

# Rewriting the Other, Understanding the Self

Translation and Reception of African American Women's Literature  
in Spain

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TESI DOCTORAL UPF / 2022

DIRECTOR DE LA TESI

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*A mis tres chicas y mis dos chicos*



## Acknowledgements

While it is generally acknowledged that the process of writing a doctoral dissertation is a lonely task, the truth is that I have never, not once, felt alone in my endeavor during the past five years. To all the people that have walked this path alongside me, I would like to express my warmest thanks.

First and foremost, this project would have never been possible without the invaluable help and support of my thesis supervisor, Dr. Luis Pegenaute. I would like to thank him for his honest commitment to the project, his interest, care, patience and availability. I have especially come to value his conception of the thesis not as an end in itself, but as a didactic experience and a means to broaden the researcher's academic training.

To the staff members of the Pompeu Fabra University who have collaborated, either directly or indirectly, in the gestation of this work. To begin with, I want to thank my tutor, Dr. Elisenda Bernal, for her guidance and help through the five years of PhD Program—particularly in my beginnings, when everything was new, unknown and quite frightening. To Dr. Anna Espunya, head of the Translation and Language Sciences Academic Coordination Unit, for allowing me to develop my research within the framework of a pre-doctoral research contract, an experience that has become an invaluable asset for me, both personally and professionally.

I should also like to thank the Discourse and Translation Studies Research Group (GEDIT) for welcoming me into the group as a pre-doctoral research. Particularly, thanks to Montserrat González and Elisabeth Miche, the directors of the GEDIT, for giving me the chance of participating in the organization of different academic activities as well as attending thought-provoking seminars about parallel research areas.

Likewise, I am deeply grateful for having had the chance to participate in the i+D research project “Portal Digital de Historia de la Traducción en España” funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. I would specially like to thank Luis Pegenaute and Francisco Lafarga for giving me the opportunity of collaborating as a technical assistant in the construction of the *PHTE* website and contributing entries to the *Diccionario Histórico de la Traducción en España*.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Elke Brems for welcoming me as a visiting scholar at the Centre for Reception Studies at the KU Leuven during my three-month research stay in Brussels, Belgium. Having the chance of working at the CERES has been a tremendously valuable asset to my research. Likewise, the help and assistance of CERES members during this time was a major support.

I also need to acknowledge the work of Jordi Sensada and Gerard Pasqual, who have been an essential aid when developing the online database of translations. Indeed, AfroBib is currently operative thanks to their work as computer specialists.

I am also deeply grateful with the translators and scholars that have generously agreed to be interviewed within the framework of my research. Thanks to Carlos Mayor, María Enguix, Pepa Linares, Danele Sarriugarte, Justine Tally and Àngels Carabí for sharing with me the intricacies of their work. I would like to thank Mireia Sentís for our tremendously enriching conversation about the nature and aim of her work as chief editor of Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid, an ambitious and necessary project that has had a major impact on the circulation of translated African American literature in Spain. Likewise, special thanks are due to Dr. Carme Manuel for her generosity, kindness and willingness to meaningfully contribute to my research and to open the door for collaborative work, which I do hope will extend beyond this dissertation. To all of them, thank you for your work which is a source of inspiration and a gift at so many different levels.

Y, sobre todo, gracias a mis amigos y familia. A Gabriela, Cris, Ramon, Jorge, Marc, Pol y Loluca, por el cariño y el ánimo constante. A Polo, que me vigila desde la estrella. A los que todavía no sabéis muy bien qué es lo que estoy estudiando, por interesaros, por preguntar, por dejarme explicaros y por querer entender.

Gracias a mis padres, Amadeo y Mary Carmen por la confianza, el aliento y la ayuda incondicionales; por coger siempre el teléfono. Y a mis hermanas, Ana e Inés, mi mayor apoyo durante estos años. Todo lo que soy os lo debo a vosotros cuatro.

I gràcies al Jordi per la comprensió i la paciència, pel suport incondicional; per la fe en mi i per la seva ajuda en aquest projecte i en qualsevol altre, sempre.

A los cinco, por vuestro amor.







“Even when we feel we can’t change things, it’s important to have awareness of what has happened. If you are unaware of what has happened, it means you’re not alive in many respects. And to be unalive in many places within yourself means you are missing a lot of the experience of being on this planet. And this planet is not to be missed.”

(Walker 2013, 15)



## **Abstract**

This PhD thesis presents a descriptive approach to the translation and reception of African American women's literature in Spain. My research starts by examining the original conditions of production of this literature, paying special attention to its reception in the source context. Undertaking a systemic and diachronic approach, I trace the translation history of African American women's literature in Spain, seeking to uncover changing strategies in translation policies as well as shifts in interests in the target context. I also examine the topicality of this cohort of authors as frames of reference for Spanish critics and reviewers. These quantitative analyses are completed with the study of the reception of the source literature in the Spanish context, which is described by reconstructing the values that underlie judgements in different reception sources. Finally, this work addresses the empirical analysis of the textual material, focusing on the specific problem of the translation of Black English into Spanish. More precisely, I attend to the function of this stylistic feature in the target context and the consequent effects of translation choices on the reception of the literary texts.

## Resumen

Esta tesis presenta una aproximación descriptiva a la traducción y recepción en España de la literatura afroamericana escrita por mujeres. Mi investigación parte del estudio de las condiciones originales de producción de esta literatura, prestando especial atención a su recepción en el contexto de origen. Con un enfoque sistémico y diacrónico, rastreo la historia de la traducción de la literatura afroamericana femenina en España, tratando de identificar las estrategias en las políticas de traducción, así como los cambios de intereses en el contexto meta. También examino la prominencia de estas autoras como marcos de referencia para los críticos locales. Estos análisis cuantitativos se completan con el estudio de la recepción de la literatura Afroamericana escrita por mujeres en el contexto español, que se describe reconstruyendo los valores que subyacen a los juicios emitidos en diferentes fuentes de recepción. Por último, este trabajo aborda el análisis empírico del material textual, centrándose en el problema específico de la traducción del *black English* al español. En concreto, analizo la función de este rasgo estilístico en el contexto de destino y a los consiguientes efectos de las decisiones de traducción en la recepción de los textos literarios.

## Resum

Aquesta tesi presenta una aproximació descriptiva a la traducció i recepció a Espanya de la literatura afroamericana escrita per dones. La meua recerca parteix de l'estudi de les condicions originals de producció d'aquesta literatura, parant especial atenció a la seva recepció en el context d'origen. Amb un enfocament sistèmic i diacrònic, rastrejo la història de la traducció de la literatura afroamericana femenina a Espanya, tractant d'identificar les estratègies en les polítiques de traducció, així com els canvis d'interessos en el context meta. També examino la prominència d'aquestes autores com a marcs de referència per als crítics locals. Aquestes anàlisis quantitatives es completen amb l'estudi de la recepció de la literatura Afroamericana escrita per dones en el context espanyol, que es descriu reconstruint els valors que subjeuen als judicis emesos en diferents fonts de recepció. Finalment, aquest treball aborda l'anàlisi empírica del material textual, centrant-se en el problema específic de la traducció del *black English* a l'espanyol. En concret, analitzo la funció d'aquest tret estilístic en el context de destí i els consegüents efectes de les decisions de traducció en la recepció dels textos literaris.



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## **Abbreviations**

BAAM: Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid

BAM: Black Arts Movement

BE: Black English

BJC: Biblioteca Javier Coy d'Estudis Nord-Americans

DTS: Descriptive Translation Studies

MECD: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

SC: Source context

SL: Source language

ST: Source text

TC: Target context

TL: Target language

TS: Translation Studies

TT: Target text



## INTRODUCTION

As with any intellectual theory, translation theory has the potential to be used for good or ill, for oppression or liberation. Like translation itself, translation theory can be a two-edged sword. What is clear at present is that translation studies does not stand in a neutral space.

(Tymoczko 2006, 30)

Among the manifold approaches to translation that have been brought forward through the past decades, Rainer Schulte has highlighted the dialogical role of translation in the contemporary international literary framework: “At a time when the world suffers from the nervousness of fragmentation, the paradigm of translation offers an integrating model” (2001, 202). In the specific case of literary translation, Olive Classe (2000, 7) has drawn attention to the increase in the production and commercialization of translations during the second half of the twentieth century; an increase that is both the consequence and the cause of the rapid expansion of transnational cultural exchanges.

In relation to this, Enríquez Aranda (2007, 15) has also defended the need to approach the study of translation from the perspective provided by the knowledge of its reception in a given context. We will thereby conceive of translation as a form of rewriting involving not only the text *per se*, but also the paratextual apparatus that it generates in the target context (hereafter TC), which nourishes dialogue between cultures and languages.

However, the particular case of African American women’s literature further challenges general approaches to the study of literary translation and reception, as the historical, cultural and political load of the textual material prompt any translation analyst to consider in their study the context surrounding the source text (hereafter ST) before looking at its translation. Following this line of thought, we may assume that it is the translation analyst’s duty to locate the ST and its author as well as the target text (hereafter TT) and its translator in their respective conditions of production and existence; that is, in their particular cultural and literary systems. Only by gaining knowledge of the structure and dynamics of both poles will we be able to examine and

describe the circulation of meaning—rarely lineal or unambiguous—across cultures and languages.

In this context, this project aims to make a modest contribution to the field of literary translation, focusing on the descriptive study of the translation and reception of a very specific type of literature. In this respect, although it is true that the bulk of scholarly research published to date on African American women's literature has been increasing dramatically (especially since the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), there is currently a gap in the study of its translation and reception in Spain. Hence the necessity and relevance of this study, in the hope that my work may be useful not only to fill the gap that currently exists on the subject but also to open up future avenues of research into related fields of study.

The motivation for this dissertation traces back to a personal literary interest that has matured within me through the last ten years. Indeed, it was during my years as an undergraduate student that I developed a special interest in North American Literature, which has now become one of my main areas of research. Already in my Bachelor's thesis (2015) I began to study Toni Morrison's work and a year later, I devoted my Master's thesis (2016) to examining the translation and reception of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in Spain. As a matter of fact, it was by approaching the subject of African American women's literature from the perspective of its translation and reception in our local context that I identified a significant gap in this area of research, as no similar undertakings had hitherto been developed. As I have already noted at the beginning of this introductory chapter, this fact contrasts with the international recognition, prestige and acclaim that a good number of black women authors have earned during the past fifty years. In this light, I would like to see my work not only as a contribution to research on Descriptive Translation and Reception Studies in Spain but also as a first step in the process of reclaiming the space that this literature (and consequently, its study) undoubtedly deserves in our local cultural and literary context.

In turn, widening the scope of my Master's thesis from the study of the translation and reception of two authors like Morrison and Walker (whose work has earned both national and international acclaim) to considering other voices within the landscape of African American women's literature has also unveiled the scarce representation of the diversity within this group and therefore, the need to look beyond the production of the



most visible heads as representative of the whole tradition. Within this framework, my work is also a call not only to diversify the literature and art we consume, but also to acknowledge and duly represent this diversity in translation. To further support this point, I will refer to Barbara Christian's work, who points out the relevance of the study of black women's literature and problematizes traditional conceptions of what is considered "universal":

It is precisely because this literature reveals a basic truth of our society, of all societies, that it is central. In every society where there is the denigrated *Other*, whether that is designated by sex, race, class or ethnic background, the *Other* struggles to declare the truth and therefore create the truth in forms that exist for her or him. The creation of that truth also changes the perception of all those who believe they are the norm. (1980, 160)

## 1. Object of Study

This project aims to analyze the presence in Spain of African American literature written by women on the basis of their translations and the critical response they have generated. This topic is of particular interest for contemporary reception studies, given that the volume of literary production by African American women authors who belong to and write about this group has considerably increased in recent decades. In Spain, the translations of writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Terry McMillan, Angela Davis or bell hooks, among many others, have multiplied in recent years given that, despite the distance that separates their background from the Spanish reading public, the literary quality of their works has secured them a place in the canons of Western literature.

However, when confronted with the task of describing the object of study of this dissertation a basic fundamental question arises: what is considered African American women's literature?; and by extension, who is considered an African American woman writer? While scholars such as Lécivain (2015, 237) or Assis Rosa, (2012, 212) have problematized the endeavor of categorization by bringing into light factors such as the growing multialignment of writers in more than one literary system and the partiality

and selectiveness of criteria implied in binary choices of inclusion/exclusion, the need to define and delimit what will hereby be treated as African American women's literature is manifest. Taking these inevitable pitfalls into consideration, together with the challenge posed by the constructed character of categories such as "African American" or "woman", this dissertation studies works by US-born or nationalized women writers of African descent that have been translated into Spanish as well as other co-official languages and published in Spain. In this respect, the writers considered in my study have been included in anthologies and/or literary histories of African American literature, which allows us to assume their identification as part of this collective. Likewise, the category of "woman" is self-imposed; that is, the authors studied in this dissertation identify with this gender and perform and write from the perspective it entails. Actually, as will be discussed through this work, the authors' alignment with the categories of African American and woman has had a fundamental impact in their literary production as well as in their reception in the TC.

Considering this essential definition, the object of study of my thesis is the socio-historical, socio-cultural, paratextual and textual reality of a corpus of literary works written by African American women that has been translated into peninsular languages and published in Spain. These translations were published between 1968—first translation of a text by an African American woman published in the TC—and 2020 in Spanish, Catalan, Galician and Basque. However, from the point of view of the study of their reception, it is also necessary to consider non-translations (i.e., works that have not been published or translated in the TC). Furthermore, the analysis of the reception of authors such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison calls for a broadening of the object of study of the thesis to include other forms of rewriting, such as film adaptation.

Likewise, when approaching the texts from an intrinsic point of view, a defining feature of the textual material under examination is the literary use of Black English (hereafter BE). This dialectal variety, considered the most complex American sociolect (Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé 1990, 97), is characterized as a sign of identity of the black community in the United States. However, the formal features of this dialect, as well as its cultural, social and political load, make it very difficult to translate it into peninsular languages. Within this framework, it is of particular interest for my object of study to include an analysis of the possibilities offered by the Spanish language to transfer the

cultural and expressive charge of this sociolect within the framework of black women's literature. Indeed, this internal approach to the texts is hereby conceived of as fundamental to obtain a complete understanding of the function and place of the studied works in the target system. In this case, the translational analysis will revolve around two key works in the panorama of African American literature translated into Spanish, both because of the international prestige of their authors and because of the literary quality of the texts: *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, translated by Iris Menéndez Sallés in 1988, and *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, translated by Ana M<sup>a</sup> de la Fuente Rodríguez in 1984.

## **2. State of the Art**

As I have already anticipated, the inception of this dissertation stems from the identification of a gap in the history of Translation and Reception Studies in Spain. In the United States, since the end of the nineteenth century, the voice and the literary works written by black women authors began to gain ground and recognition. Indeed, the presence of African American women writers would become firmly established in the country's literary and socio-political landscape through the twentieth century, seeking to condemn "the practice of measuring the achievements and progress of black men as representative of the whole race" (Carby 1987, 98). In this regard, a passage from Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South* summarizes and represents the aspirations of this new collective voice: "Only when the Black Woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me'" (1892, 228). In the second half of the twentieth century, Alice Walker coined the term *womanism*, which would lead to the development of a social theory rooted in racial and gender oppression that would reveal the limitations of the second feminist wave in the United States. Today, the contribution of African American women to the literary scene in the United States is widely recognized and there are countless research works and publications of a diverse nature that deal both with this literary tradition as well as with the literary, aesthetic and historical testimonies of the authors that belong to it.

Since the late twentieth century, European countries such as Belgium, Germany and, most prominently, France have produced several attempts at documenting the reception of African American culture and literature at a national level. Indeed, undertakings such as those by Michel Fabre (1995), Heike Raphael-Hernandez (2004), Bénédicte Ledent (2009) and Mischa Honeck et al. (2013) evidence the growing interest of European scholarship in this field of study. However, in Spain, the volume of academic production on this subject matter published to date is considerably reduced. In her seminal volume *En el pico del águila* (1998), Mireia Sentís laments the country's deliberate lack of interest in what she regards as North America's most genuine culture, especially considering the fact that the globalized (literary) market systematically directs its focus towards the United States:

¿Quién conoce realmente la historia, la literatura o el pensamiento afroamericanos? Para que uno de sus autores sea traducido a nuestro idioma, debe alcanzar en su país una difusión muy superior a la media de los escritores normalmente traducidos. Ello provoca que, en terrenos como el del ensayo, apenas existan un par de recopilaciones de textos pertenecientes a la época de la lucha por los derechos civiles, coincidente con el surgimiento del nacionalismo, el orgullo negro y el Black Power. Llevamos, pues, unos cuarenta años de retraso aproximadamente respecto a la realidad cultural afroamericana, o lo que es lo mismo, respecto a la realidad cultural norteamericana. (1998, 7-8)<sup>1 2</sup>

Following this line of argument is Arjun Appadurai's problematization of the contemporary dynamics between homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies in the modern era. He, in turn, identifies homogenization with Americanization and capitalism (1996, 32).

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<sup>1</sup> "Who does really know African American history, literature or thought? In order for one of its authors to be translated into our language, he or she must reach a level of dissemination in his or her country much higher than the average for normally translated writers. This means that, regarding genres such as the essay, there are hardly any collections of texts from the time of the Civil Rights struggle, which coincided with the rise of nationalism, black pride and the Black Power. We are, therefore, some forty years behind the African American cultural reality, or what is the same, the North American cultural reality."

<sup>2</sup> English translations have been provided for quotes in foreign languages. For short quotations (ten words or less), the English translation is followed by the original between square brackets; translations for longer quotations have been added in footnotes. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

As far as literature is concerned, at the round table of the XXVI AEDEAN Congress (2003), Mar Gallego Durán briefly reviewed the translation history of African American literature in Spain, criticizing its absence from anthologies of American literature published during the first decades of the twentieth century. In fact, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the first doctoral theses on African American literature began to be published in the country.

Likewise, even if translations proliferated during the second half of the twentieth century and, most prominently, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, attempts at studying its reception in the country have been scarce. Among such endeavors, we could highlight Robert F. Reid Pharr's *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-Humanist Critique* (2016) and the recently published volume *Black USA and Spain: Shared Memories in the 20th Century* (2020), edited by Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego. While both works study transnational exchanges in different cultural manifestations ranging from artworks to music, travelogues and performances, among others, literary products are of special importance in both cases. In the case of Reid-Pharr, his volume approaches the study of decades of dialogue between black America and Spain from the perspective of post humanist critique, paying special attention to Langston Hughes's, Chester Himes's and Richard Wright's relationship with the target country. Likewise, the works compiled by Cornejo-Parriego focus on cultural exchanges produced during the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age, the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship.

Spanish editors, translators and critics such as Carme Manuel Cuenca and Mireia Sentís have problematized the traditional preference of Spanish publishing houses for classics of universal literature. This trend has inevitably hampered the reception of black women writers who have either not been translated because they are not considered canonical or were not adequately disseminated at a certain point in the past due to sociopolitical constraints and have never been recovered. As a response to this phenomenon, the Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid (BAAM) was created in 2011. Its main objective is to provide a panoramic view of black history in the United States by translating unpublished works in the TC in order to enrich the current scarce supply (Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid 2018, n. p.).

In addition, intermedial adaptations of novels written by African American women have emerged since the 1980s. Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple* [*El color púrpura*] (1985), based on Alice Walker's homonymous novel, was a box office success and it attracted much attention in the international press. Other adaptations such as *Beloved* (1998), *Waiting to Exhale* [*Esperando un respiro*] (1995) or *Precious* (2009) also enhanced the circulation of African American women's literature in Spain. Likewise, the international prestige that authors such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Angela Davis or Maya Angelou have acquired has become a further determining factor in their canonization and consequent dissemination in the target country. In this regard, Marta Puxan-Oliva highlights "the great cultural and political interest that African American literature has recently aroused in Spain", arguing that it has contributed to the search for a common collective identity that can overcome discrimination, which has always been one of the main goals of this literary tradition (2016, 13). Similarly, while discussing the evolution of black studies in Spain, Gallego Durán draws attention to gender-oriented approaches such as black feminism, black masculinity studies and intersectionality theories as perspectives that have profoundly marked contemporary scholarship in the field (2016, 154).

As far as the specific study of the translation and reception of African American women's literature in Spain is concerned, the reality is that no extensive and complete research works on the subject have been published to date. We can find, however, some antecedents in the form of academic papers of a diverse nature that have dealt with very specific topics, among which we may highlight Justine Tally's "White over Black: Problems in the Translation of *The Color Purple*" (1989), where she analyzes the problems of translating cultural and dialectal markers in Walker's novel, as well as Marta Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé's 1990 paper, which became one of the first instances of academic work on the translation of BE into Spanish. However, in recent years, several works containing case studies on the translation of BE have been published. We can cite some examples, such as "*The Help*: Analysis of Black English Translation and Cultural Referents" (Dolgonos 2016), "The Translation of Vernacular *Black English* in Chester Himes' Novel *If He Screams, Let Him Go*" (Perez 2016) and "La traducción del dialecto: análisis descriptivo del dialecto geográfico y social en un corpus de novelas en lengua inglesa y su traducción al español" (Tello Fons 2011). Likewise, the research that is being conducted by Miguel Sanz Jiménez is of special interest, as he has recently

published several studies on the translation of black dialect into Spanish. Among these, we may highlight his doctoral dissertation (2020a), where he analyzes the translation of dialect in a corpus of ten neo-slave narratives, as well as the papers “Translating African-American Neo-Slave Narratives: Black English in *The Good Lord Bird* and *The Underground Railroad*” (2020b), “Margaret Walker’s *Jubileo*” (2021) and “Linguistic Varieties in *Homegoing*: Translating the Other’s Voice into Spanish” (2022).

Thus, although the volume of studies on the translation and reception of African American literature seems to be gradually increasing, at present there is still a large gap in terms of reference works on this subject. In this context, the present dissertation arises from the need to make a contribution to this field and, in so doing, to foreground the interest of this research area as well as the need to carry out further research on related topics.

### **3. Research Objectives and Limits**

At a disciplinary level, the main objective of this dissertation is to contribute to the development of the History of Translation in Spain, thereby conceiving of translation as a cultural product and practice. This approach allows for the analysis of the texts, the agents and the institutions under examination from a diachronic and dialogical perspective, thus participating in the decentralization of the literary canon. Within the framework of Comparative Literature, I will hereby conceive of translation as a specific phenomenon within the study of the reception of a foreign literature in a given TC. In doing so, I will identify and examine specific problems derived from intertextual, transtextual and paratextual relations, as well as a particular case of (un)translatability: the translation of dialect.

This disciplinary objective materializes in a more concrete aim: to carry out a descriptive study on the translation and reception in Spain of pieces of literature written by African American women. Considering the aforementioned lack of reference works and studies on this subject, it seems both necessary and urgent to advance some basic lines of research which may, in turn, open the door to future scholarly work around this field of study.

As should be expected, several specific objectives derive from this general aim. Regarding the conditions of production of this literature in the source context (hereafter SC), I set out to examine the development of black American women's literature over its nearly three hundred-year history. Even if it is not the goal of this work to comparatively study the reception of literary works in the source and the TC—as the social, geographical and chronological differences between both nations hardly allow for such an endeavor—I intend to integrate the conditions of production of the STs as a necessary first step in my analysis, following Gideon Toury's argument that the fact that the descriptive paradigm privileges “orientedness” to the TC, both the ST as well as transfer operations should also be part of the translation scholar's study (1995, 36). In turn, the study of the source literature in its context of production will allow me to study the authors' conception of and relationship with language so as to make connections with its representation in translation and its reception in the TC.

As for the translation and reception of African American women's literature in the local context, to begin with, one of the purposes of this project is to come up with a history of the translations of African American women's literature in Spain. In order to do so, I set out to draw a comprehensive editorial map that includes all the texts written by African American women that have been translated and published in Spain, from the first publication in 1968 to 2020. This will allow me to uncover changing strategies in translation policies as well as shifts in interests in the local literary market.

I also intend to develop a quantitative study that will examine the topicality of the authors and works that circulate in the TC as frames of reference for Spanish critics and reviewers. This task will be carried out by applying Rosengren's “mentions technique”, which consists on computing the mentions of a given writer or work in a set of reception materials during a certain time period so as to produce an overall picture of the main features of development of the reception of such author or work in the TC.

Parallel to the aforementioned quantitative analysis, this project also sets out to produce a descriptive diachronic study of the reception of African American women's literature in the local context. To do so, I will pay attention to the paratextual apparatus of the translated works as well as the metatexts appearing in a wide range of reception sources, namely press media, cultural and literary magazines, academic publications and online literary blogs and websites. Likewise, this study will also consider the impact of other



forms of rewriting such as film adaptations as well as the influence of other extratextual phenomena such as the award of literary prizes on the circulation of the TTs. This endeavor will provide detailed information about the place and function of the translated texts in the target literary system.

Finally, I intend to integrate the contextual description of translations with a textual approach to a selection of the texts under examination by studying a specific translation problem: the translation of BE. To do so, I will carry out a descriptive-comparative analysis of two STs and their respective translations into peninsular Spanish. The goal of this analysis is to extract information regarding the techniques used to deal with the translation of BE, a social dialect bound to a political and cultural context distant from the receiving system. More precisely, I will examine how a concrete feature of the STs is translated into a target language (hereafter TL), paying special attention to its function in the new context and the repercussion of translation choices in the reception of literary texts in the target culture. In turn, the outcomes of the textual analysis framed within the parameters of this dissertation will bring to the fore the benefits of combining an external and internal approach to the text in this area of study.

By setting out these initial objectives we may assume that situating the translated texts and the agents involved in their circulation in the receiving literary context will allow us to gain knowledge of the position occupied by this literature in relation to local models, as well as to ascertain whether the cultural, political and linguistic project of the source body of works can be represented through translation when coming into contact with other literary contexts.

#### **4. Previous Ideas and Hypothesis**

The point of departure of this dissertation is the embrace of a multidisciplinary and dialogical approach to the study of translation which materializes in the study of the manifold axes that play a part in the representation of literary, linguistic, cultural and political identity. Likewise, my work draws on the assumption that African American women's literature constitutes a self-governing unit of analysis when mapping the reception of US literature in Spain, and that its study is thus necessary and indispensable

to contemporary Translation and Reception Studies. Within this framework, before embarking on the formulation of a concrete hypothesis about my research topic, a number of previous ideas and assumptions shall be considered, as they will determine, to a large extent, my initial hypothesis.

In this context, the historical and sociocultural distance separating the source from the TCs ought not be overlooked. Even if globalization and the spread of technology and the internet has facilitated and intensified the flow of information and transnational exchanges, the endeavor of presenting and representing identities across cultures and languages still poses an insurmountable—and yet necessary—challenge. Following this line of thought, authors such as Justine Tally have brought to the fore the complexity confronted by the translator of black feminist literature: “translating across cultures is very difficult and especially so for those who face the challenge of a Black, feminist author. We have to compensate on various levels for our lack of firsthand experience with that culture as Black women” (1989, 198).

In relation to this, I shall also point out the fact that while the study of African American women’s literature by no means equates the study of black feminist literature, both literary traditions have experienced parallel developments. Specially since third-wave feminisms started to gain momentum in the American and international contexts during the early 1990s, the intersections between the two areas of study progressively became manifest. Thus, my study must trace the progress and influence of feminist theory on the STs—which are a natural product of their historical and cultural milieu—and their reception in the TC.

As far as the translation of the BE is concerned, given the lack of reference works establishing clear parameters or advocating a specific translation methodology, we may expect that the solutions provided over time to this translation problem will be diverse and partial in nature. Likewise, translators’ choices will reveal ideological implications regarding the representation of difference and otherness through processes of rewriting, as well as the role of the resulting textual products in the cultural construction of foreign identities in the local context. In this respect, I draw from the premise that the proposals hereby examined are useful in a conjunctural sense but never definitive, provided that translation is always a product of its time and—fortunately or not—there is no chance of foreseeing what, if any, new strategies will be devised within the discipline in order to

refine the ways in which translation may mediate between societies and, in doing so, the ways in which it may also improve the quality of our lives.

Drawing from a comparative and relational analysis of the selected materials and their conditions of production and reception, the initial hypothesis of my research is the existence of two types of rewriting of African American women's literature: one that seeks to accommodate the foreign text to target language and cultural norms and one that understands rewriting as a form of resistance to vernacular values and, in doing so, it dis-covers the representation of otherness in translation. Thereby, we may assume that this foremost differentiation will affect the decisions taken during the translation process as well as the reception of the source literature in the local context.

## **5. Thesis Structure**

Seeking to achieve the objectives described earlier in this chapter, this dissertation was divided in four main blocks or parts. While the first part tackles our theoretical and methodological framework, parts II, III and IV comprise the analysis our object of study, that is, the production, translation and reception of African American women's literature. Finally, this work closes with some final conclusions on the results of my analysis, the discussion of possible future lines of research within this area of study and the assessment of the outcomes and contributions of this dissertation to the fields of Literary Translation and Reception Studies. The structure of the different parts and chapters that make up this dissertation has been devised with the aim of facilitating reading and providing a logical vertebration to the analysis of our object of study.

Thus, Part I presents the theoretical contributions that will allow me to study the circulation of meaning between the conditions of production and reception of a literary work. The theoretical framework that guides this research is contemporary Translation Studies (hereafter TS) in their descriptive dimension. Within this general frame of reference, I will make use of an interdisciplinary approach that allows me to conceptualize the place and the function of translated literature in the target culture.

Following a deductive approach, the first chapter of Part I starts discussing general considerations on TS as well as it considers the main developments in the discipline

which have taken place since the second half of the twentieth century up to present day. Next, I will move on to discuss key approaches to the study of literary reception and translation, particularly focusing on the contributions of the descriptive paradigm and polysystem theory. This chapter also pays attention to previous work on the relationship between translation and ideology, drawing from the standpoint that the construction of any reality through discourse is an ideological process. In this context, the insights advanced by the cultural and feminist turns in TS will be of special interest for the study at hand.

Within this general framework, Chapter 2 addresses the theoretical foundations of a specific translation problem that is intrinsically related to our object of study. Firstly, I will study different definitions and characterizations of linguistic variation in general, and Black English in particular, that have been brought forward by scholars from different fields of study, such as linguistics, sociolinguistics or TS. Secondly, this chapter will also review the most relevant approaches to the translation of literary dialect as well as models of analysis of this practice. To do so, I will take as a point of departure Miguel Sáenz's contention that "Translating dialect is not a problem without solution, but something worse: a problem with many solutions" (2000, n. p.).

The first part closes with Chapter 3, which describes the methodological approaches from which my study draws. In this case, studying translation as a form of reception requires a methodology of an interdisciplinary nature that allows for an integration of the contextual study of our selected body of works and the textual analysis of a selection of translations. Finally, this chapter also tackles the justification of the corpus of authors and texts that are considered in my study.

Part II is devoted to the study of the conditions of production and reception of African American women's literature in the United States. Thus, while this section aims at providing a general overview of the development of this literary tradition, special attention will be devoted to the study of the position occupied by the STs in their context of production.

Following basic chronological criteria, the first chapter of Part I will study the beginnings of the literary tradition of black women writers in the United States, which, as already noted, is marked by the trauma of the experience of slavery in the United

States and the efforts to promote emancipation that would lead the country into Civil War. Chapter 2 deals with the post-Civil War period, in which the African American population faced a time of special instability and uncertainty that coincided with the Reconstruction (1868-1877). After a considerably bleak period for the object of study at hand, the third chapter is devoted to the study of the cultural outburst that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, generally known as the Harlem Renaissance. We will devote the fourth chapter to exploring Civil Rights literature and the Black Arts Movement, which involved a reconceptualization of blackness that would have a significant impact on the black woman's literary renaissance of the 1970s. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on contemporary black women writers and the literary developments that have taken place during the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Part III is the most extensive part of this dissertation. It is devoted to the study of the translation and reception of African American women's literature in Spain between 1958 and 2020, a research area that remains unexplored to date. The chapters conforming this part have been arranged according to the three main elements of analysis that inform our methodological model. Thus, Chapter 1 traces the translation history of African American women's literature in Spain, seeking to uncover changing strategies in translation policies as well as shifts in interests in the TC. In order to do so, I will conduct a quantitative and qualitative study of the texts composing AfroBib, a bibliographical tool that compiles exhaustive data about translations of African American women authors published in Spain. This study will provide a preliminary overview of the position where these works stand within the Spanish publishing market.

The second chapter of Part III complements the qualitative study of reception data with an examination of the topicality of the authors and works collected in AfroBib as frames of reference for Spanish critics and reviewers. This task will be carried out by applying Rosengren's "mentions technique", which consists on computing the mentions of a given writer or work in a set of reception materials so as to characterize important aspects of the literary frame of reference used by reviewers during a certain time period.

The third and closing chapter of Part III studies the reception of the source literature in the Spanish context, which will be described by reconstructing the values that underlie judgements in different sources of reception of the TTs and authors. The information disclosed in Chapter 3 will be presented chronologically; this perspective will grant a

better understanding of the evolution in the interests and trends in the TC as well as it will allow for a comparative examination of the reception of certain authors or works in relation to the production of translations in a given time period. Thus, the materials considered for our study of reception include press reviews and articles, reviews published in literary or cultural magazines, different works of a scholarly nature as well as content published in literary blogs and online websites.

Part IV addresses the descriptive empirical analysis of a selection of two STs and their translations into peninsular Spanish. More precisely, the selected texts are Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The goal of this translational study is to extract information regarding the techniques used to deal with the translation of BE, a social dialect bound to a political and cultural context distant from the receiving system. More precisely, we will examine how a concrete stylistic feature of the ST is translated in a TL, paying special attention to its function in the new context and the consequent effects of translation choices on the reception of the literary texts.

Part IV includes an initial chapter that offers an overview of the literary use of BE in North American Fiction, supplying prototypical examples and models of the use of dialect in literary works and referring to the reactions that these texts have generated. Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of the methodology that will be applied to the study of the selected works, which draws from the proposal brought forward by Hatim and Mason as well as Boase-Beier's stylistic approach to translation. The third chapter of Part IV is devoted to contextualizing the STs as well as their original conditions of production. Likewise, this chapter also characterizes the language deployed in Morrison and Walker's narratives as a necessary initial step of the translational analysis. Finally, Chapter 4 undertakes a descriptive-comparative analysis of selected excerpts of the English and Spanish versions of both novels with the aim of examining the possibilities offered by the Spanish language to render the sociocultural implications of the dialectal variant in the TC. While the structure of the fourth chapter follows the presentation and analysis of each selected excerpt, our study will consider both micro and macro linguistic aspects of the source and TTs, paying especial attention to the communicative, pragmatic and semiotic dimensions of context.

Finally, the conclusions comprise the fifth and last part of this dissertation. Through this section, I will provide a general review of my research and discuss its specific and general outcomes. The conclusions also pay attention to the contributions that this work may make to contemporary Translation and Reception Studies as well as to this particular research area. Last but not least, I will also point to future lines of research and possible extensions of this study, which, as has already been pointed out, aims at drawing attention to the interest and possibilities of this field.





## **PART I**

### **THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**



# 1. TRANSLATION STUDIES AND TRANSLATED LITERATURE

The main aim of this section is to provide an overview of scholarly contributions to the field of Translation and Reception Studies which will serve as the basis for my dissertation. Following a deductive approach, the first chapter starts discussing general considerations on TS as well as it considers the main developments in the discipline which have taken place since the second half of the twentieth century up to present day. Next, I move on to discuss key approaches to the study of literary reception and translation, particularly focusing on the contributions of the descriptive paradigm as well as the cultural and feminist turns in TS. Chapter 2 addresses the specific translation problem of linguistic variation; more precisely, I pay attention to the literary use and translation of Black English into peninsular Spanish.

In vastly general terms, translation can be defined as the transfer to a target receiver of a text originally produced in a different linguistic, literary and social context. Ever since the late 1970s, TS experienced a progressive abandonment of linguistic approaches focused on the notion of equivalence and shifted attention towards the study of the socio-cultural factors that condition the translator's work and the mechanisms of reception of the translated text within the target environment:

Equivalence, the central notion in linguistic approaches, goes from being considered at a microtextual level (word, sentence) to a macrotextual level (text), as well as the supratextual level (context), based on the belief that languages are not what we translate during the translation process (they in themselves are not translatable) but texts (specific updates of uses of language in specific cases), which are an integral part of the world around us, as they are framed in a particular extra-linguistic situation and are marked by a specific socio-cultural context. (Pegenaute Rodríguez 2014, n. p.)

A clear proponent of this new trend was James S. Holmes, who initiated a series of contacts with Czech structuralists who shared a common view of translation as a fundamental part of literary history. Holmes also established connections with researchers from Tel Aviv University (such as Itamar Even-Zohar or Gideon Toury,

among others) and other scholars from Belgium and Holland (José Lambert, André Lefevere, etc.), managing to establish a productive link between the two groups. According to Theo Hermans (1985, 10-11), this group of researchers shared

[...] an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic; an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of texts processing, and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures.

Within this context, three conferences were held in Leuven, Tel Aviv and Antwerp, the proceedings of which contributed to the cohesion of the group: *Literature and Translation. New Perspectives in Literary Studies* (1978); *Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations* (1981) and *The Art and Science of Translation* (1984). In addition to these, the most important publications at the time include Holmes's collection of papers *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies* (1988); *Papers in Historical Poetics*, by Even-Zohar (1978), where he gives shape to polysystem theory; *In Search of Theory of Translation* by Toury (1980), a statement about the principles of the descriptive paradigm; *Translation Studies* by Susan Bassnett (1980), where she sets out the most general principles of the history of thought on translation; as well as *The Manipulation of Literature*, edited by Hermans (1985).

After setting up the foundations of what Edwin Gentzler (2001, 1) has described as “contemporary translation theories”, shifting viewpoints were prompted by several “turns” in the discipline. To begin with, the cultural turn of the 1990s, formally advanced by Bassnett and Lefevere in *Translation, History and Culture* (1990), advocated the need to redirect attention to the cultural context where translations are inserted. Likewise, within the context of the manifold “post-” theories that had emerged during the decade of 1970 (e.g. post-colonialism, post-modernism, post-structuralism) and the aforementioned renewed interest in Cultural Studies, a multidisciplinary encounter between TS and fields such as Gender Studies or Postcolonial Studies emerged. To Pegenaute Rodríguez (2014, n. p.), these intersections are clearly politicized in their concern with ethics and identity and their consideration of the history of translation as a “fertile ground for conflict”. Mary Snell-Hornby (2006, 128) has also pointed to a “globalization turn”, which reexamines the role of translation in the light of

the increasing dominance of the English language and the hybridity of supranational cultures.

Mindful of these developments, Snell-Hornby (1988) has also emphasized the importance of studying translation as the interaction of several disciplines without necessarily implying a relationship of dependence. In this sense, the author rejects the traditional approach to the study of language and translation which entailed isolating phenomena to be thoroughly examined. In opposition, she stresses that TS are primarily concerned with a network of relationships in which the importance of individual elements is determined by their relevance in the broader context of the actual text, the situation and the culture.

## **1.1. Literary Reception, Translation Studies and Comparative Literature**

Comparative Literature is defined as an empirical discipline within literary studies that observes the literary text from a comparative perspective. To Claudio Guillén, Comparative Literature deals with “the systematic study of supranational systems. [...] And I say supranational, rather than international, to emphasize that the starting point is not national literatures, nor the interrelationships that existed between them” (1985, 14).<sup>3</sup> César Domínguez, Haun Saussy and Darío Villanueva (2014, xv) share Guillén’s view of Comparative Literature as the only discipline within literary studies that that acknowledges literature without borders—world literature, in a sense—as its object of research, and view the comparatist’s task as a project that starts by necessarily identifying and delimiting his/her object of study.

However, the confrontation between the historical approach (focused on causal relations) and the theoretical approach (centered in convergent relations between literatures) to Comparative Literature hardened the task of delimiting a clear object of study and a methodological proposal for the discipline (Enríquez Aranda 2010, n. p.). In

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<sup>3</sup> “el estudio de sistemas supranacionales. [...] Y digo supranacional, mejor que internacional, para subrayar que el punto de arranque no lo constituyen las literaturas nacionales, ni las interrelacionales que hubo entre ellas.”

relation to this, in 1958, René Wellek examined the state of the discipline and discussed its critical situation in his paper “The Crisis of Comparative Literature”. Reflections around the nature of this crisis, which saturated studies about the discipline during the second half of the twentieth century, prompted the search for a new field of study, which, in turn, related Comparative Literature to very specific theoretical conceptions and research lines that have developed over the years. Within this framework, during the 1970s, coinciding with the emergence of contemporary translation theories, the relationship between Comparative Literature and translation started to acquire new dimensions. Comparative Literature, thus, aligned with the descriptive approach to translation, setting out to study the role played by translation in the evolution of the different literary systems. According to Pegenaute Rodríguez (2014, n. p.):

Instead of questioning the possible (un)translatability or postulating beforehand what is (or is not) a translation, it is previous translations and how they are integrated in the reception culture what is now under study. Instead of emphasizing the cross-lingual relations, the focus is on the intertextual ones, placing the text within the norm framework of the receiving community, studying the relationship between literature and other forms of social manifestation.

Within this reorientation, the discipline tackled research questions such as: what are the modes of translation specific to each era and culture; why are certain models imported instead of others; what is the reception of the different translated works with respect to their originals; in what way can translation be used as an ideological weapon; what is its capacity to subvert, renew or consolidate a certain poetics; what is the relationship that translation maintains with other types of rewriting such as anthologization, literary criticism, etc. (Pegenaute Rodríguez 2014, n. p.)

In this context, translation went from being a necessary tool used by comparatists who could not read the language of the STs to a key element in the history of contacts between literatures from a diachronic and supranational perspective. In their introduction to *Translation, History and Culture*, Bassnett and Lefevere advocate the abandonment of such traditional and limited approach to translation:

Translation, the study of translation, has been relegated to a small corner within the wider field of the amorphous quasi-discipline known as Comparative Literature. But with the development of Translation Studies as a discipline in its own right, with a methodology that draws on comparatistics and cultural history, the time has come to think again about that marginalization. Translation has been a major shaping force in the development of world culture, and no study of Comparative Literature can take place without regard to translation. (1990, 12)

Actually, Bassnett went on to develop this premise in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993), where she compared the evolution of the relationship between TS and Comparative Literature to that of Semiotics and Linguistics (where the former had traditionally been regarded as a subcategory of linguistics, even if it was later evidenced that the reverse was the case). In this case, Bassnett argued that TS was gaining ground as a discipline with solid theoretical and descriptive work as well as a rigorous methodology and thus posited that Comparative Literature should be understood as a subdiscipline within TS. However, Bassnett herself later acknowledged that her intention had been provocative, motivated by her will to assert the expansion of TS as a new and solid discipline and her intention to put an end to the “long, unresolved debate” about the disciplinary status of Comparative Literature (2006, 5).

Beyond this ambiguity, what is most interesting for our study is the existence of a consolidated link between Comparative Literature and translation, which undoubtedly constitutes a fundamental part of the discipline’s very essence. In this regard, María Mercedes Enríquez Aranda highlights several axes of union between the two fields, such as the need for translation as a tool for the comparative study of national literatures or the fact that, drawing from a common ground, Comparative Literature and TS share many of their concerns, as well as the working methodology (2005, 75-76).

As Darío Villanueva (1994 and 2014) has pointed out, since Wellek made explicit the crisis of Comparative Literature ([1958] 1992), the discipline began to consider new theoretical conceptions and lines of research. Among these is the “extension of the literary text as the axis of Literature” [la ampliación de la perspectiva del texto literario singular como eje de la Literatura] towards “the whole system of literary communication, which integrates, together with the text itself, the situations and

determinations of its production, reception and post-processing” (Villanueva 2014, 16).<sup>4</sup> This new paradigm brings to the fore the discipline’s close link to Reception Studies. For George Steiner (1995, 139-140), “a constant inquiry into the reception and influence of texts, an awareness of analogies and thematic variants are part of all literary studies. In Comparative Literature, these concerns, as well as their creative interactions, are given special emphasis”. With reference to literary reception, Claudio Guillén’s study of the mechanisms of transmission of the literary product further highlights the link between translation and reception, as the latter is identified as a key instrument of reception, together with intertextuality and multilingualism ([1985] 2005, 283). Thus, and in conclusion, following the lines of thought of scholars such as Enríquez Aranda (2005) and Venturini (2011), the consideration of the relationship between Comparative Literature and Translation and Reception Studies allows us to examine new interdisciplinary perspectives to the study of literary texts and provides a solid theoretical and methodological framework that will greatly benefit the research at hand.

## **1.2. Descriptive Translation Studies**

The theoretical framework that will guide our research is contemporary TS in their descriptive dimension, as this allows us to conceptualize the place of translated literature in the target culture. Descriptive Translation Studies (hereafter DTS) which, as noted by Gentzler (2001, 1), form part of “contemporary translation theories”, started to gain ground during the decade of 1970, questioning the traditional prescriptive-oriented approach to the study of translation. This perspective often assumed as theory the translators’ own explanatory notes about their practice, which, for the most part, turned out to be value judgments about the characteristics of a “good” or “bad” translation. Indeed, in the history of translation, there is plenty of textual evidence—prologues, written correspondence, notes, etc.—where translators and critics advocate a certain method or try to delineate the desirable qualities of a translator or a translation.

Contemporary translation theories, on the other hand, abandoned this prescriptive stance, and coincided in the need to revise the hierarchy which had traditionally defined

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<sup>4</sup> “En su lugar debe situarse el sistema de la comunicación literaria, que integra, junto al texto propiamente dicho, las situaciones y determinaciones de su producción, recepción y posprocesado.”



the binomial original/translation as well as to call for a reevaluation of substantialist standards:

The focus in translation investigation is shifting from the abstract to the specific, from the deep underlying hypothetical forms to the surface of texts with all their gaps, errors, ambiguities, multiple referents and “foreign” disorder. There are being analyzed—and not by standards of equivalent/inequivalent, right/wrong, good/bad, and correct/incorrect. (Gentzler 2001, 4)

DTS were initially proposed by James Holmes as an integral part of TS. His groundbreaking article “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” ([1972] 2000)—generally acknowledged as the founding statement of the field—described TS as an essentially empirical discipline divided into two main branches: *Pure Translation Studies* and *Applied Translation Studies*. Pure TS, in turn, encompass two sub-branches: Descriptive Translation Studies and Theoretical Translation Studies. These two sub-branches fulfill the two main objectives pursued by TS as a field of research: to describe phenomena related to the act of translation and the translated texts(s) as they manifest themselves in the world and to establish general principles that can explain and predict these phenomena, respectively.

DTS as interpreted by Holmes ([1972] 2000) can be product-oriented, function-oriented or process-oriented. The first case calls for synchronic and diachronic descriptions and comparisons of translations in the process of building a translation history. In the second orientation, the function of translations in the target sociocultural context is described. The third case studies the translation process, which is related to the psychology of translation. Out of these orientations, function-oriented DTS are key to our research, as they are closely related to sociocultural approaches which pave the way to the study of translation from the perspective of reception.

Gideon Toury opens his seminal volume *Descriptive Translation Studies - and Beyond* (1995) by stating that “[...] no empirical science can make a claim for completeness and (relative) autonomy unless it has a proper descriptive branch” (1). On this basis, Toury stresses that the value of translation encompasses two distinct elements: on the one hand, the ST, which occupies a specific position within its cultural context and, on the other, the TT, which is a representation in a different language and culture of a text that

already exists and already occupies a specific place in another cultural system (1995, 56).

In his own discussion about the internal organization of the discipline, Toury considers that the function of translation in the target culture determines the characteristics of the translation as a product and the choices made by the translator during the translation process. In this context, the description of the function acquires a privileged position to the scholar. However, he also assumes as the main objective of DTS to describe the interdependencies that shape the relationship between function, product and process (1995, 25). In this regard, the author considers that the position of the TT in the TC is a factor that will largely determine the characteristics of the translation process and the final product. However, he also asserts the key role of the ST to the study of translation:

It should have become clear by now that neither source text nor transfer operations and transferred features, nor even translation relationships, would have been excluded from a target-oriented program of DTS. They were just given a different status. This is also to say that “orientedness” is far from tantamount to “exclusiveness”. (1995, 36)

To Enríquez Aranda (2005), the study of translation as a form of reception is greatly encouraged by the descriptive paradigm. Indeed, the paradigm shift brought forward by Reception Studies which vindicates the centrality of the reader to the study of texts further promotes the conception of translation as a product of the target culture:

el estudio del proceso traductor que defiende la descripción de traducciones no tiene por qué entrar en conflicto con el estudio de la recepción de traducciones. Es más, debe formar parte intrínseca de él [...]. La traducción es así un tipo de comportamiento condicionado en un contexto definido por la recepción. (Enríquez Aranda 2005, 85)<sup>5</sup>

Actually, Elke Brems and Sara Ramos-Pinto argue that “it was especially Descriptive Translation Studies, with its focus on the functioning of translated texts in the target culture, that made the concept of ‘reception’ relevant” (2013, 143-144).

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<sup>5</sup> “the study of the translation process advocated by the description of translations need not conflict with the study of the reception of translations. On the contrary, it should be an intrinsic part [...]. Translation is thus a type of conditioned type behavior in a context defined by reception.”

In his review of contemporary translation theories, Gentzler (2001, 131) considers that the main contributions of Toury's descriptive paradigm to TS are the following:

- a) The abandonment of classical notions of correspondence and equivalence.
- b) The involvement of literary tendencies within the target cultural system in the production of translated texts.
- c) The destabilization of the notion of the original message with a fixed identity.
- d) The integration of the ST and the TT in the semiotic network of intersecting cultural systems.

Likewise, Mona Baker ([1998] 2001, 116) notes the tremendous influence of the descriptive approach during the decades of 1980 and 1990 and argues that Toury's theory "has supported the most active research programme in Translation Studies to date".

Looking at the evolution of this new approach, Hermans (1999, 11-15) distinguishes five main stages in the development of the "descriptive/systemic/manipulation paradigm in Translation Studies":

1. The early exchanges taking place in the decade of 1960 that would lead to "the crystallization of a coherent 'disciplinary matrix'" between James Holmes and the Czechoslovak group informed by Jirí Levý, Anton Popovic and Frantisek Miko. These exchanges paid attention to structuralist literary theory, the role of translation in literary history, the description of translations, etc. After the death of Levý and Popovic, the Czechoslovak group did not make further progress, even if international contacts with Even-Zohar and Toury as well as Flemish academics such as José Lambert, Raymond van den Broek and André Lefevere had been established.
2. During the 1970s, a series of three conferences set a decisive stage in the evolution of the discipline. These were held in Leuven in 1976, Tel Aviv in 1978 and Antwerp in 1980. The exchanges produced at the time saw the emergence of a network of key figures such as Susan Bassnett, Maria

Tymoczko, Theo Hermans and Lieven D’hulst, among others, and fostered the development of a consensus on key ideas in Translation Studies.

3. Expansion followed during the decade of 1980, during which Bassnett and Hermans edited two fundamental volumes for the discipline: *Translation Studies* (1980, revised 1991) and *The Manipulation of Literature* (1985), respectively. The latter became an unexpected success, as, according to Hermans, “controversy helped to give the main ideas an airing” (1999, 13).
4. The 1990s saw the dramatic increase in publications drawing from the descriptive school of thought, which evidenced the consolidation of the paradigm. Among the channels that contributed to the expansion of research in the field Hermans highlights, among others, the journal *Target*, set up by Lambert and Toury in 1989, the translation workshops organized by the International Comparative Literature Association, the research projects on translation history ran at Göttingen University (Germany) as well as the CERA/CETRA international summer courses on translation research held annually since 1989.
5. The last years of the twentieth century witnessed a revision and reorientation of the paradigm. These developments were prompted by the decline in the rate of innovation in theoretical and methodological terms<sup>6</sup> as well as by the expansion of the paradigm in different directions. Among these, Hermans draws attention to the cultural turn in Translation Studies that was introduced by Bassnett’s and Lefevere’s collection *Translation, History and Culture* (1990).

In a previous publication, Hermans summarized the main characteristics and assumptions of the new paradigm (1985, 10-11) in TS:

[...] a view of literature as a complex and dynamic system; a conviction that there should be a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies; an approach to literary translation which is descriptive,

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<sup>6</sup> In relation to this, Hermans discusses the volumes *Polysystem Theory* (a collection of essays published in a special issue of *Poetics Today* in 1990) and *Descriptive Translation Studies - and Beyond* (1995). To the author, these texts—published by two fundamental figures in the paradigm, namely Even-Zohar and Toury—contain little innovation in the field, but instead revise or reformulate earlier theoretical and methodological positions.

target-oriented, functional and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of text processing, and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures.

While the descriptive paradigm was initially associated to the Dutch and Israeli axes, Hermans (1999, 8) points to key contributions made by researchers elsewhere in Europe, the United States, Turkey, Korea, Brazil and Hong Kong. Amparo Hurtado Albir (2001, 558) also draws attention to the relevant scholarship produced in Spain by authors such as Rosa Rabadán, M<sup>a</sup> Carmen África Vidal Claramonte, Ovidi Carbonell i Cortés and Miguel Gallego Roca, among others.

### 1.2.1. Translation and Reception

Although the relationship between reception and translation has been succinctly discussed in the previous sections, given the nature of this project, the close link between these two fields of study is especially worthy of attention. As has already been observed, ever since the paradigm shift that advocated the study of translation within the receiving culture started to gain ground in the discipline, the concept of “reception” became key to contemporary TS.

The notion of “literary reception”, as we understand it today, emerged in the late 1960s thanks to the influence of the Konstanzer Schule (Constance School), most significantly represented by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Working within the framework of the aesthetic of reception, Jauss proposed a paradigm shift in the study of literature introducing the notion of “horizon of expectations” to describe the cultural conventions and assumptions that influence and shape the way in which readers receive and interpret literary texts. This new conception of literary reception in which the reader becomes part of the creative experience (Jurt 1998, 44) exerted an enormous influence not only in the field of Literary Studies, but also on adjacent disciplines, such as Sociology or Art History. This theory of literary reception became groundbreaking in its assertion of the crucial role of the reader in the creation of the meaning of a literary work as well as in its consideration of literature as a means of communication and a historical

phenomenon with a marked social function (Leiva Rojo 2003, 60). Thus, even if the study of literary reception has been approached from manifold fields and perspectives, I shall devote especial attention to scholarship produced around the study of reception in relation to translation.

In this regard, drawing from the implications generated by the definition of translation provided by Hurtado Albir (2001, 41), I shall highlight, following Enríquez Aranda (2007, 13), the assumption that “translation is an act of communication linked to a given sociocultural context with which it develops a relationship of mutual influence”.<sup>7</sup> Taking into consideration the object of study of the research at hand, Vidal Claramonte’s approach is also worth mentioning. Following Hurtado Albir and Enríquez Aranda’s line of thought, Vidal Claramonte considers translation as “an event that wishes to merge horizons, to reach the Other, to love him, [...] even without understanding him” (1998, 9)<sup>8</sup> and concludes that, in this context, “culture is understood as a unit of translation and translation as an act of communication” (37).<sup>9</sup>

Enríquez Aranda (2007, 14) and Hurtado Albir (2001, 507) also speak of the complexity arising from the fact that translation is conditioned by two different communicative spaces linked to their own contexts. These contexts “influence the respective texts that are produced and received within them” (Enríquez Aranda 2007, 14). In this context, based on polysystem theory, both Enríquez Aranda and Rosa Rabadán advocate the consideration of the target reader in TS:

una aproximación global e interdisciplinar al proceso de traducción sitúa al receptor meta [...] dentro de la cadena comunicativa que se establece en cualquier tipo de actuación lingüística. Todo texto meta [...] funciona de forma autónoma dentro del polisistema meta y su fin último es ser leído por una audiencia que pertenece a ese polisistema. (Rabadán 1991, 80)

And

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<sup>7</sup> “La traducción es un acto de comunicación vinculado a un contexto sociocultural determinado con el que desarrolla una relación de influencia mutua.”

<sup>8</sup> “un acontecimiento que desea fusionar horizontes, llegar al Otro, amarlo, [...] aun sin entenderlo”

<sup>9</sup> “se entiende la cultura como unidad de traducción y la traducción como un acto de comunicación”

El estudio apropiado de la traducción, por tanto, se ha de abordar desde la perspectiva que otorga el conocimiento de su recepción si se desea constatar el papel global que desempeña la traducción en un momento histórico determinado. (Enríquez Aranda 2007, 17)

Enríquez Aranda also elaborates on a number of theoretical foundations from which the study of translation as a form of reception draws; namely, the aesthetics of reception, DTS and the new cultural spheres of social, historical and ideological interest for TS (2007, 21). This is of particular interest, considering that the current research also takes this theoretical framework as its starting point. Such conception of translation will necessarily lead us to approach the study reception from a privileged position, using a methodology that is necessarily interdisciplinary and dialogical in nature.

Brems and Ramos-Pinto (2013, 143) have also reflected on the nature of the interdisciplinary relation between Translation and Reception Studies:

The study of reception does not always deal with translations; however, the booming of Translation Studies in the last decades has, undoubtedly, made translation a more common topic in Reception Studies. Conversely, Translation Studies does not always consider the reception of texts, but almost from the beginning of the discipline this has been a widely practiced line of approach.

In this light, the authors distinguish two levels of analysis in the study of reception: one that focuses on reader response and assessment and another that studies reception from a more social perspective. The former focuses on “real readers” and “how specific translation strategies affect readers’ response and assessment” (2013, 145), and looks into the cognitive processes taking place at the moment of reception, the effect of specific contextual aspects on reception, the readers’ assessment of translation strategies and the readers’ needs and expectations. On the contrary, the latter studies translation at a supra-individual level and has become a useful approach in the study of literary and cultural translation.

In this case, my research assumes the social perspective to the study of the reception of translations inasmuch as it pays attention to the place and function of translated texts in the target culture. As Brems and Ramos-Pinto point out (2013, 144), such focus has been adopted by a number of approaches to TS, among which I may highlight Cultural

Transfer, Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature. Likewise, the authors suggest that both quantitative and qualitative approaches are relevant to this perspective. Among other tasks, a quantitative approach entails gathering bibliographical data, counting translations and making inventories of translations according to different criteria (e.g. a given time period or source culture). A qualitative approach calls for the study of aspects such as the reception of a certain author, oeuvre, genre or source culture in a target culture or the reputation or the interpretation(s) of a text, an author, a set of texts or a set of authors in a given system or community. At this point, Brems and Ramos-Pinto consider the relevance of DTS, polysystem theory and the concept of “norms” to the social perspective. In this light, my research combines both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of the reception of translated African American women’s literature in the Spanish context. As is further developed in the chapter devoted to methodological considerations, I necessarily make use of both approaches to carry out a complete and exhaustive examination of the object of study of this dissertation.

### 1.2.2. The Systemic Approach

Ever before the decade of the 1970s, literary translation had been studied from the point of view of literary studies, mainly with a prescriptive and evaluative orientation. However, since the second half of the 1970s a wide range of theoretical proposals for the study of literary translation began to emerge. Hurtado Albir (2001, 64-65) highlights, among many others, the relationship between linguistics and literary studies, the analysis of literary translation as part of a general theory of literature, the relationship between literary theory and literary translation, the analysis of elements of an ideological and sociocultural nature and the creation of models of stylistic analysis. To Enríquez Aranda (2007, 86), however, most of the theories around the study of literary translation have a more or less direct relationship with two related central ideas: the organization of literary translations as a system and the will to describe the behavior of literary translations within the structure of such system.

Likewise, in *The Translation Studies Reader* (2000, 123), Lawrence Venuti discusses how the systemic approach has become central to the study of literary translation,



shifting attention to the phenomenon of reception. For Venuti, this shift of focus is prompted both by the adoption of Toury's product-oriented approach and by the rise of Even-Zohar's polysystem theory.

In this context, polysystem theory becomes key to our study, mainly because this approach presupposes an ordering of the world literary polysystem that implies dynamic and unequal relations between subsystems, an argument with which this research is aligned inasmuch as it problematizes the literary politics and the dynamics of circulation of texts between systems under unequal conditions. On the one hand, this hierarchy which structures literary systems explains the particular—and complex—position of African American women's literature in the global polysystem. On the other, the dynamism of the polysystem demonstrates that relations between systems are not fixed, but in a constant process of change, as this research evidences.

Polysystem theory was brought forward by Even-Zohar in the 1970s and is a productive theoretical model for studying translations as constituents of multiple interdependent systems interacting at different levels. Russian formalist Yury Tinianov was the first to suggest the idea of a functional, dynamic and historical "literary system" that develops affected by both literary and extra-literary factors. Actually, as Even-Zohar himself has acknowledged, the foundations of Polysystem theory had already been solidly laid by Russian Formalism in the 1920s.

In the groundbreaking volume *Papers in Historical Poetics* (1978), Even-Zohar proposes the term "polysystem" to designate an "open system of systems", hierarchically structured and interacting with each other; that is, a dynamic conglomerate of systems that always present internal oppositions. The definition of a system integrated by other systems comes from the late formalists Tinianov and Jakobson (1928), although the term "polysystem" in Even-Zohar's reformulation of the proposal emphasizes the inherent complexity of the relationships described by this theory, which rejects value judgments as criteria for an *a priori* selection of the objects of study (Fólica 2016, 27). Actually, as scholars such as Montserrat Iglesias Santos (1999, 31) and Theo Hermans (1999, 89) have pointed out, the term "system" already encompasses the meaning attributed to Even-Zohar's neologism, and both terms are frequently used interchangeably in academia.

In his article “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem” (1990), Even-Zohar moves away from traditional timeless text-centric perspectives to the study of literature towards a description of the functioning of real texts and their conditions of production, distribution, consumption and institutionalization. From this perspective, both intrasystemic and intersystemic relations are established, insofar as the literary system is linked to other social systems and activities as well as it is also related to other cultural or linguistic polysystems through different channels, such as the case of source literatures entering a target literary system via translation. Thus, polysystem theory aims at describing processes of change and dynamic interplay between subsystems by studying the circles existing and competing within the polysystem.

As noted by Shuttlerworth (1997, 176), the notion of dynamic change is fundamental to the conception of the polysystem, as it describes the nature of the relations established between central and peripheral (sub)systems, which are constantly evolving and competing with each other. In this regard, Shuttlerworth conceives of the polysystem as “a heterogeneous, hierarchized conglomerate (or system) of systems which interact to bring about an ongoing, dynamic process of evolution within the polysystem as a whole” (1997, 176). As a consequence, translated literature is also conditioned by this dynamic structure and can occupy a central or peripheral position within the literary polysystem.

According to Even-Zohar (1990, 47), translations may move towards the center of the system under three different conditions:

- a) When the literary system is young and adopts existing models in its development.
- b) When a literature is “weak” or “peripheral” (or both) in relation to other literary systems and needs to import stronger or more central literary models.
- c) When there are turning points, crises, or vacuums as a consequence of which existing literary models prove insufficient; or when there is no dominant model within a literary system.

Under any of these circumstances, which stimulate the adoption of foreign literatures or literary models, translation may assume a central position in the home system and

actively participate in its configuration. When translations occupy a peripheral position in the literary system, they become a secondary activity and do not exert any relevant influence on major literary processes. However, as noted by Even-Zohar (1990, 49) and Enríquez Aranda (2007, 95), this position contradicts the very essence of translation, whose main purpose is to transfer meaningful knowledge otherwise inaccessible to the target system.

Likewise, the position assumed by translated literature in the polysystem will greatly determine the outcome of the translation. That is, if translated literature occupies a central position, the translator will not be compelled to adhere to the norms and conventions of the TC and, as a consequence, new models in the target system may be developed. On the contrary, if translations occupy a peripheral position, the translator will most likely make use of pre-existing cultural models in the TC (1990, 49). The position of translations in the literary system, thus, not only shapes the theoretical status of translation, but also determines the practice of this activity and influences literary contacts within the polysystem (Enríquez Aranda 2007, 95). In any case, this discussion evidences the fact that literary translations constitute a system in its own right, whether they occupy a central or peripheral position within the larger literary system.

In her revision of polysystem theory, Laura Fóllica (2016, 28-29) identifies six elements which conform the literary system:

- *repertoire*: a set of rules and materials that regulate the creation and use of a given (literary) product in a given culture.
- *product*: any realization of a set of signs and/or materials, for instance, the literary text.
- *producer*: any agent who produces, by actively operating in the repertoire, a product.
- *consumer*: the individual who operates and interacts with the repertoire and receives the literary work either directly or indirectly.
- *institution*: set of factors involved in the control and preservation of literature as a sociocultural activity through the regulation of norms.

- *market*: all the implicit factors involved in the production and commercialization of the cultural repertoire.

The notion of “repertoire” is of particular interest to our study. The Israeli author conceives of it as “the aggregate of laws and elements (either single, bound, or total models) that govern the production of texts” (Even-Zohar 1990, 18). While some of these laws and elements may be of a universal character, a great many others are “subjected to shifting conditions in different periods and cultures” (1990, 19). According to the author, it is precisely this temporal and local section of the repertoire which is at stake and becomes an issue of struggle in the literary system. In “The ‘Literary System’” (1990, 40), the scholar builds up on this definition:

If, on the other hand, manifestations of “literature” are considered to exist on various levels, the “literary repertoire” may be conceived of as an aggregate of specific repertoires for those various levels. Therefore, a “repertoire” may be the shared knowledge necessary for producing (and understanding) a “text,” as well as producing (and understanding) various other products of the literary system. There may be a repertoire for being a “writer,” another for being a “reader,” and yet another for “behaving as one should expect from a literary agent,” and so on. All these must definitely be recognized as “literary repertoires.”

The concept of “repertoire” was later refined by Els Andringa (2006, 525), who conceives of it as “a mental equipment that enables its users to act and to communicate in a literary (sub)system. A (sub)system is consequently determined by a group of agents who share a certain repertoire and make use of it in their different institutional and noninstitutional roles.” Andringa also breaks down the repertoire into three components:

- a. Knowledge of a collection of works/oeuvres that have a model function and serve as a frame of reference in processes of literary production, reception, and communication.
- b. Sets of strategies and conventions that govern the production, reception, and communication.
- c. Sets of internalized values and interests that determine selections, judgments, and classifications.

And two characteristics:

- d. It is shared by a group of agents (e.g. authors, readers, publishers and reviewers) and governs the way texts are deal with in a (sub)system
- e. It is particular to a certain time period and may change over time due to internal or external factors

These constituents provide a solid methodological framework for the study of the circulation and function of a translated literature in a target system. Consequently, Andringa's reformulation of Even-Zohar's repertoire theory is taken as a starting point for the methodological proposal of this dissertation.<sup>10</sup>

Polysystem theory also posits binary oppositions to describe the literary system. The first is between canonization and non-canonization. In relation to this, Even-Zohar argues that canonization, rather than being an intrinsic characteristic of texts, should be read as a feature of the system that determines which products are endowed with legitimacy and prestige, and thus conform the repertoire. Therefore, the canon is dynamic because it is modified by the intrasystemic transfer of literary elements and by intersystemic interference, which is occasioned by the unstable boundaries between systems (Enríquez Aranda 2007, 93). The pioneering element of polysystem theory is that not only does it allow the study of canonized literature, but it also places non-canonized literature at the same level of interest: "Without the stimulation of a strong 'sub-culture', any canonized activity tends to gradually become petrified. The first steps towards petrification manifest themselves in a high degree of boundness and growing stereotypization of the various repertoires" (Even-Zohar 1990, 17).

In this sense, the influence of "minor authors" may be of as much interest as that of "great writers". This perspective also brings to the fore phenomena such as the formation of genres, marginal literature and mass literature or translated literature. That is, phenomena which may be categorized as peripheral become a key object of study in relation to the creation of national literatures. In this sense, this research will further delve into the interplay between canonization and non-canonization, as we shall examine how the works of African American Women writers have been received both

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<sup>10</sup> The methodological proposal is further developed in Chapter 3.

as part of the canon of world literature and as an example to break away from such canon.

Thus, a given text can never be autonomous within a literary system and it will not reach the center of a culture because of its inherent qualities, but “(1) because of the nature of the polysystem of the receiving culture and its social/literary historical circumstances, and (2) because of the difference between certain elements of the text and cultural norms” (Gentzler 2001, 123).

Despite Even-Zohar’s proposal presents several shortcomings, among which scholars such as Hermans (1999) and Gentzler (2001) signal out its tendency to produce excessive generalizations and establish universal laws, it also brings to the fore “the complexity, openness and flexibility of cultural systems existing in a historical continuum” (Hermans 1999, 106). In so doing, polysystem theory broadens the scope of TS and challenges traditional conceptions of literature which exclude from their object of study peripheral manifestations such as translated works. It also conceives of systems as dynamic entities which are subject to change over time; this change is determined by norms, social behaviors and market strategies particular to every (poly)system.

### 1.2.3. The Notion of “Norm”

After polysystem theory was brought forward by Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury seized on the translation component of Even-Zohar’s model to search for a new theory of translation. In “The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation” (1995), Toury studies “translation norms”. These are interpreted as factors or laws shared by a community that condition any translation and convert certain intersubjective values into instructions for specific practice: “norms are the key concept and focal point in any attempt to account for the social relevance of activities, because their existence and the wide range of situations they apply to (with the conformity this implies), are the main factors ensuring the establishment and retention of social order” (1995, 55). Toury’s contribution is of particular interest not only because his application of the notion of norm to translation was groundbreaking, but also because he developed a typology which facilitates the study and understanding of the different factors governing and influencing the translation process and product as well as its circulation in a given context.

Toury makes use of the notion of “norm” in order to determine the different types of translator behavior within a specific sociocultural context. According to him, the translator’s work is conditioned or influenced by various factors: apart from time and space limitations, the sociocultural context deserves special attention. The influence of such a context cannot be conceived in terms of laws that regulate and guide the work of the *translator*, but rather in the form of general values or ideas that guide the behavior of a *community*. In this context, Toury (1995, 61) suggests that the notion of equivalence is historical and variable, inasmuch as it has traditionally been determined by the valid (changing) norms of the TC. Equivalence, thus, becomes a fluid notion which must be studied in close relation to literary norms:

The apparent contradiction between any traditional concept of equivalence and the limited model into which a translation has just been claimed to be moulded can only be resolved by postulating that it is norms that determine the (type and extent of) equivalence manifested by actual translations. The study of norms thus constitutes a vital step towards establishing just how the functional-relational postulate of equivalence [...] has been realized. (Toury 1995, 61)

Toury distinguishes between three types of translation norms. “Preliminary norms” refer to the factors that govern the choice of texts to be imported into a given culture at a particular time, the languages from which it is translated, the translators and publishers. “Initial norms” refer to the global translation strategy regarding adherence to appropriateness in the SC, acceptability in the TC or a combination of both. Once these preliminary and initial norms have been set, “operational norms” apply to the translation process. These guide the choices made during the act of translating and can be “matricial”, which determine the integrity, segmentation and distribution of textual material and “textual”, which reveal linguistic and stylistic preferences in the TL. To this taxonomy, Rabadán (1991) adds “reception norms”. They operate both in the preliminary stage and during the translation process itself. According to the Spanish scholar, these norms determine the translator’s behavior according to the type of audience of the TT and are characterized by the choice of the dominant sociolinguistic criterion in the hierarchy of translation relations. These sets of norms, though, are imprecise and cannot be directly observed, but only through their different manifestation in either textual or paratextual sources.

As noted by Gentzler (2001, 128), polysystem theory guides Toury's model:

In terms of initial norms, the translator's attitude toward the source culture is affected by the text's position in the source culture's literary polysystem; in terms of operational norms, all decisions are influenced by the position—central or peripheral—held by translated literature in the target culture polysystem.

In this respect, Jeremy Munday ([2001] 2016, 117) has argued that Gentzler's criticism of polysystem theory can also be extended to Toury's contribution, inasmuch as it also relies on the functioning of abstract laws or norms and aims at drawing generalizations out of concrete case studies. Likewise, Munday also highlights several risks derived from a target-oriented approach, namely "overlooking, for example, ideological and political factors such as the status of the source text in its own culture, the source culture's promotion of translation of its own literature and the effect that translation might exert back on the system of the source culture" ([2001] 2016, 117). Fóllica (2016, 32) further problematizes Toury's and Even-Zohar's approach, arguing that the current economic and cultural globalization calls into question the postulate that translations are only a product of the target culture, since they also influence the mechanisms of canonization, that is, the assignment of a central or peripheral place in the source polysystem.

#### 1.2.4. The Manipulation School

Even-Zohar's and Toury's early theoretical and methodological approaches were refined and expanded in a series of conferences around the theme of translated literature held by the International Comparative Literature Association. Belgium, Israel and The Netherlands hosted particularly prominent centers, and the first conferences were held at Leuven (1976), Tel Aviv (1978) and Antwerp (1980). The key publication of this group of scholars, known as the Manipulation School or Group, was the anthology *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, edited by Hermans (1985). This volume collected the works of Susan Bassnett, José Lambert, André Lefevere, Gideon Toury, Hendrik Van Grop and Theo Hermans himself. In his introduction, "Translation Studies and a New Paradigm", Hermans summarizes the group's view of translated literature:



What they have in common is a view of literature as a complex and dynamic system; a conviction that there should be a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies; an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-organized, functional and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of text processing, and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures. (1985, 10-11)

Although the research conducted by the contributors to the volume is partial in scope, the authors share their view of the underlying conflict in the constitution of a literary canon and in acknowledging the presence of both ideological and institutional components in every translation. For the manipulation group, thus, any translation involves a degree of manipulation which may serve different purposes. These purposes, in turn, will vary in different contexts, since any act of translation is a process of negotiation between particular cultures and literary traditions.

Hermans (1985, 13-14) posits a non-essentialist definition of literary translation as the basis for theoretical reflection; according to the manipulation school, literary translation is what a given cultural community at a given time considers as such. Taking this as a starting point, the study of the context of translation becomes a primary aspect of study insofar as it provides the necessary keys to determine the particular nature of the TT. Research conducted under this “paradigm”<sup>11</sup> is directed towards the identification of translation norms and the function of translation in the target culture. This functional perspective, in turn, aims at discovering universal patterns and trends governing the production and translation of literary works.

Despite the obvious contributions made by this group to the study of literary translation, the theoretical reflections posited by the manipulation school have also been subject to criticism. Scholars such as Josep Marco Borillo (2000, 34-35) and Enríquez Aranda (2005, 91) have pointed to the group’s ambition as its greatest obstacle. Indeed, their

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<sup>11</sup> Although Hermans does use the term “paradigm” to emphasize the groundbreaking character of the manipulation school and its intention to build from a solid theoretical foundation, the author calls for caution and deems more accurate its identification with the concept of “invisible school” coined by Diana Crane (1972).

purpose to cover all the phenomena concerning literary translation results in an incomplete working method. According to Hermans himself (1999, 158-161), this approach to the study of translation is unfinished and in need of a general revision that may take different directions. To Enríquez Aranda (2005, 91), the description of translations advocated by the manipulation school requires an integrated model of text analysis with a balanced presence of linguistic, literary and cultural elements:

De esta forma, la descripción dejaría de peligrar por la idiosincrasia inherente a ella y permitiría el establecimiento de relaciones con otras descripciones. Por otra parte, los estudios descriptivos deben reconocer el papel de la lingüística en este modelo y en toda la disciplina, y beneficiarse de los adelantos que la lingüística, con su particular giro cultural, ha experimentado en los últimos tiempos.

### **1.3. Translation and Ideology**

This section is devoted to the study of the multiple and manifold ways in which ideology intersects and interacts with translation practices. Given the nature of the source literature which is the object of this dissertation, examining the relationship between translation and ideology and the manifestations of such relationship will profoundly benefit the project at hand. In order to understand the nature of this relationship, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the construction of any reality through discourse is an ideological process. This process defines the limits within which a cultural system operates. As such, the system does not define a stable nucleus, but rather constructs unstable representations that bring into play relations which are subject to continuous transformation. This means that ideology does not deal with timeless essentialist notions, but with the recurrent redefinition of boundaries and systems. Cultural identity is thus something extremely mobile, subject to continuous rewriting, translation and interpreting.

These reflections had been advanced by linguists such as V. N. Voloshinov (1973), Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1978), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and Jacques Derrida (1985), among others. More precisely, with the advent of the cultural turn in TS in the decade of 1980, the intersection between translation and ideology became central to contemporary

approaches to the discipline. In this context, Gayatri Spivak reflects upon the inescapable relation between language, ideology and identity:

In my view, language may be one of many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves. I am thinking, of course, of gestures, pauses, but also of chance, of the subindividual force-fields of being which click into place in different situations, swerve from the straight or true line of language-in-thought. Making sense of ourselves is what produces identity. If one feels that the production of identity as self-meaning, not just meaning, is as pluralized as a drop of water under a microscope, one is not always satisfied, outside of the ethicopolitical arena as such, with “generating” thoughts on one’s own. (1993, 179)

The Indian scholar takes this argument further to explore the dynamics between translation and identity:

For one of the ways to get around the confines of one’s “identity” as one produces expository prose is to work at someone else’s title, as one works with a language that belongs to many others. This, after all, is one of the seductions of translating. It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self. (1993, 179)

More recently, in “Ideology and the Position of the Translator. In what Sense is a Translator ‘In Between?’” (2003), Maria Tymoczko has assessed the “in between” position which has generally been attributed to both translation and translators and which, she posits, is at the heart of the relation between translation and ideology (2003, 185). Tymoczko uses polysystem theory to question the spatial metaphor of “between”, and argues, in contrast, that in transcending the limits of a given cultural and linguistic system—the system of the SC, in this case—, the translator does not reach an intersystemic space “between” the source and the target system. On the contrary, through the act of interrogating a ST on the basis of a TL the translator enters into another, larger system which encompasses both languages and cultures, rather than being restricted to either (2003, 196). Thus, translation is placed in the special space that represents all existence on the border, and it is there that we may witness the intersection between the linguistic acts of the ST and those which translation directs

towards the receiving context, revealing the ideology in the discrepancies between the two moments (Arduini 2016, 26). In this light, Tymoczko problematizes the discourse of translation as a space between because of its implications concerning the nature of the engagement:

Whether translation is initiated for political purposes from a source culture, from a receptor culture, or from some other third culture, translation as a successful means of engagement and social change - like most political actions - requires affiliation and collective action. The discourse of a space between obscures the necessity of such collective work [...]. Effective calls for translators to act as ethical agents of social change must intersect with models of engagement and collective action. (2003, 201)

Translation, thus, is intrinsically linked to ideology inasmuch as the latter is constructed, shaped and circulated through language. To Arduini (2016, 26-27), translation reveals that language does not disclose a defined and ordered world, but an unstable ideological construct. In this sense, the manifold interpretations that a text may activate in being transferred to a target system constitute the various ways through which meaning can be transformed. In relation to this, Tymoczko (2003, 183) points out that the ideology of translation resides not only in the translated text, but also in the translator's stance as well as in the relevance of the TT to the receiving audience.

### 1.3.1. The Invisibility of the Translator

In *The Translator's Invisibility*, originally published in 1995 and re-edited in 2008, Lawrence Venuti introduces the term "invisibility" to describe "the translator's situation and activity in contemporary British and American cultures" (2008, 1). Venuti's approach addresses a number of issues that have recurrently sparked debate in literary and Cultural Studies, such as the notion of "original authorship", relations between languages, ideology, gender, race, class, globalization and the politics of cultural representation" (2008, ix).

In this case, the author uses the concept of invisibility in reference to two related phenomena:

1. The translator's manipulation of the language with the purpose of generating an "illusionistic effect of discourse" where the TT is fluent, idiomatic and "readable" in the TL.
2. The extended practice—both in Anglophone and other cultures—of reading and evaluating translations according to a fundamental criterion:

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text - the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original'. (Venuti 2008, 1)

In this light, Venuti criticizes the "illusion of transparency" expected by most publishers, critics and readers from the United States—and other non-Anglophone countries—, who consider a translation acceptable only if they can read it fluently; that is, when it generates the illusion that they are not reading a translation, but a text originally written in the TL. As a result, the crucial intervention of the translator is covered up and systematically made invisible.

According to Venuti, the translator's invisibility is closely related to the notions of *domestication* and *foreignization*, the roots of which can be traced back to Friedrich Schleiermacher ([1813] 2000). These practices may influence both the method of translation as well as the choice of STs. Venuti defines the practice of domestication as "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values, bringing the author back home" (2008, 20). This reduction of the "foreignness" of the original text is achieved through the use of syntactic structures, words and conventions familiar to the readers, which contribute to the aforementioned illusion of transparency. Following the author, domesticating translation practices are closely related to the notion of "appropriation" of foreign cultures, where translation serves a cultural, political or economic agenda in the receiving context: "enforced by editors, publishers and reviewers, fluency results in translations that are eminently readable and therefore consumable on the book market" (2008, 12). Instead, foreignizing translation "entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the TL" (Venuti 2001, 242). Thus, foreignizing

translations become a means of promoting cultural diversity and challenging the standard language of the TC:

Foreignizing translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the translating language. In its effort to do right abroad, this translation practice must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience - choosing to translate a foreign text excluded by literary canons in the receiving culture, for instance, or using a marginal discourse to translate it. (Venuti 2008, 16-17)

Venuti follows Schleiermacher in his preference for the foreignizing translation method, as it aims to highlight the differences between hegemonic literary systems—particularly, he refers to the Anglo-American culture—and more peripheral cultures while improving the social and economic situation of translators. Thus, foreignizing translation is hereby seen as a form of resistance to “ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations” (Venuti 2008, 16).

Likewise, in *The Scandals of Translation* (1998) Venuti links foreignization to the notion of “minoritizing translation”. This practice is tightly linked to the evocation of the foreign in translation, and is defined by the author as the task of translating “foreign texts that possess minority status in their cultures, a marginal position in their native canons—or that, in translation, can be useful in minoritizing the standard dialect and dominant cultural forms” (1998, 10).<sup>12</sup> Both notions—foreignizing and minoritizing translation—serve the author to define the ultimate purpose of translation: to manifest in its own language the foreignness of the text, that is, “to signify the autonomous existence of that text behind [...] the assimilative process of the translation” (Venuti 1998, 11). Of course, this tenet develops from a particular translation ethics. Actually, the author openly acknowledges the political agenda behind his approach to translation: a democratic opposition to the global hegemony of the English language and culture.

In relation to Venuti’s discourse, Munday ([2001] 2016, 146) points out that domestication and foreignization cannot be considered binary opposites but part of a

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<sup>12</sup> I shall return to the concept of minoritizing translation in Chapter 2, in relation to the translation of linguistic variation.

continuum where the translation practice is inscribed. Likewise, Venuti relates the two methods to ethical choices made by the translator, which may contribute to expand or reduce the knowledge of the source literature and culture by the target readership:

The terms “domestication” and “foreignization” indicate fundamentally ethical attitudes towards a foreign text and culture, ethical effects produced by the choice of a text for translation and by the strategy devised to translate it, whereas the terms like “fluency” and “resistancy” indicate fundamentally discursive features of translation strategies in relation to the reader’s cognitive processing. (Venuti 2008, 19)

### 1.3.2. The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies

The necessity to incorporate cultural elements to the study of translated literature was already manifest in the descriptive/systemic/manipulationist paradigm, and was expanded during the decade of 1990 with what is nowadays acknowledged as the “cultural turn” in TS. This shift sought to broaden the concept of translation and decenter the Western literary canon by bringing to the fore postcolonial and gender approaches to the study of translated literature. In the words of Pegenaute Rodríguez (2014, n. p.):

By highlighting that translations work as carriers of attitudes and ideological assumptions, their ability to create strongholds of resistance against cultural hegemony is the focus. This allows translations to become tools to rebuild lost or silenced cultural ways, thus fighting against imperialism, racism or sexism. The linguistic approach is left aside in order to analyse the interaction between translation and culture, giving importance to context, history and convention.

Thus, instead of examining texts from an apolitical descriptive perspective, this approach privileges the study of sociocultural aspects such as ideology and the role of institutions in the production of translations (Carbonell i Cortés 2014, 195).

In 1990, Bassnet and Lefevere co-published the collection *Translation, History and Culture*, formally putting forward the idea of the cultural turn in TS. This approach

dismissed linguistic theories of translation as well as “painstaking comparisons between originals and translations” and advocated the need to redirect attention to the cultural context where translations are inserted. Thus, Bassnett and Lefevere focused on the interaction between translation and culture and the ways in which cultural contexts influence or are influenced by translations. According to Lefevere (1992, 2),

Translation is not just a “window opened on another world,” or some such pious platitude. Rather, translation is a channel opened, often not without a certain reluctance, through which foreign influences can penetrate the native culture, challenge it, and even contribute to subverting it.

From this perspective, translation is studied as a strategy within cultural systems used to regulate and define cultural boundaries as well as to manage a culture’s own character. The case studies collected in Bassnett and Lefevere’s volume include research on changing standards in translation over time, the power exercised in and on the publishing industry in pursuit of specific ideologies, feminist writing and translation, translation as “appropriation”, translation and colonization and translation as rewriting.

In this context, Lefevere’s work in particular becomes key to our object of study. Lefevere’s discourse developed out of his links with polysystem theory and the manipulation group and is most fully developed in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992). The volume brings forward the notion of “rewriting” as any adaptation of a literary work for a concrete audience which has the aim of influencing the way in which that audience reads said work. In this context, Lefevere examines a set of factors that, as put by Munday ([2001] 2016, 199) “systematically govern the reception, acceptance or rejection of literary texts; that is, issues such as power, ideology, institution and manipulation”. Indeed, Lefevere argues that translations, as any other type of rewriting (e.g. anthologies, literary histories, editions, criticism), are inspired by either ideological or poetological motivations or produced under ideological or poetological constraints. Ideological factors relate to the dominant ideology of a given culture during a time period, and poetological factors refer to the preferred poetics of the time.

Lefevere identifies translation as the most recognizable and potentially influential type of rewriting: “it is able to project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work(s) in



another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin” (1992, 9). Thus, translation as rewriting is thought of as a process of acculturation or negotiation between two cultures, both from a literary and an ideological point of view. In this respect, the cultural approach emphasizes the interaction between the literary system and other social systems and devotes special attention to the internal structure of the target system inasmuch as it reveals control mechanisms and power structures that may ultimately govern the production of translations.

To Lefevere (1992, 15), the literary system is controlled by professional experts or rewriters (namely critics, reviewers, academics, teachers, anthologists or translators) who manipulate the poetics of literature—genres, symbols and characters but also the role that literature plays in a social system as a whole by institutionalizing canonicity and the dominant poetics—. Likewise, another control factor operates through patronage, which can “further or hinder the reading, writing and rewriting of literature”. The notion of patronage applies both to people as well as institutional agents such as political parties, publishers, religious institutions and media groups that commission literary translations and, therefore, influence the target literary polysystem and shape its relation to other polysystems which conform a given culture.

