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SPECIAL ISSUE

Ecowitches, Ecofeminism and Earth Repair: Symbiotic Posthuman Narratives in the Age of the Symbiocene / Ecobrujas, ecofeminismo y reparación de la Tierra: Narrativas posthumanas simbióticas en la era del simbioceno

INTRODUCTION*

Xiana Sotelo**
Universidad Complutense de Madrid & GIECO-Franklin Institute-UAH

In an era defined by accelerating planetary crisis of climate breakdown, ecocide, mass extinction, environmental injustice and technological compliance with oppressive and greedy capitalist systems of fossil fuel production and distribution, a paradigmatic shift is emerging across Ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities. This shift, recently described as the "symbiotic turn" (Karpouzou & Zampaki 2023, 25) signals a critical move beyond the conceptual bounds of the Anthropocene[1] and the Capitalocene[2] toward what Glen Albrecht in *Earth Emotions. New Words for a New World* (2019) has characterized as the age of the Symbiocene (102); a new period of human intelligence and praxis with a reinvigorated posthuman language aimed at counterbalancing the current destructive forces and reestablishing the "symbiotic bonds (...) that have been severed in the Anthropocene" (104). With its roots in Gaia's theory of Lovelock and Margulis (1974) and its interdependent forces that makes life thrive, symbiosis, the "cooperation between radically different types of organisms living in close proximity" (Albrecht 2019, 98), strongly challenges Darwin's models of evolution based on competition between species/organisms in competitive environments. Indeed, from a posthuman mindset that denounces the status quo, a new subjectivity has emerged in the last decades to demand intersectional situated positions against ecological destruction and to recognize the need for symbiotic posthumanist ecologies in Literary and Cultural Studies[3] (Karpouzou & Zampaki 2023). Thus, "the very nature of human thought must be changed" (Wolfe 2010, xvi) to be able to understand that it is not just the land that is broken, exploited and polluted but most importantly, it is human beings' relationship to the Earth that needs to be restored. Drawing from a critical posthumanism[4] that radically de-centers humans' arrogant position as the apotheosis of the planet's evolutionary process, a symbiotic posthumanism highlights a "reorganization of the thinking on 'ecology' and 'ecosystems' by pointing out the symbiotic nature of all life on earth, including a symbiosis with the non-human and the technological" (Nayar 2023, 7). Hence, realigning humanity with the "rest-of-the-world" implies embracing new connections (7) within the realm of symbiotic interconnectivity with the more than human world, the forces of nature and the universe.

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Interestingly, in this association with the cycle of life and the cyclical forces found within nature, the figure of an earth-based, green "witch"[5] embodies a perfect example of a symbiotic posthumanism whose praxis and practice emanates from a deep-rooted bond with a living Earth (Murphy-Hiscock 2017; Sotelo 2022). Far from being simply a practice based on botanical and medicinal knowledge of trees, plants, herbs and the performing of seasonal rituals, "the green witch's practice revolves around working establishing and maintaining harmony within herself, within her community, and with nature" (Murphy-Hiscock 2017, 30). However, as it is well-known, the prevailing archetype of the "witch" within Judeo-Christian traditions and sexist practices is still being one in which she is portrayed as a malevolent and demonic woman in alliance with the evil and the most harmful forces in the natural world. Consequently, in general terms, the "witch" is unfairly perceived as a figure to be despised and feared.

In response, increasingly interrogating the patriarchally constructed and historically entrenched figure of the "witch" as a pernicious and malicious agent of the devil, a growing number of ecofeminist voices have significantly contributed to the reconfiguration of the "witch" as a historical marginalized figure deeply associated with nature, healing and pre-capitalist communal care (Sjöö & Mor 1991; Christ 1997; Federici 2004 [1998]; Ehrenreich & English 2010 [1973]). Hence, recovering

* The thematic line of this special issue was conceived in three international seminars organized by the guest editor in collaboration with the Research group GIECO on Ecocriticism and Environmental Humanities-Franklin Institute-UAH and the Institute of Feminist Research Instifem-UCM. The first seminar, titled "(Green) Witches, Social Media, and Climate Change: Posthuman Re-Story-ation Narratives in the Age of the Symbiocene," was held in Alcalá University on 15th November 2023. The two following seminars entitled "Utopian Eco-Witches, Climate Chaos, and Earth Repair: Posthuman Regeneration Narratives and the Non-Human as Allies in the Age of the Symbiocene," took place on 16th of December 2024 and 8th of March 2025, and both were held in Complutense University of Madrid.

** The guest editor of this special issue would like to deeply thank Juan Ignacio Oliva, editor-in-chief of the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, for trusting me with the coordination of this thematic collection. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Juan J. Ascanio Amigó, for his technical support.

[1] A term coined by Dutch biologist Paul Crutzen in 2000, the "Anthropocene" describes how human activity is having such a destructive impact on ecosystems that it is causing profound changes in the Earth's geological, atmospheric, and biological systems. Because of this negative human footprint, climate change, biodiversity loss, and other environmental transformations are currently being triggered on a global scale.

[2] Interrogating the colonial legacy of the "Anthropocene" framed in capitalist systems, the term "Capitalocene" is suggested to underscore that not all human populations are equally responsible for the current socio-ecological destruction of our planet (See Haraway 2015 & Moore 2016).

[3] See also Braidotti 2022 & Thomas 2022.

[4] See among many others, the foundational work of Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013); Stacy Alaimo's *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (2016); Donna J. Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016); or Francesca Ferrando's *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019).

[5] The term "witch" appears in quotation marks to highlight the need of the constant questioning of the term, unfairly associated with the demonic and malevolent.

her ancestral association with resilient, healing and regenerative practices in their communities as herbalists, healers, midwives, and mediators between the human and the more-than-human, little has been written, however, from an ecofeminist, ecocritical and posthuman perspective that examines the role of these "witches" as harmonizers in the face of socio-environmental unjustness, ecological destruction and as promotors of symbiotic relations (Sotelo 2025, 20). That is, despite a growing recognition of the green witches' reparative role, nonetheless it still remains a critical gap in ecofeminist revisionism and in an ecocritical literary analysis, concerning the potential of earth-based "witches" to address contemporary ecological and social crises healing the patriarchal neocolonial wounds of injustices and exploitations. In this vein, with the intention to fill in this fissure, the term "ecobruja-ecowitch" has been recently embraced in *Narrativas de resiliencia, regeneración y futuros posibles: Aproximación ecocrítica, ecofeminista e intercultural de la figura de las ecobrujas*[6] (Sotelo 2025) to make visible practices, knowledges, worldviews and cosmologies, both current and past, that align with a "witchcraft" rooted in the earth but that actively promotes (or has promoted) resilient, regenerative, and utopian imaginaries in the face of social and ecological devastation and repression (Sotelo 2025, 18-21). Resisting nihilistic despair, ecowitches are intrinsically utopian concurring with Albrecht that in these trying times, "we need to pay attention to both destructive and creative forces in our universe" (2019, 2); that is, not just acknowledging the terrors of apocalyptic scenarios but also the possibilities implied in times of collapses, degrowth (D' Alisa *et al.* 2015), and rewilding (Tafalla 2022). And for that, ecowitches know that we desperately need utopias. Utopias understood as visions of hope (Weik von Mossner 2017, 164-66), not just as the projection of perfect worlds but as the ability to imagine "something sustainable and just through the Anthropocene's despair and still finding hope" (Wagner and Wieland 2022, 1-2). Hence, this resilient, regenerating and utopian ecowitchcraft strongly differentiates itself from other types of witchcraft by always promoting the common good, by seeking harmony and peace among humans and non-humans, and by believing in the hopeful possibility of earth repair.

In this vein, the recent resignification of the "witch" into the restorative function of ecowitches illustrates how they embody key concepts in theory and practice within the field of ecocriticism, ecofeminism and posthumanism bringing together multispecies dialogues and collaborations that not only interrogate human exceptionalism, speciesism, and dominant andro-anthropocentrism, but also seek to rebalance the destructive effects of the Anthropocene, resist the colonial capitalist legacy of the Capitalocene, and promote new trans-corporeal ecological materialisms from symbiotic posthuman positions. As such, ecowitches revalue ancestral knowledge and practices historically associated with a demonized witchcraft[7]

[6] *Narratives of Resilience, Regeneration and Possible Futures. Ecocritical, Ecofeminist and Intercultural Approach to the figure of the Ecowitches* (own translation).

[7] A clear historical example that illustrates how ancestral earth-based practices were demonized by Judeo- Christian doctrine is the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hexenhammer, "the Hammer of the Witches") published in 1486 by the Dominican monks Heinrich Krammer & Jakob Sprenger. Two years prior,

under patriarchal and colonial systems, spotlighting their relevance to contemporary ecological transitions, sustainability efforts, and environmental stewardship.

To this regard, ecofeminism, with its long-standing critique of the intersections of sexism, colonial legacies and ecological degradation, offers a fertile framework for understanding the ecowitch. Drawing on thinkers such as i.e., Val Plumwood, Karen Warren, Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, Silvia Federici, Starhawk, and Alicia Puleo, ecofeminism has consistently insisted that the degradation of the earth is inseparable from the domination of women and the erasure of Indigenous and other subaltern epistemologies. The ecowitch, as a symbolic, symbiotic posthuman and politically committed figure, emerges from this ecofeminist legacy as an agent of 'earth repair' –a term that connotes not only ecological restoration but ontological and epistemic healing.

This special issue contributes to the emergent discourse by engaging with the evolving symbiotic orientation in ecocriticism, the figure of the ecowitch as a resilient and regenerative ecofeminist agent of planetary healing, and the role of symbiotic posthuman narratives in reimagining life beyond the human. It argues that the figure of the ecowitch –both real and fictional– is emblematic of the imaginative, ethical and epistemological reconfigurations demanded by a world in ecological precariousness and peril. Situated at the intersection of symbiosis, resistance, and repair, the ecofeminist ecowitch becomes not only a metaphor but an epistemic site of posthuman convergence, a visionary force in the Symbiocene, fostering ecological reparation and resisting systemic eco-social injustices. Through her alliance with the more than human, as it will be shown in the different contributions, the possibility of earth repair is not only envisioned –it is ritualized, storied and enacted.

Moreover, as it will be unearthed in the different sections, within literary, cultural studies and lyrical expressions, this shift towards posthuman narratives in the age of the symbiocene manifests in symbiotic logics –dynamic interplays among fungi, plants, trees, animals, minerals, humans, and ecological technologies. Furthermore, a symbiotic shift also implies a renewed attention to narrative forms that accentuate the agency of nonhuman life, decenter the western Cartesian humanist subject, and imagine ecological futures founded upon "the more than human kinship as a core element of world-building" (Rupprecht et al 2021, 5).

Grounded in animist epistemologies and spiritual activism, the figure of a literary utopian ecowitch challenges andro-anthropocentric systems through the power of storytelling. In contemporary terms, Xiana Sotelo's first article, underscoring an ecofeminist, ecocritical, and symbiotic posthumanist discourse, conceptualizes the literary ecowitch as a regenerative figure of ecological resistance in the recent *Bioluminescent*. A *Lunarpunk Anthology* (Norton-kertson 2023). Analyzing Starhawk's

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the Pope Innocent VIII issued the Papal Bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* stating that what they understood as "witchcraft" (that is, everything that was not Judeo-Christian premises or practices), was now considered the enemy of the holy order and therefore a crime, thus legitimizing the systematic persecution and slaughter of "witches."

and Brightflame's stories within this first Lunarpunk collection, Sotelo foregrounds speculative fiction's role in imagining sustainable, symbiotic posthuman futures. As such, the ecowitch emerges as a visionary agent of the Symbiocene, blending science, magic, and storytelling into a posthuman pharmacopeia for ecological restoration. Moreover, attempting to tracing the historical origins of the utopian ecowitch, the second article by Clara Contreras Ameduri focuses on XIX century women involved in the so-called Occult revival, exploring spiritualist communes as examples of proto-ecofeminist spaces fostering interspecies harmony. Contreras Ameduri examines the "Summerland" concept as foundational anti-hierarchical cosmologies and eco-utopian activism, rooted in spiritualism's Edenic ideals. Through interpretations of biblical Paradise, the movement articulated anti-speciesist and gynocentric visions, female leadership, vegetarianism, and agrarian self-sufficiency. These practices synthesize esoteric belied with anti-industrialist ideals, producing a distinctive utopian model of ecological and spiritual reform.

Similarly, establishing intercultural bridges in the evolution of the concept of the ecowitch and its utopian nature, special attention is placed on how earth-oriented knowledges represent examples of resilient and regenerative strategies, either social, ecological and spiritual that, when revisited in the present, offer inspiration for environmentally conscious ways of inhabiting The Earth. Accordingly, the third article by María Tremearne Rodríguez, compares W.B. Yeats's *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Iris Peasantry* (1888) and Alvaro's Cunqueiro's *Tertulia de boticas prodigiosas y escuela de curanderos* (1976) through ecocritical and ecofeminist lens. Tremearne Rodríguez interprets the figure of the Irish fairy doctor and the Galician meiga as mediators of botanical, spiritual, and sustainable knowledge, embodying ecological resilience and ancestral wisdom. Drawing on the concept of "poetics of breathing" (Marrero 2021), Symbiocene theory, and cultural studies, the analysis frames these narratives as green utopias resisting dystopian imaginaries. The study concludes that literary witches serve as symbolic agents for restoring human-Gaia relations and inspiring regenerative ecological practices to coexist harmoniously with the environment. Following a comparative standpoint, synthesizing literary, historical and scientific perspectives, Abraham Vila Penas' study underscores the profound cultural significance of plant-based witchcraft. It traces how botanical knowledge, once central to healing, became linked to accusations of sorcery in early modern Europe. The study connects Literature –rereadings ranging from canonical works such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth (1623)* to the more contemporary and popular such as *Harry Potter's saga* (Rowling 1998)– myths and folklore with science by addressing the pharmacological basis of traditional remedies.

Certainly, botanical and medicinal Indigenous knowledges, as an example of ecowitchcraft, have been honoring an interdependent communion with an animate Earth since memorial times. For all indigenous tribes, past and present, Earth is honored as both a place and an experience ensouled and filled with greater agency and intelligence at every level (Blackie 2018; Jmail and Rushworth 2022). As such, plants, trees, and animals are not only our relatives, teachers, and guides (Wall Kimmerer 2013, 7) but they can be our environmental allies in times of climate change and in the preservation and repair of biodiversity loss. Reclaiming therefore the magic and

wisdom of the natural world, Mercedes Pérez Agustín and José Manuel Correoso Rodenas focus on indigenous traditions in the North American continent. Seeking to enhance the deep ecological relationship between North American Native cultures and communities and the natural world, Mercedes Pérez Agustín explores indigenous animistic spirituality and worldview. Drawing on oral traditions, stories, ceremonies and rituals by the Iroquois, the Abenaki, the Tuscarora and the Lacandon (Maya) among others, it highlights extensive indigenous knowledge of grains, trees and plants and their multifaceted applications for physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. In doing so, Pérez Agustín critically interrogates the representations constructed by European perspectives challenging Eurocentric romanticization by presenting indigenous ecological practices as complex and adaptive systems within an integrated worldview that resists simplistic or idealized portrayals. Additionally, José Manuel Correoso Rodenas, examines the Haida indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest coast of North America, with traditional territories extending in Haida Gwaii in Canada and the southern half of Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska, in the United States. Correoso Rodenas scrutinizes Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaa's "Haida mangas" as hybrid narrative forms that blend visual and textual storytelling to recover Haida traditions. Central to these works is the shaman figure, reimagined as a mediator between the Haida's static cultural world and the dynamic forces of external change. The shaman embodies resistance against ecological and social destruction, deriving from ancestral spiritual knowledge. Correspondingly, the study explores how such transcendent characters enact cultural healing through the integration of Haida cosmology and the supernatural.

Resignifying the supernatural dimension of the "witch" through interdisciplinary lens, Marta Miquel Baldellou's article analyzes Jaume Balagueró's film *Venus* (2022) as a feminist, posthumanist adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's *The Dreams in the Witch House* (1933). While retaining elements of Lovecraftian cosmic horror, the film reconfigures the "witch" figure from a monstrous archetype into a symbol of feminist resistance within the so-called fourth-wave feminism. Using Gérard Genette's narratological categories, the analysis traces textual, metatextual, and hypertextual links between the two works. The adaptation illustrates the evolving cultural meaning of the "witch" as a site of empowerment against patriarchal oppression.

Moreover, revisiting patriarchal repression from a distinctive ecofeminist and animal studies standpoint, Rodrigo Vega Ochoa applies an ecocritical close reading of Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron" (1886) and Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary" (1922). Vega Ochoa draws attention to Jewett's narrative as an exploration of a young woman's moral choice between economic security and ecological integrity, affirming environmental values as central to personal identity. Moreover, in Mansfield's text, interspecies bonds are examined within the domestic sphere, questioning whether they reflect domination or mutual interdependence, despite its anthropocentric framing. Together, the stories reveal nuanced intersections of gender, environmental ethics, and human-nonhuman relationships.

In the Miscellanea section, Natalia Rodríguez Nieto explores how integrating New Woman studies and Motherhood studies provides a fresh lens for re-evaluating nineteenth-century Canadian literature. Rodriguez Nieto argues that such an

intersectional approach enables the recovery of marginalized writers and texts, foregrounding their innovative contributions. Focusing on Joanna Ellen Wood and her 1984 novel *The Untempered Wind,* the analysis reveals the ambivalent critical reception of her work despite contemporary acclaim, advocating for Wood's reintegration into the Canadian literary cannon.

The Creative section includes poems that resonate with ecowitches, ecofeminism and symbiotic posthuman hearts by compassing movements from pain to empowerment, bearing witness to the resilience of women who refuse silence. Thus, the first collection titled *Threaded* by Nadia Falah Ahmad includes twelve poems which explore identity, exile, and inherited trauma through the lens of Palestinian womanhood and intergenerational memory. Weaving personal and historical narratives, the collection resists erasure through recurring motifs of fire, thread, and voice. The next piece named *Overflow* by Paloma Sebastián Quevedo, is composed of three poems and it seeks to connect the identities of gender and place through which a woman may feel close to the natural world while coming to terms with a common patriarchal oppressor. Each poem focuses on identity, giving greater importance to different elements: the experience of nature, finding oneself in the natural world, and the experience of gender. Additionally, the last two poems of this section capture the magnificence and transcendence of nature and the forces of the universe. As such, the poem "Ode to the Sun" by Eliz Ebazer portrays the sun as more than just a star. It becomes a vital source of energy, joy, and companionship. Through personification, it is depicted as a friend who brightens each day and transforms moments of sadness into hope. To conclude, "The Beating Sea" by Sara Alcaide Delgado, provides a lyrical description of a picture in which the frame shows a full moon over the sea. A prominent concluding image of the moon, understood as a symbol of the womb of stillness, silence and introspection that becomes a cradle of becoming, holding the first spark of all that is yet to emerge. A moon that illuminates these poems in coalition with the ecowitches resilient and regenerative worldviews, fostering utopian imaginaries that dare to challenge and confront socio-environmental injustices, ecocides and genocides (as the one currently undergoing in Palestine which all the contributors of this issue strongly oppose), and advocating for alternative futures rooted in care for the earth and all its peoples.

Finally, there can be found two reviews about Renée M. Silverman and Esther Sánchez-Pardo González's mid-twentieth century women nomadic travelling between Spain and the Americas, by Antonio Jiménez Hernando, in the first place, and the annotated translation of Antonio Ballesteros' and Beatriz González's *A Journal of the Plague Year* written in the eighteenth century by Daniel Defoe, by Raúl Montero Gilete, in the second.

Subsequently, as the different contributions demonstrate, symbiotic posthuman expressions –whether literary and cultural, speculative fiction, Indigenous ancestral knowledge or poetical visions– explore narrative strategies from a regenerative imagination that allows us to visualize symbiotic pasts and futures by refusing andro-anthropocentric subjects in favor of inner healing and multispecies kinship. In doing so, they align with the ecowitch not only as a figure of ecofeminist critique but as a guide toward relational flourishing. She reminds us that earth repair is not

only necessary, but it is already underway –in gardens and stories, in rituals and resistances, wherever life insists on connection, care, and collective becoming. As a result, the symbiotic posthumanism elaborated in this monograph is presented not as a destination but a process –that is, becoming-with, rather than becoming-other.

Ultimately, the urgent need for ecological reparation demands more than technological innovation or policy reform. It requires a transformation of worldview –a shift from extraction to care, from domination to reciprocity, from human exceptionalism to multispecies justice. The symbiotic turn in ecocriticism, exemplified in the emergence of a symbiotic posthumanism, offers a critical and creative vocabulary for this transformation. In tandem, the figure of the ecowitch reclaims marginalized ways of knowing and being, offering both resistance and restoration in the face of planetary crises.

In this spirit, the contributions of this special issue center ecofeminist figures-ecowitches, fairy doctors, meigas, shamans, healers, forest-dwellers, bird lovers and strong empowered women –whose symbiotic alliances enact ethical alternatives to systematic oppressions and compulsive and polluting uprooting. In these worlds, healing is neither a metaphor nor abstraction; it is a concrete, embodied, and shared process. The world is layered. The soil is not a background, but a co-agent. Trees, plants and animals communicate, and they are our renovation allies. Stones remember and vibrate. The sun is our friend. Most importantly, these posthuman narratives, either from speculative logics or relational poetics, open up imaginative spaces for what the Symbiocene demands: not a return to a mythic past, but a deep and radical reconfiguration of how we live, think, and tell stories of interconnectivity and earth repair together.

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ARTICLES

LITERARY ECOWITCHES IN THE SYMBIOCENE: HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE EARTH AND ITS PEOPLES THROUGH LUNARPUNK POSTHUMAN RE-STORY-ATION NARRATIVES

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Abstract

This article explores the contemporary literary ecowitch as a transformative figure within ecofeminist, ecocritical, and posthumanist thought. Grounded in ecofeminist revisionism and ecospiritual animist movements, the ecowitch (Sotelo 2025) is portrayed as a symbol of ecological resistance and healing that challenges dominant androanthropocentric worldviews through multispecies collaboration. The article analyses two stories from the new *Lunarpunk Anthology* (Norton-Kertson 2023) –to highlight storytelling as a form of magical activism. These narratives demonstrate speculative fiction's capacity to imagine symbiotic, posthuman possible futures. Ultimately, the literary ecowitch becomes a visionary force in the Symbiocene (Albrecht 2019), fostering ecological reparation and resisting systemic eco-social injustices.

Keywords: Literary Ecowitches, Lunarpunk, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Symbiotic Posthumanism, Re-story-ation.

ECOBRUJAS LITERARIAS EN EL SIMBIOCENO:
SANANDO LAS HERIDAS DE LA TIERRA Y SUS PUEBLOS A TRAVÉS DE NARRATIVAS POSHUMANAS LUNARPUNK DE RE-HISTORIA-CIÓN

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la figura de la ecobruja literaria contemporánea como un agente regenerativo y crítico en el contexto de los marcos ecofeministas, ecocríticos y poshumanistas. Arraigada en el revisionismo histórico ecofeminista y en movimientos ecoespirituales animistas, la ecobruja (Sotelo 2025) se reivindica como símbolo de resistencia, sanación y sabiduría ecológica que cuestiona paradigmas androantropocéntricos mediante colaboración multiespecies. Se analizarán dos relatos de la nueva *Antología Lunarpunk* (Norton-Kertson 2023), donde la ficción especulativa actúa como activismo mágico y propone imaginarios utópicos de restauración planetaria. Así, la ecobruja emerge como figura visionaria del Simbioceno (Albrecht 2019), promoviendo la reparación ecológica y resistiendo las injusticias eco sociales sistémicas.

Palabras clave: ecobrujas literarias, lunarpunk, ecocrítica, ecofeminismo, poshumanismo simbiótico, re-historia-ción.

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1. INTRODUCTION[1]

In recent years there has been an increase of (eco)feminist and ecocritical scholarship that challenges the historically entrenched and patriarchally constructed figure of the "witch" as a malevolent and demonic agent. Indeed, a solid body of feminist historical revisionism (Christ 1997; Cook 2007; Daly 1978, Federici 2012; Murry 1921; Sjöö and Mor 1997; Starhawk 1979), objectively argues that characterizations of witches as evil creatures do lack factual basis. What is more, they are unearthing a very perverse but prevalent patriarchal strategy: demonizing independent, powerful and revered women as horrendous "witches" who must be annihilated for the common good, as a very successful instrument of patriarchal control and systemic misogyny. In this line, one of the main contributions of ecofeminist thinkers is to reinterpret the "witch" as a historically marginalized figure intimately connected to Nature, healing, and community care. Far from being sinister, these women –herbalists, midwives, and custodians of ecological knowledge were crucial for the well-being and survival of their communities (Federici 2004; Ehrenreich & English 2010[1973], Sotelo 2022), both human and non-human, since they embodied a holistic and animistic worldview rooted in collaboration and respect for the more-than-human world (Blackie 2018, 14). An animistic world perceived as "a cosmos in which theoretically everything is alive and communicating and potentially possesses the qualities of being "a person" or, at the very least, an agent of some kind" (Braidotti & Hlavajova 2018, 39). Acknowledging multispecies agencies and trying to heal the wounds of such a historical injustice, many modern self-identified witches are reclaiming with pride an ancestral heritage through practices that can be labeled as 'green witchcraft' which emphasizes territorial rootedness, embodied knowledge, and collective wellbeing (Murphy-Hiscock 2017, 23; Sotelo 2022, 10).

Nevertheless, despite a growing recognition of their role as mediators and healers, there still remains a critical gap in ecofeminist revisionism and in an ecocritical Earth-centered literary analysis, concerning the potential of earth-based witches to address contemporary ecological and social crises healing the patriarchal neocolonial wounds of the earth and its peoples. Trying to bridge this gap, the term "ecobruja-ecowitch" has been recently proposed as a figure that not only reclaims historically marginalized knowledges and practices associated with women, Nature, and ancestral indigenous wisdom, but it also embodies a critical, regenerative response to the socioecological crises of the past and contemporary worlds (Sotelo 2025, 21-23). Framed thus within an ecofeminist tradition, the "ecowitch" emerges as a radical, intersectional agent of healing, resistance, and transformation, deeply

[1] The authoress wishes to acknowledge the funding provided by the Ministry of Universities and the European Union –NextGenerationEU within the framework of a postdoctoral contract for the requalification of university teaching staff during the 2022-2023 academic year in the Research Group GIECO-Franklin I.-UAH, which enabled a specialization on ecocriticism, ecofeminism and posthuman approaches.

attuned to the interdependencies between human and more-than-human life. Furthermore, embodying ethical ecocritical positions in defense of all living beings (31) ecowitches are positioned against the backdrop of the Anthropocene, a term coined by Paul Crutzen[2] that marks the geological and existential rupture caused by anthropogenic environmental degradation (Braidotti & Hlavajova 2018, 1)[3]. To this regard, ecowitches, argues Sotelo, perform a reparative function (2025, 20-21). That is, they act as harmonizers that work across cultural, ecological, and symbolic registers to counteract the fragmentations produced by andro-anthropocentrism (Puleo 2019, 46), extractivism (Machado Aráoz 2013), colonial legacies and capitalist patriarchy. To these means, ecowitches also align with contemporary critical theories within the field of ecocriticism, an earth-centered approach in Literary and Cultural studies, such as a critical posthumanism,[4] in its attempt at "deconstructing discourses and concepts (like, for example, the Anthropocene) that reify and reproduce, unwittingly or not, Enlightenment conceptions of a universal humanity" (Tan & Altaç 2024, 4). In this vein, by de-centering the human (Wolf 2010, xv) through spiritual activism (Norton-Kerston 2024), animist epistemologies, and embodied ecological knowledge, ecowitches actively participate in the current posthuman conceptual and material construction of the "Symbiocene" (Albrecht 2019, 102) –a proposed post-Anthropocene epoch characterized by ecological symbiosis, multispecies coexistence, and systemic balance.

To this regard, the ecowitch is not merely a symbolic figure but a visionary and utopian practitioner of interspecies solidarity and a conscious "inhabitant of a landscape of trans-corporeality, where people and place are substantially interconnected" (Alaimo 2010, 68). In this interconnectivity, ecowitches look through a symbiotic lens and enact a *Symbiotic Posthumanism* (Karpouzou & Zampaki 2023), a new kind of posthumanism that accounts for the ecological and its symbiotic nature. As posthumanists, grounded on a tradition that honors the legacy of the "green witch" practice, ecowitches nonetheless take a politically committed step further to creatively feel-think the planet in the fight against climate change by advocating for a symbiotic "wood.wide.of life" (Simard 2016, 249) in which life itself is appreciated as "the result of cooperation and not competition, dependency and not isolation, co-survival rather than autonomous existence" (Nayar 2023, 8).

Drawing therefore on previous research on the re-signified figure of the "witch" through the term "ecobruja-ecowitch" (Sotelo 2025) the main objective of this paper is to expand on the regenerative role that ecowitches are exercising in the

[2] The Anthropocene, a new phase in Earth's history triggered by human action, was coined by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000 and can be considered one of the most influential concepts in Ecocriticism and Environmental Humanities during the last decade (Moore 2016, 2).

[3] Nuanced as the Capitalocene (Moore 2016) to highlight its capitalist exploitation and colonial legacy.

[4] See for example pioneering works such as Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet* (2008) & *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulhucene* (2016); Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013); or T. Morton's *Humankind: Solidarity with non-human people* (2017).

here and now through literary platforms, by underscoring the power of storytelling to creatively resist and make progress toward a world of greater justice. Stories shape our imagination and our ideas of the possible (James & Morel 2020). Thus, in the examples of literary intellectual ecowitches that will be presented, writing and teaching are the specific expressions in which their magical activism channels the power of storytelling to help us envision a positive future and inspire people to take some action. In particular, two literary works from the new Lunarpunk Anthology *Bioluminescent* (Norton-Kerston 2023) will be approached as symbiotic posthuman narratives of self-identified witches. On the one hand, it will be analyzed a short story by Starhawk called "The Timid Librarian," and on the other hand, a story by Brightflame titled "When the web went down."

With a particular focus on resilient and utopian[5] imaginaries of possible futures, these literary ecowitches will be examined as promoters of posthuman re-story-ation narratives aimed at healing the wounds of the earth and its peoples through a kind of pharmacopeia in which, as Robin Wall Kimmerer reflects in *Braiding the Sweetgrass,* "the interweaving of science, sacred transcendent vision, and storytelling –old and new– can be explored as a kind of medicine for our broken relationship with the Earth" (2013, x).

As will be explained, their secret ingredient will be to stir in a little magic –the art of shaping and shifting consciousness, of connecting with the deep creative energies of nature, bending time and opening awareness. Magic that is understood as "life-enhancing" (Palin 2013, 437) and it "is not illusion, nor is it the artificial manipulation of unnatural forces, (...) but it is about realizing that we can change the world, often with our thoughts" (Murphy- Hiscock 2017, 24) our words and our stories.

2. LITERARY ECOWITCHES REIMAGINING AN EARTH COMMUNITY IN THE SYMBIOCENE

Building upon the definition of ecowitches in "De 'brujas' verdes a ecobrujas: revisión ecocrítica y ecofeminista de la figura de las 'brujas' en tiempos de injusticias, colapso ecológico y regeneración"[6] (Sotelo 2025), the concept of "ecobruja-ecowitch" and "eco-witchcraft" is articulated as a framework that illuminates earth-centered practices, epistemologies, and ontologies historically linked to so-called green witchcraft, yet reimagined to actively foster resilience, regeneration, and transformative utopian visions in response to ecological and sociopolitical injustices

[5] By "utopian" this research refers to visions of hope (Weik von Mossner 2017, 164-66), not just as the projection of perfect worlds but as the ability to imagine "something sustainable and just through the Anthropocene's despair and still finding hope" (Wagner and Wieland 2022, 1-2).

[6] My translation: "From green 'witches' to eco-witches: an ecocritical and ecofeminist review of the figure of 'witches' in times of injustice, ecological collapse, and regeneration."

(20-21). In the same vein, highlighting a commitment to the "ethics of the Green Witch Path" (15), Murphy-Hiscock explains:

> If you love and respect the world around you, you will not abuse it. The more empathy and sympathy you have for your surroundings, the better you will treat them. This is tied in to the basic Golden Rule found in several religions. It's ethical reciprocity: if you treat those around you with courtesy, they will extend the same to you. What you put out into the world returns to you, and that goes for thoughts, acts, and energy. (16)

A strong ethical positioning of love and respect for the interconnectedness of life that ecowitches share with green witchcraft, along with a common historical ancestral lineage of "spell weavers, diviners and fortune tellers, healers and herbalists, workers of magic and brewers of potions" (Green 2001, x). However, underscoring a strong political commitment to responding to contemporary (or past) crises of climate collapse and systemic oppression, ecowitchcraft is introduced as an evolution of green witchcraft into a distinctly ecofeminist and ecocritical praxis. As ecofeminists, ecowitches understand that the same patriarchal force that oppresses women is the same one that exploits nature and the non-human world and therefore, that there is a close relationship between a disenchanted world, the imposition of a patriarchal mentality, a colonial capitalist system, and ecological destruction and pollution. "A disenchanted world is a desecrated world," Sarah Lyons and Rebecca Mitchell remind us in *Revolutionary Witchcraft: A Guide into Magical*, "a world where what our pre-capitalist ancestors recognized as sacred are now considered raw materials/profits" (2019, 164-165). This paradigm shift brought about by the scientific revolution and, in particular, by Cartesian mechanistic philosophy (Merchant 1983), it is precisely the one which ecowitches have been resisting from symbiotic posthumanist positions since ancestral times by actively challenging human exceptionalism, andro-anthropocentrism, specism and the destructive logics of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene (Sotelo 2022, 2025) Hence, the practice of an ecowitch arises from a deep, "spiritual commitment to the earth, to healing, and to the linking of magic with political action" (Starhawk 1979, 8) through activist witchcraft. A "witchcraft activism" that is earth- centered and "inherently political" (Salisbury 2019,1) and where transcendence and the physical energy-materiality go hand in hand to create effective social and environmental change.

In the act of not just honoring the Earth but standing up to defend it, antecedents of ecowitches can be found in long-time communities in the US, such as the well-known Tradition of Reclaiming witches[7], where self-identified modern witches have "taken part in marches, rallies, meeting disruptions, and other forms of street activism (...) against a local pipeline as well as against international fracked gas and oil infrastructure and for divestment of fossils" (Moon 2023, 60). As Irisanya Moon recalls in *Honoring the Wild,* "I've worked between the worlds with Starhawk,

[7] https://reclaimingcollective.wordpress.com/reclaiming-tradition-witchcraft/.

Laurie Lovekraft, and other pagans to create change via magical activism: scrubbing or burning away roots of injustice, fostering new growth of justice and liberation, working with nonhuman Allies" (60). In their alliance and collaboration with the more-than-human world, nonetheless, even though previous research on green witches and ecowitches (Murphy-Hiscock 2017; Sotelo 2022, 2025) illustrates how it can be claimed that they embody critical posthumanist values and that they potentially function as ecocritical and ecofeminist agents of ecological harmony within the broader current theoretical framework of the Symbiocene (Albrecht 2019, 158-160), this analysis stresses the particular transformative role of literary ecowitches through posthuman storytelling in times of climate change, earth repair and harmonizing the Anthropocene.

Through their writings, resilient and utopian imaginaries for planetary healing will be examined reflecting a transition from the description of ecological damage (Anthropocene), to naming its systemic capitalist roots (Capitalocene) to envisioning a symbiotic (Symbiocene) post-andro-anthropocentric, sustainable, inclusive and relational paradigm for life on Earth. That is, a critical evolution in ecological thought from diagnosis to critique and later to reimagination.

And it is precisely in this process of reimagination and sympoiesis (co-creation) where literary ecowitches such as Starhawk and Brightflame are articulating posthuman imaginaries that heal the effects of the Anthropocene, harmonize the Capitalocene and promote a Symbiocene through a resilient and regenerative vision for an *Earth community*, a term that Thomas Berry,[8] a pioneering cultural historian, spiritual ecologist and eco-theologian, first created to indicate our shared sense of belonging to something greater, humans and nature in continuity (1988, xiv). In this continuity, symbiotic posthuman positions allow Nature to become a kind of "primary text" (Berry 1988, 123) in which its own agency is revealed in the very process of storytelling.

In the following examples of literary ecowitches, Starhawk a witch, writer, director of Earth Activist.org[9] and permaculture instructor (Norton-Kertson 2023, 224), and Brightflame, a witch that is a tree-talker and a writer (225), they will use the particular venue of Lunarpunk to exercise their magical activism through a symbiotic posthuman storytelling aimed at healing the wounds of the Earth and its peoples.

[8] Thomas Berry (1914-2009) was a historian of world religions and one of the first voices to awaken moral sensitivity to the environmental crisis. He is known for articulating a "new history" of the universe that explores the implications of evolutionary science and cultural traditions for creating a flourishing future.

[9] https://earthactivisttraining.org/.

3. POSTHUMAN RE-STORY-ATION NARRATIVES IN THE NEW ANTHOLOGY OF LUNARPUNK

When interrogating what are the literary imaginaries (both fiction and nonfiction) that ecowitches are currently articulating to combat climate change in this new Symbiocene era, two great examples (one by Starhawk and another by Brightflame) are found in the recent publication of the first Lunar Punk anthology *Bioluminescent* (2023).

Providing a brief genealogy, Solarpunk fiction firstly originated in the late 2000s[10] rooted in Science Fiction (Dincher 2017, 7-8), but with the particular standpoint of a punk[11] spirit centered on the value of creative rebellion (Norton-Kertson 2024, 8-9). As such, it uses "radical hope as fuel for creative disruption in the service of a better future" (11) and it sets collective imaginations in motion towards green futures based on renewable energy and a DIY aesthetics (Wagner & Wieland 2022). It is an artistic, aesthetic, literary, and political movement founded on ecology, decentralization, non-hierarchy, community and mutual aid, individual liberty, liberatory technology, diversity, (eco)feminism, and the merging of art, science, and politics (Rupprecht et al., 2021; Ulibarri 2018, 2020). Underscoring thus Greentech, renewable energy and social cooperation, it asks the questions: how would sustainable, inclusive, multispecies and compassionate societies look like? And how do we get there?

Counter-narrating dystopias are driven by a radical hope which dares to envision societies able to overcome the challenges of a changing climate and to achieve sustainability, egalitarianism and social justice (Wagner & Wieland 2017). Although often considered a subgenre within science fiction, as current global catastrophic events rapidly unfold, it will be approached as speculative fiction as many of the impacts of climate change are no longer futuristic. In this regard, "SolarPunk is a wonderful example of speculative fiction (...) with a hopeful, utopian tone" (Norton-Kertson 2024, 8) that puts environmental issues at the very center of imaginary futures. As a result, it has emerged as an increasingly popular genre within the theoretical framework of ecocriticism and environmental humanities (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996; Oppermann & Iovino 2017) in its conscious articulation of ethical narratives that confront our current globalized and neocolonial context of ecocide and progressive mass extinction of species and ecosystems (Higgins 2015, 11). Undertaking a new creative revolution in thought, these posthuman subjects are optimistically envisioning a world of post-climate change, where "hope is more than a driving factor (...), it's the very heart" of possible futures (Arseneault & Pierson

[10] First coined in an article called "From Steampunk to Solapunk" posted on the blog entitled The republic of bees: https://republicofthebees.wordpress.com/2008/05/27/from-steampunk-to-solarpunk/.

[11] The rebuilding idea is where the 'punk' in Solarpunk comes in while punk subgenres of literature are born out of the same general punk movement that began in the 1970s in Britain, they have also grown into their own unique phenomenon" (Norton-Kertson 2024, 8-9).

2015). A defiant hope that is projected through literary imaginaries into technologies that range from "solar panels to 3D printing, vertical farming to permaculture, (...) into a world where humanity has overcome eco-disasters, mega corporations, and dystopian governments (...) and inequalities have flattened" (Arseneault & Pierson 2015). As Justine Norton-Kertson[12] further elaborates:

> Solarpunk stories are about futures where humanity seeks to live in harmony with nature. They're tales where we've either solved or are in the process of working together to creatively and optimistically adapt to climate change. Stories in the genre are about social justice and equality, Indigenous sovereignty and leadership, antiauthoritarianism, and ending the system of capitalist, western, white, cis-male-hetero supremacy. (2024, 8)

Seeking to live in harmony with both nature and technology, rather than in conflict in a development that can be characterised from ecological technology to ecological spirtuality, Solarpunk imaginaries have taken a step further to reconnect with the Earth's unseen roots and connective webs of life. As such, LunarPunk has been recently born as its new subgenre through a new anthology called *Bioluminescent. A Lunarpunk Anthology*, edited by Justine Norton-Kertson and published by Android Press in January 2023. In the exploration of this new emerging subgenre of Lunarpunk, this pioneering anthology presents twenty one stories and poems that blend ecological consciousness with spiritual and fantastical elements including well-known (Solarpunk) writers such as Starhawk, Wendy N. Wagner, Sarena Ulibarri, and BrightFlame.

As the first science fiction and fantasy anthology of its kind, in its analogous relationship with solarpunk it can be claimed to expand on its creative rebellion not just against the fossil fuel industry and the idea that a climate apocalypse is inevitable, but mostly, a literary and cultural reaction against a status quo based on despair and defeat (Ulibarri 2018, 2020). As it will be argued, it complements a Solarpunk rebellion through a Lunarpunk resistance in which genuinely inclusive and diverse communities, powered by renewable energy, do not only look to the sun but to the moon and to the earth, that is, not just solar-wind panels turbines but the energy of natural forces and the grids of vibrations that stem from life beneath our feet. As a result, it explores the poetic imagination of the 'wood.web. of life' as astonishing networks of support that connect all vegetable and animal life (Trewavas 2016; Wohlleben 2015). Indeed, in its emphasis on the "vegetable turn" it emphatically incorporates indigenous wisdom and a cosmovision in which non-human animals and plants and trees are seen as akin, that is, as non-human family members as much as teachers and allies (Wall Kimmerer 2013). Moreover, exploring glowing lights in plants and ocean creatures, the word "bioluminescence" reminds us of the existence of a dark and glowing aesthetic "in the spectrum of darkness

[12] Co-editor in chief of Solarpunk Magazine entitled *Demand Utopia*: https://solarpunk-magazine.com/editorial-team/.

and light, of introspection and hope" (Norton-Kertson 2023, 82) that might come from naturally occurring glowing plants or plankton or be created in labs through genetic modification or other methods. As editor Justine Norton-Kertson suggests, the glowing in the bioluminescence could also "be one of the side effects of a magic spell meant to inspire communities to tangible action around climate change in the process of building ecoutopias" (Norton-Kertson 2023, x).

3.1. "The timid librarian": Communal Resilience Through Symbiotic Posthuman Agencies and Fluid Identities

Within the Lunarpunk anthology *Bioluminescent,* in "The Timid Librarian," Starhawk presents a narrative that blends ecological spirituality, fluid identities and introspective transformation in line with communal resilience –hallmarks of the emerging Lunarpunk subgenre. The story follows a quiet and seemingly inconsequential librarian and tailor named Sorrel through an intense love story set in a post-apocalyptic, post-capitalist world (Starhawk 2023,17) which foregrounds ecological technology along with symbiotic interdependence with the more-than-human world, especially with the vegetable realm and their wise trees that are considered akin to humans. Humans live now in societies that are inclusive, diverse and multispecies in "redwood" forests, and have reconnected again with the ancestral rhymes of nature and its wheel of the year. As the story unfolds, this reconnection is more than the celebration of solstices and equinoxes in search of an ecological balance that has been disrupted by climate change. It will incarnate seasonal fluidity and continuity in their own flesh and bodies.

The story begins with Sorrel immersed in custom preparations for the celebration of the "Grand opening of Lammas Fair (...) before the summer solstice, when dancers in bright plumage whirled about under the redwoods, and Sorrel was kept busy draping robes and sewing crowns" (Starhawk 2023,16). This year's theme is the 'Fourth of July and Liberty' and Sorrel, carefully customizing the festival clothes for the community members, plays a pivotal role in catalyzing social and ecological healing within her community of 'Furies,' a short name for "Forest Clan of Religious Order of regenerators" (17). As regenerators, Furies are in the lookout for invasive species, removing fits that threat to overtop the oaks, and do "their best to restore ancient art cultural burnings that indigenous folk had practiced for more than ten thousand years!" (18). And it is choosing a custom for the Gala when Sorrel meets Cedar, one of the most popular and handsome of the "Furies celebrities" (21). Physically opposite, Cedar being "tall, slender and with a natural grace" (23) and Sorrel described as "short, timid and shy" (24) an unlikable match turns into a passionate desire and love as Cedar realizes that "True, (...) her body lacked grace, but she was so talented" (24). It is in the cyclical move from the Summer Solstice to Fall equinox where their intense romance unfolds in ecological attunement with the vegetable world. As summer solstice symbolizes a time of "bounty and abundance (...) pure vitality. The Earth delights in a full expression of life" (Cook & Roux 2023, 49), so does their love. As one of the most skillful tree-jumpers, Cedar pursues Sorrel to rise to the skies.

