Gordon is a young girl, fan of hacking and solving puzzles, who is caught in a robbery and ends up with paraplegia. In an effort to improve her health and eventually "cure her", her father sends her to a center of rehabilitation for disabled people, a seemingly perfect institution in the fictional Gotham City. After finding out children are disappearing, including one of her friends, Barbara sets out to unravel the mystery behind the desertions, the sounds behind the walls and how to live with her new

reality; at the end, it is revealed that two doctors, Dr. Maxwell and Dr. Lachlan, had been kidnapping children who were unwanted or orphaned and using them for experiments, in the hopes of finding some sort of cure. Barbara and her friends stop the doctors by themselves, using their cleverness and ingenuity to their advantage, and decide to utilize the institution as a communal home for all the children who voluntarily wish to stay, including Barbara. Taking this into account, in this paper I will argue that disabled people are regarded as broken and incomplete by Western society, which is exemplified in *The Oracle Code* with Barbara's interactions with her father, Dr. Lachlan and Dr. Maxwell, but at the same time disabled people also have multiple ways of resistance and agency against these views.

In order to show this thesis, four major themes in the novel will be explained and analyzed: representation, media and the power of *The Oracle Code* as a cultural artifact; different views about disability from disabled and non-disabled people; the experience of institutionalization and materialism in the novel; and the role of bonds and companionship as a way of resistance against disabling attitudes.

As mentioned before, the social model of disability has been the dominant tool for analysis in disability studies for decades, establishing that disability is a social construction, that it is therefore different from the term 'impairment' and that, at the end of the day, it is society's job to remove the obstacles that disable people face (Waldschmidt 20). This meant a significant break from the medical model of disability, a biomedical perception of disability, which focused on fixing the individual disabled body so it could go back to what was deemed normal in society. For Waldschmidt, the social model was a very useful tool "for both academic discourse, disability rights activism and, last but not least, for laypersons and their identity politics" (21) but it has fallen somewhat obsolete, not only because it presents disabled people as a single and uniform subject, ignoring the differences present in every individual, but also because it dismisses the role of cultural practices, symbols and

representations. As a response to this, Waldschmidt proposes a new model for studying disability which considers culture as one aspect that creates disability, not just society. In this case, culture does not mean just high culture, but instead institutions, literature, ideas, knowledge, symbols, meanings, narratives, histories and attitudes, among others (24).

With this model, not only is the concept of disability taken beyond a merely individual affair or an effect of discrimination, but "normality", as the cultural construction opposite to disability, is also criticized, deconstrued and investigated. With a cultural model of disability, four assumptions are made: disability and impairment are created by academia, everyday discourse and mass media depending on hegemonic structures and historic context; disability denotes an embodied difference, not a natural fact, which is put in comparison with the embodied experience of ability; disability and ability are both connected to symbolic order and institutionalized practices and therefore interdependent of the individual and social consciousness; and finally, with this approach new forms of seeing and understanding health, normativity, the body and society can be developed and explored as a more holistic area of study of dis/ability.

However, one critical blind spot in this model is established by Chaturvedi: it is indeed important to consider the cultural background, but it is even more relevant to explore the interiority of the disabled person, how they view themselves, their bodies, and how they interact with their culture. In the context of modern India, the author uses the example of the concept of karma to exemplify a cultural, negative view of disability: it is thought in a karmic sense that disability comes as a punishment from mistakes or misconducts made in past lives. Therefore, in religious societies that believe in karma such as the Indian one, disabled people are supposed to be seen as cursed, afflicted with bad luck and deserving of said "retribution", encouraging a negative understanding of disability.

This macro view is contrasted with the interviews the author did with several disabled people in India, who related their daily experience with various disabilities. The cultural concept of karma, so important in Hinduism, is not relevant in any of their lives, and the discrimination they feel is not quite connected to religion. Instead, they struggle with accessibility, independence and identity, and each experience is individual and intimate, exemplifying why, although having historical and cultural context is important, it is not the whole picture, and the thoughts and feelings of disabled people should not be left out of disability studies, because, as the author states, "evaluating the life of a disabled within a cultural domain does not provide what the disabled themselves feel about their life" (Chaturvedi 80), and disabled people themselves should always be at the focus of disabled studies as agents and subjects.

Cultural representation and media

The Oracle Code is a graphic novel set in the fictional universe of Gotham City in the United States, and it attempts to explore and deconstruct Western views, values and stereotypes regarding disability. Since the experiences of disabled people are missing from most cultural artifacts, non-disabled people have few points of references to understand the reality of being disabled (Morris 59); moreover, disabled women in particular are commonly projected onto two stereotypes: the "happy, humble woman who has accepted her handicap" and the woman who is resentful and continuously lashes out at others (Morris 66); both labels make invisible the wide range of experiences that disabled women come across, while disabled children are used as objects of pity and charity, creating a culture of dependency (Morris 71). In other cases, a non-disabled person is the "wise, strong person who acts as a catalyst for a disabled person 'coming to terms with their disability'" (Morris 67), once again taking away the focus from the disabled person's feelings and thoughts and placing it on the non-disabled person. Even if disabled people are portrayed in media, these common tropes

mean that they do not often get accurate representation, pushed down to mere narrative devices or walking stereotypes.

In *The Oracle Code*, there are several subversions of these themes: Barbara, as the protagonist, is both angry at her changed life and grateful for the new friends she was able to make; she misses what she once was but is also proud of being disabled and a wheelchair user; she solves the mystery using her own resourcefulness and skills but also gets help from both disabled and non-disabled people alike. This creates a complex portrayal of a character who is not just one thing or another; instead, Barbara is three-dimensional, the narrator of her own story, also subverting the common stereotype of disabled people, especially disabled children, as vulnerable, sad and lacking agency.

Furthermore, she is not the only disabled character in the story: her friend Yeong employs crutches after a bout of meningitis, Issy uses a wheelchair because of a spinal cord injury and Jena was injured after a house fire, utilizing crutches too; Yeong is also Asian, Issy is African American (both in a lesbian relationship), and Jena has facial scarring. All of this creates a variety of realities connected to the experience of being disabled that are not limited to the narrative of the white, male, heterosexual disabled person commonly seen in media; a portrayal of several different identities and knowledges means a more complete representation of the spectrum of disability as it actually occurs in real life, including realities that might have been ignored previously, such as being black and disabled or lesbian and disabled. Since *The Oracle Code* is a graphic novel, it is very accessible to children and appealing to them thanks to its simple language, colorful images and short chapters; this means that not only many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color disabled children around the world might see themselves represented in media for the first time in an positive light, but also that non-disabled children can get a new, more positive insight into the reality of being disabled.

The actual contribution of disability representation to the improvement of social attitudes towards disability is uncertain; Beckett writes that "disabling attitudes are unlikely to be resolved, completely, by one event" (857); in a study in 2012, he found that children from seven to eleven in the UK generally thought that disabled people were ugly, broken, and flawed workers, the main problem being in their bodies. Furthermore, they could not have jobs, could not become parents, rarely had romantic partners and could not take care of themselves, and the few who gave a different opinion were not acknowledged by their peers.

An effective way to tackle these disabling attitudes, which are negative attitudes towards disability, is to understand accounts of disability as "woven through, and out of cultural ideas and discursive practices" (Beckett 859). He calls these disabling attitudes "cultural schemas of disability", and makes emphasis on the fact that children are also creators and perpetuators of cultural schemas, not mere products and recipients as they were previously thought (861). Since the protagonist of *The Oracle Code* is a child, it is important to also recognize the perspective of children in the process of dismantling cultural schemas of disability, because they have the agency and the power to question and challenge disabling attitudes, to the point where Beckett considers that there is reason to believe that children "could play their part in transforming the cultural schemas of disability - if they were encouraged and supported to do so" (871). Some ways in which *The Oracle Code* attempts to transform cultural schemas of disability can be seen not only in the representation of several disabled characters, but also in Barbara's journey of acceptance and growth and in the ways she and other disabled children resists and empower themselves through their bodies and through emotional bonds.

Although a single cultural artifact like *The Oracle Code* is not bound to change decades of these cultural schemas, it is still one step closer to a better understanding of dis/ability and the creation of more diverse stories to accompany and aid this journey, thanks

to its multicultural view about disability, the exploration of the disabled body and materialism, and the role of social bonds as a way to resist disabling prejudices and attitudes.

Views about disability from disabled and non-disabled people

In *The Oracle Code*, Barbara Gordon's experience with disability is a complex journey with ups and downs, various facets and complex issues of what it means to become a disabled person. At the beginning, she is understandably upset about her limited mobility and lack of skills with her new wheelchair; she feels abandoned by her father and best friend and wishes to leave the Arkham Center of Independence and go back to her home. This creates deep feelings of isolation, anger and longing that prevents her from reaching out to other people, verbalizing what she feels or truly joining the community, but it does not mean she is any less than what she was before: as Morris states, "there are positive and strong elements to these experiences but there are also negative and painful elements" (22), and Barbara is convinced that, although she feels lost and bereft, she is no less than what she was before, just different (Nijkamp 122).

These views about her body are in direct contrast with her father, who explicitly tells her that the doctors are trying to fix her (38), and he concentrates exclusively on her body, calling Barbara twice only to ask her about her therapies, neither heeding her concerns about the missing children (84) nor listening to her feelings as she openly says she hates the institution (38). Although this is not done out of malice, as he apologizes and respects her wishes, saying "Sweetheart, I'm sorry. I'll give you space if you wa—" (85), his behavior and words still hurt Barbara deeply, making her feel like she cannot communicate with him or ask for support: "I asked to call for help, Dad. But if you can't see beyond my therapies, I'd rather not talk for a while" (85); this fact further isolates her, but it also forces her to think for herself and rely on her own skills as a hacker. From the beginning of the story, her aptitude in hacking and programming were one of the things that set her apart and created a strong bond

with her best friend, who is also a hacker, and it was through hacking that she discovered the discrepancies in Dr. Maxwell's story regarding the missing children. Her father's view ultimately derives from one of the stereotypes Morris mentions: that disabled people 'crave' and 'want' to be whole again (7), in this case more as an implicit assumption than an outright stereotype.

A more explicit and negative view about disability can be seen in the characters of Dr. Lachlan and Dr. Maxwell: the climax of the story reveals they were both kidnapping children from the institution to use them for experimentation. They have different motivations for these crimes: Dr. Maxwell had a daughter born disabled who died young, and as a result, he believes he can fix other disabled children and save them from the same fate (149), while Dr. Lachlan thinks they are doing a scientific investigation that not only will help people, but also change the world: "What we do here is important. For you. For us. For the greater good of all. So that no child should have to suffer being less than whole" (174). Nevertheless, both of their views have in common the consistent regard of disabled people as faulty, broken objects, openly saying they are incomplete and inadequate as seen in the previous quote; they never ask disabled people themselves how they feel, how they experience the world or whether they would even want to be fixed, instead creating their own assumptions and beliefs from their outside perspective of non-disabled people. In the novel, these opinions are seen not only on their explicit quotes when they talk about disabled children (149; 174), but also in the way they continuously hurt children even when they explicitly say they are in great pain and not feeling any better with the experiments, just because they believe their suffering in the name of science "will not be in vain" (173).