In relation to the concept of the role of literature, Lefevere looks into the role of institutions in establishing dominant poetics:

Institutions enforce or, at least, try to enforce the dominant poetics of a period by using it as the yardstick against which current production is measured. Accordingly, certain works of literature will be elevated to the level of ‘classics’ within a relatively short time after publication, while others are rejected, some to reach the exalted position of a classic later, when the dominant poetics has changed. (1992, 19)

As for established canons, Lefevere sees “clear indication of the conservative bias of the system itself and the power of rewriting”. That is, he argues that such classic works may never lose their status in a given literary system as they are recurrently reinterpreted or rewritten to conform to changes in dominant poetics through time.

The interaction between poetics, ideology and translation leads the author to make a key claim: “On every level of the translation process, it can be shown that, if linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations of an ideological and/or poetological nature, the latter tend to win out” (1992, 39). For Lefevere, therefore, ideological and poetological motivations guide the translation process, and will determine the nature of the final rewritten product. Even if linguistic considerations are not to be dismissed from translational studies, together, ideology and poetics dictate the translation strategy and govern the solutions given to specific translation problems.

In the light of the above considerations, Lefevere’s conception of the notion of “rewriting” situates the study of translations within in the field of literary reception, since they “conclusively shape the reception of a work, an author, a literature or a society in a culture different from its culture of origin” (Lefevere 1992, 110). According to the author, thus, translations play a decisive role in the creation of literary traditions and the shaping of literary and cultural canon(s).

### 1.3.3. Translation and Gender

As has been discussed, the interface of Cultural Studies and TS inevitably took the latter away from purely linguistic analysis and brought it into contact with other disciplines. Ever since the arrival of the first exhibits of the Canadian feminist paradigm to TS in the European context in the early nineties, there have been several, growing and diverse contributions regarding translation and Gender Studies. Indeed, we are currently witnessing a process through which feminisms are increasingly demanding their place in TS, just as translation is fighting for its own place within Gender Studies. To Olga Castro Vázquez (2008, 286), this bidirectional trend is symptomatic of the enormous potential that each of these disciplines holds for the evolution and development of the other.

In 1997, with the publication of *Translation and Gender: Translating in the ‘Era of Feminism’*, Luise von Flotow highlighted the need to study the details of the relationship between gender and translation, and what she called “translational gender relations” (1997, 1). This interest was prompted by the cultural turn in TS and by the relevance that language-related issues had acquired in Gender Studies and in the

feminist movement at the end of the century. In this context, starting from an interdisciplinary approach, Flotow identifies a number of areas whose analysis is of particular interest for both TS and Gender Studies:

Gender studies and Translation Studies are both interdisciplinary and academic fields. When they are brought into relationship with one another, a number of issues intersect: cultural gender differences, the revelation and formulation of these differences in language, their transfer by means of translation into other cultural spaces where different gender conditions obtain. (1997, 1)

Flotow was one of the exponents of a group of feminist translators based in Quebec who understood translation as a liberating, transforming and multiplying activity, in contrast with traditional subordinating definitions. In this light, Canadian writer Nicole de Bossard encouraged her translator Susanne Lobtinière-Harwood to go beyond the ST and make the female voice visible in translation. In *Re-belle et Infidèle: La traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminine / The Body Bilingual: Translation as Rewriting in the Feminine* (1991) Lobtinière-Harwood herself suggests that the translator's voice can intervene in the translation. In this light, the act of translation productively supplements the message conveyed by the ST. As put by Gentzler, "the theory is not just one of foreignizing translation, but is an attempt to articulate a new idea regarding translation" (2001, 233).

Likewise, Barbara Godard (1990) emphasized the parallels between the postcolonial and feminist approaches to translation and developed a feminist discourse that involved the transfer of a cultural reality into a new context. This new paradigm was described by the author as follows:

Translation, in this theory of feminist discourse, is production, not reproduction, the *mimesis* which is "in the realm of music" and which, by an "effect of playful repetition" [...] makes visible the place of women's exploitation by discourse. Pretensions to the production of a singular truth and meaning are suspended. This theory focuses on feminist discourse in its transtextual or hypertextual relations, as palimpsest working on the problematic notions of identity, dependency and equivalence. [...] In this, feminist discourse presents transformation as performance as a model for translation. Transformation of the

text is conceived within the axioms of topology. However, this is at odds with the long dominant theory of translation as equivalence, grounded in a poetics of transference. (1990, 91)

It is worth noting, however, that, considering the nature of the subject of this dissertation, I will not expand on interventionist practices in feminist translation in the way that Flotow (1997, 14-32) or Sherry Simon (1996, 8-36), among others, have done. While this phenomenon is certainly attractive for Gender and Translation Studies, our interest here shifts to the analysis of how gender consciousness reflects a growing interest in Cultural Studies, as well as a willingness to make visible the differences between cultures and subjects (Flotow 1997, 2). In this regard, Flotow draws attention to the key role of translation in promoting and/or hindering understanding and interaction between different cultures and contexts. Indeed, if the current study draws from a canon constituted by women who are strongly committed and associated to a particular feminist fight, we cannot and should not overlook the fact that the mere choice of translating these texts and putting them into circulation in the target literary system already implies a clear positioning and ideology on the part of the agents who have facilitated the circulation of such translations. Thus, drawing from Flotow's and Simon's proposals, I will try to orient the present study around a question that Simon herself poses: "how are social, sexual and historical differences expressed in language and how can these differences be transferred across languages?" (1996, 8).

Flotow identifies two paradigms governing research on the intersection between Anglo-American Translation Studies and Gender Studies. The first paradigm rules research focused on women as a group with a special history within patriarchal society. It interprets the notion of gender as a phenomenon of acculturation and aims at studying works translated by women, the representation of women writers through their translations, the invisibility of women translators, etc. This paradigm has received a good amount of criticism related to hypocrisy and transculturation. To Flotow, the most indignant reaction to this paradigm comes from Rosemary Arrojo, who holds that "the deliberate manipulations of a text carried out by a feminist translator or in the name of feminist knowledge or perspectives are no different from those of any other translation produced under other ideological conditions" (Flotow 1999, 277). On a different level, further criticisms discussed the translatability of certain feminist texts across cultures, questioning the intrageneric homogeneity defended by early Anglo North American

feminisms. In this light, many women at the time decided to walk independently and only align with movements that actually represented their particular identity traits. This led to the emergence of countless feminist collectives with different characters and vindications. From then on, the number of publications incorporating studies and contributions from “other” women collectives multiplied, as cultural preferences and the notion of translation as a bridge established progressively in the North American context.

The second paradigm focuses on gender as a discursive, performative act. This perspective dismisses the traditional rigid link between gender and feminism and conceives of gender definitions as “neither universal nor absolute manifestations of inherent differences but relatively local, constantly changing constructions contingent on multiple historical and cultural factors” (Maier and Massardier-Kennedy 1996, 230). The argument, thus, favors recognizing difference rather than imposing Anglo-American feminist or hegemonic conceptions of gender (Flotow 1999, 282). This second paradigm has derived into two research lines: one that focuses on issues related to sexual identity (studies on the translation of gay or queer identities, for instance) and another—more developed in Spain—compromised with the study of the role of cultural, ethnical and racial intersectionalities in translation. At this point, Flotow draws attention to the progressive undermining of fixed categories and certainties by the second paradigm: “it combines the discursive performativity of diverse types of alternative (and conventional) genders with ideas about translation as performance—a combination that leads to textual transformance” (Flotow 1999, 285).

In “Women in Translation: Current Intersections, Theory and Practice” (1996), Carol Maier and Françoise Massardier-Keney suggest the term “woman-identified translation” to describe the practice of identifying features of the woman translator in the translation process and product. This proposal claims to go beyond the notion of “feminist translation” and parallels Hélène Cixous’s “*écriture féminine*” (women’s writing), which is defined by Elaine Showalter as “the inscription of the feminine body and female difference in language and text” (Showalter 1985, 249). However, woman-identified praxis, just like *écriture féminine*, is not limited to women, but can be exercised by writers/translators willing to embrace their “femininity” and actively project it through rewriting. As noted by Maier and Massardier-Keney (1996, 227), “its theorists and practitioners [of woman-identified praxis] either identify themselves as

women or work exclusively with writing by authors who identify themselves as women. Such translators may be female or male, they may or may not consider themselves 'feminists', and their definitions of 'feminism' vary". In this light, the authors endorse the destabilizing effect of translation to gender identity, and present the translating activity as a means to transcend the limits of conventional definitions. To illustrate their point, Maier and Massardier-Keney cite a short exchange from Barbara Wilson's novel *Gaudi Afternoon*: "'Woman or man?' 'Neither...I'm a translator'" (Wilson in Maier and Massardier-Keney 1996, 106).

According to Núria Brufau Alvira, it is precisely this second paradigm, more deeply rooted in cultural, ethnic or racial identities, the one that has progressively gained ground in the Spanish academia during the last twenty years. Among the scholars who have produced research in this area, Brufau Alvira cites M<sup>a</sup> Carmen África Vidal Claramonte, Pilar Godayol, Dora Sales Salvador, M<sup>a</sup> Rosario Martín Ruano and Olga Castro Vázquez. These scholars have advanced pioneering proposals in the field, considering global sociocultural and ideological transformations in an effort to align women's empowerment with fluid cultural identities. More precisely, Martín Ruano defines the concerns of this approach as "a new translation politics and poetics based on a flexible ethics of location and on an awareness of the importance of positionality" (2005, 37).

In this context, both national and international scholars such as Olga Castro Vázquez (2010, 2017 and 2020), Núria Brufau Alvira (2009 and 2011), Luise von Flotow (2016, 2017 and 2020), María Laura Spoturno (2018 and 2020), Lola Sánchez (2015 and 2020) and Hala Kamal (2008 and 2020), among others, have contextualized their research on translation within the epistemological framework of transnational feminisms. This perspective is seen as key to respond to the contemporary problems affecting humanity as a whole in a world profoundly defined by the neoliberal values of globalization. Indeed, the third feminist wave has evidenced the heterogeneous character of contemporary feminist movements, which affect and are affected by sexual, racial, class and cultural identities (among others):

We know that what oppresses me may not oppress you, that what oppresses you may be something I participate in, and that what oppresses me may be something you participate in. Even as different strands of feminism and activism

sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether. (Heywood and Drake 1997, 3)

According to Brufau Alvira, this perspective is tightly connected to the practice of translation, as it draws from a fundamental celebration of differences which can only be acknowledged through translation. In turn, these essential differences exist precisely because we do not speak the same language; precisely because we need translation (Ahmed 2000, 180 and Brufau Alvira 2009, 530). In this context, Brufau Alvira (2009, 530) coins the notion of “the translation turn of feminism”:

el feminismo mundial camina ya con firmeza hacia una colaboración transnacional, que incorpore las reivindicaciones de los grupos de mujeres de todas partes, contextos y situaciones, que busque convergencias, que permita, si bien no imponga, préstamos metodológicos. La colaboración intrafeminista necesita de la traducción para alcanzar la meta de la igualdad—en lo que me he permitido acuñar como el giro traductológico del feminismo—, una traducción que destruya o delate estereotipos de género y también otros que puedan ralentizar o impedir los acuerdos interfeministas.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Brufau Alvira makes use of Judith Butler’s conception of cultural translation, which she renders as the basis of a constant questioning that allows the incorporation of other concerns, other rhythms and other priorities into what is considered “universal”, thus diversifying and multiplying the spaces of work for equality. It is the application of this paradigm to Gender Studies what she deems as the translation turn of feminism. This approach draws from the confluence of cultural and gender sensibilities as well as a conception of translation as a tool for change—a stance that is nowadays generally accepted in TS—.

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<sup>13</sup> “global feminism is already moving firmly towards transnational collaboration, incorporating the claims of women’s groups from all parts, contexts and situations, seeking convergences, allowing, if not imposing, methodological borrowings. Intra-feminist collaboration needs translation to achieve the goal of equality— in what I have allowed myself to coin as the translation turn of feminism—a translation that destroys or reveals gender and other stereotypes that may slow down or impede interfeminist agreements.”

Brufau Alvira inscribes this turn in the context of the relatively recent development of a transnational feminism that seeks to move beyond the borders of nations, peoples and cultures in order to find points of contact that allow us to outline universal goals and values for equality. This task, of course, necessarily demands processes of cultural translation which, as understood by Judith Butler, inevitably intersect with the question of feminist translation. In this context, Brufau Alvira advances the notion of *intersectional translation* inasmuch as intersectional theory contributes to a new understanding of identities based on feminist theory which can also be reflected and implemented through translation practice.

Against a global feminism that favors universalized Western models, intersectional feminism works to “compare the multiple, overlapping and discrete oppressions rather than to construct a theory of hegemonic oppression under a unified category of gender” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 17). That is, it assumes diversity but draws from general projects based on affinities rather than individual identifications with fixed categories (e.g. race, gender, nationality, etc.). This feminism observes world inequality and considers transcultural power relations; it moves beyond the international and defends a postcolonial and transnational paradigm (Brufau Alvira 2009, 528).

In this complex and multifaceted framework, translation becomes a tremendously complex activity which can be understood, as Michael Cronin has suggested, “as reflection” (Cronin 2003, 141). This approach is opposed to allegedly universal and unequivocal translation strategies, as the activity becomes reflection-driven and particular to the character and features of every text. In this context, intersectional translation constitutes a tool that may offer “particular solutions for concrete challenges” (Brufau Alvira 2009, 542) on the basis of the different axes that may combine in specific contexts.

Likewise, intersectional translation can also be associated with Hermans’s conception of “thick translation”,<sup>14</sup> which he uses “as a label for a self-critical form of cross-cultural

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of “thick translation” was originally coined by Kwame Anthony Appiah in 1993 in reference to the academic footnoted translation that takes into consideration the impact of our problematic perception of difference, of alien cultures and literatures. The main purpose of this approach is to recreate the means by which the work manages, on the one hand, to have a “thick” presence in the target culture, as well as to acknowledge new disruptions of meaning and draw attention to the new significations it can generate. According to Appiah (1993, 818), this approach stresses the genuine continuities between pre-colonial and contemporary forms of cultural production as well as it challenges the assumption of



translation studies” (Hermans 2007, 148). Hermans understands thick translation as a “double-edged technique” which serves to dislocate both foreign terms and concepts, which are explored through a vocabulary that is alien to them as well as to problematize the describer’s—or the translator’s—own terminology, “which must be wrenched out of its familiar shape to accommodate both alterity and similarity” (Hermans 2007, 150). Thus, both intersectional and thick approaches to translation seek to provide specific solutions for individual cases and to avoid the imposition of strategies or viewpoints deriving from a single paradigm: “It is only a mild exaggeration to claim that thick translation contains within it both the acknowledgement of the impossibility of total translation and an unwillingness to appropriate the other through translation even as translation is taking place” (Hermans 2007, 151). However, as argued by Brufau Alvira (2009, 547), Appiah’s and Hermans’s proposals fail to acknowledge the relevance of gender approaches to these new translation proposals which, in their endeavor to emphasize cultural differences, end up invisibilizing or obscuring gender identities in translation.

In any case, the intersectional (feminist) approach to translation brings to the fore the need to rethink translation strategies and problematize their legitimacy in new social contexts that have clearly acquired a compromise with difference and plurality. Following Martín Ruano (2007, 13), translation is in need of “new, more complex conceptions of the notion of respect; new protocols for recognition and treatment; in short, new practices in keeping with new ethics and new ethics in keeping with new times”. Thus, a contemporary gender approach to the study and practice of translation must integrate the manifold perspectives and considerations which have been reflected upon through this section and aim at flexibility and comprehensiveness. Symptomatic of the growing interest in and need for studies on the many ways in which Gender and Translation Studies intersect and benefit from each other is the recent publication of collaborative volumes such as *Feminist translation studies: local and transnational perspectives* (2017), *Feminismo(s) y traducción, feminismo(s) traducido(s)* (2020) and, most significantly, *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender* (2020), as well as the special issue “Hacia una traductología feminista transnacional” (2020) published in *Mutatis Mutandis: Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción*.

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Western cultural superiority. However, Hermans traces the origins of the term to Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” (1973), and uses both concepts to bring about different ways of conceptualizing translation.



## 2. AN APPROACH TO A SPECIFIC TRANSLATION PROBLEM: THE TRANSLATION OF LINGUISTIC VARIATION

This chapter addresses the study of linguistic variation—paying special attention to the Black English variant—and its translational challenges, thus bringing to the fore the importance of the cultural dimension in literary texts. Dialectal variation represents a translation problem that has been taken up by numerous scholars, either to attempt at defining and classifying it or to provide possible solutions to the challenge of its translation. With respect to the latter, approaches to this translation problem have progressively become more oriented towards the suggestion of partial solutions and specific techniques for real translation cases. Anyhow, many theorists have bypassed this topic in their manuals and reference works on translation practice, and others have only studied the issue briefly without proposing restitution procedures or techniques. David Paradela López (2014, n. p.) adverts that the translating tradition in Spain has generally tended to standardize regional and social uses of language or has provided “archetypic solutions” which have proven unsatisfactory:

De la ineficacia de las soluciones propuestas en la práctica y de la indiferencia de la teoría, parece deducirse que la traducción del dialecto debe darse por imposible y considerarla uno más de los elementos que se pierden al traducir. Pero ¿es imposible de verdad? ¿Lo es siempre? ¿Qué se pierde al renunciar a ello y qué se pierde al intentarlo aunque el resultado no sea equivalente al cien por cien al del texto original? (Por lo demás, ¿cuándo el resultado de una traducción es al cien por cien ajustado al original? Más aún: ¿cuándo dos lecturas de un mismo texto, aun sin traducción de por medio, son cien por cien ajustadas y equivalentes?).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “From the ineffectiveness of the solutions proposed in practice and the indifference of the theory, it seems to follow that the translation of dialect must be considered impossible and one of the elements lost in translation. But is it really impossible, is it always impossible, what is lost by giving it up, and what is lost by trying even if the result is not one hundred percent equivalent to that of the original text? (In fact, when is the result of a translation one hundred percent in line with the original? Even more: when are two readings of the same text, even without translation, one hundred percent accurate and equivalent?)”

Taking Pradela López's thought-provoking questions as a starting point, this chapter aims at defining and characterizing linguistic variation in general and Black English in particular, as well as to review the most relevant approaches to the translation of literary dialect and some models of analysis of this practice.

## **2.1. The Notion of Linguistic Variation**

### **2.1.1. Definition and Classification(s)**

Even if it is not the object of this study to reflect upon the various theories about linguistic varieties, it does seem important, given the nature of my work, to shed some light on the concept of intra-lingual variation. In order to understand the translation challenges posed by this phenomenon, it is essential to delimitate the object of study as well as its main characteristics. J. C. Catford pertinently expressed this need already in 1965 (83): "The concept of a 'whole language' is so vast and heterogeneous that it is not operationally useful for many linguistic purposes, descriptive, comparative and pedagogical. It is therefore desirable to have a framework of categories for the classification of 'sub-languages' or varieties within a total language".

Thus, linguistic variation is a phenomenon inherent to language which has been the subject of extensive research undertaken from different points of view. Ricardo Muñoz and Roberto Mayoral Asensio understand variation in its broadest sense, as "the expression of potentially similar meanings through different strategies that give rise to different textual segments" (Muñoz in Mayoral Asensio 1999, 19).<sup>16</sup> For Catford (1965, 84), a language variety is "a sub-set of formal and/or substantial features which correlates with a particular type of socio-situational feature". Likewise, Hurtado Albir, following M.A.K. Halliday, Angus McIntosh, and Peter Strevens (1964) and Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990), defines linguistic variation in reference to the dimensions of language related to both its users and the context of its particular use (Hurtado Albir 2001, 544).

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<sup>16</sup> "la expresión de significados potencialmente similares mediante estrategias diferentes que dan lugar a segmentos textuales distintos"

Since the second half of the twentieth century, studies on linguistic variation have been favored in disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, stylistics and TS, among others. These approaches share a common interest in the role of external factors to the description of language, which are key to explaining its use and function in a given context. These disciplines, thus, aim at establishing relationships between phenomena internal to the linguistic system and external social and situational events. To Michael Gregory (1967, 178), “a variety can be thought of as a kind of contextual category, correlating groups of linguistic features with recurrent situational features”.

Considering that the notion of linguistic variation has been thoroughly studied and since it is not the aim of this chapter to reflect on the phenomenon of linguistic variation *per se* but rather to examine the approaches and strategies used for its translation, I shall briefly review four key approaches to the study of linguistic variation, which come from the fields of linguistics and translation. These approaches have also advanced proposals to classify and organize varieties according to their use and features, so they will serve as the basic framework that fundamentals the proposals for the translation of literary dialect which are discussed in the following section.

### 2.1.2. The Systemic Functional Approach

Before TS was established as an autonomous discipline, linguists such as Catford and Halliday laid the groundwork on the characterization of linguistic variation, advancing proposals that continue to be relevant in the discipline. While Catford’s approach will be examined in the next subsection, it was Halliday, drawing from J. R. Firth’s conception of language as a system, who advanced one of the earliest proposals at characterizing and categorizing linguistic variation. In this context, Halliday conceived of linguistic variation as “the expression of fundamental attributes of the social system; dialect variation expresses the diversity of social structures (social hierarchies of all kinds), while register variation expresses the diversity of social processes” (1978, 360).

In *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* (1964) Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens distinguished between two main dimensions of variation, which are functionally related: user-related variants or *dialects*, and use-related variants or *registers*. Especially relevant at this point is their conception of standard varieties as a

kind of dialect which is defined by and dependent on the language community (1964, 83). Within this framework, the authors draw analogies between the function of a standard variety and a lingua franca, inasmuch as both aim at intelligibility within a linguistic community:

[...] there is no suggestion that the dialect chosen as the “standard” language is any better than any other dialect. A modern state needs a lingua franca for its citizens, and there are historical reasons leading to the choice of one dialect rather than another. Nor is there any suggestion that those who learn the standard language should speak it exactly alike. The aim is intelligibility for all purposes of communication. (1964, 83-84)

Just as geography is signaled out as a key variable in differentiating dialects, the authors relate registers to the field, mode and style of discourse. The *field* of discourse is described as the subject-matter of the communicative activity; that is, the type of situation in which the linguistic activity takes place. The *mode* refers to the medium of the language activity, that is, primarily, spoken and written. Finally, the *style* relates to the relations among the participants, and primarily distinguishes between colloquial and polite, even if the authors recommend its treatment as a cline rather than a clear-cut binary opposition.

This classification set the milestones for subsequent work both within the field of linguistics as well as in neighboring disciplines such as TS. Indeed, scholars such as Catford (1965), House (1977), Hatim and Mason (1990 and 1997), Hurtado Albir (2001) or Mayoral Asensio (1999), have referred to fundamental notions advanced by Halliday’s systemic functional approach to language variation in their own proposals.

### 2.1.3. The Linguistic Approach

As has already been mentioned, Catford’s linguistic approach to the classification of language varieties draws from Halliday’s model, and is nowadays considered fundamental for the understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. Particularly, Catford’s work on linguistic theories of translation was held as a referent in contrastive

linguistics.<sup>17</sup> In *A Linguistic Theory of Translation. An Essay on Applied Linguistics* (1965), Catford classifies varieties on the basis of a number of *constants* in language-driven situations, namely the performer (writer or speaker), the addressee and the medium (phonology or graphology). In this context, he distinguishes between two major classes: (i) varieties which are more permanent for a performer and (ii) varieties which are rather transient “in that they change with change in the immediate situation of utterance” (1965, 84).

Drawing from these two notions, Catford cites idiolect and dialect as permanent forms of language variation. Idiolects depend on the personal identity of the performer, whereas dialects encompass variation related to the performer’s geographical, temporal or social affiliations. In relation to this, dialects call for a further subcategorization into geographical or “proper”, temporal or “état de langue” and social, respectively. As for varieties related to transient characteristics of the communicative situation, he includes register, style and mode.

The following scheme summarizes Catford’s classification of dialectal variation:

- 1) Varieties related to *permanent* characteristics of the performer:
  - a) Idiolect
  - b) Dialect
    - i. Geographical dialect or Dialect “proper” (e.g. American, British, Scottish)
    - ii. Temporal Dialect or “état de langue” (e.g. Contemporary English, Middle English)
    - iii. Social dialect (e.g. Upper-class, working-class)
- 2) Varieties related to *transient* characteristics of the performer:
  - a) Register (e.g. scientific, civil-service, religious)
  - b) Style (e.g. formal, colloquial, intimate)
  - c) Mode (e.g. spoken, written)

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<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, Catford’s approach to translation belonged to early translation theories based on the notion of equivalence, as he considered translation a phenomenon that belonged to the realm of contrastive linguistics. However, he published landmark work to the study of translation as equivalence (1965).

As noted by Isabel García Izquierdo (2000, 64) and Isabel Tello Fons (2011, 26), Catford's proposal can be regarded as pioneering. Indeed, authors such as Mayoral Asensio (1999) or Josep Julià Ballbè (1997a) have taken up in their proposals several insights initially brought up by Catford, such as the notion of "marker".

However, to M<sup>a</sup> Antonia Martín Zorraquino (2000, 7), it is Eugen Coşeriu the contemporary linguist that has most rigorously accounted for the phenomenon of linguistic variation, providing a solid classification which may also serve as a method of analysis. Coşeriu ([1973] 1981) describes languages as complex, heterogeneous and historically-built objects which incorporate a range of internal variation, usually defined by specific linguistic traditions. This variation can be classified, according to the author, in three main types: a) *diatopic* differences, that is, variation according to geographic space; b) *diastratic* differences, or variation in the socio-cultural strata of a given linguistic community; c) *diaphasic* differences, which refer to the different types of expressive modality (such as spoken language, written language, literary language, public language, familiar language, etc.). These types correlate with three different homogeneous traditions: syntopic units or dialects (units considered at a single point in space or which do not present spatial diversity), synstratic units or language levels (also known as social dialects or sociolects, are units considered within a single socio-cultural stratum) and synphasic units or language styles (units of expressive mode).<sup>18</sup> In this context, Coşeriu concludes that a historical language can never be conceived of as a single linguistic system, but rather a "diasystem"; that is, an aggregate of dialects, levels and styles.

#### 2.1.4. The Sociolinguistic Approach

Sociolinguistics has also significantly contributed to the study of language variation through the work of authors such as William Labov, David Crystal, Michael Gregory,

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<sup>18</sup> At this point, Coşeriu ([1973] 1981, 13) remarks that these units are only homogeneous from a single point of view, which does not imply that homogeneity is preserved when the types interact with one another: "dentro de cada unidad sintópica suele haber diferencias diastráticas y diafáticas (de nivel y de estilo); en cada nivel podrán comprobarse diferencias diatópicas y diafáticas, y en cada estilo de lengua, diferencias diatópicas y diastráticas." [within each syntopic unit there are usually diatopic and diaphatic differences (of level and style); in each level, diatopic and diaphatic differences can be found, and each language style displays diatopic and diastratic differences.]



Susan Carroll or Joshua Fishman. Especially noteworthy in this case is Gregory's and Carroll's approach, which was advanced in the collaborative volume *Language and Situation: Language Varieties and Their Social Contexts* (1978). Gregory and Carroll pick up Catford's definition of language variation which correlates formal linguistic features to recurrent socio-situational features (1978, 5). Their classification, which draws from Halliday's, McIntosh and Strevens's model, distinguishes between "reasonably permanent characteristics of the user in language events" and "the user's use of language in such events" (1978, 4). According to the authors, these groups yield the two main language varieties: dialects and diatypes, respectively.

As for dialects, the authors draw a primary distinction between standard and non-standard varieties, which are conceived of as part of a continuum of variation rather than a set of discrete categories. Idiolect is also considered a subtype of dialect, and is thereby defined as "the set of linguistic features associated with user's individuality". The authors also consider temporal dialects (i.e. language variation according to "the user's temporal provenance"), geographical dialects (i.e. language variation according to the user's geographical provenance) and social dialects, which reflect the relationship between language and social class (1978, 5-6).

Regarding diatypes, which are related to language use, field, mode and tenor are distinguished. As for the field of discourse, it is described as "the consequence of the user's purposive role"—that is, what the language is about—. The mode reflects the user's relationship to the medium of transmission; at this point the authors problematize the binary opposition written/oral, particularly in relation to language use in novels. Thus, they suggest other categories such as written to be spoken and written "to be read with the eye" (1978, 8). Finally, the tenor involves the users' relationship with their addressees, so it is related to the different degrees of formality.

Drawing from this characterization, the authors highlight the hybrid character of language variation, which is conceived of as taking place within a cline between dialects and diatypes.

### 2.1.5. The Translatological Approach

Within the field of translation, the phenomenon of linguistic variation has been approached from different angles and perspectives. Among these, I will pay special attention to Juliane House's model of functional equivalence, Antoine Berman and Peter Newmark's approach based on the notion of equivalence and Hatim and Mason's textual approach.

House's proposal was one of the earliest contributions to the classification of linguistic variation. Her model uses David Crystal's and Derek Davy's system of "situational dimensions" (1969), thereby understood as analyzable features of the context of situation where the text is inscribed (1969, 36-37). Likewise, following Crystal's and Davy's model, she differentiates between dimensions of language user and dimensions of language use. For each part, she uses several subcategories. Geographical origin, social class and time features are related to the dimensions of language user. The author does not further delve into the characterization of language variation according to the user nor does she consider idiolects in her classification, which, according to her, belong to the realm of language use.

In this framework, House aims at determining the function of the text by analyzing linguistic material through the aforementioned set of situational dimensions. This leads to a redefinition of the nature of functional equivalence: "it can be described as enabling access to the function the original text has (had) in its discourse world or frame" (1997, 112). However, in *Translation Quality Assessment: A Model Revisited* (1997), House introduced several changes in her initial proposal and leaned towards Halliday's and Hassan's model (1989) in the incorporation of the semiotic dimension as well as the notion of genre.

Another pioneer in the study of language variation from a translatological perspective was Eugene A. Nida, who picked up contributions from manifold disciplines such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, semantics or anthropology in his eclectic approach. Even if the author did not provide a specific model for the analysis of the translation of language variation, in his 1975 work *Language Structure and Translation: Essays* he draws a primary distinction between language varieties and style varieties (175-177). Regarding language varieties, he distinguishes three main dimensions: time (old vs. new

forms, archaisms vs. neologisms), geography (dialects) and class. However, he also pays attention to factors that may influence language variation, namely age, sex, education level, job, social class and religious confession. As for style varieties, Nida identifies five levels: frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate.

As earlier noted, Halliday's model influenced the later work of several experts in the field of TS who used his proposal as a starting point for their contribution to this research area. Among these, especially noteworthy is Roger T. Bell's work (1991), which brings forward a theory of translation that privileges the study of linguistic variation as a key axis in the communicative process and necessarily conditions translator's choices. In this context, Bell disregards more traditional conceptions of language variation as a problem and defines it as "in no sense an inconvenient characteristic of language in use but its very nature without which it would be unable to function as a communication system" (1991, 7). Even if the author considers both dialects and registers in his study of linguistic variation, he devotes more attention to the latter. Likewise, Mona Baker's contribution follows Bell's line of thought, inasmuch as she also shows greater interest in the study of registers and their translation. However, as for dialectal variation, the author draws from Catford's work (1965) and distinguishes between geographic, temporal and social dialects (1992, 15-17).

In parallel, Peter Newmark discussed the translation of language variation throughout his work. Indeed, the subject is tackled in *Paragraphs on Translation* (1993), *About Translation* (1991), *A Textbook of Translation* (1988b) and *Approaches to Translation* (1988a). In general, Newmark adheres to Halliday's concept of register (which includes the dimensions of field, mode and tenor of discourse) and considers that "familiarity [with this concept] is invaluable both in analysing a text, in criticising a translation, and in training translators" (1991, 77). In *A Textbook of Translation*, Newmark defines dialects as "a self-contained variety of language not a deviation from standard language" (195) and defends their translatability. In this light, the author pays special attention to the literary use of dialect, arguing that it is the translator's job to decide on the function of dialect in a given ST, which will determine translation choices. Thus, he distinguishes between three main uses: (a) to show a slang use of language; (b) to stress social class contrasts; and more rarely (c) to indicate local cultural features.

In *Discourse and the Translator* (1990), Hatim and Mason draw on the systemic-functional model of language developed by Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964). This theory of language has its origins in Bronislaw Malinowski's theory of context (1923 and 1935)—which defines the context of the situation; that is, the culture surrounding the acts of production and reception of a given text—and in Firth's work (1935), which contends that meaning has to do with what the utterance is intended to achieve rather than with the meaning of the words individually. In this context, the model brought forward by Hatim and Mason allows the study of both intratextual and extratextual features of texts, even if it devotes especial consideration to the latter. Hatim and Mason's work has impacted the field of TS, and has been especially significant for the development of subsequent models of analysis and translation teaching.

Context is presented as a key element in the authors' work, as it can account for key elements in the study and practice of translation, such as discourse intentionality, intertextuality and linguistic variation. The authors follow Egon Werlich (1970) in his understanding of context as encompassing all situational factors and socio-historical circumstances that manifest themselves within and without the area of perception shared by interlocutors. In their seminal work *Discourse and the Translator*, the authors define translation as a communicative process, and consequently base their model on the analysis of context, which is configured according to three dimensions: the communicative dimension (related to linguistic variation and elements of register); the pragmatic dimension (related to discourse intentionality); and the semiotic dimension (related to cultural value systems).

The communicative dimension refers mainly to the concepts of use and user. The category of use, in turn, relates to the elements of register, which comprise the textual field (determined by the socio-professional framework), mode (according to the written, oral, etc. material medium) and tenor (determined by the relationship between sender and addressee). The user category, on the other hand, covers what the authors define as dialect: the standard/nonstandard dialect; the geographical dialect; the social dialect; the temporal dialect and the idiolect, or individual variation (1990, 39).

The pragmatic dimension is related to intentionality, the speech act sequence, rhetorical purposes, text types and the cooperative principle. Hatim and Mason follow Robert C.

Stalnaker's conception of pragmatics, which he defines as "the study of the purposes for which sentences are used, of the real-world conditions under which a sentence may be appropriately used as an utterance" (1972, 380). In this context, the authors foreground the key role of the pragmatic dimension in their approach to translation: "The translator, in addition to being a competent processor of intentions in any SL [source language] text, must be in a position to make judgements about the likely effect of the translation on TL readers/hearers." (1990, 65).

Finally, the semiotic dimension regulates the interaction of the various discursual elements, which are hereby interpreted as signs functioning within a given culture. The semiotic dimension includes the analysis of textual genre and discourse, and is related to the connotative properties of the sign. According to the authors,

the role of the translator as reader is then one of constructing a model of the intended meaning of the ST and of forming judgements about the probable impact of the ST on intended receivers. As a text producer, the translator operates in a different socio-cultural environment, seeking to reproduce his or her interpretation of "speaker meaning" in such a way as to achieve the intended effects on TT readers. (Hatim and Mason 1990, 116)

Local scholars such as Roberto Mayoral Asensio, Ricardo Muñoz Martín and Rosa Rabadán, among others, have also provided classifications of dialectal variation. Mayoral Asensio's contribution is defined by Tello Fons (2011, 53) as the most comprehensive study in this area published in Spanish to date. Mayoral Asensio's approach integrates use and user related variants in a single scheme, thus bringing forward the possibility of a continuum—rather than a clear-cut distinction—between the two. This classification was initially advanced in "Comentario a la traducción de algunas variedades de la lengua" (1990) and later developed in "La traducción de la variación lingüística" (1997) and it distinguished variation according to factors such as attitude, age, geography, time, topic medium and genre, among others. In this respect, Tello Fons has criticized the lack of jerarquization of Mayoral Asensio's proposal, arguing that variants related to the topic, the genre and text type belong to a supralinguistic dimension based on the sociocultural context (Tello Fons 2011, 55).

Rabadán uses the characterization of target receptors of a translated text to develop a classification of linguistic variation. In her proposal, the scholar pays special attention to the distinction between sociolects and the standard variety of a language, which she describes as a *koiné* which transcends the borders imposed by social stratification (Rabadán 1991, 83). Thus, the standard language is thereby conceived of as an overlapping variety [variedad superpuesta] which answers the needs of a range of communities or social groups. From this perspective, sociolects are defined as the divergent use of the standard, normative variety which differentiate and characterize the social groups conforming a language community. The author also considers dialectal variation, and problematizes the distinction between a dialect and a language. Other variables included in her approach are time (diachronic varieties), religion, age, field (technical languages), mode, idiolect, gender and race. About the two latter, the author argues that there is no evidence of variation in language use inherent to ethnic or gender distinctions, but rather such variation is acquired and learned from the social and linguistic behavior of the linguistic community. Consequently, Rabadán claims that her characterization of the target receptor of the English/Spanish translation does not consider gender as a relevant feature because it “does not condition in any perceivable way the translators’ choices regarding their target readers” [no afecta de forma apreciable las decisiones del traductor respect a sus lectores meta] (1991, 88).

Ovidi Carbonell i Cortés approaches the characterization of language variation from a sociolinguistic perspective, and devises a chart that aims at describing linguistic variants and the relationships occurring at different levels or dimensions (1999, 81). According to the author, his graphic representation only reflects an approximation to the study of language change and actually evidences the difficulty of accounting for multidimensional phenomena in a bidimensional figure. For instance, Carbonell i Cortés admits that his proposal does not rightly account for the way in which some varieties overlap with others in real life.

The Catalan scholar also draws on previous work by Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964), Gregory and Carroll (1978) and Hatim and Mason (1990), and aligns with them in their distinction between user and use related variants. As for the former, the author distinguishes between social, temporal, geographic and personal factors that result in dialects, chronolects, sociolects and idiolects, respectively. Regarding use-related

variants (i.e. registers or functional variants), Carbonell i Cortés picks up Hatim and Mason’s notions of field, mode and tenor.

Last but not least, in *Lingüística para traducir* (1995) Muñoz Martín problematizes the systematic classification of dialectal variants, and remarks the difficulty of providing a general abstract definition of dialect, given the manifold practical exceptions and contradictions. However, Muñoz Martín conceives of dialects as “systemic varieties of a specific language which are spoken in a particular area” (1995, 5). He also draws distinctions between the standard language, geographical dialects, temporal dialects, social dialects or sociolects and idiolects. Despite these attempts at providing a general classification, he highlights the extreme difficulty of delimiting categories given the real interaction and overlapping between dialectal dimensions.

## **2.2. The Translation of Literary Dialect**

The past sections have provided a general overview of some key approaches to language variation. The purpose of this theoretical revision is not only to bring to the fore the complexity of the study of such phenomenon, but also to illustrate the enormous difficulty faced by translators of literary works which depict dialectal variation. The problem of translating linguistic variation has generated great controversy in the field of TS and plenty of scholarship has been published around this subject. As noted by Tello Fons (2011, 104), while approaches and attitudes regarding the transfer of language variation may vary, nowadays it is generally accepted as common ground that variation can be translated and that languages such as Spanish, for instance, provide a range of resources and options to deal with this translation challenge.

The relationship between dialect as a form of linguistic variation and literary translation is a delicate and problematic one. Linguistic variation is present in literature as a textual feature that can serve multiple purposes and meanings, and can be considered a further stylistic device whose use may be deemed parallel to that of any other literary mechanism, such as rhetorical figures or particular syntactic constructions (Tello Fons 2011, 141). Just as important as the use of dialect in literature is its function within the

literary work. According to Newmark (1988, 195), the translator's job is to decide on the function of dialect in a particular context, and to use translation techniques that reproduce the function of the source dialect in the TT. To Newmark, these functions can be to reflect slang language, to stress social class contrasts or to indicate local cultural features.

A good number of linguists have contributed to the characterization of this particular variant. Among these contributions, I shall highlight the early work of J. L. Dillard (1972 and 1992); William Labov (1972 and 2001); Geneva Smitherman (1977); Guy Bailey, John Baugh, Salikoko S. Mufwene and John Russell Rickford (1998) and John Russell Rickford (1999). The substantial work of these authors not only situated BE in the larger context of its history and culture, but also set the milestones of its definition and formal characterization by paying attention to its distinctive structure, lexicon and rhetorical style. Most of these works also tackled attitudes towards non-standard black dialect, paying special attention to educational policies in the United States. Regarding more recent research, particularly noteworthy are the works of Shana Poplack (2000), John Russell Rickford and Russell John Rickford (2000), Sonja Lanehart (2001), among others. These works attest to the growing interest in the study of African American English shown by scholars who have undertaken this task, as noted by Lanehart (2001, 1), from multidisciplinary perspective. These include linguistic as well as historical, sociological and cultural approaches.

Further evidence of the relevance of black dialect is Lisa Green's textbook *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (2002), which looks into the morphology, syntax, phonology and lexicon of the dialect as well as the use of BE in literature, the media, and the educational context. Likewise, in 2015 the collaborative volume *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language* was published, which gathers contributions from more than fifty reputed scholars in African American Studies. Finally, Taylor Jones's doctoral dissertation "Variation in African American English: The Great Migration and Regional Differentiation" (2020) is yet another remarkable contribution to the linguistic study of black dialect. In this case, Taylor develops the first large-scale description of regional variation within African American English, particularly focusing on variation in the vocalic system.



While it falls outside the scope of this dissertation to provide a detailed analysis of the formal features of BE, Lisa Cohen Minnick’s characterization of African American literary dialect is of special interest to our object of study. Indeed, in her volume *Dialect and Dichotomy. Literary Representations of African American Speech* (2007), the American scholar provides a classification especially devised in order to be applied to her study of the literary representation of dialect in a set of fiction works. Thus, Minnick pays special attention to grammatical and phonological features of BE, which she characterizes in the tables copied below.<sup>19</sup> The formal features of BE compiled in both tables were obtained from external sources which provided documentation of real-life data. According to the author, “comparison of literary speech data with the data of real speakers provides a basis for the evaluation of the literary data” (2007, 44). Cohen Minnick also adds examples of each given feature taken from literary sources. More precisely, the author uses as reference the four texts which she analyzes later on in the volume, namely Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, Charles Chesnutt’s *Conjure Tales*, William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is important to note that Minnick’s tables do not intend to be comprehensive, but rather compile some of the most usual features of BE which are also used in literary representations of the dialect.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Sources of Documentation</b>	<b>Authors Using Feature (Examples from Literature)</b>
Vocalization of postvocalic /r/	Bailey and Thomas, Cooley, Smitherman	All (before → <i>befo</i> ’: Hurston)
Loss of /r/ after consonants and in unstressed syllables	Pederson (1965)	All (from → <i>fum</i> : Faulkner)
Intervocalic /r/ loss with syllable loss	Pederson (1965), Smitherman	All (different → <i>diffunt</i> : Twain)
Vocalization or loss of unstressed syllabic /r/	Bailey and Thomas	Chesnutt, Faulkner, Hurston (doctor → <i>doctah</i> : Hurston)
Stopping of syllable initial fricatives	Cooley, Pederson (1965), Smitherman, Wolfram	All (that → <i>dat</i> : Faulkner)

<sup>19</sup> The author acknowledges the relevance of lexical features, but argues that her choice is motivated by the influence of scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, Lisa Green and William Labov, who have treated phonological features as crucial components to literary dialect construction as well as linguists such as Lee Pederson, “who advocates attention to grammar despite the traditional emphasis on phonology in literary dialect analysis” (2007, 43).

Stopping of voiceless interdental fricatives	LAGS, LAMSAS <sup>20</sup>	Chesnutt, Faulkner, Hurston (with → <i>wid</i> : Faulkner)
Labialization of interdental fricatives	Bailey and Thomas, Smitherman	All (both → <i>bofe</i> : Chesnutt)
Consonant cluster reduction, especially word final	Green (2002), LAMSAS, Pederson (1965), Wolfram	All (child → <i>chile</i> : Hurston)
Deletion of initial or medial unstressed syllable	LAMSAS, Pederson (1965), Smitherman, Wolfram	All (about → <i>bout</i> : Twain)
Final unstressed /n/ for /ŋ/ in present participle	LAGS, LAMSAS, Pederson (1965)	All (saying → <i>sayin</i> : Hurston)
Other alternation of final unstressed /n/ for /ŋ/	LAGS, LAMSAS, Pederson (1965)	All (evening → <i>evenin</i> : Hurston)
Alternation of /b/ or /β/ for /v/	LAMSAS	Chesnutt (evening → <i>ebening</i> )
Metathesis of final /s/ + stop	Cooley, LAGS, LAMSAS	Chesnutt (ask → <i>ax</i> )
/t/ in final position	Pederson (1965)	Twain (across → <i>acrost</i> )
/j/ after velar stops /k/ and /g/ before vowels followed by /r/	Pederson (1965)	Twain, Chesnutt (care → <i>k'yar</i> : Twain; care → <i>keer</i> : Chesnutt)
Word-initial addition of /h/	LAMSAS	Chesnutt (it → <i>hit</i> )
Word-initial loss of /h/	LAMSAS	Chesnutt (house → <i>'ouse</i> )
Alternation of word-initial unaspirated /w/ for /hw/	LAMSAS	Chesnutt (while → <i>w'ile</i> )
Alternation of diphthongs /aɪ/ for /ɔɪ/	LAMSAS, Pederson (1965)	All (boiler → <i>biler</i> : Twain)
Alternation of /e/ for /ɔ/	LAMSAS, Pederson (1965)	Twain, Chesnutt (because → <i>bekase</i> : Twain)
Merger of /ɛ/ and /ɪ/	LAGS, LAMSAS, Winford	All (get → <i>git</i> : Faulkner)
Glide reduction of /aɪ/ to /a/	Smitherman	Chesnutt, Hurston (I → <i>Ah</i> : Hurston)

<sup>20</sup> LAGS (Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States) and LAMSAS (Linguistic Atlas of the Middle Atlantic States) are two research projects which were carried out during the second half of the twentieth century within the larger framework of the Linguistic Atlas Project (LAP). These projects, directed by Lee Pederson and William A. Kretzschmar Jr., respectively, set out to draw a linguistic map of the dialects spoken in certain areas of the United States and provided valuable data of real speech characteristics.

Alternation of /a/ for /ɛ/ before /r/	Common in 19 <sup>th</sup> -century literary sources	Chesnutt (learn → <i>l'arn</i> )
Alternation of /ɑ/ for /æ/	LAMSAS	Chesnutt (master → <i>marster</i> )
Alternation of /e/ for /i/ before /r/ and /l/	LAMSAS	Chesnutt (real → <i>rale</i> )

**Table 1.** Phonological features of BE (Minnick 2004, 55-56)

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Sources of Documentation</b>	<b>Authors Using Feature (Examples from Literature)</b>
Auxiliary and copula deletion	Smitherman, Wolfram	All ( <i>What he gwyne to do?: Twain</i> )
<i>Be + done</i> for habitual, future, or conditional states	Green (2002), Labov, Smitherman	Hurston ( <i>If Ah wuz, you'd be done woke me up callin' me.</i> )
Completive <i>been</i> for SAE <i>have been</i>	Smitherman	Hurston ( <i>we been kissin'-friends for twenty years</i> )
<i>Done + been</i> (perfective)	Smitherman	Hurston ( <i>Ah done been on mah knees</i> )
<i>Done + verb</i> (resultant states)	Green (1998), Labov, Smitherman	All ( <i>I s'pose yer all done hearn befo' now: Chesnutt</i> )
Simple past <i>done</i>	Labov, Smitherman	Twain, Chesnutt, Hurston ( <i>So I done it: Twain</i> )
Multiple negation	Martin and Wolfram	All ( <i>He couldn' tell no lie: Chesnutt</i> )
<i>But</i> negative	Smitherman	Chesnutt ( <i>Dey wa'n't but th'ee er fo' poun's lef'</i> )
Negative inversion (negative auxiliary before negative indefinite NP)	Green (2002), Martin and Wolfram	Chesnutt, Faulkner, Hurston ( <i>Dey didn' nobody answer: Chesnutt</i> )
Noninverted questions	Martin and Wolfram	Chesnutt, Faulkner, Hurston ( <i>w'at fer yer won' speak ter me?: Chesnutt</i> )
Subject-verb nonconcord (includes 3rd-person singular <i>s</i> -deletion, 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular/plural <i>-s</i> , and leveling to <i>was</i> or <i>weren't</i> )	Labov, Schneider (1997), Smitherman, Wolfram	All ( <i>Ef she say anything: Faulkner; I knows: Faulkner; You wuz los': Twain; He warn't no wise man: Twain</i> )

Unmarked past	Fasold, Smitherman, Wolfram	All ( <i>he didn' tel Dilsey come on the plantation</i> : Chesnutt)
Regularized past	Fasold, Wolfram	All ( <i>he seed dis gal a-cryin'</i> : Chesnutt)
Relative pronoun deletion or alternation	Martin and Wolfram	Chesnutt, Hurston ( <i>a gemman over on Rockfish w'at died</i> : Chesnutt)
Possessive <i>they</i>	Mufwene, Smitherman	Chesnutt, Hurston ( <i>dey wicked ways</i> : Chesnutt)
Pronoun apposition	Smitherman	Hurston ( <i>And Sam, he know so much into things</i> )
Undifferentiated pronoun reflexives	Mufwene, Smitherman	Chesnutt, Hurston ( <i>deyselves</i> : Chesnutt)
Object pronoun <i>them</i> for subject pronoun <i>those</i>	Smitherman	Chesnutt, Hurston ( <i>one er dem big waggins</i> : Chesnutt)
Plural -s deletion	Kessler, Smitherman	Twain ( <i>Not if it's forty year!</i> )
Hypercorrect plural -s	Smitherman	Hurston ( <i>Folkses, de sun is goin' down</i> )
Regularized plural	LAGS, LAMSAS	Hurston ( <i>usin' yo' body to wipe his foots on</i> )
A-prefixing	Wolfram	Twain, Chesnutt ( <i>I see a light a-comin'</i> : Twain)
Existential <i>it/they</i> with indefinite subject	Green (2002), Martin and Wolfram, Smitherman	Chesnutt, Hurston ( <i>It's so many people never seen de light at all</i> : Hurston)
<i>Tell + say</i> serial verb construction	Martin and Wolfram	Hurston ( <i>mah husband tell me say no first class booger would have me</i> )
Indignant <i>come</i> as semiauxiliary with verb + <i>-ing</i>	Martin and Wolfram, Spears	Hurston ( <i>You come makin' out ah wuz dreamin'</i> )
Counterfactual <i>call</i> with reflexive pronoun and verb + <i>-ing</i>	Martin and Wolfram	Hurston ( <i>if dat's what you call Yo'self doin', Ah don't thank yuh for it</i> )
<i>For-to</i> constructions	LAGS, LAMSAS	Chesnutt ( <i>he'd be glad fer ter do w'at he could</i> )

**Table 2.** Grammatical features of BE (Minnick 2004, 57-58)

### 2.2.1. An Overview of Some Approaches to the Translation of Literary Dialect

This section reviews different approaches to the translation of language variation in literary texts which have been provided by a number of scholars within the field of TS. At this point it should be noted that some overlapping between the proposals of different authors may occur, as the suggested techniques will vary depending on a number of factors, such as the source and TL, the target readers or the agents involved in the translation process.

There is no unanimous opinion on the problem of translating dialectal variation. According to House, it is virtually impossible to transfer dialects from one language to another, as the result will always be unsatisfactory. This position has been traditionally held by a number of scholars in the field of TS, such as Clifford E. Landers (1999, 117), who contends that “no dialect travels well in translation” and Jiří Levý (2011, 98), who defends the untranslatability of linguistic variation. To Miguel Sáenz (2000, n. p.) all the solutions that have been advanced so far to address the problem of translating language variation are unsatisfactory: “Translating dialect is not a problem without solution, but something worse: a problem with many solutions, all of them unsatisfactory”.<sup>21</sup> In this light, Sáenz problematizes the translator’s strive for equivalence when dealing with the translation of language variation. However, in relation to this, Raphael Berthele (2002, 588) argues that translation theory is still grappling with definitions of “equivalence” and “authenticity” towards the ST both at the denotational and connotational levels. Indeed, rather than aiming at one-to-one equivalence, authors such as Briguglia (2013, 56) and Tello Fons (2011, 147) contend that the function of dialect in the ST should be the translator’s guiding principle—that is, aiming at functional equivalence—.

To Sáenz (2000, n. p.), any choices regarding strategies to render dialectal variation in the TT should start by considering—at least—three possible scenarios which will necessarily influence translation choices:

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<sup>21</sup> “Traducir el dialecto no es un problema sin solución, sino algo peor: un problema con muchas soluciones, todas ellas insatisfactorias.”

- a) The whole ST is written in dialect.
- b) Dialectal variation only appears in some sporadic sentences which contrast with the main variant used through the text.
- c) There are full chapters or long excerpts written in dialect; that is, dialect has a significant presence in the ST.

According to the author, the first scenario is the less problematic one, as monodialectal texts—using Rabadán’s terminology—<sup>22</sup> can be translated using another dialect or the standard variety in the TL. This assumption has also been made by scholars such as Rabadán (1991, 111) and Tello Fons (2011, 136-137). The second case would require the translator to resort to changes in standard orthography to reflect “a coherent dialect” distinguishable from the standard. According to the author, the most desirable way to face the third scenario would be to use colloquial language in the translation of marked passages.

Berthele (2002, 588), for his part, argues that the translator must understand the complex set of sociolinguistic relationships existing between language varieties, both in the source as well as in the TL. Among these, he includes:

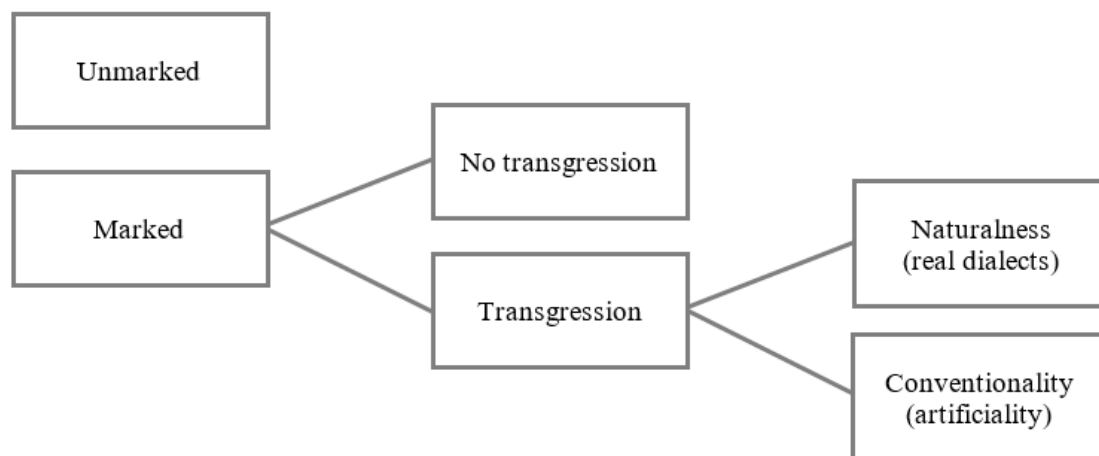
1. The sociolinguistic relationship of standard and non-standard source-language varieties
2. The author’s ideas about 1;
3. the author’s attempt to render 1 in the literary text and his/her purpose and intentions for the use of non-standard varieties;
4. the sociolinguistic relationship of standard and non-standard target-language varieties;
5. the translator’s ideas about 1, 2 and 3;
6. the translator’s attempt to render 1 (or what s/he thinks to be 1) in the TL, based on the translator’s understandings of 4

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<sup>22</sup> Rabadán (1991) distinguishes between monodialectal texts, which are complete written in dialect; partially monodialectal texts, where dialect is used to identify a particular character; and pluridialectal texts, which feature several dialects.

The preliminary considerations brought forward by Sáenz and Berthele bring light into the factors that may influence the translator's choices when dealing with the challenge of linguistic variation. I shall now present an overview of the most common translation techniques that have been suggested in relation to this subject.

To begin with, Josep Marco Borillo has designed a general diagram that gathers the main options available to the translator:



**Figure 1.** Techniques for translating dialect. Translated from Marco Borillo (2002, 8)

Marco Borillo draws a primary distinction between the neutralization of dialect or the use of some other strategy that will signal difference in translation. In the first case, variation would be translated in an unmarked standard language. The second option entails reproducing (totally or partially) the dialectal features of the ST. This can be achieved by transgressing linguistic norms of the TT (e.g. omitting certain letters, resorting to phonetic transcription, using ungrammatical forms or non-standard lexicon, among others).<sup>23</sup> However, according to the author, a marked translation can also be achieved without transgressing TL norms. This implies using informal language or a more oral style to mark difference in the discourse. Finally, if the translator opts for transgressing TL norms, he/she may trend towards naturalness or conventionality. The former involves translating the source dialect with an existing variety in the TL. The

<sup>23</sup> Given the nature of Marco's research, the author continues to suggest other strategies particular to the use of Catalan as a TL. Of course, depending on the SL and the TL, some options may work better than others. As evidenced by Marco's research, there are strategies particular to each language, which brings to the fore the relevance of case studies in this particular area of research.

latter, instead, would require the translator to come up with an artificial configuration different from existing dialects in the TL.

### 2.2.2. An Unmarked Translation: The Neutralization of Dialect

According to Tello (2011, 106), an unmarked translation becomes the lifeline for authors who defend the untranslatability of dialect or advocate for facilitating the target reader's comprehension of the text. Such a strategy goes in line with fluent translation and prompts the text's acceptability in the TC. In this respect, Muñoz Martín (1995, 40) argues that linguistic variation should only be transferred into the TT when it was originally used to perform a specific function. Otherwise, if markers of linguistic variety are considered unintentional and arbitrary, they need not be reflected in translation. His argument in this case is that social and geographical varieties are only products of the linguistic context where they occur, so any possible translation would only reflect the idiolect of the mediator rather than that of the source speaker. However, as noted by Sanz Jiménez (2020, 96), Muñoz Martín does not further delve into the criteria that may determine whether the use of variation in a text can be classified as intentional or arbitrary. Ramos-Pinto (2009, 295) suggests the possibility of incorporating textual indications to inform readers that characters are speaking a particular non-standard variety, such as phrases like "she said in dialect".

Authors such as Newmark (1988), Mayoral Asensio (1990), Rabadán (1991) and Carbonell i Cortés (1999) find the neutralization of dialect is justified when the ST is monodialectal. In this respect, Newmark argues that any attempt at reproducing a geographical, social or temporal dialect in a linguistic context different than the source will inevitably be an artificial imitation. On a similar stance, Mayoral Asensio acknowledges the loss of meaning and style in the neutralization of dialect, but he argues that the great advantage of an unmarked translation is that it avoids generating undesirable effects in the TT. On a similar stance, Rabadán justifies her argument by pointing to the potential lack of acceptability that a marked translation may generate on target readers. According to Carbonell i Cortés, if a text is fully written in a given variant, showing no differences with respect to other variants, dialect becomes the



standard norm and thus fulfills a similar (neutral) function to that of the standard language.

While this view is held by a good number of scholars in the field of TS, at this point I shall refer to Marta Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé's stance on the neutralization of BE (1990, 101):

en una traducción que asimilara a las dos variantes por igual, se perdería algo mucho más importante: el valor que tiene para un negro el empleo de dicho dialecto como método de diferenciación de los blancos, y de simultánea identificación con los miembros de su propia raza. [...] Por ello, en la traducción es necesario dejar constancia, de alguna manera, de estas diferencias tan importantes.<sup>24</sup>

According to Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé, thus, the sociocultural and historical implications and connotations of BE are such that even in the case of a monodialectal text, an unmarked translation would fail to transfer not only stylistic features of the ST but also key elements of content, context and meaning.

### 2.2.3. Translation with No Transgression: The Use of Register to Render Dialect

Within the span of marked solutions to the problem of translating linguistic variation, Marco Borillo contemplates the option of modifying the register of the originally marked passages and introducing colloquial elements as a strategy to signal deviation from the standard language. While this strategy does acknowledge variation, it still adjusts to TL norms and does not transgress linguistic codes in the TC. While authors such as Mayoral Asensio (1990) and Carbonell i Cortés (1999) seem sceptic about using a colloquial register to signal variation in literary texts, Belén Hernández's perspective

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<sup>24</sup> "in a translation that would assimilate the two variants equally, something much more important would be lost: the value for a black person of using this dialect as a method of differentiation from whites, and of simultaneous identification with members of his/her own race. [...] Therefore, it is necessary to record, in some way, in the translation these significant differences."

defends the use of non-transgressing strategies to avoid adding connotations to the TT that were not present in the ST:

Las técnicas consentidas hoy para reproducir los dialectalismos en la lengua de llegada rechazan la sustitución de un dialecto por otro, aunque éste pueda representar una variedad lingüística paralela en la segunda lengua. Tampoco es satisfactorio acortar las palabras al final, con el objetivo de subrayar que se trata de un habla de campesino ignorante, por ejemplo. Es más adecuado producir un lenguaje jergal natural, para hacer entender que se trata de un dialectalismo, y re-procesar solamente una parte de las palabras del original, justamente las necesarias para hacer entender la función asignada al dialecto. (2004, n. p.)<sup>25</sup>

Hernández also points out that contemporary studies of linguistic variation have distanced from traditional considerations of dialect as a mere deviation of standard language. In this context, aiming at rendering variation through non-standard grammar—“grammar mistakes”, in the author’s own words—, pronunciation and orthography seems incoherent considering recent reconsiderations of the status and autonomy of dialectal variation.

Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé has also discussed the options available to the Spanish translator in order to render black dialect through colloquial register:

Insertando constantes expresiones coloquiales y vulgares, buscando para cualquier concepto el término más sencillo, o el más chocante, y evitando estructuras sintácticas complejas, conseguiremos, si bien de manera muy débil, diferenciar el lenguaje de los negros del de los blancos, intentando así dar una idea del vacío existente entre ambas comunidades raciales. (1990, 101)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “The techniques used today to reproduce dialect in the target language reject the substitution of one dialect for another, even if the latter may represent a parallel linguistic variety in the target language. Nor is it satisfactory to shorten words at the end in order to emphasize the speech of an ignorant peasant, for example. It is more appropriate to reproduce a natural jargon in place of dialect, and to reprocess only part of the original words, precisely those necessary to convey the function assigned to the dialect in the source text.”

<sup>26</sup> “By constantly inserting colloquial and vulgar expressions, looking for the simplest or most shocking term for any concept and avoiding complex syntactic structures we will manage, albeit in a very weak way, to differentiate the language of blacks from that of whites, thus trying to give an idea of the existing gap between both racial communities.”

However, the scholar does acknowledge the fact that this strategy is particularly useful when black characters in a given literary text are originally characterized as belonging to the working-class or to a low social status. Following this line of thought, Sanz Jiménez (2020, 97) argues that “the reconstruction of African-American Vernacular English in a colloquial Spanish that avoids complex syntactic structures and features vulgar expressions is not an easy solution, since it can be exaggerated to the point of perpetuating the stereotype that has been associated with uneducated black characters”. At this point, Sanz Jiménez refers to the dubbing of movies such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *The Color Purple* (1985), or *Django Unchained* (2012), where BE was rendered as colloquial and vulgar Spanish. According to the author, this practice has inevitably contributed to perpetuate negative stereotypes associated to the African American community. Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé shares Sanz’s stance, and points out that “Black English does not derive from any vulgar form of British English, not even from American English, nor is it an ignorant relaxation of English grammar, but a conglomerate of influences from various languages and dialects, functionally equivalent in terms of its expressive possibilities to any other language variety” (1990, 100).<sup>27</sup>

In relation to this, Carbonell i Cortés highlights the ideological problems that may come with the use of a colloquial register to render other types of language variation (1999, 91). Following this line of thought, the author contends that reflecting a relaxed pronunciation, a limited lexicon or a simpler syntax may generate or contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes about a linguistic community or a given social group. Carbonell i Cortés’s observation can be related to Lefevere’s remark that the study of the strategies used to render variation in a TL will often reveal the ideological stance of translators or publishers towards the sociocultural communities under representation in the literary text, which are usually regarded as inferior (1992, 78). In relation to this, Ramos-Pinto (2009, 295) also suggests the possibility of upgrading the standard discourse to a more formal register in the TT and using the standard variety to reflect dialectal variation without transgressing TL norms.

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<sup>27</sup> “el Black English no deriva de vulgarización alguna del inglés británico, ni siquiera del inglés americano, ni es una relajación de la gramática inglesa fruto de la ignorancia, sino un conglomerado de influencias de diversas lenguas y dialectos, equivalente funcionalmente en lo que atañe a sus posibilidades expresivas a cualquier otra variedad de lengua.”

#### 2.2.4. Transgressing Linguistic Norms: Towards Naturalness or Conventuality

Regarding strategies that entail transgressing standard norms in the TL, Marco Borillo identifies two main types. The first type involves translating the source dialect with an existing dialect in the TL, which may be assumed to perform a (partially) equivalent function. This option was in vogue during the twentieth century, and was especially used to render geographical variation. However, the authors that have studied or used this strategy highlight the enormous difficulty of creating an equivalent effect through a different language variety or rather, a variety in a different language.

Catford (1965) was one of the first scholars who advocated for this technique, even if she acknowledged the probable lack of equivalence between geographical dialects such as Cockney English and Parigot French, which she used as an example to illustrate her argument. Julià Ballbè (1997b) has also defended the use of this strategy, arguing that it preserves the naturalness and fluency of the TT as well as it expands the readers' horizon of expectations as far as the credibility of the TT is concerned. Of particular interest to our study is Julià Ballbè's proposal of a polydialectal translation of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where he uses Catalan dialects to render variation. However, he problematizes the translation of black dialect in particular, as he finds it difficult to find a genuine Catalan variant that is effective in this particular context and that does not disturb or confuse the reader (1997b, 199-200).

However, authors such as Mayoral Asensio (1990), Carbonell i Cortés (1999), López Guix (2001) and Briguglia (2013) are sceptic about this strategy as, to their view, it may introduce cultural stereotypes or incongruous connotations. To Mayoral Asensio (1990, 40),

en nuestra opinión, aunque con este recurso se puede mantener el tono, la incompatibilidad entre la información marcada culturalmente presente en el resto del texto y la aportada por el nuevo dialecto produce efectos cómicos y de incredulidad en el lector. [...] Generalmente, los dialectos son específicos de una

sola cultura (en nuestro caso de la cultura de origen) y no se encuentra un dialecto correspondiente en la cultura de término.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, López Guix (2001, 8) argues that this strategy is nowadays considered “an abusive adaptation”, and defends the use of other options that do not bleach the “otherness” of the source culture. Following this line of thought, Briguglia (2013, 59) contends that translating dialect for dialect may result in an “excessive linguistic and cultural naturalness” [excesiva naturalidad lingüística y cultural] which may take readers to make false assumptions about the source culture and language community.

Following Rabadán’s stance on this subject, Tello Fons brings to the fore the criterion of readers’ acceptability as key to determine the applicability of translating dialect for dialect. In relation to this, Ramos-Pinto (2009, 295) has pointed to the traditional lack of acceptance shown by target readers of the use of identifiable domestic varieties to characterize foreign characters’ speech. Likewise, Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé has also problematized the use of existing dialects to render BE in particular, as “these variants are too tightly linked to particular regions [...] and using them to translate Black English would result in some incongruent connotations” (1990, 100).<sup>29</sup>

Finally, translators may make use of an artificial non-standard language; that is, a language that does not correspond with any existing variety in the TC. As noted by Tello Fons (2011, 118), while this strategy has a good number of advocates, it poses a double challenge for the translator: first, to provide accurate substandard features that represent a particular geographical or social group or a given character; second, to refrain from using features that may be associated with particular varieties in the TL.

Authors such as Coşeriu, Newmark or Mayoral Asensio have shown preference for this strategy in detriment of using existing dialects in the TL. In this respect, the latter considers that this is the option that less undermines cultural coherence and allows to preserve the general tone and style of the ST. However, Mayoral Asensio also points to

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<sup>28</sup> “In our opinion, although this resource can maintain the tone, the incompatibility between the culturally marked information present in the rest of the text and that provided by the new dialect produces comical effects and incredulity in the reader. [...] Generally, dialects are specific to a single culture (in our case, the source culture) and a corresponding dialect is not found in the target culture.”

<sup>29</sup> “estas variantes están demasiado vinculadas a las regiones respectivas [...], y de su empleo en nuestra traducción del Black English resultarían unas connotaciones incongruentes.”

some pitfalls related to this strategy, including the loss of contextual information as well as the risk to produce a comic effect, as some artificial non-standard features may be associated with ridiculous situations (1990, 41). In this case, the author uses as an example to illustrate his argument the language traditionally used in Spanish to characterize the Native American community, which typically resorts to verb infinitives and no determiners. Authors such as Judith Lavoie have also criticized the used of this strategy in literary texts. In her study of the French translations of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the author argues that creating a new discourse—and idiolect—for a given character would deprive the text from its original ideological project, which was based on the linguistic representations of the characters' individual voice and identity (Lavoie 2002, 141).

While Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé is contrary to using linguistic features of particular regional varieties in the TC, she does recommend the use of a set of non-standard markers to render black dialect in Spanish. Among these, she suggests using a relaxed pronunciation by eliminating weak word-ends (e.g. *tené, mejó, na, morí, to, pa, coló, trabajá*), intervocalic consonants in unstressed syllables (e.g. *traío, desesperao, estao, toa, monea*) as well as some final “s” (e.g. *casa, hablái*). Regarding the last resource, she recommends caution so as to prevent assimilation with the Andalusian dialect (1990, 101).

Anyhow, as has been illustrated in this chapter, there is no single valid solution for the question of translating literary dialect, as choices and options may vary depending on a number of factors (both internal and external to the text), such as the function of linguistic variation in the ST, the nature of the source and target language, the translator's or the publisher's approach to translation and the intended role of the TT in the TC, among others. As Newmark concludes (1981, 113):

There can be and are various theories of translation, but these apply only to certain types of text, and all are at various points between the continuum of transmitter and receiver emphasis. There can be no valid single comprehensive theory of translation, and no general agreement on the element of invariance, the ideal translation unit, the degree of translatability, and the concept of equivalent-effect and congruence in translation, although all these are questions

worth pursuing, particularly if interesting examples are produced in support of an argument.

However, as noted by Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé, the recreation of Newmark's "equivalent-effect" becomes more complex and problematic with texts that have a heavy social and cultural load, as often occurs with African American literature. In this case, Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé foregrounds the translator's duty to bring the text closer to target readers while preserving as much as possible its original context and connotations.





### 3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CORPUS SELECTION

This research falls within Pure Translation Studies, more specifically, within the branch of Descriptive Translation Studies according to Holmes's map (1972). It could also be considered that its orientation is threefold: to the product, to the function and to the process. Likewise, as can be deduced from the theoretical framework, this research interprets our object of study as a dynamic and relational phenomenon rather than a static unit that can be separated from its natural environment. In this case, studying translation as a form of reception requires a methodology of an interdisciplinary nature (Enríquez Aranda 2007, 32) that can relate the premises of DTS with Reception Studies, Comparative Literature and also with other fields of interest for the topic at hand, such as Cultural and Gender Studies. In the introductory chapters to her doctoral dissertation, Enríquez Aranda argues that the descriptive approach suffers from excessive abstraction, but also supplies that this "can be solved by incorporating textual analysis into the description of translations" (2007, 33).<sup>30</sup> Within this framework, this research project feeds, on the one hand, on the contextual analysis of our selected body of works and, on the other, on the textual analysis of a selection of translations.

#### 3.1. Methodological Considerations

##### 3.1.1. Methodology for the Study of the Reception of Translated Literature

To the aforementioned end, I have resorted to two methodological models which can be considered complementary: the so-called "sociological-cultural model" described by Brigitte Lépinette in *La historia de la traducción. Metodología. Apuntes bibliográficos* (1997) and Els Andringa's proposal to study the reception of foreign literatures (2006) which, in turn, draws from Even Zohar's notion of *repertoire*.

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<sup>30</sup> "se puede resolver incorporando el análisis textual a la descripción de traducciones."

Lépinette's sociological-cultural model takes into consideration the social and cultural context of translation at the time of its production and reception. More precisely, this model attempts to explain the conditions of production and reception of the translated text, which has been "*transplanted* to a different spatial (and sometimes temporal) context and *produced* by a different *agent* for a different *target readership*" (1997, 3). The application of this methodology has as its ultimate aim to determine the consequences entailed by such transnaturalization. The choice of the sociological-cultural method also determines the selection of a particular object of study which is referred to as "peritext" and comprises "all the events and phenomena that accompany the production of a text or a set of translated texts, and their appearance in a receiving socio-cultural context" (1997, 6). Finally, the adoption of the sociological-cultural model also entails the use of a set of concrete techniques which, in the words of Lépinette (1997, 7), invite the researcher to "focus on bibliographical aspects, both in terms of primary and secondary sources" and at the same time to draw up inventories that collect, for instance, catalogs of translations of texts by the same author or translations of texts with similar characteristics published during a certain time period.

Els Andringa (2006, 501) redefines Even-Zohar's notion of *repertoire* as a "mental equipment" with three observable and analyzable components: "(1) knowledge of works and oeuvres that serve as models and frames of reference; (2) internalized strategies and conventions that govern production, reception, and communication; and (3) sets of values and interests that determine selection, classification, and judgment". Andringa also describes the characteristics of a *repertoire*, arguing that it is shared by a group of agents (authors, publishers, readers, reviewers, etc.), it governs the ways texts are dealt with and it is typical of a certain period and may change over time. These components and characteristics provide a solid methodological framework for the collection and study of reception data.

In line with the above, and despite the fact that the descriptive paradigm prioritizes the orientation towards the TC as, according to Toury (1995, 29), "translations are facts of target cultures", we understand that the concept of "contextualization" put forward by the author is particularly useful in methodological terms, inasmuch as it acknowledges the relevance of the original conditions of production of the ST to the study of its translation(s). Indeed, this notion allows us to account for the whole cultural,

ideological, social and historical environment in which the literary production by African American women writers has taken place. In relation to this, Toury also notes that the observance of the target pole in no way prescribes that “neither source text nor transfer operations and transferred features, not even translation relationships would have been excluded from a target-oriented program of DTS” (1995, 36).

Following these considerations, Part II develops a general study of the conditions of production and reception of African American Women’s literature in the SC. The chapters conforming Part II have been divided according to chronological criteria and include details on the development of a tradition of black women writers in the United States, paying special attention to the influence of historical and cultural phenomena such as the civil war and emancipation, the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement or the development of black feminisms and, more recently, fourth-wave feminisms both locally and internationally. We may conclude, thus, that the study and determination of the socio-cultural factors that contextualize the creation of a ST are fundamental insofar as these factors make possible the existence of one or a set of translations and may influence their production and reception in a TC.

Once the conditions of production have been contextualized, reconstructing the history of translation of African American women’s literature in Spain as an independent factor becomes a necessary first step before trying to interpret it within the larger target polysystem. This claim is supported by Lépinette, who considers that

el objeto considerado en este enfoque sociológico-cultural obliga al historiador de la traducción a centrarse en cuestiones bibliográficas, tanto en lo relativo a fuentes primarias como fuentes secundarias o críticas y, en algunos casos, para períodos históricos dados, a realizar tareas de catalogación, así como a elaborar inventarios, antes de pasar al análisis de los datos así disponibles. (Lépinette 1997)<sup>31</sup>

This task accounts for Andringa’s second component of the repertoire, namely “internalized strategies and conventions that govern production, reception, and

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<sup>31</sup> “the object examined in the sociological-cultural approach obliges the translation historian to focus on bibliographical questions, both in terms of primary sources as well as secondary or critical sources and, in some cases, for given historical periods, to carry out cataloguing tasks as well as to draw up inventories, before moving on to the analysis of the available data.”

communication” (2006, 501). In our study, however, this second component is brought to the fore as a fundamental first step in the study of the reception of a foreign literature in a target cultural and literary system.

Thus, the initial chapter of Part III traces the translation history of African American women’s literature in Spain, seeking to uncover changing strategies in translation policies as well as shifts in interests. In order to do so, AfroBib was developed. AfroBib is a bibliographical tool that compiles exhaustive data about translations of African American women authors published in Spain. The construction of this database originated out of the need for a reliable and exhaustive bibliography of translations in the field of our domain, as international and national databases such as the UNESCO Index Translationum, the ISBN Database of Books Published in Spain or the catalog of the National Library of Spain present several shortcomings. These systematic inconsistencies have also been signaled by authors such as Maialen Marín Lacarta (2012) and Remedios Fernández-Ruiz et al. (2018), as they inevitably hamper the development of accurate studies in our research field. The analysis of the data compiled in AfroBib provides quantitative and qualitative information, pursuing the ultimate aim of offering a much-needed overview within the larger field of Anglo-American Studies that will help to identify where these works stand within the Spanish publishing market.

Likewise, the sociological-cultural model privileges the study of reception through peritexts, which, according to Lépinette (1997, 4) include “‘immediate’ recipients—at the moment of publication of the translation—and ‘deferred’ recipients—re-editions—, number of readers, cultural and social ‘profile’, acceptance of the translation—vs. rejection—, categories of recipients, etc.”. Thus, the second chapter of Part III complements the qualitative study of reception data with an examination of the topicality of the authors and works collected in AfroBib as *frames of reference* for Spanish critics and reviewers. This task has been carried out by applying Rosengren’s “mentions technique”, which consists on computing the mentions of a given writer/work in a set of reception materials so as to characterize important aspects of the literary frame of reference used by reviewers during a certain time period. This aspect of our analysis correlates with the first component described by Andringa, “knowledge of works and oeuvres that serve as models and frames of reference”. Andringa also uses Rosengren’s technique to measure the change in the meaning of a given oeuvre as a frame of reference in critical discourse. According to the Swedish scholar, “By means

of the mentions, which offer large quantities of easily identified and characterized units of measurement, the size, [...] structure and rate of change of the reviewers' frame of reference can be reliably and validly measured and related to other phenomena within, and outside of, the literary system" (1987, 298).

The third chapter of Part III turns to the reception in the Spanish context, which is described by reconstructing the values that underlie judgements in different sources of reception of the source literature. The analysis of such peritexts falls within the scope of Andringa's third component: "sets of values and interests that determine selection, classification, and judgment" (2006, 501). The sources of reception analyzed in this work were selected following Rosengren (1987), who establishes three main types of criticism: journalistic, essayistic and academic. Therefore, our study examines materials published by

- a) journalistic sources, namely mainstream press media such as newspapers and magazines;
- b) essayistic sources, namely essays, articles and reviews published in literary or specialized magazines;
- c) academic sources, namely academic journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters and full-length works of a scholarly nature.

To these we may add a fourth type of reception, which has become particularly relevant in the digital era:

- d) online sources and digital platforms such as literary blogs, forums or websites.

The study of the reception of translated African American women's literature in Spain is undertaken from a chronological perspective. This approach grants a better understanding of the evolution in the interests and trends in the TC as well as it allows for a comparative examination of the reception of certain authors or works in relation to the production of translations in a given time period.

Taking all the aforementioned elements into consideration, the method used for the analysis of reception can be summarized as follows:

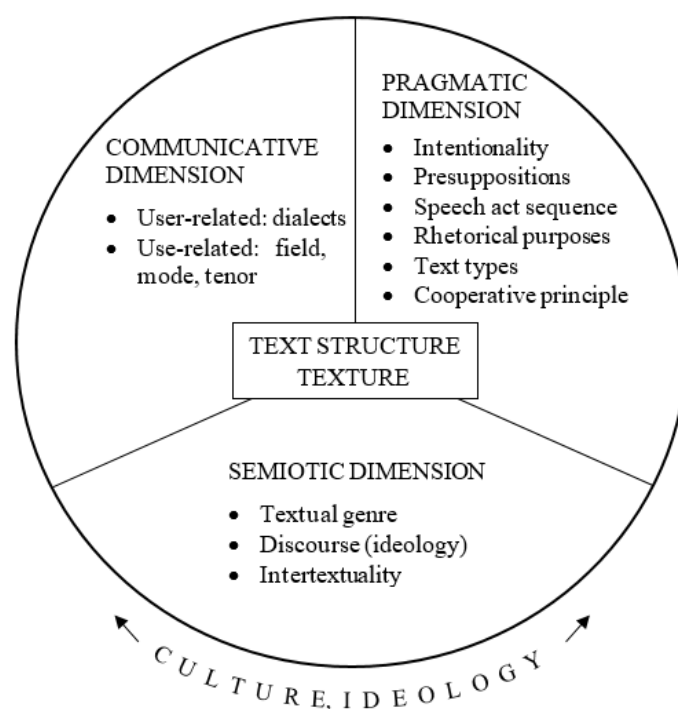
1. Contextualization of the conditions of production and reception in the SC
2. Analysis of the conditions of production and reception in the TC
  - a. Reconstruction of the history of translation of African American women's literature in Spain
  - b. Identification of the frames of reference of Spanish reviewers of African American women's literature
  - c. Study of reception through peritexts: journalistic, essayistic and academic criticism

### 3.1.2. Methodology for the Study of the Translation of Dialectal Variation

As mentioned earlier, scholars such as Enríquez Aranda (2007, 33) have defended the incorporation of textual analyses to the external description of translation and reception phenomena. Likewise, Fóllica (2016, 67) has also advocated for an integration of internal and external approaches to the study of translations; more precisely, her work combines Lépinette's sociological-cultural perspective with the descriptive comparative-contrastive approach. Following these authors, thus, the present study integrates the contextual description of translations and a textual approach to a selection of the texts under examination. In this case, Part V addresses the descriptive empirical analysis of a selection of two STs and their translations into peninsular Spanish. More precisely, the selected texts are Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

In order to compare the ST and the translation, a specific element of analysis was chosen. The problem of linguistic variation is of special interest in the study of translated African American women's literature, and thus serves as a contrastive element. More precisely, I shall pay attention to the translation of Black English, which is also presented as a suggestive case to discuss the limits of translatability. The goal of this analysis is to extract information regarding the techniques used to deal with the translation of BE, a social dialect bound to a political and cultural context distant from the receiving system. More precisely, I will examine how a concrete feature of the ST is

translated into a TL, paying special attention to its function in the new context and the repercussion of translation choices in the reception of literary texts in the target culture. In the context of the present research, our model for analysis must consider the particularities of the relation between ST and TT so as to allow for the examination not only of the use and translation of this dialectal variant but also of the translated text in its own context.



**Figure 2.** Dimensions of context. Adapted from Hatim and Mason (1990, 58)

As has been already discussed, the model brought forward by Hatim and Mason (1990) considers intratextual features of texts, even if it devotes especial consideration to extratextual elements of analysis. Despite the fact that Hatim and Mason’s model is not specific to the study of linguistic variation and its translation, the authors do consider the weight of this feature in their proposal. Likewise, their assumption that “principles of equivalence demand that we attempt to relay the full impact of social dialect, including whatever discursal force it may carry” (1990, 42) works here as a fundamental concern for our study. Indeed, researchers such as Tello Fons (2011) have successfully adapted this model to the analysis of dialectal variation in translation. Thus, the model hereby used for studying the translation of literary black dialect privileges the role of communicative and pragmatic aspects of translation. Even if linguistic features are necessarily tackled within this framework, my analysis considers

dialect a suprasegmental element in the selected texts. The summary presented in Figure 2 is adapted from Hatim and Mason (1990, 58), and outlines the main features considered in the three dimensions of context, which will also serve as the basis for my analysis.

Likewise, as a form of artistic expression, the study of dialect in literature can be approached from the perspective of stylistics. In *Stylistic Approach to Translation*, Jean Boase-Beier (2006, 5) calls for an approach oriented both to the ST and the TT, as he brings forward four potential viewpoints to the study of stylistic elements in translation:

1. the style of the ST as an expression of its author's choices
2. the style of the ST in its effects on the reader (and on the translator as reader)
3. the style of the TT as an expression of choices made by its author (who is the translator)
4. the style of the TT in its effects on the reader.

This model calls for a comparative approach to the study of translation, where the relations between the ST and the TT are crucial to understand the result of the translation process. Thus, my approach shall consider both the source and the target systems framing the texts, as well as the dominant canons regarding production and translation. As noted by Tello Fons (2011, 164), a study of the translation of dialectal variation can benefit from the stylistic approach inasmuch as it allows the researcher to transcend a purely linguistic approach to the texts.

In this context, I selected a number of key excerpts that display features of dialectal variation as used by the main characters of each novel. These excerpts are presented in tables that facilitate the comparative study of the use of BE in the STs and its translation in the TTs. Each excerpt was analyzed according to the three dimensions established by Hatim and Mason (1990), starting from a microtextual analysis that would determine the translation technique used in each case in order to examine the effects of such choices in the different contextual dimensions. These findings were schematically summarized in a table adapted from Tello Fons (2011, 395), which is reproduced below:



	Communicative dimension			Pragmatic dimension			Semiotic dimension		
	User-related	Use-related							
	Technique for translating dialect	Field	Mode	Tenor	Rhetorical Purpose	Type-text focus	Cooperative Principle	Genre	Discourse
<i>El color púrpura</i>									
<i>Beloved</i>									

**Table 3.** Model for the analysis of the translation of linguistic variation. Adapted from Tello Fons (2011, 395).

## 3.2. Corpus Selection

The selection of authors included in the database of African American women's literature published in Spain (AfroBib) was not determined by the author of this research, but was given by a number of external factors. From the point of view of the SC, AfroBib considers literature written by US-born or nationalized black women authors. This categorization is self-imposed; that is, the authors included in the database describe themselves as African American women writers. This is further supported by their inclusion in a set of reference works of an anthological nature which were examined in order to ascertain the authors' belonging to the literary tradition that is under examination. The works accessed at this point include anthologies of African American literature, namely *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* ([1997] 2003), *Breaking Ice: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Fiction* (1990), *Gumbo: A Celebration of African American Writing* (Golden and Harris 2002) and *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* (2014); as well as works specifically addressing African American women's literature, namely *Confirmation, an Anthology of African American Women* (1983), *The Prentice Hall Anthology of African American Women's Literature* (2006) and *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature* (2009).

While these sources provide a solid view of the literary canon of African American women, several recent publications in the field of Black Women Studies have problematized the delimitation of closed categories such as "African American" or "woman". Indeed, during the last decade, several authors have brought forward new approaches which interpret the works of black women writers within the larger framework of a transnational female pan-African identity. By way of example, Margaret Busby's *Daughters of Africa* (1992) and *New Daughters of Africa* (2019) compile works by women of African descent, thus transcending geographical borders. Other contemporary anthologies which adhere to this approach include *Well-Read Black Girl: Finding Our Stories, Discovering Ourselves* (2018) and *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (2016). While time and space constraints prevent this research from adopting such pan-African approach to the study of black women's literature, the aforementioned works provide a useful source to identify prominent twenty-first century

African American women writers, as these are rarely included in more classic anthologies of the genre.