No longer perceived as mere resources, the non-human are seen as akin and family members. Indeed, one of the most cherished is "Antie Marple" (Starhawk 2023, 19), which represents how trees are not mere individuals but rather members of a supportive and interconnected society, within the "wood wide web." Furthermore, validating indigenous knowledge, trees are also approached in terms of magic. For millennia, trees have been revered as wise beings, keepers of ancient knowledge and guardians of the natural world. Each species of tree carries its own energy, wisdom, and unique magical properties. For instance, the mighty Oak, revered for its strength and endurance, can offer protection and grounding. The graceful Willow, with its flowing branches, is associated with intuition and emotional healing. By forging a connection with these arboreal spirits, a door to a world of magic and wisdom can be opened, where humans can seek guidance, healing, and enlightenment. A vision of an animate earth that Starhawk honors as an ecowitch through a symbiotic storytelling that celebrates what Thomas Berry described in *The Great Work. Our Way into the Future* as the great law of Nature, "a transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner" (1999, 20). What is more, deeply rooted in ecofeminist philosophy articulated in her ground-breaking work *The Spiral Dance* (first published in 1979), Starhawk shares with Thomas Berry the confidence in the continuous revelation that unfolds in the cyclical rhymes of Nature and the universe in which *a story* is told in every star that shines in the sky and the shape and move and the sound of the earth as a living entity; in the sound of a bird, the shape of a bee, and the feel of the rain. Hence, working with trees as the protagonists of this story do, is a profound reminder that even in the seemingly simplest of beings, there are depths and breadths that we did not even know existed. We are simply limited by our own understanding of what it means to be sentient. Moreover, trees and the vegetal realm are a reminder that the Universe is constantly communicating with us through the whispers of the leaves, the crack of branches, the hum of insects in the air. They remind us that silence does not indicate a lack of intelligence, that strength is not only present in physical muscles and that wisdom does not only come from sources we already know. Recovering this natural wisdom is at the center of a process of posthuman re-story-ation in which the story of Nature and the deep mystery of existence are brought to human consciousness to treasure Nature's gifts and feel the pain of the earth as it suffers from its living energy being choked by industrial pollution. And although trees are incapable of producing complex narratives characterized by features such as focalization, representations of characters' consciousness, metalepsis, metanarration, and heteroglossia, they can nonetheless convey sequences of events through the patterns recorded in their tree rings. As Gagliano, Ryan, and Vieira elaborate in *The Language of Plants. Science, Philosophy, Literature*:

> tree rings tell a story of annual recording of events. ...and suggest that the very idea of narrative is not limited to human storytellers. Although human storytellers must interpret and can elaborate upon the events that trees record in their rings, tree rings are sites of narrativity that suggest that trees are capable of producing

> their own meanings. They are, in other words, examples of a material language at work –a plant language that can in turn inspire human language and new human imaginations. (2017, 266)

A material language in which trans-corporeality, where "the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (Alaimo 2010, 20), tells the story of Nature and humans transforming and rebirthing together through a "great Transformation (...) a Festival of world renewal" (Starhawk 2023, 34) in which the community of Furies embark as the Fall equinox is approaching. It is at this time of the year where their invocation of elements (fire, earth, water, fire) is channeled through a communal spiral dance (34). At this point, the protagonist questions: "would the perfect summer romance survive the change?" (33), since not only do seasonal cycles bring transformation but human bodies do too. That is, the feminine becomes masculine, and the masculine turns into feminine. And Sorrel, now a short, slim masculine body fears the tall and strong female body of Cedar will no longer feel attractive to their new queer trans-corporeality; a trans-corporeality driven by queerness that it can be claimed to destabilize binary hierarchies and challenge andro-anthropocentric paradigms through an animistic view of the "world in which all social and ontological boundaries are porous and can be crossed under specific circumstances, a world of becomings and metamorphoses, in which no entity precedes the sets of relations that bring it into being (Braidotti & Hjalava 2018, 39). A process of becoming in which trans-corporeality allows for the "recognition not just that everything is interconnected but that humans are the very stuff of the material, emergent world" (Alaimo 2010, 20).

In this context, the Furies can be approached as harmonizers in an Anthropocene/Capitalocene scenario that is adapting to a post-climate change, post-capitalist multispecies society while, at the same time, they embody posthuman symbionts able to enact forms of social justice by "magnifying the visibility of intersectional queer identities and experiences" (Sotelo *et al.* 2025, 271). Hence, "Surrendering form and identity to the Great Transformation" (Starhawk 2023, 35), Sorrel admits that s/he has been "an idiot" since s/he did not think Cedar could love now "a short little man who is too timid to keep up" with him (Starhawk 2023, 38). In the same way, we learn that Cedar was afraid that Sorrel "couldn't love a tomboy who was taller than" her (38).

Thus, projecting imaginaries in which "queerness is constitutive of all human beings," Starhawk creatively denounces "cisheterosexist classist whiteness as a historically imposed social and cultural norm' (Beacon et al. 2025, 2) while recovering Nature as a primary text that is queer at heart. As a result, it can be argued that trans-corporeality can be explored as a creative "theoretical site, (...) where corporeal theories, environmental theories", gender/feminist studies dialogue in imaginary ways (Alaimo 2010, 3). As Alaimo explains in *Bodily Natures*:

> the movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature necessitates rich, complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual. (2010, 3)

In these "entangled territories of material and discursive" Lunarpunk becomes a productive literary platform for the cultivation of regenerative lifeways, rewilded imaginaries, and collective resilience. A resilient queer community of Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies"[13] that favor "co- evolution, symbiosis, feedback and responses as determining conditions rather than autonomy, competition and self-contained isolation of the human" (Braidotti 2013, 81-89). Based on previous work of Elizabeth Grosz' s *Volatile Bodies*, Stacy Alaimo affirms "we need to understand the body, not as an organism or entity in itself, but as a system, or series of open-ended systems, functioning within other huge systems" (2020, 10). In this vein, queerness is envisioned as a key component of adaptation, evolution, and collective survival. As Albrecht claims in *Earth Emotions* (2019, 3) "Human life sits within larger patterns and rhythms" and "we are products of a larger system that had its own existence long before us" (2). Being part of this preceding life cycle system, reflects Sorrel as concluding thoughts, "maybe the Founder's true design" (Starhawk 2023, 45). As she clarifies:

> All the dress up and role playing and endless games of romance and all the stress of Transfiguration, the changing and adapting and playing new roles again – maybe all of that was meant to bring us to this moment when it all dissolves and we are just two beings together, remaining distinct while becoming one. (45)

As thus revealed in these ending realizations, the process in which 'I becomes we' lies upon "posthuman realizations in the Era of the Anthropocene" in which "we are the Earth; we are Everything (...) we are part of a planet" (Ferrando 2023, 9). An earth that is alive and where all "life is sacred and interconnected (...) through the earth's cycles of birth, growth, death, decay, and regeneration" (Starhawk 1979, 8).

As a conclusion, it can be claimed that "The Timid Librarian" envisions a regenerative future wherein collective healing, social justice and ecological stewardship are inseparable. The story embodies therefore the principles of spiritual activism and offers a utopian imaginary in which harmony with the more-than-human world is not only possible, but essential for collective survival. Through a combination of symbiotic trans-corporeality, ritual, and ecological knowledge, the story interrogates conventional notions of posthuman agencies and fluid identities. Furthermore, it underscores the value of ancestral knowledge and inner strength, through a process of story-a-tion that redraws the borders of climate conversation, using nature as a lens for exploring the most essential issues facing our planet, including social discrimination of queer identities. In doing so, Starhawk, as a literary ecowitch, amplifies the Lunarpunk ethos, which privileges emotional depth, liminal, and symbiotic relationships over technological dominance or Andro-anthropocentric hetero-normative individualism.

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[13] See also Braidotti's & Bignall's edition of *Posthuman Ecologies. Complexity and Process after Deleuze* (2019).

3.2. "All Are We": Symbiotic Posthumanism and Rhizomatic Resistance in Brightflame's "When the Web Went Down"

Continuing projecting literary imaginaries that offer an example of how the techno-logic of domination and extraction can be supplanted by symbiotic posthumanism, in "When the Web Went Down" Brightflame, an ecowitch that self-identifies as a 'tree-talker' (Norton-Kertson 2023, 225) explores human plant-connections in a post-digital, post-capitalist society. This society is called the Threads, emerging from the ruins of anthropocentric collapse, known as the 'Crumble'. Approached again as speculative fiction rather than Science fiction, the story tells how climate chaos was triggered by "infrastructure collapsed in the wake of worldwide power grid failure. Cyber-warfare annihilated all satellites (...). All communication was lost and millions died in the migrations that followed" (Brightflame 2023, 84). The roots of a past Anthropocene/Capitalocene are identified as the lack of "no resilience, disconnected from the land, divorced from non-human kin" (84) since people clustered in cities, all their "needs flown in, shipped in, driven to their doorsteps. Giant shops stocked with goods from all around the world. Cables and pipes carry energy and communication infrastructure, satellites beaming information all around the world" (83). Hence, it is against the backdrop of the Crumble that a new kind of posthuman subjectivity unfolds, no longer separate from or superior to the natural world. On the contrary, Tree-talkers as our protagonist, act as mediators between humans and the non-human world which is referred to as 'the Guardians'. In balance and communication with the non-human akin" (Brightflame 2023, 84), the narrator recounts:

> They say we rose with the sea. But really, we rose with mycorrhizae, like fruiting fungi popping up around the Guardians through an interconnected web that sustains us. My Ancestors fought for our communities, the Threads. They created tech in order to grow food underground, safe from extremes and mega storms. Now, nine generations past the Crumble, we have relaxed into balanced relationships with Earth akin and set former worries sailing. (80)

Expanding on Starhawk's reflection on queer ecologies and the fluidity of identities with 'Earth akin', Brightflame introduces queerness in language through the gender-neutral pronouns ze-zir for humans and non-human alike. Living now in rhythmic attunement with fungal networks and plant kin, the non-human Guardians are not only seen as allies but family members. As the protagonist explains when referring to the wise tree Bur Oak "Ze raised me as did my bio-mother" (Brightflame 2023, 84). However, one day, communication abruptly stops:

> Bur Oak spread zir arms wide and tall. I approach and lean my check against zir furrowed bark. Will you speak with me? (...) I sense zir life force, and open myenergy beyond my physical edges to click into connection with the Guardian (...). Nothing. (81)

The protagonist's temporary inability to communicate with the Guardian and the interrogations of "What's wrong with me? Why I cannot hear zir voice again?" (84), introduces a moment of ecological dissonance. It is not a loss of technological signal, but a rupture in relational harmony, underscoring the story's central premise: Communication is more than linguistic; it is vibrational, energetic, and embodied. It is so constitutive that, without communication, there is no certainty whether "Are we still we? (Brightflame 2023, 84). Hence, this last question exemplifies the intimate and symbiotic interconnectivity of the Threads with the more than human world. A 'we' in which the human and non-human entangle, and boundaries collapse, and the mycorrhizal web becomes a literal and symbolic infrastructure for this new world, offering an organic counterpoint to the shattered digital networks of the past.

As the story goes on, to find a solution, the council representative decides that a fungi-talker must be found to be able to communicate directly with mycorrhizae and discover the source of the lack of communication with the Guardians through trees. Once the protagonist finds the fungi-talker "ze shakes zir head and describing the (...) ecstasy of connection and Exchange" (98) excitedly relates stories "of zir mycorrhizal friends" (96). Echoing Donna Haraway's conception of 'tentacular thinking' in the 'Chthulucene' –a paradigm of becoming-with across species boundaries (Haraway 2016, 55)– the protagonist engages in interspecies communication not through mastery, but through relational openness: "They take me to places (...) in a bioluminescent web," the funghi-talker explains, "and I *know* things- I absorb information from them" (Brightflame 2023, 96). This is why the funghi-talker knows that communications with the Guardians have been disrupted due to the intrusion in the web of an "alien orange fungi who they cannot get through to" (95). We learn, nonetheless, that disruption is temporary, because albeit alien, "Orange is also akin" (95). In this vein, the experience of being-with fungi, mediated through a luminous, mycorrhizal network, models what Anna Tsing calls "contamination" as a condition of livable collaboration: a dynamic process by which "working across difference" ensures survival and mutual flourishing (2015, 32). Furthermore, this idea of alien as akin favors an indigenous-informed ethic of 'right relation.' In this vein, as Robin Wall Kimmerer affirms, to be in right relation with the land is to recognize the spiritual and material agency of all beings (2013, 65) –a worldview enacted in the story's repeated invocation of kinship: "Here and now, we live in balance among non-human akin" (Brightflame 2023, 84). This language of kinship –"Guardian," "myco-friends," "Orange is akin"– signals a shift from domination to communion, where even the most seemingly marginal forms of life (fungi, roots, bacteria) become central actors in ecological restoration. Additionally, both tree-talkers and fungi-talkers can be approached as posthuman bridges –not merely between human and fungi and trees, but between technology and ritual, queer futurity and earth-based spirituality. Indeed, reconnection is achieved not through force but through observation, patience, and reverence: "Let us observe the land and its interactions", as the elderly of the Threads advice (Brightflame 2023, 84). This speaks to the Lunarpunk valorization of 'rhizomatic resistance' –slowness, intuition, and cyclical time as subversive acts to reclaim interconnectivity and solidarity with the more than human people (Morton 2017).

Consequently, Brightflame's "When the Web Went Down," not only imagines a post-capitalist, symbiocenic future, but it also queers our very conception of nature by dissolving rigid binaries –between human and nonhuman, masculine and feminine, technological and organic. The consistent use of the gender-neutral pronoun 'zir' in reference to both trees (the Guardians) and humans is not merely a linguistic innovation but an ontological statement that affirms the queerness of the natural world itself. In doing so, the narrative aligns with 'queer ecocriticism', which resists heteronormative and binary taxonomies of nature by emphasizing multiplicity, fluidity, and relationality (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson 2010). The use of "zir" to refer to a Bur Oak –"Bur Oak spread zir arms wide and tall" (Brightflame 2023, 81)– is emblematic of this queering of nature, acknowledging the tree's sentience, agency, and non-binary existence. Thus, in a queer ecological framework, the plant and fungal worlds exemplify non-normative life systems in which mycorrhizal networks defy linear hierarchies, and plants, as Emanuele Coccia asserts, "live without killing, in a non-hostile premise," existing outside of predatory models of masculinity or dominance (Coccia 2018, 220). Furthermore, the fluid, non-anthropocentric forms of reproduction, communication, and symbiosis in the fungal and plant kingdoms mirror and validate queer and trans modes of being. Thus, the use of gender-fluid pronouns in this story is not merely inclusive but deeply ecological –it reflects a worldview in which identity, like ecology, is dynamic, entangled, and resistant to essentialism. This linguistic queering becomes a vital tool in resisting not only gender binaries but also the binary logic of extraction versus preservation, progress versus decay, and human versus nature –thereby offering a radically inclusive vision of ecological kinship. To this regard, Brightflame's speculative society exemplifies what Thomas Berry terms an "intimate Earth community," where humans finally learn to "listen to the various creatures of Earth, each telling its own story" (1988, xiv). The story is, in this sense, an act of "re-story-ation," a term that Robin Wall Kimmerer uses to describe the healing power of narratives to regenerate cultural and ecological memory (2013, preface).

At the end of the story, by gathering at the base of the Guardian "for storytelling, for celebration, for rituals of life" (Brightflame 2023, 99), the Threads enact a collective posthumanist symbiotic re-membering in the realization that "All are We" (99). In this recognition, it can be claimed that a revolution of thought is fungal and plant-based driven, and as such, it is rhizomatic. Indeed, through this rhizomatic imagination, Brighflame becomes another brilliant example of a literary ecowitch re-weaving the web of life through storytelling.

4. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, framed within the lunarpunk ethos of cyclical, lunar-based time and trans-corporeal collaboration and resistance, Starhawk's and Brightflame's narratives are not merely post-apocalyptic but symbiocenic –a vision of thriving through entangled interdependence between humans and nonhuman agents, natural cycles and a re-storied Earth community. In this line, this research examines

these contemporary witches, Starhawk and Brightflame, as examples of literary ecowitches currently promoting narratives of resilience, regeneration, social justice and multispecies futures through the power of storytelling.

Unlike general representations of "green," or nature-based witchcraft, the vision of a literary ecowitch in these texts is explicitly political –grounded in a renewed *ecological knowledge*, ethics of care and relationality that dismantle paradigms of exploitation, human exceptionalism, and patriarchal heteronormative masteries. Thus, the stories analysed challenge andro-anthropocentric frameworks by embodying symbiotic *posthuman subjectivities* and advocating *fluid, relational ontologies* that speak to a world in which biodiversity is not only celebrated, but fundamentally queer –fluid, expansive, and interdependent. Moreover, these narratives present a *fluid ecology of becoming* in which collective survival is contingent upon reimagining identity, kinship, and agency beyond anthropocentric confines.

As examined, through posthuman imaginaries within this new subgenre of Lunarpunk, in literary terms, it can be claimed that ecowitches serve as harmonizers of dystopian landscapes, weaving regenerative imaginaries through ritual, community care, and environmental stewardship. What is more, far from being a symbolic or mythologized construct, the literary ecowitches operate at the intersection of storytelling, political activism, and eco-spirituality, bridging ancestral knowledge systems with speculative imaginaries that envision sustainable, multispecies worlds. As we have seen, hope, for these literary ecowitches, becomes both a spiritual force and a political act –a refusal to surrender to eco-apocalypse and a commitment to restoring the *web of life* that sustains all beings. Indeed, through the power of the written word, the restoration of symbiotic living relations allows for a process of posthuman re-story-ation in which literature becomes an act of worldbuilding that affirms the possibility, and necessity, of regenerative futures. In sum, from ecological technologies to ecological spiritualities, the written words of literary ecowitches in these Lunarpunk stories magically transform into a *pharmacopeia* where literature itself becomes a kind of medicine to reimagine how to heal the current wounds of a damaged Earth and its peoples; that is, how to creatively and poetically collaborate with our non-human allies to manifest healthier and more resilient, compassionate, utopian and inclusive ecosystems.

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SEARCHING FOR SUMMERLAND: SPIRITUALIST WOMEN, EDENIC NOSTALGIA, AND ECO-UTOPIAN COMMUNALISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract

This article concentrates on the work of women connected to the Occult revival, examining narratives of interspecies harmony so as to suggest an interpretation of spiritualist communes as possibly proto-ecofeminist spaces. In order to do so, focus is first placed on how the notion of Summerland, or the spiritualist afterlife, inspired the development of anti-hierarchical cosmologies that would sustain reformist activism in spiritualist discourse. The utopian overtones of Spiritualism are traced back to the syncretic roots of the movement, which drew strongly on the desire to recover a lost Edenic bond between humans and nature. In these ways, by means of female leadership, vegetarianism, and agrarian self-sufficiency, occultist communal life developed a unique form of Utopianism, one which combined esoteric beliefs with a desire to reach the anti-industrialist Paradise announced by the spirits.

Keywords: Spiritualism, Utopianism, Communalism, Ecofeminism, Vegetarianism.

EN BUSCA DE SUMMERLAND: MUJERES ESPIRITISTAS, NOSTALGIA EDÉNICA Y COMUNAS ECO-UTÓPICAS EN EL SIGLO XIX

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en obras escritas por mujeres conectadas al ocultismo decimonónico, examinando narrativas de armonía interespecies para así proponer una interpretación de las comunas espiritistas como posibles espacios ecofeministas. Para ello, se centra en cómo el concepto de «Summerland», o el más allá espiritista, inspiró el desarrollo de cosmovisiones anti-jerárquicas sobre las cuáles se fundaría el activismo reformista en el espiritismo. Las connotaciones utópicas del movimiento espiritista se remontan a los orígenes del movimiento, que se basó en el deseo de recuperar un vínculo edénico perdido entre el ser humano y la naturaleza. De este modo, a través del liderazgo femenino, el vegetarianismo y la autosuficiencia agraria, la vida comunal ocultista dio lugar a una forma única de utopía en la cual se mezclaron las creencias esotéricas y la intención de alcanzar el paraíso anti-industrial anunciado por los espíritus.

Palabras clave: espiritismo, utopismo, comunalismo, ecofeminismo, vegetarianismo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

And a second day of Eden would on the earth begin.
Mary Howitt, "The Cry of the Animals" (1834)

Decades prior to her pioneering conversion to Anglo-American Spiritualism in 1853 (Owen 1990, 19), the Quaker writer and reform activist Mary Howitt used her poetry to imagine a world in which other-than-human creatures would be allowed to exist free from the pain and cruelty caused by human abuses. As a vegetarian (Abitz 2022, 57) and an anti-vivisectionist (Oppenheim 1985, 37), Howitt framed her interest in animal welfare within the interspecies kinship often established through spiritualist discourse (Heholt 2021, 98). Her stance was not uncommon among spiritualists in the nineteenth century, especially women, who were most actively involved in animal protection campaigns (Donald 2020, 48). Despite that fact that female occultists did not explicitly self-identify as witches –viewing, rather, their supernatural powers as a religious calling (Braude 1989, 24)–, their practices, tenets, and values display certain similarities with the framing notion operating through this issue: the "ecowitch" (Sotelo 2025, 21-23). Paralleling the present-day recovery of earth-bound wisdom and symbiotic interactions with the natural world, spiritualist culture developed a non-hierarchical cosmology to generate environmentalist narratives against industrial pollution and the massive loss of biodiversity in the nineteenth century (Adkins and Parkins 2018, 4). Just like the abovementioned ecowitches, spiritualist women sustained their environmental rhetoric by means of their unorthodox beliefs and practices, through which the souls of the deceased allegedly provided instructions for humans to advance towards a progressive, inclusive, and harmonious society that was meant to reflect Summerland, or the spiritualist afterlife (Braude 1989, 17).

This article therefore aims to examine the figure of the nineteenth-century spiritualist medium as a precursor of the utopian eco-witch at the birth of the Anthropocene (Adkins and Parkins 2018, 2).[1] In order to discuss the ways in which spiritualist women used the Occult revival as a tool of resistance against the industrialized severance from nature, the present study intends to focus on the presence of Edenic fantasies in spiritualist literature connected to the establishment of utopian communes, especially in the United States. As reflected in Howitt's poem, and as it shall be argued in this text, spiritualist environmentalist discourse relied heavily on invocations of a return to Paradise in which peace would be restored among humans and other species. Such configurations allude to occultist reinterpretations of the Book of Isaiah, specifically regarding the prophecy announcing how, once God's kingdom is fully established on earth, "[t]he wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the

[1] The environmental impact of the Industrial Revolution is often regarded as the beginning of the Anthropocene, a period in which human action became a geological force (Adkins and Parkins 2018, 4).

leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6-9). Whereas such images of interspecies harmony have mostly been interpreted as a reference to the Second Coming of the Messiah in Christian doctrine (Sim 2025, 171), this promise of "new heavens and a new earth" (Isaiah 65:17-25) was rewritten by certain spiritualist thinkers as regression into a pantheistic communion prior to the Biblical expulsion of human beings from the Garden of Eden. As I hope to illustrate, this Edenic nostalgia constituted a significant element in spiritualist narratives of reconnection with nature, which were manifested particularly clearly in written accounts of utopian communalism. More specifically, this study wishes to explore the extent to which spiritualist communes may be regarded as potentially ecofeminist spaces that yearned for a return to pre-industrial, pre-anthropocentric, and pre-patriarchal times.[2] By paying close attention to the role of Edenic Utopianism in the destabilization of speciesist and sexist hierarchies in the philosophy behind spiritualist communal life, it is possible to observe how spiritualist women writers like Anna Kingsford, Mary Gove Nichols, and Katherine Tingley anticipated the rise of the eco-witch through their works of non-fiction.

2. BACK TO NATURE: EDENIC ECO-UTOPIANISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SPIRITUALIST CULTURE

Spiritualist communalism in mid-nineteenth-century United States planted the seeds of diverse elements which would come to characterize the New Age communes of the Back to the Land movement in the twentieth century: social justice movements, environmental awareness, non-traditional views of sexuality, and alternative beliefs outside orthodox religions intersected on the margins of mainstream civilization (MacFarlane 2015, 3), united by a sense of impending transformation and progress (Claeys 2022, 424). In a similar manner, the occultist counterculture was also experiencing its own "Summer of Love" by the time Spiritualism originated in 1848. Although, as a phenomenon founded and led by women (Braude 1989, 17), its birth is usually attributed to the "Rochester rappings" initiated by Kate and Margaret Fox (Bennett 2007, 28),[3] the roots of the movement can rather be traced back to the Protestant religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening (Barrow 1986, 10). This moment of religious plurality was marked by the emergence of groups and sects such as Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism, Methodism, and other new denominations

[2] As Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan explain, ecofeminist theory explores the diverse ways in which the oppression of women has intersected with the exploitation and subjugation of nature throughout history, identifying and challenging configurations of the feminine and the non-human as secondary to male culture in androcentric systems of domination (Adams & Donovan 1995, 3).

[3] The Fox sisters, two teenagers from Hydesville, New York, are regarded as the founders of Spiritualism because they claimed to have discovered a system of communication with the souls of the dead by rapping rhythmically on the séance table (Bennett 2007, 28).

in the New York area referred to as the "Burned-over District" (Cope 2012, 32).[4] As noted by Logie Barrow, numerous "points of blur and tension" among several theological stances led to the highly syncretic roots of the spiritualist movement (1986, 10), which, among other elements, shared with the Second Great Awakening traits such as communication with the supernatural world (Braude 1989, 13), emphasis on communal gatherings (Hankins 200, 7), as well as millennialist and utopian views (Kerr 1972, 11). For instance, the pamphlet *The Future of the Human Race; Or a Great, Glorious, and Peaceful Revolution, Near at Hand, to Be Effected Through the Agency of Departed Spirits of Good and Superior Men and Women* (1853), published by Robert Owen, founder of the New Harmony commune (Jennings 2016, 139), reveals how spiritualist discourse was particularly saturated with utopian overtones, manifested not only through the intentional ideology behind communal life, but also in the transmission of allegedly ghostly messages announcing that the dawn of a new age was nigh (Braude 1989, 17).

According to the "spirits" that spoke through mediums, believers would be conducted towards a perfected society, where "Spiritualism [would] work miracles in the cause of reform" (Braude 1989, 17), "oppression [would] die" (Tiffany 1857, 169), and peace would reign for "only one humanity, and one flag for all and every one" (Cox 2003, 181). This "open and sympathetic" quest towards "the understanding of Truth irrespective of race, nation or color" constituted a groundbreaking approach in pre-Civil War America, one which, besides challenging racial discrimination (Cox 2003, 201), encouraged believers to transcend other types of earthly barriers and relate to other beings as undifferentiated spirits (Nelson 2013, 34). In addition to promoting collaborations across classes, genders, ethnicities (Nelson 2013, 34), the movement's egalitarian claims included efforts towards interspecies harmony and environmental accountability. At a historical moment characterized by a turning point in the relationship between human and non-human life (Denenholz & Danahay 2007, 8), fueled by Darwinist anxieties and industrial expansion (Murphy 2019, 23),[5] spiritualists hoped for "a Golden Age to come, not only for man but for the lower kingdoms, a time when humanity [would] realize its duty to its younger brothers – not to destroy them, but to help them" (Leadbeater 1913, 34-35). Despite manifesting anthropocentric vestiges in his view of animals as inferior creatures, the occultist vegetarian activist Charles Webster Leadbeater framed occultist predictions for a

[4] This term was borrowed by the historian Whitney Cross in 1950 from *Memoirs of Reverend Charles G. Finney, the American Evangelist* (1876) and is now employed to refer to the Western and central regions of New York where the reforms and religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. As Rachel Cope clarifies, this epithet reflects "a time and place that was repeatedly burned by the fires of revivalism" (2012, 32).

[5] Charles Darwin's well-known *Origin of Species* (1859) destabilized boundaries between humans and other animals, leading to ground-breaking considerations regarding non-human subjectivities in nineteenth-century culture (Denenholz & Danahay 2007, 2). At the same time, the Industrial Revolution problematized the gap between humans and nature by triggering pollution, mass extinction, and intensified farming methods (Adkins & Parkins 2018, 5).

utopian society within an anti-speciesist cosmology, arguing that the creation of this earthly Paradise would be only be possible once humans stopped consuming meat and other animal products (Leadbeater 1913, 35). His stance was far from unique within the Occult revival, which by the late nineteenth century was brimming with similar visions of destabilization of the human-animal barrier in the Great Chain of Being.

The eco-utopian line of thought which sustained spiritualist communes drew from diverse sources of inspiration which intersected through the origins of the movement (Barrow 1986, 11). In Britain and the United States, the nineteenth century had already witnessed several attempts to establish alternative societies characterized by their responsible interactions with nature (Jennings 2016, 12). English Romantics like Samuel Coleridge planned to build Pantisocracy, a utopian community in America (Trahair 2013, 307), while Percy Shelley imagined a perfect society based on natural harmony in *Queen Mab* (1813) and William Blake famously evoked Isaiah's prophecy as a return to natural unity in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794). American transcendentalists also adopted a pantheistic approach to non-human life (Burkholder 2010, 645), famously immortalized through Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay *Nature* (1836), which would leave its mark on spiritualist culture (Carroll 1997, 111). Vegetarian, anti-industrialist communes such as Brook Farm and Fruitlands,[6] among others (Burkholder 2010, 645), stemmed from eco-utopian Transcendentalism and became sources of inspiration for spiritualist communal life (Blake 1962, 232). Most notably, by the time the Fox sisters began contacting ghosts, the Second Great Awakening had been sizzling for decades with millennialist predictions of a righteous period on earth before the Last Judgement (Green 2022, 33),[7] many of which contained clearly Edenic overtones that were inherited by Spiritualism and transferred into the ideology sustaining the communes. For instance, Quakers, Shakers, and Universalists, all of which influenced the origins of the Occult revival (Cox 2003, 16), perceived the entry into the nineteenth century as a moment of transcendental change towards a perfected way of life marked by a sense of veneration towards God's Creation (Jennings 2016, 15). Since the seventeenth century, the yearning for a return to "Innocence," or "Arcady," an ideal, rustic past, has been a significant part of Quaker principles (Skilbeck 2021, 245). Planting trees, preventing deforestation, protecting animals, and, in numerous cases, rejecting the carnivore diet were deemed as necessary gestures to achieve this earthly Paradise,[8] which required a sense of responsibility towards the natural world (Skilbeck 2021, 246).

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[6] The famous American novelist Louisa May Alcott would later reflect on her negative experiences at the flawed Fruitlands commune in her satire *Transcendental Wild Oats: A Chapter from an Unwritten Romance* (1873).

[7] Religious groups such as the Millerite Adventist Movement or the Seventh-Day Adventists based their utopian views on the belief that the Second Coming of Christ was nigh, which required a complete reform of society (Pitzer 1997, 475).

[8] Just like Howitt, numerous early spiritualist converts owed their vegetarian ethics to their Quaker roots, in which the meatless diet was conceived as an act of peace-making with other species under the same Creator (Gregory 2018, 30).

Quite similarly, spiritualist communes were founded on Edenic aspirations, aiming towards a "property-free existence in the orchards of Paradise" (Jennings 2016, 12). Their anti-industrial, vegetarian, and environmentalist values echoed Isaiah's prophecy in diverse ways, since they intended to reach a time in which "Earth [would] become the footstool of heaven" and "health and happiness [would] flow into the place of disease and sorrow," as assured by the medium Chandos Leigh Hunt Wallace (1885, 5), who, like other clairvoyants, adopted a plant-based diet (Owen 1990, 126). Much like their Quaker predecessors, spiritualists viewed "Deathless Food" as an essential step towards the betterment of civilization (Gregory 2018, 142). Paired with a participation in the late-nineteenth-century "back-to-the-land" movement, environmental concerns had become commonplace in spiritualist utopian projects by the *fin-de-siècle* (Gregory 2018, 6). A clear example of Edenic yearning for a lost connection with nature can be found in the writings of the British medium and animal welfare campaigner Anna Kingsford, whose doctoral thesis *The Perfect Way in Diet: A Treatise Advocating a Return to the Natural and Ancient Food of our Race* (1892) promoted a recovery of interspecies harmony.[9] As the title indicates, in this work, the spiritualist author defends vegetarianism as the natural diet of the first humans, whose initial unity with their Creator was mirrored through their oneness with the rest of Creation (Kingsford 1892, 10). By means of an anti-speciesist reinterpretation of the Biblical Genesis, Kingsford argues that this state of bliss was interrupted by the beginning of the carnivore diet, which would have brought violence, sickness, and moral degeneration into the world (Maitland 2011, 29). The Fall of Man would therefore not have been caused by Eve's tasting of the forbidden fruit, but by the consumption of animal flesh. To recover this lost Paradise of pantheistic symbiosis, we should, Kingsford claims, abolish animal slaughter (1892, 9), a gesture that would bring "the real salvation of the human race" (Kingsford, qtd. in Maitland 2011, 29). Such views were likely to be inspired by the mystical experiences of the Swedish philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, a vegetarian thinker whose theology played a crucial role in the foundations of Spiritualism (Barrow 1986, 10), including his interpretation of meat-eating as the original sin (Kerrigan 2012, 112). In spiritualist terms, dietary reforms towards vegetarianism would thus contribute to humanity's "return to its ancient obedience to Nature" (Kingsford, qtd. in Maitland 2011, 29), not only by re-establishing a peaceful coexistence with all living creatures, but also by regaining a spiritual communion with the souls of plants and animals (Maitland 2011, 31).

In order to recover this Edenic state, spiritualists aimed their imaginations towards a perfected world, "working with God and Nature" to "reconvert it into Paradise" (Kingsford 1892, 9). As James Gregory explains in "Religion and the Victorian Vegetarians" (2018), numerous branches of the Occult revival understood the plant-based diet as a form of physical and psychic purification that could affect

[9] Besides being a pioneering advocate for women's rights and animal protection, Kingsford was also one of the first female physicians in Britain to earn a medical degree (Moulds 2021, 164).

the evolution of the human soul (2018, 136). Spiritualist writings by women such as Annie Besant explicitly link vegetarianism, spiritual improvement, and social reform in the shape of empathy towards non-human subjectivities (Besant 1913, 15), thus emphasizing its role in the creation of eco-utopian narratives. Likewise, Kingsford conceived meatless food as a vital step towards a fully transformed society in which dietary reform would intersect with other progressive efforts like first-wave feminism and anti-vivisection campaigns, assuring that "the Vegetarian movement is the bottom and basis of all other movements towards Purity, Freedom, Justice, and Happiness" (Kingsford, qtd. in Maitland 2011, 27). It is therefore hard to ignore the presence of utopian overtones in spiritualist depictions of the recovery of pantheistic unity (Maitland 2011, 27-28), in which the destabilization of anthropocentric hierarchies went hand in hand with the dismantling of androcentric binaries, as well as with the abolition of further forms of oppression (Nelson 2013, 34). Mirroring Kingsford's claim that "universal peace is absolutely impossible to a carnivorous race", numerous intentional communes attempted to ensure "the future creed of a nobler and gentler race" (qtd. in Maitland 2011, 28). However, as shall be discussed in the following section, certain spiritualist communes would not necessarily fit the contemporary definition of ecofeminism (Adams & Donovan 1995, 3), in spite of their revolutionary anticipation of the concept of utopian eco-witches.

3. AN ALTERNATIVE PARADISE? SPIRITUALIST COMMUNES AS POTENTIALLY ECOFEMINIST SPACES

The recurrent aspiration towards an Edenic, pre-industrial past in spiritualist discourse was materialized through the creation of communes on the margins of urban civilization (Melton 1997, 394). Despite being far from unique in their quest for connection with the natural world in mid-nineteenth century America (Pitzer 1997, 182), such social experiments were directly inspired by the values of Spiritualism, which were, in their turn, drawn on information provided by mediums. For example, the anti-hierarchical cosmology fostered by occultist colonies echoed "the brotherhood of man" (Jennings 2016, 141), one of the seven principles of the movement, allegedly dictated by the ghost of Robert Owen through the British clairvoyant Emma Hardinge Britten (Byrne 2010, 82). Similarly, the American medium Cora Scott, raised at the Hopedale commune (Owen 1990, 210), described Summerland as a utopian state where "differences of birth, nationality, outward rank or even of education are not real differences" (Scott 1915, 32) due to the dissolution of "all (...) lines, barriers, and human standards" (Scott 1915, 31). In order to attain Heaven on Earth, numerous communes attempted to put into practice the advice that Kingsford, Leigh Hunt, and other mediums provided for the improvement of society: "purity of diet," that is, vegetarianism, "passion for the animals," and the "exaltation of womanhood" (Maitland 2011, 21), the latter being particularly reflected in the notable presence of female leadership in such liminal spaces (Jennings 2016, 122). It soon became clear that spiritualist re-imaginings of interspecies encounters implied a re-evaluation of other forms of dogmatic submission, since occultist rewritings of

the Genesis not only erased God's command for man to rule over all the creatures of the earth, the sea, and the air (Gen 1:26), but also left out patriarchal dominion and the curse of Eve,[10] thus allowing for the development of potentially ecofeminist epistemologies in communal life (French 1985, 341).

Such elements had their roots in reformist Edenic narratives within the movement, since, for example, Kingsford's description of a peaceful, vegetarian era before the carnivorous Fall echoes similar discourses among certain feminist groups of the period, which found inspiration in a hypothetically lost, pre-patriarchal age supposedly marked by a plant-based diet, harmonious interactions between species, and gynocentric networks of collaboration (Adams 2010, 143). Rosemary Radford Ruether identifies comparable visions of an idealized matriarchal past in contemporary ecofeminist currents, which also imagine a distant, preagricultural time when "all was benign between the genders and in the human-nature relationship" (Ruether 1992, 143). This lost Paradise, allegedly sacrificed to the rise of the violent androcentric order (Ruether 1992, 143), was also evoked by female occultists such as Moina Mathers and Florence Farr, who searched for empowering tools in *fin-de-siècle* neo-paganism (Denisoff 2022, 140). In this sense, it may be possible to identify analogous ideas in spiritualist communes founded or led by women, which were meant to foreground feminist and environmental concerns by fostering alternative lifestyles and relational modes (Pitzer 1997, 34). For instance, most spiritualist colonies manifested this tendency through networks of progressive movements, hosting vegetarians, animal rights activists, women's rights advocates, free lovers, or dress reformers who contributed to building this arcadian future (Jennings, 2016, 122). In this way, vegetarian communes like Harmonia (1850-1917) (Kitch 2000, 299), the Brotherhood of Light (1880s-1910s) (Pitzer 1997, 455), or the Krotona Theosophist Institute (1912-) (Melton 1997, 409) shared their eco-utopian yearning for a sense of universal harmony which placed women at the center.[11]

Much like the séance room, where mediums conversed with the dead, reinvented the boundaries of female identity (Tromp 2006, 5), and supported each other on the margins of patriarchal society (Braude 1989, 166),[12] the spiritualist

[10] Mary Gove Nichols, Chandos Leigh Hunt Wallace, Alice Stockham and other spiritualist women openly defied the biblical configuration of painful childbirth as Eve's punishment for the original sin. Instead, they presented parturition as a natural event which ought to be devoid of suffering (Owen 1990, 130).

[11] For the purpose of the research scope, this article only focuses on spiritualist communes in which the struggle for women's liberation intersected with diverse forms of environmental awareness. Other colonies, such as the Lily Dale Assembly (1879-), Camp Chesterfield (1886-), or the Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp (1894-) were also in line with the gynocentric character of Spiritualism (Braude 1989, 8), but did not present, to my current knowledge, any explicit evidence of eco-utopian values beyond the fact that they were isolated spaces in nature.

[12] Numerous scholars have pointed out the transformative potential of the séance circle in relation to women's self-expression (Tromp 2006, 5). As argued by the spiritualist medium Amanda Britt Spence, participants were often advised to gather in an exclusively female and non-hierarchical space, since ghosts, she assured, abhorred the rigidity of conventional power structures (Braude

commune became an alternative space outside the rigid norms of conventional nineteenth-century civilization, a promising site where utopian impulses were intended to be combined with the non-violent cooperation often attributed to matriarchal societies (Camara 2013, 273), as well as to other communes also based on what Batya Weinbaum terms "female values:" collaboration, nurturance, and sharing, as opposed to the competitive dynamics and hierarchical domination of androcentric cultures (Weinbaum 1984, 164).[13] Dwellers shared lodgings on common land in rural areas (Silver-Isenstadt, 2002, 83), in contact with natural cycles and away from the spiritual and environmental pollution of the industrial city (Leadbeater 1913, 32). Community dining rooms, schools, and libraries were set up among orchards, fields, and gardens (Silver-Isenstadt 2002, 83). Paralleling other experimental living arrangements in the nineteenth century (Klee-Hartzell 1993, 19), spiritualist communes were meant to be rooted in egalitarian goals and equally distributed labour (Jennings 2016, 290). Most notably, since women were regarded as better communicators with the Great Beyond (Owen, 1990, 7), such colonies allowed female occultists to assume leadership roles in relation to diverse forms of resistance against ecological destruction.

This view was consolidated by the fact that mediums often functioned as porous borders between species due to their ability to visibilize animal subjectivities (Heholt 2021, 98). For numerous occultists, the very same sensitivity which allowed the clairvoyant to host stories from beyond the grave would permit them to feel the vibrations of animal emotions, which would make possible the inclusion of non-human perspectives in the séance (Leadbeater 1913, 34). As Hilary Grimes points out, their invisibilized condition as nineteenth-century women led to narratives of identification with other 'ghostly' and oppressed subjects whose voices were similarly suppressed in mainstream culture (Grimes 2016, 95). Therefore, by verbalizing the perspectives of subaltern subjects (Bennett 2007, 102), spiritualist women identified and denounced the power dynamics which excluded female and non-human voices from the historical discourse. This form of mediumistic empathy can be observed, for instance, in the works of spiritualist authors such as Florence Marryat, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, or Sophia de Morgan, who wrote against vivisection and other forms of cruelty towards animals which became prominent topics nineteenth-century women's literature (Donald 2020, 48).[14] According to Coral Lansbury, Victorian women's concern with animal suffering reveals analogies between androcentric oppression

1989, 165). Mediums were, in addition, free to perform subversive identities and utter the most scandalous "spirit-messages," as long as they remained under the alleged influence of spirit possession, which allowed them to explore diverse roles and voices outside the limitations imposed by Victorian femininity (Owen 1990, 7).

[13] Weinbaum is here referring to types of behavior observed at exclusively female communes such as Twin Oaks, which function as places where women can "cleanse themselves of male, negative, and city energies" and coexist outside capitalist patriarchy (1984, 158).

[14] See Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), Stuart Phelps' *Trixy* (1904), or De Morgan's *Threescore Years and Ten Reminiscences* (1895).

and the treatment of non-human creatures, which would imply an anticipation of ecofeminist concerns among suffragist groups and animal welfare activists (Lansbury 1985, 84). Taking into consideration this shared victimhood of women and nature under interlocking systems of domination (Adams & Donovan 1995, 3), occultist communes may have incorporated analogous notions in their advancement of women's rights and environmental conservation.

As an example of the ecofeminist potential of spiritualist communalism, visions of agrarian self-sufficiency, vegetarian living, and natural healing were upheld by the celebrated medium Mary Gove Nichols,[15] who travelled across several communes in the United States as one of the first advocates for the meatless diet (Blake 1962, 231). Her works on women's rights, gynecology, hydropathy, dress reform, and other social issues circulated among progressive circles of the day and were praised by fellow writers as well-known as Walt Whitman, who stated that "the more and wider these truths are known, the better" (qtd. in Reynolds 209). Gove Nichols and her husband, Thomas Low Nichols, founded several "harmonic homes" (Silver-Isenstadt 2002, 200), where they expected to welcome a "New Era for Humanity" through the help of "Proper Mediums and a Harmonious Circle" (Gove Nichols, qtd. in Silver-Isenstadt 2002, 203). Following the spirits' advice (Silver-Isenstadt 2002, 188), the couple settled at diverse intentional colonies like Mnemonia, Modern Times, and Desarrollo (Blake 1962, 232),[16] where the meatless diet was embraced as "the inlet to a new and holier life" (Gove Nichols, qtd. in Blake, 1962: 227). Paralleling Kingsford's arguments regarding an Edenic vegetarian society, Gove Nichols believed in the transformative power of "beautiful food" (Gove Nichols 1855, 182), which would foster "a capacity for all other reforms" (Gove Nichols, qtd. in Blake, 1962: 227), as she explains in her autobiographical novel *Mary Lyndon* (1855).

In this work, she recorded her experiences at Modern Times, a commune founded by anarchist thinkers Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews, where, in addition to rejecting materialism and industrialization in favor of a more sustainable way of life (Jennings 2016, 19), members strove for more egalitarian relations between the sexes (Passet 2003, 27). At this "place of preparation, a training ground" for utopian society (Owen 1990, 200), women were encouraged to delegate domestic labour to the cooperative kitchen, communal nursery, or centralized laundry so as to focus their time on intellectual activities and reformist activism (Passet 2003, 26). Men and women would receive equal payment for their work (Silver-Isenstadt 2002, 65), and female members of the community would be liberated from the patriarchal institution of marriage through the controversial practice of "free love,"

[15] Numerous spiritualist women became involved in natural healing methods as a strategy of resistance against the often harmful practices of male-dominated medicine in the nineteenth century (Owen 1990, 122).

[16] Gove Nichols also engaged in experimental living at natural healing establishments such as the Yellow Springs Water-Cure, although it seems unclear whether this can be technically classified as a commune (Silver-Isenstadt 2002, 202).

or polyamory (Passet 2003, 28). Furthermore, utopian communalism stood in opposition to the values of industrial capitalism (Jennings 2016, 19), which had spurred the large-scale consumption of meat (Adams 2010, 206) and transformed human-animal interactions through increasingly intensive agricultural practices (Adkins & Parkins 2018, 5). As a form of resistance, the community promoted a lifestyle centered on self-reliance, urging members to grow their own vegetables (Gregory 2018, 142). Such was the case of other colonies characterized by female leadership, like the abovementioned Krotona, founded by Besant, or Lomaland (1898-1942), a theosophist community led by Katherine Tingley, a spiritualist disciple of the notorious medium Helena Blavatsky (Melton 1997, 401).