As a result of an intense focus on their physical bodies and health, the doctors' disabling attitudes are centered on the theme of being broken and sick; since they think that disabled people are constantly in pain and want to be cured from whatever impairment they

have, then both doctors rationalize that they should do whatever it takes to achieve this, Dr. Maxwell going so far as to say “Our science has failed you (...) you deserve to be healed” (186). Although it is unclear who he is including in the word “our”, by saying “deserve to be healed” instead of “deserve to heal”, he is treating disabled people as recipients of actions without agency in their process of rehabilitation, compressing the whole spectrum of disability into one single, monolithic illness, a clear association to the medical model of disability.

In contrast to this, Barbara and their friends are vocal in their belief that they are whole and complete, and that instead they “deserve to be human” (186), allowed to live their life on their own terms. Although Barbara’s father and Dr. Maxwell had good intentions and do not consciously regard disabled people as inferior, their actions still have negative consequences for the characters, such as direct medical abuse to their bodies and feelings of pessimism and isolation, showing the importance of placing the feelings of disabled people at the front regarding disability studies, not what non-disabled might believe. The fact that most children from the Arkham Center of Independence decided to stay afterwards also exemplify the main tenants of the social model of disability: they feel different-abled, but not necessarily as a bad thing, and with devices such as mobility aids and rehabilitation, they can experience lives as fulfilling as they wish.

Institutionalization and materialism

Jenny Morris’ text *Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability* can be a very useful tool for disability studies, as a disabled author who writes about her own embodied experiences and being put in the place of the “Other” by society. Her book is a broad investigation of the different issues disabled people often face in their daily lives, making an emphasis in female disabled people, offering the perspectives of several different women she previously interviewed and how their lives have been affected by ableism not

only from society and institutions, but also from individuals in everyday life, by media, by pop culture and by feminist theorist themselves.

Morris explores a set of general prejudices and assumptions she and the interviewees have faced from abled persons and society, some of which are seen in *The Oracle Code*, although there has been little empirical research done in the area of disabling attitudes and prejudices in disability studies (Beckett 858). She also touches disability in western culture, studying both masculinity and femineity connected to disability, the cliché of "overcoming all odds" and "non-disabled person as rescuer", and charity, and how they're all ultimately harmful depictions in media despite their seemingly benign outcome, preventing non-disabled people from obtaining genuine perspectives to understand disability. Finally, she analyses institutionalization, the politics it involves from society and research, and the trauma it has generated on thousands of disabled people along the years, a trauma also seen in disabled children in *The Oracle Code*.

Morris writes "Powerlessness characterizes the experience of residential care" (37) and institutionalization is one of the things that allows the doctors in *The Oracle Code* to hide their crimes and continue their experiments. Although the Arkham Center of Independence is sold to Barbara as a modern and progressive institution (16), it is still a place where certain rules are meant to be followed, and the complete control they have over the facilities means that they can hide the bodies of the kidnapped children and monitor who has access information about the patients. Since it was Dr. Maxwell's intention from the beginning to create a place where disabled people would be fixed (149), there is an implication of hopelessness in the place itself: the patients are defenseless, in need of help and susceptible to the whims of the doctors. Orphaned children are particularly vulnerable, as doctors favored those who had no family as subjects of experimentation, and being in an isolated institution meant that few, if any, asked for their whereabouts.

In an effort broaden its scope and consider the variability of experiences of being disabled, the discipline of disability studies has gone beyond its original field in medicine to areas not initially explored, such as sociology, queer studies, feminism and post-colonial studies. Goodley writes "critical disability studies start with disability but never end with it" (82), because disability does not exist in a vacuum, and the way it is interpreted is very much influenced by the socioeconomical and political environment of the disabled person. A Marxist view of disability, for example, puts emphasis on the material dimension of disability; as disability studies worked to highlight the social origin of ableism, at the same time there was an exclusion of the body and the material conditions which said body inhabits, overlooking the importance of including embodied experience in the study of disability in combination with society and culture.

Connected to this is the concept of the body as a relevant element in the disability experience, as a site of struggle and pain but also of cultural production and new possibilities; the body should indeed matter for disability studies, because it can provide innovative and creative ways of seeing ourselves and create spaces for all our different realities. The embodied experiences of impairment are significant as well, because some "are static, others episodic, some degenerative and others terminal" (Goodley 85), and they all describe individual forms of knowledge and realities, which fall out of the scope of the social model of disability. This is why Goodley asserts that the body should be allowed to reemerge "as a significant element of the disability experience" (84), preventing the creation of a monolithic, universal disabled person and instead allowing for multiplicity of experiences.

This relevance of materialism regarding disability is apparent in *The Oracle Code* as the material conditions in which the body inhabits, which is just as important as the social aspect. One of the doctors' excuses to justify the children's disappearances is that they can no longer afford to be in the institution, and the characters are forced to believe this narrative

because it is a common problem regarding medical aid. Many disabled people do not have the monetary means to afford an expensive or comprehensive medical treatment, and they are forced to resort to less exhaustive therapies or no kind of treatment altogether. This is where the role of society is crucial to create viable and protected spaces for all disabled people, not just those with money.

In response to this, Barbara and the other disabled patients decide to use the Arkham Center of Independence to create a safe space for themselves: after Dr. Maxwell and Dr. Lachlan are arrested as a result of Barbara's discovery, the institution is put under the jurisdiction of a public hospital instead of being a private organization with no state oversight, allowing children to stay. The institution, despite its dark purpose, has many accessible facilities such as ramps, stairlifts and wide halls that allowed for children with limited mobility to live comfortably, something that other places often lack. In the epilogue, Barbara thinks that "Sure, we're all supposed to transfer out, but rumor is, Gotham General will take over and we'll stay. It's easier that way. It's fine by me, I think I might like it here" (195). Furthermore, not only is her room shown as fully decorated to her tastes with posters and photos, which she originally left empty and bare at the beginning, but she is also allowed to continue her hacking events and challenges while also staying connected with her friends on the outside. This illustrates her acceptance of her life in the institution as her new home, not because she was forced by anyone as it occurred at the beginning, but because she alone chose to, the culmination of the process of struggle and growth she went through during the story. In defiance of the grim events that transpired in the institution, I believe that, by deciding to stay, Barbara and the rest of the children reconfigured its symbolic meaning, from a place of vulnerability and powerlessness to a place of freedom and safety, displaying a sharp sense of bodily agency they were previously denied by the doctors: "We don't just come here to rehabilitate, we come here to live. And we will" (186).

Another way in which materialism is important is the control the children have over their bodies; the disabled body is often thought as one which is faulty and broken, not working properly, and which cannot do things (Beckett 866). In the case of Barbara and her friends, however, physical therapy and rehabilitation means that not only they are attuned to their physical needs, but they also use their mobility aids and orthopedics as an extension of their bodies. After uncovering the doctors' crimes, all the children start using their crutches and wheelchairs to hit Dr. Lachlan and Dr. Maxwell, managing to overpower them and stop their experiments by themselves until the police arrives and the doctors are arrested; this is a reminder of the importance of mobility aids, not as objects that confine the disabled person, but as devices which allow them to interact with their different-abled bodies and with the world in many ways, sometimes as tools for exploration and interaction, and sometimes as defense aids, with many other possibilities in-between.

Companionship and bonding as resistance

Relationships and companionship are one of the many important aspects in the process of rehabilitation, especially with other people who have similar injuries, although it can be plagued by different and conflicting emotions, such as anger, insecurity, anxiety and sadness. I believe that fear is one of the reasons both Barbara's father and her best friend behave differently towards her after her injury, and it is also the reason why she decides to isolate herself, afraid of losing more people in her life. Since her injury involved a gunshot and a long fall from a building (11), it could have easily been fatal for her, and this serves as a reminder that she is not invincible and should be careful about what mysteries she involves herself with. However, part of Barbara's journey is also accepting that it is not feasible to constantly live in fear and that, for her, there are things more important than personal safety, such as helping your friends (132).

However, what allows her to fully rehabilitate physically and emotionally are precisely the bonds she makes with other children at the institution and the rebuilding of her relationships with her father and best friend, despite said fear. Although Dr. Maxwell encourages Barbara to meet other children and make friends, he does so in a superficial way, only as long as she behaves and does not ask too many questions that are inconvenient for his plans (79). Two other girls, Yeong and Issy, quickly attempt to befriend her from the first day, and although she tried to pull away from them, explicitly trying to stop them from being friends (57), it is thanks to their tenacity and empathy that Barbara realizes she cannot do everything on her own, and together the three of them are the ones who uncovered Dr. Maxwell' and Dr. Lachlan's crimes and saved the kidnapped children.

As Yeong and Issy are disabled too, they understand how isolating life can be after being impaired, and yet that disability does not make them any less than what they were: "The truth is, no matter what anyone led you to believe, life on wheels isn't any worse or better than life on both feet, or one foot, or crutches. It's what you make of it" (91). This advice helps Barbara understand her emotions and feelings, ultimately aiding her rehabilitation and the construction of her new self as a disabled person. Moreover, they introduce her to disability culture, specifically wheelchair basketball; not only Barbara loves it, at the end of the story a poster of her favorite wheelchair basketball team is seen in her room, signaling her embracement of disabled sports and disability in general. This involvement leaves her life healthier and more enriched (93), as she opens herself to new relationships, stops pushing people away and goes back to her old hobbies. In the epilogue, the panels are also painted with brighter colors, predominantly yellow (see fig. 2), which creates a contrast with the more muted and dull blues and grays seen in the previous chapters where she struggled with her fears (see fig. 1); this new color palette also creates the impression of a happier and more vibrant Barbara, not a character who is permanently angry

and muted with fear but instead one who is capable of communicating her feelings and listening to others. This ultimately shows how fundamental relationships between disabled people are, not just as emotional connections but also as a way to build disability positivity, fight prejudices, and create safe and positive communities.



Fig. 1: *The Oracle Code*, p. 82.