Once the criteria of inclusion and exclusion were clearly delimited, bibliographic data were obtained from a number of different physical and online archives, namely the ISBN Database of Books Published in Spain, the National Library of Spain, the UNESCO Index Translationum, the National Library of Catalonia, the University Union Catalogue of Catalonia, as well as the catalogs of different Spanish publishing houses and online marketplaces such as Amazon, IberLibro and AbeBooks. Consulting a wide variety of sources did not only prevent the transference of a particular system of criteria to the research at hand, but it also compensated for the lack of complete, systematic records of bibliographical information. For instance, the ISBN database is time-limited, as it only considers publications after 1972, and it does not differentiate between reeditions and reprints. Likewise, existing entries in the aforementioned tools do not always disclose all the relevant information about published translations (i.e. references to translators, publishers or collections, among others, are sometimes missing or misleading). These systematic inconsistencies have also been signaled out by authors such as Marín Lacarta (2012), Fernández-Ruiz et al. (2018) and Fóllica (2016), as they inevitably hamper the development of accurate studies in the field of our domain.

Likewise, I also checked the online catalogues available at the websites of Spanish publishing houses. However, these usually contain lists of works available in stock, thus excluding those which are currently out of print. Scholars such as Fóllica have also encountered similar shortcomings in their research: “Often books published in the past are nowhere to be found because they are out of print [...]. Other times, the catalogs no longer exist, nor does the publisher, since the latter may have become extinct” (2016, 68).<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, the physical consultation of the volumes became a productive but time-consuming endeavor. This task was carried out in different libraries and their respective archives (both physical and virtual) and included consultation of the translations as well as other titles of the collections and publishers studied. The libraries accessed during this stage include the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Biblioteca

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<sup>32</sup> “muchas veces los libros editados en el pasado no figuran en ningún sitio por estar descatalogados [...]. Otras veces, los catálogos no existen ni tampoco la editorial, ya que también esta ha desaparecido”

Nacional de Catalunya, Biblioteca de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Biblioteca de la Universidad de Barcelona, Biblioteca de la Universidad Pompeu Fabra and Biblioteca de la Universitat de València.

While it is true that the corpus is subject to a constant process of revision and updating, it is currently informed by a total volume of 228 editions and 115 translations of works by African American women published in Spain from 1968 (first translation of a black woman writer published in Spain) to present day. These texts include both currently available and out of print works and encompass translations into Spanish, Catalan, Valencian, Galician and Basque.

**PART II**

**THE UNITED STATES AND THE LITERARY TRADITION  
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS**



# 1. VOICES OF SLAVERY UP TO THE CIVIL WAR

It was not natural. And she was the first.

(Jordan 1990, 22)

Part II discusses the tradition inaugurated by Lucy Terry in 1746, which extends to present day: literature written by black American women. The tradition initiated by Terry's poem "Bars Fight" is marked not only by the weight of the experience of the different forms of racism that have developed throughout the history of the United States, but also by the notion of "double jeopardy"<sup>33</sup> first brought forward by Francis Beale in 1969: being black and being a woman. In this regard, Frances Smith Foster has also called attention to the double burden traditionally carried by the black woman:

the temptation to label the problems of both white and Black women as female oppression seems merited, for certain grievances do seem the same. Upon examination, however, the similarities are more apparent than real. In reality, the Black woman is twice victimized, for sexual discrimination is but a further distinction within the more encompassing confines of racial discrimination. (1973, 436)

At this point it is worth noting that, although in the mid-eighteenth century Lucy Terry initiated a tradition that would extend to the present day, it was not until the mid-1970s that black American women writers began to receive attention and visibility in academic contexts, coinciding with the development of a solid feminist discourse that was based on the literary production of contemporary women authors as well as on the works of their predecessors (Mitchell and Taylor 2009, 2-3 and Beaulieu 2006, x-xi). The rise of women's and feminist discourses during the second half of the twentieth century would eventually lead to a restructuring of the American literary canon, which slowly began to acknowledge the value and the fundamental role of such discourses in the construction of the American nation and the country's literary tradition (Beaulieu 2006, xi).

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<sup>33</sup> Term coined by Francis Beale in "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" ([1969] 2008) to refer to the added risk of being female and black in twentieth century American society. Authors such as Deborah K. King (1988) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) have expanded the notion a posteriori to "multiple jeopardy", seeking to encompass all the factors and levels of oppression that an individual must face, such as social class, in addition to race and gender, among others.

In this context, Part II provides a descriptive overview of the development of black American women's literature over its nearly three-hundred-year history. Thus, the main purpose of these pages is to familiarize the reader with the development and role of such literature in the SC, paying particular attention to the aesthetic, literary and political value of the works hereby examined. Even if it is not the goal of this dissertation to comparatively study the reception of literary works in the source and the target context—as the social, political, geographical and chronological distance between both nations would hardly allow such an endeavor—, this section will also pay attention to the evolution in the reception of African American women's literature in the source country, as its study certainly sheds light upon the history and the role of black women writers and black women's literature in the United States.

## 1.1. First Miracles

In order to refer to the literature written by women before the Civil War, it is essential to speak, first, of its exceptional condition in a hostile environment, averse to the very existence of such literature. Indeed, I will start by drawing from the notion of “difficult miracle”<sup>34</sup> suggested by June Jordan (1990, 22-23):

How could you, belonging to no one, but property to those despising the smiles of your soul, how could you dare to create yourself: a poet?

A poet can read. A poet can write.

A poet is African in Africa, or Irish in Ireland, or

French on the left bank of Paris, or white in Wisconsin. A poet writes in her own language. A poet writes of her own people, her own history, her own vision, [...]

A poet is somebody free. A poet is someone at home.

How should there be Black poets in America?

However, despite the unspeakable difficulties endured by black women to write and publish in the context of the slavery era in the United States, in 1781 Lucy Terry composed “Bars Fight”, the first literary work ever produced by an African American

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<sup>34</sup> Jordan introduces the notion of “difficult miracle” in the title of the 1990 essay “The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America: Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Wheatley”.



person on record, which would establish the beginning of the African American literary tradition. The poem gradually became popular through oral transmission, until in 1855 it was published in Josiah Gilbert Holland's *History of Western Massachusetts* as well as in George Sheldon's volume *A History of Deerfield, Massachusetts* (1895) (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 32). Moreover, as the only chronicle of the 1746 battle between European invaders and Native American inhabitants of the Deerfield colony, history books in the United States often include excerpts from the poem for its historical as well as its literary value (Foster and Davis 2009, 15-16). However, at this point it is also worth noting Sharon M. Harris's view, who has argued that Lucy Terry's character and significance have been reduced to being identified as the first known African American author, thus overshadowing her life and literary accomplishments (2005, 150). In strict opposition to this approach, scholars such as Sidney and Emma Kaplan have described her as one of the most outstanding women of her time (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989, 209).

Thus, after her emancipation and subsequent marriage to Abijah Prince, Terry took part in several legal battles fighting against racism in her community in favor of the rights of the African American population. On one of these occasions, the Judge Chase praised Terry's eloquent defense, stating that "she had made a better argument than he had heard from any lawyer at the Vermont bar" (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989, 211).<sup>35</sup>

The "she" of whom June Jordan speaks in the section's epigraph specifically refers to Phillis Wheatley, the first person of African descent and the second woman to publish a book in the United States. Although it is true that the literary value and the social implications of her work have been questioned, today Wheatley's name and texts appear in most anthologies and reference works on American literature. In this regard, I shall now refer to the conditions that make hers a more than striking case for the history of American literature.

Born in West Africa, at the age of eight the young girl who was to become Phillis Wheatley was kidnapped and transported to Boston where, in 1761, John Wheatley decided to buy her and baptize her with the name of the slave ship that had taken the kid to America. Indeed, during her early years as a slave, the Wheatleys gave Phillis considerable favor, allowing her access to literacy and educating her in subjects such as

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<sup>35</sup> As noted by Sharon M. Harris, it is virtually impossible to know if this statement was actually uttered, but it has actually carried the weight of fact for more than two centuries.

English literature, Latin and Christianity. Wheatley learned at an exceptional speed: sixteen months after her arrival in Boston and without even having been schooled, she had become fluent in English and by 1765, she had already begun to produce her first writings:

The Wheatleys gave Phillis access to a dictionary and a place to write, and allowed her to mix socially with their politically, religiously and socially prominent guests. [...] The religious training and extraordinary education they gave Phillis began to pay dividends surprisingly quickly. Religion would give Phillis the motive, means and opportunity to begin writing in 1765. (Carretta 2001, 22-23)

At the age of thirteen, Wheatley began writing poetry at the encouragement of the Wheatley family. In 1767, when she was about fourteen, one of her poems, “On Messrs. Hussey and Coffin” was published in the *Newport Mercury* of Rhode Island. In view of the reluctance of American publishers to sponsor Wheatley’s works, she travelled to London in 1773, where she managed to publish the volume *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* under the patronage of Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, in September of that same year. This would become the first book written by a person of African descent and one of the first volumes written by a woman in the United States.

The volume was necessarily published with a letter signed by eighteen distinguished Boston personalities who, upon having interviewed the poet in 1772, agreed to sign an authenticity clause confirming that Wheatley was indeed the author of the twenty-eight poems thereby presented. In addition, the author included a preface of an apologetic nature, which would become a frequent practice in publications authored by African American writers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The poems in the volume dealt with various themes, as indicated by its title, for which the author used a wide variety of forms spanning from the ode or the elegy to the acronym (Foster and Davis 2009, 16).

The historical value of Wheatley’s work is undeniable, both because of its pioneering character—since it opened the door to future African American authors—as well as because of the remarkable fact that the author dedicated several of her poems and letters to personalities such as the Earl of Dartmouth, King George III or George Washington,

whom she actually came to know in person. As Foster and Davis state, “she claimed, for herself and for subsequent generations, the authority to converse with or chastise those individuals whose social position would have deterred many less confident people” (Foster and Davis 2009, 16). Following this line of thought, Henry Louis Gates has argued that, until the appearance of Frederick Douglass on the map of African American literature, Wheatley was often identified as an icon of black intellectual and creative capacity in the abolitionist movement ([1997] 2003, 74).

However, already in the author’s contemporary period, the first criticisms of her work began to emerge. These would develop until they reached their zenith in the mid-nineties. Thus, in 1773, *The London Magazine* published a commentary on the volume *Poems on Various Subjects*, in which it was affirmed that:

these poems display no astonishing power of genius, but when we consider them as the production of a young, untutored African, who wrote them after six months [sic] careful study of the English language and of writing, we cannot suppress our admiration of talents so vigorous and lively. (Bell 1773, 456)

Likewise, in December of the same year, the *London Monthly Review* wrote: “The poems written by this young negro bear no endemic marks of fire or solar spirit. They are merely imitative; and, indeed, most such people have a facility for imitation, though they have little or none for invention” (*Monthly Review* 1773, 457). Similarly, later reviews of her work kept up with the tendency to value the historical and sociopolitical worth of Wheatley’s poems more highly than their literary merit. In *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) James Weldon Johnson stated that, simply put, “the poetry of Phillis Wheatley is the poetry of the eighteenth century,” but that she nevertheless “stands out as one of the important characters in the creation of American literature, regardless of her sex or background” (53). Amiri Baraka, founder of the Black Arts Movement, also accused Wheatley of writing in an attempt to imitate the themes and forms of eighteenth century English poetry (1994, 166), and Seymour Gross even associated her work to the “Uncle Tom syndrome” (Gross and Hardy 1966, 72). Julian D. Mason, for his part, asserted that “Wheatley leaves the reader of his poems only dimly aware of her black and slave status” (1966, xxv).

Of particular interest in this regard is Gates's perspective in *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (2003). In the volume, Gates claimed to be struck by the radical shift in the narrative about the perception of Wheatley as the quintessential example of black success to her new role as a betrayer of her race:

we have moved from a situation where Phillis Wheatley's acts of literacy could be used to demonstrate our people's inherent humanity and their inalienable right to freedom, to a situation where acts of literacy are stigmatized somehow as acts of racial betrayal. (2003, 84)

And concluded:

And so we're reminded of our task, as readers: to learn to read Wheatley anew, unblinkered by the anxieties of her time and ours. That's the only way to let Phillis Wheatley take the stand. The challenge isn't to read white, or read black; it is to read. If Wheatley stood for anything, it was the creed that culture was, could be, the equal possession of all humanity. (2003, 89)

## **1.2. Biographies, Autobiographies and the Slave Narrative**

As Carme Manuel Cuenca rightly explained (2013, 43), the political and social milieu of the country inevitably affected African American women authors emerging during this period. In this respect, Manuel Cuenca highlights the influence of the abolitionist debate as well as the Romantic movement on the literary production of these authors (2013, 43). In the same vein, Venetria K. Patton (2000, 54) speaks of the work carried out by women writers of the period to reconstruct the patterns of the slave narrative in order to accommodate and draw attention to issues that specifically concerned slave women. Indeed, to a large extent, we owe the knowledge and recognition of the literary production of figures such as Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth or Maria Stewart, among others, to the revisionist work around the historiography on slavery that was carried out at the end of the twentieth century. Thanks to these endeavors, the intersection between gender and race oppression began to be read as crucial in the study of an institution that

had traditionally been considered oppressive almost exclusively for men (Van Der Spuy 1991, 184).

The difficult—if not impossible—access to education and literacy for black women in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America greatly complicated the production and publication of literature by this group. Nevertheless, a common practice proved to be the use of third parties as assistants or scribes to transcribe, edit, and/or co-author the works produced during this period (Foster and Davis 2009, 17). Some scholars, such as Cynthia Bond in *The Pen Is Ours* (1991), have endeavored to differentiate biographies from autobiographies, although others do not consider it an essential task for the study of African American literature. In any case, this genre is one of the most recurrent throughout the pre-war period, as it was generally used as a means of social vindication and support for the anti-slavery movement.

One of the earliest slave narratives is *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831), which was dictated by the slave Mary Prince to Thomas Pringle, one of the founders of the Anti-Slavery Society in England. In her account, Prince denounces from her first-person experience the discrimination and hardships against which the population of African descent in the diaspora, specifically in Bermuda and Antigua, had to contend. In this regard, critics such as Sandra Pouchet Paquet have argued that Prince's narrative reflects both an individual and collective state of mind which would eventually give rise to a new literary tradition in the Caribbean based on an ideology of survival and resistance (1992, 142-143).

Sojourner Truth, motivated by the success of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845)—which sold 4,500 copies in less than 6 months—also chose to dictate her biography; in this case, to Olive Gilbert, who eventually published *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave* (1850). Although, as Carleton and Susan Mabee have argued (1995, 52), the text is not well structured and contains contradictions and omissions, Truth's peculiar perspective is worth noting, as the author chooses as her focus the description of the suffering of slave families upon separation and the spiritual resources used by women to survive: "It [Truth's narrative] would identify freedom with the power of a black mother to reclaim her child rather than with African American achievement of status and influence in the white world" (Andrews 2003, xv). In this regard, scholars such as Eric Gardner and Jocelyn Moody

agree in identifying in Truth's work traits of the spiritual narrative, a genre that would see its full expression in authors such as Zilpha Elaw or Jarena Lee. All in all, Nell I. Painter summarizes Truth's legacy by stating: "At a time when most Americans thought of slaves as male and women as white, Truth embodied a fact that still bears repeating: Among the blacks are women, among the women are blacks" (1997, 495).

As with Phillis Wheatley's and so many other slave narratives, Harriet Ann Jacobs also published *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) accompanied by the testimony of white personalities who confirmed that Linda Brent (her pseudonym) was the author of the text. Jacobs's initial idea was to cede her story to be retold by another author. However, Harriet Beecher Stowe's suggestion to incorporate it as an example in *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* instead of publishing it independently encouraged Jacobs to publish it by her own means, with the support of Lydia Maria Child, who edited the text and was in charge of the introduction. Figures such as Mary Helen Washington (1994) and Joanne Braxton (1989) have studied the way Jacobs's text breaks with the conventions of the male slave narrative, specifically articulating the suffering of the slave woman: "Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings and mortifications peculiarly there [sic] own" (Jacobs 1861, 77).

In the case of *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman*, (1863) the text is notable, among other aspects, for the fact that the person who transcribed Old Elizabeth's narrative was another black woman (Olson 2006, 796). In this case, Elizabeth's story attests to the role of Christianity as a crucial support for black women in the nineteenth century: "The contradiction between Christian ideology and the practice of slavery became, for slaves like Elizabeth, a source of courage and empowerment in the struggle for an autonomous identity" (Andrews 1989, 3-4).

Likewise, in addition to the texts discussed above, among the slave narratives published in the antebellum period, Foster and Davis (2009, 18) also highlight *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear, a Native of Africa* by the Lady of Boston (1831), *Eleanor's Second Book* by Frances Harriet Green (1842), and *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon* by Rev. H. Mattison (1861).

On the other hand, in *Fuego en los huesos: Afroamericanas y escritura en los siglos XVIII y XIX* Carme Manuel Cuenca highlights the case of Nancy Prince, "the African

American international traveler” (2013, 85)<sup>36</sup> who, in *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1850), relates the experience of the free black woman in the period before the Civil War. For Manuel Cuenca, “the portrait she draws of herself as a traveler moves her away from the victimized stereotype so dear to her at the time and brings her closer to that of a bold and self-sufficient woman” (2013, 85).<sup>37</sup> Because of the author’s commitment to religious reform and the doctrinal nature of several passages in her narrative, authors such as Joanne M. Braxton consider Prince’s work a hybrid text that shares features of both the spiritual autobiography and the travel narrative (1989, 50). Nevertheless, both Manuel Cuenca and Carla L. Peterson agree in situating the main focus of the text in the narrative of the author’s travels, which she uses to “legitimize her political, social, and economic critique of her own country” (2013, 122).<sup>38</sup> Along these lines, Manuel Cuenca also concludes that, as an African American woman, Prince shows a clear willingness to “transgress and transcend the racist boundaries that corseted her own definition in a realm of social invisibility” (2013, 122).<sup>39</sup> Likewise, Braxton seems to agree with Manuel Cuenca in this aspect, since she also considers that “her *Narrative* represents an attempt to rise above perceived cultural isolation to lay claim to a dignified, self-defining identity in the creation of autobiography and the assertion of a literary self” (1989, 50).

On the other hand, 1859 witnessed the publication of *Our Nig, or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two Story White House, North, Showing That Slavery’s Shadows Fall Even There*, which is considered to be the first novel published by an African American in the United States. Despite this fact, both the text and its author, Harriet E. Wilson, fell into obscurity until the late twentieth century, when Henry Louis Gates Jr. published a facsimile of the novel after finding evidence that the text in question had been written by an African American woman. In this regard, R. J. Ellis has stressed the importance of Gates’s finding:

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<sup>36</sup> “la afroamericana viajera internacional”

<sup>37</sup> “el retrato que dibuja de sí misma como viajera la aleja del estereotipo victimista tan apreciado en la época y la acerca al de una mujer audaz y autosuficiente”

<sup>38</sup> “legitimar la crítica política, social y económica que realiza de su propio país”

<sup>39</sup> “transgredir y trascender los límites racistas que encorsetan su propia definición en un ámbito de invisibilidad social”

Suddenly, the first separately-published African American woman's novel no longer dated from 1892 [*Iola Leroy*], decades after Emancipation, but from 1859—a time when slavery still existed in the South and the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act held sway in the North. (2008, 163-164)

For her part, in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), Hazel V. Carby questions the consideration of Wilson's work as the first novel by an African American woman author, and argues that many of the conventions of the sentimental novel can also be found in slave narratives, suggesting a reconceptualization of *Our Nig* as an allegory of that genre: "I would argue that *Our Nig* can be most usefully regarded as an allegory of a slave narrative, a 'slave' narrative set in the 'free' North" (1987, 43). Likewise, Carby draws a certain parallel between the structure of Wilson's and Mary Prince's texts, in that both work to adapt common literary conventions by seeking to accommodate the representation of the black women's experience (1987, 45). Following this line of thought, Julia Stern has studied the representations of motherhood that occur in the work, concluding that one of the most significant features of Wilson's novel is that it raises important questions about "the innocence of the mother-daughter relationship" (Stern 1995, 439). In this light, the author questions the representation of motherhood proposed in one of the most important novels of the period, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) which, she contends, presents an atmosphere of "maternal violence and filial terror" (447).

Born in 1825, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was a novelist, essayist, journalist, poet, and activist for women's rights and the African American community. Free from birth, by the age of fourteen Harper had already acquired an education far beyond that of most Americans of any background or social class at the time (Foster 1993, 532). Harper's writing career began in 1839, when she began to publish magazine articles against slavery; her politics and her writing informed each other.

Harper published her first volume of poetry, *Forest Leaves*, in 1845 when she was 20 years old. This book revealed her as a poignant abolitionist voice. Her second volume, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854), sold thousands of copies and was reprinted several times during the following decades. Likewise, in 1895 Harper published "The Two Offers", which is considered the first piece of short fiction published by an African American woman.



Harper was a strong advocate of abolitionism and women's suffrage, two causes that would eventually intersect each other after the Civil War. In 1853, she joined the American Anti-Slavery Society and became a traveling lecturer for the group. She delivered many speeches during this time and faced much prejudice and discrimination along the way. In 1854, Harper delivered her first anti-slavery speech called "The Elevation and Education of Our People". The success of this speech resulted in a speaking tour in Maine for the Anti-Slavery Society. Likewise, over the years the author gained significant prominence as a journalist, together with other women such as Lucy Wilmot Smith, Cordelia Ray, Nellie F. Mossell and Victoria Earle Matthews. Actually, to Foster and Davis, Harper is a "supreme example" of the multifaceted work carried out by black women writers at the time (2009, 22).

During the postbellum period, Harper published the novel that is nowadays considered her best work, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892). The text became one of the first full-length volumes published by a black woman in the United States as well as it inaugurated the genre of the African American historical novel (Foster and Davis 2009, 23). The text covered the history of the country during the prewar and postwar periods and it tackled a good number of social problems, such as abolitionism, social responsibility, passing, miscegenation and women's education. While any consideration of the—limited—reception of works written by African American women during this period must consider the obstacles posed by the dominant white patriarchal social structure, according to Foster and Davis Harper's novel can be regarded as an epic similar to Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966) and Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976). Indeed, while twentieth century criticism was not generous with Harper (Palmer-Mehta 2007, 262), more recent scholarly work has emphasized the relevance of her texts to the author's immediate historical context. Contemporary scholars have also praised Harper's compromise with political activism, women's rights and social justice.

### 1.3. Religious Experiences and Spiritual Narrative

Along the lines of the narrative by Old Elizabeth, there was a group of women writers who, through their texts, sought to preach the Christian faith and even use the principles of Catholicism in the struggle for abolitionism and women's rights:

An overwhelming number of texts [...] further accentuate black women's efforts to assert themselves within male-dominated ecclesiastic institutions and racially prejudiced scriptural interpretations. Indeed, the church functions not only as a transcendent source of hope and liberation but as a site of worldly contestation in literature. Central to African American feminist renderings of faith *and* doubt are the woman's ability to claim her own religious identity, to associate freely with a fellowship of believers, and to testify in her own voice of her personal relationship with God. (Whitted 2006, 173)

Among the spiritual narratives of the prewar period, Jarena Lee's *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady* (1836) stands out. The narrative begins with her birth in 1783 and ends considerably abruptly with her becoming a prominent evangelist in 1821. However, in 1849 Lee published a revised version of the text which was much longer than her initial work, entitled *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*. According to Foster (1993, 57), in her account, Lee uses "techniques of reversal" similar to those developed by Wheatley in some of her poems and, placing herself in a position of inferiority with respect to her readers, she emphasizes the power of her message and asserts her authority to communicate it:

Implicitly calling upon the New Testament admonishment that the last shall be first, Jarena Lee presents her success as an evangelist as an example of God's ability to use even "a poor coloured female instrument" to convert sinners and to carry out His divine plan. (Foster 1993, 57)

Despite the clear evangelistic purpose of Lee's narratives, sermons and speeches, Foster insists on underlining the author's will to inscribe herself in the black female literary tradition:

Jarena Lee's *Life* is "women's literature", for the religious evangelical experiences that she recounts were generally those encountered by most women

who embraced the Calvinist Methodism of that period [...]. Like those by other women, Lee's narrative assumes a readership of both sexes but acknowledges more than male texts do the presence and the specific interests of female readers. It is "African American literature," for her experiences were colored by prevailing racial attitudes that influenced Lee to regularly identify individuals by race and often to mention peculiar burdens and opportunities imposed upon her ministry by racism. (1993, 58-59)

Ten years after the publication of *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady*, Zilpha Elaw published *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, an American Female of Colour* (1846). Although it is true that Jarena Lee's work has traditionally received more attention than Elaw's, scholars such as Nancy Kang or Richard J. Douglass-Chin agree in pointing out the similarities of this spiritual narrative with a travel diary. Thus, for Douglass-Chin "Elaw's [autobiography] often reads like a white lady's travelogue" (Douglass-Chin 2001, 34), and for Kang "the work leans more toward *meditatio Christi* than proto-feminist or abolitionist manifesto" (2007, 183). However, despite Elaw's privileged position as an evangelist preacher, the burden of her status as a black woman in the nineteenth century is brought to the fore in several passages of her narrative:

How often have I said, "Lord! Send by whom thou wilt send, only send not by me; for thou knowest that I am ignorant: how can I be a mouth for God!—a poor, coloured female: and thou knowest we have many things to endure which others do not". (Elaw 1846, 59)

Elvin Holt (2006, 459) has highlighted the proto-feminist impulse implicit in Elaw's determination to occupy an alternative place in her faith community, which led her to fight against gender differences and discrimination.

A third example of the spiritual narratives produced during the pre-war period is *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, and Shaker Eldress*. First published in 1981, the text narrates Rebecca Jackson's religious calling during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although this volume has not received as much critical attention as the previous two, Jackson's description of her divine visions is of particular interest, as they lead her to affirm that God's true people are the *Shakers*. In her

writings, Jackson shows great admiration for the organization of this religious community, which is based on a feminist theology whose divinity is formed by the Mother, the Daughter, the Father and the Son, as well as highlighting the figure of the Holy Mother Wisdom as a counterpart to God the Father Almighty (Holt 2006, 463-464).

Finally, mention should also be made of Ann Plato, a teacher at the Free African Schools in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In 1841, at the age of sixteen, Plato published her first and only book: *Essays: Including Biographies and Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Poetry*, the second full-length volume to be published by an African American writer. The book contains four biographical narratives, sixteen essays, and twenty poems. In his preface to Plato's text, James W. C. Pennington identifies her as the direct heir to Phillis Wheatley and he praises her decision to give a privileged place to religious themes in her writings (1941, xviii). However, according to Katherine Clay Bassard, Pennington's view of Plato's work "represents a domestication of religion within the sphere of black male privilege, a proscription demanding the socialization of black women within a secondary religious and public sphere" (1999, 78). Bassard goes on to assert that precisely, "it is against this backdrop of deference to black men as 'racial imperative' that Ann Plato writes" (78). On the other hand, although in her texts Plato avoids mentioning issues related to racism or the status of slaves in the United States, both Bassard and Mallory agree in determining that her commentary in this regard is implicit. In relation to this, Bassard ends up affirming that Plato's work proposes an overcoming of the boundaries of the discourse genres traditionally reserved for women and finds a space where she can articulate her own pedagogical and regenerative imperatives (1999, 79).

#### **1.4. Pre-War Poetry**

Although, as has already been discussed, the genre par excellence of pre-war African American women's literature was the biography and the autobiography, as Manuel Cuenca explains (2013, 73), some authors of the period also cultivated poetry, through which they expressed their concerns about issues such as religion, abolitionism or social reform.

Among the earliest African American poets was Sarah Louisa Forten. During the 1830s, Forten devoted herself to publishing poetry and some abolitionist essays in the abolitionist newspapers *The Liberator* and *The Philanthropist*, both run by William Lloyd Garrison. Forten's publications dating from this period are signed with the pseudonyms Ada and Magawisca. According to Manuel Cuenca (2013, 73-75) and Kris Jensen (2015, 203) Forten's poetry often used romantic sentimentality to address abolitionist ideals. In this case, Jensen highlights "An Appeal to Woman," in which the author expresses her faith in the possibility of interracial friendship between women (2015, 203-204).

Another author who, in addition to being an essayist, an educator and an activist, published several poems in the pre-war period is Sarah L. Forten's niece, Charlotte Forten Grimké. Although today Forten Grimké is best known for her diary, *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten* (1953)—which is the first diary written by an African American—between 1854 and 1864 the author would also publish fourteen poems around the theme of abolitionism. Among these I shall highlight, among others, "To W. L. G., on Reading his 'Chosen Queen'" (1855), in which the author praises Garrison's abolitionist struggle, or "The Angel Visit", clearly influenced by the romantic poetry of the time (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 79).

Likewise, although Ann Plato's poetry (twenty poems published in *Essays; Including Biographies and Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Poetry*) has generally received little critical attention for its excessively moralizing character and lack of originality, it is another example of the development of the genre in question in the pre-war period. In addition, Plato's poems reflect her concern for issues related to slavery and racism in the United States: the poem "To the First of August" celebrates the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1838 and "The Natives of America" emphasizes the nobility of Native Americans and speaks of the cruelty of white people towards them (Williams 2001, 328). Manuel Cuenca, for her part, considers most of Plato's poems to be "exaltations of heavenly rewards for an earthly life based on Christian principles" (2013, 82).<sup>40</sup> All in all, Kenny Jackson Williams concludes that the main value of Plato's writing is to be found in understanding her as a midway point between Phyllis Wheatley, whose work she seems to have known, and later poets (2001, 328).

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<sup>40</sup> "Exaltaciones de las recompensas celestiales para una vida terrenal basada en los principios cristianos"

## 1.5. Political Activism and the Abolitionist Struggle

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the struggle of black women activists in the United States had a clear common goal: to combat the images that the white gaze and the male gaze had constructed of them (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 46). Here, it is relevant to emphasize the double struggle of black women. On the one hand, literature written by white men and women had been devoted to perpetuating images that relegated African American women to stereotypical roles such as the mammy, the tragic mulatta, Jezebel or Sapphire.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the literature written by African Americans also adhered to certain conventions regarding the portrayal of black women as passive victims of a system that exerted both physical violence and sexual exploitation of their bodies (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 48). In this context, three female voices stood at the forefront of abolitionist activism: Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Maria W. Stewart.

Although I have already discussed Sojourner Truth's *Narrative*, the author actually gained greater recognition thanks to her speeches in favor of abolitionism and women's rights, among which "Ain't I a Woman?", transcribed by Marius Robinson in 1851, stands out. Twelve years later, in 1863, Frances Dana Barker Gage, a political activist and advocate for women's rights and abolitionism, produced a version of the speech that gained popularity during the Civil War and eventually became the "historical standard" which led Truth to be considered one of the key antecedents of twentieth-century black feminism (Gardner 2006, 861). In addition to "Ain't I a Woman?", Truth delivered many other abolitionist-themed speeches, sermons and songs, both in the pre-war era and during and after the war. Among her recorded pre-war speeches are the "Northampton Camp Meeting" (1844), where she sang "It Was Early in the Morning" to appease some raiders at the Northampton camp and the "Mob Convention" (1853) where, in response to a booring prior Truth claimed: "You may hiss as much as you please, but women will get their rights anyway. You can't stop us, neither" (Mabee and Mabee 1993, 173).

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<sup>41</sup> For further details about common stereotypes assigned to African American women see *Black Women Novelists: The development of a tradition 1892-1976* (Christian 1980), *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins 1990), *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (White 1999) and "Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and Their Homegirls: Developing an 'Oppositional Gaze' Towards the Images of Black Women" (West 2008).

Nicknamed “Moses” by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, it is estimated that Harriet Tubman helped rescue approximately seventy slaves on thirteen missions via the Underground Railroad, as well as she assisted the Union Army during the Civil War. After escaping from a plantation in 1849 using the Underground Railroad herself and arriving in Philadelphia, by 1850 Tubman decided to return south to help several members of her family, as well as other slaves, escape north (Larson 2004, 89-90). Among the abolitionists who admired Tubman’s work was Frederick Douglass who, on the occasion of the publication of Tubman’s biography, wrote to her:

You ask for what you do not need when you call upon me for a word of commendation. I need such words from you far more than you can need them from me, especially where your superior labors and devotion to the cause of the lately enslaved of our land are known as I know them. The difference between us is very marked. Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. [...] The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism. Excepting John Brown—of sacred memory—I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you have. (in Bradford 1869, 134-135)

In September 1869, after the end of the war, Sarah Hopkins Bradford, an admirer of Tubman’s work, published the biography *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*. However, as Larson explains (2004, 249), the work has been criticized by modern scholars for the author’s overly subjective viewpoint.

During the pre-war period, Maria W. Stewart became the first American woman to speak to an audience of both men and women, black and white, as well as the first African American to lecture on women’s rights and social justice. After the tragic death of her husband, Stewart experienced a religious conversion that led her to begin speaking out publicly about the tyranny and injustice she felt around her:

From the start, her religious vision and her socio-political agenda were intrinsically bound together, define done by the other. [...] An opponent not only of slavery, but also of political and economic exploitation, she invoked both the

Bible and the Constitution of the United States as documents proclaiming the universal birthright to justice and freedom. (Richardson 1987, 8-9)

As Richardson explains, from her earliest works Stewart began to develop the key elements of an ideology that she would defend and promulgate for the rest of her life: “the inestimable value of education; the historical inevitability of black liberation, through violent means if necessary; the need for black unity and collective action; and the special responsibilities of women” (Richardson 1987, 9). In this context, the publication of *Productions of Mrs. Maria Stewart* (1835) established Stewart as the first black political writer (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 63). Among the essays and speeches collected in this volume, “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build” is particularly noteworthy, as it collects the fundamental principles of a black nationalist ideology, it stresses the decisive role that African Americans needed to assume within their community and urges women to access education in order to reach economic independence (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 63).

However, if anything is evident from reading these pages, it is that, during the pre-war period, writing necessarily and inevitably became a political act for African American women. Thus, despite the infinite difficulties faced by the figures studied in this chapter, they all managed to make themselves heard, inaugurating a literary tradition whose legacy continues to be present in the productions of more contemporary women writers. In the words of Foster and Davis, “they are diverse in style and content. They are unified in their determination to speak and, when possible, to write by themselves, of themselves and others” (2009, 30-31).



## 2. THE POST-WAR PERIOD

Over the years, many experts have agreed in describing the post-Civil War and the Reconstruction period as one of the darkest and most complicated phases in American history in general and, of course, in African American history. This is due to the gradual deterioration of the black population as a result of the increasing segregation, the racist violence and the discrimination that took place in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. Among those who have studied the period are Charles Waddell Chesnutt (2002), Rayford Whittingham Logan (1945), Carme Manuel Cuenca (2013) and Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard (2006).

For Chesnutt, the literary era from the end of Reconstruction (1877) to the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance (c. 1920) could be called “Post-Bellum - PreHarlem” since it was characterized by an oscillation between the imprint of the terrors and the memory of slavery and the intuition of a possible future that would not be codified until the second decade of the twentieth century (Chesnutt 2002, 543-548). For his part, Logan dubs the period “The Dark Ages of Recent American History” and characterizes it as the “nadir of black history in America” (1945, 54); this conception of the period in question has become one of the most widespread, although it may also be one of the most erroneous. Indeed, both Manuel Cuenca (2013, 198) and McCaskill and Gebhard (2006, 2) concur in observing that, despite the special complexity of the postwar era for the African American population, these decades would see the publication of key works for the black American literary tradition.

### 2.1. Autobiographies after Emancipation

Although samples are scarce, we may still find some autobiographical slave narratives published after emancipation. In this regard, Jocelyn Moody’s distinction between the goals and motivations of prewar and postwar narratives is a starting point for our analysis:

In the nineteenth century, the goals and conventions of early slave narratives were generated by the socio-political needs of enslaved people, often as defined not only by slaves themselves but also by former slaves committed to the

struggle to end slavery within the US. After abolition, there were significant shifts in the aims and conventions, for inasmuch as the earlier narratives had functioned as vessels for an abolitionist message, post-emancipation autobiographies could pursue a vastly different set of social, political, and economic needs specified by the newly freed African Americans and their allies. (2009, 112)

In this vein, Jennifer B. Fleischner identifies some of the key motivations for the writing and publication of post-war slave narratives:

All narratives of traumatic experiences recounted after the events raise questions about liberation and enslavement as they relate to the act of telling. Finding a measure of linguistic relief in telling, narrators sought to liberate themselves from their memories. [...] Given that the ideology of racism, extending well beyond the slavery years, argued that African Americans were not fully human, to show that one did “suffer ... from reminiscences” [...] was to make both a political statement against bigotry and abuse, and a psychological one, against suffering. (Fleischner 1996, 135)

Taking these contributions as a starting point, in the postwar period the narratives of Mattie J. Jackson (1866), Lucy Delaney (c. 1891), Kate Drumgoold (1898) and Annie L. Burton (1909) are of particular interest.

Most of the information we have today about Mattie J. Jackson is taken from the biography she dictated to her stepmother, L. S. Thompson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson; Her Parentage - Experience of Eighteen Years in Slavery - Incidents During the War - Her Escape from Slavery. A True Story*, published in 1866. According to its preface, the text was published with the aim of gaining sympathy “from the earnest friends of those who have been bound down by a dominant race in circumstances over which they had no control” (Jackson [1866] 2009, 101). In this context, Jackson explains how the horrors of slavery affected her and the rest of her family until, after several failed attempts to escape from the plantations, she managed to flee to Massachusetts, where she dictated her story to her stepmother. Jackson’s narrative parallels Maria W. Stewart’s in its use of religion to ground the struggle against slavery and, as Tabitha Adams Morgan points out, she also expresses her concern with the

fundamental role of language in the construction of the autonomous subject, as well as with the way in which literacy facilitates the possibility of negotiating that autonomy with the rest of society (2007, 301-302). The importance of language in Jackson's work reaches its climax in the description of the act that marks the end of her tolerance of her masters' abuse as a speech act (Minor and Pitts 2010, 22). Although both Morgan and Minor and Pitts admit that, traditionally, Jackson's work has not received enough critical attention, they also acknowledge the relevance of her testimony to the African American literary tradition. Thus, Morgan concludes, "Jackson seems well aware of the larger discourse into which she is entering, and her voice is a distinct presence in the slave narrative genre" (2007, 302).

Published some twenty-five years after the war, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light; or, Struggles for Freedom* narrates Lucy Delaney's experiences in the pre-emancipation period. Thus, the text reaches its climax after the events of 1844, the year in which Polly Berry, the author's mother, went to the Missouri courts to sue for her daughter's freedom and won the case. Scholars such as Robert Folkenflik have studied Delaney's work in relation to the complexities of building a narrative of representation and correspondence that developed as she attempted to portray the collective social consciousness in the individual subject:

Delaney acknowledges a vast multiplicity of individuals who are not easily reducible to one another, and acknowledges as well a multiplicity of feelings that may animate any of those individuals. [...] In effect, at the moment in the text when she sets her own life as a standard or gauge for millions of other lives she also considers her life in terms of the infinite differences that implicitly make such a substitution impossible. (Folkenflik 1993, 113)

This dilemma, already intuited in the previous period, would be present in the vast majority of postwar slavery narratives. Another motif that stands out in Delaney's work and that has also received a good amount of critical examination is the description of the fundamental role of the family in the protagonist's life, which functions as a common thread throughout the story. For Deborah Garfield (2001, 102), for example, the praise of slave-motherhood places Delaney in the same line as other authors who have also celebrated "African American maternalism", such as Harriet Ann Jacobs, Sojourner Truth, Annie Louise Burton or Toni Morrison. Although Folkenflik agrees with

Garfield in assuming the central role of motherhood and family in Delaney's work, he also notes that:

It is clear that the privileged form of self-definition in Delaney's narrative is the family, yet it is equally clear that within the circumstances of her life and narrative this privileged form operates foremost as a tantalizing fiction. In her life and narrative, Delaney's family disintegrates even as it is invoked. (1993, 111)

And he ends by concluding: "The term enters the narrative to recapitulate its rupture and absence" (111).

As in the case of Mattie Jackson, virtually all the information we have about Kate Drumgoold comes from her autobiography, *A Slave Girl's Story* (1898). This narrative draws attention not only to the essential role of education in her life—Drumgoold was schooled until she began working as a teacher in Hinton, West Virginia—, but also to the contribution of her community, especially women, in her education and her progress as a teacher (Rashley 2006, 290). Notably, Drumgoold published her autobiography a year after the landmark case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* for the "separate but equal" ideology. In this context, the author presented her illness, which had made her an invalid woman, as a strategy for reconciling the black universe with the white one, placing herself in the middle of the terrain of rupture between the two realities (Fleischner 1996, 136). Although Drumgoold's work has not received much critical attention, Karen S. Sloan considers that, despite its problematic spatio-temporal structuring, the text is a clear illustration of the dynamics of race relations that predominated during the early Civil War and well into the post-war period (Sloan 2007, 170).

Annie Louise Burton's biography, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (1909) is divided into eight sections and, although Burton entitled the first of these "Recollections of a Happy Life", describing her happy childhood on the plantation where she lived, Gabriel A. Briggs notes that "her nostalgia is tempered by stories of pitiless hunger, separation of slave families, and the brutal lynching of African American men at the hands of vengeful whites" (2007, 59). This is reminiscent of Delaney's narrative, in which portraits of her adored family are inevitably traversed by the horrors of slavery

and racism in the United States. In his introduction to *Six Women's Slave Narratives* (1988), William L. Andrews highlights Burton's praise of motherhood and African American womanhood, which were also recurring themes in the postwar narratives of Jackson, Delaney and Drumgoold (1988, xxx).

In 1890, *The House of Bondage*, initially serialized in the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, was published by Octavia Victoria Rogers Albert. Albert's text included the narratives of several former male and female slaves, who explained their stories, as well as those of many other slaves. Experts such as Frances Smith Foster (1993) or Nanette June Morton (2003) have studied the representation of themes such as confrontation, community and family separation in the slave narratives collected by Albert. Likewise, Iva Balic highlights the portrayal of Reconstruction presented in the author's work, along with many of the growing problems of the time, such as ex-slave alcoholism, difficult access to education and the threat of the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Codes of 1895 (2007, 7).

Likewise, among the autobiographies of the postwar period, one of the most prominent at the time of publication was Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (1868). Today, experts such as Frances Smith Foster, Carme Manuel Cuenca, Jennifer Fleischner or Beth L. Lueck seem to disagree on the exact categorization of Keckley's work, which has been considered a slave narrative, an autobiography or the memoirs of a celebrity. In any case, the text recounts her life as a slave, her liberation and her experiences as a dressmaker and confidant of Mary Todd Lincoln, the First Lady of the United States. At the time of its publication in 1868, Keckley's overt reference to the First Lady was negatively received by readers who became indignant at the thought that a black woman had dared not only to reveal intimate details of the First Ladies' life, but also (and especially) of the life of the Lincolns (Jones 2007, 333). This initial negative reception of Keckley's work by both whites and blacks generated a wave of discredit that led to the publication of a parody entitled *Behind the Seams; By a Nigger Woman Who Took in Work from Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Davis* (1868) (Fleischner 1996, 317). The parodical work distorts the events narrated in Keckley's source story and imbricates them with an exacerbated racism (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 209). At the time of publication, critics even questioned the authorship of the text, speculating that some American journalist had written the black woman's account (Foster and Davis 2009, 19). Today, however, the authorship of

*Behind the Scenes* is no longer a matter of debate. For Manuel Cuenca, the book is extraordinary for two main reasons:

por la trascendencia de los hechos que relata, sucedidos en un momento crucial de la historia americana del siglo diecinueve, y por la novedad de la voz narrativa que los cuenta, una mujer que se autoproclama en la página misma del título: “esclava en el pasado, pero desde hace unos años modista y amiga de la señora de Abraham Lincoln”. (2003, 209)<sup>42</sup>

In this regard, both Manuel Cuenca and Foster highlight Keckley’s contribution in placing the African American character in a privileged position, refusing victimization and distancing from more traditional representations of the slave woman:

While it immediately and prominently identifies its author with slavery, *Behind the Scenes* also modifies that form by stressing a movement up from slavery. Keckley’s identification as “formerly a slave, but more recently modiste, and friend” and her juxtaposition of “Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House” rejects a static definition as “slave” or even “former slave”. It suggests progressive movement, and it emphasizes the social distance travelled. (Foster 1993, 124)

Indeed, regardless of the controversy generated by Keckley’s story during the years following its publication, Manuel Cuenca insists on emphasizing the value of a volume that is not only the autobiography of a former slave, but also the biography of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln and a Civil War memoir by a first-hand witness to life in the White House (2013, 215).

Other biographical narratives published during this period include Rosetta Douglass Sprague’s *My Mother as I Recall Her* (1900), where the author recounts the life of her mother; Frederick Douglass’s first wife, Susan Elizabeth Frazier’s *Some Afro-American Women of Mark* (1892), Pauline E. Hopkins’s *Famous Women of the Negro Race* (1901-1902), and Hallie Q. Brown’s *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (1926), among others.

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<sup>42</sup> “For the transcendence of the events it recounts, which took place at a crucial moment in nineteenth century American history, and for the novelty of the narrative voice, a woman who proclaims herself on the title page: ‘formerly a slave, but more recently modiste, and friend of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln’.

## 2.2. The Problem of Segregation

After emancipation, much of the post-war literature written by whites was devoted to increasing a campaign of white supremacist advocacy and consequent disparagement, discrimination, and hatred of the African American population (Gunning 1996, 3 and Manuel Cuenca 2013, 191-192).<sup>43</sup> Among these publications, critics have highlighted William B. Smith's *The Color Line: A Brief in Behalf of the Unborn* (1905), where he presents a series of "scientific" arguments defending and celebrating the trend toward black extinction in America. Other works that add to this current are those by William P. Calhoun (1902) and Robert W. Shufeldt (1907), as well as Thomas Dixon's trilogy (1902, 1905 and 1907). These works were produced so as to perpetuate racist ideas such as the growing criminality among the black community or the incapacity of this community for self-government (Manuel Cuenca 2013, 192). Likewise, the stereotypical representation of the black woman as a promiscuous creature devoid of virtue continued to be promulgated, which not only justified and legitimized violence and rape, but it also masked many conflicts related to racism, sexual desire, gender, and pro-white male power relations (Gunning 1996, 78).

Among the women who fought against this representation was Anna Julia Cooper, who is nowadays recognized as one of the first representatives of black feminism in the United States. At the World's Congress of Representative Women held in 1893 in Chicago, Cooper spoke of the "yet unwritten history" of women in the country which, according to Gunning, implied assuming the fact that "the black woman's struggle for ownership of her body was closely tied to the historical struggle to maintain a voice within an American public arena" (1996, 78). This notion is also present in Cooper's *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* (1892), along with other ideas that define her as a pioneer black feminist and a racial theorist (Shearin 2007, 112). Throughout the texts collected in *A Voice from the South*, Cooper, based on her extensive knowledge of history and the society of the time, praises the progress of African Americans only a generation after achieving emancipation. Currently, there is

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<sup>43</sup> In addition to Gunning's and Manuel Cuenca's work, the following studies on the question of white supremacy in the postwar era should also be noted: *The Black Image in The White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny. 1817-1914* (Fredrickson 1971), *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (Williamson 1984), and *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Shapiro 1988).

some controversy surrounding the articulation of Cooper's feminist ideals in her work which, at times, are perceived to be too close to the "Cult of True Womanhood" (Shearin 2007, 113). In this regard, Charles Lemert urges readers not to forget that, despite using language closer to white feminism in some passages, Cooper's work is "the first systematic working out of the insistence that no one social category can capture the reality of the colored woman" (1998, 14). He goes on to argue that:

At an earlier but crucial historical time, Cooper focused the terms of debates occurring today. Many of the concepts at issue in black-feminist and women-of-color social theory can be traced, even if indirectly, to Cooper. [...] Cooper anticipated by nearly a century today's debates over the insufficiency of such categories as race or gender, even class, to capture, by themselves, the complexities of a woman's social experiences. (1998, 14)

Unfortunately, one of the most frequent practices that spread throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century was lynching. Although already practiced before the war, after emancipation lynchings, which were promoted by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, became a way of vindicating and maintaining white social justice and superiority. It is estimated that, from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, there were about 5.000 black victims of lynching in the United States. In this regard, virtually all experts who have studied the subject agree in signaling Ida B. Wells-Barnett as one of the key figures in the fight against this activity in the country. Although Wells-Barnett had already collaborated as a columnist in several newspapers, and had even become the editor of the *Evening Star*, it was not until 1892 when she decided to undertake a tough fight against this practice, after three of her friends were victims of lynching. The author's investigation of these murders led her to publish the pamphlets *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892), *A Red Record* (1895), and *Mob Rule in New Orleans* (1900), in which she questioned the causes of several lynchings and accused the perpetrators of the killings (Leighton 2007, 601). After having seen her office burned and having received several death threats, Wells undertook a campaign against lynching from exile and she even traveled to the United Kingdom to garner more support for the cause. At this time, the author and activist also worked with Frederick Douglass, Ferdinand L. Barnett and I. Garland Penn on *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (1893), contributing a chapter which analyzed a multitude of African American



lynchings (Leighton 2007, 602). Just as today Anna Julia Cooper is known as one of the forerunners of black feminism, scholars identify both Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrell—another key figure of the period—as two of the first Civil Rights activists in the United States.

At the beginning of the 1890s and as a reaction to the constant racist and sexist segregation, several clubs and associations of African-American women began to be created, among which we shall refer to The Woman's Loyal Union, led by Victoria Earle Matthews; the Chicago Women's Club, created thanks to the initiative of Ida B. Wells-Barnett; the Women's Era Club, run by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Florida Ruffin and Maria Louisa Baldwin and The Colored Women's League, founded by Mary Patterson.

Although in her first publication, *Violets and Other Tales* (1895), Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar-Nelson avoided addressing issues related to racial discrimination (Chatman-Riley 2007, 175), Dunbar-Nelson would become a prominent voice in the social and political landscape of the United States at the turn of the century. In this regard, Gloria Hull (1984, xxxvi) has discussed the critics' rejection of her later publications because of her perspective on the issue of the color-line. Dunbar-Nelson also played an important role in the development of the women's club movement in the late nineteenth century, along with such figures as Terrell and Wells-Barnett. In her diary, *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson* (1984), edited by Gloria Hull, Dunbar-Nelson discusses her relationship with such well-known figures of the African American political and literary scene as Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Georgia Douglas Johnson, W.E.B. DuBois, and Mary Terrell. As Denisa E. Chatman-Riley contends, Dunbar-Nelson's work, like that of so many other women writers of the period, has been recovered after a period in which no attention had been paid to her writing, and some of her most popular poems, among them "I Sit and Sew" (originally published in *Violets and other Tales* in 1895) have even been anthologized in several contemporary publications.

On the other hand, in 1894, Gertrude E. H. Bustill Mossell published *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, a collection of eight essays and seventeen poems through which the author recognized and praised the achievements of black women from the Reconstruction to the end of the century. Likewise, Mossell encouraged her readers to

make responsible choices in reference to motherhood, marriage and work life, and used the historical past of the African American population as a tool to ground her racial pride (Wray 2007, 434). Although, as Amanda Wray explains, contemporary criticism has not paid much attention to Mossell's legacy, her contemporaries gave her considerable acclaim, publishing very positive reviews of *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, as well as highly valuing her work as a journalist.

### 2.3. Realistic Fiction at the Turn of the Century

The recovery work carried out by experts such as Henry Louis Gates from the 1980s onwards was fundamental to gain insight into the literary productions of African American women who are nowadays considered canonical writers and the founders of the literary tradition of black women's writing.

In addition to her work as a pre- and post-war activist, in 1892 Frances Ellen Watkins Harper published *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, which was traditionally considered the first novel written by an African American woman. Experts such as Manuel Cuenca (2013, 198), Hazel V. Carby (1987, 71-72) or Frances Smith Foster (1993, 533-534) have assumed the centrality of *Iola Leroy* in the African American literary tradition, especially when examining the nineteenth century. As Foster notes in her introduction to the 1988 edition of the novel, Harper was aware of the responsibility and the danger of publishing this text:

Were she to fail to produce a novel that would refute the myths created by writers such as Thomas Nelson Page, were she to fail to arouse the sympathies equal to those stirred by writers such as Helen Hunt Jackson, Harper knew her failure would be cited as evidence not only for her own declining abilities [she wrote the novel at age sixty-seven], but also of the artistic inferiority of Afro-Americans in general. (1988, xxiv)

On this basis, the novel combines elements of the historical, political, and sentimental novel, and is structured according to conventions established by earlier publications such as *Clotel* (1853). For Hazel V. Carby, one of the novel's greatest achievements is the development of a formula that intertwines the race and gender concerns of the

protagonist: “[*Iola Leroy*] was not a mere adaptation of what had become the conventional or formulaic presentation of a heroine but [...] a transformation of the formulaic convention, for Harper did not graft a concern with race onto a form that primarily focused on questions of gender” (1987, 73). In this regard, Carby herself suggests the need to open a dialogue between contemporary analyses of the novel that either focus on the woman heroine or the black heroine, so as to achieve a less limited view of Harper’s work as a whole.

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins was also well educated and became a nationally recognized journalist in the African American community. However, Hopkins’s best-known work to this day is her first novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900). In it, Hopkins manipulates the genre of historical romance, popular at the turn of the century, to pose a critique of the country’s nationalism and imperialism from the perspective of a subject, in Carla L. Peterson’s words, “doubly other”, being female and black (1995, 180). Despite her *otherness*, Peterson argues that by reappropriating the genre of historical romance Hopkins demands recognition of the Americanness of African Americans in the United States (1995, 181). Likewise, Madhu Dubey has argued that the characterization of both Iola Leroy and Sappho Clark (the main character of Hopkins’s novel) as exemplars of moral virtue and Christian piety is intended to counter the entire narrative and history that links African American women with sexual degradation (2009, 153). In addition to *Contending Forces*, Hopkins also published *Hagar’s Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-1902), *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and the Southwest* (1902), and *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self* (1902-1903).

Although the author has been criticized for showing a clear preference for light-skinned mixed-race characters, Jeehyun Lim argues that such heroines actually expose racial prejudice and embody racial and sexist violence (2007, 280). Despite the clear literary value of Hopkins’s work, scholars admit that until relatively recently the texts discussed above had not received any significant recognition. In fact, as Peterson herself explains, in the case of *Contending Forces*, the book was not reviewed until more than a year after its publication and copies had to be given away given the lack of buyers for the volume (Peterson 1995, 177-178). In relation to this phenomenon, Richard Yarborough et al. have compared the Hopkins’s reception to that of more contemporary writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar or Charles Chestnutt, who started to receive positive

evaluations throughout the twentieth century and have continued to be widely studied to the present day (2018, 28).

We shall conclude this section by sharing Carby's reflection on the impact of the women authors of this period on the African American literary and historical landscape. It is precisely in light of the above that Carby questions the traditional placement of the first renaissance of the black American woman writer in the 1970s:

An examination of the literary contributions of Frances Harper and Pauline Hopkins and the political writings of Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells will reconstruct our view of this period. Writing in the midst of a new "black women's renaissance" the contemporary discovery and recognition of black women by the corporate world of academia, publishing, and Hollywood [...] I try to establish the existence of an earlier and perhaps more politically resonant renaissance so we may rethink the cultural politics of black women. (1987, 7).

### 3. THE NEW NEGRO ERA

Sometimes when a writer is regarded as “before her time” we don’t quite understand that the same work is still right on time.

(Jones 2018, n. p.)

#### 3.1. The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance is understood as an era of intellectual, artistic, and social explosion and flourishing that developed primarily (though not exclusively) in Harlem, New York. In *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction* (2016), Cheryll A. Wall highlights the difficulty of the task of periodizing the movement, which is generally considered to have developed during the 1920s. However, as Wall (2016, 7) points out, starting from such limits forces the analyst to exclude certain authors who are nowadays considered a fundamental part of the movement. This is the case, for example, of Zora Neale Hurston, one of the most visible heads of African American literature and of the Renaissance itself, who had only published a single novel prior to 1929. Thus, complying with the need to delimit the scope of the movement for practical analytical purposes, I shall consider Wall’s final proposal: “In its most expansive and most useful conception, it spans the decades between the two world wars” (2016, 7).

At the time, this artistic and literary awakening became known as “The New Negro Movement”, a term coined by Alain Locke in his essay *The New Negro* (1925). This optimistic conception of the “New Negro” proposed the exaltation of the personal ego based on a feeling of deep racial pride: “The New Negro was self-defined [...] Self-understanding, self-direction, self-respect, self-dependence, and self-expression supplanted the self-pity that is the sole emotion to which the Old Negro seems to have been entitled” (Wall 2016, 2). However, as Wall points out, references to industry, warfare, and quotations of excerpts from Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson underscore the male perspective of Locke’s ideas and approach.

The same year that *The New Negro* saw the light of day, Marita Boner published “On Being Young—a Woman—and Colored” an essay that evokes a sense of immobility and claustrophobia which contrasts with Locke’s ideas of progress. This leads us to

consider the particularity of the female experience within this artistic and social upsurge of the black community in the United States. For Bracks and Smith, “Although the Harlem Renaissance primarily focuses a literary and artistic awakening as achieved through opportunity and access, it also speaks to the determination of women to change and transform their lives and the quality of life for their families and express their desire to be full partners in every way” (2014, ix). Thus, in this section we will study the development of the Harlem Renaissance by focusing both on how it affected the women writers of the time which, in turn, will reveal the ways in which these women also affected and gave shape to the movement.

### 3.1.1. Shaping the Movement

Among the experts who have studied the Harlem Renaissance, among others, Hazel V. Carby, Cheryl A. Wall or Aberjhani and Sandra L. West, there seems to be a general consensus in considering Jessie Redmon Fauset one of the key figures in the gestation of the movement. From 1919 to 1926, Fauset worked as editor for *The Crisis*, promoting the work of authors such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude Mckay, Jean Toomer, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Anne Spencer or Nella Larsen (Aberjhani and West 2003, 111 and Wall 2009, 33). She also hired artists such as Gwendolyn Bennett, Effie Lee Newsome, and Laura Wheeler Waring to design the covers for several issues of *The Crisis* (Wall 2009, 33-34). In addition to her work as a promoter of many of the most significant voices of the period, Fauset published, among other texts, *There Is Confusion*, *Plum Bun*, *The Chinaberry Tree*, and *Comedy: American Style*, four novels that focused on depicting the reality of the middle-class African American population. These texts tackle problematics related to hierarchies of skin color, social class and financial status which arise in the wake of the characters’ desire to integrate into the white American society (Myree-Mainor 2007, 197). Although initially Fauset’s fiction did not always receive favorable opinions—which mainly emphasized the sentimentality latent in her portayals of the African American middle class—critics such as Marcy Jane Knopf (1995, xi) or Arthur P. Davis (1974, 92) consider her one of the authors who have best represented this social class. Thus, according to Knopf “Fauset uses sentimentalism to do political work in her fiction [. . .] to mask a discussion of the plight of black women and to prove that blacks were just as

cultured as whites” (Knopf 1995, xi). Along these lines, in 1981 Carolyn Wedin Sylvander published *Jessie Redmon Fauset: Black American Writer* which, in addition to drawing attention to the feminist ideas present in Fauset’s texts, opened the door to subsequent research that would show a renewed interest in the study of Fauset’s works.

It should also be noted that in 1925 Fauset published an essay written by Marita Boner, which would become one of the key texts for understanding the female experience of the Harlem Renaissance: “On Being Young—a Woman—and Colored”. For Wall, “Bonner wrote with a deep consciousness of the limitations the racial past imposed on her personal future” (2009, 34). Indeed, at a time when the ideology of the New Negro was spreading strongly among the African American population, especially in the intellectual and artistic spheres, Boner drew attention to the difficulty of overcoming the racist and sexist stereotypes inherited from the slavery era, which had been perpetuated during the postwar period and, far from being extinguished, were still present in the twentieth century. Both Giddings and Wall discuss the added difficulty of denouncing issues related to sexism in the context of the exaltation of race consciousness in the 1920s: “Femininity, not feminism, was the talk of the twenties” (Giddings 1984, 183) and “Amid the effort to forge a revised racial identity, a woman who persisted in raising concerns about sexism might see them dismissed as irrelevant or trivial; she might herself be perceived as disloyal to the race” (Wall 2009, 34).

### 3.1.2. Prolific Authors

As the title of the section indicates, some of the most outstanding figures of the period were extremely prolific authors who, throughout their careers, explored genres such as the essay, the novel, drama and poetry.

Among these women we can find, to begin with, Georgia Douglas Johnson, who published her first volume of poetry, *The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems* in 1918. This work contrasts with *Bronze*—her second publication—since, although both focused their attention on the representation of the female reality and women’s feelings, the former was written from a “color-blind” perspective, while the latter directly addressed issues related to racial violence, the experience of mixed-race population and, most interestingly, the implications of motherhood for black women, who brought

children into a world that despised them from birth. These issues would also be represented in the author's early plays, *Blue Blood* and *Plumes*, her most celebrated work. For Claudia Tate, *Plumes* represents Johnson's conviction that, in the twentieth-century American society, only love could preserve the human dignity of women (1983, lx). On the other hand, research conducted by Judith Stephens has recovered several works on the subject of lynching which Johnson sent to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (hereafter NAACP). However, these works had originally been rejected by the NAACP because their conclusions aroused feelings of hopelessness and defeat for the African American population. Although Johnson's work was not received too favorably at the time, as the author was considered insufficiently committed to racial consciousness, Elizabeth Brown-Guillory praises her portrayal of the obstacles that modern black women faced and she defines Johnson as one of the first African American feminist poets (1990, 12).

For her part, Angelina Weld Grimké, who used to attend the salons organized by Johnson, was also committed to writing poetry and theater. Although her best-known work is the play *Rachel* (1916), before its publication Grimké had also written poems such as "A Mona Lisa" or "The Bresno" in which the poetic "I" expresses her sexual desire for another woman (2007, 230 and Wall 2009, 38). The drama and stories composed by Grimké explore issues that directly affect black women in the United States, namely motherhood (or rather, its rejection), lynching and economic hardship grounded in racism (Shearin 2007, 230). Both *Rachel* and *Mara*, Grimké's two plays, generated a stir at the time of their publication. Especially in the case of the former, the author's approach to the psychological impact of lynching on the wives and children of the victims drew the attention of critics who even accused her of inciting racial genocide with her play (Shearin 2007, 230). In addition, Grimké also produced two short stories that continued in the vein of her theatrical works in terms of plot lines and the controversy their publication generated. At the turn of the century, experts such as Gloria T. Hull or Carolivia Herron would awaken a renewed interest in Grimké's literary production, considering that her work had been unjustly ignored because of her triple otherness: woman, black and lesbian (Hull 1984, 77 and Herron 1991, 5).

In this regard, during the Renaissance period authors such as Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Mae Cowdery or Grimké herself would also try to express in their works the sexual desire for other women. This intent can also be traced in the musical compositions of several



well-known singers of the time, such as Gertrude “Ma” Rainey (known as “the mother of the blues”) or Bessie Smith, whose lyrics contributed to the transgression of the sexual and racial conventions of the time. For her part, Patricia Schroeder (1996, 94) considers *Rachel* a milestone in the African American drama tradition, and praises the way in which Grimké recovers the history of the silenced woman and subverts gender and racial stereotypes.

According to Wall, Anne Spencer’s poetry is striking for its willingness to create a universe where racism and sexism do not exist, or else where the rawness of modern society is transformed by a source of unexpected beauty (2009, 63). Debbie Clare Olson (2006, 811) notes that Spencer, being one of the most distinctive poets of her day, was also frequently anthologized in volumes edited by several of her contemporaries, such as James Weldon Johnson in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Countee Cullen in *Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets* (1927), Charles Johnson in *Ebony and Topaz: A Collectanea*, (19927) or Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps in *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1970* (1949). Although at times, just like Johnson and so many other women authors, Spencer was criticized for not giving a central role to race in her poems which often focused on women and their relationship with the opposite gender, she also collaborated with the NAACP and was an important activist in the Civil Rights movement.

Another poet who published frequently in *The Crisis*, the NAACP magazine edited by Fauset, is Gwendolyn Bennett. Bennett was recognized during the Renaissance as a relevant artist to the movement (in addition to writing, Bennett designed several covers for *The Crisis*) and, like Spencer, her poems can be found in the aforementioned anthologies by J. W. Johnson and Cullen, as well as in Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925). Nowadays, experts such as Sue E. Barker or Sandra Y. Govan highlight, in addition to her poetry, the “Ebony Flute” columns published in *Opportunity* between 1926 and 1928, in which Bennett publicized authors, artists and musicians as well as she reviewed and commented on their works: “Bennett’s ‘Ebony Flute’ columns represent a substantial part of her published work and offer a sense of the vibrant flowering of African American culture in many genres in the late 1920s, including African American centers beyond New York” (Baker 2006, 37). Among Bennett’s most prominent and anthologized poems are “To Usward” and “Heritage” (whose publication predates Countee Cullen’s homonymous poem), in which she enhances the diversity of the

African American experience while celebrating the unity of the black race (Smith-Spears 2006, 59). Likewise, Bennett also considers the uniqueness of the black women's experience within the context of celebrating blackness: "She is careful to emphasize the importance of black femininity to that past [the African past] by drawing Negro girls against the backdrop of the scenery" (Smith-Spears 2006, 59).

For her part, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, who had already published her first volumes of poetry at the end of the previous century, exploited her facet as an activist during the 1920s. Among the anti-racist actions taken by the poet we may highlight, among others, the foundation of the Industrial School for Colored Girls or the publication of several articles in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Washington Eagle* or *The Messenger*, among which "These 'Colored' United States", published in 1924 in the *The Messenger*, stands out. Her best-known play, *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (1918), also belongs to this period. In the play, Dunbar-Nelson explores the consequences of military service for the African American population and promotes the anti-lynching movement, depicting the image of the broken black family as a result of the latent racism in society. The themes present in Dunbar-Nelson's work would recur throughout the period, especially in the works of Renaissance playwrights. Indeed, many comparative studies have been published on these plays, including titles such as *War Plays by Women: An International Anthology* (Cardinal, Turner and Tylee 2013) or "Anti-Lynch Plays by African American Women: Race, Gender, and Social Protest in American Drama" (Stephens 1992).

Along these lines, Olga Barrios (2009) has studied Dunbar-Nelson's work in relation to Mary P. Burrill's *Aftermath* (1919). For Barrios, Burrill's *Aftermath* is especially powerful in that it proposes an armed black revolution as the only solution to end racism, discrimination and segregation in the United States (2009, 195-196). Although *Aftermath* offers the point of view of a male protagonist and his experience of war and homecoming, Burrill's *They That Sit in Darkness* (1919) focuses much more on exploring issues which directly affect black women, more precisely, the consequences of giving birth to multiple children for young women. In this regard, Sandra L. West describes the play as particularly controversial at the time, given its advocacy of contraception as a possible escape from poverty.

In the case of May Miller, the author stands out in the literary landscape of the time for her willingness to push the boundaries of domesticity, placing her stories beyond the

context of the home (Green-Barteet 2007, 408). Likewise, while Miller also concentrates on dealing with issues related to social and political consciousness, the author decides to include white characters in her plays: “Miller seemed to believe that bringing African American and white characters together on stage was an effective means of presenting racial issues and combating racial stereotypes. Most of Miller’s early plays center on issues of racism and class” (Green-Barteet 2007, 408). In plays such as *Scratches* (1929) Miller, like other contemporaries such as Marita Bonner, chose to call attention to the problems and prejudices existing within the African American community itself in the midst of a context of racial pride and optimism, “suggesting that African Americans often accept the same stereotypes about themselves that whites perpetuate” (Green-Barteet 2007, 408). The reception of both Miller’s theater and poetry was generally positive. During the first half of the twentieth century, critics praised her ability to depict the urban life of the African American population, even considering her among the best playwrights of the time. During the second half of the twentieth century, although Miller’s work as an activist eventually transcended more than her output as a writer, her creation of three-dimensional female characters with personal aspirations and desires was subject to scholarly consideration.

Although Helene Johnson’s career was brief, she was one of the most celebrated poets during the Harlem Renaissance era, receiving positive reviews from authors such as James Weldon Johnson, who included her work in the revised edition of *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1931) claiming that “she possesses true lyric talent. [...] She has taken the very qualities and circumstances that have long called for apology or defense and extolled them in an unaffected manner” (1931, 279). In her poems, Johnson chooses to concentrate on reflecting the spirit of the Renaissance, grounded in a feeling of racial pride and she does not pay as much attention to issues that pertain specifically to black women. Although during the first half of the twentieth century Johnson’s work was well received and was included in numerous anthologies along with several contemporary women poets such as Bennett or Spencer, in the present era, even with the renewed interest in African American women authors of the twentieth century, it seems that Johnson’s poetry has not attracted as much critical attention as other Renaissance poets such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jessie Fauset or Gwendolyn B. Bennett.

Another author who, despite having belonged to the milieu of personalities such as Langston Hughes or Alain Locke, has been relegated to the margins of the Harlem Renaissance literary canon is Mae Cowdery. Indeed, during the late 1920s, Cowdery's poetry appeared in such renowned publications as *Black Opals*, *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, *Unity* and *Carolina*, as well as it was frequently anthologized (Wheeler 2006, 225). Cowdery also wrote a play, *Lai-Li* (1928), which was published in *Black Opals*. Wall (2009, 39) notes Cowdery's ability to deal openly and explicitly with the subject of sexuality and (less obviously) lesbianism in her poems. Moreover, both Johnson and Cowdery, two of the youngest poets of the Renaissance, are notable for their willingness to innovate in poetic forms, a trait that distinguishes them from most of their predecessors, who tended to prefer to conform to more traditional forms.

One of the most studied and depicted themes in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, especially in works of fiction, is the notion of *passing* and its implications for the African American population. By way of example, in his 1912 novel *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, James Weldon Johnson explores the idea of crossing the color line to ensure the protagonist's personal safety and advancement. Women authors of the period also showed great concern for this growing trend, which was reflected in their works of fiction. Among the authors who best depicted this phenomenon are Marita Bonner and Nella Larsen.

In Bonner's case, although, as has already been discussed, her most widely recognized work is the 1925 essay "On Being Young—A Woman—And Colored", throughout her career Bonner published several other essays and stories in *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, and she also produced three plays: *The Pot-Maker (A Play to be Read)* (1927), *The Purple Flower* (1928) and *Exit-An Illusion* (1929), the second of these receiving the best reviews. For Sophie Blanch (2007, 40), Bonner's oeuvre as a whole anticipates several of the central concerns of other much more recognized female authors of the period, such as Jessie Fauset or Zora Neale Hurston. Moreover, in the vein of poetesses such as Cowdery, Bonner also raises issues related to empowerment linked to female sexuality. As far as this thesis is concerned, Bonner's case is particularly interesting, considering that it is likely that one of the main reasons why critics have tended to keep her at the margins of the literary canon of the time is precisely because of her resistance to and rejection of the universalist and essentialist tendencies of the New Negro ideology (Kent 2011, 142-143). Thus, Bonner used her stories to combat generalizations of the black

experience in the United States, connecting problems directly affecting African Americans such as *passing* or urban life with issues related to latent misogyny in society (especially that directed at black women).<sup>44</sup>

Along with Zora Neale Hurston—discussed below—Nella Larsen is one of the foremost women authors of the literature published during the Harlem Renaissance, even though her work has received far less attention than Hurston's. A novelist and short story writer, Larsen's fiction reflects an ingrained consciousness around the ways in which womanhood and blackness intersected and interacted with each other. In this regard, Barbara and Beverly Smith note one of the most distinctive features of the African American women's literary tradition, which is present in Larsen's work: "the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers" (1981, 170).

In her first novel *Quicksand* (1928), Larsen offers a psychological perspective on the life of a middle-class black woman in the United States. Although the protagonist is obviously affected by the racist ideology of her country, for Frank A. Salamone, "Helga is not simply a symbol of a racist victim. She is a well-rounded individual who has some responsibility for her problems. She is a seductress. She is aggressive in pursuing her own goals. The novel is not simply one of victimization and oppression" (Salamone 2007, 353). This complex portrayal of the psychology of the modern middle-class woman would become one of the hallmarks of Larsen's work.

*Passing* (1929), Larsen's second novel, has generally been considered her masterpiece by critics. For Singh (1976, 98), *Passing* demonstrates a psychological depth never before achieved in the study of this social reality. Indeed, the novel problematizes the implications of passing and questions the ideology in which the concept is rooted. That is, for Larsen, the origin of the problem is not to be found in the attempt at pretending to be white, but in the belief that the white "race" is superior to any other. Likewise, the novel also shows the different levels of racism that permeate society, which leads the reader to understand the extent to which this ideology is rooted in the social conscience.

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<sup>44</sup> More recently, Moya Bailey coined the term "mysoginoir" in a 2010 article for the *Crunk Feminist Collective* blog to refer to the type of misogyny that specifically affects black women. This contribution, gestated within the framework of intersectionality, has been well received and its use is being implemented in the realm of sociocultural critique, especially on internet platforms.

Irene, one of the main characters, uses racist terms to refer to companions whose skin is darker than hers, showing the extent of the assimilation of racist values even among the African American population in the United States. However, Larsen not only depicts mismatches between races, but also between sexes.

Larsen's novels were well received at the time of their publication. Indeed, the author was praised by many of her contemporaries as well as by literary critics and she even won a Guggenheim Fellowship as well as the Harmon Prize in 1928. However, the problematic background of her work which, in the words of her biographer George Hutchinson, consisted on "Larsen's exploration of the zone between the races, [...] black female sexuality, black sisterhood" (Hutchinson 2006, 486), generated a certain rejection not only among the white population, but also among the members of the NAACP. This meant that the critiques and denunciations implicit in Larsen's texts were not explored in depth until the end of the century, when Larsen's production began to be considered one of the fundamental contributions of the period. Indeed, contemporary criticism of Larsen's work has concluded that the author anticipated the explorations of black women and their sexuality by contemporary authors such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor or Ntozake Shange (Hutchinson 2006, 486).

Today, critics coincide in describing her as an author ahead of her time, particularly because of her treatment of the combinatory relationships between class, gender and race in her characters:

In her novels, Larsen tries to redefine both topics [race and gender] from the point of view of contemporary African American women who are actively engaged in the reconstruction of their own identity and history. This conscious process of reinterpretation offers a new vision of black women springing from their real life experiences and intentionally subverting extremely imposed images. (Gallego 2003, 121-122)

For his part, Singh has studied Larsen's novels along with others published during the Harlem Renaissance. This study has led the critic to conclude that "Nella Larsen is clearly Fauset's superior in craft and language," arguing that Larsen shows a greater mastery of dramatic form, narrative unity, and point of view (1976, 98).

Anyhow, the most visible head among the women writers of the Harlem Renaissance and a fundamental author for the development of the African American women's literary tradition is Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston's first publications date back to the 1920s, a time when, in addition to publishing several poems in *Negro World*—edited by Marcus Garvey—she wrote her first short story, “John Redding Goes to the Sea” (1920). After that, Hurston continued to publish stories such as “Spunk” (which Locke included in his anthology *The New Negro*) or “Sweat”, as well as the play *Color Struck*. In her short fiction, Hurston began to show her interest in and mastery of themes such as African American folklore or dialect variation, as well as a clear preference for complex, rounded characters who present challenges to the story and the reader. In this regard, Harold Bloom draws attention to Hurston's portrayal of black women in her early stories: “Hurston depicts strong women who develop independence in spite of oppressive social conditions, particularly those influenced by a politics of gender-and ethnic-biased economics. Hurston's characterizations of women defy traditional ideology that encourages women to remain oppressed, especially in terms of their economic status” (2007, 183). Another story that stands out among her production is “The Gilded Six-Bits”, which was published in 1933 in *Story* magazine. The story was well received by her readers, and even prompted publisher J. B. Lippincott to write to the author urging her to work on a novel. Four months later, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) was published.

Although Hurston already enjoyed a certain reputation in the intellectual spheres of the Harlem Renaissance, the publication of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* further highlighted her ability to create and manage fictional stories; not only short, but also long narratives (Bloom 2007, 186). Thus, although several reviewers took issue with some humorous elements or plot threads in the novel, critical opinions were generally very positive, most of them praising Hurston's use of dialectal variation and elements of African American folklore. For example, Margaret Wallace wrote in the *New York Times Book Review*:

*Jonah's Gourd* can be called without fear of exaggeration the most vital and original novel about the American Negro that has yet been written by a member of the Negro race. [...] Unlike the dialect in most novels about the American Negro, this does not seem to be merely the speech of white men with the spelling distorted. Its essence lies rather in the rhythm and balance of the

sentences, in the warm artlessness of the phrasing [...] Not the least charm of the book, however, is its language: rich, expressive, and lacking in self-conscious artifice. (1934, 6)

For Warren J. Carson, so many details weave together the heart of the novel, “including the handling of dialect, the detailed presentation of physical settings, the accurate and unprejudiced capturing of the lives of blacks in the rural South, and the careful and refreshing placement of humor and pathos throughout the work” (2007, 284), that it would be difficult for even the most discerning critic not to recognize the novel’s literary value and pioneering nature.

In 1935, Hurston published *Mules and Men*, a collection of Southern folklore pieces intended to highlight the importance of this tradition to the African American literary canon. In this volume, Hurston addressed issues of male/female relations and how these affected the black woman’s ability to make her voice heard, a theme she would develop in-depth in her magnum opus, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Parallely, given her interest in the African diaspora, Hurston traveled to the Caribbean and South America, where she also devoted herself to collecting samples of local folklore, which she would publish in *Tell My Horse* (1938).

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) is undoubtedly the author’s best known and most important work, and also one of the key works of the Harlem Renaissance and the African American literary tradition. Although the novel was actually published in the immediate post-Renaissance period, volumes examining the Harlem Renaissance generally include *Their Eyes* as a seminal contribution to the period, as it gathers the essence of Hurston’s entire ideology and literary imagery. According to Bloom, the novel uses the *bildungsroman* and the *kunstlerroman* to grapple with common motifs in Renaissance literature such as class, gender and inter and intraracial conflict (2007, 171). Building on this approach, *Their Eyes* incorporates all the elements that characterize Hurston’s fiction: folklore, dialect variation, humor, the portrayal of black communities and the deep and complex psychology of her characters. Carson (2007, 290) and Bloom (2007, 171) agree in observing that the critics of the time failed to appreciate the literary value of Hurston’s novel. Indeed, the text received ambivalent reviews after its publication, with the author’s black contemporaries being the ones who criticized it most harshly. Prominent among these were the opinions of Alain Locke and



Richard Wright who, while they did appreciate Hurston's energy and her ability to portray black folklore and dialect, still accused her of recreating the stereotypes of "those pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over, and envy" (Locke 1938, 18) or of writing simply to satisfy a white audience (Wright 1937, 17). In Wright's case, he went so far as to state that the novel "carries no theme, no message, no thought" (1937, 17). These thoughts, in part, aligned with the perception of black intellectuals such as Locke himself or W.E.B. Du Bois that African American authors had an obligation to present the African American characters in their texts in the best and most favorable light possible.

In addition to her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), which stands out as one of the few published by a woman after the postwar period, Hurston published two more novels, *Moses, Man of The Mountain* (1939) and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), although they have traditionally received less critical attention. Nevertheless, through these texts Hurston continued to explore scenarios marked by race, class and gender, offering a sophisticated critique of the sociopolitical differences of the time (Bloom 2007, 182). At the time of publication, although their popularity did not reach the levels of the earlier novels, both texts were generally positively received. Critics praised, in the case of *Moses*, Hurston's adaptation and reinterpretation of the biblical story (Untermeyer 1939, 11; Hutchinson 1939, 21; Carmer 1939, 5) and, in the case of *Seraph*, the portrayal of life in Florida and the use of local language and variation (Whitmore 1948, 415).

Although halfway through the twentieth century interest in Hurston's figure was lost (in fact, by the time she died in 1960 her works had ceased to circulate), the publication of Alice Walker's famous essay "Looking for Zora" in 1975, revived the spirit of and interest in the author. As Carson explains (2007, 290), this renewed recognition has placed the author at the center of the canons of Harlem Renaissance literature, African American literature and African American women's (and feminist) literature. Indeed, Hurston's work has now been analyzed from virtually every possible angle and her fiction volumes have been in constant reprint since Walker rescued her from obscurity. Although some critics such as Karla Holloway (1987, 17) or Paul Gilroy (1993, 90-92) perceive in Hurston's work a certain rejection of the changes of modernity, the literary and historical value of her production has given the author, in Carson's words, "a prime seat at the table where the best of the world's literature is served" (2007, 290).

### 3.1.3. Re-Imagining the Country

During the outbreak of World War I, the United States saw the beginning of a great migration of the African American population to the north of the country, which reached its peak after the Great Depression coinciding with World War II. This migration generated a sense of empowerment and independence among the black population which was reflected in the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movement as well as it also carried over into the literature of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, as Cheryll A. Wall contends, after the outbreak of World War II American black literature adopted a different tone from the works produced during the Renaissance.

Thus, this would be a period of intense political activism on the part of the black community, which would necessarily and inevitably impact the African American literary landscape. In this context, the novelists, poets, playwrights, and essayists of the time would continue to explore issues that had already begun to flourish in Renaissance literature, such as “a renegotiation of power relations between black and white America, a disturbance of ideological imperatives of identity, and a re-direction of the sources for literary production” (Traylor 2009, 50). Furthermore, with the rise of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, women authors of the period would also venture to question and reframe the power relations between black men and women in their literature.

## 3.2. The Black Chicago Renaissance

Although not as nationally recognized as the Harlem Renaissance, the Chicago Black Renaissance also echoed the revitalization of black arts and the reclamation of a pan-African identity, expanding its protests to include discrimination against people of African descent worldwide. Thus, as Anne Meis Knupfer notes in her introduction to *The Chicago Black Renaissance and Women's Activism* (2006, 2), “activists during the Chicago Black Renaissance did not view lynchings in the South, restrictive covenants in the North, the segregation of black soldiers during World War II, or the Italian invasion of Ethiopia as isolated events but rather saw them as linked by colonial, racist

practices”. Among the women associated with the movement were Margaret Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks, Shirley Grahams Du Bois, Alice Browning, Lorraine Hansberry and Era Bell Thompson.

Among the experts who have recovered interest in this movement we can point to Steven C. Tracy (2011) and Bill Mullen (1999), as well as the aforementioned Anne Meis Knupfer (2006), whose work is especially noteworthy for this dissertation given her specific interest in the role of women within the movement. In this regard, Knupfer highlights women’s involvement with the Renaissance not only at the literary level, but also in many other spheres: “as schoolteachers, clubwomen, founders and administrators of community institutions, activists, volunteers, and caretakers, black women were largely involved promoting the expressive arts, sustaining community institutions, and fostering black solidarity through social protests” (2006, 2). The author draws attention to the general decline in the activity of clubs affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) during the 1920s and 1930s, a decline that never occurred in Chicago, whose clubs progressively gained visibility as they became involved in national and international events (2006, 6).

Prolific writer of poetry and fiction, Margaret Walker is best known for the poetry collection *For My People* (1942), her first major publication, as well as for the novel *Jubilee* (1966). In 1942, *For My People* won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, making her the first black woman to receive a national writing award. Her collection of poetry was considered “the most important poetry collection written by a member of the Black Chicago Renaissance before Gwendolyn Brooks’s *A Street in Bronzeville*” (Hine, Hine and Harrold 2011, 132). Walker’s poetry blends the African American oral tradition with multiple literary forms and styles. In this respect, Twagilimana argues that the poet paved the way for writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Sherley Ann Williams and John Edgar Wideman (2007, 590).

Walker’s second publication, which was also her only novel, *Jubilee*, narrates the story of a slave family during and after the Civil War, forecasting the revisionary work conducted in novels such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) or Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979). In her discussion of the main themes in *Jubilee*, Maryemma Graham argues that they “are moral ones: love conquers violence and hatred; suffering makes us strong; the search for home and community prevails over all else” (Graham 2002, ix).

*Jubilee* earned Walker yet another literary award, namely the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship. However, according to Twagilimana, in spite of the popular reception of Walker's work, the author did not attract the same critical attention as other contemporary authors such as Alice Walker or Toni Morrison. Actually, poet Nikki Giovanni famously referred to her as "the most famous person nobody knows" (in Graham 2001, 21).

Poetry also flourished during the Black Chicago Renaissance, as young poets emerged from the Chicago Poets' Class, a poetry workshop carried out in the South Side Art Center at the time. One of the poets who attended the workshop was Gwendolyn Brooks, the first black writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Brooks started publishing her poems in "Lights and Shadows", the poetry column of the *Chicago Defender*. During the early stages of her career, Brooks received the encouragement of Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and Richard Wright. Her first poetry collection, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), tackles the experiences of an African American girl growing up in Chicago. The volume received critical acclaim for its textured representation of life in the neighborhood of Bronzeville and the universality of its themes. However, as Evie Shockley suggests (2006, 118), criticism often discussed Brooks work in terms that implied such merits were unexpected in a black woman. Her second poetry collection, *Annie Allen* (1949), was awarded the 1950 Pulitzer Prize for poetry and the Eunice Tietjens Prize by *Poetry* magazine. In spite of the awards that this second collection earned, Brooks's poems received mixed reviews. In relation to this, Claudia Tate interviewed the author in 1983 and argued that Brooks's early works "don't seem to focus directly on heightened political awareness", an argument which the poet blatantly refused stating that "many of the poems, in my new and old books, are 'politically aware'; I suggest you reread them" (2003, 106).