Tingley's work *The Life at Point Loma* (1909) reveals how the eco-ethical values promoted by spiritualist visions of Summerland continued to inspire communal philosophies into the twentieth century. Education at the communal school was based on the belief that humans are "immortal souls, not divorced from beneficent Nature, but indeed and in truth a part of it" (Tingley 1909, 18), a notion that was consolidated by means of outdoor teaching on land development, the dangers of pollution and the depletion of natural resources (Skeans 2018). For Tingley, children's direct contact with nature was an essential step towards the ideal society, since "[t]rue education," she argued, "is the power to live in harmony with our environment" (1909, 8). In line with the abovementioned eco-utopian discourse in spiritualist culture, the commune aimed to heal the shattered Edenic bond in search of spiritual oneness with nature: "[t]he curse of our nations is separateness," as humans "forget that they are a part of Universal Life" (Tingley 1926, 4). Members gathered their meatless food from a fruit and vegetable garden (Melton 1997, 405), building an alternative to the polluting forces of industrial capitalism. In Tingley's view, this policy would be the only plausible solution to the state of the planet, since "[t]he commerce and the industries of the world have fallen into the hands of those who are governed entirely by selfish interests" (1909, 5). However, although Tingley's leadership inspired further theosophical communities like the Temple of the People (1898-), founded by Frances LaDue (Melton 1997, 430), the occultist eco-utopian dream was not to last. Lomaland never attained the financial self-sufficiency for which it strove and, like many other similar experiments, eventually fell into decline (Melton 1997, 406). At the same time, the popularity of Spiritualism began to decrease shortly after the Fox sisters' confession of fraud (Davenport 1897, 84), and spiritualist communes were soon shattered by internal contradictions.

4. CONCLUSIONS: LOSING SUMMERLAND

> These were people who had evaded the Smoke, and looked forward to a Utopian world in which smoke would be no more.
> A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book* (2009)

By the early twentieth century, spiritualist eco-utopianism seemed to have drifted away from its initial ideals. Despite their original stance against industrial

capitalism, many became entrepreneurial communes where dwellers produced and sold diverse goods, gradually emulating the economic and property laws of the urban civilization that they had previously chosen to flee (Melton 1997, 430). This breakdown of communal values, along with the leadership vacuum left by the death of the original founders (Melton 1997, 404), led to a recession in membership, as well as to a dwindling of confidence in the toils of the agricultural lifestyle (Francis 2018, 27). In addition, Spiritualism was gradually replaced by Theosophy, which implied that the original anti-authoritarianism of the Occult revival became increasingly supplanted by hermetic elitism (Tryphonopoulos 1996, 43). The disappearance of utopian values was also reflected in women's roles in the colonies. Despite the fact that these spaces originally facilitated the subversion of conventional gender roles (Silver-Isenstadt 2002, 65), some of these organizations ultimately replicated the same androcentric dynamics they were seeking to avoid: many of them returned to traditional divisions of labour, often assigning more domestic tasks to women (Pitzer 1997, 169). Certain non-monogamous colonies, which were meant to subvert the legal status of women as private property of their husbands (Braude 1989, 126), did not achieve female erotic liberation, but, instead, resulted in the sexual exploitation of female members of the community (Jennings 2016, 18). Accounts from the theosophist Aquarian Foundation (1878-1938) reveal how the women of the commune were designated to mate with their leader, Edward Arthur Wilson, or "Brother XII," in the name of his alleged sexual teachings (Pitzer 1997, 412). Other groups exhibited similar practices, the most infamous one being the Oneida community (1848-1880), where its polygamous founder, John Humphrey Noyes, inspired spiritualist experiments with 'free love' (Pitzer 1997, 273).

These instances demonstrate that eco-spiritualist practices, rather than being entirely free from patriarchal ideologies, were not always as radical or transformative as they might appear. Nevertheless, despite the partial failure of the spiritualist quest for Summerland, the work of the activists and thinkers mentioned in this study demonstrates how the nineteenth-century Occult revival offered its female followers diverse tools to pave the way for contemporary approaches to occultism, spirituality and performative witchcraft. As manifested through the eco-utopian perspectives of Kingsford, Gove Nichols, and Tingley, spiritualist culture anticipated several of the attributes which characterize present-day reactions against the environmental crisis, such as the prominent presence of women in animal welfare advocacy (Adams & Donovan 1995, 5), or the recent interest in off-the-grid, communal living among the youngest generations (Haddaway 2025). Despite the practical limitations of eco-utopian communes, the syncretic roots and pantheistic overtones of Spiritualism offered women of the period a unique language for interspecies reconciliation, configuring their esoteric beliefs as tools of resistance and sources of hope.

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FROM GALICIA TO IRELAND: ECO-WITCHES AND GREEN UTOPIAN NARRATIVES IN ÁLVARO CUNQUEIRO AND W.B. YEATS

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Abstract

This article offers a comparative ecocritical and ecofeminist reading of W.B. Yeats's *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (2008) [1888] and Álvaro Cunqueiro's *Tertulia de boticas prodigiosas y escuela de curanderos* (1976). It explores the literary witch as a symbolic mediator between humans and nature, bearer of botanical and spiritual knowledge in Irish and Galician traditions. Drawing on the poetics of breathing, the Symbiocene, and cultural studies, the article argues that these texts preserve ancestral wisdom while imagining alternative, symbiotic models of coexistence. The *meiga* and the *fairy doctor* emerge as agents of ecological resilience. In contrast to dystopian imaginaries, these green utopias offer ethical tools to reconnect with Gaia and envision regenerative futures.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Green Utopia, Witches, Álvaro Cunqueiro, William Butler Yeats.

DE GALICIA A IRLANDA: ECOBRUJAS Y NARRATIVAS UTOPICAS VERDES EN ÁLVARO CUNQUEIRO Y W.B. YEATS

Resumen

Este artículo analiza comparativamente las narrativas regenerativas en *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (2008) de W.B. Yeats y *Tertulia de boticas prodigiosas y escuela de curanderos* (1976) de Álvaro Cunqueiro desde una perspectiva ecocrítica y ecofeminista. Se examina la figura de la bruja como mediadora simbiótica entre el ser humano y la naturaleza, portadora de saberes botánicos y espirituales en los contextos folclóricos de Irlanda y Galicia. A través de la poética de la respiración, el Simbioceno y los estudios culturales, se propone que estas utopías verdes permiten imaginar modelos de vida armónica y resiliencia ecológica frente al imaginario distópico contemporáneo. Las figuras de la *meiga* y la *fairy doctor* ofrecen herramientas simbólicas para restablecer la conexión con Gaia e impulsar futuros regenerativos.

Palabras clave: Ecocrítica, Ecofeminismo, utopías verdes, brujas, Álvaro Cunqueiro, William Butler Yeats.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"The minds of the Utopians, when fenced with a love for learning, are very ingenious in discovering all such arts as are necessary to carry it to perfection" (More 2000, 72). In a global context marked by the climate crisis and social, political, and economic turmoil, imagination is crucial for conceiving sustainable futures. Many contemporary narratives unfold in dystopian settings that depict worlds of collapse, violence, and despair. While these stories may serve as warnings, their proliferation also limits the ability to envision hopeful and viable alternatives. Thinkers such as Francisco Martorell Campos warn that the surplus of dystopias and the deficit of utopias in today's culture foster a paralyzing fatalism that undermines the capacity to imagine humanity's future in constructive terms (2021). For this reason, the construction of new ecological utopias offers a transformative horizon that not only challenges the status quo but also promotes collective creativity and action in pursuit of sustainable societies. As Melinda Harvey (2019, 2) states:

> Our reckless pursuit of infinite economic growth on a finite planet could even take us towards a global dystopia. As an unprecedented frenzy of change grips the world, the case for utopia is stronger than ever. An effective change plan requires a bold, imaginative vision, practical goals and clarity around the psychological values necessary to bring about a transformation.

In the face of the risks of the Anthropocene –from climate change to extreme inequality– the need to articulate a bold and imaginative utopian vision that inspires transformative change is becoming increasingly urgent. Unlike the pessimism and alarmism of apocalyptic imagination, utopian narratives can cultivate hope and mobilize society toward regenerative action. This article explores the possibility of reimagining the future from a "green utopian" perspective that prioritizes harmonious coexistence between human beings and Nature. It proposes that such utopias should not be seen as mere unattainable fantasies, but rather as critical tools for social and ecological innovation. In contrast to the prevailing collective imaginary, saturated with dystopian scenarios, delving into positive visions is essential to awaken a proactive human attitude that enables the construction of conscious, sustainable futures and an ethics of care. A relationship with a greener future entail shifting the focus from domination and exploitation of nature to care, interdependence, and mutual responsibility (Gilligan 2013).

This study focuses on two literary corpora that offer regenerative visions rooted in the cultural traditions of Ireland and Galicia[1]: *Fairy and Folk Tales of the*

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[1] The 88-year gap between the original publication of Yeats's anthology (1888) and Cunqueiro's book (1976) allows for a diachronic reading of how folkloric and magical figures evolve

Irish Peasantry[2] (2008) by W.B. Yeats and *Tertulia de boticas prodigiosas y escuela de curanderos* (1976) by Álvaro Cunqueiro. Both works, rooted in their respective folk traditions, share an innovative perspective of returning to the roots, to traditional knowledge, and to communion with the natural world[3]. This comparative analysis focuses on the figure of the witch, portrayed as a wise woman who understands the natural environment, lives in harmony with it, and applies her botanical and spiritual knowledge in everyday life –always guided by respect and mutual cooperation. This ancestral figure exemplifies the symbiosis between the human being and the natural space, embodies values of ecological care, and challenges anthropocentric norms.

From an ecocritical and ecofeminist perspective, this study examines how the narratives of Álvaro Cunqueiro and W.B. Yeats counter the dystopia and prevailing pessimism in contemporary literature and invite us to imagine hopeful futures and to build viable 'green utopias' that contribute to the social creation of a collective ecological consciousness. To this end, this work poses the following questions: Can new green utopias and narratives be constructed using as a starting point 20th-century Galician literature by Álvaro Cunqueiro and late 19th- and early 20th-century Irish literature by W.B. Yeats? Is the figure of the witch a key element in revealing the connection that human beings can establish with nature and the living beings that inhabit it? Can sustainable and respectful methods be learned from these regenerative narratives to build a green future in which humans live in symbiosis with the natural environment and with other forms of life? Is it possible to restore the spiritual and bodily connection our ancestors shared with Mother Earth (Gaia) through the implicit lessons in these literary works?

across time and space. While Yeats writes within the cultural momentum of the Celtic Revival in a pre-independence Ireland, Cunqueiro's narratives respond to the context of postwar Galicia under Francoist Spain. Despite their different historical and political frameworks, both authors act as literary ethnographers and mythopoetic architects, recovering, reimagining, and dignifying the oral traditions of their nations. Their engagement with local folklore is not merely archival but creative and ideological: through their fantastical narratives, they celebrate the cultural specificity, symbolic richness, and ecological sensibility of marginalised territories. As such, both Yeats and Cunqueiro can be read as visionaries who harnessed the regenerative potential of ancestral knowledge and myth to construct alternative models of cultural identity and human-nature relations.

[2] This article refers to the 2008 edition of *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, originally edited and published by W.B. Yeats in 1888. The collection sought to preserve Irish folklore and oral traditions during the Celtic Revival –a cultural movement spanning the late 19th to early 20th centuries that aimed to reclaim Irish mythology, language, and national identity in response to British colonial rule. Yeats was one of its leading figures and a key force behind its literary expression.

[3] W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) played a central role in the Irish Literary Revival, intertwining folklore, mysticism, and nationalism. His literary and political trajectory –from early romantic nationalism to more esoteric and conservative positions– deeply influenced the symbolic content of his folklore collections (Howes 1998). Álvaro Cunqueiro (1911–1981), a Galician writer active under Franco's regime, embraced myth, fantasy, and regional folklore as forms of cultural resistance and imaginative survival. His literary legacy and biographical background are well documented and readily accessible online (Garbett 2023).

The narratives of Álvaro Cunqueiro and W.B. Yeats enable the construction of new 'green utopias', as their fantastic and folkloric elements offer alternative visions in which humanity may rediscover balance with nature. The witch, as a literary figure, constitutes a key element of connection between humans and the natural world: far from being a malignant stereotype, the witch embodies traditional ecological wisdom and exemplifies ways of life that are harmonious with the environment and with the non-human beings that inhabit it. Consequently, the tales of Yeats and Cunqueiro provide sustainable knowledge and values –such as the respectful use of medicinal plants, conscious collaboration with other species, and reverence for natural cycles– that invite ecological practices in the daily life of contemporary society. The stories of Galician and Irish witches and healers suggest that humanity can rekindle its bond with the natural world and understand nature not as an inert resource, but as a community of living beings endowed with agency and reciprocity. In this way, it becomes possible to restore a spiritual and bodily connection with the Earth through the sensitivity and ancestral knowledge embedded in these narratives.

This research compares the literary representations of the witch and the healer in the work of Álvaro Cunqueiro and W.B. Yeats, identifying their similarities and differences; it analyzes, from an ecocritical perspective, how these narratives highlight the symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature, and how they oppose the dystopian visions currently prevailing; it examines the role of the Galician and Irish witch as a mediator between the human community and the natural world, evaluating her importance as a model of ecological knowledge and spiritual connection with the environment; and it reflects on the teachings or values that may be drawn from these regenerative narratives.

Likewise, this study aims to contribute to a 'green philology' and follows the principles of a "poetics of breathing," which establishes a connection between the rhythms and harmonies of nature and those of literature: literature as an ecological phenomenon that breathes in unison with its environment and enters into dialogue with it; poetry that shares rhythm and harmony with natural cycles; an ethics that makes literature responsible for reestablishing the human bond with the nature of which it is a part; and the reinterpretation of literary texts from an environmentally committed perspective that attends to the ecological, ethical, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions of literary language (Marrero Henríquez 2021). This approach involves reading literary texts not only for their formal value, but also for their capacity to "dar a los lectores la posibilidad de hacerlos respirar junto con el planeta Tierra y de favorecer el ritmo acompasado de ambos[4]" (426). It is about emotionally reconnecting human beings with the rhythms of the natural world, so that traditional fantastic literature may contribute to the regenerative narratives of the present.

[4] "Give readers the possibility of breathing along with planet Earth and of fostering a shared, synchronized rhythm between them" (author's own translation).

2. GREEN UTOPIAS AND SYMBIOTIC NARRATIVES

Rethinking our bond with the natural environment is not only an intellectual task, but also an emotional one. Drawing on concepts such as 'the Ghedeist,' the symbiotic relationships among all living beings on the planet –human and non-human– must be prioritized in order to put an end to the destructive tendencies of the Anthropocene. As Glenn Albrecht (2019) explains, the concept of the Symbiocene offers a hopeful framework, promotes healing, and encourages the creation of new possible futures. In this context, he introduces the neologism ghedeist to describe a secular, positive feeling for the unity of life and the interconnectedness of all beings. As he states:

> The neologism "ghedeist" was thus created by me to account for a secular positive feeling for the unity of life, and the intuition, now backed up by science, that all things are interconnected by the sharing of a life force. My definition of the "ghedeist" is the awareness of the spirit or force that holds things together, a secular feeling of interconnectedness in life between the self and other beings (human and nonhuman) and their gathering together to live within shared Earth places and spaces, including our own bodies. It is a feeling of intense affinity and sense of empathy for other beings that all share a joint life. It is a feeling of deep association with the grand project we call life. (151)

From the perspective of environmental literary studies, the "poetics of breathing" considers literature a privileged space for rethinking the relationship between humanity and nature in the time of the Anthropocene. The current ecological crisis demands new theories and new imaginaries to counteract the cultural inertia toward destruction. Various authors agree on the urgency of reclaiming utopian capacity as a driving force for change. Harvey (2019) argues that, in the face of rapid planetary degradation, "the Anthropocene crisis is made up of dangers and opportunities. In fact, the carrot and the stick have never been bigger" (24) and only a transformative vision can prevent a catastrophic outcome. In his transdisciplinary analysis, he proposes that an effective plan for change must combine practical goals with a bold vision and psychosocial values aligned with sustainability. This idea aligns with the position of thinkers such as Francisco Martorell Campos (2021), who observes that the rise of dystopias in the 21st century has overshadowed our utopian imagination, something profoundly detrimental if we aspire to "que el futuro contenga civilizaciones prósperas, pacíficas y modernas no capitalistas brotadas de la acción social[5]" (40). Lisa Garforth (2018) challenges traditional notions of utopia and proposes adapting new green and regenerative narratives to present realities through hybrid and sustainable systems that contribute to the development of contemporary ecological thought. In other words, by imagining and rethinking

[5] "A future that may contain prosperous, peaceful, and modern non-capitalist civilizations emerging from collective social action" (author's own translation).

viable green utopias that can be adapted to and integrated into the near future, as suggested in the following passage:

> In order to develop greener worlds, we will need to unsettle capitalist models of value and create alternative ways of understanding how we produce and consume nature. We will have to challenge binary epistemologies and come up with new ways of grasping the hybridity of life, human and nonhuman. (32)

Utopias serve primarily to reframe self/other relationships –in this case, between the human being and Nature. Utopias should not be understood as perfect and idealized alternative futures, but rather as transformative spaces that invite change. What is compelling about them is the capacity to imagine alternative worlds or green utopias that function as tools for social and ecological change in the contemporary world. Utopias are understood as spaces of experimentation and critique, where dominant epistemologies are challenged and possibilities for transformation are cultivated. As Sargisson (2000) points out, utopias are spaces in which we can begin to think differently and from which we can engage with the world through a more ethical and conscious perspective:

> They are spaces in which we can begin to think differently, play with alternatives, explore ideas to their limits –and from which, perhaps, we can approach the world with a fresh viewpoint. Utopias permit us radically to change the way that we think. Once that process has begun, we can –perhaps– begin to act in ways that are sustainably different. I call this 'transgressive utopianism' because transgression is a key part of its operation. (140)

Sargisson refers to this approach as "transgressive utopianism," in which the transgression of established norms is key to the transformative function of utopia. In other words, transgressive utopia breaks with confining intellectual and social traditions and enables radically different thinking that can translate into innovative and sustainable forms of action. This notion is particularly relevant for analyzing the narratives of Cunqueiro and W.B. Yeats, insofar as both recover marginal traditions (Celtic folklore, rural knowledge) to subvert the modern and anthropocentric worldview. By presenting witches and fairies –figures traditionally relegated to superstition– in a positive light, these texts transgress the dualisms of Western culture (civilization vs. barbarism, human vs. animal, reason vs. magic) and open fissures through which more symbiotic relationships with the environment can be imagined.

Albrecht's concept of the "Symbiocene" as a future era characterized by the harmonious reintegration of human beings with the Earth "begins when recognition by humans of the vital interconnectedness of life becomes the material foundation for all subsequent thought, policy, and action" (2019, 104). This vision offers a hopeful framework that promotes healing and the creation of new possible futures in which the human species has overcome anthropocentric individualism to embrace an existence of interdependence with the natural world and the living beings that inhabit it. Therefore, if we apply Albrecht's vision to the narratives of Cunqueiro and W.B. Yeats, we can observe how the figure of the witches, with their deep bond with

nature, are precursors of the concept of 'the Ghedeist' and embody that unifying spirit of life.

Environmental humanities conceive of literature as a space for rethinking the relationship between human beings and nature, not only through reason but also through empathy and emotion (Weik von Mossner 2017). Narratives with ecological awareness aim to involve the reader in experiences that dissolve the subject/object boundary, inviting them to 'feel with' the natural world. Through these narratives, readers empathize with nature and the non-human, experiencing their sensations, thoughts, and feelings. "Such narratives use our capacity for empathy strategically in order to encourage readers to feel moral allegiance with the victims of environmental injustice" (79). In this way, Weik von Mossner argues that a trans-species empathy is possible, through which readers or viewers can 'feel with' animals or other non-human natural entities. Therefore, generating empathy is a key aspect of 'symbiotic narratives.' Likewise, another fundamental element in 'ecofictions' is the polyphony of voices –that is, giving voice to the non-human and allowing nature, which possesses its own agency, to speak for itself. By incorporating multiple voices –those of animals, trees, plants, or rivers– the narrative places the reader in a position of encounter with other forms of life (Manwaring 2024).

3. THE WITCH AS A MEDIATOR WITH NATURE

The ecofeminist perspective reveals how the ecological crisis is intertwined with structures of gender oppression and with the domination of nature associated with patriarchy. In the context of fantastic literature, Cecilia Salmerón Tellechea (2023) observes that the representation of the vegetal and the non-human has served to deconstruct the hierarchical and anthropocentric view of nature and to question human superiority over other forms of life. As she explains:

> La representación de lo vegetal en códigos fantásticos ha contribuido a deconstruir la concepción jerárquica de los seres de la biosfera, así como las visiones antropocéntricas y esencialistas de la naturaleza. (...) Ha puesto sobre el tapete advertencias y reflexiones sobre la contaminación y la catástrofe ambiental (...) y ha visibilizado las violencias estructurales del patriarcado. Asimismo, ha enriquecido las modalidades de lo fantástico explorando la otredad mediante ricas variantes de lo monstruoso.[6] (17-8)

Following the theoretical framework of Salmerón Tellechea, the figure of the witch is situated at the intersection of ecology and gender, since historically, the

[6] "The representation of the vegetal within fantastic codes has contributed to deconstructing hierarchical conceptions of beings within the biosphere, as well as anthropocentric and essentialist views of nature. (...) It has brought to the forefront warnings and reflections on pollution and environmental catastrophe (...) and has exposed the structural violence of patriarchy. Furthermore, it has enriched the modes of the fantastic by exploring otherness through rich variations of the monstrous" (author's own translation).

witch was a wise woman –often a healer or midwife– whose connection with herbs, animals, and traditional knowledge made her suspect in the eyes of the Church and male authorities. The image of the evil witch –the demonic old woman who flies on a broomstick and casts curses– was constructed and exaggerated during the Inquisition in order to discredit these independent women and delegitimize their knowledge. In the words of Guy Bechtel (2001):

> La bruja ha sido un personaje esencial en la historia de Occidente. Y la historia de la brujería fue, en gran parte, la historia del martirio de las mujeres. (...) Fue víctima de una maquinaria que funcionaba a tres niveles: un retrato fabricado por la Iglesia, el de la bruja endemoniada; el odio de sus vecinos que la llevó a entregarse voluntariamente a la investigación que terminaría condenándola; por último, una justicia *civil* –conviene subrayarlo, si bien la violencia con la que actuó se debía al retrato difundido por los religiosos– que le dio la muerte.[7] (139-141)

In contrast, the contemporary recovery of the witch as a symbol often presents her as an archetype of an empowered woman in symbiosis with nature. This ecofeminist reclamation of the witch emphasizes that what defined these women was their defiance of patriarchal norms –their intellectual, bodily, and spiritual autonomy– rather than a simplistic dichotomy between 'good' and 'evil' witches. Applying this idea to the Galician and Irish witches in the works of Cunqueiro and W.B. Yeats, they represent a counter-hegemonic alternative to both the dominant anthropocentric model and the patriarchal gender order. These are liminal figures who live on the margins of the forest or the village, hold knowledge of plants, and escape cultural domestication. In doing so, they embody a sustainable and communal way of life that contrasts sharply with the capitalist view of nature as an exploitable resource. The relationship these witches maintain with nature "no sigue la ontológica moderna, dual, patriarcal y capitalista; por el contrario, las plantas, los animales, los minerales, entes y divinidades configuran su cotidianidad, sus re-existencias y resistencias[8]" (Parra-Valencia, Páez & Fernandes 2024, 2).

Similarly, Sullivan (2024) analyzes the representation of plants in fairy tales, which –like witches– are portrayed as dangerous and heavily sexualized, thereby reinforcing the prejudice that the vegetal realm is inferior or irrational. Sullivan ironically refers to this phenomenon as "*bad plants*," thus denouncing an

[7] "The witch has been an essential figure in the history of the West. And the history of witchcraft was, to a large extent, the history of the martyrdom of women. (...) She was the victim of a machinery that operated on three levels: a portrait fabricated by the Church –the demonic witch; the hatred of her neighbors, which led her to voluntarily submit to an inquiry that would end in her condemnation; and finally, a civil justice system –which should be emphasized, although the violence with which it acted stemmed from the image promoted by the clergy– that sentenced her to death" (author's own translation).

[8] "Does not follow the modern, dualistic, patriarchal, and capitalist ontology; on the contrary, plants, animals, minerals, entities, and divinities shape her everyday life, her modes of re-existence and resistance" (author's own translation).

anthropocentric cultural model that instrumentalizes nature. The author proposes a queer rereading of the vegetal world, one that recognizes its agency, its alterity, and breaks with modern binarism: "Indeed, our vegetal enablers should not be taken lightly, nor should they be seen as merely magnanimous beings existing solely for our benefit or manipulations. Plant life, the vast green force spread across the Earth enabling most large living creatures" (16).

The dominant imaginary that separates culture from nature is a product of anthropocentric thought that has generated the ecological crisis. Marrero Henríquez (2025) proposes a critical practice he calls "poetics of breathing," which reads texts through the recognition of the vital interdependence of all beings, always keeping in view "la ecología [para] subsanar la alienación del especialista en general y del filólogo en particular[9]", and to restore a new sense to literary analysis in times of planetary crisis (6). Both Marrero Henríquez and Sullivan advocate for a reconfiguration of literary and critical sensibility and call for the recovery of alternative narrative forms that reconnect the human with the vegetal. Tuan (1977) emphasizes that the rational understanding of the world must be surrounded by affective, symbolic, and poetic frameworks, and that mythical geography –as found in fairy tales or peasant legends– provides these frameworks: spaces where the non-human possesses its own agency. From this perspective, mythical spatial thinking is profoundly ecological, as the environment is not organized according to its utility or instrumental value, but according to its resonance with the other elements that inhabit that shared space, whether plants, fungi, animals, witches, or other fantastic beings.

4. BAD AND GOOD WITCHES: DUALITY AND DECONSTRUCTION

In Galician culture, the figure of the witch is traditionally divided into a duality: on one side, the "bruxa" (associated with black magic and dark practices), and on the other, the "meiga" (associated with white magic –a healer and benevolent sorceress with deep knowledge of the rural environment). Galician anthropology and cultural history document that "meigas" worked with medicinal herbs, fungi, trees, and local animals, assisting the community or village with their ailments, in contrast to the "bruxas," who disrupted social harmony (Lisón Tolosana 2004). Otero Pedrayo (2020) describes Celtic and Galician women as "de razas fuertes, en las que las mujeres están más cerca del alma ancestral y eterna[10]" (98), and it is these Galician women who are the guardians of the primal culture, as suggested in the following passage:

[9] "Ecology [as a means] to heal the alienation of the specialist in general, and of the philologist in particular" (author's own translation).

[10] "Of strong races, in which women are closer to the ancestral and eternal soul" (author's own translation).

> Y a la sabia también, y a la bruja y brujo-meiga, quienes, en simbiosis con la tradición, el medio y la imaginación popular local han ideado –y aceptado– una visión cósmica suprema que rehúsa y supera el hecho sensible y a la presencia concreta. Esa culminación o cosmovisión, con su correspondiente significación, que va más allá y por encima del hombre, crea una impresión de trascendencia: la presencia de lo inefable e indefinible que las mujeres de Aldán expresan con pausas y silencio.[11] (Lisón Tolosana 2004, 436)[12]

As in Galicia, in Ireland the figure of the witch is also divided: "fairy doctors" (witches who practiced white magic and had been instructed by the fairies) and "witches" (those who practiced black magic and disrupted the social harmony of the village). Like the meigas, the fairy doctors possessed knowledge of the natural environment and carried out botanical practices to heal the ailments of the people and to counteract the curses cast by the witches (Yeats 2008).

> Witches and fairy doctors receive their power from opposite dynasties; the witch from evil spirits and her own malignant will; the fairy doctor from the fairies, and a something –a temperament– that is born with him or her. The first is always feared and hated. The second is gone to for advice and is never worse than mischievous. The most celebrated fairy doctors are sometimes people the fairies loved and carried away and kept with them for seven years. (184)

It is worth noting that in Galicia, unlike in Ireland, the term "meiga" has historically carried a more ambiguous usage: although the positive meaning (wise woman or good sorceress) tends to predominate, in certain regions it is also applied to any witch in general. However, whether they are meigas or bruxas, fairy doctors or witches, the practices of all of them imply a recognition of the agency of nature and of its non-human elements (plants, animals, and even spiritual entities of the landscape), as well as a commitment to maintaining local ecological balance. In short, when stripped of the traditional good/evil duality, witches become symbols of the human-nature symbiosis and live in harmony with their ecosystems, applying a principle of mutual care that challenges anthropocentric and patriarchal hierarchies. This idea of the witch as an ecological mediator provides a key theoretical foundation

[11] And also, the wise woman, the witch, and the male or female 'meiga' who, in symbiosis with tradition, the environment, and the local popular imagination, have conceived –and embraced– a supreme cosmic vision that refuses and transcends the sensible world and concrete presence. This culmination or worldview, along with its corresponding meaning that rises above and beyond the human, creates an impression of transcendence: the presence of the ineffable and the undefinable, which the women of Aldán express through pauses and silence (author's own translation).

[12] Lisón Tolosana refers to the parish of Aldán, located in the municipality of Cangas de Morrazo (Pontevedra), renowned for the figure of the Galician fisherwoman and landowner María Soliña (1551-1617), who was tried for witchcraft in 1621 by the Spanish Inquisition in Santiago de Compostela. Remembered in the collective memory of the Galician people, María Soliña died shortly after being tortured (Santiago, 2014).

for analyzing the literary works of Cunqueiro and Yeats, where folk healers and sorceresses represent that deep-rooted bond with the living Earth.

Galician authors have always looked to Irish and Celtic culture as a reference point in shaping their mythology, folklore, and national identity (De Toro Santos 2007). As Castro (1927) remarks, the new generations of Galician writers should approach the culture of the British Isles:

> Á parte das razóns expostas é preciso advertir que case toda a moderna literatura irlandesa, escocesa e galesa está escrita en inglés. ¿Como imos penetrar no ambiente espiritual desas nacións sen ler a Yeats, Synge, George, Macdonald ou Barrie. Sería como excluír a Valle Inclán da literatura galega. (...) Galicia debe mirar cara ás terras brumosas do Norte, terras de Ossian, de Fingal, de Deidre das tristuras. E o lazo entre Galicia e eses países ten que selo Inglaterra, a cultura inglesa, a única no mundo saturada do espírito celta. (...) Propúxenme tan só contribuír modestamente á mellor comprensión desa terra de románticos, de humoristas, de poesía máxica e melancólica, cuxo coñecemento considero tan necesario para o desenvolvemento cultural de Galicia.[13] (2)

In Ireland, Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats collect Irish folklore and mythology, while in Galicia, Álvaro Cunqueiro[14] incorporates and reinterprets Galician folklore and mythology.[15] Indeed, "Cunqueiro evoca las tierras soñadas de Irlanda, recupera sus leyendas y mitos y los incorpora al espacio gallego, dándole una proyección más amplia a las tradiciones orales y mágicas de Galicia y dando forma a su identidad nacional[16]" (De Toro Santos 2007, 58). In *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (2008[1888]), W.B. Yeats emphasizes how the witches and the fairy doctors possess

[13] "In addition to the reasons already mentioned, it must be noted that almost all modern Irish, Scottish, and Welsh literature is written in English. How can we hope to penetrate the spiritual atmosphere of those nations without reading Yeats, Synge, George, Macdonald, or Barrie? It would be like excluding Valle-Inclán from Galician literature. (...) Galicia must look toward the misty lands of the North, lands of Ossian, of Fingal, of Deirdre of the sorrows. And the link between Galicia and those countries must be England, English culture –the only one in the world saturated with the Celtic spirit. (...) I have merely aimed to contribute modestly to a better understanding of that land of romantics, of humorists, of magical and melancholic poetry, whose knowledge I consider essential for the cultural development of Galicia" (author's own translation).

[14] Álvaro Cunqueiro revitalized Galician folklore and mythology through his literature, but when it comes to rigorous collectors of Galician folklore, we must turn to authors such as Vicente Risco in *Etnografía: Cultura espiritual* (1972), or Xesús Taboada Chivite in *Ritos y creencias gallegas* (1980), who undertook the task of cataloguing and analyzing popular traditions.

[15] Yeats's folklore work, although literary in tone, must be read in the context of his engagement with Irish identity politics and occult traditions, where the *fairy doctor* figure can be linked to a nationalist and spiritual renewal of Irishness (Brown 1999; Foster 1997). Cunqueiro's use of witches and healers is less overtly political but reflects a subtext of Galician distinctiveness and cultural continuity within the constraints of Spanish centralism (PérezBustamante Mourier 2008).

[16] "Cunqueiro evokes the dreamed lands of Ireland, recovers its legends and myths, and incorporates them into the Galician landscape, giving broader projection to Galicia's oral and magical traditions and helping to shape its national identity" (author's own translation).

extensive natural knowledge, regardless of how they later apply this ancestral wisdom. That is, both witches and fairy doctors exist in constant symbiosis with the natural world: "great is their knowledge of herbs and spells" (184), and there are several tales in which both fairy doctors and witches feature prominently. In the case of W.B. Yeats, there are only eight tales that reference witches: "Bewitched Butter (Donegal)," about a fairy doctor who helps restore milk to the Hanlon family's cow; "A Queen's County Witch," about a witch who uses her neighbour's milk to sell more butter; "The Witch Hare," about a witch who transforms into a hare; "Bewitched Butter (Queen's County)," about a fairy doctor who lifts a curse from a cow; "The Horned Women," about twelve witches who enter a house and force the owner to follow their orders, but she manages to expel them with the help of a fairy doctor; "The Witches' Excursion," about thirteen witches who fly from Ireland to England; "The Confessions of Tom Bourke," about a fairy doctor who healed the physical ailments of county dwellers; and "The Pudding Bewitched," about a bewitched pudding resolved by a fairy doctor.

In both Yeats's and Cunqueiro's narratives, fairy doctors or witches, as well as meigas or bruxas, may be either women or men, although the female figure predominates. In *Tertulia de boticas prodigiosas y escuela de curanderos* (1976), Cunqueiro presents a parade of rural healers –curanderas or curanderos– and endows them with an intimate connection to nature and a spirit of service to their community. A representative example is the tale of Cerviño de Moldes, who travels through Galician villages offering cures without asking for anything in return:

> Iba en un caballete del país, de aquí para allí, recogía hierbas, y se acercaba sigiloso a las casas de los vecinos; golpeaba con los nudillos en la puerta y al que salía a abrir le decía que era el profesor Cerviño y que sin prisas, y con conversación distraída, curaba algunas cosas. Y que no cobraba. Comenzó a curar catarros infantiles con una hierba que trajera de Cuba, la llamada hierba monda, que era pardo rojiza. Además de la hierba, sugería paseos a caballo: Cerviño iba en su jaco, y tras él iba en otro el enfermito con su madrina.[17] (111-2)

This passage presents an itinerant healer who embodies several key qualities of the meiga/fairy doctor: extensive botanical knowledge (of both local and exotic herbs), the practice of folk medicine (treating children's colds, likely combining herbal remedies with advice such as outdoor walks, as the text later suggests), and an altruistic ethic (providing healing without charge, aside perhaps from receiving the patient's hospitality). The figure of Cerviño is stripped of any spectacular magical

[17] "He rode a local saddle horse, going from place to place, collecting herbs, and approaching neighbors' homes quietly. He would knock on the door with his knuckles, and to whoever came out, he would say he was Professor Cerviño, and that –without haste and with casual conversation– he could cure certain ailments. And he didn't charge. He began treating children's colds with an herb he had brought from Cuba, called *hierba monda*, which was reddish-brown. In addition to the herb, he prescribed horseback rides: Cerviño rode on his mount, and behind him came the little patient with his godmother, riding another" (author's own translation).

connotations –he does not fly on a broomstick, nor chant Latin spells. His magic resides in his extraordinary imagination and in the traditional wisdom he carries.

Cunqueiro subtly blends reality and fantasy: on one hand, he legitimizes this ancestral knowledge by presenting it with costumbrista naturalness; on the other, he hints at fantastical elements (the mysterious air with which Cerviño arrives, the herbs brought from distant lands, etc.). Taken as a whole, Cunqueiro's curanderos and Yeats's fairy doctors represent the luminous counterpart to the witch archetype: women and men who, guided by a profound understanding of Nature, dedicate their lives to healing imbalances –whether those be illness, curses, or disharmony between humans and their environment: "Not many months since he recovered a young woman (the sister of a tradesman living near him), who had been struck speechless after returning from a funeral, and had continued so for several days. He steadfastly refused receiving any compensation" (Yeats 2008[1888], 217).

It is important to highlight that both Yeats and Cunqueiro demystify and deconstruct the traditional Western image of the witch. Rather than perpetuating a Manichaean view (good witch versus evil witch), they complicate those categories. Yeats, for instance, collects stories in which the boundaries between witch and fairy doctor are blurred. A single character may at times wield powers that appear dark, yet with good intentions –and vice versa, a fairy doctor might engage in questionable mischief. For example, in the tale *"*The Pudding Bewitched*,"* Harry Connolly –a fairy doctor– opposed the marriage between Moll Roe, a young Catholic woman, and Gusty Gillespie, a young Protestant man; thus, he decided to bewitch the wedding banquet's pudding: "(...) but never mind that, I tell you you'll have a merrier weddin' than you think, that's all;' and havin' said this, he put on his hat and left the house" (Yeats 2008[1888], 231).

This suggests that, in popular practice, the morality of witchcraft was not determined so much by labels as using power. Similarly, Cunqueiro, in his work, does not feel the need to explicitly label his healers as "good"; he simply portrays them as integrated within their communities, normalizing their role. The good/evil witch dichotomy is ultimately a product of fairy tale literature and simplified folklore. In fact, this rigid duality has been a didactic and inquisitorial construction –on the one hand, to demonize rebellious wise women, and on the other, to offer an acceptable substitute ("the tamed good witch"). This analysis understands that Yeats and Cunqueiro, each in their own way, reclaim the human complexity of their witches, where the boundary between good and bad actions is often blurred. These are not angels or demons, but individuals (mostly women) with extraordinary knowledge who operate outside official medicine or religion. The deconstruction of the concept and figure of the witch is essential, since –regardless of the name– the semantic associations linked to the term "witch" have no real basis and are marked by an inquisitorial past.

5. RECONNECTION WITH GAIA: ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND REGENERATIVE PRACTICES

A central trait of witches in Galician and Irish traditions is their intimate knowledge of nature and the use of ancestral wisdom. These witches/healers act as guardians of traditional ecological knowledge, as communities in earlier times depended on a deep understanding of plants, seasonal cycles, and animal behavior for survival. The figures of the meiga and the fairy doctor embody precisely that body of knowledge passed down orally from generation to generation. In the Irish tales collected by Yeats, it is emphasized that fairy doctors often acquired their wisdom through a special relationship with the fairies. It was believed that "the most celebrated fairy doctors are sometimes people the fairies loved and carried away and kept with them for seven years" (2008, 184). Upon returning to the human world, these individuals came back "touched" by the faerie realm: they became introspective, enjoyed wandering alone through natural landscapes, and acquired extraordinary creative or healing gifts. Symbolically speaking, their knowledge does not stem solely from empirical study, but from a deep communion with nature, personified in the fairies. In the Celtic worldview, fairies represent the spirits of the earth, which means that these individuals were instructed by Mother Nature herself. Each piece of knowledge involved understanding both the physical dimension (which herb, which specific act) and the spiritual dimension of the problem (what invisible force is at work). In short, Irish narrative presents fairy doctors as herbalists, healers, and ritual advisors. In the Galician case, the meigas and healers that populate the pages of Cunqueiro likewise display a wide repertoire of sustainable practices and regenerative knowledge. As he emphasizes:

> El autor de este texto tuvo ocios bastantes en la oficina de farmacia paterna para, desde párvulo, deletrear en los botes los nombres sorprendentes, desde el opio y la mirra a la menta y la glicerina, y más tarde, ayudar a hacer píldoras y sellos, y escudriñar el misterio del ojo del boticario, y sumergir una mano en los cajones de las plantas medicinales, la genciana, las hojas de sen, la salvia, la manzanilla..., y darle al molino de la mostaza, cerca del cual estaba la redoma de las sanguijuelas. Mi padre preparaba la tintura de yodo, un vino aperitivo, o las limonadas purgantes para la gula del obispo de Solís.[18] (Cunqueiro 1976, 7)

Cunqueiro, a deep connoisseur of Galician oral tradition, incorporates into his texts local plant names, home remedies, and recipes that blend natural ingredients with ritual practices: "Te lavas bien el cuerpo durante toda una semana, y comes

[18] "The author of this text had ample leisure in his father's pharmacy to, from early childhood, spell out the astonishing names on the jars –from opium and myrrh to mint and glycerin– and later, to help make pills and wafers, to peer into the mystery of the apothecary's eye, to sink a hand into the drawers of medicinal plants –gentian, senna leaves, sage, chamomile...– and to crank the mustard mill, near which stood the vial of leeches. My father would prepare iodine tincture, a tonic wine, or purgative lemonades for the bishop of Solís's gluttony" (author's own translation).

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papas de centeno cuatro veces al día. El veintidós es creciente, y he de sangrarte. (...) Curaba con sangrías, con papas de avena o de centeno, baños calientes y muchas horas de sueño[19]" (101). The Galician writer offers in his work a tribute not only to traditional pharmacopoeia –based on plants, minerals, and psychologically effective rituals– but also to fantastical pharmacopoeia, blending real remedies with imaginary ones. As indicated in the passage below:

> Se trata aquí del polvo del cuerno del unicornio, obligatorio en las farmacias inglesas todavía en el XVIII, de la piedra bezoar, de la mandrágora, de los kutbub al mawázin gabirianos, de las corrientes de agua que curan la melancolía, de las plantas secretas de la farmacia de los reyes de Portugal, de somníferos, de las medicinas para fabricar niños prodigio, de la botica del arcángel Rafael, etc. Todo ello compone un mundo a la vez cierto y fantástico, por el que pasa el hombre buscando la salud y la larga vida, o dando la muerte.[20] (Cunqueiro 1976, 7-8)

In both Irish and Galician stories, there is a constant: when the fairy doctor or meiga intervenes, the goal is to restore natural order and collective well-being (to break the enchantment, heal the ailment, protect livestock or people). This dialectic allows us to read these narratives as ecological allegories: insofar as we seek more respectful ways to coexist with the Earth today, inspiration can be found in these literary figures. For example, the importance of medicinal plants highlights the value of biodiversity and traditional botanical knowledge in the search for present-day solutions (herbal medicines, regenerative agriculture, etc.). The practice of not harming faerie beings or of respecting certain places points to the need to recognize the rights and sacred spaces of other species. Even a fairy doctor's refusal to consume meat or drink alcohol may be seen as a precursor to a sustainable and mindful lifestyle: "He never touched beer, spirits, or meat in all his life, but has lived entirely on bread, fruit, and vegetables" (Yeats 2008[1888], 184).

The witch and healer narratives of W.B. Yeats and Cunqueiro can be read in a contemporary key as pedagogical metaphors –covert lessons on how to coexist harmoniously with the environment. In the words of Salmerón Tellechea (2023), vegetal fantastic fiction has been a pioneer in "afirmar grados de intencionalidad, voluntad e inteligencia en las plantas, la agencia vegetal: categoría a partir de la cual

[19] "You wash your body thoroughly for an entire week and eat rye potatoes four times a day. The twenty-second is a waxing moon, and I must bleed you. (...) He treated with bloodletting, with oat or rye poultices, hot baths, and many hours of sleep" (author's own translation).

[20] "This concerns the powder of unicorn horn –still required in English pharmacies as late as the eighteenth century– the bezoar stone, mandrake, the *kutbub* and *Gabirian mawázin*, the currents of water that cure melancholy, the secret plants of the pharmacy of the kings of Portugal, sleeping draughts, medicines to produce prodigy children, the apothecary of the Archangel Raphael, etc. All of this constitutes a world both real and fantastic, through which man passes in search of health and long life –or to bring death" (author's own translation).

se ha cuestionado y revisado la noción de conciencia[21]" (17). Applying this idea to literary witches, these stories anthropomorphize Nature through fairies, spirits, or the magical properties of plants, which –within the traditional cultural context– implies recognizing the agency of the natural world. By accepting the literary game –imagining that the forest has a voice, that animals understand, or that herbs choose their healers– the non-human shifts from a passive object to an active subject. In short, the practices and knowledge of witches in Yeats and Cunqueiro form a catalogue of regenerative strategies (social, medicinal, and spiritual) that, when reread today, can inspire sustainable methods for inhabiting the planet and, consequently, green utopias.

In both Cunqueiro's and Yeats's work, witches mediate between two worlds: the human world and the natural world. This implies recognizing that the landscape is animated by non-human presences. Every river, mountain, plant, or tree is alive and inhabited by other mysterious beings. These types of beliefs and stories foster a sense of reverential respect for natural spaces within the community. The narratives of both authors show how a form of pagan religiosity persists in both Galicia and Ireland, and how witches, fairy doctors, or meigas act as priests of nature, protecting it and cooperating with it. In these traditional cultures, there exists a non-institutional popular religion that sacralizes the Earth, in which the witch is the custodian of rural spirituality –she knows special prayers, communicates with plants and animals, and performs natural rituals, among other things. Her powers derive not only from technical knowledge, but from a spiritual alignment with the forces of nature. For instance, the boundary between the natural and the supernatural is blurred, and Cunqueiro integrates the idea that healing is not only physical, but also emotional. The stories reveal that the patient's faith and imagination are part of the remedy. A theme that emerges in both Yeats and Cunqueiro is that of alliance with non-human beings.

The fairy doctors and Galician meigas ally themselves with fairies and with the nature spirits present in rivers, trees, hills, mountains, and so on. This literary representation suggests a path for the current era: instead of seeking to conquer nature, it is necessary to ally with it, learn from other species, and recognize the agency of the Earth. This is precisely the ethic of Albrecht's Symbiocene (2019), "protection of symbiotic bonds between and within species at all scales; and reestablishment of symbiotic bonds where they have been severed in the Anthropocene" (104). Literary witches exemplify the protection of those symbiotic bonds. When they undo harm, they are restoring a broken connection –between the cow and its milk, between the child and their health, between the community and the fairies. It can be said that they act as agents of the Symbiocene. The idea of Gaia as a living organism (Lovelock 1983) emphasizes the need for an almost reverential relationship with planet Earth

[21] "Affirming degrees of intentionality, will, and intelligence in plants –the notion of vegetal agency: a category through which the concept of consciousness has been questioned and reexamined" (author's own translation).

to halt its destruction. In this sense, the narratives of Yeats and Cunqueiro offer a regenerative imagination: they invite us to see the world as filled with invisible life, to believe that each tree may harbor a friendly or hostile spirit, and that every human action resonates on a spiritual plane.