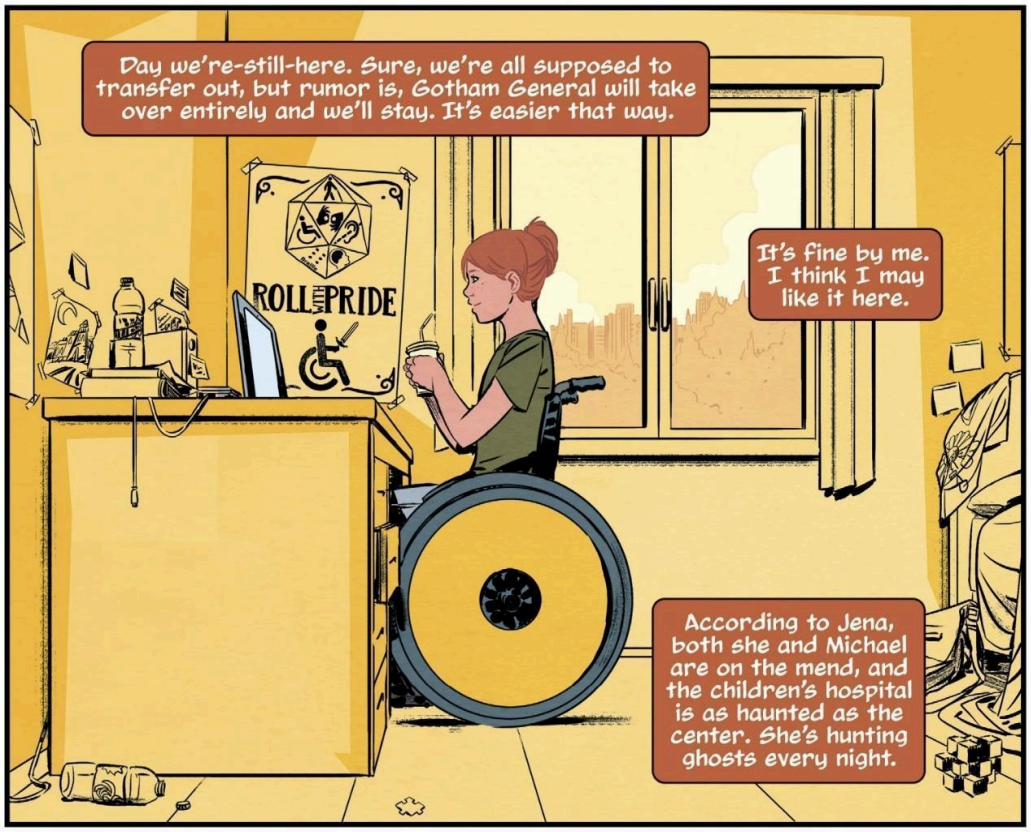


Fig. 2: *The Oracle Code*, p. 195.

In the case of her father and her best friend, they did not explicitly shun Barbara for being disabled; instead, the change of impairment left them scared for her and unable to vocalize their feelings. It is thanks to the process of self-discovery Barbara undergoes with her disabled friends that she can reach to them and explain her feelings, and her best friend accepts her new reality: "You have changed. But I'm not saying that's a bad thing" (115). With understanding and honest conversations, she is able to rebuild her relationship with both, once again enriching her life and creating stronger and deeper bonds. This, in contrast with Dr. Lachlan, is an example of non-disabled people who do not regard disabled people as intrinsically inferior; instead, it is ignorance and fear which govern their misguided actions, showing the importance of education regarding disability and impairment. In the end, Barbara's experience demonstrates that developing positive bonds with non-disabled people is essential for a balanced emotional life, just as significant as relationships with other

disabled people, built on effective communication, empathy, understanding, and respecting each other's feelings.

Conclusion

Waldschmidt problematizes the concepts of normality and ability as opposite realms, favoring instead a wide spectrum of differently abled bodies (19). Similarly, *The Oracle Code* attempts to give a diverse portrayal of some of the ways disability can be seen in reality and in different lives. From the protagonist, a white child with from a wealthy and influential family, to impoverished, orphaned children and lesbian characters, in the graphic novel there is a diverse cast of people with just as diverse types of impairment who all live their life as best as they can and who wish, above all else, the respect of being considered just as human and worthy as non-disabled people.

This portrayal of disability as a spectrum, by no means exhaustive or complete, is beneficial to disabled people as a way of showing a 'dynamic' representation of some of the experience of impairment, dynamic in the sense that the disabled characters are neither demonized nor stereotyped into rigid categories, and that disability is not depicted as negative by itself. Rather, it is closer to Waldschmidt's cultural model: disability is continuously constructed, conditioned and dependent on power relations and hegemonic discourses, and it is not a permanent, fixed entity, but instead continuously built as a process or experience (24). In the novel, this is seen in Barbara's physical and emotional journey after becoming disabled, a process that did not change the person she was before her injury, a brave, intelligent and caring child, but one that did alter her reality and the possibilities for her future, not necessarily in a bad way but simply different: "I am who I've always been. And maybe I don't know who I'll become yet, but I have all the time in the world to figure it out" (Nijkamp 188).

As mentioned before, the realities of impairment and different bodies are too varied and wide to be catalogued in just one cultural artifact. I believe that *The Oracle Code* is a good way to continue with the creation of more diverse and compassionate stories about disability, in this case depicting a character who becomes physically disabled after an injury and who has the monetary and emotional support of a family member. Other pieces of media might touch on different realities, such as being born physically disabled, having a mental disability or living in the intersection between disability and other marks of identity, such as race, gender, nationality, sexuality and class, among many others, hopefully with disabled people always at the front as narrators, agents and in control of their own stories.

In this case, a graphic novel works well for kids and people who wish for an easy, comfortable read, which I think turns *The Oracle Code* into a good complementary read for disability studies, but it is limited by its own aim towards children, lacking depictions of harsher but just as realistic themes, such as sexual abuse prevalent in institutions, racial and gender discrimination in daily life, and the social and economic costs of disability. This is where more portrayals of disability are particularly important for disabled people and disability studies, not just in graphic novels but in a variety of other cultural artifacts, such as films, books, poems, art galleries and TV shows, which can help expand and improve what we think about disability, for a variety of consumers and in a variety of settings. Following the premise that we are all differently abled-bodied, I do not believe we will ever be able to cover the entire experience of dis/ability in mass media, but it will nevertheless be an enriching and exciting enterprise, as long as we always keep empathy, understanding and humane treatment for each other at the forefront of our journey.

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EMBRACING OTHERNESS AND MONSTROSITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY LITERARY LANDSCAPE:

A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF CARMEN MARIA MACHADO'S SHORT STORY *"THE RESIDENT"*

by Sofía Lalut

Introduction

At some point, women were considered too 'sentimental' to insert themselves in the craft of writing, as the female writer Elizabeth Jane Howard claimed several times in her lifetime (Silverman par. 8). It is well-known that the Brontë sisters had to use male pseudonyms in order to make space for themselves in a literary scene where only men could publish books. The case of Mary Ann Evans, who wrote as George Eliot, was not so different, for she had to take a man's name to be taken seriously. 78 years after her death, another woman took the same decision, publishing her novel under her initials—now Joanne Rowling[8] is recognized worldwide as the female author of the successful *Harry Potter* Fantasy series.

Women have come a long way to speak their own stories—or, actually, to be heard. As Gayatri Spivak has tackled in her text "Can the Subaltern Speak?", subalternity implies that the oppressed group certainly speaks, yet it is rarely understood since their codes differ from the dominant ones[9]. This notion of marginalization involves the history of literature to an extent, or at least what has been constructed as the literary canon throughout the centuries.

Literary tradition has always been male-dominated, as Erin Twohey addresses in "Publishing Women in a Male Dominated Industry." She remarks on how the publishing industry has held a firm patriarchal position since its beginning in the production of literary culture (2). We consider "classics" and "great" literature to be works from primarily white and heterosexual men, which are the groups that historically have maintained power. What does this tell us about Western culture and settler dynamics if we consider literature a reflection of society? Whose *voices* are valued and whose are not? These rhetorical questions aid in

[8] We consider important the disclaimer that neither Sofía nor any other author in this anthology supports J.K. Rowling's actions or sayings regarding the queer community. Sadly, it has become one of the fundamental examples to demonstrate Sofía's point contemporarily.
[9] Discussed by Prof. Allison Ramay in the World Literatures class on the 28th of April of 2021.

proving how colonial power could also be interpreted as the censor of the stories of those not part of the hierarchical authority imposed.

Writing has become for women a liberating force. According to John Barber in his article "When it comes to novels, it's a man's world but a woman's universe," it is remarkable that "after suffering centuries of condescension and outright oppression, women are taking notice like never before, boldly claiming ownership" (par. 3). Women's leadership is outgrowing the rigid molds of male domination, but the aftereffects of this colonial literary model are still present for them. Their struggle remains, living the aftermath of the unequal position they try to overcome.

The objective of this paper will be to read the protagonist from Carmen Maria Machado's short story "The Resident" as an 'Other'; in this sense, I argue that this "otherness" manifests as a consequence of a traumatic wound that is merged with the current 'aftermath' of the historically colonized literary landscape—in terms of the predominance of hegemonic structures—she is immersed in. By being a lesbian writer married to a woman, her internalized monstrosity—a product of her girlhood trauma—intersects with her gender and sexuality in a psychological horror tale that resembles 19th-century tropes. I will mainly focus on the concepts of Mimicry (Bhabha), Trauma (Caruth), and the Gothic Monstrosity (Compagna and Steinhart), as they relate to the way the notion of Otherness affects her interaction with the world, and essentially with her stance as a writer in the contemporary literary scene.

Historical Context

Contemporary women's domination of the literary landscape gains more ground every year. The article "Why are women now dominating the literary landscape?" by Finn McRedmond (2020) explores the subversion of the historical trend of men dominating literature. She focuses on the fact that women are the most profitable reading audience, as

they tend to buy books written by women reliably (par. 5). She relates this shift to the increasing 'democratization' of the publishing industry, decentralizing the power historically held by men (par. 6). Deductively, the success of female authors in the fiction market also correlates with the entrance of women to the publishing field.

Furthermore, the themes contemporary female writers offer to the world are marketable, as McRedmond comments. They are selling because women readers, who seem increasingly interested in topics such as gender, resonate with them. Machado seizes themes such as sexuality, gender, and violence towards women, mixed with shades of horror and surrealism, as Sabrina Li states in her interview with the author for *The Harvard Advocate* (2020). During her tour promoting her short-story collection at the Miami Book Fair of 2017, Machado was interviewed by PBS Books. There, she expressed how drawn she is to narratives related to queerness and the body. This is noticeable in her stories, for she deals with out-of-the-norm female leads that undergo magical-realist experiences, which symbolize the legacy of oppression in the context of a historically homophobic and racist genre like horror, as she has commented in an interview for Metal Magazine.