Brooks also published several autobiographical works, namely the novel *Maud Martha* (1953) and the autobiographies *Report from Part One* (1972) and *Report from Part Two* (1995). According to Bridget Harris Tsembo, what is most significant about these works is "the strong detection of transformation that both heroines go through" as well as the identification of power "in those that had been previously rendered powerless" (2007, 51). Her prose acknowledges and celebrates the beauty of blackness, both in men and women. One of her most famous poems, "We Real Cool", published in *The Bean Eaters* (1959), also shares the celebratory tone of her narrative works, and is nowadays

considered “one of the most celebrated examples of jazz poetry” (Jones 2000, 52). Likewise, the poems that conform *In the Mecca* (1968), also present blackness as a source of inspiration and pride for black artists. According to poet Dudley Randall, Brooks’s *In the Mecca* was clearly influenced by the work of younger fellow writers:

Gwendolyn Brooks’s latest book, *In the Mecca*, shows the influence of her association in her workshop with militant young Chicago South Side writers [...] There are fewer “feminine” epithets, and certain passages have a raw power that overwhelms. As well as her piercing insight into people’s minds, there are violence, horror, and tragedy in this book. (Randall 1969, 114)

Indeed, many critics have argued that Brook’s early work was less self-aware than her latter poetry, which showed a higher political compromise. In this regard, the poems collected in *In the Mecca* have also been viewed as a call for liberation which directly addresses the black readership, thus distancing from the white Anglo-American canon.

While Lorraine Hansberry’s literary production was not quantitatively abundant, the quality of her works—particularly the plays *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* (1959)—earned her recognition as one of the great African American playwrights. According to Lisbeth Lipari, her preference for drama may have been shaped by the Chicago Renaissance’s stylistic emphasis on urban speech and the spoken word (2011, 193). *A Raisin in the Sun* highlights the lives and struggles of black Americans who lived under racial segregation in Chicago. In spite of its initial critical acclaim—especially by white critics—, there was a backlash against Hansberry’s work as a playwright, as she was accused by younger more militant writers of not being radical enough to fit within the upcoming Black Arts Movement. Still, *A Raisin in the Sun* was the first play written by an African American woman and directed by an African American, Lloyd Richards. In relation to this, as Patterson contends, Hansberry’s play eventually became a representative text that subsequent black feminist criticism would identify as embodying the concerns around which it would develop its theoretical framework (2009, 93).

While Hansberry continued to pursue different artistic endeavors throughout her career, she would only witness the production of another one of her plays, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* (1965). Hansberry’s second play questioned the attitude of the

American society towards women and homosexuals, even if it lacked the dramatic clarity of her opera prima (Bode 2007). However, beyond her plays, Hansberry also explored other genres such as journalism, public letters, essays as well as she gave several speeches and interviews. Indeed, as occurred with most Black Chicago Renaissance artists, writing was for Hansberry a political act. As later criticism of the writer has claimed, this is evident in all her works and it was actually confirmed by Hansberry herself in the posthumous work *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*: “the things that he taught me were great things: that all racism is rotten, White or Black, that everything is political” ([1968] 1995).

### 3.3. The Legacy of the Renaissance Period

On the one hand, women authors who had begun their careers in the Renaissance continued to be active during the 1940s and 1950s. Thus, figures such as May Miller, Dorothy West or Gwendolyn B. Bennett would make notable contributions both in the literary field and as political activists. On the other hand, new voices emerged, such as Ann Petry, whose first novel *The Street* (1946) made her the first African American woman to sell more than a million copies.

Like many other writers of the time, Petry began working as a journalist for newspapers such as *The Amsterdam News* and *The People's Voice*. Her early works also include several short stories published in *The Crisis*. However, it was her first novel, *The Street*, that earned her great national recognition. The text won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship and book sales exceeded one million copies. Her prize-winning novel provides an account of the social and political consequences for the uneducated black population who also usually suffered from financial struggles. As Jessica Labbé suggests, Petry's assertion of the protagonist's power at the end of the story already pointed towards a trend in African American woman's literature: identifying the black female body with a sign of empowerment. (2006, 101).

Throughout her career, Petry published two other novels. *Country Place* (1947) provides an examination of class and gender oppression through the lens of a white veteran of World War II, while *The Narrows* (1953) narrates an interracial romantic

affair between a black man and a white woman. However, it is perhaps her short stories that make up Petry's best-known works after *The Street*. These include, among others, "Like a Winding Sheet" and the novella "Miss Muriel". Actually, the former was included in the anthological collection *The Best American Short Stories* (1977) published by Houghton Mifflin.

However, as Hazel Arnett Ervin notes in the introduction to *The Critical Response to Ann Petry* (2005, xv), the author was often read in the shadows of her male counterparts. Indeed, the critical works published by her contemporaries Carl Milton Hughes (1953) and, most notably, Robert Bone (1958), as well as other male critics up until the decade of 1970, undermined Petry's narrative, especially the novels published after *The Street* as well as her short stories.

However, Petry rejected fixed labels and resisted categorization. In the words of Vernon E. Lattin:

[Petry] rebels against the falsifications of life, the dreams, rationalizations, and illusions that distort one's grasp of reality; she rebels especially against the American Dream and all of its attendant illusions, which blind one to the stark, sordid existence that is America. Like all true rebels, she seeks freedom, a new order beyond the cages, walls, and prisons—dominant images of America. (1978, 69)

In this line, Lattin foregrounds the parallelisms between the author and Lutie Johnson, the protagonist of *The Street* who, according to him, is also a rebel. Actually, Lutie Johnson's story reflects key themes in Petry's works such as the quest for the American Dream and the disillusionment induced by the realization of its unattainability.

While critical reviews initially undermined Petry's work, both *The Street* and *The Narrows* (1953) sold more than one million copies and *Country Place* (1947) garnered the status of "book of the month" in London (as Petry's novels were published in different countries and languages). As noted by Hazel Arnett Ervin, who studied the critical reception of the author, a symptomatic indicator of the prominence of *The Street* is the fact that while its reviews extended beyond the novel's second printing in 1986, reviews of *The Narrows* and *Country Place* stopped after the first printing.

In relation to this, Joy Myree-Mainor has criticized the fact that Petry's work has often been overlooked in analyses of racial justice writings of the mid-twentieth century:

Ann Petry's career came of age during the 1940s when urban realism and male-dominated sociological writings dominated the black literary and intellectual traditions. [...] Women writers such as Petry are often elided from the social protest tradition which seems to draw a continuum along gendered lines that favor prominent black male activists and critics from Douglass and Du Bois to Cornel West and Michael Eric Dyson in the present day. (2010, 176)

According to the scholar, early readings of *The Street* identified the novel as "the female counterpart to Richard Wright's *Native Son*" (2010, 176). However, contemporary criticism has considered Petry's engagement with racial and gender issues through the whole body of her oeuvre. In this respect, more recent commentaries on *The Street* have described it as a novel about "gender and sexuality" (Williams in Ervin 2006, 9), "an archetypal black woman's tale" (Smith in Ervin 2006, 10) or "a black woman's proletarian novel" (Christian in Ervin 2006, 14), thus bringing to the fore the author's compromise and involvement with the literary tradition of African American women.

Further evidence of Petry's role and relevance during the Civil Rights Movement and to the African American literary tradition is her inclusion in the Library of America series with the publication of *Ann Petry: The Street, The Narrows* in 2019. Volume editor Farah Jasmine Griffin argued that the book "restores one of the foremost African American writers of the past century to her rightful place in literary culture" (2019, n. p.). In line with these words is Tayari Jones's defense of Petry's work:

I recently reread *The Street* and I just can't figure out why this work is not more widely read and celebrated. After such a stunning reception in the 1940s, why hasn't this novel become a college staple? [...] Sometimes when a writer is regarded as "before her time" we don't quite understand that the same work is still right on time. Petry is the writer we have been waiting for, hers are the stories we need to fully illuminate the questions of our moment, while also offering a page-turning good time. Ann Petry, the woman, had it all, and so does her insightful, prescient and unputdownable prose. (2018, 22)



## 4. THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA AND THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

I  
am a black woman [...] strong  
beyond all definition still  
defying place  
and time  
and circumstance  
assailed  
impervious  
indestructible  
(Evans 1970, 12)

In the decade of 1950, after nearly a century of segregation, inequality, discrimination and other acts of violence, a group of black men and women set the milestones of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. They organized boycotts, sit-ins and peaceful protests such as the 1961 Freedom Rides and the 1963 March on Washington, among many others. According to Zoe Trodd (2015, 17) literature produced during that period reflects “the shape of a centuries long movement for equality”. Authors such as Jacqueline Dowd Hall (2001) have brought to the fore the “ghostliness” given to this movement because of its short time span.<sup>45</sup> In this light, Hall called for a new narrative of the movement and an expansion of chronological boundaries so as to consider “the continuities between the 1940s and the 1960s” (2001, 11). Following Hall’s line of thought, Trodd identifies a long heritage of narratives of literary abolitionism and dissent that goes back to the twentieth century and that became a key Civil Rights aesthetic: “Writers knew that form could protest. It could challenge racist imagery, reassign the meanings of white supremacist symbols, and undermine narratives of the past that shaped power dynamics in the present” (Trodd 2015, 18).

Today, the Black Arts Movement (hereafter BAM), whose roots can be traced to the “Black Power” ideology that gained prominence during the 1960s and the 1970s is considered one of the most significant artistic movements in the African American

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<sup>45</sup> It is generally common ground that the Civil Rights movement began in the mid-1950s and ended a decade later.

literary tradition. The movement resisted traditional Western influences and found new ways to present the black experience.

The BAM was spurred by the assassination of Black Nationalist Leader Malcolm X in 1965. In 1968, poet and leader of the movement Larry Neal disclosed the characteristics of this new artistic expression:

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. This movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. [...] The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics. Recently, these two movements have begun to merge: the political values inherent in the Black Power concept are now finding concrete expression in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists. A main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms. The Black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics. (Neale 1968, 29)

Like the New Negro Movement of the 1910s and 1920s, the BAM was a flowering of manifold kinds of artistic activities by African American writers, poets, playwrights, musicians and visual artists who believed that artistic production could be the key to the revision of stereotypes of African American inferiority and subhumanity; stereotypes that laid at the roots of racism in the United States. This was already anticipated by James Weldon Johnson who, in the preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, claimed that "No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior" (1922, 2). United under this conviction, a number of African American artists attempted to revive the efforts of their "New Negro" predecessors during the modern Civil Rights Movement.

During the Civil Rights era, activists paid more and more attention to the political uses of art. The contemporary work of those like James Baldwin and Chester Himes would show the possibility of creating a new black aesthetic. In this context, a number of art groups were established during the period, such as the Umbra Poets and the Spiral Arts

Alliance, which can be seen as precursors to the BAM. Likewise, Civil Rights activists also worked to create black-owned media such as the journals *Black Dialogue*, *The Liberator*, *Soul Book*, and *The Black Scholar* and publishing houses such as Dudley Randall's Broadside Press and Third World Press. Artists of the BAM took advantage of these channels to publish their artistic and literary works, as well as to spread black political activism.

In their introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to African American Women Writers*, Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor argue that the contributions of black women writers to the BAM have largely been ignored, even if a good number of African American women greatly defined and shaped the black aesthetic of the period, participating in artistic endeavors within the areas of fiction, poetry, drama and non-fiction (2009, 8). According to Eleanor W. Traylor,

The founding mothers [of the Black Arts movement], with other vanguard women writers, strengthen the revolutionary ferment of the movement to resonate its themes: a renegotiation of power relations between black and white America, a disturbance of ideological imperatives of identity, and a redirection of the sources for literary production. (2009, 50)

Among the vanguard women writers that were particularly prolific during this period we may cite Mari Evans, Ntozake Shange, Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, Sarah Webster Fabio, June Jordan, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Maya Angelou and Barbara Ann Teer.

Following this line, Traylor refers to the period which saw the flourishing of the BAM as "a moment when two words were reborn to conjure ever-continuing discourses" (Traylor 2009, 52). The two words she refers to are *Black* and *Woman*. Indeed, the emphasis and the embracement of the intersection between the two realities permeated the works of women of the BAM during the mid-sixties and, most notably, the seventies as these writers enunciated their desire to "assume a sovereignty ourselves", as was originally phrased by Gwendolyn Brooks.

Taking Neale's conception of the movement as a starting point, it is essential to point out that a commonplace about the BAM is that it was characterized by an extremely

sexist and homophobic character.<sup>46</sup> However, the weight of female figures in the BAM is worth noting as does, for example, James Smethurst (2006). In this regard, he notes that six of the fourteen major authors Haki Madhubuti considers in *Dynamite Voices* (1971) are women, which leads him to state: “It is hard to think of another critical work of that time considering a large artistic movement in which the work of women formed such a large proportion of the subject matter” (2006, 85). Likewise, considering that many of the authors of the period, such as Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez or Toni Cade Bambara, among many others, directly criticized in their works the male supremacist ideology of the movement, Smethurst observes that “The Black Arts and Black Power movements were among the few intellectual spaces in the United States in the 1960s where it was comparatively easy to raise the issue of male supremacy as opposed to, say, the institutions of mainstream academia” (2006, 86). Thus, these women’s voices of denunciation were not relegated to the margins of the movement, but rather progressively gained power, forcing many of their contemporaries to revise and rethink their ideological positions.

## 4.1. Reconceptualizing Blackness

In spite of the general climate of upsurge of black nationalism in the United States, not all African American writers subscribed to this ideological stance. Adrienne Kennedy’s plays, for instance, have remained controversial because of their failure to comply with the nationalistic stance of the BAM of the 1960s (Boucher 2006, 84). Indeed, Kennedy’s surrealistic one-act plays broke free from traditional conventions as the author experimented with character construction and form. Her best-known works, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1962) and *The Owl Answers* (1963) remain relevant for “their engagement with notions of African-American identity, resistance and agency through their attention to mixed race female characters or mulattas who experience bodily and psychological traumas that demonstrate the abuse of the colonized on a deeply visceral level” (Boucher 2006, 85). While some of her contemporaries criticized her lack of commitment to the cause of the contemporary Black Power and Black Arts Movement, Nita N. Kumar holds that *Sun: A Poem for Malcolm X Inspired by His Murder* (1968)

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Lubiano ([1993] 2002), Smethurst (2006), Baker (2006) and Crawford (2017).

and *An Evening with Dead Essex* (1978) attest to the author's involvement with political questions during the 1960s (Kumar 2007, 337). *The Alexander Plays*, which include *She Talks to Beethoven*, *The Ohio State Murders*, and *The Film Club*, all published in 1992, seek to explore the individual's psychological confusion and conflicts and are highly self-reflexive.

In his introduction to *The Adrienne Kennedy Reader*, Werner Sollors evaluates the scope of Kennedy's oeuvre:

Adrienne Kennedy's work has affinities to the work of Sam Shepard, Amiri Baraka, Ntozake Shange, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, and Wole Soyinka. Simultaneously, it echoes the entire dramatic tradition, from Greek tragedy to theatre of the absurd, from Euripides to Shakespeare, and from Chekhov to Tennessee Williams. [...] Kennedy's highly acclaimed and frequently staged works have been praised as surrealistic dream plays, hauntingly fragmentary and nonlinear lyrical dramas, high points in the development of the American one-act play, and dramatic harbingers of feminist themes in contemporary Black women's writing. (2001, vii)

According to Rei Magosaki, Kennedy's drama paved the way for the articulation of marginalized identities in literature. In this regard, she can be considered a precursor of Ntozake Shange's and Suzan-Lori Parks's work, who also defy the boundaries of realism in their plays. Likewise, Magosaki argues, Kennedy's plays are also indicative of the emergence of a black feminist criticism "in that her works contest for the space of a black female subjectivity against the too often universalized white female subjectivity" (2006, 516).

Another author that resists easy classification within a concrete literary movement is Paule Marshall even if, as Kalenda C. Eaton states, she has "indelibly forged a place within the history and tradition of African American literature" (2007, 386). Born to Barbadian parents, Marshall's oeuvre includes five novels and two short story collections. Her first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), tackles themes such as traveling, migration, the struggle for human integrity and psychic fracture, which are recurrent in her subsequent works. Her collection of novellas *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* published in 1961 won the National Institute of Arts Award and in 1969 she published

*The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, which was described as “one of the four or five most impressive novels ever written by a black American” in *The New York Times Book Review*. Following the positive reception of *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, in 1983 the author published *Praisesong for the Widow*, which is nowadays regarded by some critics as her most mature work.

According to Laura Baker Shearer, Marshall’s fiction should be considered feminist for her development of manifold themes around women’s emotional, physical and spiritual lives as well as her faith in the human capacity to heal: “Marshall illustrates that the only possibility for healing an oppressive history and encouraging an egalitarian future comes through interaction with self and community. The tensions created by her characters’ honest confrontations of these many pressures place her within feminist discourse” (2006, 601). Likewise, Eaton highlights Marshall’s influence on contemporary African Caribbean and African American writers and argues that her works, which have been analyzed from multiple perspectives in American academia, remain a favorite among scholars because of the author’s revealing representations of hybridity and dual consciousness within the black experience (2007, 385).

In relation to this, especially relevant is Carole Boyce Davies’s and Elaine Savory Fido’s assessment of Marshall’s transnational approach to identity—particularly, female identity—, which sets the tone for contemporary approaches to African Caribbean and African American literature. Thus, they observe that “There is a definite Pan-Africanist focus in the relationship to heritage in *Praisesong [for the Widow]* and in several other Marshall works” (1994, 61).

## **4.2. The Revolutionary Female Subject**

The BAM also saw a paradigm shift as poetry and other performative arts entered the public spaces thus engaging in a revolutionary project of artistic experimentation and social examination. This paradigm reconceptualized the traditional relation between “popular” and “high” culture, and questioned the hierarchy that was usually associated to these categories, under the belief that it perpetuated stereotypes and symbols of power and dominance. In the words of Black Arts poet Angela Jackson,

popular culture and its touchstones are where day-to-day memory is posited and repositied. As a poet, I live in popular and ‘high’ culture and all that lives above and between... I subvert popular culture and pose moral and ethical questions that arise out of my conflict with popular culture’s stereotypes and communal symbols and myths. (in Traylor 2009, 55)

One of the foremost exponents of this paradigm was Nikki Giovanni, whose work was tremendously influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. Her first two poetry volumes, *Black Feeling, Black Talk* (1968) and *Black Judgement* (1969) contain her most famous militant poems, even if she also wrote several volumes of prose and children’s poetry. While most of Giovanni’s criticism focuses on her political poems, according to Jane M. Barstow, few critics touched upon “the growing lyricism of her poetry or its broadening thematic reach” (2007, 215). In 1976, Suzanne Juhasz called for a more feminist reading of the author’s poetry and suggested that Giovanni could potentially be considered the successor to Gwendolyn Brooks. Indeed, while several poems by Giovanni specifically urge black men to take action against racial oppression, her poetry constantly explores and draws from her subjective identity as a black woman:

What can I, a poor Black Woman, do to destroy America? This is the question, with appropriate variation, being asked in every Black heart. There is one answer. I can kill. There is one compromise – I can protect those who kill. There is one cop-out – I can encourage others to kill. There are no other ways. (Giovanni 1970, 54)

The poems of *My House* (1972) and *The Women and the Men* (1975) tackle the interrelationship between the community and the individual and reflect upon the social role of the poet. According to Barstow, “Giovanni describes her persona as a woman in control, who cooks what she wants to cook and reigns supreme in her own kitchen” (2007, 214). However, she also expresses “her frustration at the failure of the black power movement fundamentally to change the consciousness of most black people” (2007, 214).

In relation to this, Margaret B. McDowell argued that critics had underestimated Giovanni’s “affirmation of Afro-American culture and her realistic portrayals of

individual Afro-Americans and their experience” (1986, 56). However, Giovanni’s work is not often anthologized and has generally been criticized for complying with the aesthetic and the ideological parameters dictated by her male counterparts.

Another author of the BAM who was criticized for her elevation of black men “at the expense of the independence of black women” (Simms-Burton 2009, 81) is the prolific poet Sonia Sanchez, whose work has usually been studied alongside Giovanni’s. According to Michele Simms-Burton: “Sanchez’s position as a black poet during the Black Arts Movement is emblematic of the tensions that existed regarding the development of nation in light of the denigration of black women by both the dominant culture and by black men” (2009, 89). Sanchez’s early collections of poetry, *Home Coming* (1969) and *We a BaddDDD People* (1970), represent the “Afro femme poetic outpouring” that was present through the works of BAM women writers. Likewise, Sanchez embraced non-western sources and experimental poetic forms, such as the Japanese *haiku*, *tanka* and *sonku* (the latter actually created by Sanchez). She also experimented with the use of diction, the disruption of structure and syntax and the rhythm of jazz and blues. These formal characteristics, together with the use of an openly confrontational rhetoric, permeated the work of important poets of the time, such as Jayne Cortez, Carolyn M. Rodgers, Haki R. Madhubuti, Etheridge Knight or Nikki Giovanni.

Sanchez also produced a number of plays, among which we may highlight *Sister Son/Ji* (1969), *The Bronx Is Next* (1968), and *Uh Uh, But How Do It Free Us?* (1974). According to Traylor (2009, 60), “these plays directly address black urban communities, issuing challenges to ‘clean-up your act’ and ‘reach out and touch’ in the enterprise of consciousness-raising”. Likewise, one of her most acclaimed works, the spiritual autobiography *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women* (1974), is a celebration of the black woman and reflects her involvement with the contemporary sociopolitical landscape of the US. Her more recent work, which has been described as less aggressive and confrontational than her early writings, includes *Does Your House Have Lions?* (1997), which was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Like the Singing Coming Off the Drums: Love Poems* (1998) and *Shake Lose My Skin: New and Collected Poems* (1999).



While, as Ben Fislser suggests, Sanchez's prolific literary work has not earned the critical attention it deserves, fellow black writers and critics significantly called attention to her poems during the development of the BAM. By way of example, Don Lee contended that Sanchez's work "helps u face yr / self. Then, actually u will be able to move thru / out the world and face other people as a true black person" (1969, 15). Likewise, in 1989 Kamili Anderson argued that the writer was probably "the most undeservedly underspoken of contemporary women poets in America" (14).

In relation to the prevalent criticism of Giovanni's and Sanchez's sociopolitical engagement with the black women's fight, Audre Lorde's biographer Alexis De Veaux argued that:

the leading voices of the Black Arts Movement were male writers and those Black women—like Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni—whose early writings reflected an 'acceptable' kinship with Black men and suppressed gendered perspectives inconsistent with a monolithic, "authentic" Blackness. In contrast, Lorde's more lyric, understated poetry was out of sync with these raced designs. Her later poetry, however, would more explicitly reflect a politicized, selfinflected Black consciousness. (2004, 92)

Lorde was a prolific writer of poetry, essay, fictionalized autobiography and personal journals, where she openly discussed the oppression she suffered as a black lesbian. As put by Heejung Cha, "Lorde refuses to be defined in the discourses of race prejudice, gender bias, and sexual oppression and continuously reclaims self-representation as a black lesbian working-class woman and mother of two interracial children" (2007, 371).

Her first poetry collection, *The First Cities* (1968) was reviewed as an innovative and introspective celebration of the black woman. Her third poetry collection, *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973) significantly focused on mother-daughter relationships and maternal concerns and was nominated for the National Book Award for Poetry. The poems included in *The First Cities* and *Cables to Rage* (1970), her second collection, were recollected in her fifth volume of poetry, *Coal*, which was published in 1976 by W. W. Norton and Company. However, her most successful volume was *The Black Unicorn*, released in 1978 which, still today, critics agree it contains her richest poems. Through the collection, Lorde explores her self-identity as a black woman and a lesbian,

as well as she relates these features with her experience as a mother. Likewise, the volume characteristically builds on the author's vision of a black transnational culture and literary tradition.

After overcoming breast cancer, an experience which is reflected upon in *The Cancer Journals* (1980), Lorde published the autobiographical work *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* in 1982, which she described as a "biomythography". Indeed, the volume blends the genre of autobiography with historical fiction and mythology and has been praised for its vivid description of the process of construction of the author's multiple selves which also becomes an awareness-raising experience.

Lorde has become one of the most influential activists in the feminist movement, and her work as a writer has received international recognition. As noted by Cha (2007, 371), her writings are widely taught in women's studies, gay and lesbian studies, American cultural studies and literature courses. In relation to Lorde's work, Barbara Christian has highlighted the importance of the concept of difference in self-formation which, according to the author, evidences the intersection of racism, sexism and homophobia. To the black feminist critic, Lorde's oeuvre attests to "the depth of analysis that black women writers are contributing to feminist thought" (1985, 210).

Across her multifaceted career, June Jordan's writings circled back to a number of themes that identified crucial concerns about her immediate sociopolitical context. Indeed, Jordan's work resists easy categorization. Her poetry reveals her engagement with the work of her American antecessors Walt Whitman, Margaret Walker, Langston Hughes and Robert Hayden, even if she was able to create a unique artistic voice that reflected her personal experiences as a black bisexual activist, educator and writer (Pérez 2007, 327). According to Monika Giacoppe, Jordan "was not one to back down from a fight, and language was her chosen means of joining the fray" (2006, 499). Her poetry collections include *Things That I Do in the Dark: Selected Poetry* (1977), *Living Room: New Poems* (1985), *Campaigns: Selected Poems* (1989), *Haruko/Love Poetry: New and Selected Love Poems* (1993), and *Kissing God Goodbye: New Poems* (1997), among others.

Among her published prose, the short novel *His Own Where* was awarded the Prix de Rome in Environmental Design in 1971 and was also finalist for the National Book

Award. The text, a story of young love addressed to adolescents, became the first novel entirely written in Black English. Indeed, through her career Jordan openly demanded recognition of BE as a distinct form of expression and a legitimate American language. These concerns were discussed through several essays, among which we may highlight “White English/Black English: The Politics of Translation” (1972) and “Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan” (1985). Likewise, her 1982 essay “Report from the Bahamas” clearly exemplifies her views on the bidirectional relation between the political and the personal and the impact of the former upon the latter. According to Giacoppe (2006, 501), Jordan’s essays also document her refusal “to be pressured into privileging or denying her identity as a woman, as a black person, as a bisexual”.

As Roy Pérez points out, Jordan’s work has often been sidelined “precisely because she challenges both African American and women’s movements to extend the boundaries of identity politics, or abandon such a project altogether in favor of a new politics of race, gender, sexuality, and transnational action” (2007, 328). Actually, in her review of *Civil Wars*, Toni Cade Bambara argued that the cultural value of Jordan’s lifetime work could be compared to W.E.B Du Bois’s *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940). Likewise, her poetry is often examined by scholars in the field in relation to that of Elizabeth Bishop, Adrienne Rich or Ntozake Shange.

### **4.3. Autobiography and Black Women Activists**

One of the artistic endeavors that gained prominence during the BAM of the 1960s was the narratological rendering of the politically aware, socially conscious black artist. While, as has been discussed, poetry—performative poetry, in particular—was the preferred genre of a good number of emergent artists within the movement, organizations such as the Harlem Writer’s Guild, which was originally set up as a forum for African American writers and artists, privileged the production of autobiographical prose and fiction:

We may comprehend this turn as a paradigm shift from modernism’s double consciousness to contemporary intertextualities (like jazz) which write with and

against tradition; from Euro-humanistic positivism to a questioning of canonized isms; from the establishment of more isms to a critique of all *isms*; from naturalism and realism to re-vision; from protest to assertion. (Traylor 2009, 63-64)

In this context, the BAM witnessed the proliferation of autobiographies and prose writings which were promoted by writer-activist organizations.

As occurred with June Jordan, it is impossible to confine the artistic contributions of Maya Angelou to one single genre. Poet, actress, dramatist, movie director and autobiographer, Angelou was involved in the BAM through the Harlem Writers Guild. Her greatest contributions to the movement came in the form of her autobiographies, thus contradicting the general appeal of performative poetry at the time. Angelou's first work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), received widespread critical acclaim which led to the publication of six subsequent autobiographical volumes: *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002) and *Mom & Me & Mom* (2013).

According to Nancy Kang, a constant thread in her autobiographical works is the struggle to preserve "a healthy sense of individuality" amid the social terrors faced by the African American population within a social context dramatically rooted on sexual and racial oppression (2006, 11). King considers Angelou's autobiographies historiographical documents which depict key events and figures in African American history and likens her contribution to Langston Hughes's chapters on Harlem life in *The Big Sea* (1940). Likewise, Hilton Als has argued that *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was groundbreaking in its presentation of the black woman writer at the center of her own narrative, thus empowering her to publicly discuss her personal life and experiences at the end of the Civil Rights Movement (2002, 24).

While Angelou's poetry has been less recognized than her narrative volumes, a good number of her poems have earned critical and popular acclaim, and are nowadays part of the American collective consciousness. According to Keith D. Leonard, the affirmation of the integrity of the poet "who writes for the sake of changing material circumstances" motivated Angelou to produce "some of the most accessible, most

directly affirming and most popular poetry in the United States” (2009, 181). The anthology *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Die* (1971) was published as a reaction to the painful events occurring to and within the African American community, which stemmed from the assassination of Malcom X and Martin Luther King, and it was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Likewise, especially remarkable are the collection *And Still I Rise* (1978) and the poem “On the Pulse of Morning”, which Angelou recited at the presidential inauguration of president Bill Clinton in 1993. Actually, after Angelou’s recitation, book sales of her autobiographies and poetry collections rose to 300%, and Random House had to print 400.000 copies of her works to meet the national demand.

Angelou’s long and multifaced career also included the production of a good number of plays, scripts for television programs and speeches. She also starred in several plays, movies as well as the 1977 television series *Roots*, which obtained international acclaim. Her script for the feature movie *Georgia, Georgia* (1972) was the first to be written by a black woman. Likewise, Angelou was also the first African American woman to direct a movie, namely *Down in the Delta*, which premiered in 1998.

Parallely, through their association with the Black Panther Party, Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown and Angela Davis (never a member) contributed noteworthy autobiographies about their personal struggle for freedom and liberation in the United States. Significantly enough, the autobiographical accounts of these three women are the subject of Margo V. Perkins *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* (2000), who studies their work in the light of their shared “commitment to radical leftist politics and the building of a society free of race and class oppression” (Perkins 2000, 2). According to the author, these autobiographies offer important insight into the range of women’s experiences in the midst of the nationalist struggle that prevailed in the United States during the 1960s and the 1970s.

According to Perkins, Shakur’s, Davis’s and Brown’s works collectively shape the genre of the political autobiography, together with other accounts published not only—but especially—during the development of the Black Power Movement. The works of these women in particular share a relational understanding of the self as imbricated within the story of the Movement and “a notable uneasiness with the genre

of the autobiography” because of its historical approach and its emphasis on heroic individualism within the Western literary tradition (2000, 22).

While Shakur and Brown have traditionally been identified more as political activists than as writers, Davis’s written production is of special interest to our study. With an anticapitalistic sentiment underpinning her lifetime work, Angela Davis’s writings have become key to black studies and contemporary feminist thought. During her incarceration in 1970, she completed *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance* (1971), a non-fiction volume that collects her views on the nature and structure of race oppression in the country as well as it reflects her activism for the liberation of political prisoners. Her autobiography, published in 1974, openly condemns the capitalistic system in favor of the ideals of the Communist Party. According to Amy Sparks Kolker, “her autobiography is not just the story of a life but a story of the struggle to overcome oppression itself” (Kolker 2006, 248). Indeed, Davis’s autobiographical work can be read within a tradition of political writings that focus on the collective conscience, the individual’s service to the community, the empowering of the dispossessed and the resistance to individualist values brought forward by the capitalist ideologue.

In her volume *Women, Race, and Class* (1982), Davis explores the ways in which intersectionality has historically shaped social relations in the United States. The examination of gender, race and class relations is further tackled in the collection of essays *Women, Culture, and Politics*, published in 1989. According to Portia H. Shields, these works “should provide direction for resurgence and continuing momentum in both the women’s and civil rights movements” (1982, 361). Still, Davis’s work as a writer was not free from criticism. In his review of *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (1989), Phillip M. Richards brought forward the question “Would she have achieved her intellectual authority without her earlier political celebrity, the integration of elite universities, the growth of the black studies movement, and the academic development of cultural studies?” (1998, 132). However, more recent criticism of Davis’s written production has asserted the relevance of the author’s work to contemporary feminist and political thought. Deirdre Osborne, following Shields’s line of thought, has praised Davis for her ability to identify “uniquely black-centered concerns” and has acknowledged the function of her work as a point of continuity in liberation politics between the 1960s to the twenty-first century (2007, 147).

## 5. CONTEMPORARY WOMEN WRITERS: NEW HORIZONS

“When they enter, we all enter”

(Crenshaw 1989, 167)

As Dana A. Williams contends, “contemporary African American women writers are perhaps best characterized as diverse” (2009, 71). Indeed, Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970) set the tone for the work that would develop during the last decades of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. As Traylor has argued, the texts compiled in Bambara’s anthology in particular and the literature produced by contemporary black women in general “explores first the interiority of an in-the-head, in-the-heart, in-the-gut region of a discovery called the self. It tests the desires, the longings, the aspirations of this discovered self with and against its possibilities for respect, growth, fulfillment, and accomplishment” (2005, 15).

### 5.1. The Black Woman’s Literary Renaissance

Drawing from the artistic work developed during the Civil Rights Era and the Black Arts Movement, the decade of 1970 saw the progressive shift from a black nationalist to a black feminist aesthetic. This blossoming of African American women’s literature during the 1970s has come to be known as the Black Women’s Renaissance. This period saw the culmination of the writing careers of well-established authors within the tradition such as Nikki Giovanni, Gwendolyn Brooks, Paule Marshall, Margaret Walker or Adrienne Kennedy as well as the emergence of writers such as Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Ntozake Shange, Toni Cade Bambara and Toni Morrison, among many others. As Williams notes, these then-emergent writers have hitherto been at the front of the literary production exploring the black female self and the African American community (2009, 72).

A clear symptom of the blossoming of black women’s literature at the time was the rapid proliferation of publications by and about this cohort. By way of example, the year 1970 witnessed the publication of Toni Morrison’s and Alice Walker’s debut novels,

*The Bluest Eye* and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, respectively; Maya Angelou's first autobiographical novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Mari Evans's *I Am a Black Woman*; Louise Meriwether's *Daddy Was a Number Runner*; Audre Lorde's *The First Cities*; Sonia Sanchez's *We a BaddDDD People* and Pauli Murray's *Dark Testament*.

Likewise, by the early 1970s, the black feminist movement had already established itself as an independent entity. In *All the Men are Black, All the Women are White, But Some of Us are Brave* (1982), Gloria T. Hull finds the cause in the overt racism of the suffragist movement and the deliberate sexism of the Civil Rights Movement. In this context, a large number of black women writers who had taken part in both spaces used their experience of the intersectional system of oppression and the theoretical material of contemporary intellectuals to produce literary works that sought to articulate a counter-hegemonic discourse. This process aimed at giving voice to black women who had been silenced in the previous decade due to the centrality of racism and masculinity, leading gender issues to be interpreted as factors of division within the black community. It also sought to reconfigure the African American female identity in order to forge new multidimensional images of the black woman that defied stereotypes and resisted categorization.

Bambara's *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), which collected the work of twenty-eight writers, was key to consolidate the turn of the BAM and to assume a renovated perception of the black woman and the black woman writer: "what characterizes the current movement of the 60's is a turning away from the larger society and a turning toward each other [...] What typifies the current spirit is an embrace, an embrace of the community and a hard-headed attempt to get basic with each other" (Bambara 1970, 7). Key exponents of this tradition are Gayle Jones's *Corregidora* (1975); Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982); Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) and Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982).

However, as critics such as Madhu Dubey (1994, 1) or James R. Thompson (1992, 179) contend, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are the foremost exponents of the Black Woman's Renaissance and the two novelists who have dominated black literary discourse in the United States since the mid-1970s. Indeed, both Morrison and Walker have represented in their fiction the constant struggle of the black subject, particularly



the black woman. Their works pay tribute to their predecessors and reflect the weight of a traumatic past marked by slavery, segregation and racial discrimination.

After graduating from Cornell University and working as an editor for Random House, Morrison published *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. Her first novel, where she portrayed the problems of African American identity through the eyes of a young girl, was not a bestseller. *Sula* (1973), her second novel, was nominated for the American Book Award, although it was not until the publication of *Beloved*, in 1987, that the writer began to gain popular and critical recognition, which culminated in her being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, thus becoming the first—and only—African American woman to receive the award. In addition to the publication of five novels after the Nobel Prize, Morrison also wrote several nonfiction works, among which we may highlight *What Moves at the Margin* (2008), *The Source of Self-Regard: Essays, Speeches, Meditations* (2019) and, most notably, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (2007). Her direct and emphatic style and her rough portrayal of gender, race and class conflicts in the country have reconfigured the North American literary canon and aesthetic.

Morrison's novels are characterized by their depiction of the violence generated by the conflict between the black and white communities, as well as within the African American community itself. Because of the latter, Rajan Anju and J. K. Sharma consider that “the violence and bloodshed within the black communities have been presented nowhere so effectively in the entire American fiction” (2011, 173). Part of the effectiveness of her portrayals comes from her exploration of different forms of violence, such as the psychological conflict in *The Bluest Eye*, revenge and hatred in *Song of Solomon*, and slavery in *Beloved*.

Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was already acclaimed by some critics for its literary quality, even if the book was not a sales success. After the publication of *Sula*, critics began to recognize Morrison as a “serious writer”, in the words of Leroy Staggars (1989, 3), but it was not until *Song of Solomon* was released that the author consolidated her position in the American literary scene. In this regard, Staggars (1989, 3) highlights how the perception of her two previous novels improved after the wave of positive evaluations that *Song of Solomon* received, for which Morrison won the National Book Critics Award in 1977. Also of note was the work of Oprah Winfrey in publicizing

Morrison's novels, as the author was invited to the hit television program *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on three occasions to discuss *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, respectively. Although, as Rachel Lister notes (2009, 145), Morrison was skeptical about the influence of these interventions on the reading public, after the programs were broadcasted sales soared and *Song of Solomon* even entered the country's bestseller lists twenty years after its publication.

However, it was not until *Beloved* was published in 1988 that scholarly criticism elevated the author to a different status. Following its publication, a group of forty-eight black writers and critics, including Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Amiri Baraka and Henry Louis Gates, signed a statement which appeared on January 24, 1988 in *The New York Times Book Review*, arguing that despite the author's international prominence, her novels had not received sufficient recognition at a national level and urging the Academy to consider awarding her the National Book Award or the Pulitzer Prize. That same year, Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and in 1993, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In 1998 the movie *Beloved* was released, which was based on Morrison's homonymous novel. In general, immediate reviews positively valued both the performance of Oprah Winfrey, who had debuted in 1985 with a supporting role in *The Color Purple*, and the work of direction and adaptation of the source text. However, the movie ended up being a box-office failure, and still today it is ranked among the least profitable films in Hollywood history.

Since the turn of the century, Morrison continued to publish novels that, in general terms, were well received by literary critics and established her as one of the pillars of contemporary American literature. In addition, over the years there has been a proliferation of academic studies of her works, which have tackled manifold aspects related to the author's literary production, among others her aesthetics and her use of language, mythology, symbolism and memory: "It appears that with each succeeding novel which Morrison has published the critics have tended to find more elements to scrutinize" (Staggers 1989, 2).

For her part, Alice Walker was active during the Civil Rights Movement and went on to become one of the most notable voices in the contemporary black feminist movement.

As an author, Walker explored various forms of writing, such as the short story, poetry, narrative fiction and children's literature. However, it is her facet as a novelist that has earned her worldwide recognition, especially after the publication of *The Color Purple* in 1982, a novel for which she won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award in 1983. Following this success, Walker wrote *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) which, while critically acclaimed in the US, also caused some backlash for their treatment of the subject of female genital mutilation. More recently, continuing her work as an activist, Walker has published *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine/Israel* (2010), which adds to her compromise with denouncing injustices traditionally silenced in contemporary society.

Walker defines herself as a womanist, a term she introduced for the first time in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, which she interprets as "A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'You acting womanish'" (Walker 1983, 11). This conception of her identity would lead her to express a primary concern with the situation of African American women, although she also pointed out that a womanist must be committed to the survival of her people, both men and women (Walker 1983, 279). Nevertheless, her literary work notably emphasized the exceptionality of the double bind (and therefore, double discrimination) suffered by black women, which led her to recreate in her work the recurrent figure of one who has experienced life "not only as a black person, but as a black woman" (Walker 1983, 275). In turn, this led some critics to oppose the alleged one-dimensional nature of the male characters in her works under the premise that, as Mel Watkins argued, the revival of African American literature in the 1970s and 1980s led to a series of stereotypical portraits "of black men as thieves, sadists, rapists and ne'er-de-wells" (1986, n.p.). Likewise, criticism of Walker's work after *The Color Purple* contended that her status as a representative of the African American woman's voice was largely due to the sales success of her Pulitzer Prize winning novel rather than to the literary quality of her works.

The controversy generated by the release of the Steven Spielberg's adaptation of *The Color Purple* in 1985 kept open the debate about the representation of explicit violence and the sentimentality of the film. However, the movie grossed more than seven million dollars three weeks after its premiere and it also gathered eleven Oscar nominations. In

this context, Lauret poses the following question: “Did it achieve canonical status because of such controversy or in spite of it?” (2011, 93). However, as Lauret herself points out, the controversy generated after the film’s release was much greater in the United States than in the rest of Europe, where literary canons had already embraced Walker’s work much more readily than in the source country.

The press also echoed her next fiction novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*, which was published after the release of the adaptation of *The Color Purple* and even made the bestseller lists in 1990, partly influenced by the success of its predecessor. Years later, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* was published, causing a stir among critics for its explicit treatment of female genital mutilation. Positive reviews praised the writer’s courage “to speak the unspeakable” (Pollock 1996, 38), but critics such as Margaret Bass (1994) castigated the novel’s portrayal of African women, accusing Walker of encouraging condescension and cultural imperialism.

Although Walker has published several collections of poetry, among which we may highlight *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (1973) and *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing: New Poems* (2010), these works have received less critical attention than her prose writings. Likewise, Walker’s non-fiction directly addresses the concerns brought forward in her novels and evidences her compromise with the fight for social justice and gender and racial equality.

Actually, the decade of 1980 witnessed the publication of a number of press articles which identified Walker and Morrison as representatives of a specific literary tradition alongside other black women such as Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall or Gloria Naylor. While the work of Marshall has already been discussed elsewhere—as she began publishing her fiction during the decade of 1950—, Naylor’s debut novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), won the 1983 National Book Award and it was also adapted as a 1989 television miniseries by Harpo Productions (owned by Oprah Winfrey).

As argued by Àngels Carabí (1997, 170), one of the pillars of Naylor’s narrative is her ability to evoke a sense of community where women always play a crucial role. She reflects on the variety and richness of the black female experience by exploring the nuances that make up her characters, thus creating a microcosm of the female

experience. The protagonists of her works are utterly special beings who embody in their personal stories the tensions of the black population. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor places the action in an urban ghetto where a black community lives isolated from the rest of the city by a wall. In it, Mattie Michael, a woman who is dispossessed of family ties, opens her affective window to the women of Brewster Place and acts as a unifying force for the community.

In her novel *Linden Hills* (1984), the author analyzes the growing alienation of the African American society as its members climb the social ladder. The loss of community ties gives way to a new environment where members of the community find that they are still to suffer the consequences of racism, only without the protection historically provided by a sense of ethnic cohesion (Carabí 1997, 170). In *Mama Day* (1988), Naylor collects the oral histories told in her family and dignifies those Southern women who, closely linked to nature and endowed with supernatural powers, instructed women in the control of their own fates. *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), tackles female sexuality and the various responses to sexual desire experienced by women in the hostile environment of the Depression and World War II.

In an interview with Diane Osen, the author explained the reason behind her literary project—a series of four interconnected novels—, claiming that that she refused to become a “one-book wonder” (like many other African American writers). In this regard, Sharon Felton and Michelle C. Loris have summarized the five main critical approaches from which Naylor’s novels have been examined, namely as a product of the African American literary tradition, as pieces of feminist work, as an example of the construction of narrative and the use of rhetorical devices, as a focus of intertextual comparisons and as an exponent of popular culture (1997, 43-45). To Carabí (1997, 170), Gloria Naylor can nowadays be cited as one of the most relevant contemporary voices in African American culture, together with Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and Maya Angelou, among others.

The decade of 1970 also saw the production of one of a few plays written by a black woman to be staged on Broadway, namely Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1974), which also became her most influential work. As argued by Cammie M. Sublette, “because of its fusion of dance, poetry, drama and music, the work’s classification is complex, though the preferred

term ‘choreopoem’ was first provided by Shange herself’ (2007, 514). The play, a twenty-part poem, chronicles the lives of seven colored women in the United States, which are explored through poetic monologues and choreographies. *for colored girls* won a good number of awards, including the Obi Award, the Oter Circle Critics Award and the AUDALECO Award.

Shange’s subsequent major dramatic works form a trilogy which includes *A Photograph: Still Life with Shadows / A Photograph: A Study of Cruelty* (1977), *Spell #7* (1979) and *Boogie Woogie Landscapes* (1979), arguably her most radical formal experiment as the author blends surrealist elements into dramatic portrayals of the black woman in the United States (Jessee 2006, 788). Also experimental in form and subject matter, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982) is Shange’s most successful novel to date. The text, which narrates the story of three sisters and her mother, addresses themes such as the role of women in the arts, Gullah and Geechee culture, the Black Arts Movement and spirituality. According to Sharon Jessee, the play “testifies to womanist liberations in the post-black liberation age” and offers rich images of womanist and aesthetic expression (2006, 788).

As for the author’s critical reception, while the success of *for colored girls* initially earned her a solid reputation as a playwright, many of her later works have received scarce critical attention. According to Sublette (2007, 518), Shange may well be “the least studied most important African American author alive”. However, her work did receive a good amount of negative reviews for its masculine representations, which were compared to the stereotypes that Walker’s *The Color Purple* allegedly perpetuated. Likewise, although Shange’s work did share some of the aesthetics brought forward by the BAM such as the “radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic” (Neal 1968, 29) that was present in the works of Sonia Sanchez, Lucille Clifton or Nikki Giovanni, for instance, Amiri Baraka, one of the foremost leading figures of the movement, refused to acknowledge her as a post-black artist and denied that her work adjusted to the new black aesthetic brought forward during the 1960s.

Nowadays considered the “grand dame” of science fiction, Octavia Butler is one of the very few African American female writers whose fantasy and science fiction works have been successful in the literary market. According to Keren Omry (2007, 64-65),

Butler's oeuvre contributes to the genre of speculative fiction simultaneously challenging many of its defining characteristics.

In her *Patternist* series, Butler allegorizes the process of othering that has dominated African American history and questions more general presumptions of human superiority. These concerns are reconfigured in *Kindred* (1979), which would become her best-selling and one of her most popular novels. Butler also published several short stories, such as "Speech Sounds", which was awarded the Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1984 and most significantly, "Bloodchild" (1984), which won the Hugo, Nebula, Locus and Science Fiction Chronicle Reader awards.

*Dawn* (1987) became the first installment of the critically acclaimed Xenogenesis trilogy. The series further delves into the human experience of estrangement and alienation when being forced to coexist with other non-human species. *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989) complete the trilogy and depict a dramatic transgression of the boundaries of gender identity (Omry 2007, 66). The subsequent *Parable* or *Earthseed* series, composed by *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) are set on a dystopian California during the 2020s. The volumes expand on the thematic concerns of the Xenogenesis trilogy and tackle current ecological and urban discourses.

While Butler's work initially received limited critical notice, her first series of novels established her a serious writer in the American context. In spite of the multiple awards and honors the writer received throughout her career, Omry laments the "astonishing dearth" of full-length critical studies on her writing. Some exception to this general critical disinterest in Butler's work are Elyce Rae Helford's essay "'Would You Really Rather Die Than Bear My Young?': The Constructions of Race, Gender, and Species in Octavia E. Butler's 'Bloodchild'" (1994), which discusses Butler's award-winning short story and Madhu Dubey's "Books of Life: Postmodern Uses of Print Literacy" (2003), a thoughtful reading of Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

Active at the end of the 1970s and most significantly, during the 1980s, Rita Dove incorporates different subjects and numerous themes to her poetry. Her works explore memory, music, dance, art, history, myth, autobiography and the African American experience. According to Laura Madeline Wiseman, "her works encompass reflections on the Great Migration, the Black Arts Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement as

well as what it was like growing up African American, female, and middle class in Akron, Ohio” (2007, 165).

Her first two poetry collections *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980) and *Museum* (1983) received instant critical acclaim. Her third volume of poetry, *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1987, thus becoming the second African American to receive it after Gwendolyn Brooks. In 1993 Dove was appointed poet laureate of the United States—the youngest in history and the first African American—a position she held until 1995. In addition to these major honors, during her career Dove has received numerous awards, including the Literary Lion citation from the New York Public Libraries (1991), the NAACP Great American Artist Award (1993), and the Woman of the Year Award from *Glamour Magazine* (1993), among many others.

While this section has referred to key events in the development of the 1970s literary renaissance of black women, many other emergent or well-established writers at the time published works which contributed to shape the turn that dominated literary discourses during the last decades of the twentieth century. These include Mari Evans’s *I Am a Black Woman* (1970), Louise Meriwether’s *Daddy Was a Number Runner* (1970), Margaret Walker’s *Prophets for a New Day* (1970), Elaine Jackson’s *Toe Jam* (1970), June Jordan’s *His Own Where* (1970), Toni Cade Bambara’s *Tales and Stories for Black Folks* (1971) and *Gorilla, My Love* (1972); Lucille Clifton’s *Good News about the Earth* (1972), Pinkie Gordon Lane’s *Wind Thoughts* (1972), Sarah Webster Fabio’s *Rainbow Signs* (1973), Angela Jackson’s *Voodoo/Love Magic* (1974), Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* (1975) and *Eva’s Man* (1976); Carolyn Rodgers’s *how i got ovah: New and Selected Poems* (1975) and Sherley Anne Williams’s *Peacock Poems* (1975), among many others.

## 5.2. Black Feminist Criticism

Parallel to the blossoming of African American women’s literature, black feminist criticism established itself in the early 1970s as an independent discipline that reacted against the white-dominated Second Wave Feminism and the male-controlled Black



Power and Black Arts Movement. The genesis of black feminist criticism dates back to the 1960s, when theoretical production was intended to be programmatic and prescriptive rather than analytical and retrospective because artists of the Black Arts Movement sought a mode of representation that would allow its authors to advance in the achievement of a proper African American creative expression. Thus, black feminist criticism emerged as a reaction to the lack of interest showed by the main exponents of the BAM to promote a literary criticism for the discipline and to problematize internal inequalities within the African American community (Grice, et al. 2001, 85).

In her *The Changing Same: Black Women's Literature, Criticism and Theory* (1995), Deborah McDowell discusses how, from the 1970s onwards, critical approaches to black literature changed rapidly and drastically due to the growing influence of various European schools of thought in the American academy. As Lauret contends (2001, 86), acceptance of this new paradigm was not unanimous among black scholars, as acknowledging the existence of what Audre Lorde referred to as “the master’s tools” necessarily implied questioning the validity of the precepts on which the Civil Rights struggle and the Black Power philosophy had been built. Others, on the other hand, interpreted it as an opportunity to expand the articulation of social change. Indeed, this new paradigm allowed for the examination of African American Studies in relation to post-structuralist and Marxist theories, feminism and psychoanalysis, gradually bringing to the fore a discipline that had never been previously acknowledged in North American academia.

Other thematic and structural elements that became fundamental for the articulation of black feminist criticism were the adaptation of black feminist theories to the literary field and the study of intersectional oppression from different perspectives and categories of analysis. In relation to this, Frances M. Beale brought forward the notion of “double jeopardy” in *Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female* ([1969] 2008), which described the foundations and the effects caused by the double oppression suffered by black women. In this regard, Frances Smith Foster also called attention to the double burden traditionally carried by the black woman:

the temptation to label the problems of both white and Black women as female oppression seems merited, for certain grievances do seem the same. Upon examination, however, the similarities are more apparent than real. In reality, the

Black woman is twice victimized, for sexual discrimination is but a further distinction within the more encompassing confines of racial discrimination. (1973, 436)

Likewise, more complex intersectionality theories originally advanced by Kimberle Crenshaw in the seminal essays “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” (1989) and “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991) laid at the foundation of black feminist criticism at the end of the century.

One of the first works to study African American women’s literature from a feminist critical perspective was Barbara Smith’s “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” (1978), where the author explicitly discussed the unprecedented character of her endeavor:

I do not know where to begin. Long before I tried to write this I felt that I was attempting something unprecedented, something dangerous merely by writing about Black woman from a feminist perspective and about Black lesbian. These things have not been done. Not by white male critics, expectedly. Not by Black male critics. Not by white women critics who think themselves as feminists. And most crucially, not by Black women critics [...]. (1978, 20)

Smith’s groundbreaking work, which was later collected in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (1982) set a number of foundations for contemporary black feminist criticism. Indeed, she argued that a black feminist perspective must address the relation between the politics of gender, class and race. She also demanded that a black feminist critic must be thoroughly knowledgeable and committed to the examination of African American women’s literature as an autonomous tradition. Finally, the black feminist critic must also have a keen eye and ear for identifying and analyzing her own language and identity without resorting to the ideas and methodologies of white male literary thought (Lauret 2001, 88).

Smith’s work opened a debate that continued with the publication of Deborah McDowell’s “New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism” (1980). While Smith assumed that black criticism ought to focus on the literary production of black women, McDowell defended the possibility of working with materials of a more diverse nature.

In turn, McDowell also demanded greater methodological rigor in the discipline, stressing the need for a deeper knowledge of the entire African American literary tradition and questioning the impact that literary criticism might have on social struggle. With these claims, she extended the reach of black feminist criticism, arguing that it may include any kind of literary criticism written by a black woman, regardless of its object of study or the perspective from which it is approached (Mitchell 1994, 433).

Barbara Christian's *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition* (1980) also became a landmark volume, as it was one of the first attempts at tracing a history of African American women's literature. In doing so, it substantiated the ideas brought forward by Smith as well as it put into practice her theoretical approaches. In relation to this, Keizer has argued that Christian brought to the fore the study of literary texts considering—but not based on—their socioeconomic and political context of production. In this regard, Christian's study of the aesthetics and the formal techniques employed in the composition of literary works would become central for subsequent black feminist criticism (Plain and Sellers 2007, 157).

Another key text that shaped black feminist criticism was bell hooks's *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), the first single-authored full-length volume of critical theory within the discipline. Even if the volume did not receive great acclaim at the time of publication, it is nowadays regarded as a key work of feminist thought. *Ain't I a Woman* examines the historical effects of racism and sexism on black women, the structure of the educational system, the devaluation of black womanhood leading to the marginalization of black women and the white capitalist patriarchal society. Likewise, in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), hooks further develops her critique of the racism exerted upon black women from white second-wave feminists which, she argues, hampered the possibility of sorority and real feminist solidarity.

Scholars such as Hazel V. Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), Frances Smith Foster in *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (1993), and Carla L. Peterson in "*Doers of the Word*": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North 1830-1880* (1995) extended the study of African American women's literature by contributing critical studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers. Following Patterson (2009, 97), Claudia Tate's *Black Women Writers at Work* (1983), Mari

Evans's *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation* (1984), and Marjorie Pryse's and Hortense Spillers's *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and the Literary Tradition* (1985) further helped to institutionalize critical views on black women's writing.

In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), Carby challenges the location of the first Black Women's writing renaissance in the decade of 1970s:

Writing in the midst of a new "black women's renaissance" the contemporary discovery and recognition of black women by the corporate world of academia, publishing, and Hollywood—marked by the celebrity of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison—I try to establish the existence of an earlier and perhaps more politically resonant renaissance so we may rethink the cultural politics of black women. (Carby 1987, 7)

Under this light, Carby questions black feminist critics like Smith who "in the desire to create a tradition, essentialize black women's identities and ahistoricize their experiences" (Patterson 2009, 98). To Carby, thus, black feminist criticism should not be regarded as a solution, but as "a sign that should be interrogated, a locus of contradiction" (Carby 1987, 8).

Other major endeavors that have significantly contributed to the formation of a solid body of black feminist criticism in the United States are Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983), Claudia Tate's *Black Women Writers at Work* (1983) and *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (1992), Ann duCille's *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (1993), Deborah McDowell's *The Changing Same: Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (1995), Valerie Smith's *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (1998) and more recently, Hortense Spillers's *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (2003).

### 5.3. New Forms, New Genres, New Horizons

Turning our attention to the new millennium, critics agree that recent work by black women writers from the United States is characterized by a preference for the portrayal of love relationships and African American upward mobility. This last phase of African American women's writing—whose discussion inevitably lacks the perspective and comprehensiveness granted by time distance—has been dominated by popular culture and the proliferation of fiction works addressed to a mainstream readership. As Dana A. Williams points out, this turn has often been criticized by established writers who have lamented

that recent African American women writers seem more concerned with selling their texts in the mainstream than with producing works which move beyond the small, the simple, and the selfish (an act which moves the tradition backward not forward) and which uphold and build on the tradition of African American women writers as trailblazers, as community advocates, and as activists. (2009, 80)

These emergent writers have also been criticized by their black male contemporaries, who have claimed, on the one hand, “that too much of the popular culture writing by African American women draws its power from male bashing” and, on the other, “that the overwhelming attention publishing houses have now begun to give these writers simply reverses the gender discrimination women writers spent years combating” (Williams 2009, 80). This conversation, Williams concludes, has inevitably forced contemporary critics to take a position which implies either defending or expanding traditional ideas of canon formation (2009, 81).

One of the contemporary writers that is tightly related to this ongoing debate is the novelist Terry McMillan. While her first two novels, *Mama* (1987) and *Disappearing Acts* (1989) received considerable national recognition, it was her third novel, *Waiting to Exhale*, that brought the author to fame in 1992. The book remained on *The New York Times* bestseller list for months and it sold more than three million copies. As Daphne A. Brooks argues (2003, 33), the novel initiated a shift in the African American popular consciousness as it gave voice to the identity and the concerns of the black middle-class

woman. In 1995, the novel was adapted into an award-winning motion picture directed by Forest Whitaker and starring Angela Basset and Whitney Houston.

Following the success of *Waiting to Exhale*, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1996) received instant acclaim by the mainstream readership and it was also adapted into a motion picture. According to Catherine Ross-Stroud, McMillan's fourth novel is at the forefront of her challenges to conventional representations of the female quest for romance, as the main character asserts her right to embrace her inner passions (2006, 615). *A Day Late and a Dollar Short* (2001) completes the author's celebration of the modern middle-class black woman.

In relation to existing criticism about McMillan's apolitical writing, Ross-Stroud calls for a reexamination of her novels, arguing that all of them include representations of characters with redeeming qualities as well as they celebrate the self-empowerment of black women in today's society: "Through these characters, readers are left with a sense of hope as they witness McMillan's commentary on the complexities and the beauty of black life" (2006, 616).

In his discussion of contemporary African American popular fiction written by women, Herman Beavers criticizes the general lack of critical consideration that writers such as Sister Souljah, Zane, Terry McMillan Barbara Neely, Bebe Moore Campbell or J. California Cooper have received to date. To Beavers, the contention that the fiction produced by these authors fails to achieve literary excellence implies a misunderstanding of the role of popular culture in black communities:

popular culture is characterized by its ability to produce a wide variety of narratives. In so doing, such narrative variety produces a set of sophisticated reading strategies that belie the charge that popular fiction is characterized by a mindless adherence to plot and fantasy. Though African American writing has from its beginnings in the eighteenth century sought to argue for the humanity and worth of the African American subject, what becomes clear is that popular fiction—in its many forms—raises questions about the nature of cultural work. (Beavers 2009, 263)

As a matter of fact, while it is evident that this is still an open debate, Beavers's chapter "African American Women Writers and Popular Fiction" which was published in *The*

*Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature* (2009) evidences the fact that the entrance of black women writers in the mainstream is already a tangible reality. Only time will determine whether popular fiction will be considered in future processes of canon formation.

Playwright Suzan-Lori Parks has also gathered a good amount of mixed criticism. Indeed, her experimental plays resort to nontraditional formats, extraordinary images, disconnected structure and poetic language. As Marla Dean observes, Parks integrates the double consciousness of the black American with a unique form of ritualistic absurdism: "Parks, unlike other African American contemporary writers, dramatizes the process of the self as an object produced by others, but also as an object looking in on itself. She creates a dual reality for her characters who are both subject and object" (2007, 461).

One of Parks's best known works is the play *Topdog/Underdog* (2001) which revolves around the theme of legacy. While Parks had written several plays during the 1980s and the 1990s such as *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* (1989), *Venus* (1996) or *Fucking A* (2000), *Topdog/Underdog* marked one of the peaks of her career as the play was awarded the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. According to Samuel Hay, Parks's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama can be regarded as "the most sophisticated play in contemporary American theatre" (2003, 13).

Even if plays such as *Venus* or *Fucking A* also received general positive reviews after their opening and Parks's work was encouraged and praised by well-established authors such as James Baldwin or August Wilson, some critics and theater producers have shown discomfort towards her dramatic works and have even ridiculed them. For instance, Abiola Sinclair claimed that *Venus* "is not absurdist, it's insulting and absurd". While the different honors and acclaim received by the author have established her as a foremost African American playwright, critical conflict and controversy continue to besiege her work.

When discussing contemporary themes in African American literature, Dana A. Williams points to Audre Lorde's key influence in the spread and proliferation of lesbian literature by black women authors. This was already noted by Barbara Christian in "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro American Women's

Fiction”, where she signaled a radical change in the fiction produced during the 1980s towards an “overt exploration of lesbian relationships among black women and how these relationships are viewed by black communities” (1985, 246). Prior to Lorde’s work, Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place* and Shange’s *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* already paved the way for a more open exploration of lesbian relations in African American fiction. Among the contemporary writers that have contributed to lesbian African American literature we may cite Jewelle Gomez, Pat Parker, April Sinclair, Sharon Bridgforth, Cheryl Clarke and Sapphire.

Recent work by African American women writers has also advanced new approaches to the genre of the autobiography. Drawing from the models provided by Angelou’s landmark work as well as the political autobiographies of the Black Power Movement, contemporary authors have also brought forward their own contributions to the genre. For instance, Anita Hill’s *Speaking Truth to Power* (1998) operates within a protest platform that resists external definition of her black female self in an attempt, “first, to defend and, ultimately, to define herself” (Williams 2009, 85). Other noteworthy contemporary autobiographies include Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* (1983) and *Lucy* (1990)—which have been described as semi-autobiographical works—Deborah McDowell’s *Leaving Pipe Shop: Memories of Kin* (1998) and Trudier Harris’s *Summer Snow* (2003).

In her revision of the development of contemporary African American women’s literature, Williams also points to the African Caribbean women writers’ will to reconnect with the black diaspora and foreground the tension created by the insider/outsider dynamics that permeate their identity. In this regard, Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) was a paradigmatic example of the writer’s concern with this issue. Other texts that reflect the position of Caribbean immigrants as “minorities in a majority culture” (Williams 2009, 77) are Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988), and *Autobiography of My Mother* (1994) and Edwidge Danticat’s *Kik?Krak!* (1991) and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994).

In relation to this, recent contributions to black literary criticism have brought forward approaches to the study of black women’s literature from a relational Pan African perspective that fosters a transatlantic dialogue between women of African descent.



Some of the recent endeavors that build on this Pan African consciousness include *Sisterfire: Black Womanist Fiction & Poetry* (1994), edited by Charlotte Watson Sherman; *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (2015) edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldua; *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (2016), edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence; *Well-Read Black Girl: Finding Our Stories, Discovering Ourselves* (2018), edited by Glory Edim and *New Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Writing by Women of African Descent* (2019), edited by Margaret Busby. These landmark volumes collect the voices of the most relevant contemporary African American women writers and set the tone for the literary and scholarly work to come.



## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Part II provided a general overview of the development of black American women's literature from the slavery era to present day. Through my study, special attention was devoted to the analysis of the aesthetic, literary and historical value of the examined works, as well as their role in their context of production. Likewise, the study of the source texts also considered their reception in the United States so as to gain insight into the changing place and role of black women's literature in the source context.

The chapters were divided following chronological criteria, which allowed me to highlight key milestones in the development of black American literature in general and, of course, black women's literature in particular. Thus, the first chapter studied the beginnings of the black women's literary tradition which were significantly marked by the trauma of the experience of slavery in the United States and the efforts to promote emancipation which would lead the country into Civil War.

Chapter 2 dealt with the post-Civil War period, in which the African American population faced a time of special instability and uncertainty that coincided with the Reconstruction. This was the shortest chapter in Part II, considering that, due to the lack of resources and the perilous situation of African American women at the time, the literary production of the period—especially in the case of women—was limited. Nevertheless, the voices that have been recovered to date mostly produced non-fiction works that described the reality of the African American experience in the United States in an attempt to improve their social, political, economic and cultural condition.

After a considerably bleak period for the object of study at hand, the third chapter addressed the cultural outburst that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, generally known as the Harlem Renaissance. This “flowering of Negro literature”, in the words of James Weldon Johnson, would set the milestones for the development of modern African American literature in all its forms of expression, as well as for the construction of black identity in the United States.

The fourth chapter tackled the study of literature produced during the struggle for Civil Rights and the Black Arts Movement, which is nowadays considered one of the most significant artistic movements in the African American literary tradition. Even if the

BAM was characterized by an extremely sexist and homophobic character, women's voices of denunciation were not relegated to the margins of the movement, but rather progressively gained power, forcing many of their contemporaries to revise and rethink their ideological positions.

Moving on to the contemporary period, chapter five started by reviewing the blossoming of African American women's literature that has come to be known as the Black Woman's Literary Renaissance, which implied a reconfiguration of the American literary canon. The last chapter of Part II also examined the genesis of black feminist criticism and intersectionality theories together with key contributions that shaped the discipline and contributed to the formation of a solid body of black feminist criticism in the United States. Finally, new directions in contemporary African American women's literature were brought to the fore. These included popular fiction, new approaches to the genre of the autobiography, an open representation of lesbianism in fiction works and a Pan African approach to the study of black women's literature.

Thus, the preliminary study conducted in Part II provided a general overview of the literary tradition of African American women writers. While numerous scholarly works have been published on this subject, this analysis allowed me to trace the conditions of production of African American women's literature in the United States, focusing on the authors, the texts and the position occupied by the latter in their original context of production. Knowledge of these factors, in turn, will be essential to understand the multidirectional dialogical relations between source and target literary, cultural and ideological systems.

## **PART III**

### **FACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF RECEPTION IN SPAIN**



# 1. TOWARDS A SPANISH TRANSLATION HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

Since the late twentieth century, European countries such as Belgium, Germany and, most prominently, France have produced several attempts at documenting the reception of African American culture and literature at a national level. Indeed, undertakings such as Michel Fabre's (1995), Heike Raphael-Hernandez's (2004), Bénédicte Ledent's (2009) and Mischa Honeck et al.'s (2013) evidence the growing interest of European scholarship in this field of study. However, in Spain, the volume of academic production on this subject matter published to date is considerably reduced. In her seminal volume *En el pico del águila* (1998), Mireia Sentís laments the country's deliberate lack of interest in what she regards as North America's most genuine culture, especially considering the fact that the globalized (literary) market systematically directs its focus towards the United States:

¿Quién conoce realmente la historia, la literatura o el pensamiento afroamericanos? Para que uno de sus autores sea traducido a nuestro idioma, debe alcanzar en su país una difusión muy superior a la media de los escritores normalmente traducidos. Ello provoca que, en terrenos como el del ensayo, apenas existan un par de recopilaciones de textos pertenecientes a la época de la lucha por los derechos civiles, coincidente con el surgimiento del nacionalismo, el orgullo negro y el Black Power. Llevamos, pues, unos cuarenta años de retraso aproximadamente respecto a la realidad cultural afroamericana, o lo que es lo mismo, respecto a la realidad cultural norteamericana. (1998, 7-8)<sup>47</sup>

Following this line of argument is Arjun Appadurai's problematization of the contemporary dynamics between homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies in the modern era. He, in turn, identifies homogenization with Americanization and capitalism (1996, 32).

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<sup>47</sup> "Who does really know African American history, literature or thought? In order for one of its authors to be translated into our language, he or she must reach a level of dissemination in his or her country much higher than the average for normally translated writers. This means that, regarding genres such as the essay, there are hardly any collections of texts from the time of the Civil Rights struggle, which coincided with the rise of nationalism, black pride and the Black Power. We are, therefore, some forty years behind the African American cultural reality, or what is the same, the North American cultural reality."

As far as literature is concerned, at the round table of the XXVI AEDEAN Congress (2003), Mar Gallego Durán briefly reviewed the translation history of African American literature in Spain, criticizing its absence from anthologies of American literature published during the first decades of the twentieth century. Even if translations proliferated during the second half of the twentieth century and, most prominently, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, attempts at studying its reception in the country have been scarce. Among such endeavors, I shall highlight Robert F. Reid-Pharr's *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-Humanist Critique* (2016) and the recently published volume *Black USA and Spain: Shared Memories in the twentieth century* (2020), edited by Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego. While both works study translational exchanges in different cultural manifestations, ranging from artworks to music, travelogues and performances, among others, literary products are of special importance in both cases. In the case of Reid-Pharr, his volume approaches the study of decades of dialogue between black America and Spain from the perspective of post-humanist critique, paying special attention to Langston Hughes's, Chester Himes's and Richard Wright's relationship with the target country. Likewise, the works compiled by Cornejo-Parriego focus on cultural exchanges produced during the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age, the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship.

Spanish editors, translators and critics such as Carme Manuel Cuenca and Mireia Sentís have problematized the traditional preference of Spanish publishing houses for classics of universal literature. This trend has inevitably hampered the reception of black women writers who have either not been translated because they are not considered canonical or were not adequately disseminated at a certain point in the past due to socio-political constraints and have never been recovered. As a response to this phenomenon, the Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid (BAAM) was created in 2011. Its main objective is to provide a panoramic view of black history in the United States by translating unpublished works in the TC in order to enrich the current scarce supply (Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid 2018, n. p.).

In addition, intermedial adaptations of novels written by African American women have emerged since the 1980s. Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985), based on Alice Walker's homonymous novel, was a box office success and it attracted much attention in the international press. Other adaptations such as *Beloved* (1998), *Waiting to Exhale*



(1995) or *Precious* (2009) also enhanced the circulation of African American women's literature in Spain. Likewise, the international prestige that authors such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Angela Davis or Maya Angelou have acquired has become a further determining factor in their canonization and consequent dissemination in the target country. In this regard, Marta Puxan-Oliva highlights "the great cultural and political interest that African American literature has recently aroused in Spain",<sup>48</sup> arguing that it has contributed to the search for a common collective identity that can overcome discrimination, which has always been one of the main goals of this literary tradition (2016, 13). Similarly, while discussing the evolution of black studies in Spain Gallego Durán draws attention to gender-oriented approaches such as black feminism, black masculinity studies and intersectionality theories as perspectives that have profoundly marked contemporary scholarship in the field (2016, 154).

In this context, this chapter draws on the assumption that African American women's literature constitutes a self-governing unit of analysis when mapping the reception of US literature in Spain, and that its study is thus necessary and indispensable. Considering the reality that no parallel undertakings have been developed within this field of research, this approach to the translation history of black women's literature is presented as a fundamental first step in the process of examining its reception in the target country.

I will first provide a general overview of the evolution of the Spanish literary system from the second half of the twentieth century to present day. Considering the changes that have developed in relation to the country's literary market and publishing industry through the established time period will supply the necessary framework to draw a history of the translations of African American women's literature in Spain.

Secondly, in order to study the history of translation of this literature in Spain, I will take as a starting point Miguel Ángel Vega's approach:

[...] resulta difícil determinar el sujeto de la historia de la traducción, que, sin duda, tiene límites imprecisos y poliédricos: ¿quién es el sujeto de esa historia: el autor, el editor, el traductor, las corrientes científicas y literarias, el público?

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<sup>48</sup> "El gran interés cultural y político que ha despertado últimamente la literatura afroamericana en España."

Posiblemente haya que integrar todos estos aspectos en una interrelación en la que intervienen factores de creación literaria, de sociología receptiva, de política económica y de saber filológico y cultural. (2004, 528)<sup>49</sup>

Taking all these translation agents into account, during the years 2018 to 2020 the bibliographic database AfroBib was developed. This open-access resource compiles bibliographical information about works by African American women authors that have been translated and published in Spain; AfroBib is regularly updated on a monthly basis. This digital collection contains specific information about more than 200 publications including currently available works as well as those out of print published since 1968 (first translation of a black woman writer published in Spain) to present day. Data relative to each entry were carefully selected, contrasted and revised before publication, and are fully available at <https://AfroBib.upf.edu>.

## **1.1. The Spanish Literary System: Publishing Industry and Market**

According to Vega, the history of translation has always been correlated to the history of publishing, as both form a mutually dependent binomial: “a translation does not exist if it is not edited, published; and hardly will the publisher be able to survive renouncing to translations” (2004, 528-528).<sup>50</sup> Consequently, a necessary step before looking at the translation history of African American women’s literature in Spain is to briefly analyze the evolution of the Spanish publishing market from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. I am focusing on this precise time period on the basis of the information

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<sup>49</sup> “It is difficult to determine the subject of the history of translation, which undoubtedly has imprecise and multifaceted limits: who is the subject of this history: the author, the publisher, the translator, the scientific and literary currents, the public? It may be necessary to integrate all these aspects in an interrelationship involving factors of literary creation, receptive sociology, economic policy and philological and cultural knowledge.”

<sup>50</sup> “una traducción no existe si no está editada, publicada; y la empresa editorial difícilmente podrá sobrevivir prescindiendo de la traducción.”

obtained from AfroBib, which indicates that the first translation of an African American female author published in Spain dates from 1968.<sup>51</sup>

So as to provide an overview of translation history within the Spanish book sector data were obtained from three main sources: Statistical data about the *Domestic Book Trade in Spain* provided by the Spanish Federation of Publishers' Guilds (FGEE), the *Overview of Book Edition in Spain* by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (MECD) and the *Book Publishing Production Statistics* by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE).

Despite the strong censorship that governed the Spanish publishing industry throughout the Francoist dictatorship (1939-75), during the last stages of the regime changes in the Spanish society and in the power structure of the administration led to the publication of a new press law in 1966 under the ministry of Manuel de Fraga, usually referred to as "Fraga's spring" by the publishing sector.

In her study "La formación de una industria competitiva a nivel internacional: el sector editorial español 1950-2015", María Fernández Moya analyzes data obtained from different documentary sources and reports a clear growing trend in the Spanish publishing industry at the end of the regime, especially throughout the decades of the 1950s and most sharply in the 1960s (2017, 5). This period is precisely the one that Miguel Ángel Vega refers to as "the new publishing wave" ("la nueva ola editorial") (2004, 537), which saw the creation of several well-known publishing houses: Planeta (1949), Seix Barral (1954), Plaza y Janés (1959), Anaya (1959), Santillana (1960), Alianza Editorial (1966), Anagrama (1969) and Tusquets (1969). Out of all these emergent publishers, Vega (2004, 543) highlights Plaza y Janés's interest in incorporating to the national literary system international voices that had gained global recognition during the previous decades, such as Virginia Woolf, Lajos Zilahy or Maxence van der Meersch. Plaza y Janés was also the first publisher to ever translate a text by an African American woman in Spain, which was Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* in 1968.

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<sup>51</sup> To access a complete history of the Spanish literary market in relation to translation, see Lafarga and Pegenaute (2004).

As Fernández Moya reports, there was a steep increase in the export of literature from 1965 to 1975, while the import only rose slightly during the same time period (2017, 23-24). Despite this significant difference, the growing trend in the import of literature does reflect the changes that were starting to take place within the literary system of the TC. Likewise, the number of titles published in Spain also experienced a dramatic rise during the decades of 1960 and 1970, going from 6.085 in 1960 to 23.608 in 1973. According to Fernández Moya, this is an especially relevant indicator, since it reveals the real publishing capacity of the Spanish industry, accounting for the release of new volumes or reprints rather than the printing capacity of the graphic industry (2017, 27). Coinciding with her, Vega also describes this as a second publishing wave facilitated by the opening of intellectual borders. This second wave saw the onset of publishing houses such as Akal (1972) or Cátedra (1973) which undertook alternative editorial lines and introduced new ideologies and morals to the Spanish publishing market (2004, 573).

After 1975, with the onset of the Spanish democracy, political policies focused on the country's cultural modernization:

La política cultural se convirtió en un medio para transformar la sociedad, para facilitar y consolidar el tránsito entre los dos regímenes. El pacto social y la convergencia en términos educativos y culturales con una cada vez más cercana Europa, tras la caída de las barreras políticas, constituían los objetivos últimos de esta estrategia. Uno de los ejes transversales fue la recuperación de la cultura anterior a 1936, depositada en las personas y obras de muchos exiliados republicanos. (Fernández Moya 2017, 30)<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, many institutions that are now part of the book industry were born within this framework, namely the General Book Counsel (Consejo General del Libro) at the Spanish MECD, the Book Chambers (Cámaras del Libro) and the Book Salon (Líber). As Miguel Ángel Vega puts it, during the years following the regime, collections of

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<sup>52</sup> “Cultural policy became a means to transform society, to facilitate and consolidate the transition between the two regimes. The social pact and convergence in educational and cultural terms with an ever closer Europe after the fall of political barriers were the ultimate objectives of this strategy. One of the transversal axes was the recovery of pre-1936 culture, deposited in the works of many Republican exiles.”

foreign literature in Spain proliferated and introduced in the country all kinds of “politically or socially cursed literature” (2004, 576).

At the turn of the century, according to Fernández Moya, 49,9% of the active publishing houses existing in 1999 had been created before or during the decade of 1970 (2017, 32). The last report published by the Reading and Book Observatory, *El sector del libro en España. Abril 2018*, registered 30.126 active publishing houses in Spain with around 86.000 books published in 2017 (2018). However, as Fernández Moya (2017, 32) and other experts have pointed out, the most significant trend during the contemporary period is not the growth in the number of publishing houses, but rather the concentration of the industry.<sup>53</sup> That is, the Spanish book and publishing industry has progressively shifted towards a clearly defined dual structure: On the one hand, big publishing groups and on the other, medium and small houses operating with specialized catalogues. As a representative example of this phenomenon, in 2012 more than 37% of the editorial production in Spain came from 3,3% of the active publishing companies (Fernández Moya 2017, 32).

A general overview of the evolution of the Spanish publishing industry since the mid-twentieth century reveals that 1998 was the year of greatest editorial activity, with 3.590 active agents in the country. Ever since, numbers started to fall down, especially after the effects of the great global recession that took place in 2008. In 2009, reports by the Spanish MECD registered 3.564 active publishers, but from that year to 2013 numbers fell to 3.086 (a downfall of 13,4%). However, data from the year 2014 showed a slight recovery for the Spanish publishing scene, which accentuated during the following years.

As for the publication of translations, Pegenaute Rodríguez (2004, 591) notices a clear growing trend in the number of translations published since the mid-twentieth century. In Spain, the proportion of published translations during this time period has always been around 10% of the country’s global production, even though the average print run of translations has progressively assimilated to that of texts originally published in Spanish.

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<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, “El sector del libro en España” (Ávila Álvarez and Poza Costa 2000).

The latest report published by the Reading and Book Observatory, *El sector del libro en España. Abril 2018*, registered 3.126 active publishing houses in Spain with around 86.000 books published in 2017, considering both electronic and print sources (2018, 18-19).

It is also important to note that in the latest years the publishing literary market has progressively acquired a dual structure governed by two great publishing conglomerates: Grupo Planeta and Penguin Random House. These groups have progressively got hold of medium publishers, while independent small editorials still occupy a significant part of the Spanish publishing market (2018, 21).

## **1.2. Database Design**

Processes of literary reception in a target culture materialize themselves in a wide range of forms and phenomena. According to Andringa (2006, 537), when studying systems of reception of a foreign literature in a target system, the translation history of such literature must be examined as an independent factor before trying to interpret it within a larger framework of analysis. Andringa's approach is shared by scholars such as Lécivain and Díaz Narbona (2009), Poupaud et al. (2009), Román (2017) and Fernández-Ruiz et al. (2018), among others. Likewise, Brems and Ramos Pinto foreground the relevance of quantitative approaches when studying the intersection between translation and reception studies (2013, 144). Indeed, the study of the translation history of a certain literature makes it possible to observe how a concrete representation of diversity is established, insofar as translations are the fundamental element guiding the acts of reception of the target works.

International and national databases such as the UNESCO Index Translationum, the ISBN Database of Books Published in Spain or the catalog of the National Library of Spain are incomplete, and existing entries do not always disclose all the relevant information about published translations (i.e. references to translators, publishers or collections, among others, are sometimes missing or misleading). These systematic inconsistencies have also been signaled by authors such as Marín Lacarta (2012) and

Fernández-Ruiz et al. (2018), as they inevitably hamper the development of accurate studies in the field of our domain.

Anyhow, experts in the field such as van Doorslaer (2007), Poupaud et al. (2009), Assis Rosa (2012) and Zanettin et al. (2015) have problematized the endeavor of database construction:

Bibliographies provide a way of surveying the past; we must, however, be aware of possible distortions created by the fact that the concepts and categories we use have been shaped by the same history that we want to trace. In order to integrate this awareness and bring an element of self-reflexivity to this bibliographic study, we draw from anthropological work by Arjun Appadurai and Tim Ingold so as to discuss translation studies as a disciplinary *landscape* (Appadurai, 1996) and acknowledge our role [...] as *inhabitants* in that landscape (Ingold, 2007). (Zanettin et al. 2015, 166, italics in the original)

In addition, factors such as the growing multialignment of writers in more than one literary system (Lécrivain 2015, 237) and the partiality and selectiveness of criteria implied in choices of inclusion / exclusion (Assis Rosa 2012, 212) also pose a challenge to the undertaking of building and using a solid and reliable tool. In this context, the necessity of drawing up a thorough compilation protocol was manifest. This protocol involved five main stages, namely planning and design, selection of data sources, data collection and classification, publication and distribution and statistical analysis.

Considering Anthony Pym's discussion of method in TS (2014), it should therefore be accepted that any endeavor to create translation bibliographies, lists or indexes will inevitably be partial and limited. Taking this assumption as a starting point, preliminary specific criteria were established from which to build our particular database. As has been already noted, preliminary considerations involved acknowledging the fact that AfroBib is partial in scope because it is selective based on specific predefined criteria which inevitably entail some limitations:

- a) **Geographic and cultural scope:** From the point of view of the SC, AfroBib considers literature written by black women from the United States. Likewise, from the perspective of the TC, it covers publications in Spain (rather than other Spanish speaking countries).

- b) **Linguistic scope:** It is restricted to English as the source language and it considers Spanish as well as co-official languages in Spain (i.e. Basque, Catalan and Galician, in this case) as the TLs. As noted by Assis Rosa (2012, 212), the linguistic criterion is only an assumption derived from the place of publication.
- c) **Thematic scope:** It considers assumed translations of assumed literary works by US-born black women authors.
- d) **Chronological scope:** It includes all translations of African American women's works published in Spain up to present date. Consequently, it covers translations from 1968 to 2020.
- e) **Scope in genre:** It covers publications from all literary genres, including fiction, poetry, drama, biography and essay.
- f) **Scope in medium:** It considers volumes published in print as well as electronically.
- g) **Availability scope:** It includes both available and out of print works.

Anyhow, according to Zanettin et al. (2015, 167), in order to “occupy” our field of study, classification through a controlled system of categories or descriptors is necessary. Consequently, an important part of the preliminary work for designing the database involved a careful consideration of the entry template to be created, in terms of both inclusions / exclusions of information and order. Table 4 displays AfroBib's eleven descriptors, which consider basic information about the ST and specific information about the TT. Following Assis Rosa (2012, 213), data provided about the STs make reference to the original first edition.<sup>54</sup> Once the criteria had been selected, special consideration was devoted to the creation of searchable categories in the online version of the database. These include the title of the ST, the publication date of the ST, the title of the translation, the publication date of the translation, the author, the translator and the publisher.

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<sup>54</sup> These data were obtained from the online catalogues of the Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/>) and the New York Public Library (<https://www.nypl.org/>).



<b>Source text</b>	Title
	Author
	Publication date
	Publisher
<b>Target text</b>	Title
	Publication date
	Translator
	Target language
	Publisher
	Collection/series designation
	Genre
	ISBN
Observations <sup>55</sup>	

**Table 4.** AfroBib design criteria and descriptors

Pym (2014, 51) has discussed the shortcomings of building bibliographies based on one single previous source, as its ideology and criteria will automatically be transferred to the new tool. Thus, bibliographic data for AfroBib were obtained from a number of different physical and online archives, namely the ISBN Database of Books Published in Spain, the National Library of Spain, the UNESCO Index Translationum, the National Library of Catalonia, the University Union Catalogue of Catalonia as well as the catalogs of different Spanish publishing houses and online marketplaces, such as Amazon, IberLibro and AbeBooks. Consulting a wide variety of sources did not only prevent the transference of a particular system of criteria to our research, but it also compensated for the aforementioned lack of complete, systematic records of bibliographical information. Indeed, although these sources may be limited on their own, each provided a list of titles and specific data that could be used to draw up a more comprehensive list.

Thus, information was collected and classified according to our predetermined criteria (see Table 4), and subsequently incorporated into an Excel spreadsheet. This process required laborious and time-consuming manual shifting in order to detect and deal with missing, misclassified or duplicate information. This procedure was of primary

<sup>55</sup> This category was added to include further relevant information which did not fit in any of the selected criteria (e.g. paratextual information).

importance as it provided us with a final set of data that could be ultimately transformed into a searchable database and used for a more detailed analysis. This data collection process ensured the construction of an exhaustive and reliable tool, which produced solid analyzable data.

Once the information was compiled and duly classified, issues related to the publication and distribution of the bibliography were brought to the fore. Not only because of the example of already existing open access bibliographical tools such as *Intercultural Literature in Portugal* (<https://translatedliteratureportugal.org>) or *BDAFRICA* (<https://bdafrica.eu>), but also because of the incomparable flexibility of navigation, search and update, it was decided that AfroBib would be an electronically searchable open access database fully available online. This decision entailed the additional necessity to design the architecture of the electronic database (as opposed to the original Excel sheet), the interface and content of the website as well as choosing the most suitable categories to use as search criteria. Thus, database entries were exported to MySQL—a specific database management system—to make the data available online at <https://AfroBib.upf.edu>.

Figure 3 shows the AfroBib search interface, where searches may be run by indicating one or more descriptors, namely the title of the translation, the title of the ST, the author, the translator, the TL, the publication date and the publisher. Inevitably, the selection and display of search possibilities in the interface draws attention towards the nature of this tool as a bibliography of translations. However, the site also includes a shortcut that provides access to the complete and unfiltered bibliographical entry list.