The rereading of Yeats and Cunqueiro can be understood as a cultural strategy for rebuilding the emotional and ethical connection with the biosphere, as we need a "poetics of breathing" that synchronizes culture with the vital rhythm of nature (Marrero Henríquez 2021). The witches in their stories –breathing in unison with forests and rivers, dancing under the full moon, whispering ancient words to their medicinal plants– metaphorically embody that poetics. They are a reminder of ancestral wisdom. Through their witches, Yeats and Cunqueiro narrate green utopias: communities in which human beings live in symbiosis with other forms of life, supported by figures of ancestral knowledge who safeguard natural and spiritual balance. Their tales teach us that it is indeed possible to imagine and build a different future, where the line between the human and the non-human is blurred in an enriching collaboration. They are literary invitations to reconsider the place of the human in the world –from masters, consumers, and exploiters to caretakers and companions in the web of life. "El arte, la creatividad, la imaginación de un mundo alternativo, más sostenible, más poshumanista, capaz de visionar una salida al apocalipsis del cambio climático, esa parece ser la pieza que faltaba del código y en la que alberga la esperanza de encontrar una solución[22]" (Sotelo 2023, 29).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Considering this study, the narratives of Álvaro Cunqueiro and W.B. Yeats offer fertile ground for the construction of new green utopias and narratives. In response to the first research question –can new green utopias and narratives be constructed using as a starting point 20th-century Galician literature by Álvaro Cunqueiro and late 19th- to early 20th-century Irish literature by W.B. Yeats?– the works analyzed demonstrate that folkloric literary traditions can indeed serve as a foundation for imagining sustainable alternative futures. Yeats and Cunqueiro recover a mythical heritage in which human beings are not detached from nature, but constantly interact with it, whether through fairy doctors, witches, meigas, or bruxas. When reread from a contemporary perspective, their stories function as critical utopias that challenge the modern view of a dystopian and disenchanted world and offer alternative visions of harmonious coexistence at a time when utopian imagination seems to have withered in the face of the ecological crisis.

[22] "Art, creativity, and the imagination of an alternative world –more sustainable, more posthumanist, capable of envisioning a way out of the climate change apocalypse– seem to be the missing piece of the code, and the one that holds the hope of finding a solution" (author's own translation).

Regarding the second question –is the figure of the witch a key element in revealing the connection that human beings can establish with nature and the living beings that inhabit it? This study confirms that the figure of the witch is indeed essential for demonstrating and emphasizing the connection that humans can forge with nature and the living beings that dwell within it. The witch personifies an intimate union with the Earth: she possesses deep knowledge of plants, understands the symbolic language of her environment, and respects both creatures and invisible forces. In the works studied, these witches serve as bridges between the human, the non-human, and the natural. Their very presence within the community testifies to the fact that human beings belong to the web of life and are not above it. Ultimately, the literary witches of Cunqueiro and Yeats reveal that the culture/nature dichotomy is false, and that they inhabit a cultural realm that is at once profoundly natural. For this reason, reclaiming these figures in a positive light helps to reimagine the human not as a dominator, but as an ally to all other living beings.

Regarding the third Question –can we learn from these regenerative narratives sustainable and respectful methods for building a green future in which humans live in symbiosis with the natural environment and with other forms of life? The answer is yes: we can indeed learn sustainable and respectful methods from these regenerative narratives to build a green future. The goal is not to replicate the solutions offered in these stories literally, but to translate their spirit into actionable models for creating a healthier relationship with the natural world and its living beings. For example, the interspecies collaboration symbolized by a fairy doctor can inspire ecological restoration initiatives in which humans work with nature (such as forest restoration projects that incorporate Indigenous knowledge, or permaculture designs that mimic ecosystems). Thus, it is possible to extract sustainable methods in an ethical and conceptual sense and to promote an attitude of humility, attentiveness, and respect for the Earth's rhythms. Rather than advocating for unrestrained exploitation, these narratives propose care and reciprocity –principles that constitute the indispensable foundation of any sustainable future society.

Finally, regarding the fourth question –is it possible to restore the spiritual and bodily connection that our ancestors shared with Mother Earth (Gaia) through the implicit lessons in these literary works? The answer is yes: it is indeed possible to restore the spiritual and bodily connection that our ancestors shared with Gaia. The witches and related figures in Yeats and Cunqueiro inhabit a universe where the material and the spiritual are interwoven: every plant possesses virtue, every forest holds a mystery, and body and soul are healed together. By engaging with texts such as those studied here, readers are invited to relearn this sensibility, as these narratives portray human beings breathing in harmony with natural cycles through an awareness of interdependence and empathy toward all forms of existence. That is the powerful contribution of *green narratives*: to rekindle communion with Nature.

In conclusion, the comparison between *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, and *Tertulia de boticas prodigiosas y escuela de curanderos* has made it possible to affirmatively address all the research questions, weaving together the utopian, ecological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions involved. It is confirmed that Celtic folkloric literature –with its witches and faerie beings– not only entertains

and preserves cultural heritage but also inspires reflections of great relevance amid the current crisis of the Anthropocene. By bringing to light models of symbiotic coexistence, female empowerment in harmony with nature, practices of care for life, and an earthly spirituality, these nineteenth- and mid-twentieth century works become surprisingly contemporary. We are facing global ecological emergencies, but we also possess imaginative tools passed down from our ancestors to confront them. The witches of Yeats and Cunqueiro whisper that another way of being is possible. Reimagining a green future through literature means reclaiming the best of the past –its knowledge and sensibilities– and creatively integrating them with new solutions. The narratives explored here function as laboratories of ecological utopias, offering a hopeful perspective.

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GREEN MAGIC AND GENDERED KNOWLEDGE: WITCHES, HEALING, AND HERBAL RESISTANCE

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Abstract

This paper explores the connection between medicinal plants and witchcraft in literature and folklore. It begins with the historical link between witches and botanical knowledge, showing how plants served in healing and sparked accusations of sorcery. A literary reading of Shakespeare's Macbeth (1995[1623]) highlights how herbs symbolize power and subversion. The study draws from European folklore and early modern texts to show plants as both empowering and persecuted symbols. It then bridges folklore with science by examining the pharmacological basis of traditional remedies. Finally, it looks at how modern herbalists and neo-pagan witches reclaim this knowledge for holistic healing. Combining literary, historical, and scientific perspectives, the paper reveals the cultural depth of plant-based witchcraft.

Keywords: Witchcraft, Medicinal Plants, Folklore, Literary Analysis, Traditional Knowledge.

MAGIA VERDE Y SABERES FEMENINOS:
BRUJAS, SANACIÓN Y RESISTENCIA HERBARIA

Resumen

Este artículo explora la conexión entre las plantas medicinales y la brujería en la literatura y el folclore. Comienza con el vínculo histórico entre las brujas y el conocimiento botánico, mostrando cómo las plantas se utilizaban con fines curativos y provocaban acusaciones de brujería. Una lectura literaria de Macbeth (1995[1623]), de Shakespeare, destaca cómo las hierbas simbolizan el poder y la subversión. El estudio se basa en el folclore europeo y en textos de la Edad Moderna para mostrar las plantas como símbolos tanto empoderadores como perseguidos. A continuación, tiende un puente entre el folclore y la ciencia al examinar la base farmacológica de los remedios tradicionales. Por último, analiza cómo los herbolarios modernos y las brujas neopaganas recuperan este conocimiento para la curación holística. Combinando perspectivas literarias, históricas y científicas, el artículo revela la profundidad cultural de la brujería basada en las plantas.

Palabras clave: brujería, plantas medicinales, folclore, análisis literario, conocimientos tradicionales.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Witchcraft has long been a subject of fascination and intrigue in literature, with its associations with the mystical and supernatural. Indeed, one aspect that often features in these narratives is the use of medicinal plants. In this line, the aim of this paper is to explore the connection between witchcraft and medicinal plants, specifically examining their portrayal in literature. Historically, witchcraft has held a significant place in various cultures around the world, creating a "witchcraft phenotype" as stated by Peacey et al. (2024, 2-4). The practice dates back centuries, with different societies having their own interpretations and beliefs surrounding it. For example, in Europe during the Middle Ages, witchcraft was viewed as evil, and practitioners were persecuted, with "estimates of the number of victims in the witchcraft trials of early modern Europe range widely, from 10,000 to over six million" as posed by Allemang (2010, 11-12). Contrastingly, some indigenous cultures saw witches as healers who possessed knowledge of using natural remedies like medicinal plants for wellness. A good example of this is the Andean healers of Ecuador presented by Cavender and Albán (2009). As Calatrava says "recent historiography has highlighted the role of women as health care providers, especially for other women" (2012, 355).

With a focus on how the representation of medicinal plants in witchcraft-related literature reflects broader cultural and historical perceptions of gendered knowledge and power, the central hypothesis is that literary and folkloric depictions of witches and their botanical practices function as a symbolic site of resistance to patriarchal and institutional epistemologies. Drawing on Silvia Federici's argument that the witch hunts were a means of suppressing women embodied and communal knowledge (2004), and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's analysis of how the rise of professionalized medicine excluded female healers (1973), this study argues therefore that medicinal plants in witchcraft narratives are not merely folkloric elements but coded sites of feminist and ecological knowledge. In this context, the following research questions guide the study: How are medicinal plants represented in literary portrayals of witches? What historical and cultural dynamics underpin the association between botanical knowledge and accusations of witchcraft? How do these narratives reflect tensions between scientific and traditional knowledge systems, and in what ways are they being reclaimed today through feminist and ecological frameworks?

As it is well known, medicinal plants are essential components of traditional medicine systems across many cultures globally (Peacey *et al.* 2024, 1). These plants possess chemical compounds that can be used for therapeutic purposes, ranging from pain relief to treating diseases. In this vein, examples include chamomile for

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relaxation or lavender for promoting sleep, etc. as Ostling mentions (2014, 183). In witchcraft literature, medicinal plants are often portrayed as powerful tools used by witches for both beneficial and harmful purposes. For instance, Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* portrays three witches who gather herbs such as "root of hemlock digged i' th' dark" (act 4.1, 123) to concoct potions associated with dark magic. Similarly, J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series depicts characters like Professor Snape brewing potions using ingredients like mandrake root or wolfsbane to create magical effects (72,110, 140). It is even said by Professor Sprout (the cheerful and knowledgeable Head of Hufflepuff House and Hogwarts' Herbology teacher in the series) that "Mandrake forms an essential part of most antidotes", thus highlighting the importance of this root (72).

Generally speaking, throughout early modern Europe, women were primary custodians of medical knowledge in their communities. They acted as midwives, herbalists, and caretakers, transmitting healing knowledge orally and through practice. To this regard, Silvia Federici exposes that this female-centered form of care was not only dismissed but violently suppressed during the rise of capitalism and state-controlled medicine (2004, 85-89). The witch hunts, in this reading, emerge as a violent purge of women embodied and communal wisdom. The 'healing witch' becomes not a figure of danger, but one of epistemic resistance –a bearer of ecological, social, and bodily knowledge that threatened the emerging medical establishment aligned with patriarchal and colonial power. Further explaining this point Federici states:

> With the marginalization of the midwife, the process began by which women lost the control they had exercised over procreation and were reduced to a passive role in child delivery, while male doctors came to be seen as the true «givers of life» (as in the alchemical dreams of the Renaissance magicians). (2004, 89)

In many cases, the same remedies used by so-called witches were absorbed into official pharmacopeias, stripped of their cultural and gendered contexts. Plants such as pennyroyal, mugwort, and rue, once used for menstrual regulation or childbirth, were demonized alongside their users (Federici 2004, 36). The branding of these women as witches functioned not only to eradicate alternative healing practices as such, but also to delegitimize women's authority over their own bodies and knowledge systems. Indeed, feminist scholars like Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English have emphasized that the transition from communal healing to professionalized medicine in Europe was accompanied by the exclusion of women and the rise of a male-dominated medical class (1973, 4). The image of the witch, then, becomes a political signifier: she is the woman who knew too much, the one who refused to surrender her knowledge to institutions that excluded her. In this sense, witches can be read as early scientists, experimenting with botanicals, observing cause and effect, and building collective knowledges long before the term scientific method came into vogue.

For this reason, witchcraft has long been a fascinating and often controversial topic, captivating audiences across centuries. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the presence

of witches plays a significant role in driving the plot and exploring themes of power, fate, and deception (Spencer 2017, 3). They are presented as chaotic, evil entities. They represent the tragic fate of most of the characters and the subversion of the moral order. Their use of plants and substances is part of a dark and unnatural imaginary world: fantastic and grotesque ingredients that fuel suspicion and fear. They are figures outside the community, and their knowledge is not therapeutic, but threatening (Spencer 2017, 3-5).

The symbolic meaning behind certain plants associated with witches further deepens our understanding of their characters and actions. The mandrake root, for instance, symbolizes malevolent magic due to its association with witchcraft throughout history (Kiefer 2003, 78). Additionally, hemlock represents danger and death since it was traditionally used as an ingredient in deadly poisons (Romero 1980, 105). By incorporating these plant references into *Macbeth*'s narrative, Shakespeare invokes a sense of darkness that aligns with his portrayal of witchcraft. Moreover, analyzing these plant references enables us to better appreciate how Shakespeare employs them as tools for character development and plot advancement. That is, the use of specific herbs helps establish the witches' otherworldliness while also foreshadowing future events within the play.

This portrayal of medicinal plants in witchcraft literature is not limited to their practical uses but also –as seen– extends to symbolism and imagery associated with these botanicals. Medicinal plants are often depicted as sources of power or danger within these narratives (Ostling 2014, 180). Another example can be found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1878 [1850]), in which Hester Prynne finds solace among wildflowers growing near a prison door symbolizing her ability to heal despite societal condemnation (106).

To these means, as it will be analysed in the next section, controversies surround portrayals or usage of medicinal plants within witchcraft literature. Critics such as Silvia Federici argue that "the branding of these women as witches functioned not only to eradicate alternative healing practices, but also to delegitimize women's authority over their own bodies and knowledge systems" (2004, 36), thus perpetuating stereotypes and inaccuracies about traditional healing practices and paving the way for their cultural appropriation or misrepresentation.

2. MEDICINAL PLANTS IN WITCH RELATED LITERATURE

The portrayal of witchcraft in literature has long been intertwined with the use of medicinal plants. These botanicals serve as essential components of traditional medicine systems across cultures and are often depicted as powerful tools used by witches in their mystical practices. The symbolism and imagery associated with these plants further enriches their representation in witchcraft narratives. While controversies may arise regarding the portrayal or usage within literature, it is crucial for authors to approach this subject matter with respect and accuracy. By doing so, they can shed light on the significance of medicinal plants within witchcraft literature while avoiding any potential harm or misrepresentation (Watt 1972, 65).

As it was already mentioned, one example of a historical reference that highlights this connection is found in Macbeth. The three witches known as the Weird Sisters are depicted as brewing a concoction that includes various plants such as "root of hemlock" and "scale of dragon." These ingredients not only serve to enhance the eerie atmosphere but also reflect the belief that witches possessed knowledge about potent herbs with mystical properties. Furthermore, Shakespeare's portrayal suggests a link between these magical plants and the witches' ability to manipulate fate. Also, historical accounts offer a fascinating insight into the intersection between herbal remedies and supernatural beliefs (Llanes 2022, 405). In ancient civilizations such as Egypt and Greece, the concept of witchcraft was deeply intertwined with the practice of herbal medicine. To these means, the *Ebers Papyrus*, an Egyptian medical text dating back to 1550 BCE, contains detailed descriptions of various plant-based remedies used by healers who were often associated with witchcraft (Bryan 1930, 110)

For example, a notable reference can be found in Johann Weyer's book *De Praestigiis Daemonum* ("On the Tricks of Demons") published in 1563. Weyer was a physician who sought to challenge prevailing beliefs about witchcraft during the Renaissance period. In his work, he argued that many so-called witches were knowledgeable healers who utilized medicinal plants for therapeutic purposes, as he wrote "multae autem sunt mulieres quae, accepto a matribus vel aliunde, simplicium herbarum usu ad medendum assuefactae sunt"[1] (198) or "similes mulierculae. (...) pro incantatricibus habitae sunt, cum nihil aliud quam simplicia remedia adhiberent"[2] (200). Weyer's writings shed light on how medicinal plants became entangled with accusations of witchcraft during this time. His position was radical for the era, especially given the intensity of witch hunts across Europe. The author's argument placed emphasis on mental illness, misogyny, and misinterpretation rather than demonic possession or malice. He posited that many accused women suffered from melancholia or delusions, and he advocated for compassion over persecution. By recognizing the therapeutic knowledge of these women, Weyer effectively challenged the moral panic that conflated healing with heresy. To this regard, his writings can be considered a proto-scientific defense of empirical observation over superstition, and they offer one of the earliest acknowledgments of the political motives behind witchcraft accusations. Furthermore, His work opened a discourse on the legitimacy of women's healing practices, subtly aligning with later feminist perspectives such as the view the witch as a symbol of persecuted knowledge and ecological wisdom.

Jumping in time to the 20th century, in Shirley Jackson's narrative, particularly in stories such as "The Daemon Lover" (1949) and "The Witch" (1949) an environment is constructed where the domestic and the natural merge with the ominous. In "The Daemon Lover" we can find the following example: "she looked carefully around the

[1] "There are many women who, having learned from their mothers or other sources, have become accustomed to using simple herbs for healing" (author's translation).

[2] "Such women (...) were considered enchantresses, though they employed nothing other than simple remedies" (author's translation).

one-room apartment (...). With sudden horror she realized that she had forgotten to put clean sheets on the bed" (14). Although Jackson does not explicitly depict witches, her work dialogues with the legacies of the marginalized feminine archetype and poses a veiled critique of the medicalization of the feminine and the repression of desire, which can be traced symbolically in the relationship with plants, poisons and enclosed spaces. In the case of the example, the scene takes the traditionally feminine-coded domestic space and subtly pervert it –turning it into a space of anxiety, anticipation, and betrayal.

In contrast to this demonizing vision, contemporary feminist literature has rehabilitated the figure of the witch as the bearer of forgotten knowledge and as a symbol of resistance. For example, in Jules Michelet's *The Witch* (2016 [1862]), a pioneering nineteenth-century academic text that combines history and lyricism, the witch is depicted as a "physician of the poor" (4), who preserves and transmits herbal knowledge persecuted by the Church and official medicine. Michelet writes: "Whatsoever may have been her sorceries, her spells, she was before all things the natural healer. At once doctor and sage, she strove with her poor simple means to assuage the sufferings that official science ignored or made worse" (2016, 4). This text, despite being idealized, marked a milestone in the revaluation of witches as heirs of a popular medical tradition and it can be claimed that Michelet's portrayal of the witch as a healer anticipates later feminist reinterpretations of the figure as a political and medical subversive.

Moreover, in the context of young adult literature, as in *Harry Potter* (1998) J.K. Rowling revitalizes the figure of the witch through a complex interplay of magical knowledge, botany, and healing arts. While the series modernizes the image of the witch, it also draws deeply from folkloric and historical associations between herbalism and feminine knowledge. Characters like Professor Snape, Madame Pomfrey, and even Neville Longbottom demonstrate that potion-making and herbology are not only central to magical education but are also direct continuations of the tradition of medicinal plant use in witchcraft (Rowling 1998, 72, 110). Rowling's depiction of witches reflects a rehabilitation of the herbalist figure through a contemporary lens, aligning with feminist reevaluations of persecuted women's knowledge (Ehrenreich & English 1973). The use of mandrake root to cure petrification in *The Chamber of Secrets* echoes historical beliefs in its supernatural and curative powers (Rowling 1998, 72). Similarly, wolfsbane and dittany reflect plants once feared or revered in herbal folklore (110). This botanical magic situates witches and wizards as custodians of a deep, nature-based wisdom –often gendered and marginal in historical contexts. Rather than depicting herbalism as irrational, Rowling elevates it as scientific within the magical world, thereby reclaiming a once-suppressed domain of knowledge. In doing so, the Harry Potter series subtly critiques the historical demonization of witches and reframes herbal knowledge as powerful, precise, and worthy of respect.

Similarly, in *Nuestra Parte de Noche (2019)*, Mariana Enriquez portrays a secret society called the Order, which practices ritual magic. While there are no witches in the traditional sense, the novel centers around mediums who occupy ambiguous, liminal spaces. These figures possess ancestral knowledge and engage in practices that blend the occult with inherited trauma. Set against the backdrop of Argentina's dictatorship, the narrative weaves together violence, spiritual invocation,

and alternative forms of power. A good example of this is the following quote, when referring to Rosario (female character, Juan's wife and Gaspar's mother, is a cold and enigmatic figure tied to the secret Order. She embodies both maternal distance and the dark legacy of ritual power.):

> El cuerpo de Rosario era como un mapa: tenía cicatrices, lunares, tatuajes hechos por ella misma, marcas de los rituales. También sabía usar plantas, pero nunca quiso enseñarle a su hijo.[3] (Enriquez 2019, 20)

This quote shows how Rosario's body preserves ancestral, embodied knowledge –linked to ritual and plant-based healing– but also reveals the silence and protection around passing it on. Another example would be:

> Las mujeres que cuidaban a los enfermos en la Orden usaban aceite de ruda, infusiones de jengibre y algo que llamaban 'agua de luna'. No estaba permitido, pero lo hacían igual.[4] (2019, 177)

Here, these figures, though relegated to the margins, are intimately linked to care, resistance, and the preservation of social and spiritual continuity. Their knowledge –rooted in the body, the earth, and memory– is criminalized by dominant institutions, yet the narrative reclaims and humanizes it as a form of ancestral feminine wisdom. In this context, plants do not signify transgression or danger, but rather alternative healing and dignity in the face of structural violence. The use of substances such as *ruda, jengibre*, or "agua de luna"[5] reflects a tradition of embodied practices, often passed down through generations of women, that exist outside the boundaries of official medical authority. As Silvia Federici argues, the suppression of these practices is not about their efficacy or risk, but about who controls knowledge and how that knowledge threatens systems of patriarchal and capitalist power. Their demonization had less to do with their actual toxicity and more to do with the social and political context of their use. As Silvia Federici argues, the rise of capitalist and patriarchal systems involved the violent suppression of women's embodied knowledge, especially in the realms of healing and reproduction (Federici 2004, 63). Similarly, Michel Foucault in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* has shown that knowledge and power are deeply intertwined, and that institutional systems often seek to monopolize "legitimate" knowledge by repressing other forms, particularly those tied to the body and non-normative subjectivities (Foucault 1980, 89-92). Thus, the boundary between medicalization and demonization of plants reflects not

[3] "Rosario's body was like a map: it had scars, moles, tattoos she had made herself, and marks from the rituals. She also knew how to use plants, but she never wanted to teach her son" (author's translation).

[4] "The women who cared for the sick in the Order used rue oil, ginger infusions, and something they called "moon water." It was not allowed, but they did it anyway" (author's translation).

[5] Rue, ginger, or "moon water."

their pharmacological properties, but who uses them, for what purpose, and under what regime of power and control.

In light of these literary, historical, and philosophical perspectives, it becomes clear that medicinal plants function as more than mere narrative elements within witchcraft discourse –they operate as charged symbols of contested knowledge and social resistance. Whether invoked through Renaissance medical texts, modern feminist horror, or magical realist fiction, these botanicals carry the weight of tradition, repression, and resilience. Far from being neutral, the representation of plant-based healing reveals enduring tensions around authority, gender, and epistemology. By tracing how these themes intersect across time and genres, we can better understand how the figure of the witch –and her relationship to nature– embodies a struggle over who gets to heal, who gets to know, and who gets to speak.

3. MYTH AND FOLKLORE SURROUNDING WITCHES' USE OF MEDICINAL PLANTS

As we have seen, throughout history, witches have been depicted as mysterious and powerful figures with a deep knowledge of medicinal plants. The myth and folklore surrounding their use of these plants has captured the imagination of people for centuries. In ancient times, witches were believed to possess supernatural abilities that allowed them to harness the healing properties of various herbs and plants (Cf. Wilby 2005; Ostling 2014; Dafni *et al*. 2021). They were seen as intermediaries between the natural world and the spiritual realm, capable of communing with nature spirits to obtain secret knowledge about these medicinal plants or, as Wilby mentions, "the line between the witch and the cunning-person was always fine and frequently crossed in the minds of the populace" (2005, 11).

It is also crucial to recognize that the history of witchcraft and medicinal plants is not monolithic. Different cultures have developed unique relationships with plant medicine, and the figure of the witch varies widely across time and geography. For example, in Afro-Caribbean traditions such as Santería or Haitian Vodou, herbal knowledge is embedded within complex spiritual cosmologies (Brandon 1991, 55). Here, plants are sacred gifts from the Orishas or lwa,[6] and herbal baths, smokes, and offerings form an essential part of ritual healing. Similarly, Indigenous North American and Andean traditions include medicine women and shamans whose botanical knowledge is revered rather than reviled, as an example, Potawatomi writer Robin Wall Kimmerer presents Indigenous botanical knowledge not merely as pragmatic, but as a reciprocal, respectful relationship with plant life in her book

[6] The Orishas (or Iwa) are deities in the Yoruba pantheon who act as intermediaries between humans and the supreme god, Olodumare. Each Orisha represents natural forces, human traits, and cultural values, associated with specific rituals, colors, foods, and drums. They are central to Afro-Atlantic religions like Santería (Cuba), Candomblé (Brazil), and Ifá (Nigeria and the diaspora), where they are invoked for guidance, protection, and spiritual healing (Olupona 2014, 58-61).

Braiding Sweetgrass (2013, 24), tending a bridge between Indigenous wisdom and western science. Plants such as white sage, sweetgrass, tobacco, and ayahuasca are not merely medical –they are ceremonial, relational, and cosmological, as she explains "in the old times, our elders say, the trees talked to each other. They'd stand in their own council and craft a plan. But scientists decided long ago that plants were deaf and mute, locked in isolation without communication" (Kimmerer 2013, 24), example of this are the Kallawaya Healers from the Andes region presented by Kripner and Glenney (1997), of whom they say:

> Kallawaya healers mediate between the ill person's body and the environment, attempting to restore the balance that has been lost. These practitioners are not shamans, even though several shamanic traditions exist in Bolivia and other parts of the Andes. Unlike shamans, who alter their consciousness to obtain power and knowledge to help and to heal their clients Kallawaya practitioners are herbalists and ritualists. They recognize the importance of faith in their procedures, as well as the superiority of natural methods; artificial fertilizers and pharmaceutical drugs are seen as inconsistent with the indigenous relationship between persons and their environment. (1997, 218)

Despite these methods, the colonial suppression of such knowledge systems often mirrored European witch hunts, wherein indigenous healers were branded as sorcerers or heretics and persecuted accordingly. As anthropologist Emma Wilby suggests, the narratives of witches flying or communing with spirits may have preserved older shamanic elements that survived in European folk traditions despite Christianization (2005, 169-170). These stories should not be dismissed as delusions but understood as expressions of an alternative worldview that modernity has sought to erase. In European folklore, witches were believed to concoct "flying ointments" using herbs like belladonna, datura, and henbane –plants with hallucinogenic properties– enabling them to fly or enter altered states of consciousness (Willby 2005, 170). These practices reflect remnants of pre-Christian shamanic traditions, as Wilby argues, "while the physical and psychological effects of early modern living conditions were generally conducive to visionary experience, to these effects can be added one further factor, the burning taper which sets the whole pile of combustibles alight –a belief in the reality of spirits" (2005, 249). Similarly, in Nordic mythology, the völva –a female seer and practitioner of seiðr (a form of magic)– performed ritualistic trance journeys and wielded knowledge of herbs to influence fate and health; one such figure, Gróa, appears in the Prose Edda, using her incantations to heal the god Thor (Price 2019, 69).

Greek mythology also includes figures akin to witches, such as Circe and Medea, both skilled in *pharmaka* (potent herbs and poisons), and capable of transforming or healing through plant-based rituals –Circe, for example, famously used a potion to turn Odysseus's men into swine (Odyssey Book 10) as seen in Zografou (2023, 4). These mythical women exemplify ambivalent archetypes: feared for their power to harm yet sought after for their healing abilities. As Ostling (2014) emphasizes, the historical witch exists at the intersection of medicine, religion, and magic, often condemned not for her ignorance but for her dangerous wisdom.

Through these myths and traditions, we see not superstition but encoded systems of knowledge –particularly botanical and spiritual– marginalized by patriarchal and colonial structures yet resilient across time and geography.

One prevalent belief was that witches used certain plants to concoct potions and brews that could heal illnesses or cause harm. For example, it was said that they would gather mandrake roots under a full moon, believing this plant had potent magical qualities (Carter 2003, 144). They would carefully prepare ointments using ingredients like belladonna, henbane, or deadly nightshade –plants known for their toxic properties when ingested in large quantities. These poisonous substances were thought to enhance their mystical powers and enable them to communicate with spirits. Moreover, as previously mentioned, witches were often associated with flying ointments made from hallucinogenic herbs such as datura or fly agaric mushrooms. It was believed that these ointments would induce an altered state of consciousness in which witches could astral project or embark on journeys through the spirit world. This perception fueled fears about witchcraft and led to widespread persecution during the infamous witch trials. However, the imaginary of the witch and her relationship with medicinal plants has not only endured in oral tradition and inquisitorial records but has also found a fertile expression in literature. Despite the fantastic elements present in these myths and folklore, there is some truth behind them. Many medicinal plants commonly associated with witchcraft do indeed possess therapeutic properties recognized by modern science. For instance, belladonna contains atropine –a powerful antispasmodic agent used today in treating certain conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (M. Bnouham *et al.* 2006, 22).

The myth and folklore surrounding witches' use of medicinal plants is a captivating aspect of literature on this subject (Dafni et al 2021, 15). While some of these beliefs may seem far-fetched or even dangerous, they reflect a deep-rooted connection between humans and nature. Moreover, they shed light on the historical oppression faced by women healers who sought alternative paths to wellness (Mji 2020, 73). Exploring these myths can offer valuable insights into the cultural significance of medicinal plants in society's perception of witches throughout history.

Our memories also are rich with tales passed down through generations. These stories often depict witches utilizing specific herbs or concoctions to cure various illnesses or provide relief from pain. For instance, may witch-related folktales imply the use of these kinds of plants, a good example of such a spellcaster would be, as it was mentioned, Circe from Greco-Latin mythology. Such narratives emphasize the close relationship between witches and their understanding of herbal medicine.

Hence, it can be argued that witchcraft studies provide a fascinating glimpse into ancient beliefs surrounding the use of medicinal plants by witches. The historical context reveals how witches were regarded as healers who possessed extensive knowledge about herbal medicine. Mythology and folklore further emphasize this connection by showcasing stories of witches utilizing specific herbs for healing purposes. Plants traditionally associated with witches in myth and folklore continue to captivate modern practitioners, who draw on these ancient symbols in contemporary witchcraft and herbalism. Figures like Circe, Medea, and the völva exemplify the deep-rooted connection between feminine power, ritual, and botanical knowledge,

where herbs were not merely tools of healing or harm, but extensions of spiritual and cosmic order. Today, the enduring legacy of these mythic archetypes shapes how many view medicinal plants –not only through scientific inquiry into their therapeutic properties, but also through their symbolic and ritual significance. By revisiting these stories, we recognize how folklore preserves complex understandings of the natural world that still resonate in modern herbal and magical practices.

4. CONTEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND NEW WITCHES USES ON MEDICINAL PLANTS AND THEIR EFFICACY

While the belief in the magical properties of medicinal plants has persisted over centuries, scientific perspectives offer a different insight into their benefits. Indeed, scientific research has explored the potential therapeutic properties of the identified medicinal plants used by witches and has provided valuable insights into their efficacy. For instance, studies (such as the ones developed by Carter 2003, Kimmerer 2013 or Ostling 2014) have shown that lavender possesses sedative qualities that aid in promoting sleep and reducing anxiety levels. Similarly, chamomile has been found to have anti-inflammatory effects which can assist with digestion issues and alleviate menstrual cramps (Ostling 2014, 181-185). These scientific findings support some of the traditional beliefs associated with herbs here discussed.

What is more, contemporary scientific research on medicinal plants and their efficacy has shed new light on the ancient beliefs surrounding the use of these plants in witchcraft (Tanaka 2009,1-2). While historically associated with supernatural powers and mystical rituals, recent studies (Bnouham *et al.* 2006; Cavender & Albán 2009; Tanaka *et al.* 2009; Dafni, Lev, & Maul 2021; Llanes *et al.* 2022) have uncovered the tangible benefits of medicinal plants in treating various ailments. This burgeoning field of research has led to a reevaluation of traditional herbal remedies, challenging our preconceived notions about witches' potions and their effectiveness. Thus, the relationship between witches and plants was not merely utilitarian, but profoundly relational. Plants were more than ingredients; they were companions, witnesses, and participants in healing. This ecological intimacy is reflected in Indigenous and ecofeminist frameworks that view the land as an archive of memory and resistance. As Robin Wall Kimmerer suggests, to be native to a place is to live like if your ancestors are in the soil, as she explains "our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold" (2013, 23). In this light, the witch's knowledge is not isolated but deeply embedded in a web of ecological reciprocity, making the criminalization of herbal knowledge also a criminalization of earth-based relationality. Witches and herbalists often cultivated deep familiarity with local plants, not through manuals or standardized training, but through immersion, observation, and oral transmission. Knowledge of when to harvest, how to dry, and which combinations enhanced or neutralized effects was shaped over generations of careful practice. The landscape itself became a co-teacher. Culturally, this relationship destabilized dominant logics that sought to divide nature from culture, mind from body, and knowledge from

spirit. In this sense, the land is more than a passive backdrop; it is a participant in the healing process. The violent uprooting of witches, then, symbolized not only the erasure of women, but also the dismemberment of a way of knowing that centered place, relation, and reciprocity. This perspective invites us to rethink witchcraft not as anti-science or superstition, but as an epistemology of interdependence. For instance, one such plant that has garnered significant attention is St. John's wort, commonly used by witches for its supposed ability to ward off evil spirits. Contrary to popular belief, modern scientific studies have demonstrated that St. John's wort possesses potent antidepressant properties due to its active compounds like hypericin and hyperforin (Zirak 2019, 8497). These compounds interact with neurotransmitters in the brain, boosting mood and alleviating symptoms of depression. The discovery of these pharmacological mechanisms not only validates the historical use of St. John's wort but also encourages further exploration into other mystical claims associated with medicinal plants.

Another intriguing example is foxglove, known for its association with witches' spells and potions in literature (McIndoe 2012, 4). Scientific investigations have revealed that this plant contains digitalis glycosides, which are powerful cardiac stimulants used today as medications for heart conditions like congestive heart failure and irregular heart rhythms (Hauptman 1999). The effectiveness of foxglove-derived drugs in modern medicine underscores the potential therapeutic value hidden within traditional folklore surrounding witches and their practices.

With that in mind, we can argue that numerous traditional medicinal plants have become synonymous with witchcraft due to their association with healing abilities. These examples, and other missing plants like mandrake, belladonna etc. as shown by Carter highlight how certain plants became entrenched within witchcraft practices and were believed to hold immense power (2003, 179). In contemporary witchcraft practices, there is a continued interest in incorporating medicinal plants for their spiritual and physical healing properties. Modern practitioners understand that these plants have an inherent energy or vibrational frequency that can be utilized for various purposes. They often create herbal remedies, teas, or potions using plant-based ingredients to address specific ailments or enhance personal well-being. The use of herbs such as sage for purification rituals or lavender for relaxation and stress relief are common examples of how witches incorporate medicinal plants into their practices (Netzer 2023, 7).

The ingestion or topical use of psychoactive plants by witches –whether through flying ointments or ritual teas– was more than a tool for escape or intoxication. These altered states often provided access to what anthropologist Michael Harner (1980) termed "non-ordinary realities." Within many pre-modern and Indigenous cosmologies, such states were not illusions, but legitimate modalities of insight. In this light, the visionary experiences of witches were not delusions but ways of engaging with spirit worlds, ancestral memories, or ecological consciousness –forms of knowing that threatened emerging scientific paradigms grounded in control, rationalism, and objectivity. Flying ointments were often composed of nightshades like belladonna, henbane, and datura, combined with animal fat to allow transdermal absorption. Descriptions of witches flying through the night sky may well be meta-

phorical expressions of hallucinatory journeys, where the body remained still while the mind entered a state of ecstatic vision. These accounts parallel shamanic practices around the world, from Siberia to the Amazon, where consciousness-altering plants facilitate spiritual travel, healing, and divination. All of this is stated by Wilby:

> This perceived link between shamanism and trance-induced visionary experience is now so strong that scholars in the field increasingly cite the ability to enter trance as one of the defining characteristics of the shaman. The anthropologist Michael Harner, for example, describes the shaman as a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness at will to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and help other persons. These psychological perspectives on shamanism can be used to gain insight into the encounter-experiences of early modern cunning folk and witches. (2005, 167)

Rather than dismissing these narratives as fantasy, scholars like Wilby have argued that they encode surviving fragments of a visionary tradition (2005, 7, 124,167). The repression of these practices thus reflects not only religious zealotry, but a broader epistemological colonization –an effort to monopolize acceptable forms of knowledge and eliminate others deemed irrational, dangerous, or uncontainable, or as she writes, these narratives "were usually dismissed as derivative of... mental illness, prosecutorial coercion... or misapprehension" (2005, 5). Furthermore, contemporary research has also examined the antimicrobial properties of various herbs traditionally linked to witches' brews. Plants such as garlic, thyme, and sage have been found to possess potent antibacterial properties against a wide range of pathogens (Llanes *et al*. 2022, 408). For centuries, these plants were believed to possess magical powers capable of warding off evil spirits or protecting against infectious diseases –a notion dismissed as mere superstition until recent scientific findings corroborated their antimicrobial efficacy. This scientific research on medicinal plants and their efficacy has debunked the notion that witches' potions were purely mythical concoctions (Tanaka 2009; Ostling 2014). Hence, the discovery of pharmacologically active compounds within these plants, such as St. John's wort and foxglove, reveals a fascinating overlap between ancient beliefs and modern medicine. Moreover, the antimicrobial properties found in herbs traditionally associated with witchcraft highlight the potential for further exploration into the therapeutic value of these plants. As scientific understanding advances, it becomes increasingly clear that there is much to learn from the literature on witches and their use of medicinal plants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to explore whether the traditional association between witches and medicinal plants (once dismissed as mere superstition) holds any contemporary scientific validity, and to what extent modern cultural and feminist reappraisals are reshaping our understanding of this legacy. Drawing from historical, ethnobotanical, literary, and cultural studies, the findings suggest that not only is

there a biochemical basis to many of the healing practices attributed to so-called witches, but that the figure of the witch itself is being reimagined in powerful ways across various academic and popular discourses. The literary portrayal of witches and medicinal plants reflects a rich interplay between imagination, historical reality, and contested systems of knowledge. To answer the first guiding question –how are medicinal plants represented in literary portrayals of witches? It is clear that such depictions extend far beyond fantasy or metaphor. In literature from antiquity to the present, witches are consistently shown as guardians of powerful herbal knowledge, often portrayed preparing potions, salves, or poisons. Classical figures such as Circe and Medea embody this dual role: they are both healers and threats, using plants to seduce, transform, or kill. Similarly, in Nordic mythology, völvas (female seers) practiced plant-based divination and healing rituals, reinforcing the link between femininity, nature, and spiritual authority. In these narratives, plants are not passive ingredients but active agents within a symbolic and spiritual ecosystem.

These portrayals are not accidental. They are deeply rooted in historical and cultural dynamics that associate women's herbal knowledge with both reverence and fear. This brings us to the second question: what dynamics underpinned the association between botanical knowledge and accusations of witchcraft? Throughout early modern Europe, midwives, healers, and cunning folk –many of whom were women– were often the primary custodians of plant-based medicine. Their embodied and orally transmitted knowledge posed a threat to the rising authority of institutional medicine and the Church. As documented by Emma Wilby (2005), such practitioners were frequently accused of communing with spirits or using forbidden knowledge, especially during times of social upheaval. The witch hunts, therefore, were not only about theology or superstition; they also reflected a systematic effort to suppress and delegitimize non-institutional knowledge systems, particularly those centered around women, nature, and community healing.

Moreover, this historical conflict exposes deeper epistemological tensions. As the article demonstrates, the botanical expertise attributed to witches was often based on real pharmacological effects. Modern scientific studies have confirmed the bioactivity of plants like mandrake or belladonna –all historically linked to witchcraft and trance-inducing rituals. Yet for centuries, this knowledge was labeled irrational, dangerous, or heretical simply because it existed outside sanctioned academic or clerical institutions. These historical narratives reflect a broader tendency to treat intuitive, relational, and spiritual knowledge as inferior to empirical science –a dynamic that persists in various forms to this day. However, as the analysis suggests, contemporary ethnobotanical and pharmacological research increasingly validates the efficacy of traditional plant use, indicating that the binary between "science" and "magic" is not only false, but also politically charged.

Finally, we find that the figure of the witch is undergoing a significant cultural revival. Drawing from thinkers like Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), who advocates for a reciprocal relationship between humans and plants, these modern frameworks emphasize connection, care, and ethical interdependence over extraction and control. Feminist and decolonial scholars likewise reclaim the witch as a figure of resistance against patriarchal suppression of women's knowledge, celebrating her as

a conduit of ancestral wisdom and embodied agency. On top of that, literature and media continue to play a key role in this reimagining. Contemporary novels, films, and even herbalism manuals increasingly depict witches as complex, empowered figures who use plant knowledge for healing, justice, and transformation. This cultural resurgence not only restores dignity to previously marginalized practices but also invites us to rethink the ways in which we define valid knowledge. It asks us to imagine a world in which scientific inquiry and traditional wisdom are not in conflict, but in conversation –a vision urgently needed in an age of ecological crisis and medical disenchantment.

Hence, the literary and historical association between witches and medicinal plants reveals deep-rooted anxieties and aspirations around power, gender, and knowledge. These associations were historically weaponized to persecute women and suppress nonconforming worldviews. Yet today, they are being reclaimed to forge new understandings of healing, sustainability, and epistemological justice. By revisiting and reinterpreting these narratives, we not only restore a richer sense of the past but also open possibilities for more pluralistic and regenerative futures.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANTS IN NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL TRADITION

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Abstract

This article aims to deepen the reader's understanding of the profound connection between Native Americans and the natural world. The animistic spirit, a concept attributed to them by Europeans, is reflected in their oral traditions, ceremonies, attire, and rituals. In this section, we will explore their extensive knowledge of grains, trees, and plants, along with their various applications on physical, mental, and spiritual levels, challenging the romanticized and idealistic perceptions that Europeans held of Native Americans.

Keywords: Native American, Oral Tradition, Three Sisters, Sacred Trees, Sacred Plants.

LA IMPORTANCIA DE LAS PLANTAS EN LA TRADICIÓN ORAL DE LOS INDÍGENAS AMERICANOS

Resumen

Este artículo pretende profundizar en la comprensión del lector sobre la profunda conexión entre los nativos americanos y el mundo natural. El espíritu animista, concepto que les atribuyeron los europeos, se refleja en sus tradiciones orales, ceremonias, atuendos y rituales. En esta sección exploraremos su amplio conocimiento de los cereales, los árboles y las plantas, junto con sus diversas aplicaciones a nivel físico, mental y espiritual, desafiando las percepciones románticas e idealistas que los europeos tenían de los nativos americanos.

Palabras clave: nativos americanos, tradición oral, tres hermanas, árboles sagrados, plantas sagradas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples maintained a profound connection with planet Earth, which cultivated their expertise in its resources. This is exemplified by the agricultural and fishing methods we continue to utilize today, which they originally introduced. However, from the 1500s onwards, Europeans dismissed this relationship as mere folly and romanticism. As an example, for the Lakota, who were nomad and lived in the Great Lakes region, natural features such as rivers, mountains, lakes, and forests embodied beauty, contrasting sharply with the European perspective that characterized them as harsh, primitive, wild, savage, and untamed.

As it will be argued, the concept of kinship is a fundamental tenet of Native American philosophy; wherein indigenous communities perceive the earth and other non- organic entities as integral components of the bios (life). For instance, they respect the spirit present in each element and seek permission before cutting, harvesting, or consuming resources. The purification and healing rituals will be conducted through the oral traditions of various North American tribes, alongside festivities centered on cereals, trees, and plants. Here we can see some indigenous perspectives around the concept of kinship:

> For hundreds of years, certainly for thousands, our Native elders have taught us "All My Relations" means all living things and the entire Universe, "All Our Relations," they have said time and time again. (...) Do you doubt still? A Rock Alive? You say it is hard! it doesn't move of its own accord! it has no eyes! it doesn't think! but rocks do move. Put one in a fire it will get hot, won't it? That means won't you agree? That its insides are moving ever more rapidly? (Forbes 2001, 287-288)

Hence, indigenous peoples have held a profound reverence for the Creator and the realm of nature, referred to as "Wemi Tali" or "All Where" in the Delaware-Lenápe language. Slow Buffalo, a revered teacher, is noted to have expressed around a millennium ago:

> Remember those upon whom you will rely. In the heavens resides the Mysterious One, your grandfather. Between the earth and the heavens lies your father. This earth is your grandmother, and the soil is also your grandmother. Everything that flourishes from the earth is your mother, akin to an infant nursing from its mother. Always bear in mind that your grandmother is beneath your feet, and you are perpetually upon her, while your father watches from above. (Forbes 2001, 285)

After having approached the philosophy and traditions of some North American tribes, in the following sections we will examine the understanding that Native Americans possessed regarding cereals, plants, and trees, as conveyed through their oral traditions and the ceremonies and rituals associated with them.