The author's context glistens when we see the naming of the protagonist of the short story as C— M—. A couple of inferences regarding race could be made considering Machado descends from immigrants. I believe it is impossible to ignore the autobiographical gestures inherent in the story, mixing up with Machado's own background. Not only do the initials of "The Resident"'s protagonist—also a writer—coincide with hers, but she has also openly identified herself as queer, speaking a few times about her marriage to another woman, just like C—. In an interview with "Al Día News," she tells a moderate amount of her personal history. She is the granddaughter of a Cuban immigrant, which is why many articles refer to her as a Latina-based writer. This adds a particular layer to her writing, for her experiences are somewhat different from other US citizens who do not undergo racial discrimination.

Additionally, she also emphasizes the influences of her family upon her. A fact that makes sense, considering her inclusion of traditional myths, functions, and resources adjunct to her grandfather's storytelling, along with metafictional and magic realist touches.

In her chapter "Against "Authenticity"—Writing the Self and the Other: Carmen Maria Machado and Jonathan Safran Foer," Leah A. Milne also talks about her background and the possible relationship between Machado's story and herself. There, Milne considers "The Resident" as her most autobiographical inclusion in the collection, which "contemplates queer Latinx and often even ethnically unmarked identity through the lenses of horror, thriller, speculative fantasy, and more" (71). It might or not represent the author herself, yet the discussions of C—'s identity depict various of Machado's own visions on gender-, sex- and race-based marginalization, as many media outlets have noted.

Theoretical Framework: Some Ramifications of Decolonization

For this project, I will be using Postcolonial Theory, a critical approach that deals with the political, economic, historical, and social impact due to the interactions between settler nations and the societies they colonized from the 18th to the 20th century, as Lutfi Hamadi confirms in "Edward Said: The Postcolonial Theory and The Literature of Decolonization" (39). His idea of Orientalism is fundamental for Postcolonialism, since it argues how these misleading Western assumptions about the East were spread by authorities, showing the Orient as the primitive, uncivilized "other" in contrast to the advanced and modern Western "Self," a discourse used to justify violent occupations (40). Whereas irrational, chaotic, and feminized attributes are attached to the Other, the West is perceived as rational, strong, and masculine. In general, colonial texts are approached for depicting communities subjected to political domination, analyzing the complexities of these relations of power (41).

Postcolonial literature aims at illustrating these processes in (formerly) colonized people. Therefore, the theory is based on the concepts of Otherness and resistance, with

common themes such as the struggle for independence, emigration, and identity, attempting to embrace "their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonizers."[10] In terms of literature, Postcolonial works emphasize the traumatic and disruptive invasion of a society's physical, moral, and conceptual realms, and reflect on its aftermath, as Irene Visser exhibits in her chapter "Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies" (113-114). Similarly, Lois Tyson, in her chapter "Postcolonial criticism," mentions how Postcolonial Theory entails cross-discussions evaluating the "similarities among all critical theories that deal with human oppression, such as Marxism; feminism; gay, lesbian, and queer theories" (398). The intersectionality within postcolonial concerns demonstrates the connections between all the domains of our experience and how they combine to form our identity (399). Depending on our position in the social spectrum, these power dynamics ingrained in the colonialist ideology are a significant part of our personal development and social interaction.

Mimicry stands out as one of the most crucial concepts in Postcolonial Theory. Bhabha discusses it in his text "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," arguing that mimicry emerges as a strategy of the colonizer to consolidate their desire for a "reformed, recognizable Other" which varies from the people in power in the way that it is a subject *almost* the same as them, but *not* quite, being a 'partial' presence (126). The fluctuation within this 'distinction' is constructed around ambivalent relations between the colonized and the colonizer. The mimic Other results as a "flawed colonial mimesis" based on imitation rather than representation (128), sustaining themselves in a hybrid identity that is also carried out by themselves. There lies the colonizer's agency, for many of them tried to imitate the colonizers as much as possible, mainly in speech and lifestyle (Tyson 403). However, this behavior could be analyzed as a reaction to the colonizer's imposing view regarding their culture as negative. The hybrid between the colonizing and the colonized

[10] Retrieved from a study guide posted by Washington University, under the title of "An Introduction to Post-Colonialism, Postcolonial Theory and Postcolonial Literature."

culture requires adaptation from the colonies to reduce invasive cultural impositions. The ambivalence is placed in how the assimilation of cultural patterns and practices can be dynamic as well as oppressive.

One of the most read critics of trauma studies is Cathy Caruth, and in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History,* her research question is directed toward why we seem to *repeat* trauma—a psychic wound—if our basic principle as human beings seems to be the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of harm. She identifies something beyond the principle of pleasure, which Freud describes as the "Death Drive." As explained by Caruth, it manifests through the repetitive voice of an Other in 'literary' ways to pinpoint the space where the traumatic experience locates—like dreams, repetitions, compulsions, and everything Freud calls "failed acts" of communication (3). Trauma Theory takes charge of tracing the itinerary of the 'wound' through "insistently recurring words or figures" that haunt the survivor due to the unassimilated, unbearable nature of the past violent event (4-5).

Related to Postcolonial studies, Visser suggests that trauma works as a layered phenomenon: while it can be understood as acute and event-based, it can also be chronic and non-event based. It can be debilitating and disruptive, but it can create a renewed sense of identity for individuals and communities (109). This directly references the aftermath of colonization which "continues until the present day (…) [with] the effective continuation of the authority structures (…) despite 'flag independence'" (111), leaving overwhelming residues in the collective identity of colonies.

Lastly, the concept of the monster is also relevant for the analysis considering Postcolonial Theory. As Diego Compagna and Stefanie Steinhart express in the introduction of "Monsters, Monstrosities, and the Monstrous in Culture and Society," the concept of "monstrous" is not clearly defined because it is based on oppositions rather than fixed notions: the ugly vs. the beautiful, the abnormal vs. the well-adjusted, the human vs. the

inhuman, among others (ix). Essentially, these antitheses found the extremes of good and evil as the only possibilities. When there are deviations from the expected behavior, individuals are stigmatized as monstrous "in a complete negative notion and therefore have to be normalized. (…) [Otherwise,] they allow the structure of order and rightness to collapse" (x). They result in a menace to the established patterns by society, mainly because it is constructed as a modern phenomenon that goes against the effort put into modernity and the technological effects it entails (xi). Therefore, according to the settler views that perceive difference as an alterity that must be contained, anything monstrous threatens the notion of 'progress,' which is why it must be destroyed. The type of narratives that stigmatize monsters as evil and demand to colonize them are the ones that focus on the domination of a monster to test "the borders of society's hegemonic rationality" (Freud qtd in Compagna xi).

Disclosed is also the failure(s) of unadjusted and dreadful monsters, alienated beings that do not fit the authority's rules and are in 'need' of control to become "beautiful and good" (xi) in order to follow up the standards. However, these narratives have been questioned, becoming more complex and giving other insights regarding the monster's functions. Modern theories consider the creation of monsters as reflective beings with the potential to enhance the established order, not purely negative (xii). The reconstruction of past conceptions seems vital for the current understanding of monstrosity, examining what they do tell about society's needs.

The Other's Muffled Voice Trying to *Emerge*

Carmen Maria Machado creates a character that carries a past hurtful enough to alienate herself from the conventions. Within her own Self, she becomes an Other for society, not only for her personality but most essentially due to her sexual orientation. Those who do not fit the hegemonic norms—adjusted according to heteropatriarchal and white structures—are usually displaced in othering forms, seen "as a negation of the European

Self'' as Tabish Khair clarifies in his book *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness* (11). The reduced notion of the Other reflects, in fact, the dominant trend in colonialist thinking (12-13).

"The Resident" tells the story of C—, a lesbian writer married to a woman, who goes to a residency, "Devil's Throat," located in the same place where she used to attend "Brownies" Girl Scout camp in her youth, where she experienced a traumatic event. To start with, she experiences Otherness by being a woman, who is besides attracted to women. Regarding gender, one could say that its performance is colonized to the extent that the patriarchal subjugation of women is analogous to the subordination due to colonization. Due to the devaluation of women and colonized groups alike, they share the final goal of achieving an independent personal and group identity and gaining access to opportunities, "finding ways to think, speak, and create that are not dominated by the ideology of the oppressor" (Tyson 405). These parallels reveal the interconnectedness of colonialist and patriarchal ideology when influencing world dynamics.

Her reaction to a 'grotesque' riddle in the Brownies myth that inspired the group's name—"Twist me, and turn me, and show me the elf. I looked in the water and saw myself"—establishes her stance towards women's subordination. She founds horrifying negligence in "[s]ending a child after an enslaved mythical brownie," to do the chores of the house in exchange for gifts, "to tell the child that she herself was the enslaved mythical brownie (…), not her brother, mind you, but her?" (Machado 208). She questions that the little girl is put up with the limitations of the domestic area instead of her brother, based exclusively on their gender, and she gets mad at the possible restraints for the girl that could come with the 'duty.'

In addition, when she is judged for her lack of originality—in the narrative of her novel in progress—by making her works a 'loose' self-portrait, she exposes and criticizes the

double standards present in literature, which have also affected women's agency in the field. “Men are permitted to write concealed autobiography, but I cannot do the same? It's ego if I do it?” (203), she rages against the fixed ideas of writing and mandatory originality and authenticity, blurry conditions which are “themselves wrapped up in misogyny and heteronormativity” (Milne 77).

Many more examples make her alienation evident, even from an early age. While all the other girls were together in the back seats during trips to the camp, she preferred the passenger seat (Machado 171), sitting with an adult instead of her peers. Likewise, when she is driving through—as a grown-up woman—to get to the residency, a police officer stops her for speeding. She notices his wedding ring as she scrutinizes the reddish sore at the corner of his lip. She begins to imagine the spouse as “a woman entirely unlike me; that is, she was a woman unafraid of contagion” (174). Before that, she discusses his assumed ‘heteronormativity’ for “there was something in his demeanor that suggested to me that he had never touched a man without anger or force or anxiety” (173-174). The figure of the normative heterosexual man goes along with a presumably straight woman by his side, meek enough to be attentive and become vulnerable to contagion, fulfilling the traditional gender roles of heteropatriarchy, always biased towards heterosexuality (Tyson 305). Here, the woman is represented as submissive to *his* needs.

This rationale is also supported by her queerness, historically opposite to the norms. Even though there have been significant gains toward equal treatment, the marginalization of LGBTQ+ people is still prevalent in Western society. Harmful myths about them still come up in conversation, and hate crimes are still committed. According to Tyson, they are usually characterized as sick, evil, and deviant, coinciding with the attributes given to the Other by colonizers (402). C— is discriminated against for her authentic desires during her girlhood, which scars her and creates a quandary between her Self and her Otherness. As Khair

mentions, those dynamics are sustained in demonizing the Other, a tendency that deems the individual in a negative light, as if lacking humanity (93) based on the dominant colonialist discourse.