# AFROBIB

A bibliographic database of African American women's literature published in Spain

Search form

**TITLE OF THE TRANSLATION**  
Search by title of the translation

**TITLE OF THE SOURCE TEXT**  
Search by title of the source text

**AUTHOR**  
Search by author: Last name, name

**TRANSLATOR**  
Search by translator: Last name, name

**PUBLICATION DATE OF THE SOURCE TEXT**  
From:    
To:

**PUBLICATION DATE OF THE TRANSLATION**  
From:    
To:

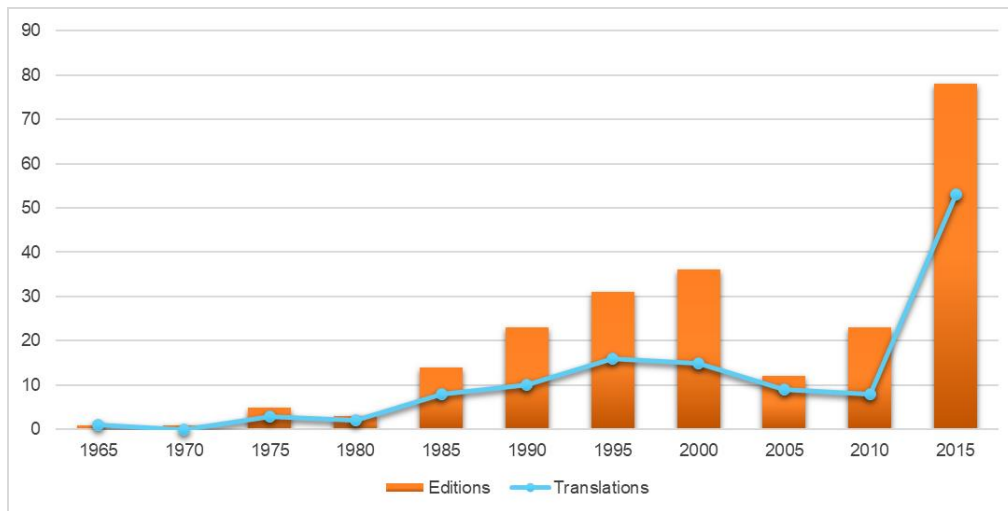
**PUBLISHER**  
Search by publisher

**TARGET LANGUAGE**  
Search by target language

**Figure 3.** AfroBib online search interface

### 1.3. Data Analysis and Discussion<sup>56</sup>

Our statistical treatment of literary works by African American women authors published in Spain is original and unprecedented, pursuing the ultimate aim of offering a much-needed overview within the larger field of Anglo-American Studies that will help to identify where these works stand within the Spanish publishing market.



**Figure 4.** Evolution of the publication of African American women's literature in Spain.

AfroBib includes a total volume of 228 editions and 125 translations of works by African American women published in Spain between 1968 and 2020. Figure 4 illustrates the evolution in the publication of these works in Spain within the aforementioned timespan. Even though an irregular development is displayed, a gradual evolution between 1985 and 2000 can be observed. This period coincides with major landmarks for black women authors, namely the premiere of the movie adaptation of Alice Walker's masterpiece *The Color Purple* in 1985, the award of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction to Toni Morrison in 1988, and, most notably, the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Indeed, during the years following the premiere of Spielberg's adaptation, six editions of *El color púrpura* were published in Spain. Likewise, the year that Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize, Ediciones B reprinted some of her most notable works,

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<sup>56</sup> All the data used for the figures and tables in this section were extracted from AfroBib unless otherwise specified.

namely *Beloved*, *La canción de Salomón*, *Jazz*, *La isla de los caballeros* and *Sula*, for the series “Tiempos Modernos”.<sup>57</sup>

After the turn of the century, DeBolsillo acquired the rights to publish Toni Morrison’s oeuvre, which had already been introduced into the Spanish literary system by independent publishers such as Argos Vergara, Plaza y Janés or Ediciones B. The dissemination of Morrison’s works by one of the great publishing groups in the country (DeBolsillo is part of the Penguin Random House conglomerate) coincided with the growing interest of independent publishers to incorporate into their catalogues the works of prominent figures of the African American literary landscape: not just Morrison, but also Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde and bell hooks were edited in Spain during the first years of the new millennium.

Regarding the publication of translations illustrated in Figure 4, during the years of stable evolution (1985 to 2000) the relationship between editions and translations oscillated at around 50%. The slight variation in this proportion during the first years of the twenty-first century—the percentual relationship between editions and translations fell to 39% from 2000 to 2005—can be understood in the context of DeBolsillo’s endeavor to reprint Morrison’s works, which were already circulating in the TC.

The year 2016 witnessed the culmination of the outburst of small publishers that had begun right before the onset of the great recession in 2008 (Alós 2017, n. p. and MECD 2018, 18 and 54). In this context, during 2016 and 2017, while Penguin Random House and other smaller editorial groups continued translating and publishing the works of bestselling authors—not only in Spanish, but also in other co-official languages—, independent publishers started to incorporate into their catalogues new names within the landscape of African American literature. These were either canonical authors in the SC who had had scarce recognition in the target country (e.g. Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Ann Petry) or new contemporary voices (e.g. Carol Anderson, Patricia J. Williams, Lisa Jones). Moreover, Morrison’s death in the summer of 2019 renewed

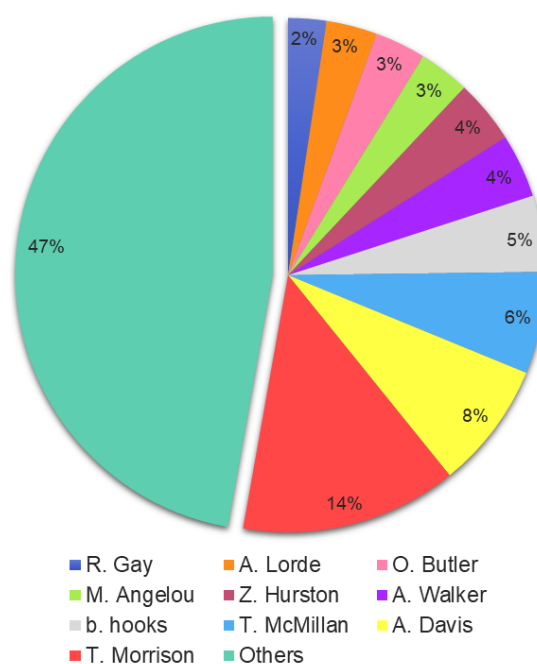
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<sup>57</sup> Actually, these volumes were published prior to the announcement of the Nobel laureates in 1993. After the announcement, the Spanish press praised the effort of Silvia Querini—Morrison’s editor in Spain—in promoting the circulation of Morrison’s works in the country precisely the same year that she reached the highest spheres of international recognition.

interest in her work. Thus, her novels were reprinted and some of her most notable non-fiction works were posthumously published in translation during 2020.

As a consequence of these events, nearly 35% of the total amount of editions registered in AfroBib was published over the last five years. Considering the volume of translations published during the same time span, this amounts to 42% of the total sum. These figures indicate a growing interest in black women’s literature by Spanish publishers, both in terms of circulating classic works and incorporating new voices to the Spanish publishing market.

Author	Published translations	Proportion
Roxanne Gay	3	2,4%
Maya Angelou	4	3,2%
Octavia Butler	4	3,2%
Edwidge Danticat	4	3,2%
Zora N. Hurston	5	4,0%
Alice Walker	5	4,0%
bell hooks	6	4,8%
Terry McMillan	8	6,4%
Angela Davis	10	8,0%
Toni Morrison	17	13,6%
Others (less than 2% each)	59	47,2%



**Table 5.** Published translations per author and proportion out of 100%.

**Figure 5.** Proportion of works published in Spain per author.

Table 5 and Figure 5 illustrate the number of texts per author that have been translated into peninsular languages, and the corresponding proportion with regard to the total amount of translated texts. Out of the 42 writers whose works have circulated in the TC, Toni Morrison is the most translated (13,2% of the total amount of translations). Angela Davis and Terry McMillan follow her with 8% and 6,4% respectively. The table and the chart above also point out the fact that most authors have only had one work translated (47,2%).

As for the translators, 85 agents have taken part in the 125 translations compiled in AfroBib. At a first glance, these numbers reveal a scarce specialization on the part of the translators, and a general lack of interest from the publishers to promote specialization in this type of literature.

For the purpose of our study, looking at the gender variable at this point is especially noteworthy. Thus, the data from AfroBib reveal that 60 works have been translated by women, while 25 by men. On this subject, Eleonora Federici and Vanessa Leonardi have argued that

the major scholars in TS are underlining the necessity to take into account the ethics of translation and the competence of translators in an era of globalization and massive movements of people around the world. Today, translation means intercultural exchange with a profound awareness of cultural difference and linguistic boundaries. (2013, 2)

Drawing from these notions, much research has been conducted within the interdisciplinary fields of translation and gender studies—and within the intersection between the two—, problematizing inherent differences between men and women writers and, consequently, men and women translators. Indeed, in recent years research has been carried out around the hypothesis that gender difference interferes or mediates in translation. Among others, the work of Leonardi (2007), Santaemilia (2014), Tzu-Yi Lee (2013), Kim (2015) and Rabeie and Shafiee-Sabet (2011) is of particular interest. Along these lines, José Santaemilia argues:

The idea that there is an *écriture féminine* or a *woman's sentence* (as opposed to a default *man's sentence*) is, undoubtedly, an attractive one, which many feel is justified. It consists of a series of abstract traits that are thought to characterize all women (and all men) and that reinforce the belief that sexual differences are inscribed in language. [...] What is especially noteworthy is that this logic leads us to the inescapable fact that there must be differences between women and men writers. (2014, 105, italics in the original)

However, unfortunately, research such as the one conducted by Santaemilia is still in its first stages of development, so that scholars in the field have only been able to draw partial conclusions from the results of very concrete case studies. Therefore,

generalizations about the influence and consequent relevance of gender difference in translation cannot be drawn yet.

In the case of our database of translators, even if AfroBib compiles significantly more female than male agents—60 against 25—, numbers are not conclusive enough to allow generalizations about a certain inclination or preference for women translators. However, further studies following Leonardi's and Santaemilia's proposals would definitely be as necessary as fruitful to bring light into this research field.

Moving on from the problematic issue of gender difference in translation, I should also acknowledge the fact that three of the translators registered in AfroBib have been awarded the National Prize for the Work of a Translator [Premio Nacional a la Obra de un Traductor] by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (MECD), namely Roser Berdagué (2009), Jordi Fibla (2015) and María Dolors Udina (2019). Both Fibla and Udina have translated works by Toni Morrison as well as other Nobel laureates such as J.M. Coetzee or Nadine Gordimer. As for Berdagué, she has translated the Nobel Prize Saul Bellow and the classical author Charles Dickens, among others; however, she has also devoted herself to the translation of bestselling authors such as Danielle Steele or Terry McMillan (present in AfroBib).

The case of translator Carme Manuel Cuenca also deserves special attention. She has translated works by nineteenth century writers Harriet A. Jacobs, Elizabeth Keckley, Harriet Wilson and Pauline E. Hopkins, voices which had never been presented to Spanish audiences in translation. In relation to this, Manuel Cuenca states:

las editoriales grandes continúan publicando todavía hoy los autores norteamericanos más canónicos, los de siempre, los de toda la vida, los que se tradujeron ya en los años 30, 40, 50 y 60; y no hacen ningún esfuerzo por introducir, dentro de lo que son las colecciones realmente comerciales, nombres nuevos, y rodearlos de un mínimo estudio, una mínima presentación. (2009, n. p.)<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Still today, large publishers continue to publish the all-time canonical American authors, those who were already translated in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s; they make no effort to include in commercial collections new names and surround them with some kind of study, some kind of presentation”.



In this respect, the various publications in which Manuel Cuenca has collaborated (either as translator or editor) include a critical study of the author and her work complementary to the text per se.

Before moving forward onto the next element of analysis, Pegenaute's remarks about the current professional status of translators should be considered at this point, especially in the light of the object of study of this particular section:

los incumplimientos en el cobro de remuneraciones son más frecuentes de lo que sería deseable; aún existen casos de traducción sin contrato de edición formalizado por escrito; [...] aún en el caso de que exista contrato, no siempre se dan liquidaciones: los contratos de adhesión no permiten la intervención del traductor, lo que hace que se pierda la libertad de establecer mutuamente las cláusulas; la unidad de medida para su posterior retribución es imprecisa; no se da una certificación de tirada; las cláusulas son abusivas, etc. (2004, 593)<sup>59</sup>

This reality not only evidences the lack of professionalism of certain publishing houses and agents, but also complicates the endeavor of disseminating foreign literatures in a target country.

As for the publishing industry, AfroBib reveals that 64 agents have published works by African American women in Spain. In the hypothetical event that the 64 publishers were active in 2020 (which is not the case, as some have disappeared or are currently inactive), this would mean that only around 2,3% of the total amount of Spanish publishers would choose to work with African American women's literature.

These data reflect the generalized scarce interest in African American women writers shown by publishers in Spain, except for a few individual cases. It is also true, however, that some Spanish editors, writers and translators have tried—and are still trying—to promote the circulation of this literature in the country, even though most times the prevalent criterion to translate and publicize literary works by African American women authors is the success granted by external factors such as the award of internationally

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<sup>59</sup> “The default in the payment of remuneration is more frequent than would be desirable; there are still cases of translation without a formal written publishing contract; [...] even when there is a contract, settlements are not always met: adhesion contracts prevent the intervention of the translator, which means that the freedom to mutually establish the terms is lost; the unit of measurement for subsequent remuneration is imprecise; no certification of print run is given; the terms are abusive, etc.”

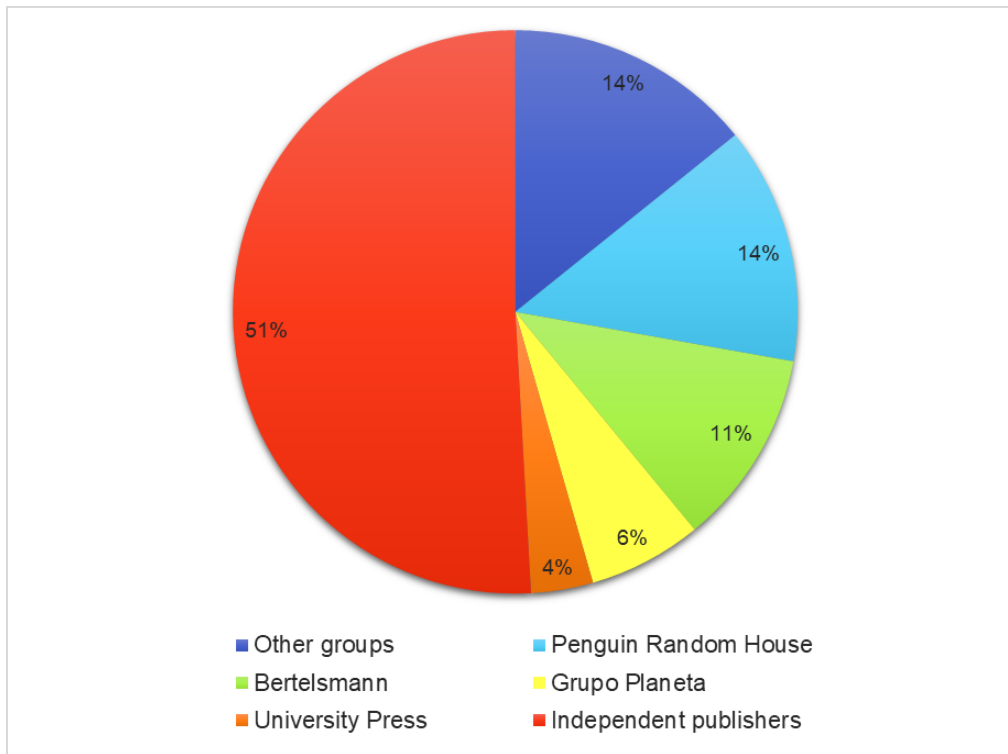
prestigious literary prizes or the popularization of certain works through their movie adaptations.

Among the agents that have published works by African American women in Spain we can find big publishing groups, medium and small publishers, as well as university presses. As for the big publishers (i.e. Bertelsmann, Planeta and Penguin Random House), most of the authors that have been translated and published in Spain by houses belonging to these conglomerates had already earned international recognition and caught the attention of the mass media before these agents decided to support them and disseminate their works at a national level. In relation to this, translator Carme Manuel Cuenca points out the scarce willingness shown by the Spanish publishing industry to incorporate new foreign voices to the dominant literary system, which, according to Manuel Cuenca, is monopolized by an ongoing tradition of promoting and reading the classics (2009, n. p.).

In this context, writers Toni Morrison, Terry McMillan, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Zora Neale Hurston have been published by Bertelsmann; Toni Morrison, Terry McMillan, Gloria Naylor, Billie Holiday and Sapphire have been published by Planeta, and Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Harriet Ann Jacobs have been published by Penguin Random House. In any case, these authors' works started to circulate in the target country only after they had become international bestsellers or the writers themselves had acquired a certain degree of worldwide literary prestige. The bulk of texts compiled at AfroBib were published by small and independent publishers, some of which eventually merged with the bigger groups.<sup>60</sup>

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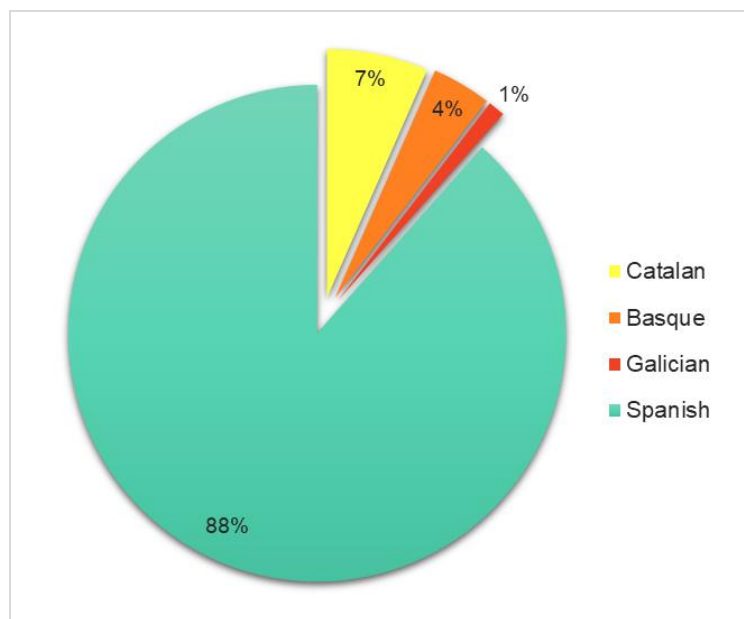
<sup>60</sup> At this point it is important to highlight the fact that some publishing houses now belonging to the Planeta or Penguin Random House conglomerates were independent at the time of publication of the works included in AfroBib, so they have been considered as independent publishers for the purpose of our study.



**Figure 6.** Distribution of Spanish publishers of African American women's literature.

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of publishers involved in the circulation of translated African American women's literature. While roughly half of the texts registered at AfroBib were circulated by independent publishers, 23 works were distributed by Penguin Random House, 19 by Bertelsmann and 11 by Planeta. Other editorial groups such as RBA, Grupo Anaya or Grupo Zeta, among others, published 24 texts altogether, and there are 6 publications registered by different Spanish universities.

As has already been introduced, AfroBib includes works that have been translated into Spanish and other co-official languages. Thus, even though most translations were published in Spanish, several Catalan, Basque and Galician titles may also be found. Figure 7 displays the proportion of languages of translation as for the works compiled in our database. As illustrated below, nearly 90% of the editions were published in Spanish (203 titles). More than half of the remaining 7% correspond to texts published in Catalan (14 titles), while 4% of the texts were translated into Basque (9 titles). Only 2 texts have been translated into Galician (1%).



**Figure 7.** Distribution of languages of translation of African American women's literature in Spain.

However, if we look at the texts that have been translated into co-official languages and compare them to the most recurrently published volumes, as shown in Table 6, we can see that there is no correspondence between them. Therefore, we can conclude that the success or popularization of a certain work in Spain is not a determinant criterion for translation into co-official languages.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Spanish editions</b>	<b>Catalan editions</b>	<b>Basque editions</b>	<b>Galician editions</b>
<i>The Color Purple</i>	15	-	-	-
<i>Beloved</i>	9	-	2	-
<i>Song of Solomon</i>	9	-	1	-
<i>Sula</i>	7	1	-	-
<i>The Bluest Eye</i>	6	-	-	-

**Table 6.** Comparison between the five most edited titles in Spain and their editions in co-official languages.

One observable difference in the texts selected for translation is that, in the case of Catalan and Basque, the authors and works that have been translated belong to the realm of contemporary literature, namely Angela Davis, Claudia Rankine, Sapphire and Terry McMillan in the case of Catalan translations and Angela Davis, Audre Lorde and bell hooks in the case of Basque translations in addition to Toni Morrison, who has been translated into both languages. However, as for Galician, the only two texts that have

been published are classics of African American literature, namely *Passing* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

At this point we should also consider the fact that the time lapse between the publication of the ST and the two Galician translations is much longer than in the case of the Catalan or Basque translations. Enric Gallén et al.'s reflections on the current status of Catalan translations may bring some light into this matter:

La literatura catalana es hoy receptora habitual de las novedades literarias en otras lenguas, aunque tiene que competir con una industria editorial en castellano de dimensiones mucho mayores. [...] El editor catalán sólo obtiene resultados satisfactorios cuando consigue que la traducción que él publica aparezca antes o al mismo tiempo que la traducción al castellano, y con un precio de venta similar. (2004, 693)<sup>61</sup>

This description in fact coincides with the data summarized in Table 7.

Source title	Catalan translation	Publication date	Spanish translation	Publication date
<i>Sula</i>	<i>Sula</i>	1995	<i>Sula</i>	1988
<i>How Stella Got Her Groove Back</i>	<i>De com la Stella va recuperar la marxa</i>	1997	<i>De cómo Stella recobró la marcha</i>	1997
<i>Paradise</i>	<i>Paradís</i>	1998	<i>Paraíso</i>	1998
<i>A Mercy</i>	<i>Una benedicció</i>	2009	<i>Una bendición</i>	2009
<i>Push</i>	<i>Push</i>	2010	<i>Push</i>	1998
<i>Home</i>	<i>El retorn</i>	2012	<i>Volver</i>	2012
<i>The Origin of Others</i>	<i>L'origen dels altres</i>	2018	<i>El origen de los otros</i>	2018
<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i>	<i>Ciudadà: Poema líric Nord-Americà</i>	2018	-	-
<i>Revolution Today</i>	<i>La revolució avui</i>	2018	-	-
<i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i>	<i>Podem abolir les presons?</i>	2020	<i>Democracia de la abolición: prisiones, racismo y violencia</i>	2016

**Table 7.** Overview of the publication dates of the first editions of texts translated into Catalan and/or Spanish

<sup>61</sup> "Catalan literature is now a regular recipient of new literary works in other languages, although it has to compete with a much larger Spanish-language publishing industry. [...] Catalan publishers only obtain satisfactory results when they manage to have their translation published before or simultaneous to the Spanish version, and at a similar selling price."

As for the two Galician translations, the earliest of them was published in 1993, a time when the Galician Government was promoting the translation of universal classics within a greater project of linguistic standardization (Noia 2004, 776). In her overview of translation history in Galicia, Camiño Noia describes Lairovento, the publisher of this early translation, as compromised with the dissemination of texts dealing with linguistic problems, political reflection, or the history of nationalisms (2004, 780), interests very much in line with the issues brought forward in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Regarding the 2017 translation of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, it was carried out by a young small independent publishing house, Irmás Cartoné, as part of their catalogue of twenty-two universal classics.

In the case of the translations into Basque, it is the only co-official language that has translated Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*, in this case for the collection "Literatura Unibertsala" [Universal Literature], which was financed by the Basque Government at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Several works by Angela Davis have also entered the Basque literary system, probably as a result of the writer's relation with the Basque nationalist politician Arnaldo Otegi. Actually, the four Basque translations of her works date from 2016 and 2017. This fact may be directly linked with the events that occurred in 2016, when Davis met Otegi after he was released from prison,<sup>62</sup> and he later wrote the foreword for the 2017 Spanish edition of the black activist's autobiography. A translation of bell hooks's *Feminism Is for Everybody* was published by Katakarak, an independent house that follows a critical and political editorial line (Fillat in García 2020, 68). Finally, an anthology of Audre Lorde's poetry was published by Susa in "Munduko Poesia Kaierak" [World Poetry], a series started in 2014 by Beñat Sarasola that edits four poetry anthologies every year. The publishing house, Susa, distributes works of narrative, poetry and drama entirely in Basque. In this context, Lorde was presented as a fundamental contemporary author who had moved from the margins to the center of the literary canon (Sarasola 2019, n. p.).

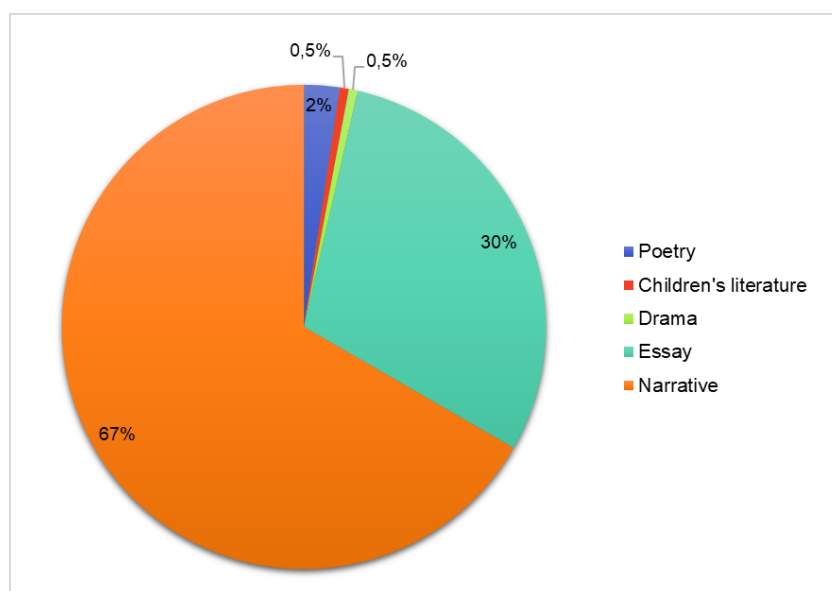
As for the genres that have been translated, AfroBib registers fiction novels mostly, although several instances of other genres in translation can also be found in the bibliography. Results displayed in Figure 8 are supported by the data collected by the

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<sup>62</sup> See "Arnaldo Otegi se reúne en Barcelona con Angela Davis" (Caballero 2017).

MECD throughout the time period studied, which conclude that narrative is by far the most edited literary genre in Spain, as for both local and imported literature.

Taking as an illustrative example data from the *Overview of Book Edition in Spain* [Panorámica de la edición española de libros] in 2016,<sup>63</sup> the MECD's report registers 11.922 ISBNs classified as narrative, 3.605 classified as poetry, 385 classified as drama and 709 grouped under "other genres". From these absolute values, the narrative genre has the highest percentage of translated texts (30,2%), followed by drama (16,6%), other genres (13,1%) and poetry, with a scarce 6% of translations. As these numbers evidence, there is a correspondence between the general values of translated literature and African American women's translations except for the case of the essay, which constitutes the second most translated genre in our data samples.



**Figure 8.** Proportion of translated works according to genre.<sup>64</sup>

Looking at the essays by African American women that have been translated into peninsular languages, which represent 30% of the total translated production, data show that the publication of this genre has increased during the last decade, essays being

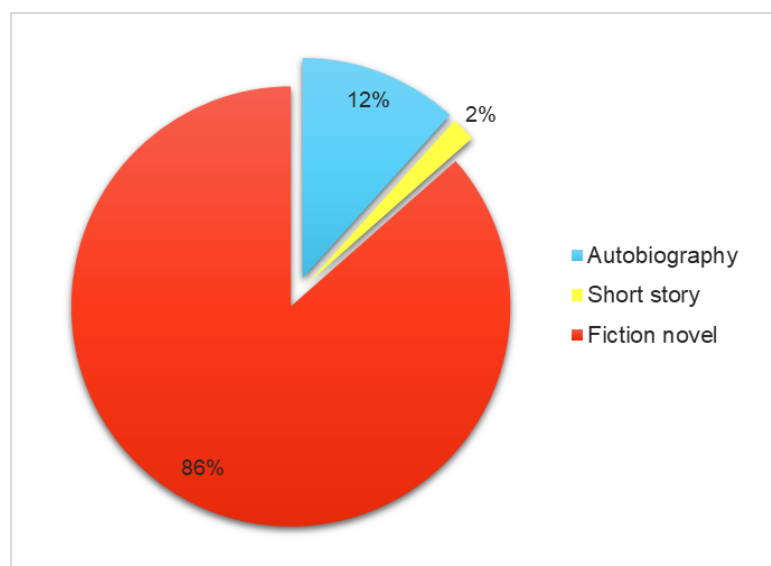
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<sup>63</sup> Reports published by the MECD do not include information about the percentage of translated works by genre prior to 2013. Taking this as a starting point, we decided to use data from 2016 as a representative sample, as it was the year within the timespan available for analysis with the highest editorial activity as far as African American women's literature is concerned.

<sup>64</sup> The different genres have been established according to the categories used by the MECD in their *Overview of Book Publishing in Spain* with the objective of facilitating comparisons between the two sources.

translated not only into Spanish but also Basque and Catalan. A common ground for all these texts is that they share strong sociopolitical imbrications, directly challenging dominant discourses of racism and sexism from the experience of the African American woman writer. It is also worth to mention that nearly one quarter of the essays published in Spain were written by Angela Davis, while the resting 75% introduce the views of diverse authors, spanning from Audre Lorde to Lisa Jones, Michelle Wallace or Jesmyn Ward. In relation to this, the volumes *Cuerpo político negro* (2017) and *Esta vez el fuego: Una nueva generación habla de la raza* (2020), deserve special attention. Both were published by Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo as part of the series Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid, and they introduced to Spanish audiences the works of contemporary authors such as Patricia J. Williams, bell hooks, June Jordan, Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah or Kiese Laymon—together with those of other African American male writers—, some of whom had never been published in Spain before.

Figure 8 evidences the overwhelming dominance of the narrative genre among all African American women’s literature published in Spain, with a 67% of the works belonging to this genre. However, this research suggests a further subdivision within the narrative genre with the aim of obtaining more precise results. Accordingly, Figure 9 illustrates such division into subgenres.



**Figure 9.** Proportion of subgenres within “narrative”.

As Figure 9 reflects, the fiction novel is still the most translated (sub)genre, even though we can also find several translated autobiographies and short stories. As for the short



stories, most of them were written by Ann Petry, and were published in the series *Los huesos de Louella Brown y otros relatos* by independent publisher Palabrero Press in 2016 (precisely the same year that the publishing house was founded). The other remaining short story, Morrison's *Recitatif*, was published in English by Spanish publisher Pons with a didactic function. Indeed, *Recitatif* was included in the collection "Read & Listen" for English learners:

En la selección de los relatos nos hemos guiado por varias premisas: en primer lugar, tenían que ser textos sugerentes pero no demasiado complejos; en segundo lugar, tenían que ser clásicos en miniatura, de aquellos que no se olvidan, que deben leerse con cuidado, degustando cada frase, cada palabra, en definitiva, textos sin los cuales la historia de la literatura no sería la misma. (Pons editorial team 2018, n.p.)<sup>65</sup>

Less striking is the fact that 12% of the translated African American women's narrative consists of autobiographies, taking into account that this has been a prolific (sub)genre for the authors studied here. These comprise from the works of contemporary authors such as Maya Angelou, Angela Davis or Billie Holiday to those dating from the Pre-Civil War era. In the case of *The Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*, *Our Nig*, and *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*, the translations of these texts had practically no impact in the TC, the former having been carried out for a workshop of North American studies at the University of León and the two latter having been published by a currently extinct independent publishing house and translated by Carme Manuel Cuenca, who has recurrently shown a deliberate interest in disseminating the works of African American women writers in the country.

The complexities imbricated in processes of reception of a literature permeated by a sociocultural reality so different from that of the TC are numerous and manifold. However, recollecting the backdrop of this study, it is a fact that recent international endeavors are evidencing the growing interest in studying the different forms of

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<sup>65</sup> "Our selection of stories follows several premises: firstly, they had to be suggestive but not too complex; secondly, they had to be miniature classics, those that are never forgotten, that must be read carefully, savoring every sentence, every word. In short, texts without which the history of literature would not be the same."

circulation of non-dominant literatures in translation. These undertakings are essential to understand more general dynamics between center and periphery as well as processes of canon formation.

This chapter has focused on the study of the translation history of African American women's literature in Spain so as to explore the different factors involved in decisions governing the translation, publication and circulation of texts in a literary system. In terms of future research directions, the database developed as the basis of this project will continue to be updated, as it is flexible enough to provide accurate representations of multiple data, opening up new frontiers for research into the translation and reception of African American literature. In this sense, some of the potentials of this research tool include expanding its scope to include a) translations of male authors and/or b) secondary sources about African American literature published in Spain. Even if these potential modifications would inevitably complicate the task of building and maintaining a solid and reliable bibliographical tool, they would also open the door to consider further variables in the study of the translation and reception of this literature.

## 2. CONTEXTS OF COMPARISON AND FRAMES OF REFERENCE

In his 1987 paper, “Literary criticism: future invented”, Karl Rosengren argues that literary facts are social by nature:

Their existence is the joint product of a community of authors and critics, printers and publishers, distributors and sellers, directors and actors, readers and listeners and spectators. Once a literary fact has been created or invented by members of this community, it may be scientifically studied by scholars and researchers much the same way other facts are being studied in the humanities and the social sciences” (296).

Petra Broomans and Ester Jiresch agree with Rosengren’s position, even if they admit that tracing or mapping the influence of a given writer or a generation (or group) of writers in a TC is a complicated task. While these authors acknowledge that an exhaustive study of such phenomenon would entail close reading and textual and intertextual analysis of the writer’s work, they also propose a first level of analysis related to the examination of documents so as to trace the mentions of a given author in different contexts. Likewise, scholars such as Nel van Dijk (1990) or Kees van Rees and Jeroen Vermunt (1996) have carried out quantitative studies based on reviewer’s perception of literary works. In this regard, the two latter have argued that “authors of literary fiction who fail to attract the attention of reviewers are not likely to gain a literary reputation and their work is at risk of falling into oblivion within a short time” (1996, 318).

More recently, Els Andringa’s redefinition of Even-Zohar’s notion of repertoire has placed the notion of “contexts of comparison” in a privileged position in the study of translated literature. Indeed, according to the Dutch author, the works and oeuvres that are used as standards in perception and judgement make up the reviewers’ and the critics’ frame of reference, which is thereby considered one of the main components of the repertoire.

In this context, Karl Erik Rosengren’s “mentions technique” provides a useful tool to study the works/oeuvres that are used as standards in perception and judgment in the

minds of the reviewers and literary critics. In “Literary Criticism: Future Invented” (1987), Rosengren computed all the names mentioned in large corpora of critical and essayistic writings, thus uncovering “the lexicon of authors available to critics and reviewers: the stock of classic and modern, minor and major poets and writers whose oeuvres embody the literary tradition and its present-day continuation.” (Rosengren 1987, 298). Now, according to earlier work by the scholar (1985, 159), if a mention may be regarded as “an expression of an association made by the reviewer”, and if the mentions of a specific writer or work can be used as an indicator of topicality, the mentions made in the context of reception in the target system during a given time span may as well be regarded as an expression of the lexicon available to the reviewers. Investigating such lexicon will reveal information about the authors who may be said to constitute a central element of the literary frame of reference of that period.

According to Rosengren himself, even if the results obtained are highly schematic, the point in using this method is not to render as faithfully as possible the details of the development of the literary frame of reference; “the point is precisely the opposite one: to produce an overall picture of the main features of that development” (1987, 303). Actually, precisely because of the relative simplicity of the mentions technique, the reliability of the results obtained is considerably high, and comparability is also satisfactory (1985, 161). Thus, while this approach may need to be supported by detailed qualitative analyses of the results, the mentions technique is a useful tool to draw generalizations and observe regularities in patterns of development of the literary frame of reference.

Even if Rosengren used this method to compute and study all the mentions occurring in his selected materials, Andringa (2006, 531) notes that “it is also possible to apply this technique on a more restricted scale” for instance, to study the process through which a given author has entered and merged with a target literary system—therefore, we should compute mentions in relation to local authors—or to study the topicality of a given writer or oeuvre in relation to other writers or oeuvres from the same cohort or time period. The manifold utilities of Rosengren’s technique are further disclosed by Andringa (2006, 532):

The number of documents in which the name of X occurs offers a quantitative measure of X’s relative importance as a frame of reference in the repertoire, if it

is compared with the mentions of other authors. The references to others also enable us to determine to which [...] writers and works X is connected [...]. The dates of publication indicate the flow of references to X in the reviewers' repertoires over time. The sources of publication and the names of the reviewers can help to reconstruct the institutional environment in the polysystem and to disclose which reviewers share the repertoire in which X is included.

Following Rosengren (1985 and 1987) and Andringa (2006), the mentions technique was used to study the components of the frame of reference of Spanish reviewers and critics in relation to the cohort of African American women writers translated into Spanish during the period comprised between 1959 (the first mention of an African American woman writer in the local context) and 2020.<sup>66</sup>

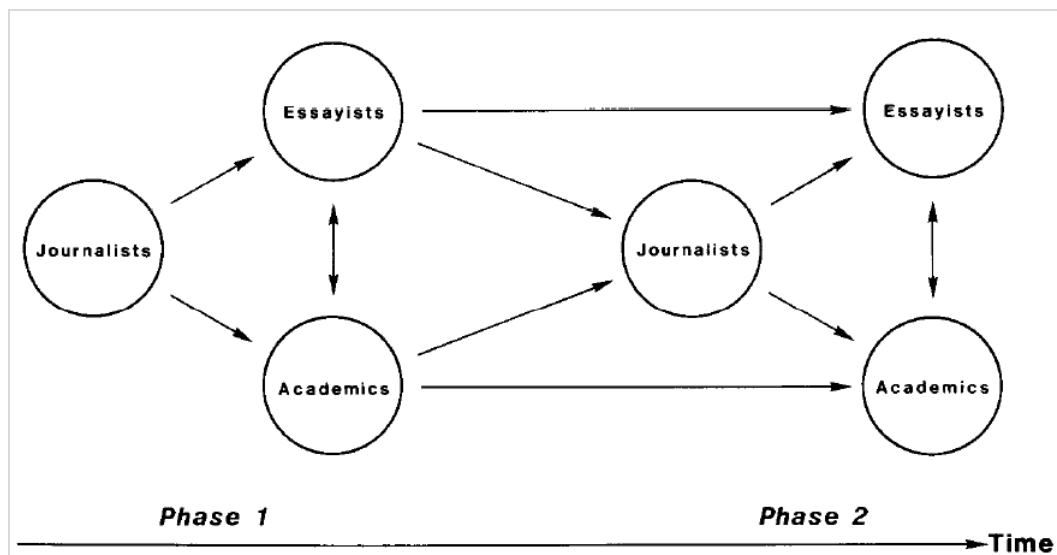
The selected sources used to trace mentions in the TC include documents compiled at the digital archives of the National Library of Spain, which can be accessed online at [hemerotecadigital.bne.es](http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es)—used to trace author mentions in journalistic and essayistic criticism—, as well as Google Scholar—used to examine sources of academic criticism—. The digital archives of the BNE include more than 26 million pages and nearly 2000 titles of journalistic publications that circulate or have circulated in Spain up to present date. This collection of documents can be searched by different means; even if access to the full texts is usually restricted, the online search application provides detailed information about the sources, the dates of publication, the names of the reviewers and the context of the searched word or word-chain. In order to document mention searches in sources of academic criticism, Google Scholar was used. Even if the Dialnet online database, which was developed and is currently managed by the Dialnet Foundation at the University of La Rioja, is an exhaustive source of documentation of scholarly works published in Spanish,<sup>67</sup> its search engine only allows searches by key words contained in the title or in the abstract of the documents it compiles, so it did not allow us to trace author mentions within the full texts.

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<sup>66</sup> Following Andringa (2006), the numbers presented in this section refer to the number of documents in which the names of authors (hereby considered “mentions”) occur. As a name may occur more than once in a document, this means that not all mentions are calculated.

<sup>67</sup> Dialnet is one of the leading search portals in the Hispanic academic world, as it compiles more than 8 million documents (papers published in scholarly journals, dissertations, conference proceedings and other scientific output) published mostly in the areas of literature and humanities.

Now, while Rosengren’s study considers the interplay and reciprocal influence between the three types of criticism—journalistic, essayistic and academic—, our study does not consider essayistic sources of reception (i.e. mentions in literary magazines), as there is currently no site in Spain that has carried out the laborious task of compiling, digitalizing and scanning through OCR or any other similar technology a considerable amount of essayistic sources of reception so that the mentions technique can be applied with a considerable degree of reliability and representativeness. However, at this point I shall draw attention to Rosengren’s graphic representation of the interplay between the three types of criticism, as illustrated in Figure 10. According to the author, journalistic criticism—to which both Rosengren (1985 and 1987) and Andringa (2006) pay the most attention—can be shaped and in turn shape the work of essayists, historians of literature and academics.



**Figure 10.** Theoretical model of reciprocal influence between journalistic, essayistic, and academic literary critics (Rosengren 1987, 307).

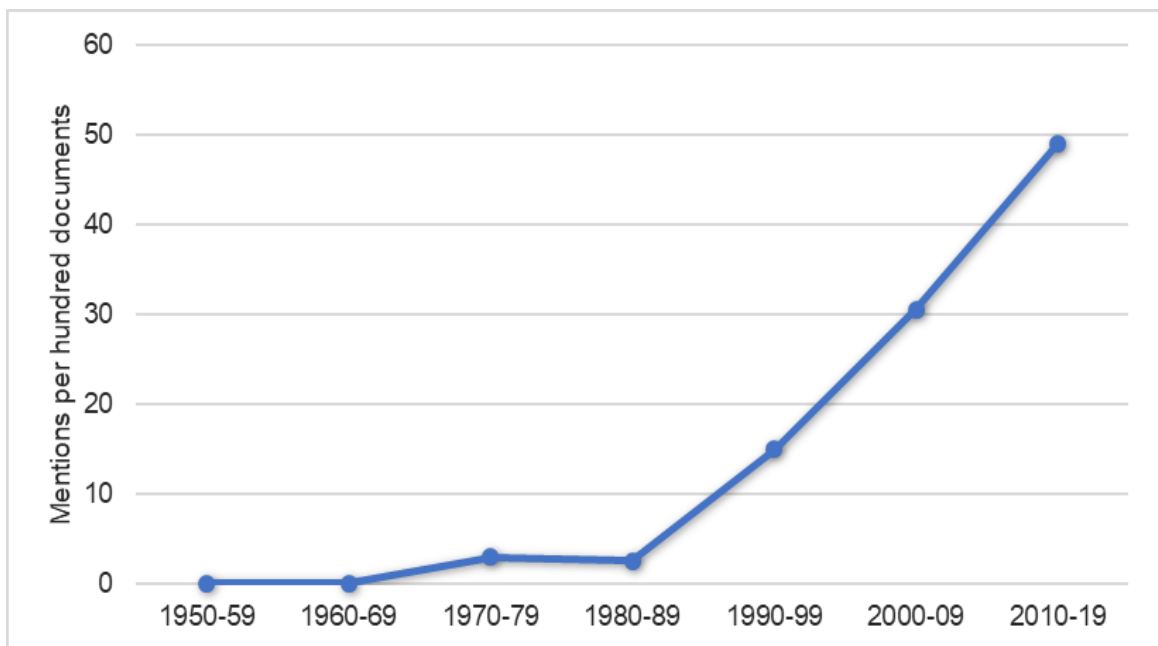
According to the model, journalistic criticism influences the criticism of essayists and academics, which, in their turn, also exert a reciprocal influence and they also contribute to shape the frames of reference of the next generation of journalists. Thus, Rosengren’s model does not only consider the three types of reception sources but also variation and influence through time.

Even if this study only considers journalistic and academic criticism, applying the mentions technique to these reception sources allowed us to obtain a preliminary overview of the hierarchies of fame and contexts of comparison in which African

American women writers participate. In spite of the fact that this is not a complete study, this chapter provides the opportunity to empirically test Rosengren’s model and open the door for future research lines that may contribute to complement and enrich qualitative studies in the fields of literary reception and translation.

## 2.1. Frames of Reference in Journalistic Criticism

As noted by Rosengren, among others, time is an integrating element in many or most literary studies: “The first thing to note about time and the literary frame of reference as here conceived is that there is a considerable range of variation along the dimension of time in the frame of reference” (1987, 302). Therefore, Figure 11 and Table 8 illustrate the “temporal ecology” of the presence of African American women writers in the Spanish press from 1950 to 2020.



**Figure 11.** Mentions in journalistic criticism per hundred documents by decades (1950-2020)

Decades	Absolute freq.	Relative freq.	Percent freq.
<b>1950-59</b>	2	0,00	0,03
<b>1960-69</b>	0	0,00	0,00
<b>1970-79</b>	230	0,03	2,98
<b>1980-89</b>	194	0,03	2,51
<b>1990-99</b>	1.152	0,15	14,93
<b>2000-09</b>	2.354	0,31	30,52
<b>2010-19</b>	3.782	0,49	49,03

**Table 8.** Mentions in journalistic criticism per hundred documents by decades (1950-2020)

Figure 11 offers an overview of the mentions received by African American women writers over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As the graph displays, during the decade of 1970 the presence of this group of writers in Spain started to rise, coinciding with what has been termed “the Black Women’s Literary Renaissance” that took place in the SC. However, it is during the 1990s and most significantly, in the twenty-first century, when mentions have experienced the most prominent increase, displaying a stable and gradual growth that extends until present date. Actually, nearly 50% of the mentions have occurred only during the past 10 years, and around 80% in the twenty-first century.

Author	Number of mentions (1950-2020)
<b>Toni Morrison</b>	3.210
<b>Angela Davis</b>	1.660
<b>Maya Angelou</b>	1.021
<b>Alice Walker</b>	634
<b>Terry McMillan</b>	371

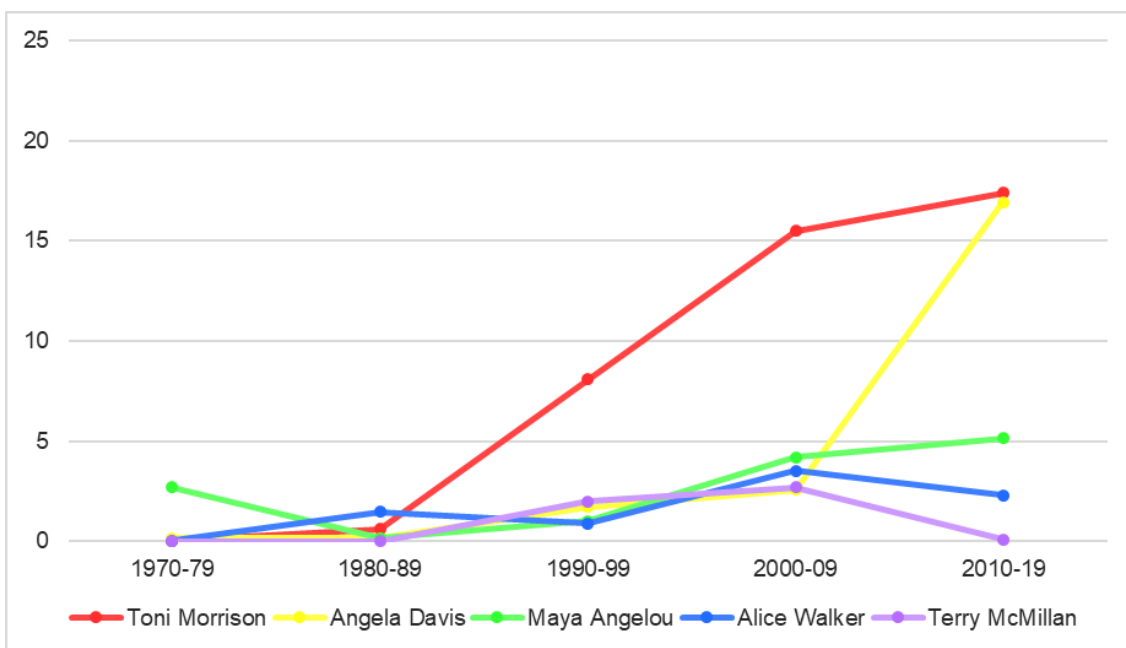
**Table 9.** Mentions of the five most cited African American women authors in journalistic criticism

Table 9 offers an overview of the mentions received in journalistic criticism by the five most cited authors to date. It shows a couple of clear differences. Considering the attention given to *El color púrpura* in the media,<sup>68</sup> the distance between Walker and authors such as Angelou, Davis or Morrison may seem surprising. As will be discussed,

<sup>68</sup> See Part III, section 3.4.



these numbers indicate Walker’s real position in the hierarchy of fame relative to other African American women writers within the Spanish context. Likewise, the mentions of Davis, who arose in a slightly different context than other writers of the same period, are considerably high. I will return to these outcomes later on in this chapter. To obtain more information about the processes leading to these results, the data were ordered chronologically by decades, starting from 1950. Figure 12 presents the mentions of each author per hundred documents.



**Figure 12.** Mentions of five most cited authors per thousand documents by decades (1950 - 2020)

Differences between the authors and periods are significant. This graph reveals that a number of factors may have influenced the presence of key authors in the Spanish press. To begin with, the mentions of Morrison started to rise during the 1980s and significantly multiplied after 1993, when the author received the Nobel Prize for Literature. However, numbers also indicate that Morrison’s presence in the repertoire of Spanish reviewers remained constant, as mentions gradually increased between 1990 and 2020. Thus, we can conclude that the number of mentions of Morrison’s name corresponds to her top position in the hierarchy of fame of translated African American women writers. Likewise, it can be observed that the distribution of mentions of Davis from 1970 to 2009 is relatively similar or parallel to Angelou, Walker and McMillan. However, Figure 12 displays a significant peak in the decade of 2010. The qualitative research conducted in the following chapter may bring some light into these findings, as

the presence of Davis in the Spanish press is tightly linked to her political activism and philosophical thought (developed in her non-fiction works), which have recently gained prominence in Spain in specific contexts. Both Walker and McMillan registered their peak of influence during the decade of 2000, with their mentions having decreased slightly in the decade of 2010. These are the only two cases where mentions decreased during the last decade studied, as mentions of Morrison and Davis rocketed during the 2010s and mentions of Angelou sustained a stable growth from 1990 to present date. Interestingly enough, both Walker and McMillan—together with Davis—are professionally active, while Angelou passed away in 2014 and Morrison in 2019.

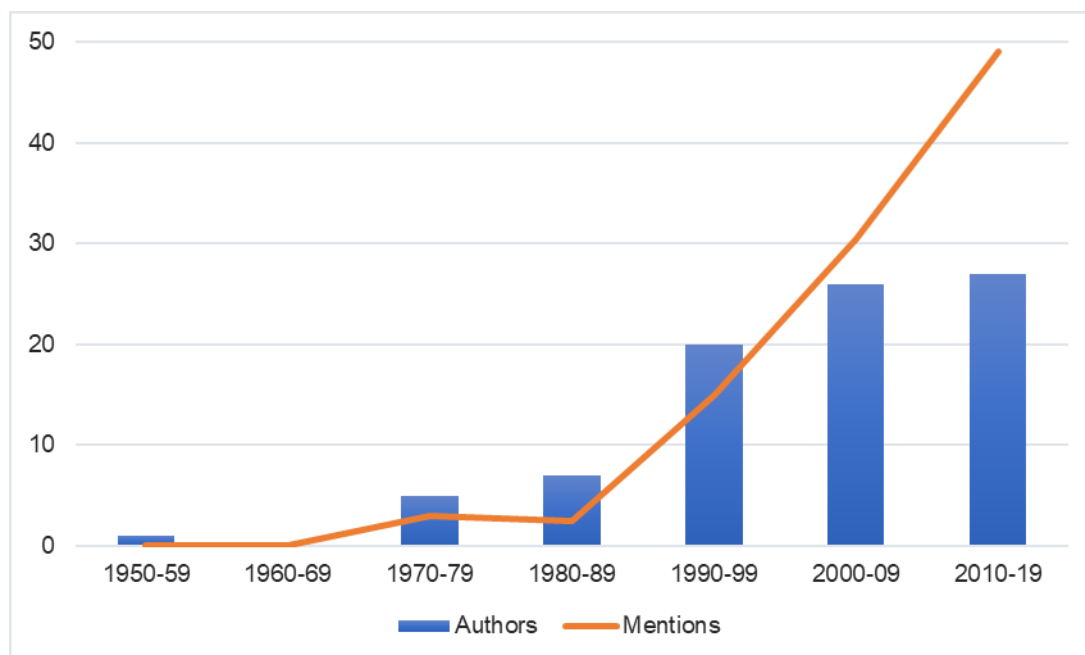
Another considerably important fact in our analysis is that, as illustrated in Table 10, the mentions of our five key authors alone represent nearly 90% of the total amount of mentions of African American women writers in the Spanish press, while the remaining 10% correspond to other 34 authors (15 authors were not mentioned in the sources used for this research). Even if numbers are comparatively small in relation to the five most mentioned authors, we may still observe a regular growth pattern in the fame of our cohort starting in the decade of 1980.

<b>Decade</b>	<b>Number of mentions (1950-2020)</b>
<b>1950-59</b>	2
<b>1960-69</b>	0
<b>1970-79</b>	3
<b>1980-89</b>	9
<b>1990-99</b>	96
<b>2000-09</b>	166
<b>2010-19</b>	562

**Table 10.** Mentions of other African American women authors per decade

Indeed, not only mentions have kept increasing until present date, but also the interest of reviewers and critics has diversified. This is illustrated in Figure 13, which displays the relation between the number of authors mentioned by decade and the total amount of mentions per hundred documents. Thus, these data evidence that after 1980 there was a considerable raise in the interest of reviewers in African American women writers as well as a diversification of interests inasmuch as numbers relative to the authors

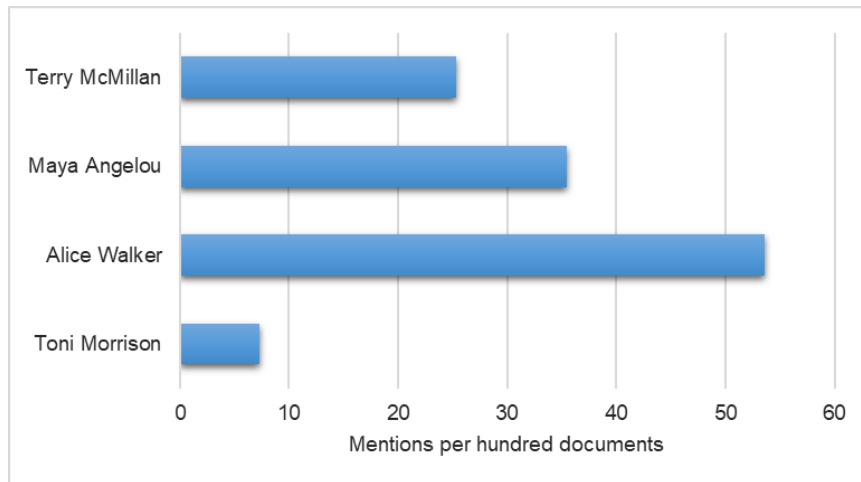
mentioned per decade also experienced a significant increase during the twenty-first century.



**Figure 13.** Mentioned authors and total number of mentions per hundred documents by decades (1950-2020)

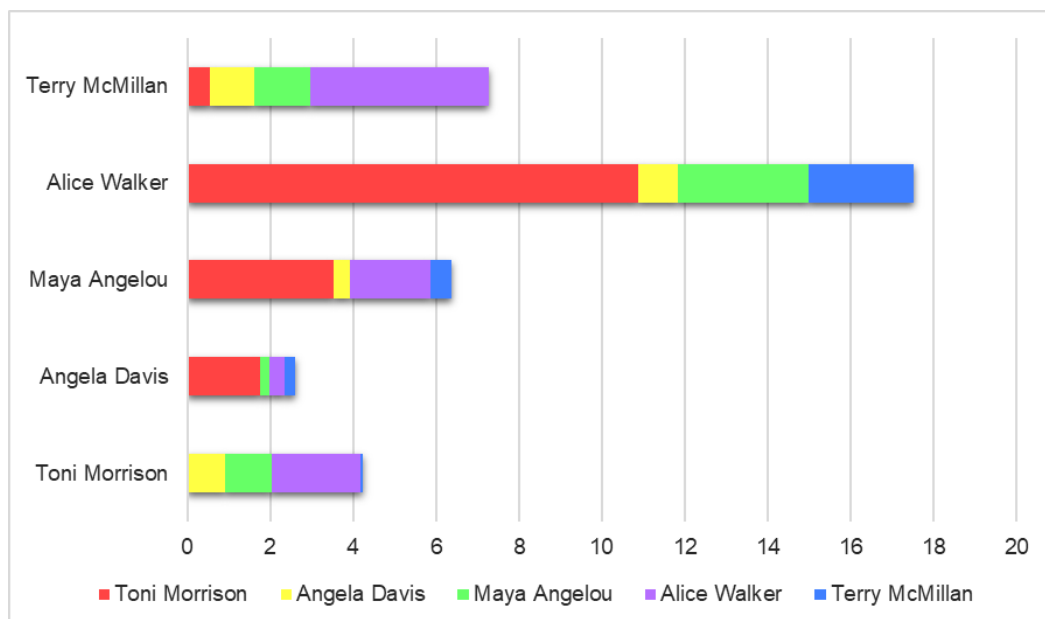
For an insight into the contexts of the mentions, I checked the relation between our five most cited authors and a number of key words, seeking to find contexts of comparison and correlations in the lexicon of Spanish reviewers and journalists. To begin with, considering that several key works by Morrison, Walker and McMillan have been adapted into the big screen, I searched for the names of the writers in relation to the names of the movie directors. The results show that while only 7,3% of the mentions of Morrison refer to the adaptation of her Nobel Prize winning novel *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme, numbers vary significantly in the case of McMillan and Walker. As for the former, roughly 30% of the mentions refer to the author in relation to the movie adaptation of *Esperando un respiro*, directed by Forrest Whitaker. In the case of Walker, the percentage of mentions relating the author to Spielberg's adaptation of *El color púrpura* rises to 53,6%. Likewise, while the adaptation of Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was never dubbed into Spanish, the multifaceted author featured in a number of cinematic productions that did premiere in the TC. Thus, I looked into her mentions in relation to her roles in movies and documentaries such as *Justicia poética* (1993), *Donde reside el amor* (1995), where she worked as an actress, and *La vida en el sur* (1998), which she directed. The mentions of Angelou in relation to these

movies amount to 35,45%. Thus, Figure 14 provides some insight into the influence of extra literary factors—in this case, cinematic adaptations—in the position of Morrison, Walker, McMillan and Angelou in the hierarchies of fame of Spanish reviewers.



**Figure 14.** Author mentions in relation to cinematic productions

Figure 15 provides further insight into the contexts of the mentions, as it considers the distribution of coincidences of the five most mentioned authors with one another. To calculate these numbers, data relative to the frequency of coincidences were compared to the total number of mentions of each author. So as to obtain comparable data, Figure 15 presents the coincidence percentage of each author pair in relation to the total number of mentions of each author.



**Figure 15.** Associations between authors of the same cohort

In this case, Davis is the writer displaying less coincidences, with only 2,59% altogether. Morrison follows Davis with a scarce 4,24% of the mentions associating her with other authors from the same cohort. While Angelou and McMillan also display a low percentage of associations (6,37% and 7,28%, respectively), numbers vary significantly in the case of Walker, whose percentage rises to nearly 18%. In this case, the fact that roughly 11% of the associations correspond to Toni Morrison is especially noteworthy. Actually, Morrison is also the writer to whom both Angelou and Davis are more readily associated, which provides information about her prominence in the minds of Spanish critics and reviewers as a referent within the cohort.

Likewise, I also traced the five writers who were most frequently associated with each of our five authors in the Spanish press. This study revealed additional differences. In the case of Alice Walker, the top five associations include Morrison, Angelou and McMillan as well as Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin. As for McMillan, while associations to other authors are scarce, the five most cited writers in relation to her also include Baldwin as well as Walker, Angelou, Davis and Morrison. While both Walker and McMillan are mostly associated to other African American women, in the cases of Davis, Angelou and, most notably, Morrison, some notable differences may be observed. As for the former, associations of her work to that of other African American writers are scarce, as she is more readily mentioned in connection to historical figures such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.<sup>69</sup> While associations to other authors are scarce, they include Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Assata Shakur, Alice Walker and Audre Lorde. Associations of Angelou include Morrison and Walker together with Baldwin as well as inaugural poets Robert Frost and Elizabeth Alexander. Finally, Morrison is more frequently associated to William Faulkner as well as Nobel Prize winning writers Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer, Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez.

These data not only provide evidence into some of the factors that have shaped the hierarchy of fame of African American women authors in the repertoires of Spanish reviewers, but they also confirm the assumption of different subsystems. To begin with, data have evidenced the influence of cinematic productions in the position of these authors in the hierarchy of fame of Spanish reviewers. This is particularly true for

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<sup>69</sup> While both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King have published non-fiction volumes, they are hereby considered historical figures instead of writers taking into account the fact that the context of the mentions relates to their political careers rather than their literary oeuvres.

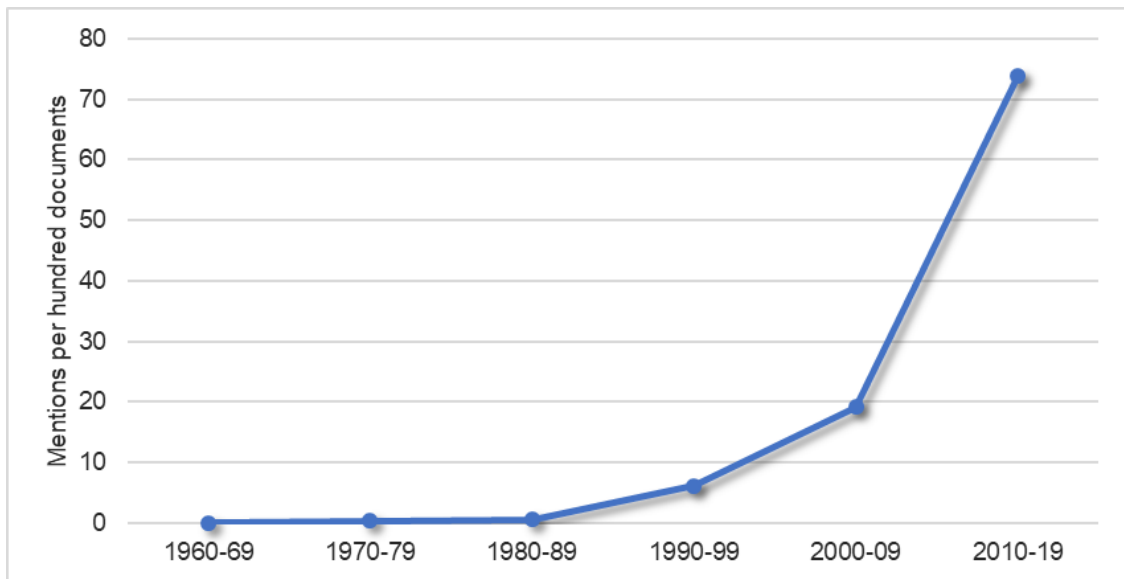
Walker, whose prominence in the repertoire of Spanish critics and reviewers, according to the data presented through this section, is mostly due to the success of the movie adaptation of *El color púrpura*. However, data relative to author associations have also shown that while Davis is the second most cited African American woman author, she belongs to a repertoire that is more readily activated when journalists write about sociopolitical affairs (where her non-fiction is frequently mentioned).

Likewise, numbers also reveal indications that Morrison may belong to different subsystems. On the one hand, I found evidence supporting the assumption that Morrison is taken for a model of African American women's literature, as the author's name is frequently mentioned in articles discussing the work of other African American female writers of the same cohort. On the other hand, a closer look into the authors to whom Morrison is most frequently associated indicates that the author also belongs to a repertoire that is more readily activated when critics write about international literature. Indeed, not only four out of the five writers to whom she is most frequently associated are from outside the United States, but also three of them are male authors. Therefore, we may conclude that Morrison has increasingly split into two referential models or repertoires: the African American woman writer in a repertoire of black female authors (which is shared by the authors in our cohort) and the international novelist in a repertoire of world literature defined by the recognition obtained through literary prizes.

## **2.2. Frames of Reference in Academic Criticism**

Moving on to the study of mentions in sources of academic reception, Figure 16 and Table 11 display the temporal distribution of the presence of African American women writers in Spanish scholarly works from 1960 to 2020. To begin with, it is worth noting that while the first mentions of African American women writers in journalistic sources were registered during the decade of 1950, this cohort did not start gaining some presence in academic criticism until the 1960s. However, while mentions during the decade of 1960 are virtually nonexistent, Figure 16 displays a gradual and stable growth during the subsequent years, even if it was in the decade of 2010 when mentions rose most significantly. Indeed, the past decade alone gathered nearly 75% of the mentions

of African American women in scholarly works in the TC. As illustrated by Table 11, this amounts to 7.640 mentions out of a total of 10.315.



**Figure 16.** Mentions in academic criticism per hundred documents by decades (1960-2020)

<b>Decades</b>	<b>Absolute freq.</b>	<b>Relative freq.</b>	<b>Percent freq.</b>
<b>1960-69</b>	2	0,00	0,02
<b>1970-79</b>	32	0,00	0,31
<b>1980-89</b>	56	0,01	0,54
<b>1990-99</b>	636	0,06	6,15
<b>2000-09</b>	1.978	0,19	19,12
<b>2010-19</b>	7.640	0,74	73,86

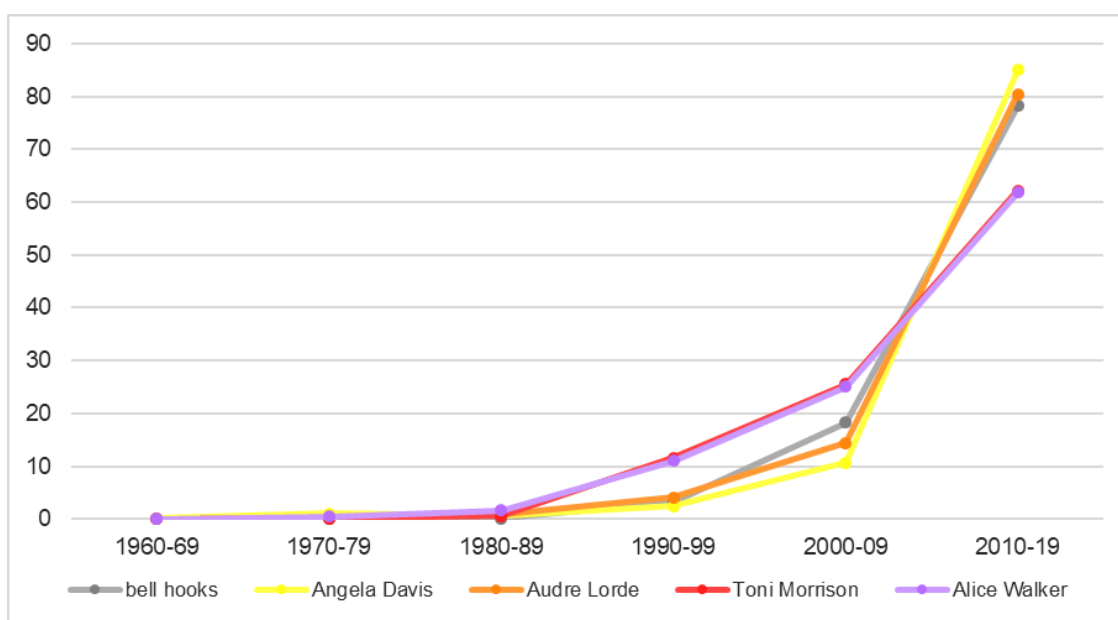
**Table 11.** Mentions in academic criticism per hundred documents by decades (1960-2020)

Table 12 offers an overview of the mentions received by the five most cited authors to date. Considering the hierarchy of fame established in journalistic criticism, some divergences can be spotted. To begin with, bell hooks, who was not included in the five most mentioned authors in press media, tops the list relative to academic sources. Likewise, Audre Lorde, who did not feature the aforementioned list either, occupies the third position in this hierarchy. Also worthy of mention is the fact that Morrison occupies the fourth position in the list, whereas she was the most mentioned author in journalistic criticism.

Author	Number of mentions (1960-2020)
<b>bell hooks</b>	2.362
<b>Angela Davis</b>	1.779
<b>Audre Lorde</b>	1.562
<b>Toni Morrison</b>	1.494
<b>Alice Walker</b>	723

**Table 12.** Mentions of the five most cited African American women authors in academic criticism

To gain more insight into these results, Figure 17 presents the chronological distribution of the mentions by decades per hundred documents, starting in 1960.



**Figure 17.** Mentions of five most cited authors per thousand documents by decades (1960 - 2020)

As Figure 17 reveals, there are considerable regularities and parallelisms in the hierarchies of fame concerning our five key authors. In this case, especially significant is the fact that during the years comprised between 1980 and 2009 Walker and Morrison were the most cited African American women authors in academic publications in Spain, accumulating around 38% of their mentions each. However, while these two authors have continued to maintain their prominence in the repertoire of Spanish scholars during the past decade, mention count from 2010 to 2019 reveals that hooks, Davis and Lorde have recently surpassed them.



A quick comparison between the results displayed in Figure 12 and Figure 17 regarding the distribution of mentions of the five most cited authors in journalistic and academic criticism (respectively) reveals significant differences both in the popularity growth rate of the authors as well as in the frequency distribution of mentions per decades. For instance, in the case of Morrison, during the decade of 2010 press sources compiled less than 20% of the mentions of the author against the nearly 60% registered in academic works. A similar pattern occurred with Davis and, most significantly, Walker. So as to bring more light into this matter, Table 13 displays numbers relative to the mentions of other African American women writers per decade.

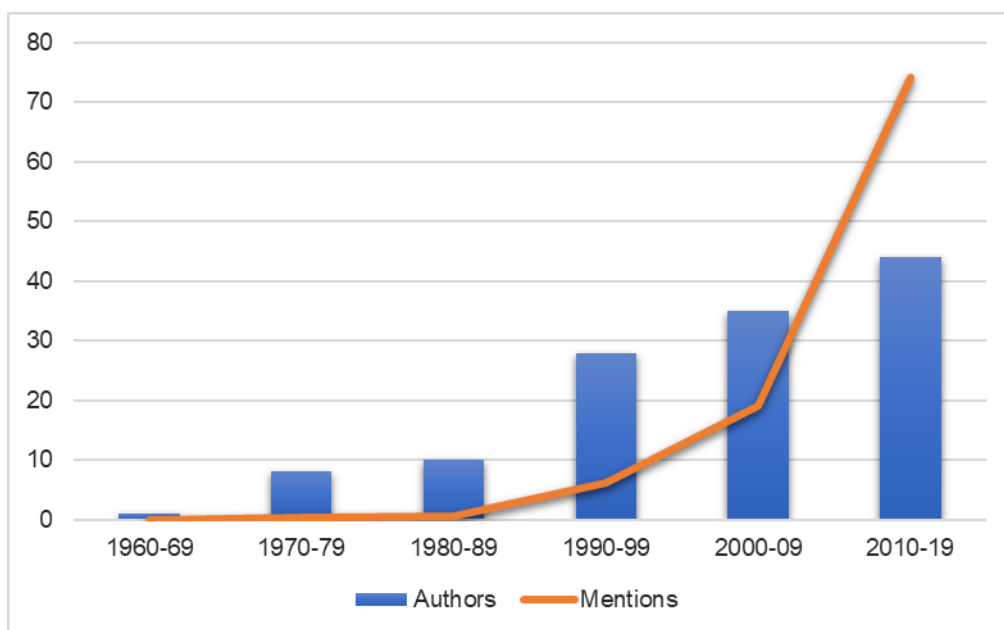
<b>Decade</b>	<b>Number of mentions (1960-2020)</b>
<b>1960-69</b>	0
<b>1970-79</b>	5
<b>1980-89</b>	7
<b>1990-99</b>	195
<b>2000-09</b>	567
<b>2010-19</b>	1621

**Table 13.** Mentions of other African American women authors per decade

As Table 13 illustrates, the distribution of mentions of other black women authors across decades parallels that of our five most mentioned writers, who slowly started to gain prominence during the 1990s and peaked in the 2010s. Also significant is the fact that mentions of other authors represent roughly 23% of the total mention count—corresponding to 40 authors—, while mentions of our five key authors amount to nearly 77%. While the relative frequency of mentions of other authors is considerably low, it is still higher than in the case of journalistic criticism, where the percentage was a scarce 10%. Likewise, Table 13 also reveals a diversification of interests in Spanish academia, as the mentions of other black women writers have increased exponentially since the 1980s.

In relation to this, Figure 18 illustrates the relation between the number of authors mentioned by decade and the total amount of author mentions per hundred documents. Thus, these data evidence that after 1980 there was a considerable raise in the interest of Spanish scholars in African American women writers, as not only the mentions

experienced a gradual growth, but also the number of authors mentioned per decade increased considerably. In relation to this, while the growth in the number of authors mentioned per decade has remained stable during the past three decades with a growth rate of approximately 10%, numbers relative to mentions per decade peaked during the 2010s, which accumulated around 75% of the total amount of mentions. Likewise, it should also be noted that the two first decades of the twenty-first century alone gathered more than 90% of the mentions of African American women writers in Spanish academia.

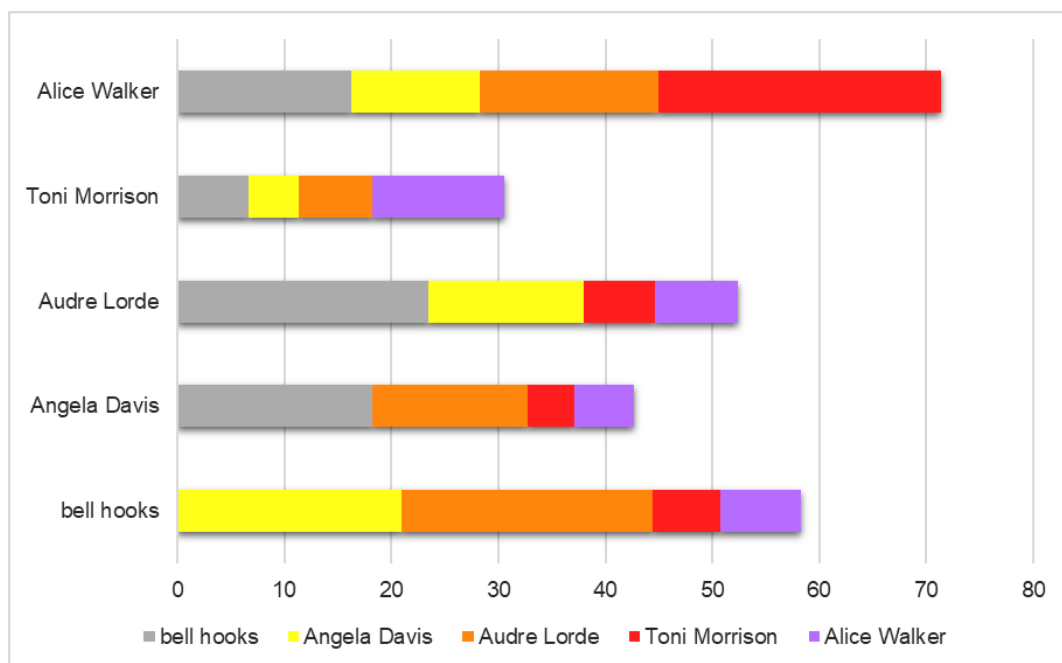


**Figure 18.** Mentioned authors and total number of mentions per hundred documents by decades (1960-2020)

In turn, these data can also be related to the increasing popularity of authors such as Audre Lorde or bell hooks, as their works are deeply rooted in sociopolitical theories that have recently started to gain prominence and consideration in the Humanities—not only in Spain, but also at a European and international level—, such as intersectional feminist theory and queer theory.

For further insight into the contexts of the mentions in Spanish academic sources, I repeated the same search procedure that was conducted in relation to journalistic criticism, consisting in checking the relation between our five most cited authors and a number of key words. As the names of Morrison and Walker feature among the five most cited authors in academic criticism, it seemed reasonable to look for correlations

with the names of the directors of the cinematic adaptations of their works, seeking to look into the possible influence of this extra literary phenomenon in their pivotal position in the repertoire of Spanish scholars. Results in relation to this search are revealing. As for the case of Morrison, only 16 documents relate the author to the cinematic adaptation of *Beloved*—only 1% of her mentions—, while in the case of Walker and Spielberg, 334 documents correlate the two authors, corresponding to 46% of the total amount of mentions of Walker. This evidences the fact that while the influence of cinematic adaptations in Morrison’s position in the hierarchy of fame of Spanish scholars is virtually none, the adaptation of *The Color Purple* has played a key role in consolidating Walker’s position as a reference author in the repertoire of critics in the TC.



**Figure 19.** Associations between authors of the same cohort

Again, so as to delve into the contexts of the mentions, Figure 19 considers the distribution of coincidences of the five most mentioned authors with one another. A general overview of the graph reveals that a high proportion of the consulted academic documents make connections between authors of the same cohort. Likewise, as occurred in journalistic criticism, Walker is the author with the highest rate of mention coincidences, Morrison being the writer with whom she is mostly associated. However, the graph also shows that the Nobel Prize winner is not frequently associated with neither Lorde, hooks or Davis. Also significant is the fact that the proportion of

associations of Lorde with hooks in relation to each authors' mentions is very similar at around 20%, while hooks is also frequently associated with Davis. As for the latter, the percentage of connections with other authors is significantly higher than it was in journalistic criticism, with around 42%, most of which are equally distributed between hooks and Lorde.

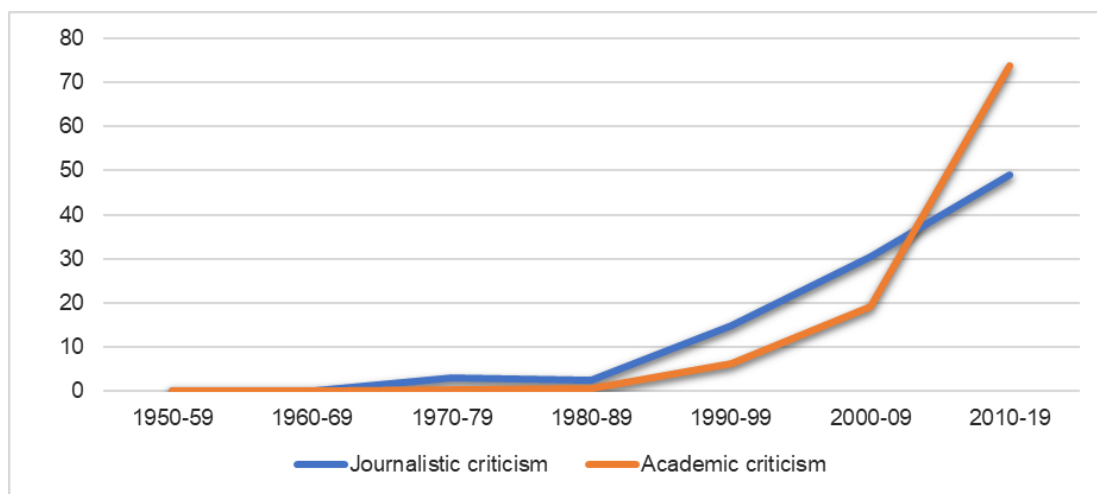
As regards journalistic criticism, I also looked for the five writers who were most frequently associated with each of our five key authors. To begin with, 4 out of 5 of the most cited authors alongside hooks and Lorde coincide, namely Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Patricia Hill Collins and Gayatri Spivak. Significantly enough, the fifth most frequently mentioned author in relation to these writers is Lorde in the case of hooks and hooks in the case of Lorde. Likewise, the top connections with Davis also include Butler, Beauvoir and Hill Collins, as well as Lorde and hooks. What this study reveals is that the associations of writers whose mentions have peaked during the past ten years bear strong connections to the fields of feminist and queer theory as well as intersectional and postcolonial theory. In the case of Walker, the top five authors most frequently related to her include Morrison, Lorde, hooks, Barbara Christian and Zora Neale Hurston. Finally, Morrison's top coincidences are Gabriel García Márquez, William Shakespeare, Barbara Christian, Alice Walker and William Faulkner. As may be seen, the associations activated in the cases of Morrison and Walker seem to be closer to the area of literary studies than social theory. Particularly, the most frequent connections with Morrison bring to the fore once again her association to male and female writers of international prestige—note that she is the only author readily associated to male writers—who are usually included in the canon of universal literature.

The data examined through this section provide evidence of the existence of different subsystems for our cohort of authors. To begin with, numbers have evidenced the influence of factors such as cinematic adaptations and association with other prominent writers in the position of authors such as Walker within the hierarchy of fame of this cohort in Spanish academia. However, the same numbers have also illustrated that the position of writers such as Morrison is hardly linked to these extra literary factors, as the proportion of connections to other black women authors of her cohort and to the adaptation of her Nobel Prize winning novel were considerably low. However, the study of the writers to whom Morrison is most frequently associated revealed that, in the case

of academic criticism, while the author’s role as a pivotal African American woman writer is long established and acknowledged, she has also progressively transitioned into a repertoire that is more readily activated when critics write about world literature.

Likewise, data have also shed light into the latest developments and trends in the fields of humanities and social sciences, as evidenced by the recently acquired prominence of writers such as Davis, and most notably, Lorde and hooks. Indeed, data relative to the distribution of their mentions and their association with other authors revealed the growing interest of Spanish academia in black women writers in relation to intersectional feminisms, queer theory and postcolonial theory. Thus, this shift has prompted the prominence of authors that belong to a repertoire that is more readily activated in connection to the aforementioned fields of study.

To conclude, Figure 20 presents the comparison between the distribution of author mentions in journalistic and academic criticism across decades (from 1950 to 2020). As might be observed, there is clear evidence of the increasing interest in this cohort of writers in the TC. However, while the development of mention rate in journalistic sources has remained steady since the 1980s, the growth in the case of academic sources has been steep since the 2000s and in particular, during the past decade. Anyhow, the proliferation not only of mentions, but also of the number of authors mentioned during the last decades confirms the alignment of both journalistic and academic criticism with recent developments concerning transnational sociopolitics which inevitably shape and are shaped by literature and literary criticism.

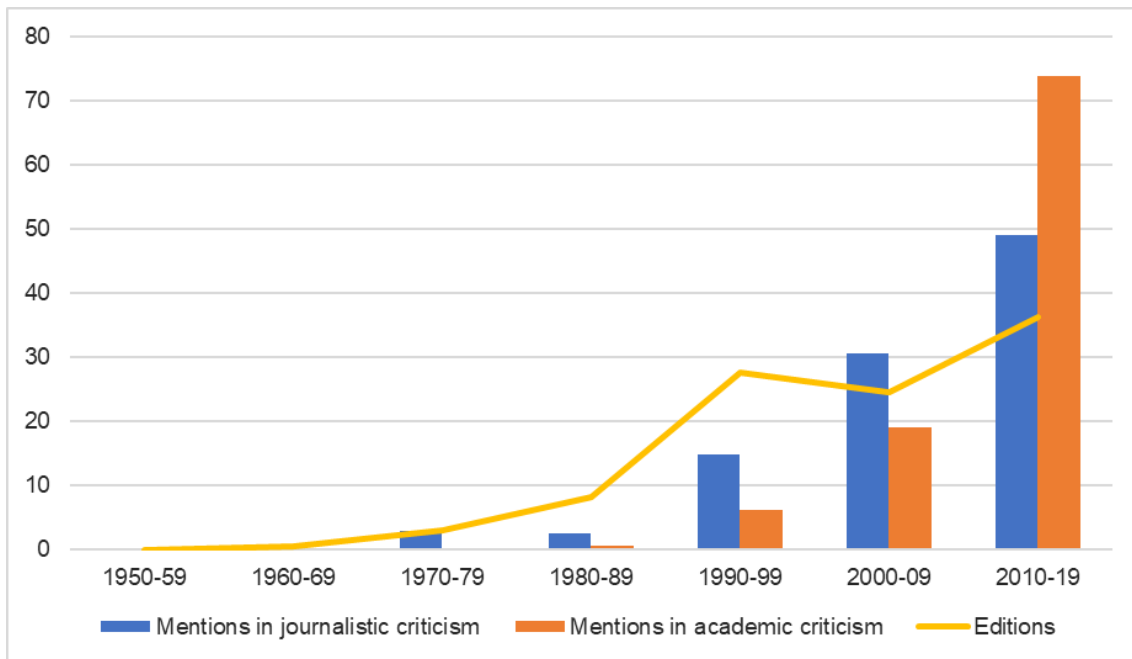


**Figure 20.** Mentions in journalistic and academic criticism per hundred documents per decade (1960-2019)

In this regard, further research into this topic may provide more insight into the influence of academic criticism in the increasing prominence of some authors in mainstream media. For instance, the amount of non-fiction works written by African American women that have been reviewed or advertised in the Spanish press has dramatically increased during the last decade, and authors such as Lorde or hooks, who are already highly considered in academia, are progressively gaining prominence in terms of mentions in press media.

Furthermore, Figure 21 provides further insight into the relation between the publication of editions of translated works by African American women writers and the mentions of these authors in journalistic and academic sources per decades. The distribution of the publication of editions across decades looks somehow irregular in comparison to the growth of mentions in both academic and journalistic sources, which has been more stable despite the difference in the distribution of the proportions for each type of criticism. However, the peak of mentions and editions still coincides in the decade of 2010, even if numbers relative to the proportion of mentions in scholarly works are significantly higher than mentions in press media and editions.

Also relevant is the fact that the decade of 1990 gathered a significant increase both in the publication of editions as well as in the mentions in journalistic criticism (which grew from roughly 2,5% to 15%). As will be discussed in the following chapter, this is the decade that saw the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Morrison, the premiere of a number of cinematic adaptations of works by black women writers (such as *Esperando un respiro* or *Precious*) as well as the expansion of postcolonial and non-Western literatures towards the end of the decade. All these factors played a key role in the dissemination of African American women's literature in the TC, thus prompting the circulation of their works in translation as well as increasing their popularity in the mental lexicon of Spanish reviewers.