2. THE THREE SISTERS IN NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL TRADITION

According to Amanda L. Landon (2008), agriculture emerged in Mesoamerica –encompassing Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Western Honduras, Western Nicaragua, and Western Costa Rica– approximately 7,000 years ago. This development included the domestication of maize, beans, and squash, which significantly transformed the types of plants cultivated by the population. The figure of the Corn Mother, also known as the Corn Goddess (Iroquois) or Onatah, embodies this connection because she provided her children with essential sustenance, including squash, beans, and corn. However, Hah-gweh-da-et-gah captured Onatah in his darkness beneath the earth, where she suffered until she vowed to the Sun that she would "never leave her fields again" (Converse 1908, 64). Interestingly, this Goddess shares notable similarities with Persephone, the Greek Goddess associated with agriculture and vegetation, particularly cereals, who was also wed to Hades, the ruler of the underworld. Additionally, in narratives such as "The Strange Origin of Corn" by the Abenaki, the emergence of corn is explained, emphasizing the profound connections between humans and plants. In this tale, long before the creation of Native people, a solitary man lived far from others, subsisting solely on roots and nuts. One day, he awoke to find a figure nearby. Initially frightened, he soon beheld a beautiful woman with long hair. When he approached her, she requested that he let her be. Ultimately, she promised him, "if you do exactly what I tell you to do, I will always be with you. Now, "take two dry sticks and rub them quickly while you hold the grass" (Pérez 2018, 12). Suddenly, a spark flew away and the grass started burning like an arrow. The beautiful woman spoke again: "When the Sun sets, take me by the hair and drag me over the burnt field." The man replied, "I don't want to do that!" to which she said, "You have to do what I say." As she continued, "Wherever you drag me, something will sprout up like this, like grass and you will see something like hair coming out among the leaves. Soon, the seeds will be ready to use" (Pérez 2018, 12).

As it can be inferred, the matrilineal and matriarchal nature of the Iroquois can be reflected in considering these plants as special gifts from the Great Spirit. In ancient times, when these plants were cultivated together on a single hill, they served as a representation of protection and unity. This was also an example of sustainable agriculture because the corn provides the beans with needed help, the beans expel nitrogen from the air and bring it into the soil to benefit all three, as the beans grow through the squash vines and work their way through the corn cobs, they hold each other together (see Figure 1).

According to the story compiled by students at Centennial College and found in *Indian Legends of Eastern Canada* called "The Three Sisters," they "were quite different in their size and way of dressing" (Canadian 1969, 19). The little one, referring to the squash, "was so young that she could only crawl at first and was dressed in green" (19). The second sister wore a vibrant yellow dress and tended to wander off alone whenever the sun illuminated the day, and a gentle breeze caressed her face. The third sister, being the eldest, stood upright and tall, always vigilant in

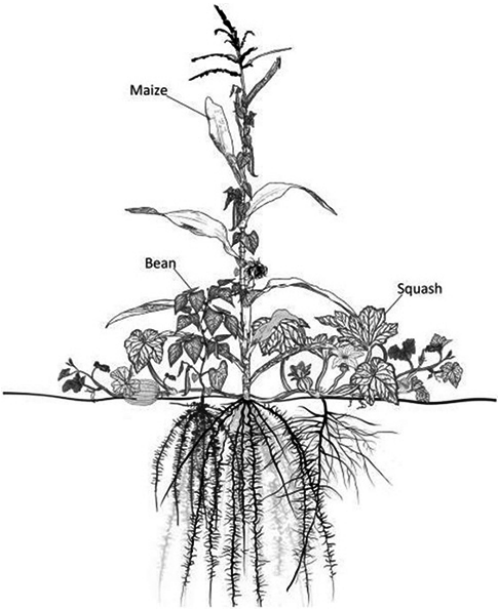

Figure 1. Plantation of the Three Sisters. Source: Lopez-Ridaura, S., Barba-Escoto, L., Reyna- Ramirez, C. A., Sum, C., Palacios-Rojas, N., & Gerard, B.

her efforts to safeguard her younger siblings. She was adorned with a light green shawl, and her long, golden hair danced around her head in the wind (19).

In the story entitled "The Corn Spirit" by The Tuscarora, since the people forgot to show respect for the corn and be grateful to the Creators for their good fortune, the grandfather, who personified corn, was crying, and his clothes were torn because people threw him to the dogs. He was also dirty because *Tuscarora* people had let their children trample him, so Dahoyagweida, who was the only person who cared for the fields, told him, "I will go back and remind my people how to treat you" (Canadian 1969, 21). It is relevant to note that, while the Tuscarora society is matrilineal, indicating that women played crucial roles in decisions concerning land and resources, the deity representing Corn is depicted as male in this tale. Hence, the community benefited from corn in various ways, including feeding ears of corn to their dogs and preserving it for consumption during the winter months. The pervasive significance of corn is illustrated in the Green Corn Festival, an annual renewal ceremony that spans a duration of 4 to 8 days. This event was celebrated upon the ripening of the first corn. During this time, men adhered to a rigorous fasting regimen, while women and children were permitted to partake under specific guidelines. The leaves of the corn plants were typically utilized to prepare a caffeinated drink, which formed an integral part of the purification ritual.

In another story, "The People of Maize" by the Lacandon (Maya) and adapted from the *Popul Vuh*, *Tepeu* and *Gucumatz* created the first people out of mud, but it was too soft and melted away. Indeed, "these people of mud spoke, but they had no minds" (Vidal Lorenzo & Rivera Dorado 2017, 71). The Creators realized they could not multiply, so they divined and saw they needed to carve people out of wood. This time, the people stood up, walked around, and spoke, but lacked souls, minds, and blood, so their cheeks were dry. Later, the Heart of Heaven sent a great flood, and the people made of wood were destroyed. Finally, Tepeu and Gucumatz held a council to decide how to make the flesh of the people. "The parrot, the jaguar, the coyote and the crow, told them of yellow ears of corn and the white ears of corn," (Vidal Lorenzo & Rivera Dorado 2017, 75) and brought them to the land where corn grew. "The Creator and the Maker ground the corn and made it into dough" (75), from which they created the flesh, arms, legs and bodies of the people. As a result, people made of maize were intelligent and they could see from afar which made the Creator and the Maker worried that they would become arrogant, so they made their eyes darker, and their sight was limited to the closest parts of Earth and Sky. Moreover, in the story "The Buffalo Bull and the Cedar Tree" by the Osage, the Buffalo Bull made the people from red, speckled and yellow corn, so they could be different from each other like animals (Bruchac 1995, 83).

As we can see, the stories provide answers to the emergence of corn, its proper preparation and its contribution to the creation of human beings as we know them today.

3. SACRED TREES IN NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL TRADITION

The shared element among these cosmogonic narratives is the descent of Sky Woman, who falls through a hollow in a tree from the patriarchal celestial realm to the terrestrial world. There, she is aided by animals that help her bring life from clay. Thus, in the "Huron Creation Myth" (First people), a legend of the Wyandot people, a female deity inadvertently descends through an opening in the sky, a realm that was previously inhabited solely by aquatic creatures. The narrative begins with the statement, "Then a woman fell through a hole in the sky."

Furthermore, in the "Iroquois Creation Myth" (Oneida), Sky Woman requests her husband to throw a tree at the center of the island, as she is about to give birth to twins. In a fit of anger, her husband complies and forcefully pushes her through the opening without her consent. "With curiosity, the woman peeked through the hole. (...) At that moment, the husband pushed her." Then, Sky Woman gave birth to twins, the entity referred to as Light One, also known as Good-minded, observed the absence of light and subsequently created the "tree of light." This tree featured a magnificent ball of light at its highest branch, predating the creation of the sun. Shortly after he "dug up the tree of light, and looking into the pool of water in which the trunk had grown, he saw the reflection of his face and thereupon conceived the idea of creating Ongwe and made them both a man and a woman" (Oneida). The tree, due to its impressive size, serves as a bridge between the terrestrial realm

and the celestial sphere, facilitating the passage of light in this context. In other narratives, the tree's hollow interior enables the creator goddess to descend onto the turtle's shell, thereby initiating the process of creation on Earth.

In one of those stories, "The Sky Tree" by the Huron, people lived on Earth, and in the middle, there was a great Sky Tree that provided all the food. An old chief lived with his wife Aataentsic "Ancient Woman," and he got weaker and weaker. He had a premonitory dream that he could be healed if he took the fruit that grows at the top of the Sky Tree. Aataentsic cuts the tree and splits it in half and falls through the hole left by the tree and says, "Without the tree, there can be no life. I must follow it" (Bonvillian 1989, 10). As it can be seen, trees possess extraordinary qualities as they serve as a bridge between Sky World and Mother Earth, while offering sustenance. Thus, in the narrative "The Thanks to the Trees," a traditional Seneca Thanksgiving Address, it is stated that the Creator determined, "Trees will be on Earth, growing here and there" (Mohawk 1972, 17). This decision holds significant importance, as these trees will be a source of medicinal resources. The Creator also declared, "Every tree shall possess a name," and "the trees will collaborate harmoniously to bring joy to families on Earth" (17). This declaration marked the origin of the maple tree. It is said that the Creator informed the people that as the weather warmed, the sap would begin to flow, and they would need to gather it to enjoy maple syrup once more, leading to the celebration of the Maple Festival or Maple Sugar Gathering. Indeed, the Haudenosaunee[1] expresses gratitude to the spirit of the maple trees, recognizing them as the first to awaken life in early spring[2] (Evans Tekaroniake). Charlie Patton practices and shares his people's traditional teachings, saying, "we call Wahta (maple) the leader of the trees because it is always the first tree to wake up in the spring, even when there is still two feet of snow on the ground" (Evans Tekaroniake). The sap harvested from these trees is believed to purify the body for the year ahead. Moreover, in the narrative "How the Ojibwe Got Maple Syrup"[3] (Ritzenthaler & Ritzenthaler 1983) Nokomis, Winneboozho's grandmother, contemplated a method to ensure that humans would need to exert effort to collect the sap, as it initially flowed freely like rain. Consequently, it was determined that individuals must host a feast, offer tobacco, and place birch bark trays before accessing the syrup. Nokomis then instructed him to insert a small piece of wood into each maple tree to facilitate the flow of sap. Upon attempting this, he discovered that the sap was "thick and sweet". The process of collecting syrup commenced with the suspension of birch bark buckets from the tree positioned beneath the desired sap collection area. To facilitate this, a

[1] The Confederacy, made up of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, & Senecas was intended as a way to unite the nations and create a peaceful means of decision making. See https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/who-we-are/.

[2] Charlie Patton is a Faith keeper of the Haudenosaunee and practices and shares his people's traditional teachings of tribal traditions at the community longhouse.

[3] "How the Ojibway Got the Maple Syrup." Story adapted from the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Snap-Ed Program and adapted from Robert E. Ritzenthaler & Pat Ritzenthaler (1983).

Figure 2. Traditionally, the process of making maple syrup begins with drilling a piece of wood into the tree to serve as a spile, or spout from which the clear sap can drip.

hole was drilled into the tree, a method referred to as 'tapping' (See Figure 2), after which a piece of wood was inserted into the hole to function as a spout.

In the narrative "Why Some Trees Are Always Green," the Cherokee people elucidate the color of trees. This tale originates when plants and animals were first created and were instructed to "watch and stay awake for seven nights" (Bird 1972, 37). Those who successfully met this requirement would be granted a unique ability. On the seventh night, only the panther and the owl remained vigilant, earning them the power to see in the darkness. Additionally, among the plants, the pine, spruce, hemlock, cedar, laurel, and holly also stayed awake, resulting in their perpetual greenness and the medicinal properties of their leaves.

It can be inferred from the narratives that trees play a crucial role in the creation process, connecting the celestial and terrestrial realms. Additionally, the necessity for humans to show respect and care to reap the desired benefits is evident. The animist beliefs of Indigenous people are illustrated when trees need to remain vigilant for seven days to receive a magical power.

4. SACRED PLANTS AND THEIR HEALING POWERS

The plants that will be present in the sacred and healing ceremonies will be grass, cedar, sage, and tobacco. Joseph Bruchac said that many American Indian women and men learned the secrets of healing through medicinal plants because they were told how to use them: "That knowledge came to them in a dream, or they heard it spoken by a breathless voice while they talked or sat in the forest" (2016, 164). The therapeutic properties of medicinal plants have been linked to the bear clan, as recounted in the narrative titled "The Gift of the Great Spirit". Iroquois elders share

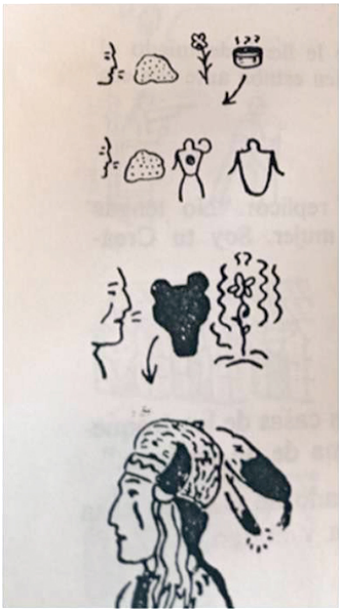

Figure 3. Pictograms of "The Great Spirit" Source: "Tehanetorens" Miraguano Editions.

this tale with younger generations to instill a sense of respect and compassion for their ancestors. As the story goes, long ago, an unfamiliar elder arrived in a small Iroquois village, clad in tattered garments and exhibiting signs of weariness and distress. In his quest for sustenance and shelter, he first approached the turtle clan, only to be denied assistance. He then sought help from the clans of the Duck, the Wolf, the Otter, the Deer, the Eel, the Heron, and the Eagle, but was met with refusal from each other. Ultimately, weary and disheartened, he reached the dwelling of the Bear clan, where an elderly woman, observing his state, extended an offer of rest and nourishment. The following day, the old man was afflicted with a severe fever and requested that the woman venture into the forest to find a particular plant. He instructed her on the preparation of the plant, which facilitated his recovery (93).

In the days that followed, she fell ill once more, suffering from various ailments, prompting him to persist in sending her to gather different herbs while supervising their preparation. One day, as the elderly woman toiled outside, she observed an extraordinary light emanating from her dwelling. Upon opening the door, she encountered a remarkably handsome young man, his visage radiating like the sun. In that instant, she understood that she was in the presence of the Great Creator.

Ultimately, the Creator entrusted the Bear Clan (Figure 3) with the enduring duty of serving as the Guardians of Medicine across generations, in appreciation for the shelter and sustenance they had provided. This account is conveyed through

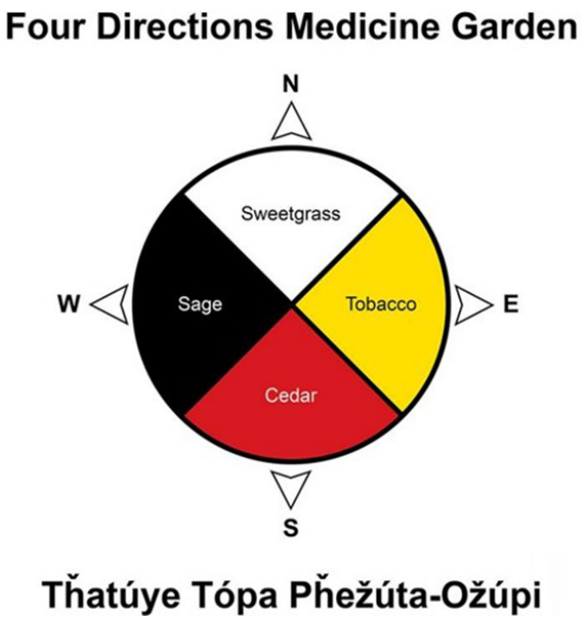

Figure 4. The Medicine Wheel. Source: University of Minnesota.

pictograms derived from ancient wampum belts by a researcher of the Mohawk tribe, drawing upon historically decorated barks or reproductions of ancient Iroquois rock art.

Medicinal plants are linked to the medicine wheel. Tobacco, associated with the eastern yellow section, is revered for honoring the creator and is considered the first plant given to humanity. Sweetgrass, linked to the western black quadrant, serves a purifying role before significant ceremonies. Cedar, associated with the northern white section, is utilized for purifying homes and sweat lodges, warding off malevolent forces. Lastly, sage, connected to the southern section, is known for cleansing the mind, dispelling negative energies, and preparing individuals for teachings and ceremonies (See Figure 4).

The initial revered plant is sweetgrass, often referred to as Mother Earth's hair. Once harvested, the grass is meticulously braided, symbolizing unity and strength. Each segment of the braid represents the mind, body, and spirit (Pérez 2020, 31).

The cedar is used in physical healing rituals and spiritual purification. The ritual consists of lighting the cedar inside a shell and shaking the smoke with a feather. You must direct the smoke towards you, first to the head, then to the heart, and finally to the rest of the body. Once you are purified, you will speak with your heart free of impure thoughts, and you will be in contact with the Great Spirit. In the story "The Buffalo Bull and the Cedar Tree" by the Osage, the great Bull Buffalo rolled on the ground, and there, healing plants grew. He told his people, "Use them

and you will see old age as you travel the path of life" (Liebert 1987, 84). As Osage people traveled, they saw the leaves falling from the trees and the days grew colder and the trees were bare of leaves, but there was a tree standing whose boughs were still green and its scent was fragrant; it was Cedar. Cedar addressed the people and said:

> "The Little Ones may make of me their medicine. Look at my roots. A sign of my old age. When the Little Ones make me their symbol, they will live to see their toes gnarled with age. Look at my branches and how they bend. With these as symbols, the People will live to see their own shoulders bent with age. Look at the feathery tips of my branches. When the Little Ones make these their symbols, they will live to see their own hair white with age as they travel the Path of Life." (Liebert 1987, 85)

This is how the Osage People named the Cedar the Tree of Life.

The widespread existence of this tree inspired various tales regarding its origin. For example, a warrior from the Micmac tribe sought immortality from Glooskap, who responded, "That is impossible; all must confront death"[4] (Public Library) Nevertheless, the creator promised him a lifespan longer than any other being on Mother Earth. The following day, at dawn, they journeyed to a desolate, rocky island. Glooskap embraced the warrior, lifted him, and positioned him face down, declaring, "Your wish has been granted" (Public Library). Then, the warrior understood he had transformed into a magnificent cedar. Glooskap continued, "I cannot specify the number of years you will endure, but I assure you that you will outlast any human. This island is isolated, ensuring you will not be felled for firewood, and you now possess the resilience to withstand any storm. Indeed, you will live for an extensive period" (Public Library).

It is widely held that the Spirit Tree possesses healing and mystical abilities. For centuries, this ancient tree has held sacred and spiritual importance for the Ojibwe people of Grand Portage, Minnesota (See Figure 5)

Furthermore, in the Potawatomi story, Skinner "The Men Who Visited the Sun," six men embarked on a journey to visit the Sun, hoping to fulfill their wishes. One of the men expressed, "I wish to avoid death. I desire to remain here to assist my people for as long as the earth endures." The Sun responded, "I shall grant you immortality. You will be known as Cedar Tree, and you will exist eternally among all nations and peoples. You will be the first to be honored in their feasts, and all will regard you as sacred." On their return, the man transformed into a cedar and instructed the others to use him as incense during their ceremonies. Another man, who also sought immortality, was transformed into a stone and advised the group that whenever they felt unwell, they should heat a stone and apply it to the affected area (Skinner 2011, 363). This narrative explains the origins of the sacred cedar and the stones used by the Potawatomi in their sweat lodges.

[4] Glooskap is considered to be the first human, a great powerful being who shapes landscapes and shrinks or grows the animals around him.

Figure 5. Almost 300 years ago, the Spirit Little Cedar Tree (or Witch Tree), growing out of the rock overlooking Lake Superior, was noticed by French explorer Sieur de la Verendrye, who wrote in 1731 that it was a mature tree.

Additionally, in the Northwestern Legend "When the Animals and Birds were Created" (Welker) when the world was so young that there were no people on earth, the two brothers of the Sun and the Moon came to earth ready to create a new race of Native Americans. They realized that Natives needed big trunks to make canoes, therefore, they created cedar trees to make many things from their bark and roots. Natives of the northwest coast exemplify the term "cedar people", as they navigated extensive distances in canoes constructed from this wood and primarily sought refuge during the lengthy winters in dwellings built from cedar poles, beams, and planks. Harris (2013) states that the construction involved hollowing out the center of a cedar log. Once the wood became sufficiently pliable, planking shaped and supported the sides. Subsequently, the elevated bow and stern were connected using twisted ropes and pegs made from cedar bark (99) (See Figure 6).

The multiple uses that could be given to the cedar tree will be explained in the story

> "The Origin of Red Cedar" by Coast Salish, where there was a good man always helping others, giving them food and clothing. When the Spirit saw this, he said, "That man has done his work; when he dies and where he is buried, a cedar tree will grow and be useful to the people with roots for baskets, the bark for clothing, the wood for shelter." (Stewart 1924, 26). Its bark was also used among Kwakiult

Figure 6. Bruce Larson uses forms that he acquired from the estate of the late Burt Libby for his new canoe construction projects. The ribs and planking are fashioned from white and red cedar. Photo by Roger Moody.

girls during puberty; a woman companion put over the girl's head a "shredded cedar bark, about 68.5 cm in diameter." (Stewart 1924, 180).

The third sacred plant is sage, which has the power to heal us spiritually because its fragrance penetrates the body, generating a feeling of height and strength. For Native Americans, sage plays a vital role during significant life events, including birth, life, and death. In Florence Stratton's "The Maiden Who Loved a Star" (2022), as compiled by Bessie M. Reid in 1936, the story follows a beautiful young Indian girl who embarks on a journey into the desert in search of the ripe, purple fruit of the prickly pear. One evening, she returns from the desert later than usual, just as the stars begin to twinkle in the night sky. One of the stars shone with exceptional brightness, appearing closer to the Earth than the others. The young Indian girl paused on the sand to admire it and wondered, "Is that star winking at me?" She envisioned its nighttime glow and found it present in her dreams. The following day, she returned to the desert in search of ripe prickly pears and once again spotted the star, repeating this ritual for seven consecutive days. In her dreams, a man communicated with her, yet she realized that as long as he remained in the heavens and she on earth, their union was impossible. The young woman was profoundly in love, but her heart was heavy with sorrow, knowing her beloved resided in the starry sky (Stratton 2022, 31).

Consequently, she decided to end her life. Seeking guidance from an elderly sorceress on how to die, she aspired to ascend to the heavens to be with her beloved star. The sorceress responded, "You must embrace the life bestowed upon you by the Great Spirit, but I can transform you into a being that will allow you to inhabit the desert beneath the gentle gaze of the young star" (31).

That very night, she departed with the elderly sorceress to the desert, where she crafted a powerful potion using local flora and urged the young woman to drink it. As she consumed the mixture, her feet began to merge with the arid, sandy ground.

Figure 7. Purple Sage. Source: Kristina Hicks-Hamblin. https://gardenerspath.com/author/kristinahickshamblin/.

Her arms morphed into branches, and her dark hair transformed into leaves. The young woman had turned into a bush unlike any that the indigenous people had ever encountered in the desert. When the wind rustled through, the bush appeared to murmur its gratitude to the old sorceress. Upon seeing the bush, a distant star emerged, its light fragmented by the vastness, causing some luminous shards to fall directly onto the bush. These star fragments settled as fine dust, blanketing the leaves in white. The shrub, adorned with white leaves and exquisite flowers, became known as cenisa. Today, it is referred to as purple sage (Figure 7), a fact that remains unknown to many white settlers regarding its origins in the desert.

Lastly is tobacco, which is used for spiritual healing and to establish a connection with the Great Spirit through the smoke that is released. In the *Anthology of Traditional Tobacco Stories* (1992), it is noted that among the Delaware people, when an herbalist collects leaves or roots from the forest, it is customary to sprinkle tobacco at the base of the tree or around the plant as a tribute to the spirit realm. This act serves multiple purposes, including calming destructive winds, attracting favorable outcomes during hunts, safeguarding travelers, and providing solace to those in distress. The Seneca people permitted the tobacco plant to grow to a length that was twice the span of their outstretched thumbs and forefingers, and it was only harvested when a storm was imminent; otherwise, the quality of the tobacco would be deemed inferior (5).

The Iroquois tale titled "A Great Gift, Tobacco" explores the origins of tobacco. According to the narrative, many winters ago, in a community along the Ohio River, the residents were startled by an unusual sound emanating from the river. They hurried to the source of the noise and listened intently to the "extraordinary sound, which at times resembled the roar of an unknown beast, evoking fear, and

then shifted into melodies that appeared to be performed by a choir"[5] (Tehanetorens 1984, 90). As they gazed upriver to identify the source of the peculiar voice, they spotted a canoe filled with strange beings who, "due to their distinctive attire, appeared to be witches" (1984, 90). This unique voice spoke to them once more, commanding them to return to their homes and secure their doors. Some chose to ignore this directive and were subsequently struck down. A relative of one of the deceased sought vengeance and initiated a military campaign. Upon discovering the canoe quietly resting on the shore, the voice reappeared, proclaiming that "if those unfamiliar beings were eliminated, the People of the Longhouse would be granted a significant reward" (1984, 92). A young warrior picked up a stone and hurled it at one of the beings, who awoke with a cry. In retaliation, the Iroquois warrior thrust a spear into him, silencing him permanently.

The peculiar beings leaped from the canoe and pursued the warrior, who led them to a nearby hut where a trap had been set. Other Iroquois warriors joined the fray, encircling the strange beings with their shouts and forcing them to the ground. They then "gathered a great pyre of bushes and dry wood" (Tehanetorens 1984, 94) and placed the lifeless bodies of the warriors upon it, igniting the fire. "From the ashes sprouted a rare plant. It was the Tobacco plant" (94). Ultimately, the mysterious voice instructed them on how to preserve and prepare the plant for its use, transforming it into a valuable gift.

The sacred pipe ceremony, as described by Calf Robe (1979), who documented the ritual for the Blackfoot community, indicates that on the eve of the ceremony, an offering consisting of willow wood, eagle feathers, sage, cloth, and calfskin is meticulously arranged and presented. This offering is placed within the tipi and is shared among participants on four separate occasions, during which they are required to speak truthfully and sing in reverence to the elements bestowed upon them, including hairstyles, necklaces, painted tipis, and medicinal pipes, among others (65).

5. CONCLUSION

The narratives previously presented illustrate the extensive understanding that Native Americans had regarding cereals, plants, and trees, which they occasionally attributed with the ability to shape the world as we recognize it today or to provide insights into the longevity of certain trees, such as the cedar. Additionally, the harvesting of cereals and the gathering of syrup serve as indicators of the transition to different seasons as well as transmission of non- invasive agricultural techniques.

Certain plants possess a power that goes beyond the physical realm, serving as a unique medium to connect with the Great Spirit, as exemplified by tobacco. Additionally, some of these plants are endowed with healing properties and play a

[5] Author's own translation.

significant role during the most profound moments in human existence: birth, life, and death.

The role of a storyteller has traditionally been a privilege granted to a select few, often due to their extensive experience or profound spiritual abilities. In summary, to safeguard the planet, it is crucial to keep sharing these narratives to maintain this valuable heritage and ensure its transmission to future generations. These stories also transmit us that we are relatives of the universe, and we need to connect with it and know it very well to survive. The importance relies on trusting our relatives and keeping a balance between what we receive and what we give so Mother Earth can be healed.

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THE SHAMAN WHO CAME IN FROM THE OCEAN: MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS'S VISUAL NARRATIVES*

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Abstract

Between 2001 and 2023, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas recovered many of the traditions of the Haida nation in the North-Western Pacific coast, creating hybrid narratives halfway between the textual and the pictorial. Yahgulanaas used different adaptations of the ancestral figure of the shaman to express the journey his people have gone through. Yahgulanaas's shamans are usually elements of confrontation between the static world of the Haidas and the external world, being the last barrier of defense against the destruction of the natural and social context in which the stories are held and told. The objective of this article is to focus on Yahgulanaas's so-called "Haida mangas" in order to explore how his shamans (his transcendent characters) can heal society and history through a deep connection with the spiritual world of the Haidas and through a deep understanding of how the supernatural is connected to them.

Keywords: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Haida Manga, Native American Literature, Shaman, Linguistics and Literature.

EL CHAMÁN QUE LLEGÓ DEL OCÉANO: LAS NARRATIVAS VISUALES DE MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS

Resumen

Entre 2001 y 2023, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas se ha dedicado a recuperar muchas de las tradiciones del pueblo Haida, creando narraciones híbridas entre los textual y lo pictórico. Yahgulanaas ha usado diferentes adaptaciones de la figura ancestral del chamán para expresar este proceso. Los chamanes de Yahgulanaas son frecuentemente elementos de confrontación entre el mundo estático de los haida y el siempre dinámico mundo exterior, presentándose como una de las últimas barreras frente a la destrucción del contexto natural y social que las historias presentan. El objetivo de este artículo es explorar los mangas haida de Yahgulanaas a la luz de la perspectiva chamánica de sus personajes transcendentes, y cómo estos pueden sanar la sociedad y la historia mediante la íntima conexión que mantienen con el mundo espiritual de los haida, así como mediante la comprensión de cómo lo sobrenatural está conectado con ellos.

Palabras clave: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, mangas haida, literatura nativo-americana, chamán, lingüística y literatura.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the reader may be recalling, the title of the present article is derived from John le Carré's (1931-2020) best-selling novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), and we will be returning to that notion in the following paragraphs, for the idea of the shaman (and of the visual narratives analyzed below) is deeply connected with this assumption. The idea of bursting into a community and the relation with the cold environments (see below the etymological conception of the shaman) that surround that community, will be crucial to understanding the primary sources that are going to be considered. Many of le Carré's Cold War novels display a context in which two opposing worlds collide, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's (born in 1954) visual narratives also aim for a similar depiction, with his particular re-consideration of the East-West divide.

1.1. Tracing The Path of The Shaman

The present article will be fluctuating between two different poles: the aforementioned visual narratives of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and how they coalesce with the representation of the shaman (and how these shamans are usually included in the graphic novels that are going to be explored as a source of environmental action and conflict). Tracing the origins of the word "shaman" is a quite complicated issue, and we need to search for different sources when doing it. Usually, when the concept is discussed today, readers and audiences tend to think about indigenous communities of a wide variety, which rely on these figures as their connection with the spiritual world. Although this may be considered acceptable in a very broad sense, shamanism has deeper linguistic roots that cannot be obviated. Even if the debate still goes on and on, it seems more or less clear that the origins of the term need to be searched for in Central Asia, at the conundrum of the Indo-European, Tungusic, and Uralic languages (approximately in what today is Russian Siberia), as Ronald Hutton confirms: "Virtually all who use it are aware that it derives originally from Siberia, even while it has long been applied to phenomena in many other parts of the globe" (2001[2007], vii).[1] As most of this author's testimonies declare, the most

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[1] As for the written records of the term, Hutton (2001 [2007], VII) also offers an evaluation, stating that it was first coined in Russian (шаман) by Avvakum Petrov (1620/1621-1682) in the 1670s. The first English usage of the term would appear in 1698, in the translation of the memoirs of Adam Brand (born before 1692-1746), published in German as *Driejaarige Reize naar China* and translated as *A Journal of an Ambassy*.

reliable semantic association of the word "shaman" (in its different variants: šamán [шаман], samān, śramaṇa [श्रमण], ṣāmaṃ, ṣamāne, shāmén [沙門])[2] could be the Tungusic root "sā-" which, according to authors such as Vilmos Diószegi (1962, 13) or Mihály Hoppál (2005, 15), should have a similar meaning to the English verb "to know."[3] In any case, delving into these definitions triggers two main (and problematic) conclusions: on one hand, and in relation with what is being explored below, a narrative containing the presence of a shaman invariably aims to explore the connections of the earthly world with the supernatural/spiritual realm that has been traditionally inherent of most historical societies; on the other hand, the generalized assumption of the shamanic role applied (indiscriminately) to different cultures worldwide leads to a complicated situation in which a Europeanized re-definition of the concept is applied to realities that lie both beyond the European and the original Tungusic-Siberian realms. As we are going to explore, Native American societies are a specially interesting target in this sense, for notions such as medicine-man, traditional healer, spiritual visionary, etc., have been assimilated with the conception of the shaman (*via* Mircea Eliade's [1907-1986] *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* [1951]).[4]

1.2. Shamanism and Myth

Focusing on the first premise that has been posted above, prior to the discussion of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's works, we need to further state what a shaman is understood to be, in order to see how the Canadian author incorporates them in his visual narratives, and how this can be re-interpreted through the notions of natural healing. Shamans are usually depicted as the connection between the earthly and the spiritual worlds, playing a role similar to that of the priest in other, parallel cultures. In consequence, the relation of the shaman with the mythical conception of the society in which it is regulated (with independence of its geographical/cultural basis) lies in the transition from the immanent to the transcendent conception of time and space. As José Manuel Losada argues:

> El mito designa un aspecto temporal frontalmente distinto de los tiempos de la inmanencia; una temporalidad también marcada por un antes y un después –toda sucesión es constitutiva de tiempo–, pero desmarcada de la nuestra. Lo mitológico es que esta cronología exclusiva de la divinidad, esencialmente irreducible a la

[2] See B. Laufer (1917).

[3] On the other hand, as it usually happens with Uralic-Tungusic languages, these conclusions are not totally accepted by the academic community, with researchers such as Juha Janhunen (1986, 98) opening the door for a potential denial of the postulate.

[4] A view that authors such as Sophie Dardenne (2005) or Sophie Golding (2018) have praised, for it constitutes a positive revisitation of how shamanism is culturally conceived, especially after the materialist, Marxist views of the central decades of the 20th century.

> nuestra, se integre, puntualmente, con esta. El comercio con los seres humanos no desmerece a los divinos. Lo numinoso no es menos divino por incluir la dimensión cronológica; antes al contrario: precisamente porque entra en el flujo temporal –en el acontecimiento, al margen del ser puro y simple–, el mundo divino se da a conocer, muestra que no le somos indiferentes y, de algún modo, nos ayuda a comprender más nuestro propio tiempo inmanente. (2022, 250)

As for what the shaman means, his actions, his wisdom, and his social presence are usually directed towards the progressive clearance of the gap that, according to Losada, exists between the two different (sometimes confronted) layers of reality. As we are going to explore in Yahgulanaas's visual narratives, the role of the shamans he portrays also takes the task of becoming a nexus between the two different worlds that have constituted the cultural background of the author, at the conundrum of the Haida and the European presence in Western Canada. Along with this, shamans have also played a leading role, being presented as referential figures among the different societies in which they have existed, something that will also appear in the texts that are being analyzed in the following pages.

1.3. Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and Haida Culture

The second main aspect that needs to be considered is that of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's own cultural presence. As mentioned above, Yahgulanaas belongs to the Haida (X̲aayda) Nation of Western Canada (native to the Queen Charlotte Islands [Haida Gwaii]). In the late 1970s, Yahgulanaas began his artistic career under the guidance of traditional sculptor and visual artist Robert Davidson [G̲uud San Glans] (born in 1946),[5] also a member of the Haida Nation.[6] Davidson, as it will happen with Yahgulanaas, is considered today as one of the main revitalizers of the Haida traditional arts and the Haida culture, having given to it a transnational scope beyond the limits of Haida Gwaii. Along with the influence of Davidson, Yahgulanaas will also be indebted to his own family history, in which the traditional creation of the Haidas will be imbricated. Actually, he is a descendant of the prominent Edenshaw family (Charles *-ca*. 1839-1920- and Isabella [K'woiyeng, Yahgujanaas, S'itkwuns] *-ca*. 1842-1926-), which by the early 20th century had given some of the most remarkable examples of non-totemic art in Haida Gwaii.[7]

The ancestral cultural production of the Haidas has traditionally manifested through the creation of two separate products that will coalesce in Yahgulanaas's production: carved totem poles [gyáa'aang][8] and stories explaining the ethnogenesis of the Haidas and the subsequent stages of their relationship with the outer world

[5] See https://www.robertdavidson.ca/ or Ian Thom (1993).
[6] For a general overview of Yahgulanaas's artistic production, see https://mny.ca/en/.
[7] See Colin Brown (2016).
[8] Understood as Mircea Eliade's cosmic column (2020, 36-38).

(with the whites [Xhaaydla Gwaayaay]), being a (mostly) isolated society prior to the 18th century. As it will be seen below, the (recreational) figure of the shaman Yahgulanaas offers to the world will gather these two concepts together.

The aforementioned contact with the outer world will have two main ways of penetration in Haida Gwaii. During the first stages of the process, contacts will come from the South, from the Spanish possessions in California, as M.L. Rodríguez-Sala (2006) or F.M. Tovell (2008) have explored. José Manuel Correoso-Rodenas has recently addressed this context, offering a multimodal approach and contextualizing some of the expeditions that took place around Haida Gwaii between 1774 and 1790:

> Within this context of fiction-reality conundrum, the end of the eighteenth century witnessed one of the most picturesque historical circumstances that the European presence in the North American territories would offer for modern historians: the presence of a Spanish expedition taking possession of what today is Alaska in the name of the Spanish king Charles IV. That territory received the quasi-legendary denomination of San Francisco del Mar Ártico and, later on, was known as San Lorenzo de Nutca (...)
>
> That day, June 3rd, 1790, would mark a culmination for the Spanish expansionist aspirations in the Northwest of the American continent. Departing from Alta California, the last quarter of the century had hosted several independent expeditions to the unknown north, towards the search of the (also quasi-legendary) Strait of Anián. These milestones in the exploration of Northwest America will produce, as a result, along with a rosary of demonyms along the coast,[9] a vast an interesting amount of documents which included the narration of these journeys. (2024, 271-272).

Some of these texts will directly address the reality of the pre-contact Haidas, with descriptions about them, their customs, and their languages. Later on, especially since the early 19th century and the cessation of the Spanish presence in the area, this contact will come from the East, from British Canada, creating the boundary of the Hecate Strait [Kandaliigwii] that Yahgulanaas will reproduce and revisit in his Haida mangas, and creating that "heterogenous space" that Mircea Eliade proposes in *Das Heilige und das Profane* (2020, 23).

Up to the 1990s, Yahgulanaas continued exploring different branches of artistic production, from sculpture to visual performance, always placing the Haida cosmology at the center of his creations.[10] By the end of this decade, Yahgulanaas would get acquainted with artistic expressions coming from the other side of the Pacific (China, Japan, and Korea) through the increasingly growing Asian community in Western Canada. Through these, Yahgulanaas would begin an exploration of the possibilities of merging the traditional stories of the Haidas with the modern, more

[9] And other linguistic interchanges, such as those explored by Henry Kammler (2009, among others) for the Natives of Vancouver Island.

[10] Thanks to this, along with Davidson, Yahgulanaas would enter the main artistic circuit of Canada, being his creations displayed within the most important venues of the country.

attractive format of the manga (and the manhwa[11]),[12] coining the term "Haida manga," in a similar way to what had happened in France with the manfra. According to Nicola Levell, this mode of expression can be defined as "(...) a kind of transpacific fusion that transculturates Haida formlines, ideas and oral histories with manga, the Japanese genre of cartoon and comic illustration" (2013, 94).[13] These characteristics will be clearly seen in the following paragraphs.

2. MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS AND HAIDA MANGAS

Since the early 21st century,[14] Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas has been publishing different hybrid volumes in which he mingles images and narrations. Although his production is way more extensive,[15] here we will focus on those publications that gather the circumstances of containing Haida narrations under the format of the manga and which depict recreational shamanic figures. Thus, the subsequent analysis will be devoted to the four following works: *A Tale of Two Shamans* (2001), *Red. A Haida Manga* (2009), *Carpe Fin. A Haida Manga* (2019), and *JAJ. A Haida Manga* (2023). All of them revisit either episodes of the folkloric past of the Haidas or the historical journey the nation has gone through, especially since the arrival of the Europeans in Haida Gwaii. As it will be seen below, there is a structural and narratorial difference between *A Tale of Two Shamans* and the rest of the volumes that contributes to make this story a special effort within the modernization the Haida manga means.

2.1. *A Tale of Two Shamans*: The Shaman's Progress

A Tale of Two Shamans [*Ga Sgáagaa Sdáng*, *Ga Sgaaga Sding*] was conceived as a federally sponsored project in order to protect and promote the legacy of the Haidas specially in linguistic terms; something that explains the peculiar format in which it was created. Unlike the following narrations, *A Tale of Two Shamans* combines fully drawn pages with pages in which images and text are confronted,

[11] For more information, see Son Sang-ik (1999), Christopher Hart (2004), or Rika Sugiyama (2004).

[12] Something that, in the most recent decades, has been a shared effort among many different Native American groups, trying to bring their ancestral traditions to the younger generations. One of the most famous examples is the videogame *Never Alone* [*Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*], developed by Upper One Games (2014) adapting a traditional Iñupiat story "Kunuuksaayuka." See http://neveralonegame.com/.

[13] José Manuel Correoso Rodenas has briefly evaluated the interrelations between the verbal and the visual in Yahgulanaas's Haida mangas (2022).

[14] He already participated in the publication of the first volume of the *Tales of Raven* series (1977). See Nicola Levell (2016, 16, 20).

[15] Even within the realm of Haida mangas, including titles such as *Flight of the Hummingbird* (2008) or the collaborative work *The Canoe He Called Loo Taas* (2010).

playing Yahgulanaas with different shades of black and white. As mentioned, one of the main purposes of *A Tale of Two Shamans* was to modernize the legacy of the Haidas,[16] so the story it encompasses is recreated in the three main surviving dialects of the Haida language [X̲aat Kíl, X̲aadas Kíl, X̲aayda Kil, Xaad kil],[17] Old Massett, Skidegate, and Kaigani (being this last version proper of continental Alaska), along with Yahgulanaas's own English translation.[18] Of all the four volumes that are being explored here, *A Tale of Two Shamans* is the only one in which the traditional figure of the shaman is explored. As mentioned above, by doing so, Yahgulanaas is already going through an exercise of adapting a non-Haida notion, such as that of the shaman, to potentially pre-existent, related figures, such as those of the keeper of the traditions, the medicine man, or the storyteller.

The plot of *A Tale of Two Shamans* is the only one dealing with the pre-contact era and discussing how the (argued) shamans acted as conductors and elements of agglutination for their respective communities: "The work you are about to read is old, much older than any of us still living. It is probably older anything one could even call Canadian. It precedes us all" (Yahgulanaas 2018, 4). The story presents two sole characters, the shaman and Elder, who will be finally depicted as the real shaman. Thus, the narration pivots between the conception of real shamanism (Elder) and fake, posed, impure shamanism (the shaman). In order to comprehend how Yahgulanaas recreation of shamanic Haida purity works, we need to revisit the aforementioned definition of what a shaman is, for here we have two characters who are closely linked to the mythic/religious views of the shamanic role. According to Yahgulanaas,

> My 2001 English version (...) is an interpretation of the elements of meaning. The conceptual structure of this parable is about sightedness and the role of transgressions and transitions in a world of symmetry, moieties within the cycle of rebirth. My paintings and text constitute a theory that there is a unified structure of meaning in what was recorded as three separate stories and that these three stories were once a single parable. (2018, 5)

Elder is presented as the actual bearer of the connection with the transcendent, trimming the shaman how to subvert his arrogance (hubris) to be dignified with the leading communal role the narration has given him:

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[16] In a similar sense, the 2018 movie *SGaawaay K̲'uuna* [*Edge of the Knife*], filmed entirely in Haida, tried to bring the ancestral traditions of the nation to the modern format of the psychological horror thriller.

[17] Some other dialects, such as Ninstints (traditionally spoken on Moresby Island [Gwaii Haanas]) are today extinct and poorly documented, as John Enrico states (2003, 1).

[18] Something that will not happen in the future books that are going to be explored, written entirely and originally in English (with the only exception of *JAJ*, which will include some brief fragments in Haida).

> As soon as the shaman passed the skin back to Elder, he felt the otter's spirit in his insides.
> Then the shaman's belly began to ache.
> "That is happening to you because you asked me for the otter," Elder cried.
> "You speak the truth," the shaman replied.
> And in three days, he died. (Yahgulanaas 2018, 23-25)

This episode, which will mark a rebirth in the life of the shaman, will also mark the transition from the mythic agent to the mythic subject according to the definition of the myth José Manuel Losada offers: "El mito es un relato funcional, simbólico y temático de acontecimientos extraordinarios con referente trascendente sobrenatural carentes, en principio, de testimonio histórico y remitentes a una cosmogonía o a una escatología individuales o colectivas, pero siempre absolutas" (2022, 193). Thus, the shaman (and, tangentially, Elder) enters the realm of transcendence, becoming a supernatural entity who has shared the mythical characteristic of the returnee, adding to his own shamanic (although posed) knowledge what is brought from the other side.

2.2. A Tale of Two Shamans: *Red* and *Carpe Fin*

As mentioned before, the three Haida mangas that came after *A Tale of Two Shamans* have the common background of depicting a scenario in which the contact of the Haidas with the Europeans (Anglo-Europeans) has already become a visible reality. More specifically, *Red* (2009) and *Carpe Fin* (2019) are indebted to the representation of the same reality, being *Carpe Fin* a prequel to *Red*. In consequence, these will be considered together here. However, prior to the literary discussion of the narrations, we should briefly consider how Yahgulanaas structurally conceived them. As mentioned above, the totem poles (also crucial for understanding *JAJ*) are some of the most characteristic Haida cultural products. In consequence, Yahgulanaas created his Haida mangas (especially *Red*) depicting this recognizable Haida trait which, according to Ishmael Reed, are also used to narrate stories:

> Some of the figures on the poles constitute symbolic reminders of quarrels, murders, debts, and other unpleasant occurrences about which the Native Americans prefer to remain silent... The most widely known tales, like those of the exploits of Raven and of Kats who married the bear woman, are familiar to almost every native of the area. Carvings which symbolize these tales are sufficiently conventionalized to be readily recognizable even by persons whose lineage did not recount them as their own legendary history. (2003, n.p.)[19]

[19] For more information, see Ruth Brindze (1951); Viola E. Garfield (1951); Viola E. Garfield & Linn A. Forrest (1961); Edward L. Keithahn (1963); Joseph H. Wherry (1964); John Smyly & Carolyn Smyly (1973); Edward Malin (1986); Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith (1990); Hilary Stewart (1993); Pamela Rae Huteson (2002); Pat Kramer (2008); or Richard D. Feldman (2012).