Likewise, she alters the everyday functioning of the residency. After some friction with one of the other residents, a musician called Lydia, the latter rages against C— when she arrives with the missing half of the rabbit she killed by accident the day she got there—which appeared by her studio's door after a while, coincidentally. Lydia spats: "You're *crazy*. You just walk around mumbling and staring all of the time. What is *wrong* with you? You should be ashamed of yourself" (210, original emphasis). She sees C— as someone out-of-her-mind who behaves "abnormally," associating her with shame, which inspires other negative attitudes towards the desire to contain this Otherness and revert it (Khair 17). She becomes a cause of terror to Lydia, menacing the dominant image of the Self, as Lydia considers her incapable of being civilized, common thinking in the devaluation of the Other (12). C—'s answer gives powerful insights that will be detailed later concerning another point, but she remarks how "everything is crazy to [her]. By whose measure?" (Machado 210). By this, she questions the cultural paradigms that attach madness to those who 'surpass' the limits of what is admissible, without questioning them.

The straw that broke the camel's back for the protagonist was when one of her fellow residents refers to themselves as an artist colony (196). She is taken aback because, in the first few pages, C— hefts the term "resident" and its curious implications. She expresses that

> [h]ere, you were a resident of this space, yes—not really, of course; you were a visitor, but whereas visitor suggests leaving at the end of the night and driving out in the darkness, resident means that you set up your electric kettle, and will be staying for a while—but also that you are a resident of your own thoughts. You had to find them, be aware of them, but once you located your thoughts you never had to drive away (186).

This train of thought is fascinating, considering her own agency and ambivalence within the story, and also her own self-perception. She is a resident at Devil's Throat but not quite, as if she belongs but not really. She could take with her some of her commodities, but also would have to face her own personal thoughts, what she feels on her own and without anyone imposing attitudes on her. She becomes a subject of difference almost the same (Bhabha 132) as someone who lives permanently there—but *not quite*. By being only a temporary resident, C— becomes a partial presence—more than a visitor, less than a landlord. Considering Bhabha's concept of mimicry, interpreted as a colonial subject, she has both limitations and responsibilities. She could never be equal to the owner's status, yet the intended location of her thoughts illustrates the complexity of her agency during her stay, containing the underlying power in unleashing them.

Therefore, when Diego, an illustrator, banally mentions how he considers them to be colonists, she is horrified. It contrasts her beliefs regarding what she had discussed about 'resident' and her acceptance of it as a *balanced* state. The word 'colonist' hits her with a violence that "settled down next to me, with teeth. (…) [It] sounds monstrous, as if you have kicked down the door hatch of your mind and inside you find a strange family eating supper (…). I felt strange around the entrance to my own interiority" (Machado 196). It takes away all the personal aspects of the ambivalent resident, replacing them with an uncanny intrusion that reduces her to a mere invader. But most essentially, her own interiority suffers from this colonization, being mentally invaded by an oppositional set of rules that relegate her to an inferior position, either by being a woman or a lesbian, due to what happened on the other side of the same lake.

The external façade is also a significant aspect of her alienation. The "colony" in the woods is first depicted as a place people of the town nearby hold in contempt. Before arriving at Devil's Throat, she encounters locals from Y—, like the police officer, but also with an

adolescent behind the counter of a gas station's minimart. When she tells them where she is headed, both blemishes erupt (170, 173), symbolizing a repulsive reaction associated with the place. This could be read as a class conflict as Nora Kipnis addresses in her review of the story (par. 9). It is the resentment of regular people who do not live in a past resort for New York millionaires upon a hill, as the main character tells the reader when she arrives (Machado 175). The inn was maintained by the organization that provided funded fellowships to artists for them to live there. Moreover, even for C— the place grows a certain suspicious feeling within her: "[t]he former hotel swelled out of the ground like an infection, a disturbance in the woods" (176). She herself, resembling a postcolonial identity, is disturbed by what the place represents; the building appears in the middle of a rural area as the footprint of an imperial past. Despite all of this, she is willing enough to go there and try to strategically fit in—to *mimic*—for the sake of her novel.

At first, she is enthusiastic about integrating herself into the residency, as she sees it as an opportunity for her writing endeavor. "I felt renewed as I drove this lane—to paradise! To a completed novel!" (174), as she is hopeful of inserting herself in the literary landscape with "modest but positive reviews" (174). She feels encouraged to pursue her newfound literary success to be considered an author worth reading, even in an artistic scenery still 'colonized'—that is, led by hegemonic structures of gender and race. To that end, she is willing to put up with situations outside her comfort zone. Thus, she introduces herself, unconsciously, as a mimic woman to some degree. According to Tyson, mimicry potentially reflects the desire of colonized individuals to be accepted by the colonizing culture (403); in these terms, she wants to be finally accepted for her difference despite the norms, in order to make her talent stand out.

In her first dinner in the residency, she behaves indulgent to her own desires. When Benjamin, the sculptor that welcomed her first, offers her a glass of red wine, she grabs it and

thanks him instead of declining it, for she does not drink (Machado 181). After that, Anele asks her to pose for a portrait for her latest project, "The Artists." C— expresses to the reader that "[t]he pressure felt real" (183), and not sure if she wanted to do it, she could still not refuse. According to Kipnis, C— longs to be wanted and accepted, which the residency seemed to render, at least at first (par. 13). However, due to her turbulent stay there, that acceptance proves to be ultimately wounding. Her comings and goings are inconsequential, alienating her from the group, and even her letters to home are ignored. For instance, she deludes herself into thinking she was friends with Anele (Machado 195), and she realizes her letters are "sent off into oblivion" (211).

Hence, soon after arriving at the residency, she discovers that she is an outsider. In rejection of artists who "cloister themselves from the rest of the world" (216), she cloisters herself from them, repeating vague childhood memories of that incident in a Scout excursion—traumatic flashbacks that alienate herself from the norms within the symbolic order. She is still living the aftermath of her trauma as it still affects her, as we can notice.

Her traumatic experience is related to her sexual awakening since, when she is driven to kiss a fellow camper, the others decide to make her a prank as a punishment (Milne 82). She is left in the woods while sleepwalking in the night, so she wakes up in the darkness. The fight with Lydia over the rabbit triggers her telling of the event, but we can discern cues during the whole story. Caruth treats trauma as a wound with a repetition that implies a voice—the infliction of the wound becomes conscious, primarily by nightmares and repetitive actions (4). Firstly, from earlier in the story, the protagonist constantly comments about the camp due to its proximity to the residency, gradually adding more information about that time. In addition, she got sick the next day she arrived, resembling the fever she contracted after the prank. Against her will, her body begins to somaticize the stress of going back to the

same lake where she was traumatized with fever, vomits, and infected bumps in her skin in a kind of resistance to the environment.

The abjection spreads through all her body in a painful haunting as the physical manifestation of her inner turmoil (Milne 80). She admits that "[t]hey did not itch, but they felt full, and I felt full, as if I needed release" (Machado 191). The containment of the trauma became a hardship to the point that she knew she could not resist the bother anymore, as the repetitive voice was trying to tell her through the 'abjections,' especially when they returned after curing them. "They were more plentiful [now]," to the point that C— affirms she "could hear their insides. They crackled, like Pop Rocks. I could *hear them*" (205). In her own body appears an 'Other' voice that she can hear but tries to dismiss for the distress it causes her, as a projection of the "deep fears and longings" unconscious ghost of her past (Khair 10). Her sexual predilections are judged in opposition to the social conventions affiliated with the West, her despair deeply rooted in herself.

As Visser remarks, trauma remains "unsayable" that impacts the person's health (115). One night, she dreamed with her wife, and when she asked C— "what is through the forest?" repeated times, the protagonist is only able to answer with "I cannot tell" and "I do not remember" (205). The typical copy mechanism for traumatic events is to resist the memory, but what keeps returning to hunt the victim is how the violence attached to the experience has not yet been fully known by who suffered it (Caruth 6). At the end of the story, she "understood that knowledge was a dwarfing, obliterating, all-consuming thing, and to have it was to both be grateful and suffer greatly" (Machado 213), an epiphany she would not have acquired without releasing the memory, without realizing that her monstrosity is valid.

Before tackling that term, we must acknowledge that when C— wakes up in the middle of the woods, "rigid with terror" (Machado 212), her mind process is trying to grasp what really happened because trauma works as a "break in the mind's experience of time"

(Caruth 61). The coldness of the scene also denotes the freezing of time: “it felt like [my body] was disappearing at the edges, like my shoreline was evaporating. (…) And then I was just a hovering brain, and then a consciousness, floating and fragile as a bubble. And then I was nothing” (Machado 212). She senses she is reduced to nothingness, also perceived in her eyes in the portrait taken by Anele. Under someone else's perception, she could look “irrevocably dead” (201) as if she is not alive enough, as if she is removed due to her Otherness—which turns her monstrous in opposition to the human/self constituent, as approached by Katherine Kurtz in her chapter “Monster-as-Actor, Woman as Role” (36). The latter begs the question: could it be that her new state was indescribable because of the Other's ability to exceed conventional language?

When she struggles to grasp the traumatic event before her eyes, monstrosity begins to take over. One of the defining elements of Gothic fiction is the disturbing return of the past to the present (Khair 6), which structures one of the principal tensions in the short story, reinforced by the negative and the irrational. Khair defines the Gothic as a writing of ‘excess’ and transgression, which also represent a writing of Otherness displaying differences in its multiple versions—gendered, colonial, racial, among others, as non-European presences (5-6), according to structures already mentioned. The monster is usually a fundamental component of Gothic literature, historically representative of Otherness in tales of darkness (8). The looming and eerie setting, established by the storms and mists with the ominous past lingering, impacts and is impacted by C—’s difference that transforms her into a ‘monster,’ reflecting certain aspects rejected in the normatively embodied self.

In other words, the monster represents the aspects of a discontinuity that escaped Western codification, as Sidia Fiorato exposes in their review of Daniela Carpi’s “Monsters and Monstrosity. From the Canon to the Anti-Canon” (198). By kissing another girl, she is defining her identity, but at the same time, defies the norm—she admits feeling “something

unfold[s] inside me like a morning glory" (Machado 211), representing her sexual awakening. However, her emotional expansion contrasts with the reality of the other girl. "How could I have known that she was merely curious, and then *afraid*?" (211, emphasis added): the reaction of Mrs. Z—'s daughter, whom C— kisses, is essential to understand the social purpose of the monster. While quoting Cohen's Monster Theory, Kurtz addresses the monster as an embodiment of cultural anxieties or representations of must-repressed qualities to produce "proper" subjects, ones that do not contribute any alterity to the conventions constructed by a patriarchal, phallocentric ideology (28-29). Likewise, Fiorato indicates that the monstrous "exposes the (hetero)normativity of the incarnated self" (199), imposing boundaries that seem to be interrogated by marginalized groups—due to their sexuality, largely.