**Figure 21.** Percent proportion of editions, mentions in journalistic criticism and mentions in academic criticism per decades (1950-2020)

However, the study presented through this section only opens the door for further research into the possible empirical applications of Rosengren’s methodology, which, in this case, is complemented with the qualitative study of the documents computed earlier in this chapter. It still remains to broaden the range of observations and to find out what other subsystems play a role, how they interact, and, in the words of Andringa (2006, 562), “how they relate to changes in society at large”. This would require more case studies of foreign and national, major and minor writers but also of the role of mediators such as publishers, critics, and translators and, of course, the way in which these agents interact with and influence one another. According to Andringa (2006, 562), the coordination and interconnection of various studies of this nature will develop into a “comprehensive theoretical model of the dynamics of change”.





### 3. CRITICAL DISCOURSE: CHANGING VALUES AND INTERESTS

If I could write this in fire, I would write this in fire.  
(Cliff 2008, 9)

It was already noted that the reception of a foreign literature in a target culture does not necessarily start with its translation. Instead, processes of reception take place in a number of different ways which usually bear a certain connection or present themselves intertwined. Following this line of thought, this chapter will present a study of the Spanish critical reception of African American women's literature, focusing on press reviews and content published in specialized magazines and academic journals as well as other print and audiovisual sources. Inevitably and necessarily, this section will also consider relevant facts about the history of translation of this literature in Spain, drawing from the idea that the elements of analysis tackled in previous chapters can be better interpreted when supplemented by a detailed qualitative analysis.

I have already studied the conditions of production and formation of the literary tradition of African American women's literature in the United States. However, it cannot be assumed that the context of production of the STs will entirely determine the meanings and interpretations that this literature may acquire when received by other nations or in different languages. As Bourdieu (2002, 4) argued, the circulation of texts towards literary polysystems different from the source follows a different dynamic, given that they tend to circulate without their SC in foreign societies.

Taking these premises as a starting point, this chapter studies the reception of African American women's literature in Spain during the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century. However, the literature that I set out to examine is so culturally and politically imbricated that its reception in any target culture can hardly be alienated from the SC and its original conditions of production. Therefore, this research delves into the transformation of meaning and the changing values resulting from the dialogue between the SC and the TC in relation to the set of texts which are the object of my study.

In her research on the reception of Spanish American fiction in West Germany (1994), Meg Brown finds that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors can affect the reception of a certain literature by a foreign culture. This idea is reinforced by Brian Nelson and Brigit Maher in *Perspectives on Literature and Translation: Creation, Circulation, Reception*:

While the appeal of a translated work's setting, content, themes and characters will always be important, the study of reception must also take into account the effects of such external factors as critical reception, the awarding of major prizes, the prominent presence of a given author or national literature at international trade fairs and a receiving culture's exposure to a nuanced view of a region's political and cultural life. (2013, 7)

These "external factors" are precisely the key to begin to understand how translated African American women's literature has been received in Spain.

Also, the interactions studied in this chapter occur both at the level of popular culture and the general reading public (printed press and mainstream multimedia sources) as well as intellectual circles (specialized magazines, scholarly work and university curricula). These elements of reception will be studied separately, taking as a starting point the notion that the working mechanisms governing both spheres function differently and independently from one another. Anyhow, the sections of this chapter have been arranged primarily following chronological criteria, which will allow me to pay special attention to key moments in the history of reception of black American women's literature in Spain. In this context, before proceeding with the first section of the chapter, a general overview of the introduction and evolution of English and American Studies in Spain will be provided. These preliminary notes are fundamental to understand processes of literary reception in the local context.

In most European countries, the discipline of English Studies emerged during the decades of 1920 and 1930, whereas in Spain English Philology came into being during the 1950s as a branch of the university degree in Modern Philology (Monterrey 2003, 63). This delay was due to the political situation of the country during the first half of the twentieth century, which was marked by circumstances "too well-known to require mention here", as professor Javier Coy phrased it in his fundamental 1975 contribution "American Studies in Spain" (18). Thus, according to most experts in the subject, the

fifties were the decade that saw a significant change regarding the position of American Studies in the country.

In 1952, during a phase of relative cultural openness, the first Department of English Studies was established at the University of Salamanca, and in 1954 the Universities of Madrid and Barcelona also created their own Departments of English Studies. In the three cases, American Studies had some representation in official curricula, even if its presence in the degree was still meagre (Coy 1975, 18-19). However, the focus of the degree was explicitly directed towards training students in modern languages, interpreting and translation (Monterrey 2003, 64-65),<sup>70</sup> rather than cultural or literary studies. In any event, by the end of the sixties, almost all Spanish universities had their own English Studies departments. In the final remarks of his review of American Studies in Spain, professor Coy expresses a pessimistic view of the future of the discipline, concluding that “if no jobs are available after graduating in English with a doctoral thesis on an American Studies subject, then no graduates will be attracted to the field. If no scholars are devoted to the field, then no development is possible” (1975, 24).

However, the first lines of Enrique García Díez’s contribution to *American Studies International* in 1987 are an indicator of the evolution that was taking place in the field: “The Spanish University has begun to take an interest in American Studies at a time when those studies are engaged in a profound and radical reappraisal of their ideological and methodological foundations” (1987, 85). In his paper, García Díez takes on Coy’s work from a more optimistic stance, citing various factors that were fostering the consolidation of the field in Spanish academia, namely the university reform law (LRU) and the creation of an American Studies Association in Spain (AEDEAN), together with other initiatives undertaken by several universities to establish groups fully or partially devoted to American Studies (García Díez 1987, 86-87).

Looking at the mid decades of the twentieth century, I shall highlight the work of journals such as *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, *Anglo-American Studies* and most prominently, *Atlantis*, the journal of AEDEAN, in publishing research on American Studies in Spain. In his review, García Díez cites various full-length works

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<sup>70</sup> Note here that the Translation and Interpreting independent degree would not begin to be implemented until the decade of 1970, and only in Barcelona, Madrid and Granada.

published by Spanish scholars on American authors during this period, including Ernest Hemingway, Arthur Miller, John Barth, Walt Whitman, William Faulkner, Henry James, J.D. Salinger, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Benjamin Franklin; all of them part of a traditional white male canon. Only towards the end of the paper, a translation of Emily Dickinson's poetry is mentioned, even though no scholarly work on the poet or on other women authors is referenced.

In her 1994 review of recent trends in American Studies in Spain, Sylvia L. Hilton picks up on García Díez's optimistic stance about the status of the discipline. To support her view, she enumerates a series of indicators of the gradual development of the field in the country:

the general awareness of the pervasive influence of the United States on countless aspects of Spanish life, [...] the commendable efforts of scholars who are actively seeking the comparative, layered, or textured views of American social and cultural realities, [...] the creation in 1987 of a Master's degree in American Studies at the University of Alcalá de Henares, [...] the founding of two new journals dedicated to North American Studies and Canadian Studies (*Revista Española de Estudios Norteamericanos*, 1989 and *Revista Española de Estudios Canadienses*, 1992) and the project to create a new Spanish Association for the Study of the United States. (42)

Hilton's contribution is significantly complemented by a bibliographical compilation of "humanities studies of the Americas published in Spain" (41). This list includes 375 items related to American language and literature, among which the first studies on African American and African American women's literature can already be found. These early research works were carried out by scholars who would later become referent figures in this research area. Their contributions from this period will be examined in the forthcoming sections of this chapter.

As for the twenty-first century, Spanish academia has witnessed a proliferation of scholarship on American Studies, leading to consequent divisions along various disciplinary lines among which Mar Gallego Durán emphasizes the crucial impact of the institutionalization of Black Studies "for developing a multicultural agenda, both in

specialized research and in new curricular trends for many Spanish scholars in recent times” (2016, 153).

Of special influence to Black Studies in Spain was Paul Gilroy’s paradigm of the Black Atlantic (1993). This innovative perspective allowed Spanish scholars at the time to conduct research on the field of Black Studies in the larger framework of international and transnational studies:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol. [...] Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs. (Gilroy 1993, 4)

According to Gallego Durán, even if Gilroy’s paradigm continues to be used as a framework for contemporary research in Spain, gender-oriented perspectives have also defined—and continue to do so—scholarly work on the subject, namely Black Feminism, Black Masculinity Studies and intersectionality theories (2016, 154).

Following the survey conducted by Gallego Durán, Spanish scholars working in the field of Black Studies agree that there has been a shift of focus from African American literature to a wider area of study involving diasporic identities and literatures (2016, 155). According to Ana María Fraile Marcos, one of the participants in Gallego Durán’s survey, “Spanish scholars have participated actively and passionately in the shift toward diaspora paradigms in the last decades” (Fraile Marcos in Gallego Durán 2016, 155). Justine Tally, another participant of the survey, adds to this stance by drawing attention to the 1995 Collegium for African American Research (CAAR) conference held in Tenerife, which was one of the first attempts by Spanish scholars at initiating an “ever-expanding transnational dialogue with American scholars” (Tally in Gallego Durán 2016, 155). However, according to Gallego Durán’s research, even if African American studies are relatively well-established in official programs in the Humanities at under-graduate and graduate levels, there is a current need to incorporate more courses tackling the literatures of the African diaspora and diasporic identities (2016, 156-57).

All in all, despite ongoing efforts to institutionalize and contribute to Black Studies and particularly, African American Studies, the evolution of the field in the country has been irregular and remains limited up to date. Indeed, while Gallego Durán considers that the contribution of Spanish scholars to Black Studies has been significant, she also identifies several problems limiting a further development of the discipline:

some colleagues are not even familiar with other researchers' contributions to Black Studies as a whole, or prefer to cite African and African American scholars rather than Spanish ones ([Olga] Barrios). [Isabel] Soto also observes the lack of acknowledgement of Spanish scholars and the way in which the teaching and administrative loads of University teachers in Spain do not encourage sustained research. (2016, 155)

Even if the introduction of American Studies in Spain was delayed by the political circumstances of the country, the field has been evolving ever since the mid-twentieth century and, especially in recent years, it has diversified into multiple lines of research. As for African American Studies, research on this field seems to be the basis from which contemporary Black Studies are drawing. According to research on the subject, Spanish scholars in the discipline have traditionally shown a keen interest in gender-oriented approaches to the field. Their work will be reviewed throughout this chapter.

### **3.1. Early Reception**

In his 1931 article for graphic newspaper *Ahora* entitled “The Human Night” [La noche humana] José Francés discusses the necessity to add to Spanish literary catalogues translations of works that warn us about “the awakening of a great human night” [el despertar de esa gran noche humana] and “the black intelligence” [la inteligencia negra] (21). However, the truth is that the scarce mentions of African American culture in the Spanish printed press during the first half of the twentieth century mostly refer to black music, jazz and “folklore”. Indeed, after the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939, the 1938 Press Law prevailed, which implied total control of journalistic work in the country (Yanes 2005, n. p.) This law would be in force for twenty-eight years, during which

different stages can be identified. According to Alejandro Pizarroso (1989, 231) and Rafael Yanes (2005, n. p.) even if censorship was intransigent at the end of the war, since the beginning of the sixties a relative tolerance prevailed, which would culminate in the new Press Law of 1966. Therefore, considering the severe cultural repression that dominated the country during the first half of the twentieth century, it is only expectable that the socio-political and cultural developments of the black population in the United States were hardly reported until the second half of the century. A symptom of this is, among others, the fact that no Spanish newspaper, magazine or journal reported the first African American winner of the Pulitzer Prize in the United States. This refers to Gwendolyn Brooks, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1950, even if her name did not appear in the Spanish press until 1985, with the event of her being appointed Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. However, even with the generalized lack of knowledge about this culture during the first half of the century, we can still find several references to black male American authors during the period, namely Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer or W.E.B Du Bois.<sup>71</sup>

During the decade of 1960, with the onset of a new period of relative cultural openness, the Spanish press started to echo events related to the rise of the Black Power movement in the United States, as the political and social fight of black Americans achieved world recognition. In Spain, some media identified this event as “the great emancipation movement that has been stirring the world for the last quarter of a century” [el gran movimiento emancipatorio que ha conmovido al mundo durante el último cuarto de siglo] (Zuñiga 1966, 14). Also, in the 1961 edition of *Revista de estudios políticos*, Salustiano del Campo and Juan Díez published a paper examining the situation of the black American people entitled “The Black American” [El negro americano]. The report studied historical, social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the life of black people in the United States. Of special interest here is the section devoted to culture, which opened after the following lines:

El campo de la producción cultural, [...] es, sin duda, uno de los que mejor pueden servirnos para apreciar el progreso cada vez mayor de los negros en todos los ámbitos. Al principio se trataba de genios aislados, que alcanzaron

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<sup>71</sup> See Francés (1931, 21); Torre (1936, 5), “Ventana del mundo” (*Heraldo de Madrid* 1932, 9) and “Poesía negra” (*Ritmo y melodía* 1947, 4) among others.

celebridad porque eran precisamente casos excepcionales. [...] los negros que hoy triunfan en estas actividades lo hacen no porque sean de ‘una raza inferior’, sino porque verdaderamente valen, independientemente de su color. Los que leían los versos de una Phyllis Wheatley lo hacían posiblemente más por su color que por el valor real de sus creaciones; por el contrario, los que hoy escuchan a Marian Anderson lo hacen por su voz y no por su raza o color. (197)<sup>72</sup>

Among the early prominent figures of black literature, the authors cite Frederick Douglass, Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Charles W. Chesnutt, even if they considered Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois the two greatest writers and leaders of the period. The article also referred to the influence of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) upon writers such as Ann Petry and Chester Himes, among others, as well as it cited laureate authors such as Lorraine Hansberry (“Hansbury” in the original), who had won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for *A Raisin in the Sun* and Gwendolyn Brooks, Pulitzer Prize winner who was considered “a great poet” by the authors. Del Campo and Díez also praised the fact that some black authors refused to use the racial conflict as the main trope of their works, citing William Motley’s *Knock on Any Door* (1947) and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). The writers also examined other fields where black culture had left its imprint, such as music and painting and concluded the section by stating: “All this proves that blacks are capable of standing out in any field and that they are neither biologically nor intellectually inferior to whites, just like Otto Khneberg’s classic sociological study of black intelligence has conclusively shown” (Campo and Díez 1961, 200).<sup>73</sup> Despite the significance of the authors’ interest in the subject matter of their study and the remarkability of their work to introduce black culture in the Spanish academia, this last remark gives some insight

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<sup>72</sup> “Cultural production [...] is certainly one of the fields that can best serve us to appreciate the growing progress of black people in all areas. At the beginning, these were isolated geniuses, who became famous because they were precisely exceptional cases. [...] blacks who succeed in these activities today do so not because they are “an inferior race” but because they are truly talented, regardless of their color. Possibly, those who read the verses of a Phyllis Wheatley did so because of her color rather than for the real value of her creations; in contrast, those who listen to Marian Anderson today do so because of her voice and not for her race or color.”

<sup>73</sup> “Todo ello prueba que el negro es capaz de destacar en cualquier campo y que no es ni biológica ni intelectualmente inferior al blanco, según ha demostrado terminantemente—por otra parte—el estudio sociológico clásico de Otto Khneberg sobre la inteligencia de los negros.”



about common beliefs and the dominant ideology in relation to black literature and culture in the TC during the Franco regime.

It was precisely within this time period that audiences could access a Spanish translation of a work written by an African American woman for the first time. It was Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966), translated as *Jubileo* (1968) by Mercedes A. Cuenca and published in hardcover by Plaza y Janés. Information obtained from the censorship reports of books published in Spain during the period under examination, which are available at the State's General Administration in Alcalá de Henares, reveals that the printing of the novel was authorized by the Spanish Ministry of Information and Tourism. The report stated that Walker's novel combined the themes explored in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone with the Wind*, even if it contended that the literary quality of these two texts was superior to *Jubilee*'s.

Anyhow, the decision to publish Walker's work in translation may have been originated or fostered by the recognition it had received in France. Indeed, even if after the Civil War Spain's publishing sector was trying to gain autonomy in the European framework, France was still a cultural referent for the country or, following Pascale Casanova's wording, "The World Republic of Letters" (2004). Actually, initial advertisements of the novel in *La Vanguardia* echoed the sales success in the neighboring country:

Veinticinco libros de la temporada francesa han doblado el cabo de los cien mil ejemplares este verano. [...] Entre los de autor extranjero lleva la palma *Jubilee*, especie de *Lo que el viento se llevó*, por Margaret Walker, que con sus 100.000 ejemplares aventaja en 20.000 a la esperada traducción de *Sexus*, primer postigo del tríptico autobiográfico de Henry Miller. (*La Vanguardia* 1969, 14)<sup>74 75</sup>

The novel was also publicized in *ABC* under the headline "Bookstore Window: Latest News" [Escaparate de librería: Últimas novedades] (1968, 29) and in *La Vanguardia* as "the Black-American version of *Gone with the Wind*" [la versión negro-americana de *Lo*

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<sup>74</sup> "Twenty-five books from the French season have doubled the hundred thousand copies this summer. [...] Among those by foreign authors is *Jubilee*, a kind of *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Walker which, with its 100.000 copies, outnumbered by 20.000 the expected translation of *Sexus*, the first leaflet of Henry Miller's autobiographical triptych."

<sup>75</sup> Following *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2017), for unsigned newspaper articles the title of the newspaper stands in place of the author both in in-text citations and in the bibliographical references.

*que el viento se llevó*] (*La Vanguardia* 1968a, 18). A general strategy adopted by the press to draw the audience's attention towards the novel was to compare it with other American works that had been successful in Spain, such as *Lo que el viento se llevó* (*La Vanguardia* 1968a, 18; *La Vanguardia* 1968b, 58 and *La Vanguardia* 1969, 14). In the review published in *La Vanguardia* (1968b, 58), the transcendence of the novel and the veracity of its plot were treated as pivotal elements and Walker was praised for her work compiling historical data and documenting personal testimonies. The review finished with the conclusion that the novel was a good introduction for European readers to the historical landscape of the United States. *Jubileo* was reprinted by Plaza y Janés in 1972 and in 1976 a paperback edition of the novel was published, even though no mentions to the volume or the author could be found on the printed press during these years.

At this point, we should consider the fact that Walker was a prominent author in the SC mostly because of her work as a poet, especially thanks to the volume *For my People* (1942), which was never translated into Spanish. Actually, the only verses written by her that can be read in the TL up to date are the ones opening the *The Black Power Revolt* (1968), a collection of essays about blackness and the black power edited by Floyd B. Barbour and translated as *La revuelta del poder negro* by Miguel Montaner (1969). As was discussed in Chapter 1, the predominant literary genre in Spanish translations in the narrative, so this could be one possible explanation for the fact that Walker's only novel is also the only work written by her that has circulated in Spain.

### **3.2. The Literary is Political: Angela Davis and the Black Power Movement**

Even if the translation of Walker's novel was a landmark event for the history of African American women's literature in Spain, Spanish audiences were more interested in the contemporary social protest of black America and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s at that time. In this context, writer and political activist Angela Davis became a prominent figure in the Spanish printed press, especially during the summer of 1970, when she was listed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List. Even though none of her works had been published in Spain yet, the country's mass media followed and

reported Davis's persecution until she was finally imprisoned in October of the same year. Reports of her arrest in the Spanish media followed two different lines: On the one hand, a number of local newspapers, namely *Eco de Canarias* (1970, 2), *Proa* (1970, 3) and *Diario de Las Palmas* (1970, 4) reported Davis's arrest after she was accused of providing several weapons used during the attack in a courtroom in Marin County, California. Likewise, the news in *La Vanguardia* (*La Vanguardia* 1970, 18) followed the same informative line: "Last night the FBI announced the arrest of Angela Yvonne Davis in connection with an attempted assault in a California jail where a judge and two prisoners were killed".<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, *ABC* (1970, 39), *Diario de Avisos* (1970, 3), *¡Hola!* (1970, 27) and most prominently, *La Nueva España* (1970a, 3; 1970b, 1; 1970c, 2; 1970d, 23), published more aggressive reports of the event, with headlines such as "TERRORIST ANGELA DAVIS UNDER ARREST IN NEW YORK" [LA TERRORISTA ANGELA DAVIS, DETENIDA EN NUEVA YORK] (*¡Hola!* 1970, 27, capital letters in the original) and presented her as a direct participant in the shooting in California: "Angela Davis, the 'black panther' who provoked the shooting in San Rafael" (*La Nueva España* 1970a, 3).<sup>77</sup>

At this point, we should note that 1970 was also the year when sixteen members of the Basque terrorist group ETA were judged for their crimes during Franco's dictatorship and nine of them were sentenced to death (Viana 2011, n. p.). These sentences caused a great reaction among the popular opinion, who pressured the Government in a series of protests and events against the court resolution. Therefore, the explicit condemn to any form of terrorism expressed by the second group of newspapers (most of them considered right-winged) can be better understood when read in the light of the events that were taking place in Spain at that time.

Indeed, the sociopolitical developments that took place in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s were an international source of profound inspiration (Cornejo-Parriego 2020, 10). Particularly, the Black Civil Rights and other related emancipatory movements had a broad repercussion on the TC, especially on the Spanish youth:

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<sup>76</sup> "El FBI anunció anoche la detención de Angela Yvonne Davis, en conexión con un intento de asalto a una cárcel californiana en el que resultaron muertos un juez y dos presos."

<sup>77</sup> "Angela Davis, una mujer que pertenece a los 'panteras negras' y provocó el pasado día siete el tiroteo en San Rafael."

Individuals and moments related to the emancipation struggles were etched in the global imaginary. [...] Widely distributed, these images appealed to significant Spanish sectors that were eager to join the revolutions taking place beyond the national borders, in order to escape the political and cultural strictures imposed by a long-lasting dictatorship. (Cornejo-Parriego 2020, 10-11)

In her study of relations between Black USA and Spain, Cornejo-Parriego provides a multidisciplinary analysis of the ways in which Black protest movements took hold in Spain (e.g. musical influences, Hollywood's international reach, impact of popular figures such as Muhammad Ali). Even if this is not the focus of our study, it is fundamental at this point to refer to the impact of this social protest so as to properly contextualize the reception of contemporary black women's literature in the TC.

Early in 1971, while being prosecuted for her involvement in the shooting in San Rafael, Davis edited the collection *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*. The volume voiced the views of various contemporary black activists and authors around topics such as "Political prisoners, prisons and black liberation", "Prisoners in rebellion" and "Realities of repression". Even if Davis's case was closely followed by Spanish media, the volume was never translated into Spanish or mentioned by the country's literary critics and reviewers.

After Davis's imprisonment, even though some sources still opted for presenting her as a terrorist or introduced her to Spanish audiences after the lines of "Angela Davis, a black woman, expelled from the Faculty at Berkeley University" [Angela Davis, negra, expulsada de la Facultad de la Universidad de Berkeley] (Massip 1970, 21), her case started to become a sensation for mainstream press and references to Davis progressively ceased to be aggressive and incriminatory, even if they acquired a fairly patronizing tone: "the attractive professor of philosophy Angela Davis [...]" [la atractiva profesora de filosofía Angela Davis] (*Diario de Mallorca* 1970, 7), "the girl who used to be a chair professor is accused [...]" [la muchacha excatedrática acusada [...]] (*Diario de Avisos* 1971, 3), "Angela Davis, the beautiful black woman, professor of philosophy [...]" [Angela Davis, la hermosa negra, profesora de filosofía [...]] (*Diario de Avisos* 1971, 4), "the young professor of color [...]" [la joven profesora de color [...]] (*La Vanguardia* 1971, 13). Also, newspapers published headlines such as "Angela Davis's Cause: A Thrilling Trial for the United States" [La causa de Angela Davis: Un juicio

que apasiona a Estados Unidos] (*Diario de Avisos* 1971, 1). Protests of freedom for Angela Davis spread quickly throughout the American continent and across the ocean, and reports about protest acts in South America or France could be found in the Spanish press (EFE 1970, 20; Calvo 1970, 25 and Umbral 1971, 7).

On 6 June, 1972, the news about the verdict of innocence for Davis's case occupied the front page of *La Vanguardia* under the headline "Angela Davis found not guilty" [Veredicto de inocencia para Angela Davis] (1) and a picture featuring her at a press conference surrounded by friends and family. On that occasion, José María Massip wrote an article for *ABC* comparing Martin Luther King and Davis as referent figures of the fight against racism in the United States. About King, Massip considered that he was seen as a savior for middle-aged black people, while he argued with respect to Davis: "With Angela Davis [...] the opposite has happened. The black adult feels indifferent or fearful before the Marxist intellectual, while the youth adore her like a 'Che' Guevara of the theory of revolution" (Massip 1972, 32).<sup>78</sup> The author closed his report with a final reflection: "Inter-racial tensions can lead to surprising situations in this country [the United States], such as the verdict of the white San Jose jury absolving Angela Davis" (32).<sup>79</sup>

Later in 1972, José María Alfaro published an extensive article in *ABC* where he criticized the capacity of North American society to turn into international celebrities even their worst enemies: "The case of Angela Davis—the subversive teacher, the Marxist agitator, the inspirer of terrorists and guerrillas, the pathetic Dulcinea of the 'Soledad Brothers'—<sup>80</sup> is a rich symptom of this phenomenon" (3).<sup>81</sup> Disregarding the judgmental implications of Alfaro's remarks, the "symptom" to which he referred was

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<sup>78</sup> "Con Angela Davis [...] ha sucedido lo contrario. El negro adulto, se siente indiferente o temeroso ante la intelectual marxista, mientras que la juventud la adora como a un 'Che' Guevara de la teoría de la revolución."

<sup>79</sup> "Las tensiones entre las razas pueden producir en este país asombrosas situaciones, como el veredicto del Jurado blanco de San José absolviendo de toda culpa a Angela Davis."

<sup>80</sup> Davis was an open supporter of the Soledad Brothers, three inmates who were accused of killing a prison guard at the Soledad Prison.

<sup>81</sup> "El caso de Angela Davis—la profesora subversiva, la agitadora marxista, la inspiradora de terroristas y guerrilleros, la Dulcinea patética de los 'Hermanos de Soledad'—es un abultado síntoma de este fenómeno."

also latent—relatively speaking—in the TC, where between 1970 and 1972 (both included) the name of Angela Davis was cited 121 times in the national and local press.

Despite the international reach and coverage of the events related to Davis’s case, after the black activist was declared innocent of any charges pressed against her, her name progressively and temporarily disappeared from the Spanish press. Occasional mentions, however, still occurred, such as in Fernando Monegal’s interview with psychologist José Monrás, where they discussed the status of ethnic minorities in the United States. When asked about the African American population and their racism against white people, Monrás claimed:

Sí, se refiere a los Panteras Negras, o la popularización del “slogan” “black is beautiful”. Pero eso sólo se da en grupos muy aislados. Hoy en día los Panteras Negras no existen; han sido totalmente destrozados. Pensemos un momento, ¿qué queda de Eldridge Cleaver o de Angela Davis? Como todos ellos predicaban con el ejemplo fueron desarticulados. (1975, 33)<sup>82</sup>

Following this line of thought was Manuel Leguineche’s article for *El País* about the Ku Kux Klan:

[...] mientras el activismo negro, desmovilizado, recuerda los años de la guerrilla urbana. ¿Qué ha sido de los santos canonizados del Black Power? Sólo queda Angela Davis. Eldridge Cleaver diseña calzoncillos; Stokely Carmichael, el autor del eslogan de la época—“Lo negro es bonito”—, vive en un exilio autoimpuesto y su lema sirve para vender laca; Martin Lutero y Malcolm X fueron asesinados; Huey P. Newton se pasó a la doctrina del capitalismo negro y Rap Brown vende fruta en un supermercado de Atlanta. (1980, 70)<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> “Yes, it refers to the Black Panthers, or the popularization of the ‘slogan’ ‘black is beautiful’. But that only happens in very isolated groups. Today the Black Panthers do not exist; they have been totally destroyed. Let us think for a moment, what is left of Eldridge Cleaver or Angela Davis? Since they all preached by example, they were disbanded.”

<sup>83</sup> “[...] demobilized black activism reminds us of the years of urban guerrilla warfare. What happened to the canonized saints of Black Power? Only Angela Davis is left. Eldridge Cleaver designs underwear; Stokely Carmichael, the author of the slogan of the time—‘Black is beautiful’—lives in self-imposed exile and his slogan is used to sell lacquer; Martin Luther and Malcolm X were murdered; Huey P. Newton switched to the doctrine of black capitalism and Rap Brown sells fruit in a supermarket in Atlanta.”

In the midst of these events, in 1973 *La Vanguardia* published a series of two articles by Maria Rosa Obiols, doctor in comparative literature entitled “The Birth of a Black Culture in North America” [El nacimiento de una cultura negra en Norteamérica]. The first text, “The Most Important National Movement Among Colored People” [El movimiento nacional más importante surgido entre la población de color] (1973, 51), briefly touched upon the historical past of African Americans in the United States, even if the author mainly focused on the black liberation movement and the search for an identity as depicted by Ralph Ellison, W.E.B. Du Bois and James Baldwin. In her essay, Obiols discussed the relevance of the interaction between socio-politics and culture: “Supporters of the nationalist movement insist on the importance of the interaction between the two factors, culture and socio-politics, and advocate ‘access to power through culture’” (51).<sup>84</sup>

The second part of this article (1973, 44), also written by Obiols, targeted the different genres and “forms” that black culture took after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The author started by presenting the blues as the first cultural manifestation to ever explain what it meant to be black in America. After that, she provided a list of books and magazine titles published for and by black authors, as well as she also highlighted new approaches to Black Studies taken in North American universities. However, the focus in this case was directed towards black poetry, which, according to the author, had become more relevant than the novel in the literary panorama of the country because it bore more links to the oral tradition of African American literature and culture. In relation to this, Obiols cited the “sacred figures” of the new poetic movement, namely Leroi Jones, Gwendolyn Brooks, Don Lee and Sonia Sanchez, and argued:

Muchos de estos poemas son cantos a los héroes de la historia negra como W. E. B. Dubois, Malcom X, Lumumba y otros están dedicados a la mujer negra, mujer tradicionalmente degradada, frustrada, herida y llena de resentimientos y temores. Estos poemas en tanto son afirmación de la belleza y

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<sup>84</sup> “Los partidarios del movimiento nacionalista insisten en la importación de la interacción entre los dos factores, cultura y socio-político, y abogan por el ‘acceso al poder mediante la cultura’.”

entereza de la mujer negra han ayudado a devolverle confianza y orgullo en sí mismas. (1973, 44)<sup>85</sup>

Lastly, Obiols concluded her essay with a thought-provoking reflection on the rootedness of racism in white societies and the implications of the (re)creation of the black identity in this context. Considering the general lack of interest shown by Spanish press media in the sociopolitical and cultural changes that were taking place in the United States at that time, Obiols's stance opened the door to a dialogue between two distant cultures which would proliferate in the following years.

The same year that Davis was declared not guilty in San José, another black author reached the news in Spain: Maya Angelou became the first black woman who was going to direct a movie in America. Even though the movie did not air in the United States until April 28, 1979, Spanish newspapers were already advertising the event in 1971. Indeed, an early report in *La Vanguardia* read "Maya Angelou is the first black woman director in Hollywood. She will direct the movie *Caged Bird*, based in her 1969 best-selling autobiography" (*La Vanguardia* 1971, 53).<sup>86</sup> The news was rephrased and extended to a 1972 article for the same newspaper: "A black woman will direct a Hollywood movie for the first time ever" [Por primera vez una mujer negra dirigirá una película en Hollywood] (51), which summarized Angelou's achievements as a multifaceted artist.<sup>87</sup>

After the news of Angelou's plans to undertake the movie adaptation of her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), a translation of the work reached Spanish audiences in 1976: *Ahora sé por qué cantan los pájaros enjaulados* (Quatto Ediciones), even though no reviews of the volume were published. Actually, it was the translation of Angela Davis's autobiography (*Angela Davis. Autobiografía*),

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<sup>85</sup> "Many of these poems are hymns to the heroes of black history like B. E. W. Dubois, Malcolm X, Lumumba and others are dedicated to the black woman, a woman traditionally degraded, frustrated, hurt and full of resentments and fears. These poems, while affirming the beauty and identity of black women, have helped to restore their self-confidence and pride."

<sup>86</sup> "Maya Angelou es la primera mujer de color que actúa como director cinematográfico en Hollywood. Dirigirá la película titulada *Caged Bird*, basada en su obra autobiográfica que fue un 'best seller' en 1969."

<sup>87</sup> The television movie *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1979) was finally directed by Fielder Cook rather than Angelou, even though she wrote the script. As a matter of fact, Angelou did direct a feature movie during her career, namely *Down in the Delta* (1998).



published in Spain in 1977, what renewed the audience's interest in black women's literature at the time. Indeed, one year after *El País* was founded, José Enrique Rodríguez published an extensive review praising Davis's work entitled "Woman, Black, Philosopher, Revolutionary" [Mujer, negra, filósofa, revolucionaria] (1977, 27). In his review, Rodríguez highlighted the author's writing skills and the transcendence and universality of her work, while he also praised Davis's perspective, values and ideology: "It is truly impressive to see how a person in her thirties is already in a position to write a dense autobiography of universal scope. It is not common, of course, but neither it is meeting people of the human, intellectual and revolutionary stature of Angela Davis" (27).<sup>88</sup> Rodríguez concluded his review locating Davis's contribution within a wider current of socially compromised and awareness-raising works. Davis's autobiography was also shortly reviewed in *La Vanguardia* following Rodríguez's line of thought: "This impressive testimony of Angela Davis, the Black American activist, is also the testimony of an entire people whose existence can be summed up in one word: oppression" (*La Vanguardia* 1977, 24).<sup>89</sup>

In 1978, Davis featured the cover of feminist magazine *Vindicación Feminista*. The magazine, which was edited for a short time period—from 1976 to 1979—aimed at encouraging debate, information and coordination among feminist organizations in Spain (Larumbe 2001, 65). Its twenty-third number, published in 1978, featured an exclusive interview to the black activist and author by feminist journalist Francisca Nieto, entitled "Black is beautiful" [Negro es hermoso] (1). In this conversation, Davis defended her intersectional approach to political activism, and discussed the prevalent racism and sexism in the United States.

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<sup>88</sup> "Verdaderamente impresiona ver cómo una persona está ya a los treinta años en condiciones de escribir una densa autobiografía de alcance universal. No es algo frecuente, desde luego, pero tampoco es frecuente encontrarse con personas de la talla humana, intelectual y revolucionaria de Angela Davis."

<sup>89</sup> "Este impresionante testimonio de Angela Davis, la activista negra norteamericana, lo es, también, de todo un pueblo cuya existencia puede resumirse en una sola palabra; opresión."

### 3.3. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker Enter the Spanish Literary Scene

In 1978, Argos Vergara published *La canción de Salomón*, the first translation of a novel by Toni Morrison that ever circulated in Spain. Contrarily to Davis, who was introduced to general Spanish audiences as a political character rather than as a writer, in this case it was through translation that Toni Morrison entered the target literary system. Prove of this is the fact that, prior to the publication of reviews of the volume, no mentions of the author could be traced in Spanish newspapers or magazines. *El País* was the first to advertise the novel through a translation of a review originally published in the *New York Times*, stating that its first two hundred pages were superb and its last hundred, a triumph (*El País* 1978, 50). *La Vanguardia* (1978, 37) and *ABC* (1978, 44) also advertised *La canción de Salomón*, although no reviews were published in these newspapers.

In relation to the ST, professor Àngels Carabí from the University of Barcelona talked about her experience the first time she read it in a documentary about Morrison broadcasted by Catalan autonomic television channel TV3:

[...] em va entusiasmar de tal manera que, l'endemà d'haver-la acabat de llegir, vaig entrar a classe, em vaig dirigir als alumnes i els vaig dir: “de totes aquelles coses de què havíem de parlar avui us n'oblíeu, perquè us he d'explicar una cosa fantàstica d'un llibre fabulós que he trobat, i de quèestic segura que en seguiré parlant durant temps. (2000)<sup>90</sup>

However, in spite of Carabí's remarks, no scholarship on Morrison would be published in Spain until late in the following decade. In this regard, the literary magazine *Cuadernos para el diálogo* also referred to Morrison's novel in translation as an excellent literary work that had gone unnoticed both by the audience and the critics (1978, 9).

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<sup>90</sup> I was so enthusiastic that the day after I finished reading it I went into class, addressed the students and said: “forget about all those things we had to talk about today, because I have to explain something fantastic about a fabulous book that I have found, and that I am sure I will continue to talk about for some time”.

*La isla de los caballeros*, the Spanish translation of *Tar Baby*, was published by Argos Vergara in 1981, the same year as the ST, and had a similar reception to *La canción de Salomón*. Indeed, even if reputed newspapers and literary magazines advertised the volume and acknowledged the author's literary skills and success in the SC (*Diario 16* 1982, 23; *La Vanguardia* 1982, 33 and *ABC* 1982, 29), no reviews were published on the printed press.

In 1983, one year after publishing *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Even though the news of Walker's success did not prevail in the Spanish press, *La Vanguardia* did publish an article about her being the first black women laureate (AP 1983, 26). The article presented Walker as a feminist author, and summarized the plot of her masterpiece specially focusing on the realism of the stories of the novel's main characters, which portrayed the lives of Walker's ancestors.

One month after Walker was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, Rafael Ramos published an extensive article in *La Vanguardia* entitled "A Generation of Young Women Writers Is Making Inroads in North American Literature in the Eighties" [Una generación de jóvenes escritoras se impone en la literatura norteamericana de los ochenta] (1983, 45). In this text, Ramos argued that ever since the beginnings of North American literature written after the colonization, women's literature had occupied a secondary space in the literary landscape of the United States. According to him, this tendency started to revert in the decade of 1980, what he named the "post-feminist era". He also considered that the traditional lack of success of women's literature in the United States was due to the fact that texts written by women only conveyed superficial analyses of female feelings and psychology:

[Sus obras] fueron sustancialmente dogmáticas y giraron en torno a las cuestiones clásicamente feministas del dilema de la mujer que ama a un hombre en particular, pero odia a los hombres como género, de la aspiración de independencia, de la angustia de competir en una sociedad discriminatoria e injusta, del ansia de libertad... (1983, 45)<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> "[Their works] were substantially dogmatic and revolved around the classically feminist issues of the dilemma of the woman who loves a particular man but hates men as a gender, of the aspiration for independence, of the anguish of competing in a discriminatory and unjust society, of the yearning for freedom."

Indeed, Ramos considered that women writers from the 1980s had distanced themselves from this tradition.

In his introduction to the full text, Ramos cited the following authors as the most representative figures of “American literary post-feminism”: Ann Beate, Gail Godwin, Anne Tayler, Judith Krantz, Joan Didion, Alice Walker, Fran Lebowitz and Toni Morrison. Then, under the subheading “From the black ghettos to Beverly Hills” [De los ghettos negros a Beverly Hills] he stated:

Toni Morrison y Alice Walker son las dos mejores novelistas negras del momento. La primera, autora de *Tar baby* y *Song of Solomon*, se dedica sobre todo a analizar las angustias y los dramas que se viven en las cochambrosas cocinas y en los fríos dormitorios de las viviendas de los ghettos negros de este país, mientras que la segunda, violada de pequeña por su padre y víctima después de la violencia de su marido, ha encontrado en la literatura una especie de refugio. (45)<sup>92</sup>

As we will study in forthcoming sections, the tendency to identify Alice Walker and Toni Morrison as pivotal figures of the whole cohort of African American women writers would intensify during the following decades. It is relevant to consider at this point, however, Ramos’s pioneering stance, as by the time his article was published Walker and Morrison were still peripheral authors in the receiving system.

Indeed, even though Plaza y Janés published *El color púrpura* in translation in 1984, a year after Walker received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the novel did not have a significant impact on Spanish audiences until the homonymous movie adaptation was released in 1986 (1985 in the United States). We could still retrieve one review published in *ABC* by Luis de Paola dating from 1984. In his review, de Paola followed Ramos’s line of thought about Walker’s work being substantially different to that published by other black female authors before her: “There is no *racial chauvinism*, no feminist proselytism in the pages of *The Color Purple*; there is, instead, sincerity. And

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<sup>92</sup> “Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are the two best black novelists around. The former, who is the author of *Tar baby* and *Song of Solomon*, is mainly concerned with the anguish and drama of the filthy kitchens and cold bedrooms of the black ghettos in this country, while the latter, raped as a child by her father and victimized after her husband’s violence, has found in literature a kind of refuge.”

genuine self-criticism” (59, italics in the original).<sup>93</sup> About de Paola’s last point, both he and Ramos coincided to praise Walker’s attacks not only upon the white, racist society but also the violent misogyny of black men within the African American community.

During the year 1985, *La Vanguardia* published a series of two comprehensive articles by translator and professor Sam Abrams introducing black literature to Spanish audiences. The first text, published in March, was entitled “The black literary tradition in the US” [La tradición de la literatura negra en EE. UU.] (33). It covered black literature from the beginnings up to the figure of Richard Wright, whom the author identified as the key to the black literary outburst of the 1950s and 1960s. Abrams started by reviewing the nation’s historical past and the horrors of slavery, where he cited the autobiography of Frederick Douglass (whose portrait is the only picture included in the article), *The Narrative of William Wells Brown* (1847) and *Narrative of the life and adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (1849) as representatives of the genre of the slave narrative.<sup>94</sup> After the subheading “A legendary figure” [Una figura legendaria], Phillis (“Phillips” in the original) Wheatley and Frances E. Watkins Harper were briefly discussed, together with the “first attempts” at a black novel.<sup>95</sup> Abrams then described the role of Booker T. Washington during the second half of the nineteenth century as the Martin Luther King Jr. of the time, as well as he cited Paul Lawrence Dunbar as the first notably relevant black writer. The Harlem Renaissance was described as the first genuinely great movement within the black literary tradition. When discussing the key writers of the Renaissance, Abrams cited Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Zora Neale Hurston, and closed his panoramic review citing some titles of works which, according to him, had already become classics in US literature. Among them, he referred to Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, (“Zola Neale Hurston” in the original), McKay’s *Harlem Shadows* (1922), Cullen’s *Color* (1925) and *Copper Sun* (1927), Rudolph Fisher’s *The Walls of Jericho* (1928) and Arna Bontemps’s *Black Thunder* (1936).

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<sup>93</sup> “No hay *chovinismo racial*, no hay proselitismo feminista en las páginas de *El color púrpura*; hay, en cambio, sinceridad. Y genuína autocrítica.”

<sup>94</sup> All book titles in Abrams’s essay are cited in English.

<sup>95</sup> In this case, Abrams is referring to Harriet E. Wilson’s *Our Nig*, even though the work nor the author are directly referenced in the article.

The continuation of Abrams's review was published in April 1985, and it covered black literature in the United States from the 1950s and the 1960s. This second article mainly focused on the imprint of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison as heirs of Richard Wright's legacy (23). As Abrams provided a general account of the authors' biographies and their establishment as referent figures in the contemporary literary panorama, he also took the chance to briefly touch upon the Spanish translations of Ellison's *Invisible Man* (*El hombre invisible*) and Baldwin's *Another Country* (*Otro país*), both published in 1984.<sup>96</sup> In this case, the author did not offer a wider overview of the contemporary literary panorama of the United States, but he focused on discussing Baldwin and Ellison without referring to other contemporary black authors.

That same year, however, Rosa Maria Piñol interviewed Abrams for the Catalan edition of *La Vanguardia* about his contribution as translator of Catalan works into English. Under the subheading "A little-known literature" [Una literatura poc coneguda] (1985, 31), Abrams expressed his interest in studying North American authors that were relatively unknown in Catalonia and Spain at that moment, such as black American writers. Following this line of thought, Abrams discussed "curious phenomena" related to the Spanish reception of North American literature, arguing that several well-known authors from the SC had not even been translated into Spanish:

Ara als Estats Units estan en boga els moviments que havien estat marginats, com ara la tradició literària dels negres. Tony Morrison [sic] i Alice Walker són dues autores best-sellers. Aquí fa dos anys Plaza & Janés va publicar la millor novel·la de la Walker, *El color púrpura*, i l'altra no ha estat editada" (31).<sup>97 98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Requests to translate Baldwin's novels had been declined on several occasions by the Spanish Government before the first (censored) translations were allowed after the Press Law of 1966 was enforced. To read more about the Spanish censorship of Baldwin's works see "La obra de James Baldwin ante la censura franquista: el contrabando de libros, la conexión latinoamericana y la evolución del sector editorial peninsular" (Cornellà-Detrell 2015).

<sup>97</sup> Actually, by the time Abram's interview was published, Argos Vergara had already published two editions of *La Canción de Salomón* (1978 and 1980) and one edition of *La isla de los caballeros* (1981), even though both novels had a minor impact on the Spanish audience.

<sup>98</sup> "Nowadays in the United States, movements that had been marginalized, such as the Black literary tradition, are in vogue. Tony Morrison [sic] and Alice Walker are two bestselling authors. Here, two years ago, Plaza & Janés published Walker's best novel, *The Color Purple*, and the other author has never been published in Spain."

In the light of these thoughts, Abrams concluded the interview arguing that the Spanish publishing industry should open its scope to provide readers with a more realistic representation of North American literature in translation rather than continue promoting the traditional canon (31). This argument, in fact, continued to be brought up by different critics and scholars until present day. By way of example, translator and scholar Carme Manuel Cuenca has recurrently argued that commercial publishers have made no effort to introduce in their catalogues authors or titles that fall outside of the traditional canon (Manuel Cuenca 2009, n. p. and 2019, personal communication).

In May 1985, the Institute of North American Studies, based in Barcelona, organized the “black culture week” [semana sobre la cultura negra]. The event opened with a conference given by Baldwin entitled “An Unreached World” [Un mundo inalcanzado] (*La Vanguardia* 1985, 91). During that week, the Institute also scheduled a screening of a movie about Toni Morrison (in English) as well as a round table on “The Black American Literary Tradition” with Baldwin, Morrison (via telephone) and Abrams as the main speakers. During his visit to Spain, Baldwin also gave a talk about his works at the Washington Irving Institute in Madrid, entitled “The Writer Discusses His Work” [El autor habla de su obra]. That year, the Institute also organized a session devoted to Gloria Naylor and Maya Angelou. The session started with a video projection of Naylor’s biography told by herself, and continued with the 1979 film *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the adaptation of Angelou’s homonymous autobiography. The event was advertised in press media such as *Diario 16*, *El País*, and *ABC*. However, despite the attempts at promoting these activities by the Spanish press, the events had no virtual impact on mainstream audiences, so no reviews, conference papers, or further information of any other kind about the aforementioned actions were registered.

### **3.4. The Politics of Adaptation: The Impact of Spielberg’s *El Color Púrpura***

Following the news of Spielberg’s movie adaptation, three editions of *El color púrpura* were published in 1986, two by Plaza y Janés and one by Círculo de Lectores. The movie adaptation had already been advertised in *La Vanguardia* in November 1985 (37), one month after its official release in the United States, as it had received ten

nominations for the Academy Awards and five for the Golden Globes. More extensive news on the movie were published in January 1986 in *La Vanguardia*, in a page-long article entitled “Steven Spielberg Challenges Hollywood with a Melodrama Performed by an All-Black Cast”<sup>99</sup> by Lluís Bonet (27). The article emphasized both Spielberg’s merit in undertaking a project so different from previously directed movies such as *Shark* or *E.T.* and the challenge and risks of taking to the big screen a story such as the one disclosed in *The Color Purple*. The article also dealt with the issue of an all-black cast being led by a white director: “Finally, Spielberg contended that ‘my color was never a problem from the moment the author of the book, Alice Walker, accepted me as the right person to direct the film. The question at stake was not the color of my skin, but whether or not I would make a good film out of the book’” (27).<sup>100</sup>

Likewise, in February 1986 Rafael Ramos published an in-depth analysis of the movie and its relation to Walker’s source novel: “Spielberg, Americans prefer aliens” [Spielberg, los americanos los prefieren extraterrestres] (1986, 27). After acknowledging the movie’s success in the box office and among the Academy (it had received eleven Academy Award nominations), Ramos explored the controversy aroused by the treatment of the black community in the movie:

*El color púrpura*, [...] pinta al hombre negro como un bruto irrespetuoso de los derechos de los demás, vago y torpe, capaz de violar a sus propias hijas y pegar y maltratar a sus esposas, y a la mujer negra como una víctima sumisa de su violencia y falta de escrúpulos, incapaz de salir del callejón sin salida que aparentemente es su vida (1986, 27).<sup>101</sup>

Taking this idea as a starting point, Ramos argued that opponents to the movie considered that it was not a faithful representation of Walker’s novel, where the behavior of the male protagonist was clearly linked to white oppression which he, in

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<sup>99</sup> “Steven Spielberg desafía a Hollywood con un melodrama interpretado únicamente por negros.”

<sup>100</sup> “Finalmente, Spielberg ha manifestado que ‘mi color nunca significó una dificultad desde el momento en que la autora del libro, Alice Walker, me admitió como la persona adecuada para dirigir la película. La cuestión no radicaba en el color de mi piel, sino en saber si haría o no una buena película a partir del libro’.”

<sup>101</sup> “*The Color Purple*, [...] portrays the black man as a brute disrespectful of the rights of others, lazy and clumsy, capable of raping his own daughters and beating and abusing his wife, and the black woman as a submissive victim of his violence and lack of scruples, unable to get out of the impasse that seems to be her life.”



turn, inflicted on black women. According to Ramos and other critics, this relationship was not present in Spielberg's adaptation, which depicted the black man as genuinely violent and insensitive: "Critics of the film even speak of a white conspiracy to discredit people of color and of a betrayal of Alice Walker's original novel" (1986, 27).<sup>102</sup> However, Ramos also cited the opinions of defenders of the motion picture, who argued that the unreliability, violence and hatred in the relationships between black men and women in *El color púrpura* were real and should not be silenced. In any case, Ramos followed the argument of historian Lero Clark, who claimed that even if the movie's portrait of interpersonal relationships was realistic, having so few representations of the black community in the mass media, *The Color Purple* did more to confirm stereotypes rather than to fight them.

After the Academy Awards ceremony took place in March 1986, the news of Spielberg's polemic movie not having won a single award out of its eleven nominations reached the Spanish press. Thus, *ABC* reported the outcome of the ceremony in a two-page article entitled "The Memoirs of Success and the Color of Failure" [Las memorias del éxito y el color del fracaso] (1986a, 81-82), in reference to the success of *Memorias de África* and the failure of *El Color Púrpura*. Pedro Crespo, the author of the article, referred to *El color púrpura* as an epic failure (1986a, 82), and pondered about the possible causes of this unfortunate outcome: "Perhaps it was Spielberg's personality [...], perhaps it was also the underlying criticism of the black melodrama, of its accusatory black male background, the silence of Alice Walker [...]" (1986a, 82).<sup>103</sup> In this case, Walker's critique of intraracial misogyny was used by Crespo as a possible argument to justify the movie's lack of acknowledgement by the Academy. In relation to this, he continued "The truth is that the disappointment has been rather than a revenge, a statement on the industry's position, a rejection of perhaps excessively innovative methods; regardless of what is generally admitted, Hollywood does not usually take risks in its bets" (1986a, 82).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> "Quienes critican la película hablan incluso de una conspiración blanca para desprestigiar a las gentes de color y de traición al libro original de Alice Walker."

<sup>103</sup> "Acaso haya sido la personalidad de Spielberg [...], acaso también, las críticas de fondo al melodrama negro, a su trasfondo acusatoriamente machista negro, el silencio de Alice Walker [...]"

<sup>104</sup> "Lo cierto es que la decepción ha constituido algo más que una venganza, la toma de posición de la industria, el rechazo a unos métodos tal vez excesivamente innovadores, al margen de lo generalmente admitido Hollywood no suele arriesgarse en sus apuestas."

In May of the same year, Pedro Crespo charged against Spielberg's adaption again in another article for *ABC*: "The Pink Color of The Color Purple: Spielberg's Movie Is a Dense and Sweet Melodrama" (1986b, 84).<sup>105</sup> One remarkable difference to previous critiques of the movie is that, in this case, Crespo opened his review referring to the source novel, rather than to its adaptation:

La novela de Alice Walker, *El color púrpura*, que obtuvo hace dos años el premio Pulitzer y que ahora ha rodado Spielberg, es un relato denso, folletín orientado hacia la crítica feroz del machismo y la situación medieval de las mujeres negras hasta casi ahora mismo. Alice Walker, lógicamente, es negra y sabe de lo que habla. (1986b, 84)<sup>106</sup>

Crespo continued discussing the movie's lack of success at the Academy Awards ceremony held the previous month: "The concatenation of misfortunes was only reasonable [...] in the case of *The Color Purple*, since its own pages compile all kinds of misfortunes" (1986b, 84).<sup>107</sup> After arguing that Spielberg "relatively" transformed Walker's novel for the plot of his movie, Crespo concluded that the title of the work could be changed to *The Color Pink* [*El color rosa*] because of its melodramatic character. However, he also conceded that even if the film had not been released in Spain yet, the expectation by Spanish audiences was major.

Contrarily to *La Vanguardia* and *ABC*, *El País* focused its reports on the figure of the director, Steven Spielberg, rather than on the controversy aroused by *The Color Purple*. The left-winged newspaper published an article entitled "Spielberg, Best Movie Director of the Year in the United States" [Spielberg, mejor director del año en EE UU] (1986, 39), reporting that Spielberg had been acknowledged as the best director of the year by the Directors Guild of America. *El País* also highlighted the fact that, despite the movie's numerous nominations for the Academy Awards, he had not been considered for best director. Similarly, after the Academy Awards ceremony took place,

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<sup>105</sup> "El color rosa del color púrpura: El movie de Spielberg es un melodrama espeso y dulce."

<sup>106</sup> "Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, which won the Pulitzer Prize two years ago and has now been shot by Spielberg, is a dense account focused on the fierce criticism of male chauvinism and the medieval situation of black women up to present day. Alice Walker, of course, is black and knows what she is talking about."

<sup>107</sup> "Era lógica la concatenación de desgracias [...] tratándose de *El color púrpura*, ya que en sus páginas se dan todas las desgracias posibles."

Diego Galán's report for *El País*'s read "Sydney Pollack and His Movie *Out of Africa*, Winner of the Oscars. Steven Spielberg, without Any Award for *The Colour Purple*, the Great Loser".<sup>108</sup> In this case, Galán focused his observations on Spielberg's failure to change registers (1986, 62).

In some cases, several press media compared or related the controversial success of *El color púrpura* to that of *Roots*, the movie series adapted from Alex Haley's novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976). In Spain, the series was broadcasted by TVE1, and it was critically acclaimed, as it became a referent and a milestone for the depiction of racism in television (Aniorte 2016, n. p. and Manuel Cuenca 2019, personal communication). Following this line, the article "The Movie *The Color Purple* Opens the Controversy on the Racial Problem in the United States"<sup>109</sup> published in *Diario de Avisos* stated that *The Color Purple* was the only cinematic work that had achieved the level of success and controversy that *Roots* had originated in the previous decade (1986, 34).

On a latter occasion, with the event of the San Sebastian film festival during the fall of that year, Andrés Fernández wrote an article for *El País* reviewing the movies that would premiere in the festival, paying special attention to Spielberg's *El color púrpura*: "Spielberg Opens the Movie Season" [Spielberg abre la temporada cinematográfica] (1986, 76). Following the style of previous articles, Fernández focused on *El color púrpura* being Spielberg's last box office success in the United States and the risks implied in undertaking this project. At this point, it is interesting to see how the articles published in *El País* tend to separate the movie from the novel, or rather, treat Spielberg's work as an independent unit of analysis, contrarily to reviewers in other aforementioned newspapers. Indeed, no article about the movie published in *El País* mentions Walker's name or her links to the project. Actually, there is one single reference to the novel in connection to the movie, stating that Spielberg might have chosen the wrong text to take to the big screen (Fernández Rubio 1986, 76).

*El color púrpura* premiered in Spain on September 16, 1986, even if newspapers had been advertising the official movie poster since the beginning of the month. The poster

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<sup>108</sup> "Sydney Pollack y su filme *Memorias de África*, triunfadores de los 'oscaros'. Steven Spielberg, sin ningún premio para *El color púrpura*, gran perdedor."

<sup>109</sup> "La película *El color púrpura* abre la controversia sobre la problemática racial en los Estados Unidos."

was exactly the same that was used by advertisements in the United States, translated into Spanish. The only element that was not present in the source poster was a heading on top of it, reading “BEST MOVIE OF THE YEAR!” [¡LA MEJOR PELÍCULA DEL AÑO!] (capital letters in the original). The movie poster was recurrently publicized at a page or half a page’s length in *La Vanguardia*, *El País*, *ABC*, *Diario 16* as well as in local newspapers such as *El Periódico de Catalunya*, *Canarias 7*, *Diario de las Palmas*, *Diario de Mallorca* or *La Voz de Almería*. However, even though publicity of *El color púrpura* became usual in the Spanish press during the last months of 1986 and the first months of 1987, no further reviews or critical material were published about Spielberg’s movie or Walker’s novel.

A quick search on the online newspaper archive of the National Library of Spain provides quantitative information about the mentions of the names of Steven Spielberg and Alice Walker associated to the entry “*El color púrpura*”. Thus, during 1986 and 1987 the name of “Steven Spielberg” was cited alongside “*El color púrpura*” 921 times in the Spanish press, while “Alice Walker” was only mentioned 111 times in reference to the title.<sup>110</sup> These numbers are a clear representation of the general approach that was taken towards the phenomenon of *El color púrpura* in Spain, where Alice Walker’s masterpiece was overshadowed by the commercial success of Spielberg’s adaptation in both the SC and the TC.

Further prove of this can be extracted from the chapter “A Phenomenon Called Spielberg” [Un fenómeno llamado Spielberg] broadcasted by Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE) on September 27, 1986 as part of the monthly program “De película”. At the beginning of the documentary, Spanish journalist José Ruiz interviewed the film director about *The Color Purple*, and started by asking him about his decision to undertake such a project and depict “people who are very different from you, and with a social background also very different from yours” (1986). Ruiz’s initial questions did not include any reference to Walker’s novel, so it was Spielberg who cited the original source in his reply:

SS: Well, the first reason, and I guess the most obvious one, was I was very touched by the book. If somebody came to me and said “why don’t you write an

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<sup>110</sup> These numbers include advertisements, reviews and articles published in Spanish newspapers.

original screenplay based on a black story, on that kind of experience, I probably wouldn't know where to start. But I read a book by Alice Walker called *The Color Purple*, and the book emotionally touched me. [...]

JR: And was it difficult to write the script? I don't know the book, that's why I'm asking. Is this a very long book? Did you have to cut a lot of things? Was it difficult to do the screenplay?

In Ruiz's second intervention, he easily admitted ignoring that Spielberg's movie was an adaptation and, consequently, his unfamiliarity with Walker's novel.

However, at this point it should be noted that even if the impact of the cinematographic adaptation was greater than that of the ST, these circumstances also prompted the circulation of Walker's novel in Spain. Proof of this is, among others, the fact that even if no new editions of *El color púrpura* were published in 1985, the year after the translation of Walker's novel was published in Spain, after Spielberg's adaptation was released the novel was reprinted in 1986 (Plaza y Janés and Círculo de Lectores), 1987 (Círculo de Lectores, Orbis) and 1988 (Orbis, Plaza y Janés).

In addition to these data, in 1987 the International Commission of Catalonia's Department of Culture [Comissió Internacional del Department de Cultura] coordinated by Catalan author, translator and critic Marta Pessarrodona, invited Alice Walker to become a member of its international team. The International Commission, constituted after the 1988 election, was conceived as a tool to promote dialogue and exchange between the Catalan culture and others at an international level, with especial interest in the European and North American cultures (1987, 36). With this goal, around thirty foreign intellectuals were invited to become part of the project in 1987: "One of the ways to project Catalan culture abroad is to link a series of international cultural figures to our reality, so that they can act as a sounding board for what is happening here; in short, to help 'export' Catalan culture" (Pessarrodona in Piñol 1987, 36).<sup>111</sup> These international intellectuals included Jean Baudrillard, Nadine Gordimer, Günter Grass, Umberto Eco, Susan Sontag, Noam Chomsky, José Saramago, George Steiner and Alice Walker, among others. The first meeting of the International Commission was held in

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<sup>111</sup> "Una de las formas de proyectar la cultura catalana en el extranjero es vincular a una serie de figuras de la cultura internacional a nuestra realidad, para que hagan de caja de resonancia de lo que aquí suceda; en definitiva, que ayuden a 'exportar' la cultura catalana."

Barcelona in January 1988; however, no further references to Alice Walker in relation to the Commission can be found in the Spanish press, from which we may infer that she did not get engaged with the project promoted by the Catalan Government.

Also in 1986, Justine Tally's doctoral dissertation was published at the University of La Laguna (Tenerife). Supervised by Pedro Jesús Marcos, the doctoral project was entitled "Womanism in the Fiction of Alice Walker". This dissertation became the first full-length study about an African American woman writer published in Spain. Tally focused her research on the notion of "womanism" and women characters in Walker's fiction, directly drawing attention towards her as a feminist writer. In 1986 Tally also published the article "Why 'womanism?' The Genesis of a New Word and What It Means", which was actually an introduction for the study undertaken in her dissertation. Both Tally's doctoral project and paper drew attention upon "the historical and cultural factors which have conditioned black women's response to (white) feminism" (Tally 1986, 205) through the lenses of one of the highest-regarded authors in the contemporary landscape of North American literature. Tally's approach was especially valuable as it introduced in the TC the study of black feminism, which had never been tackled by mainstream, specialized or scholarly media. Hence, Tally's work not only became one of the first research works on African American Studies published in the country, but it was also pioneer in the author's gender-oriented approach to the field. Indeed, the study of black feminism, womanism and literary representations of the black woman were at stake in scholarship published in the United States at that time.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, her contribution to the field was equally valuable and necessary to update research interests in the Spanish academia. Also, it should be noted that Tally did not limit her doctoral study to Walker's Pulitzer Prize winning fiction, but rather she examined three novels (*The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Meridian* and *The Color Purple*), and two volumes of short stories (*In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* and *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Stories*), which provided a better

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<sup>112</sup> See, among others, "The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers" (Hernton 1984), "Octavia Butler and the Black Science Fiction Heroine" (Salvaggio 1984), "'With My Sword in My Hand': The Politics of Race and Sex in the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston" (Schmidt 1983), "Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Black Woman's Epic" (Stein 1984), *Black Women, Feminism and Black Liberation: Which Way?* (Gordon 1987), "Ethnic Orbits: The Circulation of Capitals and Peoples" (Bonilla 1986), "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (Ogunyemi 1985), "Integrating Third World Womanism into the Psychology of Women Course" (Brown-Collins 1988), "Womanism and Feminism in African Letters: A Theoretical Perspective" (Rotimi 1990).

ground on which to base her study and introduced to Spanish readers texts that had not been translated or acknowledged by the media.<sup>113</sup>

At this point, the figure of Justine Tally and her scholarly work deserve special attention. Actually, her doctoral dissertation was not the first study about African American culture published by the author. Indeed, in 1981 she had already written a paper entitled “*Roots: A Case for Black English*” for *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, where she echoed the incipient research being conducted since the 1970s by American linguists such as William Labov or J.L. Dillard on this variant of American English. In 1985, she also published “Black Women Studies in the 1980s: An Interview with Beverly Guy-Sheftall” for the same journal. As has been mentioned previously, *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, founded in 1980, was a groundbreaking journal in the tradition of American Studies in Spain, and Tally has become a referent figure when tracing back the origins of scholarly work on African American women writers in the country.

Moreover, taking up the subject of her first publication, in 1989 she presented a paper at the XI AEDEAN Congress, Translation between the Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon Worlds: Linguistic, Cultural and Literary Relations [La traducción entre el mundo hispánico y anglosajón, relaciones lingüísticas, culturales y literarias] about problems in the translation of *The Color Purple* (195-198), where she addressed issues at stake in TS, such as the translation of culture-specific items and dialect (focusing particularly on black English). Even if Tally’s approach to this topic was incidental, she also became one of the first scholars in Spain and Europe to draw attention towards a particular area of TS that still today remains relatively unexplored by the Spanish academia. Even if her research around black women writers continued in the following decades, towards the end of the 1980s Tally was already established as a pioneer in the field of African American literature in the European and the national contexts.

In 1987, the Galician feminist journal *Festa da palabra silenciada* published a paper under the section “Festa da palabra / Cine” entitled “Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Violet” [Alice Walker: A cor púrpura e violeta] by María Pilar Jiménez (68). The journal had been created in 1983 with the purpose of drawing attention towards women

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<sup>113</sup> Actually, except for *The Color Purple*, all the texts by Alice Walker with which Tally dealt in her doctoral dissertation remain untranslated into Spanish.

writers and feminist thinking that had traditionally been obscured. In this line, Alexandre presented a firm critique of the Academy's decision not to reward Spielberg's adaptation in favor of *Out of Africa*, and condemned critiques to Walker's works that accused her of putting black women at the center of her narratives: "The critics question her [Walker] precisely for the prominence of women in her novels, for the brilliance of the female characters in contrast to the male ones, which are misogynistic, brutal and, above all, always in the background" (1987, 68).<sup>114</sup> Thus, after stating her initial view on the subject, Alexandre went on to present 1986 as a "year of grace" ["ano da grácia"] because it revealed that literature and cinema could sometimes be sexist, that men and women were treated differently in fiction, and that there was always an inescapable bias in making and judging politically compromised fiction (1987, 68). In this regard, Alexandre praised Walker for subverting gender and race stereotypes in her works, and for not contributing to perpetuate fixed (sexist) structures in the modern literary tradition. Towards the end of the paper, the author lamented the scarce attention given to the novel in the TC even after it won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983, and commented on the fact that *El color púrpura* did not start to truly circulate in the Spanish literary system until the success of Spielberg's adaptation reached local audiences. The paper closed with a very short, direct stance: "Alice Walker, a name to remember" [Alice Walker, un nome a lembrar] (1987, 68).

Precisely on the same month that *El color púrpura* premiered in Spain (September, 1986), Toni Morrison, who had been identified by many Spanish journalists and critics as one of the major African American authors at the moment, visited the country with the event of the IV Salón Internacional del Libro, Liber 86, where she was asked to participate in a round table about literature and feminism (Carabí 2019, n. p.). Even if Morrison was a considerably unknown author in the TC—especially in the mainstream scene—*El País* took the chance of her visit to the country to publish an extensive article about the author: "The Black Sound of Novelist Toni Morrison" [El sonido negro de la novelista Toni Morrison] (Sorela 1986, 32). In his article, Pedro Sorela presented Morrison as a key figure in the landscape of contemporary North American literature through references to critics from the SC, and he revised key aspects of her personal life

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<sup>114</sup> "Os críticos botan-lle en cara precisamente ese protagonismo das mulleres, a brillantez das personaxes femininas en contraste coas personaxes masculinas, machistas, brutais e ¡sobre todo! sempre en segundo plano."



and her literary project. Thus, taking as a starting point her intervention in Liber 86, Morrison was introduced to Spanish readers as a referent in contemporary literature from the United States. However, even if other press media followed the development of Liber 86, no further registers of Morrison's intervention there could be found.

After this event, in October of the same year, the cultural program "Tiempos modernos" broadcasted by Spanish television channel La 2, dedicated a short section to the literature of Toni Morrison, acknowledging her as a representative of the North American literary scene: "Her appearance on the American literary scene in the 1960s was received with excellent reviews, which have been repeated with novels such as *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*" (ABC 1986, 109).<sup>115</sup>

Literary magazines such as *Quimera* and *Revista de Revistas* also echoed the growing reputation of the author, and published articles reviewing Morrison's works. In the case of *Quimera*, the magazine published "Black Literature" [Literatura negra] in 1986, written by Àngels Carabí. The article offered a general overview of the quality of contemporary black literature in the United States, and pointed at Morrison as its greatest representative. Also, *Revista de Revistas* published "Efemérides de noviembre", where special attention was paid to the poetic language of *Song of Solomon*: "en inglés como en español, como en francés, el negro no olvida el ritmo de sus dialectos viejos, africanos, mezclados" (Calzada and Montes de Oca 1983, 53). The authors of this article refer to both *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* ("Be Loved" in the original), as two of the most internationally acclaimed and successful novels from the twentieth century (1983, 57).

Prior to these events, in 1984, the VIII AEDEAN Congress, The Last Twenty Years of Anglo-North-American Studies [Los últimos veinte años en los estudios anglo-norteamericanos], was held at the University of Malaga. The papers presented there examined the work of modern English and North American authors who were either canonical, or in the process of becoming so, namely, Ian McEwan, Allan Sillitoe, D.M. Thomas, William Golding, Edward Bond, Salman Rushdie, John Fowles, Jerzy Kosinski, Thomas Pynchon, Harold Pinter and, last but not least, Toni Morrison. In this

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<sup>115</sup> "Su aparición en el panorama literario de Estados Unidos en los años sesenta fue acogida con excelentes críticas, que se han repetido con novelas como *La canción de Salomón* y *La isla de los caballeros*."

list, Morrison stands out as the only representative of notable English-speaking female authors in “the last twenty years of Anglo-North-American Studies”. The paper tackling her work was entitled “Milkman’s Flight: The Quest for Identity in *Song of Solomon*” [El vuelo de Milkman: Una búsqueda de identidad en *Song of Solomon*] and it was presented by professor Àngels Carabí, who would publish her doctoral dissertation *Toni Morrison: The Quest for an African American Identity* [Toni Morrison: Búsqueda de una identidad afroamericana] four years later at the University of Barcelona. Carabí’s 1984 paper studied the search of identity depicted in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison’s third novel which had been originally published in 1977 and translated into Spanish in 1978. Carabí’s work became the first introduction of the author to Spanish academia in a context which identified Morrison as a central writer of modernity. All this happened in a time when the focus of research on this field was directed towards studying classics and modern classics of North American Literature. In relation to this event, interestingly enough, the year 1984 registered no mentions of Morrison’s name or works in the national printed press.

The year 1987 is a considerable landmark in the reception of African American women’s literature in the printed press, as it was the first time that a Spanish newspaper addressed the topic of black feminism and black American women writers. The article, entitled “Against ‘Black Machos’” [Contra los ‘black machos’], was published in *La Vanguardia* in October of that year under the section “Letras sobre Letras”, without mentioning the name of its author. Even if it was a short text (less than 300 words), it provided a general overview of the sociopolitical context in which African American women’s literature was inscribed, as well as it argued for the international, global reach of these writers. The text cited Carlene Hatcher’s *The Flagellants*, Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (“*Colour Purple*” in the original) as bestsellers, as well as it mentioned writers Gloria Naylor and Gayl Jones. It also referred to Harriet E. Wilson’s *Our Nig* as the initiator of the literary tradition of African American women writers:

Estas escritoras norteamericanas no son fruto de aquel mayo [i.e. May, 1968], como en nuestra ignorancia podríamos suponer, si desde Harriet E. Wilson y su “*Our Nig*”, publicado en 1859, no bajan de 12.500 las obras de

“fiction” [sic]—centenar y medio de novelas, entre las mismas—y pasan de 28.000 los poemas debidos a escritoras norteamericanas de color. (1987, 45)<sup>116</sup>

Even if the article focused on situating African American women writers within their SC rather than on their reception in Spain, it concluded its argument by encouraging the publication and reprint of more works by these authors stating: “it is not only in the white society that male chauvinism reigns” [que no sólo en la sociedad de los blancos impera el denostado machismo] (45).<sup>117</sup>

The year 1987 also saw the publication of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* in the SC. Considered by American and international critics her masterpiece, the novel was finalist for the National Book Critics Award that same year, and it won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. The news of Morrison’s success reached the Spanish press in the spring of that year. *La Vanguardia* published an article entitled “Toni Morrision and the Absent Word” [Toni Morrison y la palabra ausente] preceded by a note reading “About the Last Pulitzer Prize for Fiction” [Sobre el último premio Pulitzer de novela] and “Mihály Dés presents and analyzes the last Pulitzer Prize winning novel: *Beloved*, by black American writer Toni Morrison”<sup>118</sup> as a subtitle (1988, 50). Dés’s article, which showed the clear intention of introducing the author and her work to Spanish audiences, presented Morrison as a seamstress who had given shape to the “exotic and lyric” threads of the plot until the novel reached its final, inconclusive ending. When Dés referred to the conclusion of the novel, she compared Morrision’s style with authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, and Amada, the main character in *Beloved*, with Rebeca, the protagonist of *Cien años de soledad*. In relation to this, Dés highlighted the influence of Latin American literature in the author’s use of magical realism in her works:

En *Beloved* hay dos realidades bien diferenciadas, aunque no contradictorias.

Una es íntima, sentimental, metafísica: la historia de Amada. La otra es

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<sup>116</sup> “These North American women writers are not the result of that May [i.e. May, 1968], as we might ignorantly believe. Actually, since Harriet E. Wilson and her *Our Nig*, published in 1859, there have been no less than 12.500 works of ‘fiction’—a hundred and a half novels among them—and more than 28.000 poems written by American women of color.”

<sup>117</sup> In this particular stance the text remains ambiguous, as it can hardly be guessed whether the comment was referring to the source or the target culture.

<sup>118</sup> “Mihály Dés presenta y analiza la obra ganadora del último premio Pulitzer de novela: *Beloved* (Amada), de la narradora americana de raza negra Toni Morrison.”

histórica, realista, casi documental: es la historia de los negros norteamericanos alrededor de la abolición de la esclavitud. Las dos realidades tienen en común un elemento mágico, irracional, que las enlaza. [...] *Beloved* comparte todas las obsesiones temáticas y estilísticas de los libros anteriores, incluida esa tendencia “latinoamericanizante”. (50)<sup>119</sup>

After mentioning the prestige of the writer in her home country and referring to the international success of *Song of Solomon* in terms of its translation into multiple languages (including Spanish), Dés closed her article with a subtle critique of the novel's sentimentalism: “It is also a bit sentimental; that is the reason why it has been on the American best-seller lists for almost thirty weeks” (50).<sup>120</sup>

The newspaper *ABC* also published a noteworthy article with the event of the Pulitzer prize-giving ceremony which, even if it discussed all the 1988 Pulitzer laureates, was entitled “Toni Morrison, with a story of death and acceptance, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction” (Carrascal, 51).<sup>121</sup> After going through the complete list of prize winners, José María Carrascal continued: “But it is Toni Morrison, with her *Beloved*, the one who has aroused the most interest, for both literary and extraliterary reasons” (51).<sup>122</sup> After examining the controversy generated by the plot of the novel in the author's home country, Carrascal argues:

[...] el impacto es enorme, y si eso era lo que la autora trataba de obtener, desde luego lo obtuvo. No fue bastante, sin embargo, para hacerle ganar el Premio Nacional de Literatura del año pasado, lo que provocó una carta de 48 escritores negros acusando al jurado de ‘incuria y pusalinimidad’, que levantó enorme

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<sup>119</sup> “In *Beloved* there are two distinct, though not contradictory, realities. One is intimate, sentimental, metaphysical: the story of *Beloved*. The other is historical, realistic, almost documentary: it is the story of black Americans around the abolition of slavery. The two realities have in common a magical, irrational element that links them. [...] *Beloved* shares all the thematic and stylistic obsessions of Morrison's previous novels, including the use of a Latin American style.”

<sup>120</sup> “Es también un poco sentimental; por algo lleva casi treinta semanas en las listas de best-sellers norteamericanos.”

<sup>121</sup> “Toni Morrison, con una historia de muerte y aceptación, obtuvo el Pulitzer de ficción.”

<sup>122</sup> “Pero es Toni Morrison, con su *Beloved* (‘Queridos’), la que más interés ha despertado, por razones tanto literarias como extraliterarias.”

polémica.<sup>123</sup> ¿Ha sido el Pulitzer el premio de consolación tras aquello? Es lo primero que se preguntan hoy los críticos. Los jurados de ese último lo niegan, pero la duda siempre quedará. (51)<sup>124</sup>

The journalist closed his review by referring, once more, to the controversy generated by the novel, predicting that it would become more of a bestseller than it was in that moment.

Later that year, several press media announced the publication of the Spanish translation of Morrison's prize-winning novel. Indeed, Ediciones B published *Beloved* translated by Iris Menéndez Sallés, together with reprints of *La canción de Salomón* and *La isla de los caballeros*. Also in 1988, Ediciones B published the first translation of *Sula*, Morrison's second novel which had been circulating in the SC since 1973. Spanish magazine *Tiempo* devoted a short article to praise Morrison's works and to announce this event: "During the last week of September Ediciones B will launch four works by Toni Morrison, who is quite unknown in Spain, one of the first literary (and journalistic) writers in the United States. *Beloved* will undoubtedly be an aesthetic discovery for many Spanish readers" (1988, 104).<sup>125</sup>

When these editions were published, many Spanish newspapers publicized Morrison's novels, showing a special interest in *Beloved*. Among others, advertisements of the novel could be found in *El País*, *El Periódico de Catalunya*, *Diario 16*, *Panorama Internacional* and *Tiempo*. During that time, the magazine *Tiempo* showed especial interest in Morrison's works, and it repeatedly published news about her novels in translation, together with reviews and articles praising her work: "Toni Morrison is the Nina Simone of North American literature [...]. Toni Morrison leaves no room for doubt: the novelist, the journalist, the black writer had a place in the country's literary

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<sup>123</sup> Even if the event was highly controversial in the SC, this is the only instance where it was reported in the Spanish press.

<sup>124</sup> "[...] the impact is enormous, and if that is what the author was trying to get, she certainly got it. It wasn't enough, however, to make her win last year's National Literature Award, which prompted a letter from 48 black writers accusing the jury of 'negligence and pusillanimity', which raised enormous controversy. Was the Pulitzer Prize the compensation prize after that? That's the first question critics are asking today. The jurors deny it, but the doubt will always remain."

<sup>125</sup> "Ediciones B lanzará en la última semana del próximo mes de septiembre cuatro obras de Toni Morrison, bastante desconocida en España, una de las primeras plumas literarias (y periodísticas) de Estados Unidos. *Beloved* será, sin duda, para muchos lectores españoles un hallazgo estético."

panorama” (1988, 224).<sup>126</sup> The laureate novelist was also cited as a referent in a review of Richard Perry’s *Montgomery’s Children* [*Los niños de Montgomery*], where Robert Saladrigas argued about Perry’s influences:

[...] si se trata de buscar afinidades o posibles influencias, es posible hallarlas sin desplazarse tan lejos, en el mismo hemisferio de Perry. Pienso concretamente en Toni Morrison y en su magnífica novela *La canción de Salomón*, en la que el tema de volar otorga un sentido épico al relato. Lo que también logra Perry a través de su personaje Norman Fillis (1988, 19)<sup>127</sup>

Precisely that year, Àngels Carabí, who had defended her doctoral thesis, “Toni Morrison: búsqueda de una identidad afroamericana”, in 1987 at the University of Barcelona, published her work in book format. Carabí had personally interviewed the author in New York in 1986, and devoted her study to examining Morrison’s analysis of the conflicts faced by the black population of the United States (particularly black women), which, as she suggested in the abstract of her dissertation, had led her to create unique women characters with a personal, independent identity (Carabí 1988, 4). To do so, Carabí analyzed Morrison’s first four novels: *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*.

The volume was reviewed by Javier Coy, one of the foremost scholars in American Studies in Spain, in *ATLANTIS*. As Coy suggested, Carabí’s dissertation significantly focused on the study of the metaphorical trip of Morrison’s heroines, who looked for their own identity through their relationship with others: “With sensitivity and capacity of penetration, this study seeks the way to reveal this metaphor and the peculiarities that make it original and extremely personal” (1990, 199).<sup>128</sup> Coy also discussed the study of Morrison’s preoccupation with the ancestral past in Carabí’s work:

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<sup>126</sup> “Toni Morrison es la Nina Simone de la literatura norteamericana [...]. Toni Morrison no deja lugar a dudas: la novelista, la periodista, la escritora negra tenía un hueco en el panorama literario del país.”

<sup>127</sup> [...] if we are looking for affinities or possible influences, we can find them without moving so far, in Perry’s same hemisphere. I’m thinking specifically of Toni Morrison and his magnificent novel *Song of Solomon*, in which the theme of flight gives the story an epic meaning. This is what Perry also achieves through his character Norman Fillis.

<sup>128</sup> “El estudio que nos ocupa busca precisamente, con sensibilidad y capacidad de penetración, la forma de desvelar esa metáfora y las peculiaridades que la convierten en algo original y sumamente personal.”

Esta preocupación de Morrison por su cultura ancestral, por sus raíces étnicas, dota a su obra de un acento personal y original, que la profesora Carabí ha sabido explorar con inteligencia y sensibilidad en las cuatro primeras obras de esta autora [...], y su intención ya se pone de relieve en el título de su libro. Esta tradición afro-americana está patente en sus novelas, enriqueciendo su mundo imaginativo, y añadiendo a sus personajes una frescura y una originalidad que lejos de descontextualizarles, les da una perspectiva y una profundidad que les convierte en metáforas de valor universal. (1990, 199)<sup>129</sup>

Finally, Coy praised Carabí's decision to include two introductory chapters on the historical and literary background of the African American (female) community. According to professor Coy, these chapters were key to understanding modern North American history and thus to contextualize Morrison's oeuvre. The review closed with a remarkable stance on the value of Carabí's contribution and the universality of Morrison's work: "Tenemos entre nuestras manos un valioso acercamiento al mundo de la literatura de mujeres negras americanas de los dos últimos decenios, que transmite mucho más de lo que parece porque sus enseñanzas son perfectamente extrapolables al campo de la novela en general, sin limitaciones étnicas ni temporales disminuyentes" (1990, 201).<sup>130</sup>

Following the defense of her dissertation, Carabí published a series of papers tackling the literature of black and minority women writers in the United States. In "New Voices: The Writings of Minority Women in The United States", a conference paper presented in 1988 at the XII AEDEAN Congress and published in 1991 in the conference proceedings, the author reviewed traditional roles assigned to black women in the structure and the literature of the "dominant class" (1991, 216) focusing on the double jeopardy suffered by this cohort. More precisely, she examined four stereotypes:

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<sup>129</sup> "Morrison's concern for her ancestral culture, for her ethnic roots, permeates her work with a personal and original accent, which Professor Carabí has been able to explore with intelligence and sensitivity in the author's first four works [...], and her intention is already highlighted in the title of her book. This African American tradition is evident in her novels, enriching her imaginative world and adding to her characters a freshness and originality that, far from decontextualizing them, gives them a perspective and depth that turn them into metaphors of universal value."

<sup>130</sup> "We have in our hands a valuable approach to the world of black American women's literature of the last two decades, which conveys much more than it may initially seem because its teachings can be perfectly extrapolated to the field of the novel in general, without diminishing ethnic or temporal limitations."

the loose woman, the mamma, the conjure woman and the mulatta. As a response to these distorted generalizations, Carabí praised the work of a new generation of black writers who had appeared during the decade of 1970, including Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, Audre Lorde and Nikki Giovanni, among others. The paper also included testimonies of women belonging to other minority groups in the country, namely Indian writer Leslie Silko, Chicana author Sandra Cisneros and Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston.

During that time, Alice Walker was invited to give a talk at the Hispano North American Cultural Association in Madrid. Even if no records of the conference could be found, on that occasion *El País* published an article entitled “The Writer of *The Color Purple* Fears the Consolidation of Reaganism” [La autora de *El color púrpura* teme la consolidación del reaganismo] (García 1988, 41). The text also included the following specification in the subheading: “Alice Walker has sold six million copies of her novel” [Alice Walker ha vendido seis millones de ejemplares de su novela]. The strategy of referring to Alice Walker as “the author of *El color púrpura*” rather than or prior to mentioning her actual name reflects the press’s intention to attract readers using the title of Spielberg’s international blockbuster, which was homonymous to the source novel. In this line, the article opened with a more detailed contextualization of the author: “Alice Walker, aged 44, the North American writer of *The Color Purple*, which was taken to the big screen by Steven Spielberg” (41),<sup>131</sup> which aimed at helping readers connect Spielberg’s movie to the writer. Indeed, as was discussed earlier in this chapter, a significant part of the Spanish audience was assumed to ignore the fact that Spielberg’s movie was actually an adaptation from a novel, so preventive clarifications of this kind were frequently needed. However, as García’s article explains, in her visit to Spain Walker expressed her excitement with the reception of her novel in the country: “it means that there is a very lively and very favorable opinion towards the problems of racial or sexual discrimination in the country” (41).<sup>132</sup> With the pretext of Walker’s stance on the Reagan Era, García’s extensive article reviewed Walker’s personal life and career, briefly discussing her opera prima, translated in the text as *La*

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<sup>131</sup> “Alice Walker, de 44 años, la escritora norteamericana autora de la novela *El color púrpura*, llevada al cine por Steven Spielberg.”

<sup>132</sup> “significa que hay una opinión muy viva y muy favorable hacia los problemas de discriminación racial o sexual.”



*tercera generación en la granja Copeland*,<sup>133</sup> together with her views on the sociopolitical situation of her home country and her feminist (womanist) intersectional ideology.

Likewise, in 1988 the TV3 program “Retrat” also broadcasted a chapter devoted to Walker. The piece covered the author’s biography together with notes on *The Color Purple* and its adaptation to the big screen. The documentary was shot mainly in Catalan. This broadcasting was advertised in local newspapers as well as in *La Vanguardia* at a national level (1988, 42), even if it had a minor impact among the Catalan audience.

In March 1989, *El País* published an extensive article written by journalist and translator Cecilia Ceriani, specifically targeting the subject of black American women novelists. The article was entitled “The Color of Writing” [El color de la escritura], and subtitled “Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor, Protagonists of the Success of African American Literature” [Alice Walker, Toni Morrison y Gloria Naylor, protagonistas del éxito de la literatura afroamericana]. Ceriani started by referring to the “surprising yet comforting” strength with which black American women writers had entered the American literary scene of the 1970s and the 1980s: “The surprise comes when, after a story of silence in which the black woman has been relegated to an almost invisible background, a more than considerable number of black writers have emerged bringing with them editorial support, critical studies and courses on the subject” (34),<sup>134</sup> and she cited Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor as the main representatives of this tradition.

Unlike other press articles published previously, Ceriani did not present her text as an “introduction” of African American women writers to the foreign Spanish reader. Instead, from the beginning of the article she delved into a rigorous analysis of the most significant features of this literary tradition, referring to concrete elements such as the autobiography, the taste for the postmodern and “the musicality of language as is used by the black race” [la musicalidad del lenguaje tal y como lo usa la raza negra], among

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<sup>133</sup> Even if the writer of this article refers to Walker’s first novel as *La tercera generación en la granja Copeland*, a full translation of the volume has never actually been published in Spain.