When considering all the different scenes that compose *Red*, what the spectator actually gets is the depiction of one of the faces that have traditionally adorned Haida totem poles.[20] The actual organization of the vignettes also addresses a reality of the Haida nation, reproducing the grammatical structure of the Haida language, an isolate language arguably one of the slowest on Earth. Thus, the manga offers an inter- and intra-page distribution completely different to European and Asian models.[21] Along with the following shamanic traits *Red* shows, this utilization Yahgulanaas makes of the linguistic reality of the Haidas. In the most recent decades, the linguistic research of Edward J. Vajda (2010a, 2010b, 2012, and 2013)[22] has proposed the theory of a Yeniseian-North American language connection through the Na-Dene languages (a macro-group which would include Haida).[23] Although this still remains at a very theoretical research level, it undoubtedly triggers new questions about the historical migration of the shamanic figure. Let's be clear: there is no evidence yet of that connection, but in the future decades, proving it would mean a huge step in the reevaluation of how spiritual figures have traditionally worked for Native societies, not only being an adaptation of the Siberian reality, but also a tangible recreation.

As it happened with *A Tale of Two Shamans*, *Red* also depicts a traditional Haida story,[24] narrated from the perspective of the Native side:

> After a few weeks, I became acutely aware of the difference between settler stories about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous stories about Indigenous peoples. Settlers, it appeared, were interested in decontextualized trauma and relegating Indigenous strength to the past. Indigenous authors, however, were more likely to write stories about recovering from trauma, or stories more specifically about the ways that we are strong now. Indigenous authors avoided stereotypes, while building a canon of their own voices. (Daigneault, Mazowita, Rifkind, and Callison 2019, 152)

In this manga, the peaceful Haida village of Kiokaathli is traumatized with the sudden arrival of a white raid that concludes with the kidnapping of Jaada, Red's sister, creating the liminal (chronological and spatial) space of the shore:[25] "Out there is where we are conceived (...) here on the beach is where we are born (...) and in there, that is where we becoming adults" (2014, 5). This will be the first moment of epiphany within the narration, for Red, who had been trained to become

[20] For a further depiction of Yahgulanaas's creative process, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POMbyPLhqRI&t=10s.

[21] A more detailed discussion of the layout of *Red*, *Carpe Fin*, and *JAJ* would excessively exceed the limits and scope of the present publication. In consequence, for further notice on this, we recommend R. Harrison (2016); Cara Tiemens (2019); or José Manuel Correoso Rodenas (2022).

[22] Being contested by other major linguists such as George Starostin (2012).

[23] Something that Michael Fortescue had already venture in his archaeological research (1998).

[24] Which itself is a Pacific version of the Roman tradition of the rape of the Sabine women [Sabinae raptae].

[25] Also linking with Eliade's conception of the *templum-tempus* (2020, 67-69).

the future shaman of the village ("'So, going on a spirit quest, eh? Gonna become a shaman?" [2014, 10]) is defied by reality, and thus adopts the role of warrior leader of Kiokaathli, using his future life to seek revenge. This will become a real possibility through the second moment of epiphany in *Red*, when the main character finds Carpe, a shipwrecked white character who will also become a shamanic figure himself (linking two realities, adopting them, and linking this manga and *Carpe Fin*). Carpe, a talented ship builder, creates an artificial whale (SGaanaGwa),[26] recreating an animal that is very relevant in Haida cosmology, which is used as a war machine to attack the Europeans on the continent, disclosing the reality in which Jaada has actually married a white man and had his children; in consequence, Red becomes a murderer, his shamanic-spiritual guidance has been surpassed by his own hubris, which leads to destruction through the perfidious utilization of the SGaanaGwa.

The shamanic conversion of Carpe is completed with the exploration of his own personal history in *Carpe Fin*. This volume, presented as a prequel to *Red*, explains how the character suffers his own process of sublimation by being separated from his own community. On a fishing expedition, due to an accident and poor weather conditions, Carpe is stranded on a rock in what is assumed to be Hecate Strait. There, he will be confronted with different elements belonging to the Haida spirituality,[27] which will demand explanations for Carpe's past actions: "Why do you murder women? I demand an answer!" (2019, n.p.). Thus, the rock in the ocean will become Carpe's own *axis mundi*, as Mircea Eliade explains it: "Wo eine Hierophanie zur Durchbrechung der Ebenen geführt hat, ist zugleicht eine 'Öffnung' nach ober (in die göttliche Welt) oder nach unten (zu de unteren Regionen der Welt der Toten) entstanden. Die drei kosmischen Ebenen –Erde, Himmel, untere Regionen– sind miteinander in Verbindung gesetzt" (2020, 36). There, he will be found and rescued by Red, triggering the whole episode with the whale that is narrated in the previous manga. However, these scenes on the rock will be presented as crucially more important as we approach the end of the narration. As it happens with any character who has been in contact with the supernatural, Carpe is transformed forever, his previous Xhaaydla Gwaayaay nature is modified and now he has become a different person, a true shaman, for he is now able to connect the different worlds he has been in contact with. This transition is explicitly stated in the last two pages of *Carpe Fin*. After the adventure of the whale, and after Red has to suffer the consequences of his hubris, Carpe is offered the possibility of returning to British Canada, to his own community, to be re-integrated with his pre-shamanic self. However, his decision will go in a completely different direction: "Skaanaa, we have one more task (...)

[26] The presence of the whale in traditional (and folkloric) literature is also quite interesting. See Anne Simon (2021) or Justine Scarlaken (2024).

[27] In an episode that clearly resembles what José Manuel Losada mentions about the oneiric dimension of the myth: "los sueños acarrean una enorme carga íntima, cuya garantía de verosimilitud explica en buena medida su recurso por muchos escritores y su poder cautivador entre tantos lectores. A estas características se añade la convicción tradicional de que los sueños vienen siempre preñados de una significación: son metáfora, alegoría o símbolo de algo" (2022, 254).

take me back to Lord's rock" (2019, n.p.). This quotation marks the sacrality of the rock on which he had been shipwrecked, a space that has become sacred (his own hermit) through the experience Carpe has lived there. On the other hand, this final passage also states how Carpe cannot deny his own fate, and goes on embracing his new (we assume, future) shamanic role.

2.3. *JAJ*: The Shaman That Came In

The last stage of this shamanic journey deals with the Haida manga *JAJ*, published in 2023. Unlike in the previously visited examples, here Yahgulanaas does not explore the early colonial era of Haida Gwaii, but he sets his hybrid narration in the last quarter of the 19th century, when the European presence in British Columbia is already a well-established reality. The shamanic implications of *JAJ* are far more challenging than in the previous narrations, as Yahgulanaas recognizes before the opening of the manga: "JAJ: (1) one who decides (Hindi),[28] (2) Johan Adrian Jacobsen" (2023, n.p.). As this definition presents, the story is going to deal with a dual reality of spiritual connection between the ancestral and the modern, and also with the actual, historical expeditions of Johan Adrian Jacobsen (1853-1947) to Northwestern America in the early 1880s.[29] The main objective of these expeditions was collecting Native material to be displayed at the newly created Ethnological Museum of Berlin: "Bastian needed a museum collection grand enough for the new Germany: one to rival the British, the Americans, and everyone else out looting the planet. But such a collection required world-class material... and the services of one willing to deliver it to him" (Yahgulanaas 2023, 51). Among some of the most valuable items Jacobsen brought back to Germany, we can find a totem pole, still displayed at the museum.

Unlike Carpe, Jacobsen will not go through a shamanic, supernatural experience due to his connection with the Haida spirituality. However, the narration Yahgulanaas creates around him will disclose some traits that need to be considered. The first of them, in relation to the Hindi/Sanskrit meaning(s) of "जज," will be religion. In the previously considered mangas, religion is absent (beyond the religious implications the spiritual and shamanic mentions imply). However, in *JAJ*, religion is directly addressed since the opening of the narration, and it is presented as an important factor for the Haidas in the late 19th century. The opening of *JAJ* deals with the legendary journey of Bartholomew the Apostle (died *ca*. 69/71) to the Americas, along with Thomas the Apostle (died 72):[30] "Old stories remind us that centuries

[28] *जज*. Actually, the Hindi word encompasses a wider meaning than that exposed by Yahgulanaas, being it also possible to translate it as "judge," making a clear connection with the shamanic social leading role.

[29] As a result, Jacobsen would write a chronicle entitled *Capitain Jacobsen's Reise an der Nordwestküste Amerikas, 1881-1883* (1884).

[30] See Louis-André Vigneras (1977, 82).

after a Buddhist monk arrived in these waters, Bartholomew was the first European" (2023, 3). Leaving apart the Indian connection of this sentence (Bartholomew also visited India, as recorded by Eusebius [*ca*. 260/265-339] in his *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία*), what Yahgulanaas expresses here is the arrival of Christianity to the Haida world and to the Haida cosmology. Historically, this process began with the British and American missionaries that visited the archipelago by the mid-19th century, within the context of the short-lived Colony of the Queen Charlotte Islands (1853-1858), and consolidated after 1876, with the presence of the Church Missionary Society,[31] as John R. Henderson explains:

> Although these appeals for a missionary brought no minister immediately to the Queen Charlotte Islands, missionary activity was stirring on the mainland during the 1850's and 1860's. The Church Missionary Society of London (Anglican) sent William Duncan to establish Metlakatla near the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Simpson. Duncan's mission provided a church and school to teach, convert, and minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the local Tsimpshiam Indians. In addition, Duncan used Metlakatla to train local Indians to serve as lay ministers to spread the Word up and down the north Pacific Coast. Later, novice missionaries from Great Britain interned at Metlakatla before embarking alone to other Anglican outposts along the coast. (1974, 304)

This meant, still in historical terms, the beginning of the decline of the Haida culture, vanished through conversion, assimilation, and smallpox, as also narrated in *JAJ*:

> Dr. Helmcken[32] was an MLA and speaker of the Vancouver Island Assembly.[33]
> He was also a physician: he knew the difference between inoculation (illegal) and vaccination (legal).
> Helmcken: "Let's inoculate."
> (...)
> British law was clear that the sole and correct response to a smallpox outbreak was quarantine. James Douglas[34] and his son-in-law Helmcken knew that law. (2023, 23-24)

This pernicious presence of the Europeans in Haida Gwaii, which Yahgulanaas also adds to the presence of missionaries,[35] will be the one of the main sources of shamanic clash in *JAJ*, for leading role the shaman has traditionally hold is perturbed by other spiritual and social elements of guidance, such as the priests and the civil authorities: "Indigenous laws regulated access to land and water, preventing

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[31] See the anonymous *The Hydah Mission*.
[32] John Sebastian Helmcken (1824-1920).
[33] The Legislative Assembly of Vancouver Island, existing between 1856 and 1866.
[34] Sir James Douglas (1803-1877).
[35] Who will help Jacobsen in the negotiations necessary to bring the totem to Berlin.

newcomers from claiming everything for the British Empire. Those laws troubled Governor James Douglas. They made him look weak" (2023, 16). The second main source of shamanic clash (also derived from the pernicious presence of the Europeans, in his case Jacobsen) will appear towards the end of the narration. Here, Yahgulanaas presents a disruption with the actual course of historical events, in which the totem arrived in Germany and was displayed at the museum. In *JAJ*, on the contrary, the cultural pre-eminence (pseudo-shamanic) of historical Jacobsen (bearer of the secrets of the Haidas) is neglected: "As for Johan, his time at Haida Gwaii was, in reality, one stop of many on a long journey. Though he was welcomed when he returned to Berlin, he was no ethnographer, and no German, and so there would be no permanent position for him at the Ethnological Museum" (Yahgulanaas 2023, 107). However, what is even more relevant is what actually happens at the very last page of *JAJ*, when the academic authorities of the Berlin Museum open the boxes in which the totem had been stored, "And the totem?" (2023, 108), opening the possibility for a disappearance of the item. Deprived of the spiritual, cultural, and geographical substrates that made the existence of the totem something valuable and recognizable, his material reality (what is valuable and recognizable for the museum) disappears. In consequence, Yahgulanaas displays the Europeans (Jacobsen and the museum and, by extension, the missionary and civil authorities of British Columbia) as irrelevant in the spiritual (shamanic) connection the totem had historically meant for the Haidas.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, as we have had the opportunity of exploring through the previous paragraphs, the notion of the shaman is extremely tricky and malleable. Although the origins of the term (and the figure) still remain unclear, it is undeniable that the shamanic perspective has permeated cultures and societies that have had a special connection with the ancestral across the globe. Although its assimilation when dealing with Native American cultures may not be totally accurate, it has been successfully incorporated into the Native cultural and spiritual discourse (both endogenously and exogenously). Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, one of the last cultural figures of a vanishing indigenous tradition, that of Haidas, means an extremely useful link between the traditional world of his nation and the modern world of Anglophone Canada. His more or less original creation of the Haida mangas has played (and still plays) a decisive role when connecting young Haidas with an almost lost legacy (something that, unfortunately, cannot be done linguistically anymore). The examples that have been considered in the previous pages, *A Tale of Two Shamans*, *Red*, *Carpe Fin*, and *JAJ*, offer different visions of what a shaman is supposed to be, and what the shamanic role is supposed to mean. From the most traditional views that *A Tale of Two Shamans* offers to the intermingled universe *JAJ*, Yahgulanaas revisits how the Haidas had always been in search of a shaman, and how the shaman has always been in search of a respectable person to host what he is. Red and Carpe are good examples of this, for they follow different patterns that finally converge, and they also have to go through their own hubris-led spiritual quest in order to be sublimated

into the shamanic realm, something that Jacobsen is denied. It is a mystery where shamans come from, but for Yahgulanaas they have always came in from the ocean; the shore, the whale, and the ship have always been their resources. As it happens with Alec Leamas in John le Carré's novel, Yahgulanaas shamans are always a source of turmoil, something that not only leads the Haidas, but also triggers their own comprehension of what their history, their identity, and their cosmology are.

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REVISITING AND UPDATING H.P. LOVECRAFT'S "THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH HOUSE": JAUME BALAGUERÓ'S *VENUS* AS A CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST WITCH TALE

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Abstract

Jaume Balagueró's film *Venus* (2022) adapts H.P. Lovecraft's short story "The Dreams in the Witch House" (1933), which amalgamates characteristic traits of cosmic horror, but presents them around the horror archetype of the witch. Balagueró's adaptation transforms Lovecraft's tale into a cinematic narrative which arises as a contemporary feminist story that vindicates female empowerment in the era of fourth-wave feminism and the post-humanities. A comparative analysis between both textualities based on Gérard Genette's narratological theories will pave the way for identifying intertextual, metatextual and hypertextual connections, while it will also underscore the evolving interpretation of the witch from a figure of monstrosity to an icon of feminist struggle against patriarchy.

Keywords: Witchcraft, Adaptation, Narratology, the Monstrous-feminine, Post-humanities.

REVISITANDO Y ACTUALIZANDO "LOS SUEÑOS EN LA CASA DE LA BRUJA" DE H.P. LOVECRAFT: *VENUS* DE JAUME BALAGUERÓ COMO CUENTO DE BRUJAS FEMINISTA CONTEMPORÁNEO

Resumen

El largometraje *Venus* (2022) de Jaume Balagueró adapta la narración breve "Los sueños en la casa de la bruja" (1933) de H.P. Lovecraft, la cual amalgama rasgos característicos del terror cósmico, aunque los presenta en torno al arquetipo clásico de la bruja. La adaptación de Balagueró transforma el cuento de Lovecraft en una narración cinematográfica que se erige como una historia feminista contemporánea que reivindica el empoderamiento femenino en la era de la cuarta ola feminista y las poshumanidades. Un análisis comparativo entre ambas textualidades, basado en las teorías narratológicas de Gérard Genette, servirá para identificar conexiones intertextuales, metatextuales e hipertetxuales, a la par que subrayará la interpretación evolutiva de la bruja de una figura de monstruosidad a un icono de la lucha feminista contra el patriarcado.

Palabras clave: brujería, adaptación, narratología, lo monstruoso-femenino, poshumanidades.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jaume Balagueró has become one of the most acclaimed contemporary Spanish filmmakers who specialize in genre cinema, particularly in horror fiction. Along with cinema directors like Alejandro Amenábar, Juan Antonio Bayona, Paco Plaza, Álex de la Iglesia, Guillem Morales, Eugenio Mira and Carlota Pereda, Balagueró belongs to a generation of consolidated horror filmmakers. According to Julio Ángel Olivares Merino (2011), as a cinema director, Balagueró integrates the influence of classic filmmakers along with his own authorial creativity, thus giving rise to his unique creative eclecticism, which involves a series of distinguishing thematic traits, such as the apocalyptic, the monstrosity of the postmodern city, recurrent loneliness, manifestations of the double, the individual's fragility, and references to existentialism and even nihilism. Additionally, as Olivares Merino further argues, Balagueró's cinema has been acclaimed both by audiences and critics, shifting alternatively from experimental films to commercial cinema. Likewise, from the beginning of his career, Balagueró has explored a significant array of archetypes from the horror tradition, such as demonic sects in *The Nameless* (1999), ghosts in *Fragile* (2005), and zombies in *REC* (2007). In his most recent film to date, *Venus*, released in 2022, Balagueró revisits and updates the archetype of the witch, insofar as it consists in a contemporary narrative of witches which is set in one of the districts in the city of Madrid. In the advent of the fourth-wave of feminism –which promotes women's empowerment all across the globe, the use of internet tools, transversalism, intergenerational relationships, and the struggle against patriarchy and sexual harassment (Moracho 2019)– Balagueró envisioned his film *Venus* as a narrative of female empowerment. *Venus* thus revisits classic tropes attached to the figure of the witch, and it takes the baton as a representative of a new generation of witches seeking to overcome pervasive practices of patriarchy that extend to present days.

Deeply aware of the horror tradition, as a genre filmmaker, in *Venus*, Balagueró aimed to put together a narrative that revolves around the archetype of the witch and that vindicates women's ancestral powers. In this respect, in a recently-published interview following the release of his film *Venus*, Balagueró confessed: "Me declaro fan absoluto de ese grupo de brujas que son como las amigas de tu abuela, de tu tía o de tu madre. Mujeres aparentemente normales que son tus vecinas en el edificio donde vives y que de repente descubres que son como las brujas de Macbeth"[1] (Fernández 2022). At the same time, though, he also added: "*Venus* habla del empoderamiento, no solo relacionado con el feminismo, sino con el concepto de la superación y de la transformación (...) sobre una mujer que se empodera sobre

[1] "I declare myself a devoted fan of those groups of witches who are like the friends of your grandmother, your aunt or your mother. Women who are apparently ordinary and happen to be your neighbours in the building where you live and, all of a sudden, you find out they are like Macbeth's witches" (the author's translation).

ella misma, sobre lo divino y sobre lo demoníaco"[2] (Fernández 2022). Judging from Balagueró's words, his film *Venus* was aimed at striking a balance between tradition and modernity, between the conventional portrayal of the witch as grounded in folk tales and horror popular fiction, and its contemporary and updated archetype as symptomatic of discourses intrinsically related to the fourth-wave of feminism. As evidence of the entanglement between tradition and innovation, Balagueró's film is based on Lovecraft's tale "The Dreams in the Witch House," published in *Weird Tales* in 1933, and ninety years after the publication of Lovecraft's text, Balagueró's film adaptation retains some of its basic elements, but also transforms the tale and updates it to contemporary times.

In his classic essay on supernatural horror in literature, Lovecraft outlines his concept of cosmic horror, referring to "a certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces" and "a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space" (1945, 15). Some of these features are also recurrent in Balagueró's cinema, and particularly, in his adaptation of Lovecraft's original tale. Indeed, Lovecraft's "The Dreams of the Witch House" partakes in cosmic horror, insofar as its protagonist comes across unknown and malignant forces which remain latent as a result of their invocation on behalf of a witch in former times. In Lovecraft's tale, Walter Gilman, a student of mathematics and folklore, rents an attic room in the Witch house, in Arkham, Massachusetts, which used to host Keziah Mason, an accused witch who vanished mysteriously from a Salem jail in 1692. As the story goes, Gilman finds out that the attic is supposed to be cursed, and while he theorises that the unusual geometry of the room may enable travelling from one dimension to another, he begins to experience bizarre nightmares about the witch and her giant rat Brown Jenkin (Lovecraft 1945, 90). As Walpurgis Night is close at hand, he suspects that he might have been an accomplice in the kidnapping of a child who will be sacrificed in a bizarre ritual. Gilman finally dies as Brown Jenkin eats its way out of its chest, which leads the landlord and his few tenets to abandon the building. Years later, bones belonging to an older woman, children, and a giant rat are found on the foundations of the abode (111).

Loosely grounded in Lovecraft's tale, Balagueró's film *Venus* is set in the city of Madrid and revolves around a young dancer working at a night club, Lucía (Ester Expósito), who flees from her workplace after stealing a substantial supply of drugs and, as she is being hunted by a male gang of drug dealers, she determines to take shelter in an apartment block known as the Venus building, in a faraway district, in which her sister Rocío (Ángela Cremonte) and her niece Alba (Inés Fernández) live, being totally unaware that the building is cursed and inhabited by three aging

[2] "*Venus* revolves around empowerment, not only in relation to feminism, but in connection with the concept of self-improvement and transformation (...) about a woman who becomes empowered in relation to herself, the divine, and the demonic" (the author's translation).

witches –including Marga (Magüi Mira), Romina (Aten Soria), and Rosita (María José Sarate)– who worship powerful female demonic entities. As cinema critic Desirée de Fez (2022) argues, Balagueró's horror film revolves around final girls and screen queens, but also witches and fright empresses. In fact, these apparent malignant female forces play an essential role in protecting Lucía from the gang of three men –including Calvo (Francisco Boira), Moro (Fernando Valdivielso), and Salinas (Federico Aguado)– who are in her pursuit, and these ancestral female entities also ensure Lucía's awakening and empowerment as a woman.

Given the narratological parallelisms between Lovecraft's and Balagueró's narratives of witches, this article aims to explore their intertextualities ranging from those passages that are retained in Balagueró's film to those thematic and formal elements that are transformed, while finally underscoring the components that are introduced in the film, which are aimed at turning Lovecraft's original tale into a portrayal of the contemporary witch in a feminist narrative of vindication and redemption. On the basis of Gérard Genette's terminology, intertextuality involves direct allusions between texts, metatextuality means explicit or implicit commentaries of one text on another, and hypertextuality implies the connection between a later narrative known as hypertext that transforms a previous narrative known as hypotext (1982, 23). An analysis of the transtextual correspondences between Balagueró's film and Lovecraft's short story through intertextual, metatextual and hypertextual links will give evidence of the updated and transformed portrayal of the witch from contemporary precepts such as the post-anthropocentric, the post-human, the technological, and the ontological from a feminist perspective.

2. THE FIGURE OF THE WITCH: PAST AND PRESENT

It was mainly in the nineteenth-century that gothic archetypes and tropes, from vampires to ghosts, became the subject of literary fiction. Although witchcraft and the figure of the witch in literature developed later in comparison with other gothic themes and characters, gothic writers, and subsequently, horror filmmakers began to feel interested in developing witch tales. From her origins, the witch has inextricably been linked with ancestral fears and anxieties toward women which were mostly rooted in patriarchal misconceptions. In fact, according to Freeman, gothic narratives traditionally establish a distinction between witchcraft, which they often associate with women and the worship of nature, and black magic, in which the conventionally male magician makes use of a variety of ritual practices (2019, 745). Nonetheless, from an anthropological perspective, according to Joseph Campbell (1976), women were the first witches associated with magic given women's ancestral ability to create new life. It was also believed that during some periods, such as the time of the menarche, women's magic gift became particularly powerful. In medieval treaties, though, witches were alleged to collaborate with malignant forces and cast terrible spells and curses which could even bring death. Witches were also inextricably linked to sexuality, insofar as they were supposed to have intercourse with the devil, and they were accused of causing male impotence, thus underscoring

ancestral male fears of castration. According to Barbara Walker (1985), the crone personifies a destructive motherly power capable of exerting control in a male-dominated world. Besides, Mary Russo coined the notion of the female grotesque to refer to the cavernous anatomical female body, thus associating women with earthly elements, which contributed to revalorising ancestral images of the female as representative of the earth mother and the witch (1995, 1). Russo further argues that the term grotesque is related to the Kristevan notion of the abject, which blurs physical boundaries, and the Freudian notion of the uncanny, which distorts the distinction between familiarity and strangeness in the human psyche. Accordingly, as a result of patriarchal definitions of woman as other, it was believed that women were more inclined to witchcraft than men as a result of woman's alleged powers of castration.

In the collective unconscious, a series of tropes have been conventionally associated with witches and have contributed to configuring their iconic depiction. White-haired and wrinkled-faced women in black, with a broomstick and a pointed hat, respond to the classical portrayal of witches as legacy of fairy tales. As Barbara Creed notes, though, "there is one incontestably monstrous role in the horror film that belongs to woman –that of the witch" (1993, 73). Mark Robson's film *The Seventh Victim* (1943) is alleged to be one of the earliest exponents in cinema in which the witch becomes a figure of terror. Later on, through films like Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* (1963) and Don Sharp's *Witchcraft* (1964), the witch joins the ranks of popular horror monsters in films that mostly revolve around the witch hunt on behalf of patriarchs. Nonetheless, it is Sidney Hayers's *Burn Witch Burn!* (1962) which has often been considered the first horror film with a witch as a central character. Subsequently, Dario Argento's series of witch films, like *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980), contributed to reinforcing the image of the witch as a malevolent and monstrous figure who aims to destroy the symbolic order. Through understated references to demonic possession, Brian de Palma's film *Carrie* (1976), based on Stephen King's novel, could be interpreted as the portrayal of a contemporary young witch canalising and releasing frustrated desire in the wake of second-wave feminism.

The figure of the witch has been recruited in the service of ecology, feminism, spiritual renewal, and personal development in contemporary times (Freeman 2019, 746), thus marking the figure of the witch as distinctly female in order to accomplish feminist aspirations in the era of the Symbiocene. As a result of a recent revival in folk horror cinema, films like Robert Eggers's *The Witch* (2015) focus their narratives on central female characters who acquire extraordinary influence through witchcraft, esoteric rituals, and a close association with the powers of nature. In the last decade, there has been a proliferation of horror films which portray contemporary witches, underscoring their intrinsic connection with nature, their links between family generations, and their latent power as aged females which symbolises feminist vindications. Films like Ari Aster's *Hereditary* (2018), Natalie Erika James's *Relic* (2020) and Axelle Carolyn's *The Manor* (2021) revolve around aging women, suffering from illnesses such as dementia, who increasingly acquire unforeseen dominion, they defy the established boundaries of life and death through ancestral rituals with nature, and they assert links with other females in

resemblance with a coven of witches. In this context, Balagueró's film *Venus* also partakes in contemporary portrayals of the witch in which women from older and younger generations join each other, vindicate themselves, and achieve female empowerment. These contemporary horror films which focus on the figure of the witch are grounded in theories about transversal post-humanities. According to Rosi Braidotti, "post-humanism prioritizes a critical assessment of the Humanist ideal of 'Man' as the allegedly universal measure of all things, while post-anthropocentism criticizes species hierarchy and anthropocentric exceptionalism" (2019, 1181). Consequently, transversal post-humanities draw attention to post-anthropocentric reconfigurations of life, decolonial theories, the entanglement of the ecological and the computational, and the prevalence of ontological grounding for critical posthuman scholarship (Braidotti 2019, 1190).

Contemporary cinematic portrayals of the witch from a feminist perspective are also rooted in the notions of post-anthropocentric theories (Barad 2003), material feminism (Alaimo and Hekman 2008) and the posthuman (Braidotti 2019), which call into question human exceptionalism, draw attention to the ontological component of the materiality of the body, and give emphasis to blurred identities. Post-anthropocentric precepts question androcentric and dominant interests, while they give value to other realities that move beyond the anthropocentric dimension and subject. Furthermore, as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman claim, material feminisms bring the ontology of the human body and of the natural world into the forefront of feminist theory (2008, 1). In this respect, material feminists highlight the materiality of the body, the need to reconceptualise nature as agentic, and the will to turn the focus from epistemology to ontology. Rather than privileging the discursive as was the case of postmodern precepts, material feminisms defend the need for a material turn in feminist theory. Mostly based on Karen Barad's premise about posthuman performativity and agential realism (2003), material feminism involves incorporating the material into the discursive, the nonhuman into the human, and the ontological into the epistemological. Additionally, according to Braidotti (2019), post-anthropocentric precepts are critical of human hierarchies and human exceptionalism. In a historical context characterised by advanced capitalism, climate change and artificial technology, known as the Anthropocene, the normative epistemic structure pertaining to traditional humanities is challenged in favour of the characterisation of the posthuman condition as computational, ecological, and diversified. As Braidotti argues, the posthuman environment is not only the prerogative of humans alone, insofar as it involves "the coexistence of multiple organic species, computational networks, and technological artefacts" (2019, 1187). In this respect, drawing on Donna Haraway, "a cyborg is a cybernetic organism as well as a creature of fiction" (2001, 291), which blurs the boundaries between the animal and the human, the animal-human and the machine, and the physical and the non-physical, while it is considered "a creature in a post-gender world" (2001, 292). Besides, "the cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience" (Braidotti 2001, 291). It could be argued that the post-humanist approach is thus characterised as mainly post-anthropocentric and post-gendered.

In the same vein, the portrayal of the witch in a series of contemporary Spanish horror films reflects the premises pertaining to post-humanist theories and material feminisms, thus amalgamating discursive and materialist approaches, drawing attention to nature and the body, and the entanglement of the human with the non-human. As cases in point, Álex de la Iglesia's *Brujas de Zugarramurdi* (2013) arises as a folk horror tale emphasising the connection between the witches and the natural environment, Paco Plaza's *La Abuela* (2021) brings to the fore the posthuman through the psychoanalytic notions of the uncanny and the abject, and Carlota Pereda's *La Ermita* (2023) underlines the connections between women belonging to different family generations, giving particular emphasis to the material turn through continuous visual references to nature and the body, but also through feminist psychoanalytic references. In this context, Jaume Balagueró's film *Venus* (2022) amalgamates the notions of the posthuman and material feminism, updating and transforming H.P. Lovecraft's tale "The Dreams in the Witch House" (1933) by means of resorting to instances of transtextuality. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, Genette's coins the concept of transtextuality, which responds to "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (1992, 83). Given the fact that Balagueró's film is based on H.P. Lovecraft's short story, what follows is an analysis of instances of different kinds of transtextuality, comprising intertextuality, metatextuality and hypertextuality in relation to Lovecraft's tale.

3. INTERTEXTUAL LINKS: PLACES, RITUALS, DREAMS

Approaching Balagueró's film as an adaptation of Lovecraft's original tale, there are a series of elements that display the intertextualities existing between both narratives, involving the prevalence of the house, esoteric rituals, and the relapse of nightmares. In Lovecraft's tale, the house where the plot unfolds acquires essential relevance, as is also the case with the Venus building in Balagueró's film, which actually gives it its title. Additionally, in Lovecraft's short story, the male protagonist, Walter Gilman, devotes his time to perusing the rituals that the witch and her partners performed, in which children played a major role, as also happens in Balagueró's film. Finally, in Lovecraft's tale, nightmares become pervasive, as Walter Gilman experiences a series of nightmares which make him aware of the witch's latent presence and, in Balagueró's film, the female protagonist, Lucía, also perceives the malevolent presence that haunts the building through a series of persistent bad dreams. As the plot in the film unfolds, boundaries between initially divergent dimensions become blurred, thus calling into question anthropocentric and androcentric realities in an eminently esoteric and feminine dimension which is regulated by alternative principles and realities. In this post-anthropocentric universe, domestic settings, magic and the unconscious take precedence over the public sphere, rationality, and the consumerist world.

In Lovecraft's tale, Walter Gilman, as a student fascinated by folklore and witchcraft, takes lodgings at the house where the witch Keziah Jones, judged

during the Salem trials, had her abode. As is stated in the story, "when he heard the hushed Arkham whispers about Keziah's persistent presence in the old house (...) he resolved to live in the place at any cost. A room was easy to secure; for the house was unpopular, hard to rent, and long given over to cheap lodgings" (1933, 87). In analogy, in Balagueró's film, the Venus building –where Lucía takes shelter to escape from the male gang who are in her pursuit– is also believed to be cursed and is almost deserted, as it is connected with the deaths of some children. When Gilman explores the attic room, where the witch used to perform her spells, he notices "the timber and plaster walls for traces of cryptic designs at every accessible spot" (88). Analogously, in the film, when the neighbours tell Lucía that the attic has been empty for over thirty years, but still, she hears noises coming from the attic at night, she decides to explore it and finds the walls inscribed with witchcraft symbolism and a series of photographs hanging down from the ceiling as testimonies of offered sacrifices.

Eventually, in Lovecraft's tale, Gilman's frequent encounters with the witch and her evil comrades imply that "the Witches' Sabbath was drawing near" and that it was close to "Walpurgis-Night, when hell's blackest evil roamed the earth and all the slaves of Satan gathered for nameless rites and deeds" (92). Correspondingly, in Balagueró's film, the aging witches living in the Venus building are also making the final arrangements for the coronation day, which will sanctify the rule of the female demon known as Lamaasthu. In both narratives, the witches intend to take part in a ritual involving children in which the male and female protagonist in the respective stories are expected to play an important part. Nonetheless, if in Lovecraft's tale, Gilman suspects he may have been used to kidnap one of the children as a result of the witch's machinations, in Balagueró's film, Lucía acts in defence of her niece. Hence, in resemblance with the iconic figure of the witch in popular folklore and fairy tales, the witch usually displays a deviant sexuality and is usually childless, which causes her to kidnap, kill or even eat children. In Lovecraft's story, it is mentioned that, as a result of the witch's misdeeds, one of the neighbours in the house assumes "a child or two would probably be missing" because he "knew about such things, for his grandmother in the old country had heard tales from her grandmother" (93), thus handing down prejudices against older women from generation to generation. In Balagueró's film, in analogy with Gilman's research, Lucía also finds information about the murders of children in close connection with the building that she is now inhabiting.

In Lovecraft's short story, after taking lodgings at the witch's house, Gilman begins to have horrible nightmares, stating that "the dreams were wholly beyond the pale of sanity" (89) and from which he manages to bring some objects, which are described as "organic and inorganic alike" and "totally beyond description or even comprehension" (90), thus blurring the boundaries between dimensions. Analogously, in Balagueró's film, her niece Alba explains to Lucía that dreams can be interpreted as doors opening to other dimensions, as she keeps a box with all the tokens that the figure of the servant has bestowed upon her while she is dreaming, including children's tears, teeth, and a cockroach. Accordingly, as a result of her own nightmares, Lucía is also bequeathed several items on behalf of the servant which will have a purpose of their own to protect herself in the future.

4. METATEXTUAL ECHOES: TRIADS, CRONES, AND THE FEMALE GROTESQUE

In Lovecraft's tale, there are a series of latent features which are revisited, transformed, and elaborated on in Balagueró's film in terms of triads established among characters and the perpetuation of female generations, the figures of the crone and the female grotesque, and the psychoanalytic notions of the abject and the uncanny. Insofar as Genette's notion of metatextuality involves critical commentaries on previous texts, it may be argued that Balagueró's film adaptation draws on traditional interpretations of the characterisation of the witch as an archetype, but subverts them in order to offer a contemporary portrayal of the mythical figure of the witch, thus envisioning from a vindicative and empowered perspective. As C.S. Lewis (1964) claims, in spite of their conventionally kind portrayal, fairies were also perceived as demoted angels (135), in analogy with witches, who have been traditionally categorised as malicious (La Fontaine 2016), although they also possessed healing powers (Perrone et al. 1993). Drawing on the premises of material feminisms, the material takes priority over the discursive, the nonhuman over the human, and the ontological over the epistemological. Accordingly, as is displayed in Balagueró's film, the portrayal of witches is not entirely positive or negative –as they are wicked, but protective– in comparison with Lovecraft's narrative, in which the witch is eminently evil. Besides, given the fact that both narratives are illustrative of cosmic horror, some entities evoke mythical goddesses from the classical tradition who were inherently ambiguous in nature.

Lovecraft's short story comprises subtle mythical references, particularly in terms of triads. In Lovecraft's tale, it is stated that "both Brown Jenkin and the old woman (...) had been urging him to go somewhere with them and to meet a third being of greater potency" (1933, 91). This reference to an ancestral triad is resumed in Balagueró's film adaptation, and given its pervasive witchcraft imagery, the Greek goddess Hecate, who was commonly represented as triple-bodied, is called to mind, as the goddess of the moon, of crossroads, and of the underworld. Additionally, Hecate's triple quality recalls mythical female triads that are subtly evoked in the film, like the Graces who are alleged to be goddesses of beauty and fertility, the Fates who are considered divine figures who control the life of mortals, and the Furies who are regarded as deities of vengeance. When Lucía determines to escape, she joins her young sister Rocío and her niece Alba, who is only a child, thus configuring a first female triad in resemblance with the Graces. In the Venus building, Lucía becomes acquainted with the three aging female neighbours who live on the flat upstairs –Marga, Romina and Rosita– who are welcoming, but inquisitive, and will gradually reveal their identity as witches who are getting ready for the arrival of a female demon known as Lamaasthu and control the destinies of their counterparts, as happens with the Fates. Another female triad comprises a series of female entities who are endowed with preternatural powers as is the case with the Furies. Aunt Galga possesses the gift of divination and her rituals bear resemblance with the mythical figure of Pythia at the Oracle of Delphi, who would fall into a trance to foretell the future. A female entity –who lives in the attic upstairs and is known as the servant–

interacts with the three young protagonists through their nightmares and brings them presents in resemblance with Circe as a mythical sorceress. Finally, a female creature, whose appearance strongly recalls the Venus figurine from the Palaeolithic period commonly known as Venus of Willendorf, makes her appearance in the flat of the young protagonists as a fertility goddess, but also as a goddess of destructive power.

In Lovecraft's tale, the witch lives in perfect communion with nature, and she appears to establish relationships with the sky, the earth, and the underworld. The main character, Gilman, even considers "it was by no means impossible that Keziah had actually mastered the art of passing through dimensional gates," and thus explains the witch's longevity, stating that "Time could not exist in certain belts of space, and by entering and remaining in such a belt one might preserve one's life and age indefinitely" (1933, 102). As a director, Balagueró mentions that he envisioned his film as a narrative of cosmic horror (Fernández 2022), insofar as, at the beginning of the film, it is stated that, "three innocent female children will die at dawn, a new planet will rise from nowhere and it will devour the sun," thus putting forward a cosmology entirely run by females under the protection of Lamaasthu as a female demon. These references to the sky, the earth and the underworld, while making allusion to another female triad, bring to mind Robert Graves's myth of the triple goddess, comprising the goddess of the sky who exerts influence on the phases of the new moon, full moon, and waning moon; the goddess of the earth who exerts control over the seasons of spring, summer, and winter, and the goddess of the underworld, who manages the life stages of birth, procreation, and death. The different female triads that pervade the film reinforce the presence of the mythical figure of the triple goddess, who stand in perfect unison with the seasons, the moon, and the cycle of life. In the film, the figure of the absent mother, Rocío and Lucía, and Alba belong to different generations, thus symbolising the different life stages in communion with the phases of the moon and the seasons of nature. From a psychoanalytic perspective, drawing on Creed's theory of the monstrous-feminine, the diverse female generations respectively represent the archaic mother, the castrated/castrating mother, and the phallic girl.

Moreover, both narratives are rooted in the traditional portrayal of the witch as an aging woman, although Balagueró's film offers an interpretation which reflects feminist reinterpretations of the figure of the crone. In Lovecraft's short story, Gilman refers to the character of Keziah Mason "as an ancient crone" (1933, 119), and he describes her, mentioning that "her bent back, long nose, and shrivelled chin were unmistakable, and her shapeless brown garments were like those he remembered. The expression on her face was one of hideous malevolence and exultation, and when he awaked he could recall a croaking voice that persuaded and threatened" (93). Gilman's description of the witch as a crone complies with Herbert Covey's depiction of the witch in popular folklore, since it highlights old age as one of her most outstanding features, stating that, "by the nineteenth-century, the older woman was firmly entrenched as the image of the witch" (1991, 74). Nonetheless, in the film, even though this image is resumed by means of the three female neighbours living in the Venus building, it gains further complexity insofar as it could be argued that this characterisation in the film rather responds to Walker's precepts in relation

to the crone. As Walker argues, the crone "established the cyclic system of perpetual becoming" (1985, 14), stating that it was "the feminine equivalent of the old man with a white beard who lived in the sky," and "it represented an "all-powerful Mother, who embodied the fearful potential for rejection, abandonment, death" (1985, 12), whom men found particularly intimidating. As is revealed in the film, despite their apparent power, the men chasing Lucía find themselves totally helpless at the mercy of powerful and destructive aging female forces that exert dominion all over the Venus building.

According to Russo, the female grotesque refers to the "cavernous anatomical female body" and underscores "associations of the female with the earthly" (1). In Balagueró's film, the three aging witches make use of elements from nature, such as toads and herbs, to make the necessary arrangements for the day of the coronation. Female bodies blur their established boundaries to commune with nature and also with other female bodies in a display of the abject. When Lucía finds her sister Rocío imprisoned and injured, her blood tinges her own body and fuses with the blood of her own wounds. When the male gang are in pursuit of Lucía and they consult the pythoness to tell them her whereabouts, she mistakes Lucía's identity for that of her sister Rocío. When Lucía abandons the building with her niece in her arms, their alliance between generations is graphically displayed. The blurring of identities not only takes place at the level of the body, but also in terms of the psyche by virtue of the uncanny as the conjunction of the familiar and the strange, which blurs identities between female characters. By means of establishing contact with them through dreams, the figure of the servant provides Lucía and her niece Alba with elements from nature which turn into amulets and tokens to protect themselves. In her dreams, Lucía also finds her body covered with insects, which mostly come out from the stab wound on her thigh, thus suggesting a symbiotic and parasitical connection between nature and the female body.

Upon referring to Keziah Mason as the witch, Lovecraft's original tale also comprises passages that describe her on the basis of the psychoanalytic notions of the abject and the uncanny. Drawing on Kristeva, the concept of the abject situates itself "on the edge of non-existence" (1982, 2), whereas Sigmund Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1964, 2-3). In Lovecraft's story, the witch becomes a source of the abject, as her actions give way to ludicrous and gory passages that subvert physical boundaries, while she also turns into a source of the uncanny, as the male protagonist feels both attracted and repulsed by her latent presence. As is stated in the tale, "he felt the crone's withered claws clutching at him" (1933, 130), thus becoming a source of the abject and of the uncanny. Through these notions, the portrayal of the witches in Balagueró's film brings to the fore the female grotesque as related to the body, which becomes a source of the abject, but also the projection of an inner state that reverts to the uncanny.

5. HYPERTEXTUALITY: IN THE WAKE OF POST-HUMANITIES

Balagueró's film *Venus* also establishes hypertextual connections with Lovecraft's story, insofar as, despite being considered a film adaptation of Lovecraft's classic tale, Balagueró's film, as a hypertext, transforms and elaborates on Lovecraft's short story, which functions as a hypotext with respect to the film. In comparison with the original tale which the film adapts, *Venus* introduces a series of innovative elements that depart significantly from Lovecraft's text, particularly because Balagueró's adaptation is aimed at updating the original short story to contemporary times and presenting it to younger audiences. Moreover, the innovative features that Balagueró's film emphasises in contrast with Lovecraft's tale mostly respond to contemporary theories pertaining to the notions of the post-human from a feminist perspective.

In comparison with the original tale, Balagueró's adaptation arises within the framework of theoretical philosophies like posthumanism. The kind of femininity that is heralded in the film corresponds with the posthuman condition, insofar as women are portrayed in relation to nature, new technologies, and diversity. Insofar as posthuman philosophies leave behind humanism and emphasise the role of nonhuman agents –whether they be animals, plants or technology– both the aging and younger witches in Balagueró's film establish a symbiotic relationship with other non-human elements. Drawing on Haraway's thesis which rejects the rigid boundaries between humanity and technology and Braidotti's development of the notion of the cyborg, in Balagueró's film, Lucía takes advantage of them so that she exchanges the traditional broomstick for a mobile phone and a remote control, while she resorts to the servant's gifts –a stapler and some tape– to cure her stab wound.

While Lovecraft's narrative is set in Arkham, Massachusetts, Balagueró's film is set in the contemporary Villaverde district of Madrid and focuses on the vicissitudes of a young woman who works in a night club and must fight economic constraints and patriarchy on equal terms. In a context that fuses dance music, drugs, and new technologies together with traditional elements from the folklore, Balagueró's film about witchcraft appeals to younger audiences and constructs a contemporary tale of witches that also reflects everyday life. By means of establishing contact with the female entities and witches living in the Venus building, which also happens to be her female relatives' home, Lucía undergoes a process of empowerment as a young woman, but also of personal transformation who leads her to take an active role to save her family and reveal herself as the heiress of a genealogy of witches.

Balagueró's film can be described as an exercise of feminisation of the original story, inasmuch as the main characters in Lovecraft's tale –Walter Gilman, Frank Elwood, and Joseph Mazurewicz, who all live in the Witch House– are men, whereas, in *Venus*, except for the male gang of drug dealers who chase Lucía, all the characters are women. Hence, there is a reversal of gender, particularly in the main character of the narrative, who transforms from a young man in the original story into a young woman in Balagueró's film.