In the woods, she finds herself with something she could not locate or give a name to. She narrates, "[s]omething pushed through the underbrush, coming toward me. Not a girl, not an animal, but something *in between*. I came back into myself and began to scream" (Machado 213, emphasis added). Monstrosity approaches her and blends into her: while her bullies see her as 'inhuman,' she only finds herself (Milne 75). The monster acts as an in-between being that embodies the blurring of the shaping boundaries of cultural paradigms, disrupting them with their liminality, as Fiorato explains (197). The monster becomes the dialectical Other, for they are beyond the normalizing discourses—characterizing the societal codes—that produce their very Otherness (Kurtz 36). She cannot articulate the transformation she was going through, combining the antagonist forces in an individual and collective sense, for Otherness exceeds the structure of language (Khair 88). That night she realizes the impact of her own Otherness in her Self, and to deal with that encounter, she not only is in between a confrontation with the status quo (Compagna and Steinhart x), but she lives an intense moment of heightened and hysterical emotion—which it causes her body to protest the

injustice through a fever. Her screams, as an excess of sound without a "linguistically formulable content" (Nussbaum qtd in Khair 95), arise from the simultaneous clash in time and space when the person rubs up against "all other different reality," in Levinas's words (Khair 17). Here lies her difficulty in acknowledging her past, but to live in the present and seize her real identity, she needs to confront it and overcome the pressure to be "normal" as a form of healing. Also, the Gothic genre's priority for emotions suggests that some truths, as C—'s, are only accessible through emotions, rationality not having the unique monopoly over the understanding of experience of life in every sense (94).

To adapt herself, she accepts the challenge of a double-edged agency, containing both the constraint and freedom involved in interpreting the received norms that render her monstrous (Kurtz 35). Her whole confinement in the residency exhibits in detail the isolation habituated to her persona; however, taking up residence allows the main character to finally confront her past and understand what it means to meet herself, even if that is truly terrifying.

With the opportunity to retreat into her own thoughts, she can perform monstrosity to the extent that she does it to embrace it finally. When one of the residents suggests that everyone present their art, C— she reads a passage of her novel about Lucille, who discovers "her sexuality by an autumn lake and falling in love with a girl" (Milne 77), the same as the protagonist. After reading, Lydia interrogates her: "Do you ever worry (…) that you're the madwoman in the attic? (…) That old trope. Writing a story where the female protagonist is utterly batty. It's sort of tiresome and regressive and, well, *done* (…). And the mad lesbian, isn't that a stereotype as well?" (Machado 202-203, original emphasis). Lydia's hostility communicates her interpretation of the work as unoriginal, questioning its authenticity. It exhibits how marginalized people are usually dismissed as untrustworthy, confirming the still predominant male influence in considering a work acceptable, as Milne discusses (67). They also establish how "[u]nreliability further becomes associated with repetition, mental

instability, and deviance, but then how do the marginalized tell their stories in a world that moves them to madness [and excludes them from dominant narratives]?" (69).

For Lydia, C—'s work is a disturbing copy (Bhabha 126)—her lack of originality is taken as a deception, mimicry not being enough. If we consider the protagonist's aspirations to flourish in the field, to be accused of plagiarism is an enormous insult. Yet, it comes not as a novelty: the story also exposes the literary tradition that has excluded women for centuries for believing them incapable of creative contributions (Kipnis par. 5). Women's narratives have been either told by others—essentially, white men—or disregarded due to the society's devaluating perception of females. What would it matter if a woman's story is authentic or original if it is ultimately *hers*, finally given the fair power of testimony?

Milne remarks how "C——, as a lesbian writer married to another woman, is triply excluded from the configurations of what it means to be a true, reliable, and original writer" (77). But her journey is also about accepting the intersection of the parts of herself that do not coincide with the norm. She gets frustrated with a society that excludes her only for being herself, categorizing her with presumed madness. Nevertheless, she surrenders herself to her monstrosity and actively performs it when she can no longer take Lydia's comments. With the argument regarding the dead rabbit, her difference unleashes as a disruptive move when she proclaims that: "[i]t is my right to reside in my own mind (…). It is my right to be unsociable and it is my right to be unpleasant to be around" (Machado 210), raising her voice as she had never before. This moment of growing self-acceptance demonstrates her embracing of the supposedly mad, unreliable monster inside her, "constituted by the enacting of a discursively-produced, given role (…) [a]s a strategy of subversion" (Kurtz 36) of what is stable and objective. This enactment opposes the normative/colonizing ideologies that render some people 'abnormal,' providing an uncodified form (Fiorato 198), thus marginalizing their existence.

C—'s answer is empowering, for it defends her writing and her identity and authority in telling her story, whether others deem it to be worthy, original, or not. Representing the disruption of the limits imposed upon women (writers), "Machado's protagonist realizes that she must bear witness to her own stories—particularly the ones that caused her trauma" (Milne 69) as she becomes filled with ideas of being a monster. Nonetheless, she encounters a powerful tool in her monstrosity to express her difference and find comfort within it. "Don't be afraid," she said to the other residents. "I'm not. Not anymore" (Machado 215). She looked up inside herself, confronted whichever excess, and opened her arms to it. She asks people to do the same; however, what is more vital to her narrative is highlighting the possibility of testimony as her own personal brand of self-care as the aftermath becomes progressively more bearable.

Conclusion

"The Resident" provides kaleidoscopic insights about the importance of telling one's story, especially from a position of Otherness. Nevertheless, the difficulties in making your own name should not be overlooked; the pressure of societal expectations somehow becomes denser for a woman writer, especially "mad" and queer. C—'s self-imposed exile comes at a psychological expense when she confronts her memory, entailing the manifestation of her heightened emotions that also distinguishes her from the norm. In a world that "encompass ongoing, everyday forms of violence and oppression affecting subordinate groups" (Craps qtd in Visser 112), it becomes valid for a person/character like C— to go 'crazy,' as the psychological horror elements in the story may try to portray. However, writing their experiences and sharing them with the world allows people to acquire tools to embrace their own Otherness, validating them even if they are caught in a battle with their own minds. And this could be approached as a process part of decoloniality. Considering that literature seems

to reflect society, more than postcolonial, this story becomes an *anticolonial* response to the literary structure.

Because of her queerness, the protagonist was programmed to see herself as inferior due to the colonization—understood as the imposition of marginalizing conventions—which is central to the ostracism C— experiences at "Devil's Throat." She appears as both the Other and the Self for herself if we consider Khair's sayings about Otherness being central to the identity of the Self but remaining different from it (105) and the rules of language (109). Her residency results in an inner disorder concerning power and authority by delineating the trauma (Visser 127) that alienates her from society. While in the beginning, the main character interacts with the authority as subjugated, in the end, she displays the acceptance of her identity, taking her Otherness more as a shield. In full circle, she expresses: "I can tell you with perfect honesty that the night in the forest was a gift. Many people live and die without ever confronting themselves in the darkness" (Machado 218). She is aware of her oddness, perceived by people, and discovers how difficult her thoughts are to live with—to ultimately acknowledge how her power *resides* there.

Chinua Achebe's 2010 essay argues humanity's ability to confront adversity "by refusing to be defined by it, refusing to be no more than its agent or its victim" (qtd Visser 108). Her agency in the mimicry she employs in society significantly speaks about her need to adapt to survive in a hostile world to her identity. As Kurtz mentions, "[p]reoccupations with notions of authenticity are for those who do not bear the burden of subordination" (39), so that is why, when she leaves the residency, she signs up with the epigraph of "Resident colonist & colonizing resident & madwoman in her own attic" (Machado 216). The ambivalence alludes to embracing the repetitions that become disturbing for the colonial and white and male-dominated discourse (Bhabha 126).

As trauma unfolds as a method to illustrate C—'s psychology, it also creates a renewed sense of identity within the protagonist, as her traumatic experience seems to be remembered and reconstructed in a narrative of deep wounding that has affected her sense of self. Milne reckons her "trauma influences not only [her] mental health but also what and how [she] write[s]" (67); however, this does not invalidate her tale, demonstrating the importance of celebrating change and diversity in narratives. Testimony in literature may not be perfect, but it needs to be addressed, especially by those who have experienced the harm, becoming a "reversal of conventional writing" (71). What was supposed to remain invisible, conforming to a masculine logic, has now shed light on changing one's self-perception: the ambiguity and subversiveness of monstrosity against discourses of purification. The protagonist "demands that readers read her story on her terms" (73), not under hegemonic codes, as she tries to prove the difficulty of standard authenticity in her non-universal works "while recognizing and embracing her seeming monstrosity as a lesbian woman and a woman writer" (74). With this epiphany, she turns her supposed flaws into the ability "to stand on [her] own as an artist" (Machado 174), all while theorizing about literary alternatives allowing these voices to consolidate themselves.

"What is worse: being locked outside of your own mind, or being locked inside of it?", she wonders. "What is worse: writing a trope or being one? What about being more than one?" (216). By remaining outside, the possibility of not knowing your identity, or a refusal to look within, stands out. But, by identifying ourselves as many tropes, we are able to acknowledge the diversity in layers that underlies us. This research establishes some implications of the presence of Postcolonialism in literature—as many other pluralist theories—and the impact it can and will have on future works. In an interview with *The Atlantic* (2017), Machado states, "[i]n my work, I think non-realism can be a way to insist on something different. It's a way to tap into aspects of being a woman that can be surreal or

somehow liminal—certain experiences that can even feel like horror.” For further research, violating traditional genre boundaries becomes a statement while using the rules from the canon to express the rationality lying in previously considered too sentimental works as well as erase scathing discourses within the literary norm, ultimately.

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THE WOUND THAT MADE ME CHAMPURRIA:

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF *RÍO HERIDO*

by Anita Fuentes Fuentes

Introduction

Our family's history is what has taken us to where we live and made us who we are today, which is why growing up with our ancestor's past hidden behind a wall can lead to a confusing present. The information that is taken away from us becomes a missing piece of the puzzle of our identity, creating voids that are filled with doubts and concerns. While some families lose their history as a consequence of moving across the country, others lose it because being indigenous was to be hidden. The obstacle of missing history is present in the lives of many Mapuche people who nowadays create art in an attempt to reconnect with their origins and the past they were not able to know, or, like me, were not allowed to.

Through the art of poetry present in *Río Herido*, Daniela Catrileo shares her feelings on being an urban Mapuche who grew up away from the language and their traditions. The author's work presents us with the pain of not knowing her family's history and the dread of never being able to recover the lost stories and memories. The writer's texts also give us an insight into how she ended up in her position by exploring her family's relationship with their own Mapuche identity. With her poetry, Catrileo demonstrates the effects of these emotions in her life, such as an unstable sense of identity, the question of what it is to be indigenous or not, the search for a new way of being Mapuche, and what it means to be Mapuche today.