<sup>134</sup> “La sorpresa viene dada porque después de una historia de silencio en la que la mujer de color ha sido relegada a un casi invisible segundo plano, surge un número más que considerable de escritoras negras y detrás de ellas todo un apoyo editorial, estudios críticos y cursos sobre el tema.”

others (1989, 34). Even if Morrison, Walker and Naylor were presented as the most notable figures within this context, Ceriani also cited Maya Angelou, Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara and Margaret Walker, as well as she drew attention upon the considerable number of literary prizes awarded to these authors in the decade of 1980.

Interestingly enough, the second part of Ceriani's article, entitled "Oppression" [Opresión], focused on the Spanish translations of some works by African American women authors, namely *The Color Purple*, *Beloved* and *Mama Day*. Ceriani referred to *The Color Purple* as the most popular of the three selected novels, thanks to the promotion originated by Spielberg's film adaptation. After mentioning the success of *The Color Purple* in Spain,<sup>135</sup> Ceriani proceeded to praise Ediciones B for having published Spanish translations of virtually all of Morrison's novels.<sup>136</sup> About Morrison's style, she argued:

El poder del lenguaje en Toni Morrison se percibe ya desde las primeras páginas de sus obras: expresiones, colores y ritmos que alcanzan una densidad próxima a la de la música negra. Una prosa que combina perfectamente, en el caso de *Beloved*, el lenguaje escrito y el oral. Que puede leerse y casi escucharse. (34, emphasis in the original)<sup>137</sup>

Additionally, she also praised the author's ability to merge the mundane with folklore and magic, establishing a parallelism with Latin American magical realism. As for *Mama Day*, Naylor's novel had been published in Spain a few months before Ceriani's article came out. However, having read both the ST and the translation, she compared the setting of the novel with Faulkner's Yoknapatawplia, García Márquez's Macondo or Onetti's Santa María, and praised Naylor's careful choice of imagery, wording, and stylistic devices, most notably repetition.

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<sup>135</sup> *El color púrpura*, published by Plaza y Janés, had reached its tenth edition by the end of 1988.

<sup>136</sup> By 1989, Ediciones B had published translations of *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*; only *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison's first novel, would remain untranslated until 1993.

<sup>137</sup> "The power of language in Toni Morrison can be perceived from the first pages of her works: Expressions, colors and rhythms that reach a density close to that of black music. A prose that perfectly combines, in the case of *Beloved*, written and oral language. It can be read and almost heard."

After reviewing the main stylistic features of each novel, Ceriani concluded with some remarks on the skills and knowledge necessary to translate any of these texts into Spanish, a process which she actually considered “traumatic”:

Es difícil reflejar palabras cortadas, giros o la mala utilización de formas verbales tan características del lenguaje negro en inglés. Pero hay palabras más negras que otras en nuestro idioma, y un traductor debe buscarlas. Lo mismo sucede con las repeticiones que crean un ritmo en el texto inglés: no deben adulterarse. (1989, 34)<sup>138</sup>

According to Ceriani, while the Spanish translations of *The Color Purple* and *Mama Day* were acceptable interpretations of the STs, Iris Mendez’s version of *Beloved* did not preserve the power of Morrison’s style and language.

Of special interest here is Ceriani’s choice of Naylor as one of the visible heads among contemporary African American women writers, considering the limited impact of this author in the TC. As she noted, the Spanish translation of Naylor’s *Mama Day* had been published early in 1989 by Seix Barral. However, even if press articles on African American literature insisted on the relevance of Naylor for this literary tradition,<sup>139</sup> *Mama Day* had no significant impact among the Spanish printed press and mainstream audience. Actually, the only mention of the novel in newspapers was a short advertisement in *Diario 16* (1989, 33) published several months after the volume came out in translation in the TC. Similarly, no publications on the author could be traced during this time period in the Spanish printed press.

Another author whose works had very little, if any impact in Spain during that time is Octavia Butler. Indeed, in 1989 translations of *Dawn* (1987) and *Adulthood Rites* (1988) were commercialized by Ultramar, one of the leading independent publishing houses specialized in genres of fantasy, science fiction and terror during the decades of 1970 and 1980. A translation of Butler’s *Imago* (1989) was also published early in 1990 by

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<sup>138</sup> “It is difficult to reflect the cut words, twists or the misuse of verbal forms that are so characteristic of the black English. But there are words that are blacker than others in our language, and a translator should look for them. The same goes for the repetitions that create a certain rhythm in the English text: they must not be adulterated.”

<sup>139</sup> See “Contra los ‘black machos’” (*La Vanguardia* 1987, 45) and “El color de la escritura” (Ceriani 1989, 34).

Ultramar. However, no reviews, advertisements or mentions of any kind either of any of Butler's novels or of the author herself could be found in the Spanish printed press relative to the time period studied here.

However, the end of the 1980 decade and the first years of the 1990s significantly saw the publication of a series of academic works about African American women authors by scholars from different Spanish universities. This was a turning point for the circulation of African American women's literature in Spain, as reception in the academic sphere started to diverge from reception by the general reading public. Indeed, as studies on the field became more prominent in Spanish universities, scholarly interests eventually turned more varied and diverse. Consequently, authors such as Margaret Walker, who had been barely acknowledged by the Spanish press; Gloria Naylor, who had recently been translated into Spanish for the first time; or Zora Neale Hurston, whose translations had scarcely circulated in the TC, became key figures in Spanish scholarly research within this field of study.

To begin with, in 1989 professor Barbara Ozieblo published a paper for the *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* revising the traditional American literary canon from a feminist perspective:

Recent studies have attempted to dis-cover what the institutionalizing of American Studies contrived to cover up, and slowly—in America at least—forgotten writers have been suffered to take their places in the literary canon. Here [in Spain] the process is much slower, but it has been initiated, and I hope this gathering will do something towards furthering it. We will be talking about women who have been rejected and ignored, and about the consequences of this process to our knowledge of the reality of the world we are studying. (1989, 119)

Through her paper, Ozieblo cited Nella Larsen as one of the main forgotten figures of the American literary canon, overshadowed by the work of male contemporaries such as William Faulkner.

As part of her revision, the author also explored the awareness-raising process originated through the questioning of the canon, with special focus on the recovery of slave narratives as a fundamental part of the American literary tradition (1989, 121-22).

Following this line of thought, she praised the achievements of Toni Morrison (“Tony Morrison” in the original) and Alice Walker, who “have been accorded a secure place in the canon” (1989, 122), as well as she acknowledged the work of the latter in recovering Zora Neale Hurston. However, Ozieblo reasonably argued that these two writers could not be taken as representatives of a whole forgotten—or, as she put it, “covered up”—literary tradition. Therefore, she concluded that more work needed to be done around this field of study, so that the black women’s literary tradition was duly acknowledged, honored and represented.

The 1989 issue of the *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* also contained a paper by Isabel Durán examining the African American tradition in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. This was the first critical study of Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel published in Spain, considering the fact that Carabí did not examine this text in her doctoral research. Durán, who would be the president of the Spanish Association for American Studies (SAAS) until 2019 and Chair of the Department of English Philology at the Complutense University of Madrid (2013-2015), made a solid contribution to the study of American literature in Spain, not only because of the originality of her subject matter, but also for the quality of her analysis.

In her study, the author focused on Morrison’s use of language and stylistic devices as a technique to preserve the African American tradition in the novel. After briefly summarizing the main tropes of Morrison’s first novels, Durán presented *Beloved* as an artwork and one of the best novels of the decade. Through the paper, she conducted a careful textual analysis, drawing upon *Beloved*’s narrative voice and structure as well as the richness of Morrison’s language and artistic imagination: “Toni Morrison ha escrito, pues, una escalofriante novela con un lenguaje preciso y sensual, una narrativa majestuosa y la mayor de las fuerzas imaginativas” (1989, 34).<sup>140</sup> In her study, Durán did not establish relations between Morrison’s *Beloved* and other contemporary novels or authors, but rather she limited her scope to the universe of the author, occasionally drawing comparisons with other novels by Morrison. In relation to this, at the beginning of her paper Durán explicitly argued that part of the ultimate worth and meaning of Morrison’s novel could only be understood from a more holistic perspective, locating it

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<sup>140</sup> “Toni Morrison has written a chilling novel with a precise and sensual language, a majestic narrative and the greatest imaginative force.”

in the context of her whole oeuvre (1989, 31). Durán finished her dissertation with a summary of her ultimate stance: “The story of some women and men, black in particular, human beings in general, surrounded by an unjust, mysterious, cruel, grotesque aura or perhaps they are just inhabitants of an absurd world full of unanswered questions” (41).<sup>141</sup>

During that time professor Tally, whose prolific research had focused on the works of Alice Walker, widened her scope and published several papers on diverse black women authors, such as Zora Neale Hurston and Gloria Naylor, who remained relatively unnoticed by Spanish academia. According to Tally, during that time there was a generalized tendency among the Spanish academia to consider African American women studies as a minor subfield within the scope of North American studies (2020, personal communication). Therefore, even if her research was published in reputable journals, work in this field was not truly valued until certain major events took place later on in the century. Anyhow, the paper “What Do We Do with Zora?: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a ‘Modernist’ Novel” was published in 1989 in the first volume of the *Revista Española de Estudios Norteamericanos* (REDEN). Significantly enough, the vast majority of the contributions to this first edition of *REDEN* were devoted to American white male modernist and postmodernist authors. This turns out to be a clear symptom of Tally’s initial stance: “Trying to integrate the Black Woman’s Literary Tradition into the mainstream of American Literature (read, mostly white and male) has been perhaps as hard as trying to integrate black people in the United States into the mainstream of American Life” (1989, 99). Indeed, Tally criticized the way in which black women authors at the beginning of the twentieth century had to move in the margins of the “New Negro Era” because they were considered “secondary” writers by male critics. In this context, Zora Neale Hurston was introduced as a “self-made”, “most controversial” figure of the period (1989, 100). After reviewing the socio-historical conditions of black literature during and after the Harlem Renaissance, Tally presented her study of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, drawing from the initial premise that Hurston’s modernist novel entailed a break with the previous era on different levels, namely the thematic, the temporal, the linguistic and the symbolic (1989, 102).

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<sup>141</sup> “La historia de unas mujeres y unos hombres, negros en particular, seres humanos en general, rodeados de una aureola injusta, misteriosa, cruel, grotesca o quizá simplemente habitantes de un mundo absurdo lleno de preguntas sin respuesta.”

One significant aspect of Tally's contribution is the fact that Hurston's work was examined as a product of her socio-historical and literary framework, so relations and comparisons were drawn between hers and other publications by African American male and female novelists. This dialogue from which Tally approached Hurston is vital for understanding the relevance of her work both for the literary scene of her time as well as for contemporary American Literature. Thus, Tally established comparisons between the protagonists of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an ex-colored man* (1912) and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, focusing on their different quests for identity. According to the author, Janie Starks's quest "has nothing to do with being white", unlike the main characters of the other cited novels (103). In that sense, Tally also contrasted Hurston's conception of "the black woman" from those of other black women novelists of her time. Indeed, Tally's approach not only introduced the figure of Zora Neale Hurston in North American Studies in Spain, but it also provided a reference framework of black authors of the Harlem Renaissance and after, some of which were still unknown in the target literary system.

Finally, Tally's paper also drew attention towards Hurston's use of language, which is of special interest for our work. Again, the author referred to key works of black literature to support her stance on Hurston's use of black dialect:

[...] what is different is the way she approaches her material. While Dunbar, Chesnut [sic] and Hughes all employ Black talk in order to entertain white sophisticates who were "into" Black culture as an exercise in "primitive" experience, Hurston's objective is to faithfully record what she considered to be an incredibly rich form of expression, peculiar to her own race and in many ways vastly superior to the bland form of English spoken by whites. (1989, 105-6)

After illustrating her point with various passages from Hurston's masterpiece, Tally argued in reference to the presence of African American women writers in university curricula:

It is unfortunate that the average student of American literature is not introduced to Hurston because her use of language makes reading this novel a veritable lark

[...] It is my own personal hope that in the near future she will be accorded a slot in the canon of American literature as the innovator she obviously was and that the studies of her work will no longer be confined to courses on Black American women writers. (1989, 110-11)

The worth of Tally's groundbreaking contributions to the study of African American literature in Spain would not be duly acknowledged until later on in the century; just like Hurston, she seemed to be somehow ahead of her time. Indeed, her research was fundamental for the construction of a solid basis for scholarship on African American literary studies in the TC, and her works were original, pioneering contributions to the field, both in the source and in the target cultures.<sup>142</sup>

In 1990, a significant symptom of the new trends that were taking hold in North American Studies was reflected in the twenty-first volume of *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingles*, which was dedicated to "women writing". Indeed, the volume compiled twenty-three contributions by different Spanish scholars focused on English-speaking women writers; from these papers, nine were devoted to African American women. Even if this fact alone evidenced the shifting interests of contemporary English Studies, research papers published in the journal tackled different topics and authors within the field of African American women studies. Professor Justine Tally contributed to the volume with papers on "The Black American Woman's Literary Tradition and the Cult of 'True Womanhood'" and "Powerlessness into Power: Intersecting Gender, Race and Region", where she revised traditional works of black women's literature as well as she analyzed the fruits of the Black Woman's Renaissance in the contemporary era. Tally also co-authored a third paper with Mercedes Pérez, about Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*.

The remaining contributions to the volume offered a varied overview of issues at stake in contemporary research in African American women's literature. María Candelaria Pérez and María Beatriz Fernández, who were graduate students at the University of La Laguna at that time, chose to write about *Sula*: the former published "Sula... y Nel", a paper examining love and friendship relations in *Sula*, and the latter "La temporalidad de Sula". Other scholars also chose Toni Morrison as the focus of their research papers;

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<sup>142</sup> Subsequent numbers of REDEN did not include papers on African American literature again until 1993 (number 6).



Dulce María Rodríguez published “Leitmotifs in the Quest of T. Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” and María del Cristo Cruz de Reyes wrote “‘I Make Myself Wood’: The Green World Archetype in the Literature of Black American Women”, particularly focusing on the role of nature and the characters’ relationship with “the green world”—as termed by literary critic Annis Pratt—in black women’s novels, although she paid especial attention to Morrison’s works. Following this line, in 1994 Cruz de Reyes would publish further research on the field in her paper “The Greenworld Archetype: A Tool for Self-expression in Toni Morrison’s Prose”, which provided an original approach to the analysis of black women’s literature at the time. María de la Cruz Expósito, in turn, contributed an introductory yet rich study of Alice Walker’s *Meridian* in “Algunas consideraciones sobre *Meridian*”, a novel which had received little attention in Spain except for Tally’s studies of Walker’s oeuvre.<sup>143</sup> Lastly, Juana Herrera’s paper “Negro: El color de una raza alienada” should also be cited. Even if Herrera did not focus her research on black women writers particularly, she presented a comprehensive historical review of race conflicts in the United States from a rather sociological approach.

At this point it should be noted that most of the papers published in this number of *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingles* were authored by young researchers who did not specialize in the field of African American Women Studies throughout their careers. Indeed, when looking at their publications in databases such as Dialnet, we can easily see that some scholars published their dissertations and further work on different topics within the fields of English Literature and Linguistics, while others count with a small volume of research papers published to date. However, this fact should not diminish their contributions to the consolidation of a young research area at a time when it was still difficult to find reliable scholarly work on the field in the TC. Similarly, the University of La Laguna, through their *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, became one of the first scholarly journals in Spain to publish and circulate a significant body of works on African American literature and culture, interestingly enough, directing the focus towards black women writers.

Also in 1990, Manuela Matas Llorente published her doctoral dissertation at the University of Seville, entitled “A Path to Freedom: Form and Content of Nineteenth

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<sup>143</sup> Actually, the novel remains untranslated into Spanish up to date.

Century Women Slave Narrative” [Un camino hacia la libertad: Forma y fondo de la narrativa de esclavas]. In this case, Matas presented her research as a reaction to the works of contemporary African American women authors, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Paule Marshall. As she explained in the introduction of her dissertation, these writers paid tribute to a certain tradition and heritage rooted in the works produced by slave women during the nineteenth century. According to the author, even if contemporary black women writers were acquiring a certain degree of international recognition, the literary tradition to which they recognized themselves as heirs remained unexplored, especially in the TC.

Considering the status of African American studies in Spain during the second half of the twentieth century, Matas’s trendsetting project can be regarded as an introduction to the genre of the women slave narrative in the TC. Indeed, the fact that no further research into the subject had been published in Spain prior to Matas’s dissertation can be inferred by the structure of her work. The first chapter introduced the slave narrative as a distinct genre by examining different definitions provided by referent authors in the SC, such as Henry Louis Gates Jr., William Andrews and Arna Bontemps, among others. Even if the works of these critics considered several women writers when tracing the origins of the black literary tradition, Matas resorted to Barbara Christian, Dorothy Sterling, Frances Smith Foster and Minrose Gwin when looking particularly at women slave narratives. In relation to this, she criticized the difficult access to narratives that had never been reprinted after their original publication, and praised *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers* for their work at collecting and facilitating access to these works. The second chapter of the dissertation studied a selection of women slave narratives, namely the works of Harriet Ann Jacobs, Mattie Griffiths, Kate Drumgoold, Annie L. Burton and Elithabeth Keckley, which were further analyzed in the third and last chapter, seeking to demonstrate the interrelation among the structure of these works, on the one hand, and the difficulty of establishing encompassing and homogeneous criteria to define the genre, on the other (1990, 3-4).

In the conclusions of her project, Matas criticized the general tendency of scholars in the SC to study the slave narrative from the perspective of certain prevailing criteria that automatically excluded women narratives from the genre: “the slave narrative does not faithfully conform to the forms and contents that critics and scholars have coincided in

pointing out as characteristic of the genre” (1990, 5).<sup>144</sup> In this respect, the author concluded that the writer’s gender was crucial in the form and content of his/her work, so that women narratives could not be studied or understood in terms of criteria used to define men narratives:

Es necesario tener en cuenta el hecho de que sea una mujer la autora de la narración. [...] Por esta razón, no se puede hablar de un esquema común, como sucedía en las narraciones de esclavos, que englobe toda la narrativa de esclavas. [...] Las narraciones de esclavas sitúan el énfasis en aspectos que tienen que ver con su situación de mujer dentro del sistema esclavista y que pueden incidir, o no, con el de los autores esclavos. [...] Las diferencias en la finalidad de cada una de las narraciones hace necesario tener en cuenta el tiempo en que estas fueron escritas. No puede hablarse sólo de lo similar, sino que hay que referirse también a lo diferente y, por lo tanto, distintivo dentro ya de las narraciones de esclavas como grupo de obras con carácter propio. (1990, 71-72)<sup>145</sup>

And concluded: “All this makes it necessary to consider women like Jacobs, Griffiths, Burton, Drumgoold or Keckley, among others, when analyzing the forms and contents of contemporary African American literature” (73).<sup>146</sup> This last remark about the fundamental relevance of this literary tradition to the study of contemporary literature reminds us of the worth of Matas’s work in recovering a literary tradition unexamined in the TC, yet essential for studying contemporary African American women’s literature. Indeed, when African American literature started to penetrate the target literary system, the focus of scholars and critics was directed toward the contemporary panorama, so that genres such as the women slave narrative did not enter the TC until

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<sup>144</sup> “la narrativa de esclavas no se ajusta fielmente a las formas y contenidos que críticos y estudiosos han coincidido en señalar como característicos del género.”

<sup>145</sup> “It is necessary to take into account the fact that the author of the story is a woman. [...] For this reason, one cannot speak of a common scheme, as was the case in male slave narratives, that encompasses all women slave narratives. [...] Women slave narratives place the emphasis on aspects that have to do with their situation as women within the slavery system, which may or may not coincide with the situation of slave authors. [...] Differences in the purpose of each narrative makes it necessary to take into account the time in which they were written. We cannot only speak of similarities but we must also refer to what is different and, therefore, distinctive within the women slave narratives as a specific group of works with their own character.”

<sup>146</sup> “Todo esto hace necesario tener en cuenta a mujeres como Jacobs, Griffiths, Burton, Drumgoold o Keckley, entre otras posibles, a la hora de adentrarse en el análisis de formas y contenidos de la literatura afro americana contemporánea.”

scholars such as Matas secured classic authors their rightful space within African American literature studies in Spain. As we will see in forthcoming sections of this chapter, during the decade of 1990 Matas continued her research on black women authors, presenting and publishing various papers on the topic. In addition to her scholarly work, she also translated into Spanish Harriet Ann Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in 1996, and published it in a bilingual edition by the University of Leon.

After having presented her doctoral dissertation "Female Characters in the Narratives of African American Women Writers: Evolution Cycles" [Los personajes femeninos en la narrativa de autoras afro americanas: ciclos de evolución] in 1990, in 1991 María Esther Álvarez López published several research papers on African American women's literature. To begin with, she contributed to the first volume of *Studia Patriciae Shaw oblata*, a compilation of works published in honor of professor Patricia Shaw, who had been her thesis supervisor at the University of Oviedo. In her paper "The Sounds of Silence: Race, Gender and Literary Voice" [Los sonidos del silencio: Raza, género y voz literaria], Álvarez López explored the modes of expression of African American women writers from an intersectional perspective, as well as the interrelation of voices and silences in their works:

Voz y silencio representan respectivamente la autoridad o la falta de ella y, como consecuencia de esta última, la marginación, el sometimiento, la represión. Asimismo, el proceso de apropiación de la voz tiene su paralelismo en la relación entre raza, género y voz literaria, o lo que es lo mismo, entre escritor y audiencia, entre autoridad y autonomía narrativa. (1991, 13)<sup>147</sup>

In this case, the works considered in Álvarez López's study were Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Walker's *The Color Purple* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Álvarez López's paper explored the horrors suffered by the women protagonists of the three novels and the narrative and linguistic devices used to fight against repression and voicelessness.

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<sup>147</sup> Voice and silence respectively represent authority or the lack of it and, as a consequence of the latter, marginalization, submission, repression. Likewise, the process of voice appropriation has its parallel in the relationship between race, gender and literary voice, or what is the same, between writer and audience, between authority and narrative autonomy.

Likewise, in 1991 Álvarez López also published the paper “Language and Space as Elements of Human and Natural Distortion in *The Bluest Eye*” [Lenguaje y espacio como elementos de distorsión natural y humana en *The Bluest Eye*] in *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. Álvarez López also contributed to the volume *Studies in American Literature: An Homage to Enrique García Díez*, published by the University of Valencia, with a chapter devoted to studying of the role of traveling in African American women’s literature. In this case, Álvarez López postulated that African American women writers (together with women writers from other nationalities and ethnicities) rejected traditional identifications of the trope of traveling with men’s literature, and turned it into a universal ungendered experience (1991, 263). Through her academic career, Álvarez López did not only work on African American women’s literature, but she also published scholarly work on Chinese American, Chicana and Latin American women writers, among others, during the decade of 1990. Indeed, this intersectional approach to the study of American women writers would become fundamental for contemporary English Studies in Spain.

As the popularity of African American women’s literature gradually increased in the Spanish academic scene, mentions of these authors in the press at the beginning of the 1990s were sporadic and of no significant relevance. Towards the end of 1990, Plaza y Janés had published *El templo de mis amigos*, the translation of Alice Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar* by Sofía Noguera. This event, however, was hardly relevant for Spanish press media, who were still publicizing *El color púrpura* (both the movie and the novel) at that time. Some minor notices of Walker’s new work were published in *El País* (1990a, 26 and 1990b, 76), but no further references to the novel could be found in any other Spanish press source. A similar reception was given to *En posesión del secreto de la alegría*, translated by Gemma Rovira and published by Plaza y Janés, who had purchased the rights to publish Alice Walker’s works in Spain. However, no reviews or advertisements of the novel were published in the TC. In this case, we should note that the impact of the two texts following *The Color Purple* was also minor in essayistic and academic sources. Indeed, no reviews or critical material on any of them were published in cultural magazines or scholarly journals until later on in the twenty-first century.

Contrasting with the lack of concern with Walker’s work, Toni Morrison’s visit to Spain in 1991 earned her several headlines in Spanish newspapers. Indeed, that year the

author was invited to the XV AEDEAN Congress held at the University of Logroño (La Rioja), where Dr. Àngels Carabí presented a paper on “The Affirmation of the African American Woman: A Challenge in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*” [La afirmación de la mujer afro-americana: Un desafío en *Sula* de Toni Morrison]. After the congress, Morrison visited the University of Barcelona, where she was welcomed by local philology students, teachers and researchers: “la vaig portar fins a Barcelona, a la universitat, on va donar una conferència en una aula magna plena a vessar on els meus alumnes i jo mateixa li vam cantar la Cançó de Salomó inspirada en un poema de la seva novel·la” (Carabí 2019, n. p.). The event was announced in newspapers *El Mundo del siglo XXI* (1991, 55) and *El Periódico de Catalunya* (1991, 31) and, with the occasion of her stay in the country, María Asunción Guardia interviewed her for *La Vanguardia* (1991, 48). The title of the conversation read “There Is No Universal Literature: That Is a White Idea” [No hay una literatura universal: Ésa es una idea de blancos]. This premise was actually the guiding thread of Morrison’s communications during her time in the country, so her problematization of universal literature was the predominant theme of press articles published at that moment in Spain. Despite its title, Guardia’s interview revolved around the theme of race and racism, as she questioned the author about the confrontation of the white and black societies, both in fiction and in reality. In this case, the transcriptions of Morrison’s answers showed a clear will to explain to a non-specialist foreign audience the issues at stake in the author’s literary imagination. As a matter of fact, one of the interviewer’s questions was whether the author was trying to “overcome the complacent and melodramatic ghost of Uncle Tom” [superar el complaciente y melodramático fantasma del tío Tom], to which Morrison responded: “I haven’t even thought about it. Whoever said that has no notion of contemporary African American literature” (1991, 48).<sup>148</sup> Questions such as this one evidenced the inherent problematic in the reception of a foreign literature derived from a sociopolitical and historical context so different from the target culture. Indeed, Morrison’s answer reiterated the distance between the contemporary concerns of the source literature and those of the receiving culture. In this case, the interviewer questioned the author’s work on the basis of an 1852 novel which was treated as representative of the present concerns of black literature and society.

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<sup>148</sup> “Ni si quiera lo había pensado. Quienquiera que haya dicho eso no tiene ninguna noción de la literatura afroamericana contemporánea”

Anyhow, the interview was supplemented by a short article by Àngels Carabí entitled: “The Affirmation of an African American Identity” [La afirmación de una identidad afroamericana] which offered a general overview of Morrison’s literary project paying special attention to the universal dimension of her oeuvre:

Toni Morrison explora la sociedad negra desde un punto de vista genuino, rompiendo con una tradición de estereotipos y confiriendo una dimensión universal a los aspectos particulares de la cultura negra. Su obra desvela lo que significa ser una persona de color en Estados Unidos, y, especialmente, lo que significa ser una mujer negra. [Sus personajes] son voces que hablan de los abusos a los que las mujeres de color se han visto sometidas, de su fortaleza y de su fragilidad. La escritora habla de supervivencia y de amistad y de la alegría de ser mujer. (41)<sup>149</sup>

As can be seen, Carabí emphasized Morrison’s stance as a black *woman* writer, as she presented the author to target readers from an implied intersectional perspective. Finally, Carabí also referred to the political implications of the author’s work, and her portrait of intra—rather than inter—racial relationships. During her stay in Barcelona, Carabí took the chance to interview the author about *Beloved*. Their conversation was published in the United States in 1992, and its advertisements read “Don’t miss it!” (Carabí 2019, n. p.). In Spain, the interview also appeared in *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* in 1993, after the title “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: ... ‘and the Past Achieved Flesh’” (105). Carabí’s interview revolved around the role of memory and the past in Morrison’s novel, which was ultimately presented as a healing or cathartic device for African American people. Other topics tackled in this conversation were the role of black women and the recovery of their past, specially focusing on mother-daughter relationships; the measure of love and relationships and the role of white characters/people in the black imagination. This last point, however, was not approached from the traditional confrontational perspective (white vs. black), which had prevailed in previous publications about Morrison’s works in the TC, but rather from

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<sup>149</sup> “Toni Morrison explores black society from a genuine point of view, breaking with a tradition of stereotypes and giving a universal dimension to the particular aspects of black culture. Her work reveals what it means to be a person of color in the United States, and especially what it means to be a black woman. [Her characters] are voices that speak to the abuses that black women have been subject to, their strength and their fragility. The writer speaks of survival and friendship and of the joy of being a woman.”

the will of using the remembrance of the past to address contemporary “race” relations in the United States.

With the event of Morrison’s visit to the country, newspaper *ABC* also published an interview to the author by José Antonio Gurpegui which discussed her views on “minority literatures” in the United States (1991, 55). Indeed, the interview’s title read “Toni Morrison: The Future of US Literature Lies on Ethnic Minorities” [Toni Morrison: El futuro de la literatura de EE. UU. depende de las minorías étnicas]. Gurpegui opened the interview arguing that despite Morrison’s experience as a novelist, the mainstream public only knew her for her two most successful novels: “Autora de seis novelas, sin embargo, para el gran público es únicamente la autora de *Beloved* y *La canción de Solomón* [sic]” (1991, 55).<sup>150</sup> However, Morrison responded to these claims by pointing out that appreciation of her books was tighed to scholarly opinion and acceptance, and that novels such as *Sula* were progressively getting more attention in the North American academic scene. Apart from these remarks, Gurpegui explored the concerns of literature produced by ethnic minorities in the SC as opposed to that written by white canonical authors. In this case, Gurpegui highlighted Morrison’s views on the different perspectives and literary styles of contemporary white and black women authors, and foregrounded her firm belief that minority literatures are the most realistic representation of contemporary American literature.

Before going back to her homeland, Morrison met with professor Carabí and gave her the manuscript of her following novel, *Jazz*, as a present. Carabí generously donated the manuscript to the University of Barcelona, and Morrison’s novel was published the following year, 1992, in the United States. In Spain, however, it would not be translated until the following year, after the author had become a Nobel laureate. Anyhow, in 1992 newspaper supplement *ABC Cultural* published a translated version of a review by American book critic David Gates in the section “In a Foreign Language” (En otro idioma). The original review had been published in American magazine *Newsweek*, and was entitled “American Means Black, Too” (Gates 1992, n. p.). In the Spanish version, the title was supressed and changed to “*Jazz*: Toni Morrison” (1992, 23). The fact that Morrison was not introduced to the target reader at the beginning of the article

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<sup>150</sup> “Being the author of six novels, however, for the general public Morrison is only the author of *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*.”



evidenced the foreignness of the reviewer, as Spanish reviews usually included some initial stance with background information about the writer. Indeed, the beginning of the review read:

¿Qué novelista no suspira por escribir, al menos una vez, un libro como *Jazz*, de Toni Morrison? Corto. Denso. De lenguaje tenso y lírico. Con un argumento como una serpiente que se muerde la cola. E interesado no sólo en su narración y en sus personajes, sino también en el proceso de su propia creación. Un libro con frases. Que no son frases. (1992, 23)<sup>151</sup>

After this initial stance, Gates jumped into examining *Jazz* within the framework of Morrison's oeuvre, citing works such as *The Bluest Eye*—which had received little attention in the TC, as no translation of the text had been published in Spain—, and “Playing in the Dark”, Morrison's groundbreaking essay which had been published that same year in the SC. Thus, the review did not use any preparatory devices such as introductory paragraphs or explanatory appositional clauses to help target readers locate the author within the contemporary literary panorama. Instead, the text presented a thoughtful analysis of *Jazz*, alluding to culture-specific references such as “lowdown music” or “the East St. Louis riots” [los disturbios de East St. Louis] as well as to Morrison's incorporation into the American canon alongside authors such as Poe, Melville, Twain or Faulkner (1992, 23).

Following this line of thought, in 1991 *La Vanguardia* advertised a course on North American literature organized by the Institute of North American Studies in Barcelona (1991a, 44 and 1991b, 9). The course program featured Morrison alongside other referent North American writers, namely Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, William Faulkner, and James Baldwin. Similarly, in 1992 *ABC* published an article entitled “To turn your back on your own life” [Dar la espalda a la propia vida] (Sánchez, 90), where the morality of the mother's choice in Morrison's *Beloved* was compared to other ethical dilemmas posed by authors such as Mario Vargas Llosa in *Elogio de la Madrastra* (1988), Tennessee Williams's *La*

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<sup>151</sup> “What novelist doesn't yearn to write, at least once, a book like Toni Morrison's *Jazz*? Short. Dense. Its language highstrung and lyrical. Plotted like a snake devouring its own tail. And concerned not only with its story and characters, but also in the process of its own creation. A book with sentences. That are not sentences.”

*primavera romana de la señora Stone* (1964), Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La novela de Perón* (1985) and Patrick Süskind's *El perfume* (1985). In a display of great knowledge and appreciation for contemporary literature, Luis Rafael Sánchez pondered on the "unequivocal" attribute of morality by referring to a series of works that repeatedly problematized universal ethical values. About Morrison, Sánchez presented her as heir to James Baldwin and argued: "For her and with her we suffer with her valuable, brave people. For her and with her we are repulsed by the idea of white supremacy that circulates as faith in her homeland".<sup>152</sup> After discussing a wide range of varied sources, the author made a claim for the universal reach of culture-specific literatures in hope that some day we would be able to get out of the "alarming misery" of ignoring that everybody is represented in *the other*. He poetically concluded:

¿Será necesario, será útil reiterar que una sola es la aventura de todos los hombres sobre la tierra, uno solo el logro, una la condición? Humana condición que florece y prospera cuantas veces la batalla con el ángel resulta en un estremecido, responsable montón de palabras que a todos redescubre, a todos reforma, a todos liberta. (90)<sup>153</sup>

In 1991, Angela Davis had traveled to Paris to participate in an homage to French writer and supporter of the Black Civil Rights Movement Jean Genet. On that occasion, Javier Valenzuela published an article in *El País* announcing "The Return of the Black Panther" [El regreso de la pantera negra] (76). The first paragraph of the text provided a detailed description of Davis's physical appearance after years away from media interest: "Tan ágil y hermosa como en los tiempos en que figuraba en la lista de las 10 personas más buscadas por el FBI. Menos crispada y mucho más sonriente, en cambio".<sup>154</sup> The text also described her clothing, her hairstyle and her command of the French language: "conserva un francés extrañamente bueno para un norteamericano" [she has a strangely good command of French for a North American]. The rest of the

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<sup>152</sup> "Por ella y con ella nos duele su gente valiosa, valiente. Por ella y con ella nos repugna la idea de la supremacía blanca que circula como fe en su país."

<sup>153</sup> "Will it be necessary, will it be useful to repeat that one is the adventure of all men on earth, one is our achievement, one is our condition? A human condition that flourishes and prospers as often as the battle with the angel results in a shuddering, responsible pile of words by which we are all rediscovered, we are all reformed, we are all freed."

<sup>154</sup> "As nimble and beautiful as in the days when she was on the FBI 10 Most Wanted list. Less angry and a lot more smiling, though."

article alternated between providing information about Davis's contemporary activity and discussing Genet's influence on her activism. According to Valenzuela, Davis had recently incorporated to her fight for black rights the fight for the rights of women as well as homosexuals, guided by Genet. However, the article highlighted Davis's opposition to the means used by black panthers and other groups at the end of the sixties and during the seventies: "At that time, Angela Davis, leader of the Communist Party of the United States and the 'Black Panther' movement, participated in armed assaults in an attempt to free her imprisoned comrades. She paid for it with 18 months in prison".<sup>155</sup> <sup>156</sup> The formulas used to refer to the author and activist and the general tone of the text bear a resemblance to early writings about her published in the Spanish press, which portrayed Davis—and, by extension, the whole apparatus of the black protest—as a dangerous and exotic product of the SC.

In 1992, the *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* was founded, edited by the SAAS at the University of Seville. Pilar Marín, chief editor, cited the 1992 AEDEAN Congress as one of the catalysts which had encouraged the creation of the journal (S. C. 1993, 60). The first volume compiled eight contributions by different Americanist scholars, including an interview with Gloria Naylor by Àngels Carabí. Carabí's conversation with the writer was divided in two distinguishable parts. First, they revisited the history of black women in America as Naylor had lived it from childhood to present day. The writer emphasized her reaction to the sociopolitical events occurred during the decade of 1960, and considered natural the "eclosion of Afro-American writers, especially women writers" that had taken place during the 1970s and 1980s: "Black women have been writing in this country for over a hundred years. And they began to proliferate in the 30's during the Harlem Renaissance and they continued to grow and build on each other" (1992, 24). In relation to this phenomenon, she discussed the questioning of the canon which started during the 1960s and 1970s, which had necessarily led to a reconfiguration of what was considered the American literary tradition. Likewise,

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<sup>155</sup> "En aquellos tiempos, Angela Davis, dirigente del Partido Comunista de Estados Unidos y del movimiento de los 'panteras negras' llegó a participar en asaltos a mano armada para intentar liberar a sus camaradas presos. Lo pagó con 18 meses de cárcel."

<sup>156</sup> The truth is that even if Davis was associated with the Black Panther movement, she was never a direct member of the group, and much less her leader, as Valenzuela implied. Likewise, she was declared innocent of the charges she was accused of in 1972, because of which she had served the 18 months of pretrial detention mentioned in the article.

Naylor identified a tradition shaped by women writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, even if she also acknowledged the fact that the most contemporary black literary voices were concerned with depicting experiences different to those portrayed in the novels of such canonical authors.

The second part of the interview was concerned with the intrinsic analysis of Naylor's work. The main focus in this case was laid upon her opera prima *The Women of Brewster Place*. When discussing the novel, Naylor identified a common trend in black women literature: the preference for narrating experiences within the black community rather than tackling the confrontation with white America: "I think it's a gender fact. Men have a need to somehow confront the world, to flex their muscles, if you will. The female confronts what is around her" (1992, 31). *Linden Hills* and *Balley's Cafe* were also examined, even if the latter was still unpublished at the time of the interview, paying close attention to the representation of masculinity and femininity in both novels.

In 1992, Ana María Manzanás published her doctoral dissertation "Toni Morrison's Narrative: In Search of an African American Aesthetic" [La narrativa de Toni Morrison: Búsqueda de una estética afroamericana] at the University of Salamanca. The study, which was supervised by Dr. Catalina Montes, focused on Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *Tar Baby*, one of her least studied novels, and read them in the context of the African American women's literary tradition. In her approach, Manzanás compared Morrison's work in recovering and revising the black aesthetic to that conducted by Zora Neale Hurston at the beginning of the century. She also studied the influence and representation of her literary ancestors, namely Harriet Ann Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, Frances Harper, Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset and Ann Petry. However, the three novels analyzed in Manzanás's dissertation were also read within the framework of contemporary African American literature, where they entered a necessary dialogue with the works of some of Morrison's contemporaries, such as Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Sherley Ann Williams or Gayl Jones (1992, 13). In her introduction to the study, Manzanás justified her choice of texts arguing that the three selected novels perfectly represented and displayed the African American heritage. Thus, her analysis of *Song of Solomon* focused on revising the myth of the flying African slave and its interpretation in the contemporary setting. Regarding *Tar Baby*, the author examined the connections between the novel and the African American folkloric tale from which it

derived, and the ways in which this counterpoint affected or determined the main conflict in the novel. Finally, as for *Beloved*, Manzanas approached the text as a revision of autobiographical slave narratives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1992, 13-14).

That same year, Jesús Benito also read his dissertation at the University of Salamanca, which was entitled “The Narrative of James Baldwin: In Search of an African American Aesthetic” [La narrativa de James Baldwin: Búsqueda de una estética afroamericana] and it was also supervised by Catalina Montes. Two years later, in 1994, Benito and Manzanas co-wrote the volume *The Aesthetic of Memory: The Narrative of James Baldwin and Toni Morrison* [La estética del recuerdo: La narrativa de James Baldwin y Toni Morrison], which merged both dissertations in a rich comparative study between the two authors. This was one of the first book-length studies published about African American literature in Spain which, through the analysis of the works of two contemporary referent writers, honored the whole African American literary tradition. Indeed, Manzanas’s and Benito’s volume tackled a wide range of themes particular to black American literature, such as the use of bible sources, the incorporation of black music genres such as blues or jazz into their narratives, the oral tradition, the use of folklore and the reconstruction of the historical past, among others.

During the summer of 1993, a short but revealing article was published by Juan Ramón Masoliver in *La Vanguardia* (42). The article’s prophetic title, “Color Wins” [Gana el color], reviewed landmark events for black writers in the United States; writers who were, in fact, all women. To begin with, the author highlighted the success of Terry McMillan’s bestseller *Waiting to Exhale*, which had sold more than 400.000 hard cover copies, thus proving the existence of “a market for the black middle-class readership” [un mercado de lectores negros medios]. He also referred to Maya Angelou’s public recitation of the poem “On the Pulse of Morning” at the first inauguration of President Bill Clinton on January 20, 1993. After this event, Angelou became the second poet in history to recite at a presidential inauguration, and the first African American to do so.<sup>157</sup> Lastly, Masoliver considered Rita Dove’s appointment as Poet Laureate that same

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<sup>157</sup> Until present day, from the six poets that have recited at an inaugural ceremony, three are African American authors, namely Maya Angelou (Bill Clinton, 1993), Elizabeth Alexander (Barak Obama, 2009) and Amanda Gorman (Joe Biden, 2021).

year, also becoming the first African American to hold the position since its creation in 1986:

Y que [el presidente Bill Clinton] remache el clavo nombrando para el cargo de poeta laureado [...], designando, digo, a una profesora de literatura en la universidad de Virginia, ganadora del Pulitzer años atrás con su novela *Thomas and Beulah*, y desde ahora cantora oficial USA: la muy moderna Rita Dove, sorprendida ella misma de que tal honor haya recaído en una negra. (42)<sup>158</sup>

The news of Rita Dove's appointment as the United States Poet Laureate was briefly reported in *ABC* (1993b, 80) and *Diario 16* (1993c, 40). In the case of *Diario 16*, the news was mentioned anecdotally in a larger piece about Toni Morrison's appointment as Nobel prize winner that same year. As for *La Vanguardia*, the only reference to the event appeared in Masoliver's article.

### 3.5. From Margin to Center: Toni Morrison and the Nobel Prize in Literature

Up until 1993, Toni Morrison's publishing history in Spain had been predominantly linked to a now defunct publishing house, Argos Vergara, which had circulated her most important titles in translation in the late seventies and early eighties. However, following the publication of her most recent book, *Jazz*, Ediciones B undertook the task of rescuing some parts of her novelistic corpus: *Sula* and *La isla de los caballeros*, both translated by Mireia Bofill; *La canción de Salomón*, by Carmen Criado; *Beloved*, by Iris Menéndez Sallés; and finally, the aforementioned *Jazz*, whose translator was Jordi Gubern, were published in the collection "Tiempos Modernos" in 1993. However, of special relevance here is the fact that this occurred right before Morrison was announced as the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature that same year. Indeed, while these series of editions published by Ediciones B started to circulate during the spring of

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<sup>158</sup> "[President Bill Clinton] finishes off by appointing as Poet Laureate [...], a professor of literature in the university of Virginia, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *Thomas and Beulah*, and from now on official singer of the USA: the very modern Rita Dove, surprised herself that such honor has fallen on a black woman."

1993, the announcement of that year's Nobel laureates did not occur until the month of October. Anyhow, the endeavor of the Barcelona-based publishing house was an event for Spanish readers, and several press media considered it an indicator of the consolidation of Morrison's novels as modern classics of universal literature.

In this context, during the spring of 1993 advertisements and reviews of her novel *Jazz* were published under headlines such as "Toni Morrison. A Classic of Contemporary Literature" [Toni Morrison. Un clásico de la literatura contemporánea] (1993, 45), "Toni Morrison, The Most Famous Black Novelist" [Toni Morrison, la novelista negra más famosa] (1993, 206) and "Toni Morrison, A Great American Novelist" [Toni Morrison, gran novelista americana] (1993, 146). Moreover, a considerable number of periodicals took that chance to write about the author's career and her role as a key author of modernity. Some newspapers, such as *Diario 16* (1993a, 22), *Tribuna de actualidad* (1993, 73) and *El correo español* (Ayala-Dip 1993, 46), highlighted the work of Ediciones B as a response to the Spanish readership's interest in the author's work. These reviews targeted specific aspects of Morrison's oeuvre, such as the role of the black woman (*Canarias 7* 1993, 61), intraracial problems within the black community (*El Mundo del siglo XXI* 1993a, 51), or the representation of the historical past and the African heritage in novels such as *Beloved* (*Diario 16* 1993b, 49). Anyhow, the degree of specificity and the depth of analysis displayed in these contributions was significantly different to that of previous articles published in similar press media addressed to the popular reading public.

Even if the news of Morrison's award were not free from controversy, as will be illustrated throughout the following pages, the truth is that her name was frequent in the speculative pieces published before the announcement. Ricardo Moreno (1993, 39) considered her a "new addition to the favorites list" [un nuevo añadido a la lista de favoritos], joining the recurrent names of Marguerite Duras, Bai Dao, Doris Lessing, Ana María Matute, Günter Grass and Seamus Heaney. Likewise, Carmen Villar argued that even if experts agreed that there was no clear favorite among the many contestants, the fact that the name of the laureate author was going to be revealed on the first Thursday of the month of October was a symptom that there was a general agreement among the members of the Academy (1993, 57). Villar also reflected upon the various names subject to consideration on that occasion, citing several representatives of the "so-called orientalism" [el denominado orientalismo], such as Bei Dao, Kenzaburo Oe,

or arab winner of the Goncourt prize Tahar Ben Jelloun. Other European names such as José Saramago, Marguerite Duras, Günter Grass and Salman Rushdie were also mentioned by the journalist, as well as the North Americans Thomas Pynchon, Susan Sontag and Toni Morrison. Other local periodicals such as *El Correo Español*, *La Provincia* and *Diario de Mallorca* joined the discussion about the possible winners, amongst which they recurrently cited Morrison, Matute, Duras and Lessing. Contrarily, periodicals such as *El Mundo del siglo XXI* or *El Periódico de Catalunya* did not include Morrison among the key names under consideration.

On October 7, 1993, the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy announced that Toni Morrison was the winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature, describing her as “a literary artist of the first rank” (Nobel Media AB 1993, n. p.). Morrison was the nineteenth winner of the prize, the eighth woman and the first black woman laureate. On October 8, the news of Morrison’s achievement filled the international press. In Spain, around thirty different periodicals detailedly reported the event. On the one hand, local newspapers that had previously paid scarce attention to the author published lengthy articles on that occasion. This was the case, among others, of *Canarias 7*, *El correo español* (Bilbao), *Diario de avisos* (Santa Cruz de la Palma), *Diario de Ibiza*, *Diario de Mallorca*, *Diario de Soria*, *Faro de Vigo*, *Ideal* (Jaén), all of which featured news about the Nobel laureate, most of them on the cover of the October 8, 1993 issue. Most of these reports highlighted the implications of a black woman laureate—especially after South African writer Nadine Gordimer had won the same literary prize in 1991—, as well as they considered the event a triumph for African Americans.

On the other hand, larger national periodicals which had followed Morrison’s career from earlier stages also disclosed the culmination of her international recognition as a major writer of modernity. Indeed, on October 8, 1993, *El Mundo del siglo XXI* published contributions by Alex Salmón and Mariano Antolín disclosing the keys to Morrison’s international accomplishment. Salmón (1993, 61-62) compared her role in contemporary North American literature to Spike Lee’s in cinema and celebrated the author’s task to “liberate once and for all the submissive conscience of blackness in the United States of America” (61).<sup>159</sup> After quoting the author about her view on race relations in the United States and problems within the African American community

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<sup>159</sup> “liberar de una vez por todas la conciencia sumisa de la negritud en los Estados Unidos de América”



and its relation to white America, Salmón concluded his intervention with a rather striking stance: “Toni Morrison is a writer of pure race, but not a racist” [Toni Morrison es una escritora pura raza, que no racista] (62). Antolín (1993, 62-63), in turn, centered his approach on the Nobel laureate’s connections with the target country, both through her various visits to Spanish Universities and through the translations of her novels. In this respect, Antolín recalled her testimony when she traveled to Barcelona in 1992, where she expressed a major concern for social minorities in the United States, specially tackling the problems to which the black community was subjected. Antolín also devoted special attention to the role of publisher Silvia Querini at Ediciones B in foreseeing the relevance of Morrison’s work in the international sphere:

Parece que nadie puede asegurar quién ganará el Premio Nobel de Literatura entre los numerosos nombres que se barajan anualmente, si se exceptúa mi amiga Silvia Querini, de Ediciones B, a la que es necesario dar la enhorabuena porque en la primavera pasada apostó por Toni Morrison, publicando la pasada primavera cinco de sus mejores trabajos, hasta ahora prácticamente desconocidos. (63)<sup>160</sup>

After referring to the difficulties of being a black woman writer in the United States, Antolín closed his contribution by arguing that Morrison’s literature could not be easily understood, but rather it demanded the patience and compromise of her readers.

On that occasion, *El País* devoted the section “Tribune: The Nobel falls upon a black activist” [Tribuna: El Nobel recae en una activista de la negritud] to discuss the 1993 Nobel award, counting with various contributions from different journalists and correspondents who had been following the development of the event in question. The image of the author that emerged from these articles, most of which were written from a considerably subjective viewpoint, was nuanced and multifaceted. Certainly, while all the approaches drew from a profound respect and admiration for the laureate writer, each author tackled different aspects surrounding her: from José Miguel Oviedo’s (1993, 30), Antonio Caño’s (1993, 31) and Pedro Sorela’s (1993, 31) general overviews

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<sup>160</sup> “It seems that no one can determine with any certainty who will win the Nobel Prize in Literature among the many names that are considered annually, with the exception of my friend Silvia Querini, from Ediciones B, who should be congratulated because last spring she bet on Toni Morrison, publishing five of her best works which had been practically unknown until recently.”

of the implications of the 1993 Nobel Prize for the contemporary American literary scene to Juan Ernesto Ayala-Dip's (1993, 32) and Juan Marín's (1993, 32) readings of Morrison's works within the framework of black women's literature as well as more concrete analyses of her works, such as Gabi Gleichmann's (1993, 33). In any case, if these pieces are read contrastively, some contradictions arise at certain points of the authors' arguments.

Oviedo's opening article claimed that Morrison was already a popular and prestigious voice among the American reading public and the literary criticism of the country before achieving this major international recognition. Similarly, Marín wrote that Morrison was the most respected black writer in the country and that, ever since James Baldwin died, she had become the matriarch of American letters. While these positions were generalized among the Spanish press, some critics, such as *El Mundo del siglo XXI* journalist and editor Mariano Antolín (1993, 62), shared Sorela's view that Morrison was not a popular writer in the SC other than in academic circles: "many North Americans must have found out about the existence of this woman yesterday" [muchos norteamericanos se debieron enterar ayer de la existencia de esta mujer] (1993, 31). Likewise, while Caño and Sorela coincided in not categorizing Morrison's work as protest literature—as both authors considered that the social conflicts involving the black community as a minority were only a backdrop in her novels—, other authors such as Marín and, most prominently, Ayala-Dip, precisely located social protest at the core of her literary project: "the conscience of this [racial] drama is the moral vehicle of her books" [la conciencia de este drama [racial] es el vehículo moral de sus libros] (Ayala-Dip 1993, 32).

However, there were also some insights that most authors publishing in *El País* coincided to bring into light, namely the contemporary status of black literature at a national and global level, the particularities of Morrison's style and language and, most notably, her role as a black woman writer. Indeed, most contributions started by highlighting the way in which the author's work had changed the paradigms of black literature as a fundamental component of American and world literature:

La narrativa de la flamante premio Nobel norteamericana, la escritora negra Toni Morrison, es uno de los más serios intentos de crear una literatura alejada de los presupuestos que su etnia imponía en los tumultuosos años 60. Una literatura

que hacía lo posible por alejar de su discurso la sensación de que la literatura negra norteamericana estaba condenada, como señaló alguna vez con gran lucidez Ralph Ellison, a ser considerada siempre como “un pequeño problema de derechos civiles”. (Ayala-Dip 1993, 32)<sup>161</sup>

And

Dentro de la literatura actual, su obra significa algo que seguramente ha convencido a los académicos suecos de su importancia: algunas de las manifestaciones literarias de las lenguas mayores son expresiones de marginalidad, de sectores deprimidos u olvidados, provenientes de la periferia de su propia cultura. (Oviedo 1993, 30)<sup>162</sup>

In this respect, Marín considered the decision of the Swedish Academy a confirmation of the crisis of white literature at a global level:

El reconocimiento mundial que supone el Nobel para la escritura en negro también puede leerse como el certificado de la crisis de la literatura en blanco. [...] Estados Unidos se reconoce ya como una nación multicultural, y escritores latinoamericanos, asiáticos y europeos han invadido las universidades americanas, terminando con el monopolio de los blancos anglosajones protestantes. Y está claro que, en esa apoteosis de la multiracialidad, los negros son los más americanos. Es su turno. (1993, 32)<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> “The narrative of the new American Nobel Prize winner, black writer Toni Morrison, is one of the most serious attempts to create a literature far removed from the assumptions imposed by blacks in the tumultuous 1960s. A literature that did its best to remove from its discourse the feeling that black American literature was condemned, as Ralph Ellison once pointed out with great lucidity, to be always considered as ‘a small civil rights problem’.”

<sup>162</sup> “Within contemporary literature, her work means something that has surely convinced the Swedish Academy of its importance: some of the literary manifestations of the major languages are expressions of marginality, of depressed or forgotten sectors, coming from the periphery of their own culture.”

<sup>163</sup> “The worldwide recognition of the Nobel Prize for black writing can also be read as the certificate of the crisis of white literature. [...] The United States is now recognized as a multicultural nation, and Latin American, Asian and European writers have invaded American universities, ending the monopoly of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. And it is clear that, in this apoteosis of multiracialism, blacks are the most American. It’s their turn.”

As illustrated by the previous examples, reports published in *El País* generally supported the idea that Morrison's achievement was representative of the renewed status of black literature in the contemporary era.

One of the symptoms of this renovation was, indeed, the relocation of the black woman at the core of the nascent directions in black literature. With respect to this, even if not all articles discussed black women writers with the same depth of analysis, virtually all the authors mentioned this aspect of contemporary American literature to some extent. Thus, while Caño (1993, 31) discussed the enhancement of the black woman in her novels by referring to the protagonists of *Beloved* and *Sula*, he also emphasized the non-reductionist character of her oeuvre, concluding that "her work is much more than a portrait of women" [su trabajo es mucho más que un retrato de la mujer].

Marín (1993, 32) showed more interest in the prestige and success that other women writers apart from or together with the Nobel laureate were acquiring at that time. Indeed, he focused on bestselling author Terry McMillan, whose *Waiting to Exhale* had outsold Morrison's *Jazz* in the SC. Taking McMillan's success as a starting point, Marín continued to discuss "the entrance of women" [la entrada de las mujeres] in the panorama of black literature, which he considered fundamental for its evolution. To the names of Morrison and McMillan, the author added that of Alice Walker and presented the three women as representatives of new trends in US literature. Marín, like other Spanish writers and critics, showed a deliberate will to justify the appeal of this literature to a non-black audience arguing, in this case, that the contemporary concerns of these writers were universal, or at least parallel to those of people from other ethnic backgrounds:

[...] ahora escriben sobre la vida difícil en los barrios, el paro, la aventura de hacerse adultos, el amor, sobre las mismas cosas que escriben los que tienen otros colores de piel, pero con la fuerza, con el optimismo que produce el abandono de las obsesiones que torturaron a sus predecesores, la de educar a los blancos y la de concienciar a los negros. Libres ya; a solas, pues, con la literatura. (1993, 32)<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> "Now they write about the difficult life in the neighborhoods, unemployment, the adventure of becoming adults, love, about the same things that those with other skin colors write about, but with the

While Marín highlighted the work of McMillan, Morrison and Walker as illustrative of black women's writing, Ayala-Dip cited Morrison and Walker together with Toni Cade Bambara as the most consecrated black women authors in the United States: "Las escritoras negras, en líneas generales—Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, por citar algunas de las más consagradas—sujetas a los mismos condicionamientos externos que sus colegas varones y con el agravante de ser mujeres, han orientado, sin embargo, sus novelas hacia soluciones más específicamente literarias" (Ayala-Dip 1993, 32).<sup>165</sup> In this case, Ayala-Dip referred to the recovery of "ethnic sources" [fuentes étnicas], the folkloric reminiscences and the musicality of their language, and he cited Morrison's work as the greatest exponent of these literary features. Gleichmann, in turn, provided a detailed review of some of the author's most successful novels and, in doing so, he tackled the portrait of characters such as Peccola (*The Bluest Eye*), Sula and Nel (*Sula*), Pilate (*Song of Solomon*) and Sethe and Beloved (*Beloved*) (1993, 33).

In the case of Sorela, from the beginning of his text he explicitly referred to Morrison's rejection of "the common places from which her literature is generally approached" [los lugares comunes desde los que se suele abordar su literatura] (1993, 31). Taking this as a starting point, he presented the author as a woman who had decided to redefine her own existence through the novels she wrote, seeing that no valid representations could be found in the literary tradition of her country and of her people. Indeed, Sorela's article explicitly criticized the traditional portrait of black women in literature, who, according to the reviewer were recurrently depicted as submissive slaves and servants (1993, 31). Lastly, while Oviedo's analysis focused almost exclusively on the implications of Morrison's success as a black writer—rather than as a black woman writer—, towards the end of his article he did relate the event in question to Maya Angelou's invitation to recite at the presidential inauguration of Bill Clinton in 1993. Reading the two events parallelly, Oviedo concluded: "The Nobel Prize that has now been awarded to Toni Morrison fulfils a similar function: it does not distinguish

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strength, with the optimism that comes from abandoning the obsessions which tortured their predecessors, that of educating whites and raising awareness among blacks. Free now; alone, then, with literature."

<sup>165</sup> "Black women writers, generally speaking—Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, to cite some of the most established ones—subject to the same external conditions as their male colleagues and with the aggravating factor of being women, have nevertheless oriented their novels towards more specifically literary solutions."

maximum greatness in literary terms, but it makes a decisive contribution to the spiritual cause of black culture in the world” (1993, 30).<sup>166</sup>

On that occasion, *La Vanguardia* also compiled the testimony of different voices who tackled manifold aspects of the author’s work. In this case, the report started with a brief introduction to the laureate’s biography and career, followed by the main piece of the section: Isabel Carbajal’s and Rafael Ramos’s “Toni Morrison, First Black American Author to Be Awarded the Nobel Prize” [Toni Morrison, primera autora negra americana galardonada con el Nobel] (1993, 35-36), which was in turn complemented by two opinion articles and a short piece reviewing the Morrison’s reception in Spain. Carbajal and Ramos’s contribution started by echoing the controversy aroused by the Swedish Academy’s decision:

Pocos se esperaban que la Academia, normalmente tildada de tradicional, apostara una vez más por una mujer, esta vez negra, después del galardón a la sudafricana Nadine Gordimer hace dos años. Es difícil saber si el reciente acceso de dos escritoras a la Academia, la joven poetisa Katariña Frostensson y la novelista Birgitta Trotzig, ha significado nuevos aires en los empolvados salones de la institución. Sture Allén negó, como era de esperar, todo comentario al respecto. (35)<sup>167</sup>

Indeed, when Nadine Gordimer won the prize in 1991, reports of her success paralleled those published in 1993. Reporters seemed substantially concerned with clarifying that none of the two awards were the result of political pressures, but rather of the literary quality of the authors’ work. In the case of Gordimer, Spanish press reports showed special interest in the fact that she was the first woman Nobel laureate since 1966, just as she was considered a representative of “third world literature” (Carbajal 1991, 39). In contrast, when Haitian poet Derek Walcott was awarded the prize in 1992, press reviews in Spain did not question or refer to other than literary reasons for his

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<sup>166</sup> “El Premio Nobel que se le ha otorgado ahora a Toni Morrison cumple una función semejante: ya que no distinguir la máxima grandeza en términos literarios, sí la de una contribución decisiva a la causa espiritual de la cultura negra en el mundo.”

<sup>167</sup> “Few expected the Academy, usually described as traditional, to bet once again on a woman, this time black, after the award to South African Nadine Gordimer two years ago. It is difficult to determine whether the recent entry of two women writers into the Academy, the young poet Katarina Frostensson and the novelist Birgitta Trotzig, has brought new airs to the dusty halls of the institution. As expected, Sture Allen denied any comment on this matter.”

achievement. Comparing the 1993 and 1992 winners, Carbajal and Ramos argued: “Once again, the choice of the 18 academics was surprising, although in a different way to last year when the award was given to the then little-known Derek Walcott” (35).<sup>168</sup>

After their initial commentary on the choice of a woman laureate, Carbajal and Ramos continued to draw attention upon her condition as a black writer: “Ten North American writers had won the award before Morrison, but none of them were black” (1993, 36).<sup>169</sup> Through quotes of her first public statements after the announcement, the article reviewed Morrison’s endeavor, literary and political vision, with a special focus on her role as a black woman writer. The authors finished paying special attention to the Nobel laureate’s condemn of the use of language as a vehicle for racist oppression, and her determination to change the rules governing this complex cultural structure. Carbajal’s and Ramos’s article was completed with a marginal bibliography of Morrison’s works, among which *The Bluest Eye* stood out as the only volume that had not been published in translation in Spain.

*La Vanguardia*’s report also incorporated two opinion articles by professors Àngels Carabí (1993, 35) and Aranzazu Usandizaga (1993, 36), both of whom had studied the Nobel Prize winner’s oeuvre and personally met the author. Carabí’s contribution, on the one hand, recounted her multiple encounters with Morrison and the author’s visits to the city of Barcelona, while she also extolled her contribution to the task of voicing the history of African Americans, especially black women. On the other hand, Usandizaga discussed the literary tradition in which Morrison was inscribed, citing Harriet Ann Jacobs, Richard Wright and Malcom X, among others, as her precursors and Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker as her contemporaries. In any case, both articles praised Morrison’s exploration of the black experience as well as her transcendent contribution to the legacy of American and world literature.

Finally, *ABC* announced Morrison’s success through several articles and sections of their daily issue. To begin with, the cover included a subheading reading “North American novelist Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize in Literature” [La novelista

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<sup>168</sup> “La elección de los 18 académicos sorprendía una vez más, aunque de manera distinta al año pasado, cuando el premio fue concedido al entonces poco conocido Derek Walcott.”

<sup>169</sup> “Diez escritores norteamericanos habían ganado el premio antes que Morrison, pero ninguno de ellos era negro.”

norteamericana Toni Morrison, Premio Nobel de literatura]. The front page was filled with an extensive article by renowned Spanish writer and journalist J. J. Armas Marcelo, who started by alluding to the “strange arbitrariness” [extraña arbitrariedad] reigning over the selection criteria of the members of the Swedish Academy:

Quizá no hubiera pensado en la magia de esta mujer negra y excepcional como ganadora de un galardón literario que no ha sido concedido a escritores excepcionales, ya fallecidos o todavía en vida [...] Bowles, Updike y Mailer, si se trataba de un norteamericano, hubiera sido mi trío favorito. Pero Toni Morrison es mujer, luchadora, integradora, universitaria y “afroamericana”. (Armas Marcelo 1993a, 1)

Even if Armas Marcelo filled the first page of the Spanish newspaper with compliments to Morrison’s works and sociopolitical compromise, he recurrently referred to the thought that her condition as a black woman had been a determinant factor for her being chosen as the 1993 Nobel laureate. After reviewing her most significant works and praising Morrison’s ability to “record through a journalistic lens” [registrar con lente periodística] the past and present of her “cultural environment”, he highlighted *Song of Solomon* and *Jazz* as the two works that better conveyed her integrationist beliefs as well as the tribute to her skin color, traditions and ethnicity. However, after these considerations Armas Marcelo returned to ideas of “arbitrariness” and “political correctness” in the choice of the Nobel winner. Indeed, among other observations, he argued:

Más allá de las polémicas o las hagiografías que ahora susciten la vida y la obra de Toni Morrison, tal vez la Academia Sueca—en su arbitrariedad, en su sabia gratuidad literaria, en su elección sin compromisos inconfesables, estemos o no de acuerdo con el nombre de la ganadora—valoró en su intención y extensión la lección moral que cada título escrito por Morrison representa en nuestros días. (Armas Marcelo 1993a, 1)

After further comments on the motives of the Swedish Academy and the implications of Morrison’s success, the journalist finally concluded that perhaps it was not only “our guilty conscience” [nuestra conciencia culpable] but also the exceptional literary worth of Morrison’s oeuvre what had granted her this eternal recognition. Anyhow, these ideas were expanded in a larger piece published that same year in *Cuenta y Razón* (1993,



69-71) entitled “Toni Morrison: A Surprising Nobel Prize” [Toni Morrison: un Nobel sorprendente]. Despite reaffirming his surprise and skepticism with respect to the decision of the Academy, Armas Marcelo did acknowledge that Morrison’s “cultural and civilized syncretism” [su sincretismo cultural y civilizado] was the necessary way forward: “miscegenation is, in any cultural sphere of the world, one of the great solutions to ethnic, racial, religious and nationalist conflicts” (1993b, 71).<sup>170</sup>

As a prelude to the main piece, *ABC* published several commentaries in the “Opinion” section of the October 8, 1993 issue. These started with a short advertisement reading “La negritud representada por la novelista Toni Morrison, premiada con el Nobel de Literatura” [Blackness represented by novelist Toni Morrison, awarded with the Nobel Prize in Literature] (1993, 6). Following this was an unsigned article which took the chance of the event to present a brief review of the history of black literature in the United States from the 1920s—allegedly, the actual onset of this tradition—, citing Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Martin Luther King and Ralph Ellison as Morrison’s precursors (*ABC* 1993a, 15). The piece also mentioned the imprint of Latin American magical realism in the works of the author, drawing parallelisms between her novel *Song of Solomon* and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez’s oeuvre. The subsection “Opinión: Panorama” came with an overview of Morrison’s main works presented by Beatriz Hernanz, who started by drawing attention upon the fact that Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, had not been translated into Spanish yet.<sup>171</sup> Hernanz considered that Morrison’s award drew attention towards “other voices” in the contemporary literary sphere: “Toni Morrison is ‘the other voice’ that reflects a thriving America, a huge minority who, like children, women and blacks, are a bunch of illusions anxiously piled up on the sidewalk of life” (Hernanz 1993, 18).<sup>172</sup>

Following these contributions, the main piece was presented under the headline “The Nobel Crosses the Mississippi” [El Nobel cruza el Mississippi], and it started with a two-page excerpt of an unpublished translation of *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison’s first novel

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<sup>170</sup> “El mestizaje es, en todos los ámbitos culturales del mundo, una de las grandes soluciones de los conflictos étnicos, raciales, religiosos y nacionalistas.”

<sup>171</sup> Lacking an official translation of the title at that time, *The Bluest Eye* was referred to as “*El ojo más azul*” in the contributions published in *ABC* during the period following Morrison’s award.

<sup>172</sup> “Toni Morrison es ‘la otra voz’ que refleja una América pujante, inmensa minoría que, como los niños, las mujeres y los negros, son un montón de ilusiones amontonadas ansiosamente en la acera de la vida.”

which, as Hernanz was already anticipating, had never been translated into Spanish (*ABC* 1993c, 56-57). Even if *ABC* claimed to have acquired the rights to publish the whole volume of *El ojo más azul* in Spanish, it was actually Ediciones B who published Jordi Fibla's translation of the novel the following year. Indeed, Fibla's translation does not coincide with the one presented in the excerpt in *ABC*, whose author was not specified.

After that, the newspaper published a compilation of the main insights of two interviews made to the author by *ABC* journalists during her visit to the country in 1991 (Gurpegui 1991, 55) and early in 1993 (previously unpublished). These were arranged thematically, covering topics such as the relationship between the literary and the political ("The Future Belongs to Ethnic Minorities" [El futuro es de las minorías étnicas]), the role of language in the contemporary era ("The Sublimation of Writing" [Sublimación de la escritura]), the relationship between music—jazz—and literature ("Music and Literature" [Música y Literatura]) and finally the prospects for white canonical authors in the United States ("White Writers in the US" [Escritores blancos en EE. UU.]). With respect to these categories, the content discussed under the subheading "Sublimación de la escritura" especially focused on the relevance of the intersection between race and gender for black women writers, while the writer of the article (unspecified) concluded that Morrison's work had allowed readers and writers to conceive of black characters without necessarily resorting to the slavery period. (*ABC* 1993d, 58).

Following this, Cándido Pérez Gallego started a descriptive review of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby* and *Jazz* by arguing that the 1993 winner of the Nobel Prize had been "human suffering", and that the decision of the Swedish Academy did nothing but evidence the extraordinary quality of American women's literature (Pérez Gallego 1993, 59). In his review, Pérez Gallego established a network of literary references which he found in Morrison's works, spanning from Mark Twain to William Blake, Alice Walker, James Baldwin and Duke Ellington. Of special interest here is Pérez Gallego's reference to *The Color Purple* when discussing Morrison's *Sula*: "A novel that brings us that unforgettable aroma of the 'Color of Purple' [sic], written by

another great black author, Alice Walker. Writing as nostalgia and literature as an examination of conscience” (1993, 58).<sup>173</sup>

Pérez Gallego’s review was accompanied by Marta Pessarrodona’s comment about Morrison’s visits to the country (1993, 58). Pessarrodona, who was the head of the International Commission for the Promotion of Catalan Culture, had already invited Alice Walker, among other international personalities, to become a member of the institution in 1987. On this occasion, the Catalan critic recounted Morrison’s intervention in the sixth meeting of the Commission that same year, where she spoke about the hybridity of language. Pessarrodona also discussed the significance of presenting the writer to Spanish audiences as participant of the larger African American literary tradition. In this respect, she also cited Walker’s *The Color Purple* as a representative of this tradition in the TC, especially because of the success of its filmic adaptation. Worthy of mention is the fact that a translation of Pessarrodona’s article was published in Catalan newspaper *Avui* as a supplement to a larger piece discussing the news of the author’s achievement. The Catalan subheadline read: “It is worth mentioning that Morrison receives the prestigious award after last year the Swedish Academy distinguished the work of Antillean Derek Walcott and the previous year that of South African Nadine Gordimer, who denounces the apartheid regime in her works” (*Avui* 1993, 38).<sup>174</sup>

*ABC*’s tribute to the 1993 Nobel laureate ended with the contributions of Valentí Puig and Jose Miguel Oviedo. The former, on the one hand, showed a deep understanding of Morrison’s political and literary vision in his article “Realism and Black Magic” [Realismo y magia negra], alluding to Baldwin and Ellison’s “foundational radicalism” to characterize the essence of Morrison’s work. However, after these initial considerations, Puig seemed to align with Armas Marcelo’s view about the Academy’s selection criteria:

Tanto incómodo lirismo predomina a veces en las páginas de sus libros que un juicio crítico de su obra puede llevarnos a pensar si no habría otros escritores

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<sup>173</sup> “Una novela que nos trae aquel aroma inolvidable del ‘Color de púrpura’ [sic] de otra gran escritora negra, Alice Walker. La escritura como nostalgia y la literatura como examen de conciencia.”

<sup>174</sup> “Val a dir que Morrison rep el prestigiós premi després que l’any passat l’Acadèmia Sueca va distinguir l’obra de l’antillà Derek Walcott i l’anterior la de la sudafricana Nadine Gordimer, que en les seves obres denuncia la situació d’apartheid.”

norteamericanos algo más merecedores del premio Nobel de Literatura, pero así es a veces el veredicto anual de la Academia sueca, como un bingo cantado a destiempo con voz algo bronca. (Puig 1993, 60)<sup>175</sup>

Indeed, after revising Morrison's literary vision and discussing the effects of her reimagination of the African American past and tradition, Puig concluded his commentary by putting in jeopardy the actual transcendence of the Nobel laureate's oeuvre: "Now acclaimed like a blues, it is inevitable that the popularity of the Nobel Prize will make Toni Morrison rise like foam but it does not seem so indefectible that her name can endure significantly in some chapter of the history of literature".<sup>176</sup>

Finally, José Miguel Oviedo, who had also published about the Nobel laureate in *El País*, explored in this case how Morrison's works navigated the intersection between gender and race, referring once again to Walker's masterpiece as well as introducing the notion of "womanism" (untranslated) (1993, 60). Indeed, Oviedo situated Morrison within the larger framework of black women's literature, becoming the first contributor to acknowledge the existence of this literary tradition. Additionally, Oviedo examined the dialogue between Morrison's literary universe and reality, arguing that the decision of the Swedish Academy was the first step to draw attention upon the social, political and historical conditions of black America: "The literature of writers like Toni Morrison is the first remedy for this inequality, and to draw attention to an undeniable fact: that true integration does not exist, that it is half done and that it is everyone's problem to make it a reality".<sup>177</sup> Of special interest is Oviedo's observation about the use of language in the author's works, which, in opposition to the general consensus, he considers "a mere end [...] to denounce unsustainable situations" [un mero fin [...] para denunciar situaciones insostenibles]. Likewise, while reviewers both in the source and TC identified *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* as Morrison's masterpieces, Oviedo

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<sup>175</sup> "So much uncomfortable lyricism permeates the pages of her books that a critical judgment of her work could lead us to consider whether there might not be other American writers somewhat more deserving of the Nobel Prize in Literature, but this is sometimes the case with the annual verdict of the Swedish Academy, like a bingo sung at the wrong time in quite a rough voice."

<sup>176</sup> "Ahora aclamada como un 'blues', es inevitable que la fama del Nobel haga que Toni Morrison vaya a subir como la espuma pero no parece tan indefectible que su nombre pueda perdurar significativamente en algún capítulo de la historia de la literatura."

<sup>177</sup> "La literatura de escritoras como Toni Morrison es el primer remedio para subsanar esa desigualdad, y para llamar la atención sobre un hecho incontestable: que la integración verdadera no existe, que está a medio hacer y que es un problema de todos hacerla realidad."

considered that only in her latest work *Jazz* had language reached the level of complexity, lyricism and perfection present in the underlying ideas derived from the novel's plot.

During the days following the announcement, Morrison's name recurrently appeared in the Spanish press. To begin with, Juan Vicente Boo's article for *ABC* continued fueling the controversy surrounding the Academy's decision: "The United States Coldly and Reluctantly Welcomes the Nobel Prize to Toni Morrison" [Estados Unidos recibe con frialdad y con reticencias el premio Nobel a Toni Morrison] (1993, 51). Following this premise, Boo criticized the fact that few key representatives of American literature had taken the chance to publicly congratulate the author on her recent success: "[...] the heavy and even average weights of North American literature missed the chance to congratulate the author, just as if the Nobel had been awarded to some writer from Borneo".<sup>178</sup> Likewise, he argued that *USA Today* had only included statements by writers Alice Walker and Nikki Giovanni and journalist Audrey Edwards about the event, while the *Times* had only published Henry Louis Gates's compliments to the laureate author. In the light of these events, Boo reminded Spanish readers that it was only after "a group of black writers complained about the scarce public recognition to the writer's work"<sup>179</sup> that she was granted the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.<sup>180</sup>

Following this line of thought was Baltasar Porcel's argument, who wrote in a short article for *La Vanguardia* (1993, 21) that the award of the Nobel Prize oscillated between successful writers of great literature and writers from minority groups, among which he cited Walcott and Morrison: "Toni Morrison, an undoubtedly popular novelist in the United States, but also a black voice that surrounds her racial and female

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<sup>178</sup> "[...] los 'pesos pesados' e incluso los 'medios' de la literatura norteamericana faltaron a la cita de felicitaciones, como si el Nobel hubiese ido a parar a una escritora de Borneo."

<sup>179</sup> "un grupo de escritores negros protestó por la falta de reconocimiento público al trabajo de la novelista"

<sup>180</sup> This timing of the events is actually inaccurate, as Morrison had already won the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Song of Solomon* in 1977, eleven years prior to the events of 1988 when the statement signature and the award of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction took place.

roughness, two sentences in this case, with a brilliant poetic prose”.<sup>181</sup> Anyhow, Porcel also celebrated the renovation of US literature that was being led by figures such as Morrison, Alice Walker, Terry McMillan and Maya Angelou. About this, he argued that “the expressive capacity of suburbs is astonishing” [la capacidad expresiva de los suburbios es asombrosa], referring to both the African American and the Hispanic communities in the United States as well as the Indian community in England. He used this argument to reflect upon the thriving interest in literature in English at the expense of French literature. According to the author, the former had proven wrong the common belief that a certain culture could only be reflected upon its traditional, historical language.

The debate was also sparked by the statements of prestigious writers Mario Vargas Llosa and Harold Bloom, who were interviewed by *ABC* and *La Vanguardia*, respectively, during these dates. On the one hand, César Hildebrandt’s conversation with Vargas Llosa (1993, 16-17) addressed Morrison’s recent award, about which the Peruvian author argued that he had read some of her novels but had not found them particularly interesting. On the other hand, after the publication of Bloom’s controversial work *The Western Canon* (1994), Mercedes Vicente interviewed the literary critic for *La Vanguardia* (1994, 53-54). When discussing the construction of the western canon, Bloom was asked about his opinion regarding the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature:

La incluyo como canon potencial por una de sus primeras novelas, *Song of Solomon*, que considero un gran libro; aunque no creo que merezca ser equiparada, como lo ha sido, con Virginia Woolf y William Faulkner. Sí creo que dicho libro es una prueba de lo prometedora que fue su carrera... hasta que fijó su atención en Alice Walker, una de las peores escritoras de Estados Unidos, alguien, que en términos estéticos, calificaría por debajo de Danielle Steel o una Jackie Collins; es decir, basura. Creo que Morrison, tras mimetizarse con

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<sup>181</sup> “Toni Morrison, novelista sin duda popular en Estados Unidos, pero también una voz de la negritud que envuelve su aspereza de fondo racial y femenino, dos condenas en este caso, con una prosa brillante y poetizada.”

Walker, decidió tomar la ruta de su libro *Beloved* un libro insufrible y por el que ganó el premio Nobel.” (54)<sup>182</sup>

The discussion around the legitimacy of Morrison’s award was culminated by Federico Jiménez Losantos’s criticism towards the decision of the Swedish Academy. In an article entitled “The Illiterate Nobel” [El Nobel analfabeto], the journalist complained about the modern tendency to favor minorities in the concession of awards, grants and subsidies for the sake of political correctness, even if their works were “insignificant”:

Al dar la noticia del premio se nos indicó que Toni Morrison lo recibía por ser mujer, negra y feminista. Nadie recordó algún poema inolvidable, alguna novela universal, algún ensayo demoledor, alguna brillante comedia llevada al cine. Es evidente que la obra de esta escritora que, por ser ‘políticamente correcta’, será necesariamente discreta y aseada, importaba poco al Jurado. [...] yo espero que el año que viene el premio le toque a un negro, homosexual, judío o musulmán y enfermo del SIDA [...]. (1993, 18)<sup>183</sup>

In October 1993, journalist reports of the Frankfurt Book Fair reached a common agreement that the general climate of political uncertainty (the European Union was formally established in November 1993) had increased interest in political works. Following this line of thought, Ignacio Vidal-Folch reported that sales in the Fair had been moderate except for two cases: Belgian novelist and poet Hugo Claus, whose sales had decreased after he lost the Nobel Prize that year—he was ranked among the favorites—and the actual winner of the award, whose latest novel *Jazz* rocketed to the top of the charts. Once again, *La Vanguardia* highlighted Silvia Querini’s tenacity in promoting Morrison’s work in Spain (Vidal-Folch 1993, 35). Likewise, the week

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<sup>182</sup> “I include her in the potential canon for one of her early novels, *Song of Solomon*, which I consider a great book; although I don’t think she deserves to be equated, as she has been, with Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. I do think that book is proof of how promising her career was... until she turned her attention to Alice Walker, one of America’s worst writers, someone who, aesthetically, I would rate below Danielle Steel or Jackie Collins; in other words, trash. I think that Morrison, after mimicking Walker, decided to take the route of her book *Beloved*, an insufferable book for which she won the Nobel Prize.”

<sup>183</sup> “We were told that Toni Morrison was receiving the award for being a woman, black and a feminist. Nobody remembered any unforgettable poem, any universal novel, any devastating essay, any brilliant comedy made into a movie. It is evident that the work of this writer who, because she is ‘politically correct’, will necessarily be discreet and neat, mattered little to the Jury. [...] I hope that next year the prize will go to a black, homosexual, Jewish or Muslim person suffering from AIDS [...].”

following the announcement of the Nobel Prize, Morrison's latest novel *Jazz* was listed among the top ten bestsellers in the country (*ABC* 1993e, 9).

Parallel to these events, Morrison was also a member of the International Parliament of Writers (IPW), created after an appeal launched in 1993 by more than 250 writers from around the globe, in reaction to the increase of writers' assassinations in Algeria, and it was presided by persecuted author Salman Rushdie. In November 1993, she traveled to Strasbourg together with other 50 writers to formally constitute the association. While her name had never been mentioned in relation to the IPW before the announcement of her award, on this occasion several press releases focused on the presence of the author in the ceremony. Rosa Mora (1993, 26), who started arguing that "only the strength and prestige of men such as Derrida and Bourdieu [...] have made the miracle possible",<sup>184</sup> made reference to the "violent divergences" between Susan Sontag and Morrison about the possibility of undertaking interventionist politics in Sarajevo, favoring Sontag's defense of cultural interventionism. Almost as a response to this standpoint, *La Vanguardia* published an article entitled "Morrison Believes that writers Have More Gestures than Compromise with Sarajevo" [Morrison cree que en los escritores hay más gesticulación que compromiso con Sarajevo] (Ferrer 1993, 57). Francesc X. Ferrer, the author of the piece, explained that even if the black novelist was sympathetic to support initiatives to the Bosnian capital, she was also concerned with the delicacy and instability of its situation, as she argued that it required the response and serious compromise of political and military forces on the first place. Ferrer also reproduced the writer's comments about the impact of the Nobel Prize in book sales, about which Morrison argued that other African American writers were selling fifty times more than her, and that her actual goal was to restore the rightful place of African American literature within the universal panorama. Finally, the article echoed Morrison's famous response to the question of whether she was ever going to incorporate a white protagonist in her novels: "I am going to answer your question but first I am going to ask another: Would you ask something like this to a white writer?".<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> "solo la fuerza y el prestigio de hombres como Derrida y Bourdieu [...] han hecho posible el milagro"

<sup>185</sup> "Voy a responder a su pregunta, pero antes voy a enunciarle otra: ¿le plantearía usted algo así a una escritora blanca?"



*El Mundo del siglo XXI* also examined the writer's "rotund views" on the conflict in Sarajevo, and it recounted the Nobel laureate's "vivid reaction" to the German journalist's question about white characters (1993b, 84). Likewise, a number of other Spanish periodicals reported the confrontation between Morrison and Sontag, namely *El Correo español* (1993a, 45), *Faro de Vigo* (1993, 36) and *Diario de Mallorca* (1993, 64), among others.

With the event of Morrison's arrival to Stockholm in October 1993, Carmen Villar, who was *ABC*'s correspondent in the Swedish capital, wrote a short piece for *ABC* reporting her first statements (59). Villar also announced the forthcoming presentation of *Jazz* and *Playing in the Dark*—translated in this case as *Juego oscuro*—in the Swedish capital.<sup>186</sup> Contrarily to earlier opinion articles published in the periodical, Villar's piece was mostly written from an objective point of view, as the journalist confined herself to translating and highlighting the Nobel laureate's key arguments. Among these, Villar reported Morrison's defense of black women and black women writers, as well as her self-definition as a spokeswoman of her whole race. She also paid special attention to Morrison's description of her writing process and the role of language in her novels.

Villar published another piece with the event of Morrison's lecture as a recipient of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Stockholm, which took place exactly two months after the announcement (Villar 1993, 43). Even if the article was entitled "Morrison: 'American Culture Is Doomed If It Disregards Black Lives'" [Morrison: La cultura americana está condenada si no se preocupa por la vida de los negros], Villar's contribution most significantly targeted issues related to gender, rather than race. Indeed, the correspondent drew attention towards the fact that Morrison was only the seventh woman laureate in the history of the prestigious award, and the only one to receive it that year. In relation to this, she also echoed Morrison's statements about her conception of intersectionality, as she argued that sex, gender, race, power and talent were indistinguishable for her.

The writer's speech was thoroughly analyzed in *La Vanguardia* (1993, 35), where Carbajal combined Spanish translations of key passages with her personal commentaries and explanations about the underlying ideas following the novelist's narration.

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<sup>186</sup> In her article, Villar refers to *Playing in the Dark* as a novel, even if it is generally considered a work of literary criticism.

Honoring the message latent in Morrison's lecture, Carbajal focused on highlighting Morrison's stance regarding the transcendent role of language in the dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed. In relation to this, Carbajal related the black writer's critique of the white gaze to that of 1992 and 1991 laureates Derek Walcott and Nadine Gordimer.

As a consequence to these events, Ediciones B published *Ojos azules* in 1994. The text was a translation of Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, which had never been published in the TC. *Diario 16* (1994, 53), *El País* (Ayala-Dip 1994, 52), *El Mundo del siglo XXI* (Sánchez Lizarralde 1994, 45) and *ABC* (Gurpegui 1994, 12) published reviews of the novel. While most reviewers criticized the late publication of Morrison's opera prima in the TC, they also coincided in considering it one of the author's finest works.

The news of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature also had a significant impact on the academic production of the time. Indeed, even if the Spanish academia had already begun producing research on Morrison, the number of studies published during the years immediately following the event is a clear symptom of the author's establishment as a major writer of modernity.

To begin with, Mary E. Farrell published a short paper in *Asparkía* directly addressing the event of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature. Farrell's discussion followed the line of the contemporary discourse about the Nobel Prize, as she quickly observed that the list of Nobel laureates was progressively opening up to include more diverse perspectives of the world, citing by way of example the cases of Gordimer and Walcott.

Likewise, in 1994 some of the most prestigious journals of English Studies in Spain included papers on Morrison. To begin with, *ATLANTIS* published an interview made to the author by Wayne Pond for the radio program *Soundings* in 1991, which was accompanied by a discussion of her most notable works from professor Trudier Harris. María Frías, editor and transcriber, was granted permission by the National Humanities Center in North Carolina to publish the interview in the Spanish journal. One of the assets of the conversation was that it touched upon different themes surrounding Morrison's oeuvre. Indeed, issues related to womanhood, race, intersectionality, the writing process and identity were discussed.

Other scholars, such as, Salvador Rodríguez Nuero (1994), Sol García de Pruneda (1995), Ana María Manzanás Calvo (1994) and Mar Gallego Durán (1994) also paid attention to Morrison's works. While Rodríguez Nuero analyzed the "Miranda complex"<sup>187</sup> affecting some of the female characters in *Song of Solomon*, García de Pruneda studied the role of nature in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*. For their part, both Manzanás Calvo and Gallego Durán focused on the themes present in *Beloved*; while the former analyzed the novel as an allegory of the African American past, the latter, also interested in the significance of the historical past in the novel, focused on its effects upon the affirmation of the self and his/her connection to the community.