In comparison with the original tale, the Manichean assumptions that establish a schism between good and evil characters in Lovecraft's narrative are also constantly disrupted in the film. If, in the original story, the roles of Walter Gilman,

as the hero, and of Keziah Jones, as the witch and villainess, are clearly differentiated as representatives of good and evil, in the film, despite being the heroine, Lucía is far from perfect and kind-hearted, insofar as she has neglected her responsibilities with her family and has stolen a stash of drugs from the night club where she works. Conversely, the malignant forces that she encounters in the building where she joins her sister and niece ultimately help Lucía and her family escape from the male thugs who are in their pursuit. As individualism is left behind, drawing on Alaimo and Hekman's notions of porosity, fluidity and interrelations between bodies, the identities between the different female characters are blurred by means of the symbolic overlapping of their bodies and the blurring of the members pertaining to different family generations.

The exploitation on behalf of men that Lucía and her coworkers face at the night club, along with Rocío's struggle to raise her child as a single mother, complies with feminist tenets. In Balagueró's film, even though the female characters are not portrayed as entirely good-natured and kind-hearted, precisely because they are witches belonging to different generations and typologies, aligned with nature and technology, it is ultimately contended that evil comes almost exclusively from the male characters, so that the film turns into a vindictive tale of witches. As the three gang of men –comprising Salinas, Moro, and Calvo– penetrate the Venus building, the different triads of witches slay them. The aging witches kill Calvo when he pretends to be the owner of the building. After stabbing Lucía, Salinas is slain by one of the wicked female forces in the building. Lucía murders Moro when he tries to attack her. The three men are beheaded, which conjures the biblical character of Salome, but also a reversal of the mythical figure of Medusa. In an iconic final scene, as Lucía leaves the building –wearing a crown, with her niece Alba in her arms, and holding the sports bag crammed with the stolen drugs– Arruza, the head drug dealer, kneels down and apologises, while Lucía, who calls herself "la que trae la luz del día," exonerates him.

6. CONCLUSION

Balagueró's film *Venus* arises as a cinematic narrative that blends the traditional portrayal of the witch with contemporary depictions informed by the discourses of post-anthropocentrism, material feminisms, and posthumanism. Accordingly, it still retains the imagery of the witch as a crone, described as an older widow, dependent and poor, whose practices operate on the edge of moral laws, and who was turned into a social scapegoat to explain deaths, crop failures, and illnesses. Nonetheless, in its plethora of different typologies of witches in terms of age, aesthetics and generations, the film also defends the image of the contemporary witch as an imperfect woman who has been wronged and longs for redemption, thus presenting a narrative of female empowerment.

Accordingly, Balagueró's film offers a post-anthropocentric approach to the characterisation of the contemporary witch which complies with the Symbiocene and moves beyond the anthropocentric and androcentric subject to renew the union with

the forces of nature. As Lucía leaves behind her subjugation to the gang of men, she embraces a female universe in which the values and priorities are radically reversed. Besides, Balagueró's film also conforms to the tenets of material feminism, insofar as the female body takes further protagonism in its diversity and non-normative configurations, the non-human as embodied by alternative realities is also taken into consideration, and the ontological focus on the being is more profoundly revered in comparison with the epistemological. As a case in point, Lucía's normative body is constantly injured and even transformed as a cyborg by effect of artificial gadgets, she acknowledges the transcendental significance of alternative dimensions and realities, and she also appreciates her newly acquired ontology that grants her a new identity as a woman and her status as a witch. Likewise, Lucía embraces the posthuman condition, since, in her communal fight against patriarchy, her body blends with gadgets and artificial substances that grant her the appearance of a female cyborg. Balagueró's portrayal of the contemporary witch is thus rooted in preceding prototypes, but this representation is thoroughly renewed to comply with the prevailing times in which categorisations of the human and the non-human are constantly blurred for the sake of feminist vindication. As has been shown, displays of intertextuality, metatexxtuality and hypertexuality reach a balance between the prevalence of classic representations of the witch and contemporary portrayals that bridge the gap betweeen the past and the present.

As a contemporary feminist tale of witches, Balagueró's film encourages the prevalence of the female body in its different variants and the reinforcement of collective female identities by establishing bonds with other women, while it calls into question clearly-cut definitions that categorise goddesses, witches, fairies, and female demons. In Balagueró's film, the contemporary witch turns into a fallible and human, but empowered, action heroine, who not only lives on the margins of society, but also obliges those who judge her to kneel down and make amends for the wrongs she was made to suffer in the past.

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ON WOMEN AND BIRDS: ECOFEMINISM AND ANIMAL STUDIES IN SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S "A WHITE HERON" AND KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S "THE CANARY"

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Abstract

This paper explores the short stories "A White Heron" (1886) by Sarah Orne Jewett, and "The Canary" (1922) by Katherine Mansfield through the postulates of ecofeminism and animal studies, respectively. In "A White Heron," it is explored how the female protagonist must solve a predicament for which she has to choose either the financial safety that a man offers, or her own ecological belief system, which is deeply rooted in her identity. In "The Canary," a lonely woman mourns the death of her canary. It is explored how interspecies relationships work in the case of domestic animals, and it is debated whether these are relationships of dominance/submission or of interdependence. While Mansfield's text cannot ultimately escape anthropocentrism, as the bird is only conceptualized in relation to the woman, it is nevertheless a thoughtful, sensitive account of the love and admiration that human animals can feel for non-human animals.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Animal Studies, Birds; Katherine Mansfield, Sarah Orne Jewett.

SOBRE MUJERES Y PÁJAROS: ECOFEMINISMO Y ESTUDIOS ANIMALES EN "UNA GARZA BLANCA" DE SARAH ORNE JEWETT Y "EL CANARIO" DE KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Resumen

Este artículo explora los relatos "Una garza blanca" (1886) de Sarah Orne Jewett y "El canario" (1922) de Katherine Mansfield a través de los postulados del ecofeminismo y los estudios animales, respectivamente. En "Una garza blanca," se explora como la protagonista debe resolver un dilema para el que tiene que elegir entre la estabilidad económica que un hombre le ofrece y sus propios valores ecologistas, profundamente arraigados en su identidad. En "El canario," una mujer que está sola llora la pérdida de su canario. Se explora el funcionamiento de las relaciones interespecie en el caso de los animales domésticos o mascotas, y cuestiona si este tipo de relaciones están basadas en el binomio 'dominación/sometimiento' o si son de dependencia mutua. Aunque el texto de Mansfield no deja de ser antropocéntrico debido a que el pájaro solo es conceptualizado en relación a la mujer, "El Canario" es, aun así, una emotiva y sensible narración sobre el amor y la admiración que los humanos pueden sentir por los no-humanos.

Palabras clave: ecocrítica, ecofeminismo, estudios animales, pájaros, Katherine Mansfield; Sarah Orne Jewett.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the words of acclaimed ecofeminist scholar Diane Warren, "the oppressive conceptual framework which sanctions the twin dominations of women and nature is a patriarchal one" (1990, 127). Nowadays, it is widely known that patriarchy has consistently reinforced a series of limiting –and ultimately false– assumptions consisting of binary oppositions in which "humankind" is always in a position of superiority to "non-human beings" and the "natural environment;" and in which "man" is always superior –intellectually, emotionally, physically, and morally– to "woman." In the Western tradition, the concepts of "culture" and "nature" are also put in opposition to each other, where "male" and "human" are associated with the former and "female" and "non-human" are equated with the latter. This kind of bipartite divisions are the tools through which the patriarchal order has justified its own supposed superiority and power over any other conception of reality or of the world in which capitalism, imperialism, industrialism, ethnocentrism or sexism was not at the center. This set of ideas is what Val Plumwood called the "logic of colonization," through which the universe is conceptualized in relation to a –prototypically male– master. In her words, "it is the identity of the master (...) which lies at the heart of western culture. This identity is expressed most strongly in the dominant conception of reason, and gives rise to a dualized structure of otherness" (1993, 42). And, although the set of twofold separations is exhaustively long and potentially open-ended, there seems to be a consensus to her assertion that "a gendered reason/nature contrast appears as the overarching, most general, basic and connecting form of these dualisms" (Plumwood 1993, 44). Thus, prejudiced assumptions such as the patriarchal, domineering logic of colonization are the ones that ecocriticism and its branches aim to debunk. These relatively new disciplines seek to promote an ecological, egalitarian thoughtfulness in human individuals by identifying and reflecting about these social and environmental matters in literary texts. Ecocriticism advocates for the awakening of a new consciousness to effectively denounce –and ideally, terminate or significantly reduce– the kinds of oppression that anthropocentrism –power of human over non-human– and androcentrism –domination of men over women– exert.

Although Sarah Orne Jewett and Katherine Mansfield respectively wrote their short stories "A White Heron" (1886) and "The Canary" (1922) before ecocriticism became established as an academic discipline in the 1990s, this article shows that these stories are clearly revealing of a poignant appreciation for nature and non-human living beings –particularly birds– and that these two exquisite women writers shared an admiration for these flying, non-human animals across time and space, an admiration that served them as inspiration for their literary, creative enterprises. As it will be shown, the birds in these narratives are presented on two levels: in literal terms as the non-human animals that they are, and as symbolic parallels to the human female protagonists of the stories. Both stories –each in its own specific way– present two opposing forces: submission to anthropocentric/androcentric oppression versus the need for freedom and solace in response to that oppression, a kind of freedom and solace that the female protagonists can only find in their connection with nature

and/or non-human animals. Thus, superficially, it could be asserted that both stories contain an ecocritical sensibility –and they do. But a detailed close reading might prove that there are degrees of ecocritical consciousness even within eco-friendly texts. Not both stories are equally ecocritical. There is one main difference between them: In Jewett's story, there is a clear identification between the challenging situation of "woman" to "man" to that of "non-human" to "human." Both situations run parallel in "A White Heron" and, indeed, throughout a narratively powerful dilemma, intertwine to the point of communion between the young female human protagonist and the natural environment that she inhabits –exemplified in the figure of a rare, precious bird–, a circumstance that culminates with her understanding that she can only be free herself if she sets nature free. By contrast, in Mansfield's "The Canary," the unnamed female human protagonist –also narrator– appears to be both a victim and a perpetrator. She is oppressed as a woman by men, but she is the oppressor as a human being over a non-human being, as she keeps her bird locked up inside a cage for her own pleasure and comfort. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that Mansfield's text is not concerned with non-human animals. But the perspective that she shows in the matter, at least through the textual evidence present in "The Canary," is clearly anthropocentric, which would put into question whether this is an ecocritical text or not. This does not make "The Canary" any less valid, of course, as a piece of literary art, as it proves to be a thoughtful, detailed observation of grief over the loss of a non-human animal by a human animal, and thus, it is understandable that the perspective in this story belongs exclusively to the mourning woman.

The theoretical framework for this paper does, therefore, consist of a combination of two branches of ecocriticism: ecofeminism and animal studies. Both approaches are applied to both texts, as the different branches of ecocriticism share many of its principles. However, it should be noted that the ecofeminist approach plays a predominant role in the analysis of Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron," while the animal studies approach has a more significant relevance on Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary." This division is merely motivated by a matter of pragmatism, given that the contents and ideas that can be extracted from a close textual analysis of each story make said story ideally suited to be tested against the postulates of a particular ecocritical branch. More specifically, "A White Heron" proves itself to advocate for the same principles and beliefs that the postulates of ecofeminism defend, consequentially revealing that the ecofeminist consciousness was already alive a century before being academically theorized. On the other hand, given that the ecocritical conclusions that can be drawn from Mansfield's "The Canary" put into question this story's concern with the well-being of non-human animals, the postulates of animal studies are especially relevant for its analysis, considering that one of the main claims of this ecocritical branch is that the anthropocentric tendency of humans drives them to anthropomorphize non-human animals –to assign human traits to non-human beings–, something that is potentially detrimental to the latter, and which is clearly made evident in Mansfield's text.

2. SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S "A WHITE HERON"

The historical context in which Sarah Orne Jewett wrote "A White Heron" should not be overlooked, as it brings insights that are relevant for this story's analysis. During the last decades of the 19th C., rare birds' feathers constituted a luxury product for the fashion industry and thus, "by the early 1900s, massive depredations by European and American hunters around the globe had wreaked havoc on avian populations. Bird hunters were now the arm of industrial capitalism" (Taylor 2016). This was the case until the second decade of the 20th C., when the feather trade came to an end. But before the prohibition came to be, herons' feathers were amongst the most coveted in the late Victorian hat-making business. To exemplify this claim, it can be confirmed that "about 192,000 herons [were] killed to provide the packages of heron feathers sold at a single London auction in 1902" (Taylor 2016). Considering this, and although "A White Heron" makes no reference to this particular outcome being the intended fate of its precious bird –this story's hunter is supposedly a taxidermist rather than a businessman–, there is reason to believe that Jewett might have chosen a heron for her story and not any other bird because of how popular and attractive they were in the eyes of the capitalist market of her own contemporary context: the 1880s.

The story's heroic protagonist is Sylvia, a nine-year-old girl who lives in the middle of the countryside at her grandmother's farmhouse, and who holds a powerful feeling of communion with her non-human, natural environment. As George Held asserts, "the key to her vivacity is that she is utterly in harmony with nature" (1982, 58). This is exemplified from the very first lines of the text by showing her comfortability while her cow stops to drink: "Sylvia stood still and waited, letting her bare feet cool themselves in the shoal water, while the great twilight moths struck softly against her. She waded on through the brook as the cow moved away and listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure" (Jewett 1883, 52). The sensorial, physical description that the text elicits already suggests that Sylvia easily connects with her natural surroundings in a way that does not seem to revolve around a hierarchical structure of human over non-human. Accordingly, she behaves as if knowing herself to be one with nature and does not seem to see her tasks at the farm as an obligation, but rather, as an adventure. Despite having grown "for eight years in a small manufacturing town (...) it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm" (52). Nature seems to suit Sylvia's interests and capacities, and to give her a more authentic sense of self in contrast to her previous urban life. Her instinctual connection and adaptability to nature could relate to what Ursula K. Heise calls "situated knowledge," which is acquired: "out of sensory perception and physical immersion, (...) rather than out of more abstract or mediated kinds of knowledge acquisition. Walking through natural landscapes, observing their flora and fauna, (...) and tending animals are some of the ways the human body is perceived to reintegrate itself into the 'biotic community'" (2007, 30). All these are the activities that Sylvia has been engaging with since she arrived to live at her grandmother's farmhouse. However, her integration into the natural biosphere

is going to be tested when a stranger comes into the picture, thus establishing the conflict in the story, an inner conflict that Sylvia will have to solve.

As the story goes, a nice, polite young man tries to befriend Sylvia and her grandmother, telling them that he seeks lodging at the farm for a couple of days, so that he can continue chasing and hunting birds. Sylvia's grandmother readily accepts him with hospitality and tells him that "'the wild creatur's counts [Sylvia] one o' themselves. 'Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o 'her hands, and all sorts o' birds" (Jewett 1883, 54). This is enough for the young hunter to make a financial offer to Sylvia in exchange for her help in his quest for the heron. A mere ten dollars, which might be close to nothing to him, but it would certainly help the humble farm. Indeed, "by offering to pay for a favor that would otherwise be done as but a gesture of country hospitality, the ornithologist introduces into a subsistence economy the instrumentality of money" (Held 1982, 60). It should not be overlooked the way in which the binary oppositions "man/woman," "culture/nature," and "rich/poor" become intermingled in the story. These are some of the unfair dualities that ecocriticism denounces, and which "A White Heron" illustrates. There are "strong" entities –a man from the city with money to offer– and complementary "weak" entities –women from the countryside who need extra money just to get by. Whether cunningly or not, the hunter is taking advantage of the villagers' needs. Following the principles of capitalism, where transactions are always favored over collaboration and cooperation, it is easier and more convenient for him to offer money than to ask for a favor, as it would be safe to assume that this way he makes sure that they –out of mere necessity– cannot say "no" to him, and he becomes the client who hires a service that must be provided to him. He becomes the one in control of the situation and the one with power and agency, even though he is an outsider in the context that the story presents. However, his condition as an outsider who aims for control can actually serve to identify him with the figure of "the colonizer," a figure that is certainly criticized by ecocriticism. Nevertheless, all these binary oppositions – male/female, culture/nature, rich/poor, and colonizer/colonized– end up intersecting in a way that introduces and sets the story's main conflict or dilemma. A dilemma that occurs within its protagonist Sylvia, but which is quite inherent to the human condition and therefore universal: The choice between needs and principles; between wishes and values.

That is, with the young man's offer, temptation begins for Sylvia, as "no amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy" (Jewett 1883, 55). But this dilemma "between the egoist and the altruist" (Held 1982, 59) is not only about money. This situation also brings her with a gender-related predicament, considering that the person who seeks assistance is an attractive and nice older boy to whom she feels intimidated by his charming, manly ways. As such, "Sylvia is tempted less by the young sportsman's money than by his masculine appeal. (...) If this romantic response seems a strange turn for a story about a nine-year-old to take, it nevertheless has a certain psychological validity" (ibid., 61-2). Platonic as their exchange is, it is only natural that a young girl could feel some sort of attraction for a handsome young man. As the text elicits, "the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled

by a dream of love" (Jewett 1883, 56). This circumstance only strengthens the internal conflict that she must solve. It is not that she feels obliged to assist the man in his hunting quest out of mere material necessity. What really sets the stakes high is that a part of her truly wants to help him accomplish his wish, due to the fascination that he awakens in her. In other words, it would also please her to please him, thus perpetuating –albeit symbolically– the gendered stereotype of the female finding happiness and purpose by devoting herself to her man's wishes –an idea that was certainly pervasive and dominant in Victorian times, when this story was written. In fact, after their first day hunting together, "she grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive" (56). This leads to infer that, had they encountered the bird soon enough, Sylvia might have willingly assisted the hunter to catch it. But fortunately for the heron, their first day on the hunt proves unsuccessful.

The text also suggests that the man's seductive actions towards Sylvia are not altogether genuine. He has a personal goal that he wants to achieve. This does not necessarily make him a devious man, but he is certainly being strategic because of his desire to gratify his own personal interest. He is ultimately using Sylvia due to "his eager interest in something else" (Jewett 1883, 54). She is a means to reach his end: the white heron. His portrayal falls in line with Marilyn Frye's argument that "Western Civilization's primary answer to the philosophical question of man's place in nature" is that "everything is resource for man's exploitation" (1983, 67). Sylvia is to him a resource to hunt the heron. And the heron, a resource to satisfy his reputation and self-image as a hunter. He "is less evil than banal, for his cheery egoism reflects the optimism of the nineteenth-century despoilers of nature who deforested the woods" (Held 1982, 59). He simply does not think beyond the scope of his own anthropocentrism. It is not that he has any ill-wish towards the natural world. It is, simply, that he has not developed any capacity for empathy towards his environment beyond what is convenient for him. As Val Plumwood asserts, "This self uses both other humans and the world generally as a means to its egoistic satisfaction" with no interest in "the welfare of others, except to the extent that these are useful to serve predetermined ends" (1991, 19). Thus, it is not a matter of malignant evil per se, as there does not seem to be any specific ill-will on the hunter's part. It falls more closely in the line of what Hannah Arendt coined as "the banality of evil," motivated only by "an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement" (1964, 134). That is, it is about selfishness and lack of empathetic environmental consciousness.

The next morning, just before the break of dawn, and thus, before the hunter awakens to undertake his next attempt at finding the heron, Sylvia escapes the farm by herself and manages to climb the tallest trees, discovering the heron's exact location. Consequently, "she knows his secret now" (Jewett 1883, 58). And as a result, she feels exhilarated and compelled to impress the young man, "wondering over and over again what the stranger would say to her, and what he would think when she told him how to find his way straight to the heron's nest" (58). But, although the text does not specify it and makes an ellipsis instead, it can be inferred that Sylvia has an epiphany on her way to deliver the news at the farm. An ecological epiphany. Because, when she meets her grandma and the hunter, and the moment of truth comes, she does not say a word. Sylvia knows that "he can make them rich

with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell" (Jewett 1883, 59). But instead, she resorts to the power of silence, "exercis[ing] her option to withhold her boon" (Griffith Jr. 1985, 24), and thus, finally resisting the temptation that the hunter's offer sparked in her.

But what does her silence mean? It can be concluded that it means reverence to the nature around her and to her own inner nature as well. It means that she has finally chosen her ethical commitment to the environment and non-human beings over the material, financial improvement for which she would have submit to a man's wish. She does what feels right deep in her heart while being aware that it also entails a sacrifice. This is precisely where a large part of the story's environmentally ethical significance lies. It is not easy for Sylvia to make such a renouncement. Not making it would even seem comprehensible considering her and her family's precarious circumstances. The text clearly expresses her internal questioning: "When the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake?" (Jewett 1883, 59). Thus, her final resolve is not without awareness that she must renounce something valuable so as to comply with her principles. Because of this, her maturity becomes altogether more evident, despite her tender age. However, there is an additional factor to consider that might be even more essential in her decision: it is not only about her moral standards or sense of honor, but also a matter of sheer, instinctual empathy with her non-human environment. Sylvia's dilemma is ultimately what brings her with an enhanced awareness that her own sense of self is inseparable from her sense of the natural world. The vital key about this issue is empathy, not just principles or code of ethics. For Sylvia to have revealed the heron's location, she would have had to resort to what Alexa Weik von Mossner defines as empathy inhibition: "the cognitive suppression of an affective empathetic response due to egoistical motives, cultural beliefs, or outright denial" (2017, 108). It can be interpreted that, during the ellipted ecological epiphany, she has realized that she is one with nature, that she feels deeply *with* nature as a part of *it*, and thus, had she decided on the opposite outcome, she would also have betrayed herself. In this heroic journey that Sylvia has made, her affective respect for nature and her self-identification with it have prevailed. Her sense of ecological responsibility and her sense of female agency have been tested, and she has not yielded. And these two senses prove to be symbolically intertwined: "For in the end the heron's life has become the equivalent of the girl's life" (Held 1982, 65). Sylvia learns that it was not about either saving herself or the bird. But rather, saving the bird was the same action as saving her own identity and integrity.

3. KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S "THE CANARY"

Katherine Mansfield's employment of animals in her stories was frequent, and it is believed that she had a deep appreciation for them, filled with curiosity and admiration. In Derek Ryan's words, "Mansfield foregrounds animals in her work in order to reject anthropocentrism and the oppositional categorization of

human and nonhuman life" (2018, 30). However, it should be noted that, even if this was Mansfield's intention, this supposed rejection of anthropocentrism is not particularly evident in "The Canary," as all agency is ascribed to the lonely woman who recalls her relationship with her caged canary. All that the reader gets to know about the bird comes from the woman's voice and perspective, and whenever there are attempts to "give voice" to the canary, it all comes through the interpretations that the woman makes about the bird's singing. In any case, it can be asserted that, although Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary" can be easily accused of anthropocentrism, the text also proves to be an honest effort at giving visibility to animals as company and to interspecies relationships; as well as a truthful representation of the comforting feelings that domestic animals can prompt on their caretakers. Therefore, tested against the postulates of animal studies, and unlike the case of this paper's other short story, "The Canary" cannot be unequivocally catalogued as an environmentally conscious text. But this does not mean that there are no reasons to consider that it is, as it would be reductive to consider this a matter of absolutes.

"The Canary" is heartfelt account of grief over the loss of a bird-pet. Through the female protagonist's memories, it is shown that her bird-pet meant solace and an escape from a life of seclusion and isolation. "That was what he was. Perfect company. If you have lived alone you will realize how precious that is" (Mansfield 1922, 2). Not much is known about this woman or how her life has come to be one of extreme loneliness. But it is made known that she works as a housemaid at the service of three young men who might not be very fond of her. She says "I was nothing to them. In fact, I overheard them one evening talking about me on the stairs as 'The Scarecrow'. No matter. It doesn't matter" (2). Getting to know this detail heightens the reader's sympathy for this woman, who, in contrast, never says anything negative about the men. What is more, there are textual hints that point to the woman suffering from a lifelong struggle with untreated depression, which was there before the loss of her pet. "There does seem to me something sad in life. It is hard to say what it is (...) It is there, deep down, deep down, part of one, like one's breathing. However hard I work and tire myself I have only to stop to know it is there, waiting" (3). And, in all this sadness, it seems that her only true source of comfort, the only side of life that alleviated her malady, was her little canary.

Nevertheless, there is an incongruity in the interspecies relationship between the woman and the canary of this story. The caged bird prompts in her caretaker a feeling of solace and comfort that ameliorates her sense of seclusion and isolation. But paradoxically, this comes at the expense of the bird, because it is the bird the one who lives in seclusion inside a cage. As Ryan asserts, "there can be little doubt that the canary has penetrated this woman's innermost feelings, even as it is suggested that such feelings are what trapped this bird within a distinctly human realm" (2018, 45). This is certainly an intrinsic feature of birds as domestic animals. Unlike dogs or cats, who can much more easily adapt to a domestic space because they can move freely within it and they –ideally or desirably– have access to outdoors, birds are never let loose, not even inside the human's house. This would turn out to be inconvenient for its human caretaker, who would literally "lose control" of it. Thus, by their very nature as flying creatures and for them to become domestic animals,

birds need to be held inside a cage and, therefore, they stay literally imprisoned. By this reasoning, it could be asserted that birds are naturally unsuitable for being any person's pet, as this condition undoubtedly precludes them from their natural means of transportation and movement (flying) and their natural habitat, which is certainly not a human-made cage. In other words, birds as domestic animals –unlike other animal species such as the canine and the feline– seem to serve only one purpose: they are instrumentalized for the pleasure of human beings. The woman in the story does not seem to consider the importance of the bird's own freedom. When she describes the moment that she first met him, she says: "From that moment he was mine" (Mansfield 1922, 1). This does not mean that the woman in the story does not feel genuine affection for the bird, but her lack of concern for it as a creature in its own right –not only in relation to herself– is revealing of how their relationship can be conceptualized as closer to one of dominance/submission than to one of interspecies interdependence.

As the woman describes the dynamics of her relationship with the canary, it becomes evident that she thinks of herself as its protector, because of how meticulously she takes care of him. She bathes him, cleans his cage, provides him with food... and all this brings happiness to the lady. On a surface level, many would not find it difficult to find this a poignant interspecies connection. But such reading would be nothing short of anthropocentric and, thus, it would be missing one of the key aspects that ecocriticism defends: non-human animals should not be considered and valued only in relation to what they can provide or entail for human animals. As Plumwood states, "there is good reason to reject as self-indulgent the 'kindness' approach that reduces respect and morality in the protection of animals to the satisfaction of the carer's own feelings" (1991, 5). This suggests that, for human beings, there is a fine line between selfishness and selflessness. And the former can easily be confounded with the latter by the human self. In all the interactions that the lady has with the bird, it becomes readily apparent that she is seeking her own satisfaction through her little acts of kindness and nurturing. Besides, although she feels authentic affection for him, and her efforts to bring him comfort are entirely well-meant, it could also be thought that she presumes that the bird is happy with the established situation. As the woman confides, "and I am perfectly certain he understood and appreciated every item of this little performance" (Mansfield 1922, 2). There is no possible way for her to truly know any of this. It seems that she finds the idea comforting enough to choose to believe it. She is projecting her own feelings onto the bird, and thus, she is anthropomorphizing him by ascribing to him human reactions. This does not necessarily mean that she is mistaken in her assumption –she might be mistaken just as she might not be– but there is no real textual evidence that discloses the bird's feelings, given that everything that the reader gets to know is the interpretation that the woman makes of them or how she imagines them to be. For that reason, it may be asserted that both the female human character and Mansfield's text itself perpetuate the hierarchical structure where the category "human" is unmistakably above the category "non-human."

From a strictly earth-centered perspective –the one that ecocriticism aims to take–, it would not seem unfair to assert that Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary"

is insensitive to the natural world. However, it would probably be reductive if this were the only ecocritical conclusion to be arrived at about this text. The story is ultimately a portrayal of a woman's grief and sadness over the loss of her canary, so it is understandable that the narrative point of view belongs exclusively to her. What is more, in those human-animal relationships that are domestic, there always can be found reasons to believe that they are based on dominance/submission: After all, the domestic relation occurs because the human decides so. But nonetheless, there are also reasons to consider that such relationships can be based on interspecies interdependence, given that humans cover the animals' basic needs and provide them with food and shelter –which would not be assured in the wilderness– and genuine affection. As Ryan says of Mansfield: "rather than altogether disposing of hierarchical oppositions between human and animal, a close reading of her texts shows how she often probes and plays on species boundaries" (2018, 31). It does not seem to be a matter of black or white, but rather, of ambiguous shades of gray. Thus, it can be asserted that, in Mansfield's "The Canary," what Plumwood called "logic of colonization" is maintained, but at the same time the appreciation of non-human animals by human animals is evident, thoughtful, and based on admiration. The problem comes when human appreciation derives into potentially unethical and harmful actions towards the non-human subject; actions that the human perpetrates while apparently remaining oblivious to their significance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This essay has analyzed from an ecocritical perspective two short stories: American author Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron" (1883), and New-Zealander writer Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary" (1922). In Jewett's "A White Heron," nine-year-old Sylvia is faced with an ethical dilemma when she is given the opportunity of a much-needed financial asset on the condition that she helps to hunt and kill a rare, beautiful bird: a white heron. Besides, her attraction to the hunter complicates her dilemma, as she instinctively feels the wish to satisfy his will. But ultimately, she reverences her innate sense of communion with nature and non-human animals by deciding to withhold the information about the bird's whereabouts, thus making a sacrifice, but knowing that she gets to keep her freedom as a young female with an ecological conscience. In Mansfield's "The Canary," a lonely woman eulogizes her dead canary, who was the only relationship of her life that provided her with pleasant company and comfort. The story illustrates the kind of pleasurable, beautiful feelings that domestic animals awaken in their caretakers, but Mansfield's portrayal of the woman's consciousness also reveals a lack of consideration for the bird's autonomy, given that the woman's solace comes at the expense of the bird's freedom. What is more, the woman presumes that the bird is satisfied, while the text never attempts to portray its own non-human point of view. Despite this obvious tendency towards anthropocentrism, "The Canary" makes visible the mutual comfort that interspecies relationships can provide. Both Sarah Orne Jewett's and Katherine Mansfield's stories are interesting, complex, and valuable examples of how literature can be written,

read, and studied through the lens of environmental sensitivity and ecocritical consciousness.

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MISCELLANY

JOANNA ELLEN WOOD: A SILENCED FEMALE AUTHOR IN ENGLISH CANADIAN FICTION

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Abstract

At the intersection between New Woman studies and motherhood studies, critical approaches to female literature can offer a renewed perspective that fosters the revitalization of silenced authors and works. When applied within the framework of nineteenth-century Canadian literature in English, new readings of dismissed writers and works from this intersectional critical perspective offer the chance of voicing their innovations and achievements. Although praised in her time, the attention paid to Joanna Ellen Wood and her novel *The Untempered Wind* (1894) within the Canadian literary framework has been ambivalent. The present analysis of her literary career and her novel demonstrate both deserve a place within Canadian literature still to be recovered.

Keywords: (English) Canadian Literature, Nineteenth-Century Women Literature, Joanna Ellen Wood, *The Untempered Wind*, New Woman & Motherhood Studies.

JOANNA ELLEN WOOD: UNA AUTORA SILENCIADA EN LA FICCIÓN INGLESA CANADIENSE

Resumen

En la intersección entre los estudios de la Nueva Mujer y los estudios de la maternidad, acercamientos críticos al análisis literario ofrecen una nueva perspectiva sobre la literatura escrita por mujeres que, a su vez, fomentaría la revitalización de autoras y obras silenciadas hasta la fecha. Como enfoque innovador en el ámbito de la literatura canadiense en general y específicamente en el área de la literatura decimonónica, este acercamiento ofrece la posibilidad de revitalizar autoras y obras que han desaparecido del canon literario, a pesar de su relevancia en la época. Este es el caso de la autora Joanna Ellen Wood y su novela *The Untempered Wind* (1894) las cuales, a pesar de la aceptación por parte de la crítica en su época, han sido borradas de los discursos literarios canadienses como significativas. El presente análisis demuestra que, tanto la autora como la novela, merecen un lugar dentro de la expresión literaria de Canadá.

Palabras clave: literatura canadiense (anglófona), literatura decimonónica de mujeres, Joanna Ellen Wood, *The Untempered Wind*, estudios de la nueva mujer y de la maternidad.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The critical space opened by New Woman studies and motherhood studies offers the chance to develop new readings and interpretations of frequently misunderstood and, consequently, dismissed nineteenth-century writers and works. The choices of New Woman writers both in their creative lives as well as regarding their fictional characters can be approached from a different perspective that may foster the revitalization of their figures and works as significant, original and even pioneering as in the case of Joanna Ellen Wood and her contribution to the Canadian novel in English with her groundbreaking work *The Untempered Wind* (1894).

Although later re-appropriated and re-signified, the term New Woman was originally employed as a denigrating label to describe those female writers and fictional heroines who deviated from the traditional concept of "the angel in the house" and who were actually considered "the devil in the house" (Podnieks 2023, 27). Also called "the Odd Woman, the Wild Woman, and the Superfluous Woman" (Ardis 1990, 1), she was fearsome for deviating from traditional womanliness roles of wife and mother and thus representing a threat against patriarchy to such an extent that "she was accused of instigating the second fall of man" (Ardis 1990, 1). As Podnieks explains, female writers of the time developed two types of fiction that, although different, are connected through the depiction of revolutionary women. Whereas the so-called sensation fiction usually depicts "scandalous plots of adultery, crime, and intrigue," the feminist focus of New Woman fiction entails broader critiques and wider claims on women's identities (2023, 28). Despite the contemporary contestation of the term New Woman, of the literature to support its derogatory scope and their influence on society and culture by feminist critics who managed to counterbalance their authority, some writers and works vanished along the way.

Mainly developed and applied in the British cultural framework, other literatures under the influence of British colonialism show similar patterns of misinterpretation and dismissal of *fin-de-siècle* contributions by women writers. Within the context of Canadian literature in English, women in the nineteenth-century were also becoming emancipated writers who managed to earn a living as such and shaped differing female protagonists that challenged traditional female roles and claimed for new visions of female identities either following the tradition of sensation fiction or opening groundbreaking spaces in New Woman's fiction. According to Lorraine McMullen, "the figure of woman as strong and competent is central to the Canadian tradition" (1977, 134). Her idea that a distinctive model of female identity of "woman as hero, rather than "heroine"" (1977, 134), who distanced from old patriarchal archetypes of femaleness, evolved in Canadian literature from early stages is key to understand the figures and works of female writers before the twentieth century.

Taking anthologization as proof of Canada's disregard concerning nineteenth-century female authors, Wood's case is revealing. Mainly rescued from oblivion in critical works focusing on women writers as in the case of Carrie Macmillan's chapter "Joanna E. Wood: Incendiary Women" included in the groundbreaking critical work *Silenced Sextet* (1992), the attention paid to Wood and her works in

anthologies, literary histories and critical works with broader perspectives has been ambivalent, to say the least. Very few focus on her figure and writings, or even mention them, with the notable exceptions of Desmond Pacey's *Creative Writing in Canada; a Short History of English-Canadian Literature* published in 1964, where she is aligned with currently renowned authors like William Kirby, Gilbert Parker or Sara Jeannette Duncan, together with Vernon Blair Rhodenizer's 1965 edition of *Canadian Literature in English* where both Wood and *The Untempered Wind* are included. Ignored in some well-known literary histories and anthologies such as *ECW's Biographical Guide to Canadian Novelists* (1980), as well as in William Toye's edition of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (1983), she appears again in the 1990's version of the volume on *Canadian Writers 1890-1920 of the Dictionary of Literary Biography.* Later compilations such as *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* in both its 2010 and 2019 editions seem to insist on this neglect. It is necessary to turn to critical works specifically focusing on women's writing to find interesting data as the fact that Joanna Ellen Wood was "ranked with Charles G.D. Roberts and Gilbert Parker as one of the three major novelists of the day" during the 19th century (McMullen 1990, 56).

Wood's case is paradigmatic regarding the underestimation of *fin-de-siècle* female literature because of reasons such as colonialism and the frontier mentality of Canada, together with gender biases. According to MacMillan, facts such as the nineteenth-century trend to underestimate Canadian literature in favor of British and/or US literatures, the absence of Canadian literature from academic curricula, the decreasing interest in sensation fiction of later literary traditions such as modernism, together with the unequal quality of Wood's latest works also played an important role in the oblivion of her figure and works (MacMillan 1992, 170). Such forgetfulness and subsequent neglect seem not to have been thoroughly investigated, and mended, if necessary, since Carole Gerson's comment on the fact that "even in the anthologies dealing specifically with the nineteenth century, there has been almost no effort to reconstruct the period and recover its lost women authors" (McMullen 1990, 62). The most recent mention to Wood I have been able to find is in one of Mandy Treagus' thorough analyses of Sara Jeannette Duncan's *A Daughter of Today* (1894) published in 2014 which approaches Duncan's work precisely from the perspective of New Woman studies.

2. JOANNA ELLEN WOOD

As a New Woman herself, Joanna E. Wood deviated from Patmore's model of the angel in the house as exposed in his now questioned poem of the same title. Unmarried and childless, she was a devoted writer and, thus, a clear paradigm of a boundary-crossing New Woman who changed her Scottish birthplace for USA and Canada, where she resided most of her life. Confident not only of women's role as contributors to literature in general but specially to Canadian literature, her participation in Canada's artistic expression as writer and commentator demonstrates she believed in Canada as valid literary realm, just as her approach to the issue of

Canada as relevant artistic source in some of her works as her novel *Judith Moore; or, Fashioning a Pipe* (1898) (MacMillan 1992, 185). Her commitment to literature might have influenced her decision to remain unmarried and childless which, in turn, together with the decline in esteem of her works, seem to have provoked the collapse of her health during her last years for "the frustrations and tensions of being a single woman seriously pursuing a career in a world where the vast majority of women still married and had families, may well have been factors" (MacMillan 1992, 196). MacMillan's words resonate in Podnieks idea on the problematization of motherhood and, by extension, womanhood for New Women divided between "women who remain with their children at home against those who seek independence and creative, professional, and intellectual fulfillment outside of wifehood, parenting, and domesticity" (Podnieks 202, 3).

As a New Woman writer at the end of the nineteenth century, Wood's career attests the ambivalence of a socio-cultural framework increasingly open to new possibilities for women yet attached to old mores. Facts such as Wood's aspiration to be a woman writer even from an early age, her diverse and extensive contribution to letters including articles, short stories, and novels, as well as the prizes for her writings might be considered as proofs of a certain openness in North American society regarding women as writers. The dark side being, for instance, that there are very scarce data on Wood's early Canadian years; that she had to use pen names to hide her real identity, like "Jean D'Arc" which has been attributed to her perhaps signaling her feeling of heroism as writer; or that the prizes she won had to be "sent in to the credit of two male friends" (qtd. in Dyer 1994, xiv). This bipolarity clearly speaks for a culture in crisis very frequently represented through the "improper" version of femaleness New Women like Wood epitomized and who, just like her, had to develop a literary career trapped in between tolerance for new female roles and the necessity to hide female identity. But in Wood's case there is another factor to be taken into consideration. She contributed to and worked for both Canadian *and* US publications and editors so that her role as writer also had a transcultural scope that might have influenced the consideration of her figure and works on behalf of literary criticism. By crossing national boundaries, she became another alternating voice whose achievements seem to have been lost in the liminal space of a no man's land where many other writers such as Frances Brooke, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, or Sui Sin Far have also vanished.

While in Canada, Wood experimented regionalism since her family moved to a farm in a small Ontario town, Queenston Heights. In fact, Wood is claimed to be one of the earliest writers in employing a realistic and critical perspective regarding Canadian regionalism as well as "important to the development of feminist themes in Canadian literature" (MacMillan 1992, 200). As in the case of other New Women writers within the British literary framework, perhaps such realistic approach influenced the consideration of her works. As Ann Ardis explains, realism was one of the tools employed in the underestimation of the *fin-de-siècle* women's contributions to the novel genre since it was considered to involve a detriment to aestheticism. By being realistic, or even *too* realistic, their novels were said to distance from traditional concepts of literary value as those inscribed in the aesthetic features

a work was supposed to hold. Paradoxically, whereas "literary texts were evaluated in the 1880s and early 1890s as "agents of cultural formation," [and] not as works of art whose formal complexity was to be admired" (Ardis 1990, 29), realistic accounts in novels by women *and* on women which functioned as "agents of cultural formation" were dismissed because of an apparent lack of "formal complexity." Certainly, the realism these writers and their works proposed also influenced their discredit since they involved new configurations in fictional representation closer to naturalism as well as the fictionalization of new topics that had had no place in literature until then. Tired of the heated debate on New Woman's novels, some critics derided it *and* them so that by "moving literature from the center to the margin of culture, they relegated the New Woman novel to the margin of that margin" (Ardis 1990, 29). The ambivalent estimation of Wood's works moving from appraisal at her time to current oblivion seem to demonstrate that Wood's novels have gone through a similar process of dismissal.

Moreover, Wood's critical perspective on Canadian society may have also influenced this neglect. The transcultural nature of her life offered her an extraordinary critical standpoint from which to move away from the traditional romanticization of Canada's regionalism. For her, the Canadian small town epitomized in the fictional Jamestown of *The Untempered Wind* was not idyllic at all, and much less for women who dared to contravene its puritan mores as the protagonist, Myron Holder, does. Finally, it could be said that her figure and novels raised feminist issues for which the Canadian society of the time was not yet prepared and that it could have affected the consideration of her contributions. But this is not true. Her works were very successful at her time, so there must be another reason for these feminist messages to have vanished along the way. The introduction and maintenance of certain absences in mainstream literary discourses in Canada as anthologization proves may well serve as explanation, together with the sensational literary trends most of Wood's works followed. "The reaction against romance and sentimentality ushered in by the Canadian modernists" (MacMillan 1992, 170) brought the rejection of writers and works ascribed to those literary modes as formulaic and predictable to such an extent that later generations could, and can, only access them by doing an intense archaeological work into the literary past.

It can be concluded that the disappearance of Wood and her writings from Canada's literary canon lies more on the perpetuation of her dismissal on behalf of mainstream literary discourses than on the consideration received at her time and, of course, on the works she wrote. The success of her first short story "Unto the Third Generation," the printing and reprinting of *The Untempered Wind* in both the United States and Canada, together with the fact that the publishing rights of her 1898 novel *Judith Moore; or, Fashioning a Pipe* are said to be among the highest of her time are clear paradigms. Furthermore, Joanna Ellen Wood can be considered one of the first complete literary figures of Canadian literature in a modern sense for her literary success brought a financial success and independence that allowed her to live out of writing and enjoy a cosmopolitan literary life. By becoming a professional writer, she had the chance of traveling to the main literary circles of the time such as London, Paris, Boston, or New York, becoming one of the first women of her time to

do so, together with Sara Jeannette Duncan. Both pioneering women writers indeed. Interestingly enough, during one of these travels Wood met the Pre-Raphaelite poet Alergnon Charles Swinburne whose writings had been criticized for their focus on corporality, sensuality and sexuality. In consonance with her positioning as a New Woman writer, she wrote a revealing comment praising his innovative poetry and questioning the puritan literary framework that rejected it since, for her, "the anaemic art which affects to despise the body is essentially false and worm-eaten" (qtd. in MacMillan 1992, 199). These words clearly disclose her idea about the significance of a literature that challenges established conventions and this is precisely what seems to be the focus of her works.

3. *THE UNTEMPERED WIND* (1894)

First published in New York and reissued three times in the US, it was not until 1898 that *The Untempered Wind* saw a Canadian edition. Likewise, the impact her work had on both sides of the border fluctuated from appraisal to disavowal. Whereas US magazines and newspapers labeled it as "the strongest and best American novel of the year" (qtd. in Dyer 1994, xiv), and a masterpiece which proved its author's literary skills comparable to those of renowned writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Eliot, or even Charlotte Brontë, Canadian reviews were more ambivalent. From comments disdaining the excessive social pressure on the protagonist and the novel's critical perspective on Canadian regionalism, to others affirming that *The Untempered Wind* was "perhaps without a peer among Canadian novels" (MacMillan 1992, 180-1). Curiously advancing MacMillan's idea on the Canadian inclination to underrate Canadian works in favor of those from the United States or Britain, Wood raised this Canadian paradox in a letter to William Kirby when objecting to the distain her novel received precisely from a Canadian newspaper which was the "one to render a Canadian work into pieces" (qtd. in Dyer 1994, xvi). It is certainly shocking that while American critics concluded that her novel deserved a place within the North American literary canon of the nineteenth century, it has almost completely vanished from Canada's mainstream literary discourses of the time and elsewhere.

Through the story of a female protagonist who is an unmarried mother that refuses to reveal the identity of the father within the backdrop of a Canadian small town, *The Untempered Wind* raises crucial questions regarding women at the end of the nineteenth century and offers a critical viewpoint on Canadian society. "She was Myron Holder -a mother, but not a wife" (Wood 1994, 6), states the narrator in Chapter I. A woman who "in obedience to no law but the voice of nature" loses herself in a man and is seen by society as an epitome of shame (Wood 1994, 6). By including a protagonist like her, Wood's text can be said to participate in the challenge New Woman novels shaped by re-imagining "worlds quite different from the bourgeois patriarchy in which unmarried women are deemed odd and superfluous" side character[s]" (Ardis 1990, 3).

Myron is not at all marginal but central in the novel, the axis around which the rest of characters gravitate in direct contradiction with contemporary

patriarchal society. She is both the center of the novel as well as her own center as her determination in keeping the father's name secret and enduring the rejection of Canada's regional society show. Defined by others as an incomplete woman, as a sinful symbol of a half-made womanliness that abides by means of maternity but deviates as a non-wife, she represents what at the time was considered a "fallen woman", a woman who distances from the traditional archetype of the "angel in the house" and embodies what Lynn Pycket calls "the improper feminine" (1992, 1). She is a New Woman and as such stands for a female transgressor, which is a novelty within the Canadian literary framework of the time (MacMillan 1992, 172). In this way, *The Untempered Wind* ultimately performs a challenge in the representation of femininity in fiction and especially in the nineteenth-century Canadian novel.