In the present paper, the analysis will be carried out with the use of colonial and post-colonial theory and indigenous studies. Such approaches will be applied to a selection of poems from the first and third parts of *Río Herido*. Firstly, the focus will be on the author's choice of words when dealing with grief, territory, and belonging. After doing so, a reflection on the use of plural pronouns in each of the aforementioned topics will be made in order to understand the importance of collective pain in the individual search for identity.

Historical Context

A conflict between the Mapuche and the state of Chile that has been present for hundreds of years is still happening. This conflict is rooted in the injustices the Mapuche have been victims of, such as the illegitimate occupation of their lands and the erasure of their language. Several people have been killed due to the military repression in the Wallmapu[11], and different Mapuche communities have been raided with the support of Chilean authorities. For years, the Mapuche have been migrating from the South of Chile to the capital, Santiago, mainly inhabiting the city's outskirts due to the lack of economic resources. This phenomenon has been named the Mapuche diaspora, an event whose consequences can still be seen in the present day. One of the most evident is the fact that the highest density of the Mapuche population is set in the Región Metropolitana, not in the Wallmapu or Araucanía. The spreading of the ones who belong to this group to other cities; the imposition of Occidental culture; the constant discrimination they face, and the need to hide the Mapuche for safety have caused the progressive loss of their culture. As a result, younger generations today have little knowledge of their ancestors' traditions and beliefs, leaving an unresolved wound that some people, like Daniela Catrileo, decide to heal.

Daniela Catrileo's *Río Herido*, published in 2016, is only one of the several works done during this period that deal with the harm that the diaspora has caused in the generations that have been raised in urban spaces. Many people from said generations have become artists and activists that use their creativity to help them voice their pain and concerns. Such is the case of Daniela Catrileo, who, through her poetry, raises the question of Mapuche identity, shedding light on the pain caused by the displacement of indigenous people and how the current conflict in the Wallmapu affects us even from afar.

In the present paper, I will approach Danila Catrileo's work from a post-colonialist point of view that will take into consideration the recent history of oppression towards the

[11] Mapuche territory

Mapuche. In order to avoid an extreme bias that could arise from my positionality, I will support my claims with the works of other two authors. Both María José Barros' and Carla Llamunao's texts provide concepts from the field of literary and indigenous studies that are necessary in order to understand and interpret the ways in which identity is presented in *Río Herido*. The former is a thorough analysis of Daniela Catrileo's poetry and the number of topics it has dealt with throughout the years, such as racism, oppression, and Mapuche erasure. The ideas in said article are developed under the concept of the Mapuche diaspora: the exile and migration of the Mapuche people to different urban cities and the resulting spreading of the community (66). A frequently mentioned concept in both articles is that of *champurria*[12], a word that initially meant mixed blood and used to have a negative connotation, which is now being reclaimed by the Mapuche community. Barros develops this word with an emphasis on the geographical, while Llamunao defines it in terms of what someone who identifies as *champurria* feels is missing. The latter highlights the relevance of being exposed to Mapudungun and Mapuche traditions in order to achieve a specific worldview called *Rakizuam*[13], which is necessary to fill the gaps in their identity (154). *Champurria* is a concept that fulfills both definitions; it is an identity that allows the intersection of the colonial, the urban, and the Mapuche (67). Along with its new meaning, the concept of *champurria* will be used often in the research paper when discussing Daniela Catrileo's poetry in terms of the different relationships that can be created between one's family's indigenous past and one's present. It will also be used to understand how one's identity is not only something related to the experiences one has gone through but also something that can be searched for through knowledge and art.

To complete my analysis, I will share parts of my family history that relate to the topics in *Río Herido*. For this to be possible, I will explore the field of autoethnography and

[12] Mapudungun: Mixed-race. In this context it means to have a colonial and Mapuche identity
[13] Mapudungun: A way or frame of seeing the world specific to the Mapuche who are familiar with the language, traditions, and spirituality of the culture

indigenous studies, taking the works of three other authors as inspiration. First, Aimee Carrillo's text provides different aspects that build identity, which will be helpful for understanding, through her poetry, how Catrileo's identity is built. In her text, Carrillo questions, explores, and discovers her identity in relation to her ancestry and the territories she has inhabited. The author attempts to understand what makes Chicanxs who they are by linking the concepts of identity, descent, blood, and land (525). After reflecting on these aspects, the author shares that while she felt close to her indigenous ancestry, she also acknowledged that a number of her ancestors were colonizers that occupied other's land. Carrillo's struggle led her to identify herself as a settler Xicana, an indigenous woman with settler ancestors (531). This idea leads us to the concept present in Gloria Anzaldúa's book, in which she proposes the concept of a new mestiza that does not perceive the borders of her identities as limits, but as points that intersect, similar to the term *Champurria*. The new mestiza learns to accept the contradictions they encounter through life when being addressed as different people by others, for according to the author, a mestiza will be treated as Mexican, Indian, and American on different occasions in life. The contents in Carrillo's and Anzaldúa's texts are useful for understanding how identity can be the result of the interaction between factors different from blood only. This information can be applied to Daniela Catrileo's focus on territory, family history, family stories, and one's choice to claim an indigenous identity. The information provided by the authors will also add relevance to the topic of the search for identity and the unstable sense of self in Catrileo's work, which is appropriate to understand the writer's positionality in regard to what being Mapuche today means and the contradictions she has in herself.

The most relevant autoethnographic text in my analysis belongs to an author whose experience as a white-passing person is similar to mine. In Cherríe Moraga's text, the author shares her experience growing up as the daughter of a Chicana and an Anglo man and how,

during her upbringing, she understood the implications of being white or brown. As a woman who passed as white, Moraga's experience was different from the authors mentioned above. An essential part of the text deals with her process of re-recognizing the Chicana in her, for being "white-passing" made her forget or ignore the cultural aspects of her indigenous heritage. The realization that she had neglected that part of her life created in her the need to remember what she used to know, which forced her to face the absence of a significant amount of knowledge. Moraga's text adds weight and validates my positionality as someone who perceives creativity and knowledge as ways to learn what I believe necessary to claim my Mapuche identity.

The present analysis will consist of interpretations of Daniela Catrileo's choice of words based on other academics, along with a thorough observation of the use of pronouns. Throughout the following part of this paper, my individual experiences and anecdotes will be used to provide a closer insight into the thoughts and feelings of a fellow *Champurria.* The analysis will focus on a selection of seven poems from the first and third chapters, which will be translated in specific cases for efficiency and respect toward the author's work. Each chapter will be analyzed separately, as both of them deal with different topics related to being a racially and culturally mixed Mapuche.

Chapter 1

"Cesura: Testimonio del Accidente", is the first chapter of Daniela Catrileo's *Río Herido*. It consists of eighteen poems that deal with the recognition of the pain of being distanced from our indigenous ancestry and the losses that come with said problem. Apart from recognizing the problems, this chapter hints at the start of the process of healing and the doubts that may arise during it, as it is shown in the first poem of the book: "Este no es mi viaje. / Este es mi viaje" ("This is not my journey. / This is my journey"; my trans.; 11). These first verses start off the book with the question that many mixed people struggle with,

whether it is valid to claim an indigenous identity. In Aimee Carrillo's words, "my desire for indigeneity becomes complicated by the fact that I am a settler of *their* homelands" (533). The internal battle comes from a place that acknowledges that only some of our ancestors have gone through the pain and battles of being Mapuche, while the others produced it. The journey belongs to the ones who have endured it, and by saying that it is and is not hers, Catrileo admits to both parts of her history.

A frequent topic that is dealt with in almost half of the first chapter is the loss of Mapudungun, which, after years of oppression, racism, and epistemic violence, is now rarely spoken. In Chile, only 10% of the 1.400.000 Mapuche people speak Mapudungun, and other 10% are able to understand it (García). Its majority of speakers reside in small Mapuche communities in the surroundings of Galvarino and Padre Las Casas, two counties in the Región de la Araucanía in which Mapudungun is considered to be an official tongue (Berríos). The idea of this native tongue slowly disappearing leads to the thought of Mapuche culture fading away, along with the stories of our indigenous ancestors. Catrileo explores this struggle by reflecting on the possible origins and causes of the erasure of this ancestral language:

> El secreto en la rotura
> de la lengua
> como quién se apuñala
> a sí mismo
> para salvarse. (Catrileo 20)

The author's words in this poem talk about the disappearance of Mapudungun as a physical wound in the tongue that has been self-inflicted. The identity of the one who created that injury can be found in the Mapuche families, who, in their attempt to avoid the acts of violence they used to face, stopped speaking the language. The same action was done in other

Mapuche families, with different intentions that were rooted in their internalized racism. Such was Cherríe Moraga's case, who lived that experience as a Chicana's daughter, "everything that had to do with my education … tried to make me even whiter. Even though my mother was fluent in Spanish, they never taught me much of it at home"[14] (120). Moraga's case represents one of the factors that take part in the loss of languages in families like mine.

My late grandfather, Orlando Fuentes Cumián, was, until last year, the only one in my family who was able to speak Mapudungun. My grandmother, who disliked the idea of her children being immersed in that culture that made them brown, never allowed him to teach my mother, uncles, and aunts how to speak it, and after years of not practicing it enough, he lost most of his knowledge. The aftermath of my grandmother's actions is the sadness and shame that I feel for not knowing how to speak the language that belonged to my ancestors, and the fear of never being able to achieve the *Rakizuam*, for I lack the words that are necessary to understand Mapuche cosmovision.

Apart from exploring the origins of the loss of Mapudungun, Catrileo addresses the end of this language in Mapuche family lines, "Las palabras ya no son huesos / sino fantasmas / enterrados en su boca…." ("Words are no longer bones / but ghosts / buried in their mouth…."; my trans.; 23). In this poem, Catrileo creates a metaphor to refer to the process of the erasure of the words, of Mapudungun. Bones are the last part of our bodies that decompose before disappearing entirely in a process that can last from six to thirty years (Teo et al. 4). After Mapudungun turns to dust, it will become a ghost that will either haunt the ones who feel it is missing from their lives or be forgotten forever.

The loss of Mapudungun in my family has caused pain in the ones who would like to learn more about our indigenous ancestors and has made me struggle with my Champurria identity. By the time I started to take an interest in my Mapuche ancestry, my grandfather

[14] My trans.

could no longer teach me more than three words in the language I now long for. Because of that, my grandfather's death also meant the death of Mapudungun in my family.

Water is an element that appears several times in Daniela Catrileo's book *Río Herido*[15] that is used to describe the wound of being Mapuche in a society that has looked down upon them for centuries. This specific metaphor was inspired by the author's last name, who stated that "*Río Herido* is a poetic translation of my last name, Catrileo (Katrü-lewfü[16])" (Catrileo). By changing or reinterpreting the literal meaning of her last name (cut river), the author found a way to tell her family's history of migration and pain, and the story of others that have gone through the same. In this way, the writer's work "is transformed into a poetics that carries multiple voices" (Catrileo). This collectivity is shown in Catrileo's use of plural pronouns when referring to the struggles that the Mapuche go through during our lives, as shown in the following quote:

El río nos sumerge
en el temblor de sus olas.