But the implications of her divergence from society go beyond motherhood without wifehood. First of all, maternity outside the wedlock implies sexuality without marriage, a certainly deviant behavior for a woman in a *fin-de-siècle* Canadian small town; besides, instead of looking for possible ways of being reinstated into public favor, Myron keeps the baby who incarnates her sin and refuses to marry another man different from the father; finally, she performs a final outrageous gesture in the eyes of mainstream society by keeping the sinful secret of the father's name.

As an unmarried mother, Myron's approach to maternity can be defined as "non-normative" since, by being a single mother by choice, she "counter[s] and correct[s] as well as destabilize[s] and disrupt[s] normative motherhood" (Podniecks 2023, 2). Destabilization and disruption also performed through the unintentional exertion of maternity and as the lack of maternal instinct; Myron's motherhood is the product of chance, not of a pondered decision of a married couple. In fact, "no maternal love warmed her heart towards her child" at the beginning (Wood 1994, 18), but in time "her adoration of her child waxed stronger and stronger" (Wood 1994, 25). She *learns* to love her baby, an outrageous behavior for a woman expected to be an unconditionally loving mother. Little by little, she embraces him as well as their shared fallen condition and calls him "My" because "he belongs to none of you; he is mine –my own baby–my own child–My–My!" (Wood 1994, 253). In doing so, the protagonist of Wood's novel seems to participate in Adrienne Rich's questioning on motherhood as a patriarchal institution –differing from motherhood as a biological act– by suggesting the possibility of a different maternity, that is, mothering as a strategy of resistance that moves the maternal away from the centrality of wifehood as premise for it to happen. As the narrative voice asserts in the text, maternity and marriage need to be linked: "to be present and assisting at the coming of a life or the passing of a soul was the highest excitement and most precious pleasure these women knew; [...] only after many years of wifehood" (Wood 1994, 167).

The heated debate during Wood's times in Canada on the issue of pregnancy outside marriage seems to support Rich's idea of motherhood as an institution. In order to protect that institution, authorities of the time discussed the topic raising it to the level of State affair as the participation of the Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, demonstrates. The situation of women being seduced by men, getting pregnant without being married, and very frequently being disowned divided Canadian society of the time right before the publication of *The Untempered Wind*.

Such division is certainly significant since it exposes the bipolarity of Canada regarding female questions, but also because it supports Wood's depiction of Canadian regionalism in her novel. From those, mainly liberals, who supported the introduction of laws that criminalized this male behavior to those, mainly puritans, who objected since it would imply "'rewarding the woman who comes forward and confesses that she did commit this sin'" (qtd. in Dyer 1994, VII-VIII), it was a vital topic for Canadians at the turn of the century. The word *sin* in the previous quotation deserves some attention. Having sexual encounters outside marriage was considered a sin, not a crime. Terminology is not trivial since it proves the influence religion had on political issues affecting the lives of women as well as unveils the difficulty Canadian society and its politicians had to differentiate between sin and crime, between a religious offense and an offense against society. But why was this topic so crucial? Precisely because womanliness was a state affair. Some of the participants in the debate affirmed that female "chastity, morality and decency" needed to be protected by the state since outrage against women's virtue was indeed considered a "'a crime against society'" for as keepers of domesticity they were the defenders of "'the pure Christian home [which] is[was] the only safe foundation for the free and enlightened State'" (qtd. in Dyer 1994, VIII). As custodians, women were thus expected to perpetuate that State by means of maternity. "What is Home Without a Mother?" reads an inscription above the door or Mr. And Mrs. White in the novel (Wood 1994, 123). Domesticity, marriage, and motherhood, and as a consequence heterosexuality and femininity seemed to be gathered under the umbrella of the State, or in other words, all seemed to be institutions society wanted, or needed, to protect perhaps in order to maintain that "identifiable sexual hierarchy" patriarchy was –and is– using Rich's words (Rich 1986, XXIV).

In addition, Myron's performance of maternity implies a deviant sexual behavior for the time. Getting pregnant without being married involves having free sexual relationships outside the restraints of wifehood and, perhaps, exclusively led by passion and without any maternal instinct whatsoever. In doing so, a character like Myron's is performing a re-appropriation of the female body insofar as she uses hers freely, unbound, unattached to social mores. She can be said to embody "the necessity for women, whoever they are, to decide how their bodies shall be used, to have or not to have children, to be sexual and maternal as they choose" (Rich 1986, xxii). And this is precisely what she performs in the novel; she decides to be sexual and maternal outside the boundaries of marriage so that she exerts the "power of women to choose how and when we will use our sexuality and our procreative capacities" (Rich 1986, xxiii). But, according to the text and in connection with the heated debate previously mentioned, her decision seems to be more a product of male influence rather than a self-conscious decision. Her explanation of how the father of the baby induces her is certainly revealing for he persuades her by affirming that it is not "the *saying* of marriage vows" what matters, but "the keeping of them that made[makes] the marriage" (Wood 1994, 188-9); that is to say, it is not the social construct of marriage but the commitment of the lovers what creates the real bond. Of course, he neither marries nor keeps his vows but his false promise makes Myron fall for it and even maintain it because her vows are "true and binding" and she will never be

false to them (Wood 1994, 189). In spite of the seduction, in the end it is her choice; she chooses to believe him, to give herself to him freely, to follow her sexual instincts and allow passion to lead her actions; what is more, she finally chooses to keep the symbol of their sinful encounter, the "child of shame" (Wood 1994, 173). It can be thus said that she chooses herself, with all her contradictions and the consequences within the backdrop of Canadian society at the end of nineteenth century.

Before reuniting with the child's biological father at the end of the novel, Myron remains sexless and unmarried even when having the chance not to. She even declines a marriage proposal from another of the few outsider characters of the novel, Homer Wilson, who, more compelled by compassion and social justice than romantic love, offers her the chance to reinstate herself and the baby in the eyes of society. "I will protect you; (...), I will make you happy; (...), I will compel them to respect you," he affirms (Wood 1994, 190). Buy why would a woman in such a hard and complex situation say no to an apparently kind marriage? Because she has a plan. Her intention is giving her child his real name, that of the real father which can only happen through marriage to him; as she explains: "I went against the world's ways, and I suppose it's only right now to expect the world to be against me. No one can help me but *him*" (Wood 1994, 192). Once again, enduring society's rejection as well as refusing to take the easier path of a convenience marriage are Myron's free choices.

Similarly, the election of a female protagonist like her is Wood's choice as a New Woman writer to "replace "the pure woman," the Victorian angel in the house, with a heroine who either is sexually active outside of marriage or abstains from sex for political rather than moral reasons" (Ardis 1990, 3). In this way, *The Untempered Wind* is ultimately challenging "the 'natural' inevitability of the marriage plot" at first (Ardis 1990, 3). Inevitability that is finally embraced when Myron leaves the Canadian small town of Jamestown after the death of her child to be a nurse in a quarantine station where a doctor turns out to be –somehow magically– her son's biological father. While working there, she gets cholera and dies, but right before dying they get married, their vows are renewed and she finally achieves what she had been seeking for so long: giving her son his real identity back, that of Henry Willis, like his father. In this way, her determination and strength are rewarded and her somehow insane stubbornness is finally compensated.

The fact that the novel's closure apparently must go through the sensational ending of marriage to find a convenient resolution might seem paradoxical given the challenging protagonist, but it rather reflects the crossroads at which pioneering women writers were at the end of the nineteenth century. The centrality of female characters and, moreover, of daring women characters within a literary background not yet prepared for such challenging content resulted in creative decisions that, notwithstanding the shock for the modern reader, responded to the literary problematic of fitting exceptional literary content into a traditional literary framework. In choosing woman-centeredness, using Rich's words, exceptionality and an apparently customary ending for her fiction, Wood is performing a renegotiation of traditional literary boundaries just as many other New Woman writers did. Despite seemingly formulaic, the novel's closure also breaks with established literary patrons

for it involves both marriage *and* death, contrarily to most exemplifying endings that included marriage as symbol of final rightfulness *or* death as reforming tool. A groundbreaking fictional decision, to such an extent that *The Untempered Wind* seems to be one of the only Canadian novels of the time to combine the two options. By means of its closure as well as of its female protagonist, the novel renegotiates "the relationships between women and men, women and society, sexuality and marriage, and gender and labor" (Dyer 1994, xxiii), and becomes a novel "that displaces the idealization of heterosexual love, a novel that figures life in a world where people are not constrained" which is "a revolutionary act" indeed (Ardis 1990, 133).

"Myron Holder was an outsider" states the narrator in Chapter IX (93). As an exceptional woman and differing mother, she certainly is, although not exclusively. Myron is British. Unlike her Canadian neighbors who are "descendants of some half-dozen families, the original settlers of the country" that even bear "a strange resemblance to one another" (Wood 1994, 93), she comes from a recently settled British family and, as such, she is not considered one of the chosen, a builder of a society in the make as Canada's. Quite the contrary, they are seen as aliens, as newly transplanted members into a community "subjected to the same mental influences, the same conditions of life, the same climate, the same religion" (Wood 1994, 93). Whereas the inhabitants of Jamestown represent uniformity, Myron and her family stand for difference. Difference that is symbolically portrayed through the character of Myron's father, Jed Holder, as the only inhabitant of Jamestown able to appreciate the English sparrows flying over the village in contrast to the Canadian farmers for whom they are a plague that needs governmental intervention, perhaps suggesting a similar message for new settlers in Canadian soil. Equally symbolic is the lantern Myron keeps from her mother as one of the very few traces of the family's past. Having "lighted her mother's happy footsteps along Kentish lanes" (Wood 1994, 58), it sadly lights Myron's despair and loneliness as emigrant *and* woman, that is, as a culturally transplanted member and deviant representation of womanliness. But perhaps the most significant sign of her difference is her accent; despite the time spent in Canada, Myron keeps a British accent that voices her difference. In this way, her divergence from the people of Jamestown is not only visible physically but audible.

Myron's Britishness also functions as reminder of a colonial past Jamestown people want to forget. Just as they refuse to acknowledge her cultural background as part of their own, they also despise the character of little Bing White who happens to be a handicapped boy with the habit of collecting relics from past wars that took place on Jamestown's soil. Considered an "unfortunate" that needs to be "kept out of sight as far as possible" (Wood 1994, 94), he is thought to be an "idiot" which, according to the dissenting narrative voice, is "far from the truth" (Wood 1994, 96). "Bullets, broken bayonets, portions of old-fashioned guns, military buttons, and Indian arrow heads of flint" are some of the objects nature stubbornly returns and little Bing treasures (Wood 1994, 96), all of them traces of an uncomfortable heritage the new settlers prefer not to see. Bing's fascination with blood also connects with the connotations of war, subjection, and death these objects hold. By rejecting him, Jamestown's people are also intentionally leaving aside the colonial ancestors they want to break ties with. Surprisingly, the only reference to ethnic communities other

than the white inhabitants of Jamestown are those Indian arrow heads so that the so-acclaimed multicultural essence of Canada seems a fallacy in the novel, perhaps signaling another inconvenient but crucial cultural paradox of Canadian society.

Unlike many New Woman novels of the time that "figure women supporting other women's "monstrous" ambitions to be something –anything– besides wives and mothers" (Ardis 1990, 134), *The Untempered Wind* portrays a very different picture. Myron's deviation from accepted womanliness is criticized, rejected, and punished especially by the rest of women of Jamestown, those who consider themselves true representatives of righteous womanhood. As custodians of femininity, they are all wives and mothers who protect their domestic universes and preserve the religious morale of the town. They are the angels in the house, although evil against unconventional members of their sisterhood. Unable to empathize, none of them make efforts to understand Myron's situation, let alone take pity on her or support her, but quite the opposite; their double-standard morality only allows them to provide superficial assistance that actually makes her life miserable.

The clearest paradigm of these women is Mrs. Deans, "distinctly a leader in Jamestown society" (Wood 1994, 29). From her pedestal, she feels compelled to assist the so-called bound girls of the town as Myron; if giving them a job that involves the hardest tasks of the farm for a miserable wage, can be considered aid. In consonance with her neighbors, "that this 'help' consisted in being allowed to do the hardest work under the most intolerable circumstances for very meagre pay, they did not stop to consider" (29). Likewise, she also seems oblivious of their shared female condition for "woman and mother as Mrs. Deans was, she was never moved by their peculiar needs" (29). Curiously enough, she is conscious of her femininity and its implications in a patriarchal society since, when talking to her husband, she claims the following: "I suppose you'd like me to enslave myself to death (...) Well, if that's what's on your mind, just relieve your feelings of it right away –for be a salve to no man I won't" (Wood 1994, 102). Paradoxically, whereas she claims she will never be a slave of men, she enslaves other women who have perpetrated an apparently sinful act such as having a baby out of the wedlock. In doing so, she functions as tool of the patriarchal society she claims to fight against. Like her neighbors, Mrs. Deans considers this assistance a Christian duty but mistreats these women due to the conviction that they represent evil so that redemption is simply impossible for them, thus revealing the strong influence religion has on her and the community. A very revelatory episode regarding the double religious morality of the town is the death of Myron's grandmother. Whereas according to the narrator "it was customary for five or six to go and stay overnight in the house where death was" (Wood 1994, 171), they leave her alone with the dead body and her baby in their isolated cottage. Only Homer Wilson helps her and cries out: "What beasts these women are to leave you alone!" (172).

Myron's endurance of such a suffocating social environment also has religious connotations. Her strength against these women's offenses and her determination in not revealing her child's father's name, turn her into a kind of messianic figure. Besides Homer Wilson, the only character who is able to grasp the sanctity of her attitude is precisely a church minister, Philip Hardman, whose presence gives some

relief to Myron until forced to leave the town. As the narrator explains, he seems to be the only one to realize that: "this woman was [has been] sent to bear the griefs of this village, even as One long since –the Carpenter's son– had borne the griefs of the world" (Wood 1994, 266). Misunderstood by her neighbors and indirectly pleading for comprehension and compassion much like a Christ-figure, she seems the bearer of all the community's sins but also of a lesson for "a message she should have" (Wood 1994, 266). And indeed, she does. Transplanted into a small Canadian community, her presence should function as illuminating symbol for her fellow neighbors of their hypocritical religious practices, but it does not. Blind and self-righteous, they cannot see. In this sense, the significance of Myron's character is broader because a critical depiction of the religious hypocrisy of a Canadian small town is developed through her.

Mrs. Deans and Myron Holder are just two characters of the female universe *The Untempered Wind* depicts. The presence of women dominates over that of men, just as Mrs. Deans overshadows her husband who, according to the narrator, "had sat under his wife's ministry" (Wood 1994, 26). The token participation of men in the text speaks for a woman-centeredness that is brought to a different level; it is a novel inhabited not only by a female protagonist but by women whose power is evident, although from within their domestic realms. Nevertheless, there is no sisterhood in Jamestown; it is a divided female universe. This is precisely one of the main themes the text raises in which the narrative voice plays a crucial role. By maintaining a detached position through the narratorial strategy of irony, the narrator functions as a backdrop where the inconsistencies of the hypocritical society of a Canadian small town can be unveiled. As Mandy Treagus comments in relation to Sara Jeannette Duncan's *A Daughter of Today* (1894), irony helps create "distance between the narrator and the perspective of the characters" (Treagus 2014, 159), opening a liminal space where some character's ideas and attitudes can be questioned. In the case of Wood's novel, it is these women's contradictory behavior towards their fellow sisters which contrasts with the comments by the narrative voice on the necessity of a common sisterhood for women's causes to advance. In this way, whereas for these women Myron represents vice in opposition to their incarnation of virtue, comments by the narrator offer the opposite reading: Myron's determination and strength make her virtuous while their behavior grazes immorality, so that their embodiment of the image of the angel in the house vanishes. If "irony always has a victim" (Treagus 2014, 159), they are the narrator's victims and not Myron because she is already *their* victim. Interestingly, Myron's victimization is also brought into question; her acceptance of these women's rejection seems rather excessive and so it is claimed in the text: "it is perhaps true that martyrdom is a form of beatitude; but, if compulsory, it rarely has a spiritualizing effect" (Wood 1994, 36).

Interpellating Myron's fellow women, the narrative voice begs them to "think of it, you holy women," to realize there is no point in abusing another woman for they are equal since "with her you share, despite yourselves, a common womanhood" (Wood 1994, 185). But such consciousness seems not to take roots among the women of Jamestown even after Myron's departure. Progress seems to sprout all over with new factories and workmen here and there, but not in these women's understanding of a

shared sisterhood to which the narrator rises up and claims that a "woman is more nearly an allied to woman than man to man" and also that "each woman is linked to her sister women by the indissoluble bond of common pain" (Wood 1994, 295). These other women, mainly embodied by Mrs. Deans, as well as their contrast with Myron and the narrative voice raise fundamental questions for New Women during Wood's times. On one hand, Mrs. Deans inability to see what she is inflicting on her comrades suggests the importance of transcending the patriarchal system, of developing an awareness of its tentacles that foster, for instance, a bondage like hers with her husband. On the other hand, the dangers of a divided womanhood are evident in the fictional resolution of a woman vilified by her comrades who finally loses her baby and dies. In order to rise above such enslaving framework, the novel clearly proposes a common sisterhood as necessary strategy of resistance and tool for change.

4. CONCLUSION

Reading the *The Untempered Wind* from the new critical space New Woman and motherhood studies propose demonstrates it is an original, provocative, and inquiring novel that deserves, at least, closer attention. By means of woman-centeredness, the text aims at renegotiating the representation of femininity through the non-normative maternity, free sexuality, rejection of unwanted wifehood, and cultural challenge the protagonist embodies. Moreover, her position of cultural transplanted member of British origins raises crucial questions about the influence of religion on Canadian society as well as on Canada's colonial paradoxes. Myron Holder is an outsider, an alien, the other, although the critical perspective offered through the narratorial voice tells otherwise. Thanks to its ironic approach to the novel's female cosmos, there is an interesting shift of positions by which the possibility of a woman like Myron being the *I*, the centre, of herself, of a small Canadian town, of Canadian society, and maybe society in general, is suggested.

Equally daring is Joanna Ellen Wood's figure within the Canadian literary framework of the nineteenth century. She was a New Woman author who left female constrictions of the time aside to pursue a literary career and participate in the advancement of Canadian literature in English. She was a modern literary figure whose contributions like *The Untempered Wind* offered a realistic perspective on Canadian society and raised fundamental feminist questions. As paradigm of her literary career, the novel analyzed here is said to entail "one of the most vivid representations of small-town Canada in nineteenth-century fiction" and connects Wood's early accomplishment to later fundamental novels within Canadian literature like Margaret Laurence's 1947 novel, *The Diviners* (MacMillan 1992,175).

All in all, it seems clear that renewed critical approaches as the one offered from the intersectional perspective of New Woman and motherhood studies open a new array of possibilities to revisit literary figures and contributions lost within mainstream literary discourses. Just as many other female writers and their works, the close reading of Wood's *The Untempered Wind* demonstrates that both the text and

its author need to be revisited so that her figure and contributions find a balanced place within Canadian literary tradition.

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CREATION

THREADED / ENHEBRADA

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"LINES"

Loneliness,
Strand of my soul,

Threading through the hollow world.
A world alive,
Yet lifeless,
A paradox I wear.
Unheard,
The whispers of my heart,
Unseen,
The desperate cries for help.
Uneven,
The jagged edges of returning
To a self
I barely remember.

"THE BOW"

A bow,
A prayer,
A feeling,
A loss.
An experience muted,
A voice silenced.
A nightmare,
A god.

"FREE(DOM)"

The chills,
The fear,
The avoidance of death,
Thou concealed with life
Heated laugh,

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Cynical advice
Hysterical voices
Rising through the crowd.
Hysterical?
Maybe so.
But free,
At least for the seconds we scream.

"FROM THE RIVER..."

Water flows,
Each tear carves rivers of memory.
The sweetness of watermelon
Splits my heart in two,
A reminder of summers lost,
Of freedom foreseen but never held.
Forever mine,
forever elusive—
The promise of freedom,
The land I long to claim.

"PAIN"

Pain cuts deep.
It burns,
it howls,
It demands space.
Poetry calls for grace,
But today I am graceless.
Pain is not elegant,
And neither am I.
I will not apologize for this ache.
My pain is mine—
A burden and a shield.

Pain is a bitch.

Fear defines me,
Until it doesn't.
Pain defines me,
Until we end it.
Be brave,
Feel the anger.
Feel the sorrow.
Feel it all.
And when you're ready—
Be free.

"A VISIT TO MY LAND"

I went to Palestine once.
Not the one in my dreams,
Not the one my father spoke of
With a strong voice,
Not the one my mother prayed for
When no one was watching.
The real Palestine.
Dust clung to my skin
Like a second exile.
The sun burned
As if it wanted to mark me,
To remind me this was home,
Just as I longed for it to be.
I touched the soil,
Walked the streets,
Saw the olive trees
That had stood longer
Than my bloodline.
I thought I'd feel whole.
I thought I'd belong.
But Palestine heals loneliness,
Just as it deepens it.
Because how do you belong to a place
Where they are trying to bury us,
To erase us.
Where drones tear the sky
And bombs drop to break
The silence of the night.

But we do belong.
And we will grow.
And we will return.

"DAUGHTER OF FIRE"

I was not born in fire,
But I will become it.
My skin is parchment,
My heart a torch,
Set alight by hands
That never learned
The meaning of love.
My ancestors are dust,
Their voices too soft to hear
Beneath the weight of blood.

But they scream inside me—
Hollow echoes of women
Who were never given the chance
To burn,
to be
More than whispered names.
I carry their flames
In my chest,
But this time,
I will not be silenced.
I will be the fire
That turns ash to life.

"THE PRISON OF EXPECTATIONS"

They told me
I had to be soft
To fit into this world.
They told me
I had to be quiet,
A whisper in the halls of men
Who are never asked to listen.
They told me
I had to be what I was not—
A dress with no voice,
A girl with no anger.
But I have lived in too many skins
To pretend I am not raw.
I was not born to please,
Not made to be the thing
That bends beneath their gaze.
I belong to no one—
Except the parts of me
That are still sharp enough
To draw blood.

"THE WEIGHT OF YOUR NAME"

I wear my name
Like a crown,
But it is a crown too heavy
For anyone to bear.
It is the name of a place
That no one wants to remember,
The name of a people
Who were told they did not belong.

I was born with it—
A gift and a curse.
A name that holds the weight
Of blood and history,
A name that holds the weight
Of exile.
I wonder,
If I could shed it,
Would I be lighter?
Would I belong somewhere?
But I know now—
Belonging is an illusion.
My name is mine,
Our land is ours,
And we will fight for it.

"THE PAIN OF WOMANHOOD"

Womanhood is a storm
That swallows me whole,
Yet leaves me still standing,
Broken but unbowed.
They tell me
It's beautiful to suffer,
Beautiful to bear pain
With grace.
But I am tired of grace—
Tired of swallowing the fire
That burns beneath my skin.
I am tired of pretending
That my wounds
Are not mine to claim.
The world wants to make me soft,
Wants to dress me in sorrow
And make me smile.
But I am no longer the girl
Who whispers "thank you"
For what was stolen.
I will scream,
And let my rage be
The anthem of every woman
Who has been made to believe
She was not enough.

"SISTERHOOD"

We are the daughters
Of all the women before us—
The ones who fought
Without words,
The ones who bled in silence
But never gave in.
We are the women
Who know the weight of our bodies,
The weight of our names,
And we carry them,
Like stone in the chest,
Like fire in the veins.
Together,
We are not broken—
Together,
We are fierce
And loud and unashamed
Of the spaces we take.

"THE FIGHT TO BE SEEN"

I fight to be seen,
To be heard,
To be understood—
But our voice are always
Drowned out by the noise
Of a world
That would rather
Erase us.
We fight for the right
To exist in spaces
That were never meant for us.
We fight to speak
Our truth,
Even when the truth
Hurts to hear.
And still—
We will not be silenced.

“OVERFLOW” / “REBOSAR”

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Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

I

In the depths where shadows dance:
I am woman.

I feel dread upon my fate.
I carry the lineage of death.
I take life,
Faster than I give up.

Unprotected. Unresolved. Unrequited.
I too burn at the stakes tonight.

Did I inherit the sin?
Tradition is then a devil
Passing from womb to womb
Where this hunger is growing:
The insatiable within
Demanding to be fed.

I forge my scar, I make way.
I too was afraid to shed skin.
I testament my own creation
And find refuge.
Am I heir to them?

I am not afraid,
For I do not rise a phoenix.
I do not rise anew.

I rise a woman.

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II

Is there stillness in the night
when shadows move?

There is darkness before death
Songs that creep and wait,
Yet surrounded by storms and stares
I'm loose.

I'm no longer squared and straight
For my feet sound since as hooves;
I do not miss my bed,
I created words to
Sentence me
And summoned my debt.

Was it death that held you down
Or was it you?
I no longer find pressure
In the beat and beat of time
For my chest no longer tries,
It moves.

Word build. Tongue freed.
There is sense and creole in the streets.
But I no longer live,
I create.

III

For a moment I thought
Frozen time—on the turn of the page
That I'd lost my intuition.

And when the night speaks
All land stays silent.
Except for the trees,
Cracking away at the moon
While their leaves fall asleep;
For the distant breach of life
Untouched by moon,
Unaware;
For time, who made us trust the sin

Yet me always want more.

We spent centuries writing to the same
Writing to the same moon
Yet we failed to seduce her.
Let us try.

And if what's left of me is enough
I'll remain silent
And embrace under this tree
To ink my back to stone
(to the moon, time froze)
To us—the future dead.

“ODE TO THE SUN” / “ODA AL SOL”

Eliz Ebazer
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

The sun, a star that has always been there,
And will remain until our final breath.
Even when we don’t see it,
We feel it and we wait for it.
Some people don’t appreciate it.
Others feel low when it doesn’t show.

I must declare, I’m one of them.
The sun is my source of energy,
My source of happiness,
A friend that walks with me,
A friend I’m always anxious to see,
A friend who brightens my day,
A friend I deeply appreciate.

When it’s cloudy and you break through,
I stop what I’m doing to stand in your ray.
When it’s sunny,
I avoid the shadows.
When I’m feeling blue,
You make it yellow.

You, a star I always hope to see
You, a star that will always keep my company.

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“THE BEATING SEA” / “EL MAR QUE PALPITA”

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Supermoon Over the Beach of Ris, Noja, Cantabria, Spain, 2024. Own photo.

The sea beats as every wave reaches the shore, carrying a salty smell that weaves with the wind and the sound of the crashing waves against the rocks. The full moon, witness to the beating sea from behind the lit-up brushstrokes of the clouds, and reflecting upon the waves, creates a beautiful landscape that feels almost ethereal.

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Review of *Nomadic New Women: Exile and Border-Crossing Between Spain and the Americas, Early to Mid-Twentieth Century* edited by Renée M. Silverman & Esther Sánchez-Pardo (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 380 pp. ISBN: 3031624815).

The current global situation concerning forced displacement and outgrowing drastic immigration policies requires urgent scholarly acknowledgment. *Nomadic New Women: Exile and Border-Crossing Between Spain and the Americas, Early to Mid-Twentieth Century*, edited by Renée M. Silverman and Esther Sánchez-Pardo, dexterously attend to these matters through the prismatic lens of the arts. By approaching the life and works of early and mid-twentieth century female writers and visual artists, the contributors to this volume suggest that the period in which the modernist movement developed shares many of its traits with today's international affairs. The present raise of the liberal right in Europe and America, the new identities fighting for recognition, and the deracination of oppressed multitudes seem to mirror the turmoil of sudden changes which took place as the twentieth century unfolded. *Nomadic New Women* exudes thus actuality by presenting a radically innovative creative outcome derived from the trauma of exile.

In the introduction to the volume, the term *nomadic woman* is given to those artists who, under the influence of uncertainty, were forced or decided to cross borders and create a unique diaspora in places of refuge like Mexico, the Caribbean and the USA. All the artists considered share an intellectual restlessness, versatility, and creative fulfilment which originates in a boarding crossing framed by gender and sexuality. Sánchez-Pardo and Silverman explain that in their study they follow Braidotti's "cartographic method," "a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the process of power relations" (Braidotti 4). However, they make clear that they distance themselves from Braidotti's postmetaphysical vision of subjectivity which relies on the ontological rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari: identity is central in *Nomadic New Women,* in which the postmodern is defined by a marked performativity and the absence of historical anchoring and identity fixing (Sánchez-Pardo and Silverman 10). The essays in the book present women *embedded in circumstances* border-crossing Spain and the Americas and occupying liminal spaces of "becoming" which shelter and develop the self in an aseptic detachment. The authors' incisive use of geographical material as both facilitator and isolator, a subjective map which renders the particularities of Anglo-Hispanic communities, reveals how these flâneuses –in order of appearance Marina Romero, Ana María Martínez Sagi, Zenobia Camprubí, Isabel de Palencia, María Zambrano, Gertrude Stein, Janet Riesenfeld, Leonora Carrington, Kati Horna, Lupe Vélez, Dolores del Río and Maruja Mallo– were to develop new, unconventional ways of seeing and being. Via uprooting and its resulting psychic trauma, these artists were to challenge gender constructions, an imposed sexuality, and the fixity of social orders, shaping a counterfigure to the well-stablished highly educated and socio-economically élite man.

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Divided into three different sections, the volume opens with "Part I: Women Writing (in) Exile: Art, Life, Politics," which partly focuses on how authors manage to impress homelessness –defined as the projection of home– in both texts intended for publication and private writings. The reader acknowledges that these modernist nomadic women needed to and were capable of developing particular styles which, by means of radically different experiments with language, achieved to mirror the unreal present they underwent. Ana Eire opens the discussion with her essay "The Intimacy of Distance," which comments on the poetry of Marina Romero as a representation "of the self as host of the other" (45). As many female writers associated with the Generation of 27 or the Spanish Republican diaspora, Marina Romero has been drastically overlooked by scholars and critics. Eire makes us realise how after Francisco Franco's coup d'état in July 1936, the forced displacement of poets generated a homeless literature which deserved a homecoming and went on its quest. This is the matter which guides the poems in Romero's second book "Nostalgia de Mañana" (Mexico 1943), which presents the upheaval that exiles experience. Eire states that this collection displays the problems which come out of the defensive predisposition of relying solely on personal subjectivity and understanding the other as an alien. Marina Romero employs a grammar necessary to showcase this issue, playing with pronouns, for instance, in order to delude who *is.* There are instances of symbolic union in her poetry, which, by relying on Romantic and even alchemical motifs, allows for a proper description of the dwelling for existence Romero experimented. Eire suggests that union of self and other is sought for inward reconciliation, as Romero tries to compensate the fact that for her exile is not a correlative space, but a breakage, a partition from reference. In poems like "Sin Agua" ("Without Water") Romero achieves "meaning beyond the impoverished referentiality of isolated words" (Eire 34), creating a web of semanticity which plays with the idea of being and non-being. Objects in her poetry are removed from more complex ones containing them, but the latter do not cease to be, just as the self loses apparently fixed properties but that does not stop it from *becoming*. Lines like "Without water, / the sea. / Without time / the clock. / Without air, / The sigh." prove to state the difficulty of defining reality by commenting on its possible lack of essence. The contradiction of being without a core seems to haunt Romero, whose poetry tenderly suggests that when one has been stripped from home, life in exile goes tautologically on and on "as a merry-go-round" (Eire 43) in the quest for what is lost.

Leonor María Martínez Serrano has a share in this first part of *Nomadic Women*, "Words in Space," which focuses on the exile diary of Zenobia Camprubí. This essay works as a successful transition between the poetry written in Spanish of María Romero and Ana María Martínez Sagi and the texts in English which many of the regarded authors produced, setting the defining tone of the volume. Martínez Serrano develops a chapter partly devoted to a colourful depiction of Camprubí's and her husband Juan Ramón Jiménez's biographical data, which widens the volume's thematical scope. Camprubí is presented as a cosmopolitan polyglot who, contrary to the custom of the time, travelled extensively as a child and adolescent, leaving Spain for the U.S.A. in 1904 at the age of seventeen and returning five years later known as "La Americanita." In her essay Martínez Serrano considers Camprubí's twenty years kept diary and correspondence, which she regards a piece of bilingual literature that works as an ever-lasting umbilical cord connecting the writer with Spain. Language in her memoirs is taken as an escape from the reality of exile, since Camprubí wrote in Spanish while being in English-speaking spaces and vice versa. This is taken by Martínez Serrano as an instance of the author's long search for privacy, reflected widely in her diary through her obsession with single rooms: "I dream with building a large bedroom with a fire place and many windows which will be mine and free me from everyone else" (91). Home is for Camprubí a metaphor for stability and intimacy, something she looks for even after reaching emancipation by lecturing in Maryland in 1944, as she comments on the losing of intimacy after marriage. In her diaries one can admire her "sensory intellectual alertness" (92), her capacity to connect body and non-human

matter. Through descriptive catalogues such as the views from her rooms in exile –"the seashell-rose tinted opened a glorious path toward the unreal light and all of a sudden made all one's child dreams true" (93)– Camprubí, as Marina Romero, regards objects not as passive, but as a dynamic tangent to humanity. Both the natural world of her paradises of exile, Cuba and Puerto Rico, where she felt a dream had come true (Martínez Serrano 84), and the Hopper-like urban instances of Miami and Maryland prove to be the source of the adaptability Zenobia Camprubí coveted after deserting Spain in August 1936.

In the last essay to be commented on from this first section, "María Zambrano's Caribbean Imaginings," Esther Sánchez-Pardo effectively gives the reader a glimpse of Zambrano's extensive oeuvre by focusing on her work written in Cuba and the lesser Antilles. Zambrano's production during this period –in the form of letters, pieces in journals or bits of memories– is said to include some of her most representative pieces, allowing us to understand the crucial factors which defined her trajectory. Sánchez-Pardo rightfully speaks of a new hybrid genre tailored by Zambrano, a blending of personal data, philosophic material and lyrical instances which goes beyond the "structures of genre taxonomy" (124). Moreover, the paper swirls around the concept of the island as a liminal space where Zambrano dwelled outside the normative constructs of space and time, in a "time outside time" (131) which allowed her to wonder and meditate on loss and the hope for recovery. Puerto Rico, understood as an insular hinge between North and South Americas, leads Zambrano to reflect between daydream and dream, acting as a mirror of the solitude of the self. Her *insularism* becomes hence a concept framed under a nostalgia in which the western heritage is recalled, which somehow seems a relieving compensation for the fragile condition Zambrano bore as a leftist in exile. As Sánchez-Pardo points out, her writings on the islands explored essential themes tied to insularism –light, coastline, and sea– which she reconfigured into philosophical ideas concerning sight, awareness, temporality, and historical understanding. However, Zambrano's own utopian "liveable world" was considered by her to be a problematic realm which turns the European landscape into a mirage, a pure horizon. As Sánchez-Pardo writes by means of a lush tapestry of quotes and references, Zambrano acknowledged, only after exiting her own liminal Atlantic spheres, that encounter with time would be the awakening of the dream. In Zambrano's Caribbean texts, a hopeful future for Spain and Europe after the fratricidal wars is imagined, which proves that her individual intellect represented that of a community of selective migrants which formed a true diaspora of women philosophers and artists. Something stated by M. Silverman and Sánchez-Pardo truly resonates in this essay –dissociation and uprooting, either brutal or smooth, reveals the importance of adaptability in a completely new environment. In the case of Zambrano this takes the form of a self-aware delusional hope for the lost territory. Julie Highfill's essay "The Scene of the Firing Squad" follows this first approach to Zambrano, working as an eye-opening piece which takes up many of the motifs regarded in the previous one, such as the collective dream destiny of Republican Spain. In fact, this pair of essays lean on each other and aid to elaborate on the elegiac capacities and textual experimentation of María Zambrano's heartrending memoirs.

The second section of *Nomadic Women*, "Border-Crossing: Displacement and Creativity," consists of three pieces which cover the evolution of the style of the arts of Gertrude Stein, Janet Riesenfeld, and Leonora Carrington in relation to their experiences in exile. Anett K. Jessop's "Gertrude Stein Off Centre in Spain" is a most significant overview of the experimental literary techniques that this American writer developed in Spain between 1901 and 1916. Jessop comments upon Stein's purposes and achievements by framing the author's conflicting narratives and poems under what she names a reversal of the *picaresque*, a technique conceived in a land which offered a space free from the frenzy of the U.S.A. Through an analysis of her early novel *Q.E.D.* (1903), the central *Three Lives* (1909) and the collection of poems *Tender Buttons* (1914), Jessop pays attention to the presence of the archetype of the Spanish picaresque genre under the light of a reversal of heteronormative plots and courtly love. Concerning the modernist experimentation

central to Stein, Jessop insists on her remarkable use of blurred pronouns and homophonic puns in order to shake the long-stablished roles taking place in a relationship understood under binary opposites. This gives a lesbian twist to the chivalric tradition, which still ironically drinks from works like *Don Quixote* and *The Life of Lazarillo of Tormes.* Even of more interest are Jessop's the commentaries on the employment of a "wandering" language (119) to portray a continuous state of becoming. Stein's non-archetypal characters such as Adele in *Q.E.D.* and most notably Melanctha in *Three Lives* show the very real mistrust and misunderstanding of what partners really want. This essay denounces the recognition that Stern missed when she published her most representative pieces, which can be observed in John Reid's 1937 article in Hispania Magazine. Reid's influential text considered authors like Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos major voices that spelt out the matter of Spain in the North American sphere, reducing the figure of Stein to a side observant in a single footnote. In this regard, Jessop rightfully acknowledges that without Stein's experimentations in her exile, central modernist works developed in the following two decades –definitely Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and perhaps Stevie Smith's varied oeuvre– could never have been conceived.

This second section closes with Javier Martín Párraga's "From British Sorcery to *El Mundo Mágico de Los Mayas*: Leonora Carrington's Cultural Hybridity." The title of this piece does pretty much explain its content and purpose: to trace Carrington's literary and visual evolution across the different cultural areas she fostered herself in. In this essay, she is considered by Martín Párraga not only a worthy member of the surrealist movement and André Breton's sect, but also one of its most representative and a central one. As is the case with all the nomadic new women presented in the volume, and despite of her pioneering techniques, the importance of Carrington has been through the years minimized under the shade of Max Ernst (her partner for a time during her stay in France), André Breton and Salvador Dalí –like many female writers of her movement, she was patronizingly reduced to a "femme-enfant" (238). Martín Párraga illustrates her family background, particularly the importance of the Irish myths ever-present in her household and how she would develop a personal mythology by blending her Celtic influence with those archetypes she found wherever she travelled to. Moreover, the essay works as a delineation of her movements across United Kingdom, France, Spain and Mexico, with Martín Párraga insisting on the traumatic experience she underwent during her time in Madrid. Being raped by a group of requetés in Madrid after fleeing from the unstable conditions in Paris, she suffered from a breakdown and was taken to a mental asylum in Santander. After being released she went directly to the Mexican embassy, finally arriving to Mexico in 1942 after living eighteen months in New York. The place was for her as Wonderland for Alice (251), an environment in which she experienced an emotional and intellectual journey which led her to produce her most stylistically personal paintings and culminated with the production of her 1974 novel *The Hearing Trumpet*, to which Martín Párraga illustratively comments on as a way of closing the final pages of his contribution to *Nomadic New Women*.

The third and last section of the volume, "New Women, New Art Forms," compiles three essays which cover the visual works of photographer Kati Horna, actresses Lupe Vélez and Dolores del Río, and painter Maruja Mallo. The closing essay, Reneé M. Silverman's "A Double Exile," guides us across the influences and final experimenting creations of Galician painter Maruja Mallo. We are reminded that Mallo firstly presented her work in a 1928 solo exhibition lead by Revista de Occidente, founded by philosopher Ortega y Gasset. Silverman insists on how Mallo's work transcends the feminine, fitting into a new art and new production separated from the masculine objectivity of Ortega. Moreover, her potential "shortcomings of abstraction" (325) became acute after having to flee Spain as a consequence of war. She claimed that cubism is a subjective style for a minority, which is not employed merely to represent but to create a new reality in perspective. After her journey to South America, Mallo introduced certain motifs in her art, as can be seen in the series *Naturalezas Vivas* (*Live Nature*). She distanced herself from the multitudes of her early

works such as the surrealist painting *La Verbena* (1927), and focused on a detailed taxonomic function oozing, as Silvermans put it, sensuality, consciousness, and oceanic motifs. Lastly, Silverman considers the 1941-1951 series *Cabezas de Mujer (Heads of Women)*, with special focus on the solemn *Cabeza de Mujer Negra* (*Black Woman Head*) and the theriologic *El Ciervo Humano* (*The Human Deer*). Through these works, Mallo aims to portray the "polyethnic nature of South America," (337) guided by the perspective of her exile and a longing for a just and harmonious coexistence among humanity.

Nomadic New Women stands out for its ability to intertwine the development of diverse art forms with biographical and geopolitical contexts, resulting in a rich and insightful volume supported by meticulous research. Through a tapestry of vivid perspectives on literature and the visual arts, the collection compellingly explores how the trauma of deracination shaped and informed the creative output of women artists and intellectuals. In addition, while some essays offer accessible and comprehensive introductions to the lives and works of the figures they examine, others –such as those focusing on Marina Romero, María Zambrano, and Gertrude Stein– delve into more intricate theoretical frameworks, offering readings that will appeal particularly to the specialized public. This balance of accessible narrative and scholarly depth makes the volume a valuable resource not only for academics and researchers but also for general readers and students interested in the intersections of exile, identity, and artistic production. The contributors keenly deal with the fact that via uprooting, the deconstruction of gender roles, new identities and queer existence find their impression in a wide range of arts. Ultimately, *Nomadic New Women* stands as a testament, a fruitful dialogue which offers a nuanced and thought-provoking contribution to the fields of gender studies, exile literature, and transnational art history, ever resonating with today's fragile global situation.

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Review of Daniel Defoe's *Diario del año de la peste*, edited, translated, & annotated by Antonio Ballesteros González & Beatriz González Moreno (Madrid: Cátedra, Letras Universales, 2025, pp. 411 ISBN: 978-84-376-4910-8).

The recent edition of Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), published by Cátedra in its Letras Universales series, represents a significant contribution to eighteenth century literary studies and to the broader reflection on how literature engages with public health crises. Edited, translated and annotated by Antonio Ballesteros González and Beatriz González Moreno, the volume offers a rigorous Spanish translation and a critical framework that situates the work at the intersection of fiction, historical chronicle, and moral essay.

Defoe, best known for *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), remains a central figure in the English literary canon. *A Journal of the Plague Year*, published in 1722 but situated during the 1665 outbreak of bubonic plague in London, is one of Defoe's most complex and genre-defying works. Written as a fictional diary by a narrator identified only as H.F., the text blends personal testimony, social observation, and moral reflection, articulated in a prose style that oscillates between empirical precision and emotional intensity.

This edition stands out for its balance between philological rigor and accessible exposition. The extensive and well-documented introduction provides a panoramic view of both the historical context of the 1665 plague and the cultural moment in which the book was published, during the rise of journalism –Defoe himself excelled as a pioneer in this profession– and nonfiction prose in eighteenth-century England. The editors emphasize the text's generic ambiguity –variously read as novel, chronicle, pamphlet, or essay– and its resistance to conventional narrative classifications.

One of the present edition's most valuable contributions is its attention to the discursive complexity of the text. The narrator, H.F., is not a passive witness but an interpretative and moralizing subject. His account reflects tensions between faith and reason, divine providence and civil governance, individual experience and collective memory. Taking these aspects into account, Defoe's work may be read as a meditation of human fragility and the capacity of societies to organize themselves in the face of catastrophe.

The Spanish translation, undertaken by the editors themselves, is fluid and faithful to the original tone. Ballesteros and González adopt a sober register that avoids unnecessary archaisms while preserving the gravity and reflective quality of the prose. Translation choices are justified in the notes, which provide lexical clarifications, cultural references, and historical explanations without overwhelming the reader. This adequate balance between accessibility and scholarly depth is one of the edition's most recommendable achievements.

The critical apparatus is thorough and relevant. Footnotes explain specific terminology, religious references, and relevant aspects to understand the novel and its historical context, which allow readers to appreciate the text's intertextuality density and its place within a discursive tradition that merges empirical observation with moral interpretation.

The introduction of Ballesteros and González also includes a section on the critical reception of the work, from the eighteenth century to the present. It highlights the *Journal*'s influence on later literature, from nineteenth-century realism to contemporary pandemic narratives. Without resorting to anachronism, the editors suggest that Defoe's text offers valuable insight into how societies respond –culturally and ethically– to collective illness, a theme that has regained urgency in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From a publishing standpoint, the volume meets the high standards of the Letras Universales series. The typography is clear, the layout coherent, and the organization of content facilitates consultation. A selective bibliography guides readers toward essential scholarship on Defoe,

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the 1665 plague, and eighteenth-century English literature.

Overall, this edition of *A Journal of the Plague Year* is a major contribution to eighteenth-century studies. It not only recovers a foundational text of the English canon but also equips readers with the tools for a critical and contextualized reading. The work of Ballesteros and González belongs to a tradition of scholarly editions that combine philological precision with critical sensitivity, enabling contemporary readers to engage deeply with texts from the past.

The edition also holds considerable pedagogical value. Its clarity and documentary richness make it suitable for courses in English literature, cultural history, medical humanities, or narrative theory. The figure of H.F., with his blend of Enlightenment rationalism and religious anxiety, provides a compelling entry point for discussions of ideological tensions in the eighteenth century and of literary representation of trauma.

In conclusion, this edition of *A Journal of the Plague Year* is a reference work that enriches the Spanish-language scholarship on Defoe. Its combination of precise translation, contextual introduction, and rigorous annotation makes it an indispensable resource for scholars and students alike. At a time when plague literature has regained cultural relevance, this edition reminds us that past texts continue to speak powerfully to present concerns.

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