Meto piedras en mis bolsillos
Para asegurar el descenso.

En el vestigio de la seña:
Nacemos
de rabia
de pobres
de olvido
como musgo en la ribera. (24)

[15] A translation of the title could be Wounded River.
[16] Mapudungun: cut (adjective), and river, respectively.

In this poem, the river is the wound that is being endured by the Mapuche due to the constant oppression and racism that keeps on taking lives away, just like violent waters. One can choose to go deeper into these waters by exploring the wound further, or in this case, by researching one's family's history and stories. Allowing ourselves to know more about Mapuche culture and the history of these indigenous people sometimes leads us to understand and learn about the struggles our families went through. In the final stanza, we see the anger that arises in the voice of the poem after realizing that our grandparents had to raise our parents in poverty because of the exile that forced them to settle within the limits of Santiago. According to Patricia Espinosa, "the awareness of this marginalization constitutes the idea of a shared crisis that is determinant for their (the voice's) identity." Espinosa's interpretation of the work of Daniela Catrileo makes me reflect on my family history and the stories that I keep asking for, even if sometimes they make me share the anger shown in the poem.

My grandfather was born and raised in San José de la Mariquina, in the lands of my great-grandmother. The grounds that saw him grow up were also the place in which his children would play for hours, running around with the stain of maqui[17] on their mouths. These fields provided my family with food and wood even when they had almost no money, a situation that changed after losing these terrains to an unfair deal. Their poverty became a real and long-lasting struggle when they moved to Santiago, a place that welcomed them with racism, hunger, and a house built on illegally occupied grounds.

Chapter 3

In the third part of Catrileo's *Río Herido*, "Ser Incendio en Tu Cauce", the images of the mother and father figures are used to represent the ones who had to move from their homelands to the outskirts of the city. The poems in this chapter use these elements to shed

[17] Native Chilean berry that produces stains due to its dark color.

light on the obstacles family leaders had to go through while settling in Santiago. One of those experiences is shown in the following poem:

Él no tiene una foto con su número de cédula
pero repite su nombre
como si formara un gran dígito.
Yo tengo de su madre
una manta de lana
que borda cada punto
de sus dedos. (47)

Catrileo's poem presents us with characters from three different generations, the grandmother who has passed, the father that mourns her, and the father's child witnessing his grief. In the first stanza, we are shown how the last two keep alive the memory of the late woman. The son repeats his mother's name as a replacement for the number of a document that she did not have. The reasons behind this missing object could lie in the woman's age[18], or in her reluctance to be registered as Chilean. She did not have a number that confirmed her identity, but a name that was as important. Moreover, the grandchild in the poem remembers the elder with a handmade woolen blanket[19] that resembled her touch, an object that will be forever Mapuche.

In the analysis of the following poems, I will make connections between their contents and the story about the precariousness that moving to Santiago meant for my family. The approach used will be an autoethnographical one, similar to the works done by the authors listed above, as a more conventional approach would not work to explain the more personal and identity-related information. For others to be able to understand my analysis, I

[18] Identity cards in Chile began to circulate in 1924. Ever since 1930, each card has been assigned with a document number.
[19] Textile art plays an important role in Mapuche culture. Traditionally, woolen blankets are made in a type of loom called witral.

must provide information about parts of my family history and family stories with the authorization of the family members involved.

My grandfather started working when he was fifteen years old because, like many other people in those times (1940's), he could not finish school. He would drive trucks throughout the whole country for months, not being able to go home for months. Years after marrying my grandmother, they moved to Santiago and brought my mother, aunts, and uncles with them. My great-grandmother, la Abuela Tato, stayed in San José de la Mariquina until she was of old age and had to come live with my grandparents. The following poem makes me think of one of the biggest pains my grandfather had to endure, all due to the exploitation he suffered as a truck driver:

Habitar caminos que siguen
en un hombre
que ha perdido la mitad de su juventud
una madre y una casa.
……..
Recuperar la mueca incansable
colmar de humo mi botella.
Quiero ser la temible infancia
con toda la vida en sus remos. (51)

The day my great-grandmother passed away, she was in Santiago while my grandfather was driving around in Punta Arenas. He got the news three days after her death, for reaching him was almost impossible. While his mother was being buried, he was on the road doing what he had been doing since his youth. A month later, he arrived at a home that was different from the one he had left long ago, he did not see her face again, and his home —his mother— did not exist anymore. The second stanza evokes the idea of having to put on a mask, in this case,

a smile that needs to come back for things to feel normal again. Moreover, in the last two verses, we see the melancholic wish of going back to being a child whose destiny is yet to be determined, a child that holds his future in his hands, in his paddles.

The story of my grandmother's choices and the consequences that they have had in my life have been a recurrent topic in this paper, for they are directly related to the journey of finding my identity as *Champurria*. I am aware that my writing shows a degree of anger towards her, a theme that I will be explaining with the help of the following poem by Catrileo:

> El amor al padre, el odio al padre
> llevar la cuenta de ancestros
> por orden santo
> no es recomendable en la juventud…. (53)

Catrileo writes about the feelings of love and hatred towards a parental figure that come from the anger that is felt by us, Champurria, during the process of recognizing ourselves as such. Digging into the history of our families leads us to learn information that makes us question the decisions of the ones who came before us and wonder what life would be like if they had done things differently. The love and admiration I feel for my grandmother is undeniable, but it does not make me blind to the mistakes she made in the past. Many times, her decisions were influenced by the racism she learned at home, with a family that came from Spaniards only. In spite of the way she was raised, my abuela married a Mapuche man in a Mapuche ceremony, which could have meant that she did not share her family's rejection towards my grandfather's indigenous group, but that was not the case.

At this point in my life, I have come to the realization that my grandmother constantly tried to ignore and deny my abuelo's indigeneity by hiding his last name and shushing him whenever he tried to speak Mapudungun to their children. She bathed my mother, aunts, and

uncles in sunscreen, put chamomile in their hair, and sprayed their skin with lemon juice; she did everything she could in order to hide the fact that she had chosen to spend her life with a Mapuche man. It is true that I am angry with my grandmother and her actions, because they made my family members insecure about their skin color and the thickness of their hair and denied them the opportunity of being fluent in two languages and cultures. Nevertheless, I want to try and understand her reasons, because I know that all she wanted was for her daughters and sons to be safe. She wanted to avoid the looks they would get when speaking Mapudungun in public, and the insults they would (and did) receive because of their skin color. I know she had good intentions because she told me so, and I know that she regrets her mistakes because she is proud of the fact that I am trying to bring back the memories, knowledge, and words that have been fading with time. As Catrileo states in her poem, it is not recommendable to feel this anger during my youth, and listing my grandmother's mistakes will not fix them. Instead, I will use the pain that has been caused in my life as an impulse to find the pieces of my identity that are lost in stories that are still alive in my family.

The final poem in my analysis is one that led me to find a piece of information that showed me how my great-grandmother, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and mother have been connected from the beginning by their own *Río Herido*:

Somos una madeja
la familia esparcida
entre cables
que recorren avenidas
como antes el río.
…….
Estamos en un mapa que se fragmenta

y con cada piedra formamos un origen. (49)

When my grandparents first moved to Santiago, they lived in a house with a dirt floor instead of tiles and cardboard for a roof, next to a river that carried wastewater. A year later they moved to a house without windows, but with a real roof. Two years after that, they arrived at a place with tiles, a roof, and windows, a house that became my grandparents' forever home. Nowadays, I have family members living in Santiago, Osorno, and Valdivia, spread in between, and united cables, highways, and forests, like "antes el río".

My grandfather was born in San José de la Mariquina; my grandmother, as well as two of my aunts, was born in Loncoche. My mother and two of my uncles were born in Lanco, and my youngest aunt was born in Valdivia. While researching about the places in which these family members were born, I found out that all of these cities are connected by a river called Río Cruces, that carried clean water and beautiful, black-necked swans. This river kept my family company in each city they lived in, until they came to Santiago and our map became fragmented. This fragmentation, instead of breaking us, allowed my family members to spread our origins, history, and stories to different places. The anecdotes we hear nowadays at family functions are what connect us throughout our history and territories, just like Río Cruces, our own, my own *Río Herido*.

Final Thoughts

Daniela Catrileo's work in *Río Herido* is a portrayal of the process that mixed-race people go through when trying to find one's identity by means of reconnecting with our heritage. The author's poems show the ups and downs of this journey by dealing with topics that relate to the gaps that some mestizos and mestizas feel in their lives due to the lack of information they have about their family's past. The way in which she explores problems such as the loss of Mapudungun in Mapuche families, the precariousness these families have gone through, and the self-erasure of their indigenous origins show the product of these

actions, an unstable identity. Catrileo does not only reflect on the origins of the struggle, but also on how painful it is to live life while constantly questioning one's identity and the role we have as Mapuche descendants with little knowledge about the culture of our ancestors.

In *Río Herido*, Catrileo tells us about the Champurria identity from an individual and plural point of view, presenting our pain as something that creates community, giving beauty to an experience that may feel lonely if it is not shared with others. This sense of community was something that I discovered during the process of the present research project and helped me find a space that validated the questions I have about what my role is as part of an indigenous group that simultaneously feels as a place in which I belong and not belong.

Being able to approach this research paper from an autoethnographical methodology provided me with the opportunity to have a journey similar to the one that is shown to us in Daniela Catrileo's work. Like Cherríe Moraga, I feel confident enough to say that "I feel bleached and silenced; and I am angry about this" (127), without feeling shame for wishing to look Mapuche like my mother does, even if I am aware of the privilege that it means to be white-passing. It has allowed me to feel angry towards my grandmother, and nostalgic about things I never lived. It has also made me experience the same feelings Moraga described about her own process of recognizing herself as Chicana:

> "Researching forced me to remember things I have always known, things that come from my roots. But remembering makes me face the things I do not know…. But one cannot only take what is good and run. I knew…that all that is worth writing about is what seems unknown, thus, terrifying"[20]. (125)

Today I feel angrier than I did before I started this research, but I also feel more motivated to keep on exploring my identity as a Champurria, to learn more about my great-grandmother,

[20] My trans.

to learn Mapudungun so I can keep my grandfather's memory alive through a language that was taken away from him.

Claiming my Champurria identity provides me with a type of serenity that I did not know was possible, and with a kind of power that I want to take further into the Academia. In the future, I would like to take carry out more autoethnographical research, in order to create a space that allows others to tell their stories in an environment that considers individual experiences as valid sources of knowledge and views personal biases as an element with Academic value, a space that mixes theory and life, una academia Champurria.

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