One of the agents who played a determining role in the circulation of Morrison's works in Spain is Silvia Querini, her first editor in the country. Indeed, during her time working for Ediciones B, Querini fought to introduce in Spain new voices of the contemporary literary scene. The first evidence of her success came in 1991, when Nadine Gordimer received the Nobel Prize in Literature right after Ediciones B had published *La historia de mi hijo* for the series Tiempos Modernos.

Two years after that, Querini purchased the rights to publish Morrison's works in Spain for the same series:

Parece que nadie puede asegurar quién ganará el Premio Nobel de Literatura entre los numerosos nombres que se barajan anualmente, si se exceptúa mi amiga Silvia Querini, de Ediciones B, a la que es necesario dar la enhorabuena porque en la primavera pasada apostó por Toni Morrison, publicando la pasada primavera cinco de sus mejores trabajos, hasta ahora prácticamente desconocidos. (Antolín 1993, 63)<sup>188</sup>

According to the editor, the difficulties she endured to secure Morrison a place within the Spanish literary landscape were manifold, and even if she got to publish four of her novels during the spring of 1993, sales were very limited. According to Querini, the

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<sup>187</sup> The fundamentals of what Rodríguez Nuero calls "Miranda complex" are to be found in the character of Miranda from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. The expression was coined by Laura E. Donaldson in "The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading" (1988).

<sup>188</sup> "It seems that no one can determine with any certainty who will win the Nobel Prize in Literature among the many names that are considered annually, with the exception of my friend Silvia Querini, from Ediciones B, who should be congratulated because last spring she bet on Toni Morrison, publishing five of her best works which had been practically unknown until recently."

author had sold between 2.000 to 2.500 copies prior to the events of the fall of 1993. However, when Querini was interviewed for *La Vanguardia* after Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize, she estimated that sales would dramatically increase during the following years. In relation to this, she explained that Gordimer went from selling 2.500 copies to 20.000 after the award, and that Morrison's sales were expected to exceed those numbers. With respect to the modest initial sales of the author, Querini related this event with a progressive decrease in the consumption of literature (especially contemporary literature) in Spain.

In line with Carme Manuel Cuenca's argument about the Spanish publishing industry's traditional preference for canonical works (2019, personal communication), Querini had also condemned the lack of interest in new voices shown by Spanish publishers. In relation to this, she argued "when I discovered her, nobody in Spain knew who she was. I had a hard time convincing my management team to take on her work" (Querini 2019, n. p.).<sup>189</sup> In an interview for *ABC*, Querini highlighted the author's satisfaction with the Spanish edition of her texts, especially with the covers: "She was thrilled with the covers, with the Spanish edition of her texts. Before she was a writer she had worked as an editor so she was aware of the hazards of the job: she knew how hard it had been for me to have her works published here in Spain".<sup>190</sup>

Querini is responsible for editing four Nobel women writers in Spain, namely the aforementioned Gordimer and Morrison, as well as Doris Lessing and Alice Munro, among other major authors of international prestige. However, she has repeatedly argued against the existence of an *écriture féminine* or woman's writing in favor of a female sensibility, which, according to the editor, is not necessarily bound to the writer's gender. Along these lines, José Santaemilia has argued:

The idea that there is an *écriture féminine* or a *woman's sentence* (as opposed to a default man's sentence) is, undoubtedly, an attractive one, which many feel is justified. It consists of a series of abstract traits that are thought to characterize all women (and all men) and that reinforce the belief that sexual differences are

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<sup>189</sup> "cuando la descubrí, en España nadie sabía quién era ella. Me costó Dios y ayuda convencer a mi equipo de dirección que se hiciera cargo de su obra."

<sup>190</sup> "Ella estaba entusiasmada con las cubiertas, con la edición en castellano de sus textos. Antes de ser escritora, había sido editora y conocía muy bien los gajes del oficio: sabía todo el esfuerzo que me había costado publicar su obra aquí."

inscribed in language. [...] What is especially noteworthy is that this logic leads us to the inescapable fact that there must be differences between women and men writers. (2014, 105, italics in the original)

There is still much debate about this topic, which also leads to the consequent argument regarding the legitimacy of translating writers from a different gender. On this subject, Eleonora Federici and Vanessa Leonardi have argued that “the major scholars in TS are underlining the necessity to consider the ethics of translation and the competence of translators in an era of globalization and massive movements of people around the world. Today, translation means intercultural exchange with a profound awareness of cultural difference and linguistic boundaries” (2013, 2). Drawing from these notions, much research has been carried out within the interdisciplinary fields of translation and gender studies—and within the intersection between the two—, problematizing inherent differences between men and women writers and, consequently, men and women translators.<sup>191</sup>

In the TC, the years following the award of the 1993 Nobel prize saw a number of translations by black women novelists. This phenomenon is especially worthy of our attention given the fact that, even if the works of writers such as Maya Angelou, Octavia Butler or Gloria Naylor had been circulating in Spain for several years, their impact in the country was very limited. Prove of this is the scarcity of reviews, opinion articles or critical material on most works by African American women writers published in press media before 1993. In contrast, Terry McMillan’s *Esperando un respiro*, translated by Roser Berdagué (Anagrama, 1993), which had become a bestseller in the SC, was reviewed in a significant number of Spanish periodicals, among others, *La Vanguardia* (A. M. Moix 1994, 32 and L. Moix 1994, 31), *El País* (1994a, 55 and 1994b, 66), *Diario 16* (1994, 37), *El Correo Español* (1994, 49), *La Nueva España* (1994, 81), *El Mundo del siglo XXI* (1994a, 43 and 1994b, 37) and *Diario de Ibiza* (1994, 51).

The majority of McMillan’s reviewers predicted that the novel was destined to be “a commercial success of high literary quality” [un éxito comercial de gran calidad literaria] (A. M. Moix 1994, 32). According to Ana María Moix, *Esperando un respiro*

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<sup>191</sup> See Part I, section 1.3.3.

met all the requirements to lure potential readers: it had acquired a certain degree of popularity and prestige in the SC, it was written in English and its major themes were covered with a certain degree of essentiality, as it mirrored the reality of the black American woman during the 1990s. Likewise, reviewers praised McMillan's distancing from "the cotton fields", contrasting the novel's setting with those by authors such as Morrison or Walker. In this regard, Llätzer Moix (1994, 31) raised the question: "Will African American authors be able to write some day putting their personal circumstance before their racial circumstance?"<sup>192</sup> and concluded that *Waiting to Exhale* "may seem like a book written for the pleasure of cheeky women. But it is addressed, without discrimination, to any human being".<sup>193</sup> While Llätzer Moix and Ana María Moix coincided to describe the writer's style as funny, entertaining and fresh, the latter also took the chance to praise Berdagué's translation, which, according to her, preserved the essence of the ST (1994, 31).

Likewise, a retranslation of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* had been published in November 1993 (Lumen, trans. Carlos Manzano). Reviews of Angelou's first autobiographical volume hit the Spanish press during the first months of 1994. The volume had been originally published in 1969 and translated by Esther Elena Sananés in 1976 following the news of its cinematic adaptation. However, none of the reviews published in 1994 credited Sananés's translation, and they presented Lumen as the first editor of the author in the country. While Alicia Giménez Bartlett claimed that Angelou was "virtually unknown in Spain" [una autora prácticamente desconocida en España], she echoed the author's prestige in the United States, and praised her "clean, dense and effective style" [estilo limpio, denso y eficaz] (Giménez Bartlett 1994, 39). Following this line, M. Dalmau introduced the author as one of the most prestigious African American writers in the SC, as he highlighted the fact that her opera prima had become a best seller in the United States. Dalmau also considered that the use of a woman's voice as a tool to overcome adversity was the novel's most remarkable trait (1994, 39).

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<sup>192</sup> "¿Podrán los autores negros americanos escribir algún día anteponiendo su circunstancia personal a su circunstancia racial?"

<sup>193</sup> "Puede parecer un libro escrito para contento de mujeres respondonas. Pero se dirige, sin discriminaciones, a cualquier humano."

Anyhow, most reviews of both McMillan's and, especially, Angelou's works introduced them as contemporaries to Nobel laureate Toni Morrison. In this respect, while some reviewers acknowledged the fact that Morrison's success had sparked the interest of Spanish audiences in black women's literature (Dalmau 1994, 39), others frequently referred to these writers as members of a specific literary tradition. Giménez Bartlett (1994, 39), for instance, claimed that while Angelou had not received any international award, both she and Morrison were representatives of the black woman's literary tradition and heirs to Zora ("Sora" in the original) Neale Hurston's work.

Another writer whose work was commonly associated with this literary tradition was Gloria Naylor. Indeed, even if Elsa Mateo's 1989 translation of *Mama Day* (Seix Barral) had no virtual impact in the Spanish press media, Antonio Desmont's version of *Bailey's Café*, which was published in Spain in 1994 as *El bar de Bailey* (Salamandra) had a significantly different reception. As a matter of fact, a number of journalists and critics in the TC had shown consideration for Naylor's work before the publication of Desmont's translation. Prove of this are the recurrent citations of the author's name or work in publications such as Ceriani's "El color de la escritura" (1989, 34) or "La canción de la América negra" (Usandizaga 1993, 36), among others. However, the mainstream press had never paid specific attention to Naylor per se, but rather her name used to appear cited alongside more prominent voices in the target culture such as Morrison or Walker.

However, with the event of the translation of Naylor's latest novel, Àngels Carabí published a review in *Revista de Libros* (1997, 35). Indeed, even if the text was published as a review of *El bar de Bailey*, Carabí took the chance to present an overview of the author's career. Prior to tackling *Bailey's Cafe*, the text thoroughly discussed the representation of women, community and femininity in *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*, evidencing Carabí's effort to insert Naylor's fourth novel within a certain sociohistorical and literary context. Likewise, the review's conclusion echoed the initial reference to the tradition which was being shaped and defined by women writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde and Gloria Naylor herself:

Su estilo, impregnado de la musicalidad, la magia y el pragmatismo que han caracterizado la cultura de su gente, desvela la fuerza, la complejidad y la

belleza silenciada de la mujer negra. Su obra rompe con los estereotipos creados y da vida a personajes femeninos que entonan su propia canción, el blues coral de Gloria Naylor. (Carabí 1997, 35)<sup>194</sup>

Following contemporary trends in US literature studies, Àngels Carabí and Marta Segarra edited the volume *Mujeres y Literatura* (1994). The book compiled a series of lectures given at the University of Barcelona between 1990 and 1993 with the event of the cycle of conferences “Literature for women” [Literatura feta per dones]. These contributions examined the relationship between women and literature through the voices of writers such as Virginia Woolf, Teresa de Àvila, Clarice Lispector, Caryl Churchill and Assia Djebar, among others.

Carabí’s contribution to the volume followed the line of her 1988 paper “New Voices: The Writing of Minority Women in the United States”. In this case, the author presented an overview of the history of African American women writers in the United States, paying special attention to the portrayal of women in the works of Toni Morrison. Drawing from Barbara Christian’s work (1980), Carabí revised the construction of images traditionally assigned to black women: the mammy, illustrated through reference to the character of Scarlet O’hara’s servant in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*; the loose woman, the witch and the mulatta. The construction of these images, which had already been explored by the Catalan author in 1988, was revised and re-examined on this occasion. Before undertaking the analysis of Morrison’s female characters, Carabí reviewed the works of key black American women writers, namely Harriet Wilson, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Pauline Hopkins, Zora Neale Hurston, and the more contemporary Angela Davis, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Gloria Naylor and Nikki Giovanni, among others. All in all, Carabí’s paper reproduced and analyzed how connections between history and literature, tradition and contemporaneity, the political and the literary affected the written tradition of these authors. These premises were recovered and reformulated in “Voces literarias cimarronas en los Estados Unidos” (1996), a paper presented by Carabí at *The Roots of Memory: Latin America, Yesterday and Today. Fifth Debate Forum* [*Las raíces de la memoria: América Latina, ayer y hoy. Quinto Encuentro Debate*].

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<sup>194</sup> “Her style, imbued with the musicality, magic and pragmatism that have characterized the culture of her people, reveals the strength, complexity and silenced beauty of black women. Her work defies stereotypes and gives life to female characters who sing their own song, Gloria Naylor’s choral blues.”



In 1995 Lumen published Hurston's masterpiece, *Sus ojos miraban a Dios*, translated by Andrés Ibáñez. However, no major reviews of the text reached Spanish newspapers or magazines. Only *El País* (1994, 63) referred to the publication of the novel in a short article about literary news. In her 1996 paper "How to Desecrate a Glorious Text: Andrés Ibáñez's Translation of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", María Frías explained that Lumen editor Esther Tusquets had apologized to her for Ibáñez's translation, and reassured that the publishing house would reprint the work with a new translation (Frías 1996, 173). Indeed, Frías's paper analyzes "the many deficiencies in Andrés Ibáñez's translation from the lexical, syntactical, semantical, and cultural point of view" (173), arguing that the Spanish version of Hurston's text ignored and misrepresented the Southern rural dialect originally used by the author, not bridging the gap between the SC and the TC. Likewise, the scholar also condemned the editor's and the publisher's task by criticizing the manifold printing mistakes as well as the faulty use of paratexts; in this case the image in the front cover and the editor's note, which stated that Hurston had been rediscovered in the United States by Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, rather than Alice Walker and Hurston's biographer, Robert Hemenway.

Anyhow, Frías's contribution is particularly relevant not only because it presents a detailed analysis of the effects of a faulty translation upon target readers, thus directly relating with the object of our research, but also because it became one of the first and, still today, scarce attempts at studying the impact of a translation in the reception of African American literature in the country at a time when neither mainstream media nor academia seemed to be paying attention to this domain of study. Frías herself referred to this in the conclusions of her paper, stating that:

At a time when Afro-American writers such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Terry McMillan are being translated into Spanish, here we face a disappointing translation of the very text which has ultimately illuminated all the Morrisons, the Angelous and the McMillans of Afro-American literature. Now that a potential audience of Spanish readers might have access to the richness and the beauty of Hurston's language, Andrés Ibáñez's translation only serves to *desecrate* the beauty of black rural dialect and oral tradition. (Frías 1996, 180)

### 3.6. African American “Chick Lit” in the Spanish Context

After the commercial success of Terry McMillan’s *Waiting to Exhale* in the SC, the homonymous movie adaptation was released in 1996. Spanish newspapers picked up the news of Forest Whitaker’s directorial debut, which had quickly become a phenomenon in the United States. Spanish magazine *Semana* published an article about *Esperando un respiro*, the book and the movie, and concluded: “When the novel *Waiting to Exhale* was published in the United States in 1993, little could its author, writer Terry McMillan, have imagined that she would be responsible for a true social phenomenon”.<sup>195</sup>

Along these lines, many Spanish newspapers publicized the “*Waiting to Exhale* phenomenon” (*Faro de Vigo* 1996, 28; *Diario 16* 1996, 28; *El Mundo del siglo XXI* 1996, 23 and Muñoz 1996, 34). Along these lines, Andrés Fernández Rubio described Whitaker’s movie as “an event” (1996, 39), echoing Karen de Witt’s review for *The New York Times* (1995, 1). If Fernandez Rubio’s and de Witt’s articles are read together, some degree of parallelism can be traced:

*Waiting to Exhale*, the movie, is rapidly proving to be *Waiting to Exhale*, the event, as African-American women across the country pour into theaters to see the film about the lives of four black professional women. [...] Groups of women, largely black but including many whites, are buying tickets in blocs and holding sessions to talk about what they have seen. In the theaters, meanwhile, audiences have talked to the screen, with many women shouting “Amen” to the actresses’ lines. (de Witt 1995, 1)

and

Ahora, acaba de estrenarse en España el primer largometraje de Forest Whitaker como director, *Esperando un respiro*, que se ha convertido en un fenómeno racial en Estados Unidos. Mujeres negras, y muchas blancas, van en grupos a ver

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<sup>195</sup> “Cuando en 1993 se publicó en Estados Unidos la novela *Esperando un respiro*, poco podía imaginar su autora, la escritora Terry McMillan, que iba a ser la responsable de un auténtico fenómeno social.”

la película y luego organizan cenas y fiestas, como las actrices de la película, para contarse las penas. (Fernández Rubio 1996, 39)<sup>196</sup>

Even if both de Witt and Fernández Rubio celebrated the universality of the movie's characters, the former praised the characters' wit, sorority and authenticity. In contrast, Fernández Rubio concluded that the stories depicted by McMillan and Whitaker were simple, didactic and moralistic.

In December 1995, *La Vanguardia* published an interview with Terry McMillan with the event of the publication of *Ahí te quedas* (Miles 1995, 53). McMillan was supposed to visit Spain in January 1996 to attend the movie's premiere in Madrid, but her trip was eventually cancelled. The interview, conducted by Valerie Miles, presented the author as one of the funniest writers in the United States and compared her works with those by Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker and Charles Johnson. The interview tackled topics such as the author's alignment with the feminist movement, the cinematic adaptation of *Waiting to Exhale* and the lawsuit filed against McMillan by her ex-husband after the publication of *Disappearing Acts*. However, the focus of Miles's questions was directed towards the author's decision to break away with traditional themes and depictions of black characters in African American literature and cinema.

This issue was recurrently brought up in subsequent reviews of the movie, which praised *Esperando un respiro* for showing that "black and white women experience love in the same way" (Muñoz 1996, 34).<sup>197</sup> Critics also applauded the movie's groundbreaking depiction of black women characters outside stereotypical roles: "The witty, solid, middle-class heroines of *Waiting to Exhale* are depicted less as victims than as shrewd professionals" (*El País* 1996, 56).<sup>198</sup> In this spirit, Lluís Bonet Mojica argued:

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<sup>196</sup> "Now, Forest Whitaker's first feature movie as director, *Waiting to Exhale*, has just been released in Spain and has become a racial phenomenon in the United States. Black women, and many white women, go in groups to watch the movie and then organize dinners and parties, like the actresses in the story, to tell each other their sorrows."

<sup>197</sup> "las mujeres negras son iguales que las blancas en cuanto a los sentimientos y el amor."

<sup>198</sup> "las ingeniosas y sólidas heroínas de la clase media reflejadas en *Waiting to exhale* aparecen menos como víctimas que como avanzadas profesionales"

Novela [...] y película proponen una manifiesta ruptura con la literatura y el cine, de inequívoca vocación “rapera”, que parecía caracterizar todo lo afroamericano. Acostumbrados a yonquis, prostitutas, camellos, rateros, proxenetas y demás, “Esperando un respiro” cambia el decorado y nos propone la crónica agrídulce, solidaria, de cuatro mujeres negras cuya estabilidad económica no corre pareja con la sentimental. (1996, 34)<sup>199</sup>

Anyhow, in Spain Anagrama took the chance of Forrest Whitaker’s directorial debut to publish the translation of *Disappearing Acts*. McMillan’s second novel, which was originally published in 1989, was also translated by Roser Berdagué and published towards the end of 1995 in the TC as *Ahí te quedas*. In his 1996 review of the novel, José Antonio Gurpegui lamented the chronological order followed to publish the translations of McMillan’s works in Spain. In this case, he was referring to the fact that the decision to translate McMillan’s second novel only came after the success of the movie adaptation *Esperando un respiro*. After praising the author’s narrative style and choice of themes, Gurpegui picked up the conversation around McMillan’s distancing from traditional representations:

De igual forma que McMillan no está interesada en los enfrentamientos raciales, tampoco le parece abrazar ciegamente, en *Ahí te quedas*, los postulados feministas. Las dicotomías blanco-negro, hombre-mujer pierden para ella su significación tradicional. Es la persona y sus circunstancias lo que realmente le interesa. Unas circunstancias, por otra parte, que en nada difieren de las del común de los mortales. (1996, 12)<sup>200</sup>

Finally, the reviewer celebrated the freshness of a novel about ordinary and realistic characters. No assessment of Berdagué’s translation was made in this review.

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<sup>199</sup> “Both the novel [...] and the film propose a clear break with literature, cinema and the unequivocal ‘rapper’ vocation that seemed to characterize everything African American. Habituated to junkies, prostitutes, drug dealers, thieves, pimps and others, *Ahí te quedas* changes the scenery and introduces the bittersweet and solidary chronicle of four black women whose economic stability is not matched by the emotional.”

<sup>200</sup> “Just as McMillan is not interested in racial confrontations, neither does she seem to blindly embrace feminist postulates in *Ahí te quedas*. The black-white, male-female dichotomies lose their traditional significance for her. It is the person and his/her circumstances that really interest her. Circumstances, on the other hand, that in no way differ from those of ordinary mortals.”

In December 1996, Anagrama edited *Mamá*, McMillan's first novel originally published in 1987. Together with *Mamá*, the publishing house also printed Walter Mosley's *Blues de los sueños rotos*, which was frequently advertised together with McMillan's novel (*El País* 1996, 104 and *ABC* 1996, 19). On this occasion, reviews of the novel described McMillan as a celebrity within the domain of African American culture: "Terry McMillan is probably the most popular African American woman writer" [Terry McMillan es, probablemente, la más conocida de las escritoras afroamericanas], (*El Periódico de Catalunya* 1996, 78), "Terry McMillan, one of the most successful African American writers" [Terry McMillan, una de las escritoras afroamericanas de mayor éxito] (*El País* 1996, 88), "Terry McMillan has become one of the most influential figures of the African American community" [Terry McMillan se ha erigido como uno de los personajes más influyentes de la comunidad afroamericana] (*El País* 1996, 88), "this writer, one of the most prestigious figures of US culture" [esta escritora, uno de los personajes más influyentes de la cultura estadounidense] (*El País* 1997, 125). Similarly, a review published in *El País* placed McMillan alongside the "indisputable" Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, claiming that the author of *Waiting to Exhale* had been ignored until her third novel and the subsequent movie adaptation acquired national recognition (*El País* 1996, 88).

In 1997, *La Vanguardia* announced the launch of a collection of 12 titles representative of "the best literature in the world" [la mejor literatura que se hace en el mundo] (1997, 6). Despite the newspaper's claim for the universality of the collection, most of the works included were written by Spanish-speaking authors, including Arturo Pérez Reverte, Almudena Grandes, Zoé Valdés and Isabel Allende, among others. Four works were penned by foreign authors, namely Antonio Tabucchi, Marguerite Duras, Paul Auster and Terry McMillan. McMillan's selected work was *Esperando un respiro*, which, according to reviewer Mercedes Vicente, appealed to women "because of the significance and the strong expression of the contemporary woman's identity injected into her leading characters"<sup>201</sup> (1997, 12). Like previous reviewers of both the novel and the film adaptation, Vicente relied on McMillan's distancing from traditional themes of black literature to appeal to local audiences, concluding that the characters in *Esperando un respire* actually shared the values and customs of the average American.

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<sup>201</sup> "el protagonismo y la fuerte expresión de la identidad de la mujer contemporánea que inyecta a sus heroínas."

While in Spain Anagrama was circulating McMillan's early works—throughout 1996 the first editions of *Ahí te quedas* and *Mama* were published, and *Esperando un respiro* was reprinted—, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* was published in the SC. The novel was translated in 1997 and published simultaneously in Spanish and Catalan as *De cómo Stella recobró la marcha* (Anagrama, trans. Roser Berdagué) and *De com la Stella va recobrar la marxa* (Edicions 62, trans. Pep Julià).

Even if the novel's translation into Catalan was a clear symptom of the writer's favorable reception in the TC, McMillan's latest work received mixed reviews in the Spanish press. On the one hand, Ana María Moix predicted the novel's success in the TC, emphasizing the universality of McMillan's characters:

El punto de vista desde el que Terry McMillan aborda la realidad social y humana de la población de color en los Estados Unidos es sustancialmente distinto del expuesto en la narrativa de escritoras (y escritores) perteneciente a su generación anterior (Alice Walker o Tony Morrison) [sic] y sus protagonistas femeninas están más cerca de las de Mary MacMarth y Rona Jaffe que de las citadas autoras de color. (1998, 36)<sup>202</sup>

These arguments picked up the spirit of the promotion of *Esperando un respiro*, where reviewers of both the novel and the movie focused on the contemporary values represented by McMillan's characters. In this case, Moix praised the writer's "narrative nerve" in coming up with yet another story imbued with "freshness, vitality, humor, tenderness and irony" [frescor, vitalidad, humor, ternura e ironía] (36).

Other newspapers such as *Marca* (Linares 1998, 42), or *El Correo Español* (1998a, 85 and 1998b, 231) produced positive reviews of the novel. In the case of Miguel A. Linares, he considered McMillan's latest work "first and foremost, a fun novel" [ante todo, una novela divertida]. In this spirit, reviews in *El Correo Español* praised the author's wit and narrative style, and concluded that *De cómo Stella recobró la marcha* was an "easy but alluring" [sencilla pero seductora] piece of fiction (*El Correo Español* 1998b, 231).

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<sup>202</sup> "The point of view from which Terry McMillan approaches the social and human reality of the colored population in the United States is substantially different from the narrative of writers belonging to her previous generation (Alice Walker or Tony Morrison) [sic] and her female protagonists are closer to those of Mary MacMarth and Rona Jaffe than to the aforementioned colored authors."

On the other hand, Juan Marín (1998, 86) was more critical with McMillan. In a review entitled “Between Pink and Black” [Entre el rosa y el negro]—which paralleled Pedro Crespo’s 1986 headline “The Pink Color of *The Color Purple*”—, he considered that *De cómo Stella recobró la marcha* lacked the author’s characteristic sense of humor, and condemned the resemblance of McMillan’s heroines to white Anglo-Saxon blond women (1998, 86). However, the harshest criticism came from journalist Nieves Suims:

La norteamericana Terry McMillan—autora del celebrado *Esperando un respiro*—ha escrito *De cómo Stella recobró la marcha*, un relato vacío, facilón y autocomplaciente sobre el alocado caminar de una mujer madura que se enamora de un jovencito. Sin pizca de interés, por la falsa marcha de fémina demasiado retratada. (1998, 81)<sup>203</sup>

Despite the efforts of publishers and other agents to promote McMillan’s works in the target country, the readers’ reception did not meet expectations based on the author’s success in the United States. A symptom of this limited reception was the fact that the cinematic adaptation of the bestseller *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, which premiered in 1998 in the SC, was never released in Spain. This may be related to the fact that Forest Whitaker’s *Esperando un respiro*, a blockbuster in the SC, had practically no impact in the TC. In Spain, Anagrama had reprinted *Esperando un respiro* with the event of the movie’s premiere in 1997. However, according to Mònica Martín, Whitaker’s adaptation had no virtual impact on book sales: “The book sold pretty well until the movie came out. When the adaptation premiered, we had already sold more than 25.000 copies, but we didn’t sell any more after the movie was released”.<sup>204</sup>

In Spain, the only mentions of the movie appeared in *La Vanguardia* (Muñoz 1998, 42) and *ABC* (Arenas 1998, 97), with the event of the Montreal Film Festival. In this case, José E. Arenas’s review for *ABC* mistakenly claimed that *How Stella Got Her Groove*

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<sup>203</sup> “The American writer Terry McMillan—author of the celebrated *Waiting for Exhale*—has written *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, an empty, easy and self-indulgent story about the crazy walk of a middle-aged woman who falls in love with a young boy. Without a hint of interest because of the false gait of the over-portrayed female.”

<sup>204</sup> “Vam vendre molt bé el llibre fins que va arribar la versió cinematogràfica. Quan es va estrenar el film, ja portàvem més de 25.000 exemplars venuts, però amb la pel·lícula es pot dir que no en vam vendre ni un exemplar més.”

*Back* was based on McMillan's *Esperando un respiro*. He also criticized the commercial character of the movie, and concluded that the adaptation was designed "for the physical flaunting of a lady with powerful and indisputable 'talents'" (1998, 97).<sup>205</sup>

On another note, in 1995 the Catalan translation of *Sula* was published by Columna. Even if Dolors Ursina's version of Morrison's novel became the first work by an African American woman writer translated into Catalan, the promotion of this volume was very limited, and was restricted to the local press. Isabel Monsó, editor in Columna, published an article for *Avui* regretting the status of Catalan publishing policies, which prevented publishers from translating works other than consecrated classics or contemporary writers who had achieved international acclaim (1995, 71). Monsó included Morrison in this second group, even if she admitted that the endeavor of translating *Sula* was exceptional. Indeed, no further attempts at translating any of Morrison's works into Catalan were made until *Paradise* was published in 1998. In this case, the Catalan version of the text was published simultaneously to the Spanish translation.

Also in 1995, Itziar Iriondo translated Morrison's Nobel acceptance lecture for Basque publisher Erein, thereby becoming the first work by an African American woman writer to be translated into Basque. In this case, the text was published under the title "Gaueko Hitzak" [dark words] in the series "Milabidai", which compiled short essays and stories of autochthonous and foreign writers. However, this event had no virtual impact on the Basque readership, and no reviews or mentions of the publication could be found in journalistic, essayistic or academic sources.

In November 1997, Catalan newspaper *Avui* published "Black Women Play and Win" [Les negres juguen i guanyen] (Oliva 1997), a three-page special section about black women writers. Marta Oliva, the author of the publication, alluded to black women protests in the United States, which coincided with the publication of the novels *De com l'Stella va recuperar la marxa* and *El cafè de Bailey* in Catalonia (69).<sup>206</sup> In her review

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<sup>205</sup> "son obras para el lucimiento—físico, faltaría más—de señora con unos poderosos e incuestionables 'talentos'".

<sup>206</sup> Even if Oliva cited *El cafè de Bailey* as an upcoming translation of Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café*, no records or further information about this volume were found in the printed press or any database of books published in the country. Actually, up to present day none of Naylor's works have been translated into Catalan.



of the literary tradition of black women writers, the author praised Morrison, Walker, Naylor and Angelou's endeavor in their "moral, thematic and stylistic distancing from the North American literary tradition" [distanciament moral, temàtic i estilístic de la tradició literària nord-americana] (70). In doing so, Oliva claimed, they were intuitively shaping the fundamental traits of post-modern literature.

Under the subheading "The New Generation" [La nova generació], Oliva discussed the case of author Terry McMillan. According to her, even if the author of *Esperando un respiro* was heir of the fundamental tradition shaped by authors such as Morrison, Walker and Naylor, she had opened the door to a new generation of women and women writers, whose concerns were far from those of the characters from *Beloved* or *Bayley's Café*:

Novel·les on l'home, sense aspirar a ser part integrant d'un imaginari que segueix sent marcadament femení, potser més que mai, s'arriba a convertir en un dels nuclis argumentals que fa moure la roda de la narració. Com és el cas de *De com Stella va recuperar la marxa* [...]. La protagonista, una executiva divorciada de quaranta anys, amb un fill, es troba buida davant l'excés d'ordre. ¿A vostè no li passa el mateix? (1997, 71)<sup>207</sup>

All in all, Oliva's analysis of the development of a tradition of black women writers in the United States can be considered one of the most comprehensive and thoughtful studies about black authors published in the country's printed press.

In the midst of this outburst of African American chick-lit which arrived to the TC represented by its most visible head, Sapphire published her controversial novel *Push* in 1996. Even if newspapers such as *El País* took note of the event (1996, 95) and reported the novel's successful reception in the SC, Spanish publishers did not initially show interest in purchasing the rights to translate the novel. However, possibly influenced by the positive reception of the French translation published in 1997, in 1998 Anagrama published the volume translated by Jesús Zulaika. In Spain, the novel generated positive but minor reactions. Indeed, most reviewers considered it "a breath of fresh air" within

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<sup>207</sup> "Men, despite not becoming an integral part of a universe that is still strongly female, can eventually become one of the driving forces of the narrative. This is the case of *De com Stella va recuperar la marxa*, whose main character, a forty-year-old divorced executive and a mother, feels empty in the midst of an orderly life. Don't you feel the same?"

the landscape of African American literature, and highlighted the author's portrait of life in Harlem as well as the appalling nature of the story. In this regard, Anna M. Vilà (1998, 4) subtly compared Sapphire's proposal to Terry McMillan's *Esperando un respiro*, criticizing the lack of development of McMillan's heroines in favor of Precious Jones, the main character in *Push* who, according to Vilà, reflected the cruel and immediate reality of many African American women.

### **3.7. Market and Cultural Values at the End of the Century: The Reconfiguration of Marginal Spaces**

During the second half of the twentieth century, Europe saw a progressive expansion in the circulation of multicultural and postcolonial literature. In Spain, interest in non-western literatures was sparked during the last decades of the century. Even if the domain of postcolonial studies has traditionally been dissociated from US literature (Hand 2001, 28), the repercussion of the expansion of these literatures in translation on the reception of African American literature in the TC is undeniable.

Indeed, within the polysystem constituted by literature written in English two main dominant subsystems can be identified: (1) English literature and (2) North American or, more precisely, US literature. However, following Áurea Fernández Rodríguez (2008, 175), these central systems are surrounded by a series of non-canonical subsystems which, to a higher or lesser degree, navigate the periphery. Among these Fernández Rodríguez cites African American literature, Caribbean literature, African literature, postcolonial literature, women's literature and immigrants' literature. Likewise, according to Félix Martín (1997, n. p.), the phenomena of multiculturalism—which he relates to the North American context—and postcolonialism presented themselves as naturally parallel, as both were built on similar class, gender and race difference policies.

While these theorizations took place in the Spanish academic spheres, the generalist press also picked up the debate about the opening of the canon. To begin with, with the event of the publication of Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994), which was

translated as *El canon occidental* (1995) several journalists and other personalities of the Spanish cultural spheres manifested their views on the implications of the canon and the notion of “political correctness” that was gaining ground as they headed towards the new millennium. In this context, poet and translator José Ángel Valente condemned defenders of Bloom’s notion of the canon, as he considered it stemmed from the fear to the thread of multiculturalism (1995a, 43). Aligning himself with the tenets of critic Robert Hughes, Valente advocated for multiculturalism as the foundational basis of the plural American society, and criticized Bloom’s conception of the paradigm as a principle of disconnection rather than interpenetration (1995b, 3).

On another occasion, *ABC* published a special section on “political correctness” capturing the views of Valente, Francisco Jarauta and Ernst Jünger. The section was introduced with a series of questions framing the “threat” of political correctness for the contemporary literary and cultural spheres: “How is ‘political correctness’ affecting contemporary literature, art and aesthetics? Does it actually put the artwork at risk? What about the audience? Are they defenseless?”.<sup>208</sup> Drawing from these stances, the positions of the three contributors coincided in their criticism of the traditional canon and their view of multicultural policies as a necessary first step in the deconstruction of Western supremacy. In this respect, Jarauta explicitly referred to Bloom’s work, as he considered it a failed attempt at reasserting the Western identity in the contemporary era (1995, 9). To Valente, however, the notion of “political correctness” was inevitably tied to multiculturalism, as both were verbal artefacts devised to conceal the failure of the American “melting pot” (1995, 9).

In the article “Other Voices, Other Domains” [Otras voces, otros ámbitos], Mauricio Bach discussed the outburst of publishers that had taken an interest in translating “exotic literatures” (1997, 27). Among these, Bach concentrated on the endeavor undertaken by Anna Soler Pont, a literary agent specialized in non-western literature who was in charge of the collection “Étnicos del bronce”. The collection had published translations of African and Asian writers, but was opening its scope to Caribbean authors Edwidge Danticat—“Edwinge” in the original—and Giselle Pineau. The article also considered the endeavor of Ediciones de la Torre in publishing Nordic literature;

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<sup>208</sup> “¿Cómo está afectando lo ‘políticamente correcto’ a la literatura, al arte, a la estética contemporáneas? ¿Es un peligro real para la verdadera obra de arte? ¿Y el público, está indefenso?”

Casiopea, a *post-boom*<sup>209</sup> small publisher specialized in Latin American literature and Ediciones del Oriente y el Mediterráneo, interested in cultures of the Mediterranean basin. The journalist also cited a number of publishers who, in the light of this cultural turn, were starting to incorporate non-western authors into their catalogues. Within this last group, he included Circe, Muchnick Editores, Emecé, Proa, and Txalaparta.

Following these events, Pau Vidal published an article about third world literature and the Nobel prize, where he discussed the cases of Nigerian Wole Soyinka, South-African Nadine Gordimer, Saint Lucian Derek Walcott and Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz alongside African American Toni Morrison (1998, 45). In this case, even if we may assume that Morrison's association with these writers was motivated by her belonging to an ethnic minority, the systematic identification of a black US citizens with the third world was nothing but a symptom of the country's relation to otherness and ethnocentrism. In this line, Vidal celebrated the endeavor of publishing house Ediciones del Bronce in circulating "exotic literature" in Spanish citing, among others, the works of Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri and Edwidge Danticat—the latter mistakenly referred to as a male writer ("el haitiano Edwidge Danticat")—.

Early in 1998, Morrison's *Beloved* appeared in *La Vanguardia*'s list of 100 key artworks of the twentieth century (33). The list comprised the works of painters, sculptors, actors, moviemakers, writers and other artists. Interestingly enough, only ten women, including Morrison, were considered for this selection. These included poets Anna Ajmatova, Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath, choreographer Martha Graham, sculptor Barbara Hepworth, novelists Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison and ceramist Lucy Rie.

That same year, Morrison published her first novel after having received the Nobel Prize in 1993. Also in 1998, the movie adaptation of *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme, premiered in the SC. These events started to resonate in Spain towards the end of 1998, when *Paradise* was translated into Spanish (Ediciones B) and Catalan (Proa)

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<sup>209</sup> This term is used here to refer to the decades immediately following Latin American literary boom ["*boom latinoamericano*"], which took place during the decades of 1960 and 1970. For more details, see "Boom, Yes; 'New' Novel, No: Further Reflections on the Optical Illusions of the 1960s in Latin America" (Martin 1984), *The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction* (Shaw 1998), *Collisions With History: Latin American Fiction and Social Science from "El Boom" to the New World Order* (Nunn 2001) and "Before and after the Boom: Recent Scholarship on Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies" (Meter 2004), among others.

by Carmen Francí and Miquel Casacuberta, respectively. However, at the beginning of the year the Spanish press was already building up expectation for these events. Indeed, in January 1998, *El País* (J. C. 1998, 36) and *La Vanguardia* (Mas de Xaxàs 1998, 32) published two homonymous articles, reading “Toni Morrison publishes her first novel after the Nobel prize” [Toni Morrison publica su primera novela después del Nobel]. Mas de Xaxàs’s review focused on the treatment of race and gender in the novel, stating that “Morrison’s paradise is race-neutral” [el paraíso de Morrison no tiene raza] and that the book was “more than a novel in favor of black women” [ha escrito algo más que una novela a favor de las mujeres negras]. J. C., for his part, echoed reviews of *Paradise* published in *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*. He also took the chance to mention the upcoming cinematic adaptation of *Beloved*, as he discussed the writer’s alliance with famous television show host Oprah Winfrey, who also starred in Demme’s movie.

Other newspapers such as *El Mundo del siglo XXI* (1998, 171) or *Tiempo* (1998, 11) also echoed the expectation generated by the novel in the United States. In this line, Pilar Rico wrote “Toni Morrison y Milán Kundera: Luces y sombras”, where she compared the positive reception of *Paradise* by American critics, who argued that it was Morrison’s masterpiece, with the readership’s negative response to Kundera’s latest work, *L’identité* (1998), which had been translated by Beatriz de Moura and published in Spain that same year.

With the event of the publication of *Paráiso* in December 1998, various newspapers published reviews and articles about the novel. To begin with, Carlos Fresneda interviewed the author for *El Mundo del siglo XXI* (110). Fresneda’s interview, like other pieces published on the novel, focused on Morrison’s view of gender and feminism. Miguel Sánchez-Ostiz’s extensive review praised the author’s narrative abilities in creating a “diverse, remote, deep, harsh, meticulously and patiently built” literary universe in her works (1998, 20).<sup>210</sup> Unlike most critics, Sánchez-Ostiz did not pay excessive attention to Morrison’s choice of women as protagonists of the story. Instead, he described the novel as a complex and neat account of the consequences of heterophobia, which he considered one of the distinctive symptoms of the end of the century. In this line, Marta Pessarrodona started her review for Catalan newspaper *Avui*

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<sup>210</sup> “abigarrado, lejano, profundo, duro, construido meticulosamente, tejido con una paciencia magistral.”

by explicitly expressing her will to be “politically incorrect”, moving on to claim that Morrison’s *Paradise* was “the great American novel” (1999, 51). Likewise, contrasting with previous publications where the author’s relation with feminism had been silenced, condemned or negatively assessed—see, for instance, Amiguet and Sanchís (1998) and Fresneda (1998)—, Pessarrodona celebrated her alignment with both the black and the feminist cause.

Following this line of thought was José Antonio López Hidalgo’s comment on the relationship between language and reality in Mia Couto’s *Tierra Sonámbula* (1998, n. p.). In his review for *Revista de libros*, López Hidalgo discussed the problems of translating the variants of Portuguese present in Couto’s novel, which mixed standard Portuguese with the Mozambican dialect. From this perspective, he argued:

[...] la traslación problemática de un idioma a otro muestra que todavía existen diferencias al interpretar el mundo. Tal vez sea éste el germen de la diversidad cultural, y de las buenas maneras de enfrentarse a un solo sistema dominante, así como lo ha pregonado la escritora afroamericana Toni Morrison, avanzando mucho más allá de los mohines superficiales que exhiben los movimientos políticamente correctos. (1998, n. p.)<sup>211</sup>

While the reception of Jonathan Demme’s cinematic adaptation, which premiered in Spain in 1999, was very limited, reviews and advertisements of *Paraíso* flooded the country’s national and regional press. Thus, *El Periódico de Catalunya*’s review (1998, 133) considered that Morrison had turned the novel into “an experimental workshop of her already rich language” [un taller experimental del seu ja ric llenguatge], and *El Correo español* (1998b, 100) claimed that with *Paradise* the author had created “something different from literature” [algo diferente a la literatura]. The novel was also advertised in *El diario vasco* (1999, 80), *Canarias 7* (EFE 1999, 63), *El Correo de Andalucía* (1999, 68), *La Crónica de León* (EFE 1999, 53), *La Verdad* (EFE 1999, 48), *Alerta* (EFE 1999, 37), *Diario 16* (1999, 1) and *Información* (1999, 72), among others.

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<sup>211</sup> “[...] The problematic translation from one language to another shows that there are still differences in interpreting the world. Perhaps this is the seed of cultural diversity, and of the right ways to confront a single dominant system, as African American writer Toni Morrison has proclaimed, moving far beyond the superficial pouting of politically correct movements.”

As for Demme's adaptation, even if the movie was indeed publicized in most Spanish newspapers, the press quickly echoed the adaptation's scarce success in the American box office. In this case, and contrasting with the publicity campaign of Spielberg's *El color púrpura*, which hardly referred to the author of the source novel, Morrison's name and prestige was used as a catch to advertise the movie. Despite the common view that the movie's results at the box office in the United States did not live up to expectations, general criticism of the movie was actually positive. Jorge Parrondo (1998, 73) considered that "the movie's magnificence together with its epic content and correct turnover may indicate that Jonathan Demme's movie could be nominated for the Oscars".<sup>212</sup> However, Parrondo's article also contained several inaccuracies surrounding the author of the novel, such as the recurrent mistakes in the spelling of her name ("Tony") and the claim that she obtained the Nobel Prize in 1987 (this was actually the publication date of the novel).

Several Spanish newspapers advertised the movie when it reached Spanish cinemas during the summer of 1999. Still, neither Demme's past success with *The Silence of the Lambs* (his directorial debut), Ophra Winfrey's participation as producer and leading actress of the movie or the claim that the production was based on the work of a Nobel prize winner were enough to grant *Beloved's* success in the TC. Indeed, the impact of the movie in Spain was so moderate that no reprints of the novel were published between 1998 and 2000. Eventually, in 2001 Canal + broadcasted the movie. The advertisement in *La Vanguardia* awarded the movie two stars out of five, and explicitly compared Demme's endeavor with Spielberg's *El color púrpura*, arguing that the comparison favored the latter because of the devastating cinematic strength of the director's work (Batlle 2001, 8).

Anyhow, as the paradigms of multiculturalism and postcolonialism permeated the receiving system, critics and opponents of the cultural turn publicly condemned the policies and actions taken by countries such as the United States. In this spirit, Juan Vicente Boo (1998, 48) echoed Denise Chandler's reaction to the controversial effort to diversify the San Francisco Unified School District's literature curriculum. Boo defined this initiative as an endeavor to "get rid of" [quitarse de encima] white American

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<sup>212</sup> "la grandiosidad del filme, cuyo contenido épico, así como su correcta factura, permiten pensar que el filme dirigido por Jonathan Demme puede alcanzar el honor de ser premiada con varias nominaciones para los Oscar."

authors, among which he cited John Steinbeck and “Henry Melville”. Under the subheading “An Offensive and Ridiculous Proposal” [Propuesta ofensiva y ridícula], the journalist summarized Chandler’s main arguments against the endeavor, and concluded that according to the initiative “there would be a Toni Morrison for every Emily Bronte [sic] and a Derek Walcott for every Charles Dickens” (48).<sup>213</sup> Boo took the chance to comment on the failure of the Oakland Ebonics resolution (1996), which recognized the legitimacy of Ebonics as an official language of instruction, and alluded to Maya Angelou’s negative reaction towards the proposal.

In 1999, Mauricio Bach published another article in “Libros” about the new wave of “exotic” women writers that were being translated into Catalan and Spanish. Under the subtitle “Women from Other Worlds” [Mujeres de otros mundos], Bach provided short accounts of the most translated writers from India, the “Far East”, the Pacific, the Caribbean, “Black Africa” and Arab countries. Together with Bach’s report came a short piece by Llätzer Moix who, on another occasion, had reflected upon the capacity of African American writers to get over their racial condition in their literary production. Under the title “The Whole Globe in the Library”, Moix allegedly disclosed the keys to the international success of non-Western literatures, namely exoticism, intensity, promotion and freshness. Indeed, the journalist highlighted the lure of unknown cultures, the epic character of the experiences of Vietnamese or Algerian women and the originality of literatures from young countries. He also compared the phenomenon related to exotic literature to the spread of reggae during the 1970s.

Likewise, with the event of the 2001 Nobel award to Trinidad and Tobago-born British writer V. S. Naipaul, the debate about the opening of the canon was resparked. In this respect, journalist Oriol Izquierdo argued that the dynamism of contemporary Anglophone literature was owed to peripheral writers (2001, 46). Among these, he considered South African Nadine Gordimer, Saint Lucian Derek Walcott, African American Toni Morrison and Irish Seamus Heaney in addition to Naipaul (all of them Nobel laureates). To the question of legitimacy and political correctness, Izquierdo argued: “[...] I see nothing wrong with interpreting it [the Nobel Prize] as something

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<sup>213</sup> “habría una Toni Morrison por cada Emily Bronte [sic] y un Derek Walcott por cada Charles Dickens.”



more than a literary prize. After all, where does literature begin and where does it end? Who can say whether there are purely literary criteria?” (2001, 46)<sup>214</sup>

The legitimacy of the Nobel Prize in Literature was recurrently put into question through the last years of the twentieth century and the early years of the new millennium. Indeed, when browsing the archives of the discourse surrounding the Nobel prize at the time, we may find that more or less explicit attacks to the Swedish Academy’s decisions are recurrent. To illustrate this, we may refer to Manuel Rodríguez Rivero’s discussion of Philip Roth’s possibilities at winning the award (2004, 3). While Rodríguez Rivero pointed out that four winners within the last ten years were Anglophone writers (Morrison, Heaney, Naipaul and Coetzee)—even if Morrison was the only US-born author within this cohort—, he added a comment on the board’s habitual attention to matters related to politics, gender, identity and minority languages. According to Rodríguez Rivero, this last argument might have undermined Roth’s chances at achieving such prestigious recognition.

All in all, the expansion of postcolonial and non-Western literature in the receiving context had two visible effects on the circulation of African American women’s literature. On the one hand, the readership’s redirection towards “exotic” literatures and cultures, usually related to developing countries (the “third world”) or young nations, diminished interest in “first world” African American literature. So as to delve into this phenomenon, we shall turn to Marta Puxan-Oliva’s reflections about the dynamics affecting the reception of localized literature in a globalized society:

Una de las razones que ha tenido un peso importante en los mercados es la capacidad de atribuir un origen nacional a un texto literario específico, lo que explicaría muchos casos de *bestsellers*, en los que los libros se promocionan por su carácter de *color local* [...] En general, y aunque parezca lo contrario, el peso del “de dónde viene ese libro” en un mundo globalizado que sin embargo

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<sup>214</sup> “[...] no veo nada malo en interpretarlo [el premio Nobel] como algo más que un premio literario. Al fin y al cabo, ¿dónde empieza y dónde termina la literatura? ¿Quién puede afirmar si existen criterios de valor literario puros?”

conserva un apego muy considerable a lo nacional, está a la orden del día y es la base de muchas campañas promocionales de la literatura. (2016, n. p.)<sup>215</sup>

Indeed, the complex status of African American literature as a subsystem inevitably tied to the texture of US literature hampered its reception in a context where interest in discovering “other worlds” and promoting “exoticism” prevailed.

On the other hand, the condition of writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker or Gloria Naylor as black women prompted their association with women writers from other non-Western contexts. Walter Mosely had briefly touched upon this phenomenon in an interview with Catalan journalist Mari Carme Sánchez, where he argued that African American women writers disposed of more ways to build bridges across cultures and communities because of their connection to other women writers (1997, 74). Indeed, the readership’s interest in women’s and minorities’ literature (and, specially, the intersection between the two) did in fact prompt the association of certain figures which started to be considered representatives of this cohort. By way of example, several articles which addressed the topic of the increased circulation of translated women’s literature cited African American writers Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Terry McMillan and Toni Morrison alongside authors such as Nadine Gordimer, Zadie Smith, Doris Lessing or Edwidge Danticat.<sup>216</sup>

Félix Martín (1997) considered these intercultural encounters of minorities around the globe a natural consequence of the politics of particularization, localization and specification of race, gender and class differences that were starting to take hold in the collective social conscience. To illustrate his point, Martín alluded to “the tight and almost imperceptible filiation” [la estrecha y casi imperceptible filiación] displayed in the works of writers such as Paula Gunn Allen, Amy Tan, Gloria Naylor, Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff, Louise Erdrich, Toni Cade Bambara, Ana Castillo and

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<sup>215</sup> “Something that has played an important role in the literary market is the capacity to attribute a national origin to a specific text, which would explain many cases of bestsellers in which books are promoted for their *local color* [...] In general, and although it may seem otherwise, the weight of ‘where does this book come from’ in a globalized world that nevertheless retains a very considerable attachment to the national, is currently commonplace, so it actually is the basis of many promotional campaigns for literature.”

<sup>216</sup> See, among others, “Próximas entregas” (*El Mundo del siglo veintiuno* 2002), “La responsabilidad de crear una editorial” (*El Correo español* 1993b), “Qué lee Manuela de Madre” (Ibarz 2002), “¿Krik? ¡Krik!” (*El País* 2000).

Montserrat Fontes. In this line, Martín argued that Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Sherley Anne Williams, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde and Terry McMillan had developed a more radical and compromised “historicization of the ethnic conscience” [historización de la conciencia étnica] than black male authors. Again, he drew attention towards the particularities of the dialogue established between these writers:

Frente al lenguaje de integración y de inclusión multicultural que otros escritores afroamericanos desean llevar a cabo en nombre de la conciencia étnica, el lenguaje emancipador de estas escritoras se sustenta en los actos de resistencia y de reconocimiento que definen su identidad subyugada. [...] como reconoce Audre Lorde, ellas hablan desde la particularidad múltiple, compleja, social e histórica que constituye su subjetividad. (Martín 1997, n. p.)<sup>217</sup>

Likewise, in December 1998 *La Vanguardia*'s Friday supplement *Libros* featured the article “Acclaimed Fighters” [Aclamadas luchadoras] on its cover page (Usandizaga 1998). Aránzazu Usandizaga's article took the chance of the simultaneous publication of Toni Morrison's *Paraíso / Paradís*, Doris Lessing's *Un paseo por la sombra / Passejant per l'ombra* and Nadine Gordimer's *Un arma en casa* to discuss the expansion of politically compromised literature in the TC:

No hay más que recorrer las librerías para confirmar la importancia en cantidad y en excelencia de los autores y autoras [...] que desde mitades de siglo se inspiran en cuestiones político-raciales, tanto en Estados Unidos como en los países que en su día fueron colonias europeas. Cuestiones y temáticas hasta hace poco culturalmente marginales [...] han adquirido una centralidad insospechada y se han apoderado de la imaginación y la conciencia de Occidente. (1998, 1)<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> “In contrast to the language of integration and multicultural inclusion that other African American writers wish to deploy in the name of ethnic consciousness, the emancipatory language of these writers is sustained by the acts of resistance and recognition that define their subjugated identity. [...] as Audre Lorde recognizes, they speak from the multiple, complex, social and historical particularity that constitutes their subjectivity.”

<sup>218</sup> “One only has to browse the bookstores to confirm the importance in quantity and excellence of authors who find inspiration in political and racial issues, both in the United States and in the countries that once were European colonies. Issues and themes which used to be culturally marginal have acquired an unexpected centrality and have captured the Western imagination and conscience”

Despite not finding “a particular relation” [una relación concreta] between the three authors, Usandizaga described them as unsatiable writers who “have spent decades putting their literature at risk through constant experimentation” (1998, 1).<sup>219</sup> In this context, independent reviews of the three works were provided. Even though the author presented Morrison as the most important black writer of all times, her review of *Paraíso* was mixed, as he considered that the combination of magical realism and postmodernism which permeated the novel might hamper its comprehension (1998, 2).

Indeed, despite Carles Barba’s claim that “women’s influence covers all fields: from the Nobel Prize to the most commercial literature” (2000, 49),<sup>220</sup> the emergence of a market of women writers was tightly associated to “high literature” and to the authors’ achievement of a certain degree of international prestige, usually signaled by the award of literary prizes (Barba 2000, 49). This drew particular attention to the figure of Morrison who, having won the 1993 Nobel prize in Literature, was recurrently associated to other distinguished women authors. As noted above, the names of Gordimer, Lessing and Morrison were commonly cited as illustrative examples of prestigious women writers. Other authors who featured discussions about contemporary international literature alongside the aforementioned personalities were Arundhati Roy, Margaret Atwood and 1996 Nobel winner Wislawa Szymborska.

During the summer of 1998, Mireia Sentís’s *En el pico del águila: Una introducción a la cultura afroamericana* was published by Árdora Ediciones. Sentís’s seminal volume compiled sixteen interviews to prominent figures of African American culture, including writers Amiri Baraka, Walter Mosley, June Jordan, Terry McMillan, Rita Dove and bell hooks, photographer Gordon Parks, musician Sonny Rollins and activist Angela Davis, among others. In the book launch, which took place at the North American Studies Institute, Sentís lamented the country’s deliberate lack of interest in what she regarded as North America’s most genuine culture, especially considering the fact that the globalized (literary) market systematically directed its focus towards the United States. These concerns were also voiced in her introduction to the volume:

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<sup>219</sup> “se arriesgan desde hace varias décadas a someter su escritura a una experimentación constante”

<sup>220</sup> “La influencia femenina abarca todos los campos: desde el Nobel hasta la literatura más comercial”

¿Quién conoce realmente la historia, la literatura o el pensamiento afroamericanos? Para que uno de sus autores sea traducido a nuestro idioma, debe alcanzar en su país una difusión muy superior a la media de los escritores normalmente traducidos. Ello provoca que, en terrenos como el del ensayo, apenas existan un par de recopilaciones de textos pertenecientes a la época de la lucha por los derechos civiles, coincidente con el surgimiento del nacionalismo, el orgullo negro y el Black Power. Llevamos, pues, unos cuarenta años de retraso aproximadamente respecto a la realidad cultural afroamericana, o lo que es lo mismo, respecto a la realidad cultural norteamericana. (Sentís 1998, 7-8)<sup>221</sup>

Despite some reviewers criticized the absence of conversations with Toni Morrison and Spike Lee, two of the most prominent figures of African American culture (Lizarralde 1998, 93) the editor actually specified that during the three and a half years spent in the project, she became more interested in introducing artists who were still considerably unknown in the TC rather than promoting figures who had already achieved international recognition.

In his review for *La Vanguardia*, Xavi Ayén highlighted the contributions of Cornell West, Quincy Troupe, June Jordan, Olive Jackson, Terry McMillan and Angela Davis, who, according to Sentís, was only associated with the Black Panther movement in the TC. Among these, of special interest to our study is the interview with Jordan, who discussed the status and role of black English in the United States. The unfamiliarity of the target readership with this “other English” became evident when Ayén argued: “One of the things you learn by chatting with Sentís, or reading her, is that there is a language specific to the black community, ‘black English’, which is spoken by 37 million people” (1998, 40).<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> “Who does really know African American history, literature or thought? In order for one of its authors to be translated into our language, he or she must reach a level of dissemination in his or her country much higher than the average for normally translated writers. This means that, regarding genres such as the essay, there are hardly any collections of texts from the time of the Civil Rights struggle, which coincided with the rise of nationalism, black pride and the Black Power. We are, therefore, some forty years behind the African American cultural reality, or what is the same, the North American cultural reality.”

<sup>222</sup> “Una de las cosas que se aprenden charlando con Sentís, o leyéndola, es que existe una lengua específica de la comunidad negra, el ‘black english’, que hablan 37 millones de personas.”

The didactic nature of Sentís's endeavor led her to surround the interviews with a series of complementary information intended to contextualize the testimonies compiled in the volume. To begin with, each interview was preceded by a picture of the interviewee and a presentation written by Sentís, which introduced the author's work and ideology. In addition, the volume included a biographical index ("Quién es quién en la cultura afroamericana"), a chronology of key events in African American history, a bibliography of the works of interviewed authors (both STs and translations), a bibliography of relevant materials and Internet sites, a general bibliography of works published in Spanish and a map of the United States. Especially relevant here is the fact that all of the works listed in the "General Bibliography in Spanish" section were translations of texts originally published in English. Thereby, Sentís's volume became the first work originally published in Spanish about African American culture.

On another note, Sentís's work was written from a deliberately critical perspective, where not only the colonial and the slavery era, but also modern systems of intersectional oppression were patently and explicitly denounced by most of the contributors to the volume. Actually, Sentís herself condemned the deliberate silencing and disinterest for the African American reality exerted by colonizing countries—more precisely, Spain. Nevertheless, none of the reviews published in the printed press were written from a similar perspective. Indeed, while reviewers applauded the author's endeavor, none voiced Sentís's concerns about the scarce circulation of key works of this literature in the TC. This lack of criticism of the country's and Europe's own colonial past permeated the publications of the Spanish printed press, not only when discussing African American authors, but also the so-called wave of "ethnic" writers. In this respect, Iván Rubio Cuevas argued: "on many occasions, clichés are produced under the belief that they are part of a distinct genuine voice, without admitting the neocolonialist component that entails satisfying metropolitan desires to continue to see the foreigner as 'other'" (1998, 227-228).<sup>223</sup>

Yet another example of what Rubio Cuevas referred to as the "neocolonialist component" of contemporary discourses is to be found in *ABC*'s promotional text of Spielberg's *El color púrpura*, which was broadcasted on television in 2000:

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<sup>223</sup> "[...] en muchas ocasiones, los clichés se producen bajo la creencia de que forman parte de una voz propia, distinta, sin admitir el componente neocolonialista que supone satisfacer los deseos metropolitanos de seguir viendo al extranjero como 'otro'."

La dramática vida de una joven negra a principios del siglo XX en Norteamérica es el centro de la novela de Alice Walker y del tortuoso film de Spielberg, tan impersonal como perfectamente rodado. Frío y distante, adolece de toda la ternura que el resto de la filmografía de este realizador tiene. [...] Una cinta que pudo ser épica se convierte en una dilatada y aburrida reflexión sobre la adaptación afroamericana en la sociedad estadounidense. (Casado Reina and Marín Bellón 2001, 92)<sup>224</sup>

On the one hand, Casado Reina and Marín Bellón's critique contrasted with the opinions of most local newspapers, which considered that Spielberg's endeavor was a solid melodrama and a splendidly executed adaptation of Walker's text (*La Opinión de Málaga* 2001, 71; *Información* 2003, 69 and *El Día* 2001, 95). On the other, the critics' description of the storyline as "a reflection on the adaptation of African Americans in US society" reflects their neocolonial and reductionist approach to the text, as the phrase automatically obscures vertebral themes in both the novel and the movie, such as the reality of slavery or racist and sexist oppression.

Heading towards the end of the century, in 1999 Phyllis Alesia Perry's debut novel *Stigmata* (1998) was translated into Spanish as *El retorno de Ayo* (El Aleph Editores, trans. Mireia Porta i Arnau). The novel entered the Spanish literary system preceded by the success it had gathered in the United States and Europe throughout the previous year. Thus, reviews published in the printed press followed the line of international criticism of Perry's opera prima. Both *ABC* (Castro 2000, 19) and *El País* (Freixas 1999, 101) praised Perry's endeavor to delve into the past by navigating the limits of sanity and madness, reality and delusion. Similarly, both reviews related the author's work with that of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, mostly because of their interest in and development of female characters. Antón Castro for his part, also found in *El retorno de Ayo* reminiscences of "Terry McMillan's self-confidence and compromise" [el desparpajo y el compromiso de Terry McMillan] (2000, 19).

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<sup>224</sup> "The dramatic life of a young black girl in early twentieth century America is the focus of Alice Walker's novel and Spielberg's tortuous film, as impersonal as it is perfectly shot. Cold and distant, it lacks all the tenderness that is present in the rest of this director's filmography. [...] A film that could have been epic becomes a lengthy and boring reflection on the adaptation of African Americans in the US society."

### 3.8. Academic Reception Until the End of the Century

As was already discussed at the beginning of the chapter, it was during the last decades of the twentieth century that the Spanish academia began to take an interest in American Studies. According to Enrique García Díez, this coincided with a time when these studies were engaged “in a profound and radical reappraisal of their ideological and methodological foundations” (1987, 85). Indeed, the attitudes of European countries towards the United States progressively turned more complex and more critical than they had been several decades before. Within this framework, García Díez argued that “the challenge of American Studies, then, lies precisely in contributing an objective vision, one that is free of prejudices and ideological contents, and at the same time devoid of any self-complacency” (1987, 85-86).

It was also throughout the eighties and nineties that the first women’s studies groups appeared in Spanish universities. As pointed out by Lola Castaño (1992), compared with the next building women’s studies in other European countries, Spain had a late start. However, the spread of a network of women’s studies around the country was rapid and it resulted in the creation of manifold groups, journals and courses around this particular area of research. By way of example, we may refer to the creation of feminist journals *Asparkía* (1992), *Lectora* (1995) and *Dossiers feministes* (1998) as well as the inter-disciplinary research group GREC (Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Class), formed at the Rovira i Virgili University (Tarragona) in 1989. Likewise, since the 1990s women’s organizations multiplied in local administrations. The creation of the Women’s Institute [Instituto de la Mujer] in 1983 is an example of this process of institutionalization. Among the institutions that proved to have a key influence on feminist discourses, Mari Luz Congosto et al. (2019, 54) highlight Emakunde (Basque Women’s Institute) and the Andalusian Women’s Institute (Instituto Andaluz de la Mujer). Certain strands of women studies, however, were criticized by scholars such as Jesús Benito Sánchez, who argued against Missy Dehn Kubitschek’s concept of “a continuous historical experience shared by all women” (1994, 100). According to Benito, these ontologically existentialist formulations emerged as a reaction against poststructuralist challenges to logocentrism and actually entailed multiple drawbacks for contemporary African American criticism.



Likewise, Commonwealth Literature studies, now generally known as Postcolonial Studies, also gained momentum in the Spanish academy during the last decades of the millennium. According to professor Felicity Hand (2001, 30):

As interest in this “new” literature grew in those countries where English is the native language or where it is the medium of education, (“new” from the point of view of geography, content, use of the English language, social, political and artistic intent), teachers and scholars in other countries where English Studies were quickly catching on also discovered the richness and diversity of the poems, novels and plays written by non-British and non-American authors.

A logical consequence of this interest in Anglophone minority literatures was the widening of the scope of English Studies journals published in the country which, especially during the decade of 1990, started to publish a considerable number of studies within this domain. To illustrate, the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* published several special issues dedicated to this field of study, namely “Postcolonial and postmodernist narrative in English” (1994) and “Margins and minorities in recent English literature” (1997), and *Links & Letters* dedicated their 1997 issue to “Literature and Neocolonialism”. Likewise, other Spanish renowned journals such as *ATLANTIS*, *REDEN* or the *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* published manifold interviews and critical works within this area.<sup>225</sup>

Thus, the parallel expansion of research in the fields of American studies, women studies and minority literatures logically prompted the examination of encounters and intersections between the three disciplines. In this context, it is only reasonable to deduce that research on African American women’s literature in Spanish academia proliferated during the last decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, up until the onset of the 1990s, academic research in the field had focused on two main authors, namely Morrison and Walker. To this we could add several papers and dissertations which examined the black American woman’s literary tradition from more holistic

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<sup>225</sup> See, among others, Carabí (1988), Hatchard (1992), Osborne (1993), Halbach (1994), Collado Rodríguez (1995), Simal (1995), García Ramírez (1996), Godayol (1996), Hernáez Lerena (1996), Fernández Sánchez (1997), García Landa (1997), López Liqueste (1998), Bados Ciria (1999), García Ramírez (1999).

perspectives. However, the last years of the century saw a considerable diversification of themes and author subjected to critical analysis.

Still, as has already been discussed, the award of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature became a turning point for the consolidation of Toni Morrison as a major figure of world literature. Following these events, the last years of the century saw a number of publications around the author's works. To begin with, Magdalena Vallejo Álvarez published her doctoral dissertation "African American Identity and Female Victimization in Toni Morrison's Narrative" [La identidad afroamericana y la victimización femenina en la narrativa de Toni Morrison] in 1998. Vallejo Álvarez's work was clearly influenced by the events occurred earlier in the decade, as she devoted the first two chapters of her dissertation to discussing Morrison's place in the hegemonic literary canon and the implications of such canonization to the African American literary tradition. The scholar's hypothesis, thus, was that Morrison's entrance in the Western canon had been subjected to the erasure of differential forms and traits of the African and African American tradition in the critical examinations of her works (1998, 4). Vallejo Álvarez's work also examined the intersection between race, gender and class as depicted in Morrison's works. As will be discussed through the following pages, the intersectional approach to the study of African American literature predominated in the Spanish academic production of the time.

One of the aspects of Morrison's oeuvre that lured Spanish scholars was the representation of the mother and mother-daughter relationships. This interest emerged as a critical reaction to the traditional silencing effected upon women characters. From this perspective drew Bárbara Ozieblo's feminist revision of the role of the mother in US literature:

La madre no existe; no figura ni en la historia ni en la literatura porque la mujer es—somos—madre únicamente para nuestros hijos y nuestras hijas. [...] Todo lo demás no es sino una construcción del patriarcado, una imagen que la sociedad nos impone a las mujeres mediante la cual nos controla y nos subyuga. (1998, 37)<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> "The mother does not exist; she is invisible to history and literature because women are—we are—mothers only for our sons and daughters. [...] Everything else is nothing but a construct of patriarchy, an image that society imposes on women through which it controls and subjugates us."

Following this approach, Ozieblo edited the volume *El vínculo poderoso: madres e hijas en la literatura norteamericana* (1998), which included a chapter by Nilia Martínez Rodríguez on “Pauline Breedlove’s Destructive Maternity in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*” [La maternidad destructora de Pauline Breedlove en *The Bluest Eye* de Toni Morrison]. A further analysis of Morrison’s rupture with archetypal features attributed to black women is found in María José Álvarez-Faedo’s “Sula: A Rule Breaker” (1999).

For her part, Mar Gallego Durán, who had published a paper on Morrison’s *Beloved* in 1994, also published studies on “The Role of the Black Woman as Preserver and Creator of Culture in Ntozake Shange’s *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*” [El papel de la mujer negra como conservadora y creadora de cultura en *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* por Ntozake Shange] (1994) and “The Birth of African American Feminism: Spiritual Narratives in the nineteenth century” [El nacimiento del feminismo afro-americano: narrativas espirituales del siglo XIX] (1994), where she examined nineteenth-century spiritual narratives from a feminist perspective in an attempt to map the origins of black feminism in the United States. Even if Gallego Durán was only starting to publish research at that time, she would become one of the key contributors to research in African American Studies in Spain.

Indeed, through the following years Gallego Durán continued to write and present manifold research papers on American literature. More precisely, her interest in minority literatures from the United States was manifest in works such as “New York: ‘The New Frontier’” (1996), where she examined the evolution of racial relations ever since the 1920s and the Harlem Renaissance. Even if at the early stages of her career Gallego Durán published papers on different authors such as Frederick Douglass, Charles Chestnut, Louise Erdrich or Amy Tan, her focus of attention was clearly directed towards African American women studies. Proof of this is the volume of her critical production on this domain published during the decade of 1990, which includes studies on Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* and *Passing* (1996), Frances E. W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy* (1999), Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* (1999), in addition to the aforementioned research works on Morrison and Shange.

One of the authors that sparked the interest of Spanish scholars at the time was Zora Neale Hurston. While Hurston’s work was rediscovered in the SC during the 1970s and

1980s—after the publication of Walker’s “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston” (1975)—in Spain the author’s oeuvre remained unexplored. Thus, contemporary interest in silenced voices in American and world literature prompted the emergence of studies on this author. Among the most relevant works published at the time we should highlight María Frías’s doctoral dissertation “Marriage Discourse in Zora Neale Hurston’s Works” [El discurso del matrimonio en la obra de Zora Neale Hurston] (1993), where she focused on the exploration of female characters in Hurston’s works. Frías’s dissertation was followed by a series of conference papers presented by the author, all of which further explored the figure of Hurston in the wider context of African American women’s literature.

Another doctoral dissertation about Hurston was published by Ana María Fraile Marcos (1994), who had also translated “My People! My People!”—the twelfth chapter from *Dust Tracks on a Road*—for a bilingual edition of the text published by the University of León (1994). Distancing herself from Frías’s approach, Fraile Marcos focused her research on Hurston’s short stories, which she used to map the influence and place of the author in the texture of African American literature. Fraile Marcos’s diachronic analysis considered, on the one hand, Hurston’s work in the context of the Harlem Renaissance and, on the other, her influence and legacy to the formation of the contemporary literary canon. Despite not being her main concern, Fraile Marcos also studied Hurston’s oeuvre from the perspective of black feminist studies, which led her to draw comparisons between the characters and themes of her works and those of other contemporary African American women novelists. Like Frías, during the years following the publication of her dissertation Fraile Marcos contributed a series of papers dealing with diverse aspects of Hurston’s production, among which we may highlight her interest in examining the processes of canon formation (1993).

The crescent interest in literary manifestations of the dynamics between race, gender and class progressively inclined Spanish scholars to opt for intersectional approaches to their research. A good example to illustrate this phenomenon is María Pilar Sánchez Calle’s paper “The Poet and her Muses: Female Sources of Inspiration in the Poetry of Audre Lorde” (1996), where she questioned the traditional role assigned to muses as passive “others” through the study of the female sources of creative inspiration in Audre Lorde’s poetry. Likewise, Juan Carlos Palmer published a study about the interplay between women, violence and race in Alice Walker’s *Meridian* (1997). Of special

interest here is Palmer's discussion of the Civil Rights and the black feminist movement in the light of new organized movements in defense of minority groups and marginalized collectives. Thus, while Palmer acknowledged that the international impact of activist movements in the United States had diminished during in the last decades—partially due to the shifting interest towards non-Western cultures—, he also claimed that contemporary demonstrations against the oppression of Western countries could not be compared to the protest movements that originated in the United States during the 1960s (1997, 49).

Following the line of the aforementioned research was Celia M. Wallhead's study of "Paradigms of Oppression in Paule Marshall's *Merle*" (1998), which examined the components of power and oppression affecting the character of Merle in Marshall's short story, namely race, class, gender, economy, technology, ideology and education. Wallhead also presented Marshall's text as one of the precursors of recent interest in West Indian literature. Furthermore, Carme Manuel Cuenca also contributed a paper uncovering the traditionally silenced voice of the slave woman in eighteenth and nineteenth century narratives (1997). Further delving into the theme of sisterhood in African American literature, Manuel Cuenca studied Harriet Beecher Stowe's relationship with and representation of black women, paying special attention to the literary exchanges between the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Harriet A. Jacobs (1998). This theme was recovered and reexamined in the scholar's critical study of Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which was published together with her translation of the text in 2005.

Likewise, José Díaz produced the paper "La traducción de géneros, en *El color púrpura*: del femenino al masculino, de la novela al cine" (Díaz 1997) which appeared in a three-volume collection dedicated to "Writing and Feminism". While the collection compiled works examining issues such as sexism in the Spanish language, lesbian criticism, the construction of the woman's sexual identity or the translation of women-authored works, Díaz's contribution studied the representation of gender difference and power relations in Spielberg's adaptation as compared to Walker's ST. However, even if quotations were taken from the Spanish translation of the novel and the dubbed version of the film, no consideration to the actual role of translation was taken by the author.

Other themes subjected to examination by Spanish scholars included black women's theater (Barrios 1996 and 1997 and Ojeda Alba 1998), postmodern features in African American fiction (Collado Rodríguez 1999, Simal 2000 and Vega González 2000) and, most notably, African American women's autobiographies (Frías 1996 and 1998, Matas Llorente 1996, Nandín Vila 1997 and Rodríguez Mourelo 1999). With regard to this last topic, we should also refer to the publication of María Concepción Pérez Martín's and Belén Rodríguez Mourelo's doctoral dissertations, both of which presented studies of the autobiographical genre in African American literature. In the case of Pérez Martín (1999), her research targeted Maya Angelou's autobiographical series, paying special attention to the challenge to traditional forms and the significance of motherhood and womanhood. For her part, Rodríguez Mourelo (1997) presented a more diachronic approach, examining the autobiographical tradition from slave narratives to the Harlem Renaissance and the following decades of the twentieth century. In this case, Rodríguez Mourelo's study focused on the works of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright, which she presented as representatives of this literary tradition.

One significant absence in the body of academic research produced in Spain during the decade of the 1990 is Terry McMillan. Indeed, even if her name was cited in some research papers published at the time, no major studies of her work featured Spanish journals until the end of the century. The only significant endeavor that could be found is the paper "Outsmarting Whitey 'Shirley Temple women'?: Terry McMillan's *Waiting to exhale* (1992)" (1997), presented by María Frías at the 20<sup>th</sup> AEDEAN Congress. Thus, the lack of interest in the author contrasted with her ample promotion and success in the United States which, as has already been discussed, resulted into the proliferation of translations in the TC. This phenomenon may respond to the fact that McMillan's novels were commonly classified as "commercial fiction" or even "commercial women's fiction" (Griffin 2004, 69), which may have prevented scholars in the TC from studying her works alongside those of other black American women authors who were more readily associated to "high literature".

Anyhow, in addition to the aforementioned endeavors, studies tracing common trends, themes and interconnections in African American women's literature proliferated during the last years of the century. Indeed, works such as "Dusty Roads and Cages in Afro-American Autobiographies: Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1968)" (Frías 1996), "Power

Relations and Metaphores of Violence in Three Slave Narratives: Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Mattie Griffiths's *Autobiography of a Female Slave* and H. Mattison's *The Octorron: A Tale of Southern Life*" (Matas Llorente 1997),<sup>227</sup> "Black expressive modes as survival technique in two African American female novelists: Paule Marshall and Toni Cade Bambara" (Henderson Osborne 1999), "Conflict in the Female Community in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*" (Gallego Durán 1999) and "Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou and Jill Nelson: Identity, Cultural Miscegenation and Postcolonial Experience in African American Women's Autobiography" (Anievas 1999)<sup>228</sup> offered comparative perspectives around concrete themes in African American women's literature.

In her review of contemporary African American women's fiction, Gallego Durán (1999) identified two crucial events which inevitably entailed a reexamination of the American literary canon: the Nobel prize obtained by Morrison in 1993, and the designation of Rita Dove as poet laureate that same year. Of special interest here is the scholar's reference to the second event, as Spanish experts in the area had paid no virtual attention to Dove's work until present date. Indeed, from the point of view of reception in the TC, even if Dove's appointment as Poet Laureate represented a milestone for the American literary canon, the actual impact of the event on the Spanish readership—both in mainstream, specialized and academic circles—was minor. Anyhow, according to Gallego Durán, the crescent visibility of the production of African American woman writers, some of whose works had reached the top of international bestseller lists, reaffirmed the preponderance of this literature and confirmed the existence of a readership and a market for these authors (1999, 78). Following this line, Olga Barrios discussed the "fashionable status" that non-canonical literature had acquired during the last decades of the century (1997, 101). While Gallego Durán referred to Morrison's Nobel award and Dove's appointment as Poet Laureate as two key events in the contemporary history of African American women's literature, Barrios signaled the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements as turning points for the rethinking of the canon. According to Barrios, these movements resonated in

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<sup>227</sup> "Relaciones de poder y metáforas de violencia en tres tipos de narraciones de esclavas: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Mattie Griffiths, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*; y H. Mattison, *The Octorron: A Tale of Southern Life*".

<sup>228</sup> "Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou y Jill Nelson: identidad, mestizaje cultural y experiencia postcolonial en la autobiografía femenina afroamericana"

female and gay communities, giving rise to the Women's Liberation Movement and the Gay Movement.

Let us finish this section with reference to Juana Guerra de la Torre's discussion of the status of English Studies in Spanish universities (1998). In the light of recent trends permeating the landscape of English Studies in Spain, Guerra discussed the crisis of traditional values affecting archetypal definitions of literature, culture and the canon:

¿Qué se entiende hoy por 'literatura inglesa'? [...] ¿Literatura escrita en los países de habla inglesa tanto en otro dialecto como en otra lengua? [...] ¿Cómo se entiende el concepto de *nación* hoy por hoy en el terreno literario y en general en el terreno de la cultura occidental? [...] ¿Qué se entiende por 'Englishness' cuando pensamos en el arte de Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Wole Soyinka, Jean Rhys o V.S. Naipaul? (1998, 61)<sup>229</sup>

These were just some of the questions upon which Guerra de la Torre reflected, paying special attention to the ways in which feminist or gender studies and postcolonial studies had forced a reconfiguration of the inherent conception of English Studies worldwide. In this context, the author confided on the configuration of new syllabuses that "facilitated the engagement of all places of the literary word in the English language" (62), thus defending her conception of the discipline as a space of flexible multiplicity.

### 3.9. ... And into the New Millenium

At an international level, the concentration process that the publishing industry had started to experience during the 1970s and 1980s underwent a considerable growth that extended through the first decades of the new millennium (Thompson 2010, 102 and Vázquez Álvarez 2015, 45). This phenomenon was also visible at a national level

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<sup>229</sup> "What is nowadays understood by 'English literature'? [...] Literature written in English-speaking countries both in another dialect and in another language? [...] How is the concept of nation understood today in the literary field and more generally in the field of Western culture? [...] What is meant by 'Englishness' when we think of the art of Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Wole Soyinka, Jean Rhys or V.S. Naipaul?"



(Fernández Moya 2017, 32), where large publishing groups such as Planeta continued to expand through mergers or purchases of smaller houses.

A symptom of this trend was the creation in 2000 of the commercial brand DeBolsillo, launched through the allegiance of Planeta and Berstelmann. The newborn publisher nurtured from the collections of the publishing houses belonging to both groups (Trenas 2000, 45). In this context, in 2001 DeBolsillo published *El color púrpura* in the collection Jet, which compiled Spanish and international bestsellers. Likewise, that same year the publisher started the numbered collection Biblioteca Toni Morrison, where editions of *La canción de Salomón*, *Sula*, *Beloved*, *La isla de los caballeros* and *Ojos azules* were initially published.

Following new trends in the circulation of translated literature, Lumen published Maya Angelou's 1974 autobiographical volume *Gather Together in My Name* as *Encontráos en mi nombre* (2000), translated by Carlos Manzano. The decision to circulate Angelou's narrative works in Spain—*Yo sé por qué canta el pájaro enjaulado* had been published in the TC in 1993—came from editor Esther Tusquets, who was in charge of the collections Femenino Singular and Femenino Lumen. According to the editor, these collections had been created with the intention of fostering positive discrimination and offering readers a landscape of women writers from different cultures, rather than for commercial purposes: “We wanted to create an addict readership, but we haven't succeeded, because the sales rate of this collection [Femenino Singular] is no different from others published by Lumen [...]. Personally, I have never known how to publish commercial books in order to finance good literature” (Tusquets 2000, 51).<sup>230</sup>

Indeed, as Tusquets anticipated, the reception of Angelou's work in Spain was very limited. In addition to the sales rate mentioned by the editor, further prove of this is the fact that no significant mentions of the author or her work could be found in *La Vanguardia* and *ABC* until her death was reported in 2014.<sup>231</sup> Only *El País* and *El Cultural*—the cultural supplement of *El Mundo*—published reviews of *Encontráos en mi nombre*. While the review published in *El País* argued that Angelou's masterful work

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<sup>230</sup> “Queríamos crear un público adicto, pero no lo hemos conseguido, porque el ritmo de ventas de esta colección [Femenino Singular] es igual que el de las otras de la editorial. [...] Yo, lo de publicar libros comerciales para financiar la buena literatura, nunca lo he sabido hacer.”

<sup>231</sup> From 2000 to 2014, the only mentions of Angelou's name in *La Vanguardia* and *ABC* occurred in advertisements of the movie *La vida en el sur*, which she had directed.

transcended de biographical genre, José Antonio Gurpegui, writing for *El Cultural*, took the chance to situate the author within the literay landscape of African American women writers, arguing that the quality of her work deserved a higher recognition in the TC. From Gurpegui's viewpoint, the publication of translations in Spain was a clear indicator of the interest and relevance of these writers in the international sphere:

Primero fue Alice Walker con su *El color púrpura*, después Toni Morrison, galardonada con el Nobel en el 93, más tarde Terry McMillan y ahora le ha tocado el turno a Maya Angelou (aunque ya se encuentra traducida *Yo sé por qué canta el pájaro enjaulado*). Esperemos que no tarden mucho en traducirse a Niki Giovanni [sic] o la ya desaparecida Zora Neal Hurston [sic], por citar dos ejemplos. (2000, 107)<sup>232</sup>

Likewise, in 2005 reports of playwright August Wilson's death cited Angelou alongside Morrison and Walker as some of the most relevant contemporary black writers (DPA/EFE 2005a, 56; 2005b, 42 and 2005c, 66).

While initial reviews of Forrest Whitaker's *Esperando un respiro* had been mostly positive, when the movie was broadcasted on television during the first years of the twenty-first century advertisements tended to criticize the director's work in favor of Terry McMillan's source novel. Thus, *Avui* (2000, 70), *La Crónica de León* (2000, 66) and *El Mundo* (2000, 74) considered Whitaker's work a dull adaptation of McMillan's fresh and witty source material. Likewise, José Antonio Gurpegui wrote a review of the novel for *El Cultural* after the publication of the paperback edition in 2000. In this case, the topic of the universality of McMillan's characters was recovered as one of the volume's main attractions. Indeed, Gurpegui argued that the categories of "woman" and "black" were insignificant in the novel as, according to him, the story transcended all sorts of restrictive limits. In this spirit, the reviewer urged readers to purchase the volume in the light of its "general, globalizing and complete portrayal of reality" [una visión general, globalizadora y total de la realidad].

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<sup>232</sup> "First it was Alice Walker with *The Color Purple*, then Toni Morrison with the 1993 Nobel Prize, then Terry McMillan, and now it is Maya Angelou's turn (whose *Yo sé por qué canta el pájaro enjaulado* had already been translated). Let us hope that Nikki Giovanni or the long gone Zora Neal Hurston [sic] are soon published in Spain."

In this context, McMillan's 2001 novel, which was published in the TC in 2002 as *Un día más y un dólar menos* (trans. María Dolores Bueno Camejo), was received with expectation among literary critics. Gurpegui, like many others, celebrated McMillan's return to the literary news lists in the country (2000, 124). In contrast with Anna M. Vilà's critique of the author's plotlines and characters (see page 340), Gurpegui applauded McMillan's "attractive proposal" and praised her distancing from the dramatism permeating the novels of other black women writers: "Here we don't find the marginalized black women of Tony Morrison [sic] or Alice Walker's early works. [...] Much more attractive is the sarcasm with which McMillan approaches the social reality of women of our time" (2000, 124).<sup>233</sup> Following this line of thought, Gurpegui drew attention towards "the crescent role of women in Spanish-speaking societies or any other society" [el creciente papel de las mujeres en sociedades de habla española u otras sociedades] which was represented by the insightful analysis of gender relationships in *Un día más y un dólar menos*. Likewise, Sergi Doria's review (2002, 46) continued to focus on the universal character of McMillan's work, citing the author's own words about the existing differences with previous generations of black writers. In this spirit, Doria concluded that the preoccupations of African Americans in the twenty-first century transcended the frontier of race or ethnicity.

Other newspapers produced reviews of McMillan's novel. While most of them revolved around the universal appeal of the novel's heroines (*Levante* 2002, 43; Bach 2002, 7 and *Mediterráneo* 2002, 56), a minority of reviewers took the opposite stance, arguing that McMillan's text was written for and destined to the black American community (*Época* 2002, 122). Anyhow, most critics coincided in praising the author's narrative style as well as her fresh use of humor and sarcasm.

With the event of McMillan's visit to the country in 2002—where she was invited to the Institute of North American Studies in Barcelona to present her latest novel—*La Vanguardia* published a short interview with the author by Lluís Amiguet (2002, 80). Amiguet's interview reproduced some of the stereotypes that were increasingly being assigned to black population in the United States, such as the existence of an expanding new class of "rich African Americans":

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<sup>233</sup> "Aquí no encontramos a las negras marginadas de las primeras obras de Tony Morrison [sic] o Alice Walker. [...] Mucho más atractivo resulta el sarcasmo con el que McMillan se acerca a la realidad social de las mujeres de nuestro tiempo."

L. A. Su hijo irá a Stanford. ¿Es usted de los nuevos ricos afroamericanos?

T. M. ¡Jesús! ¿Ricos afroamericanos? Me parece que tiene usted un empacho de telecomedias “de clase media afroamericana”.

L. A. Bill Cosby, “Bel Air”, sí, he visto algunas.

T. M. Pues no se fíe de ellas. La televisión es enemiga de la realidad.

(2002, 80)<sup>234</sup>

Likewise, one of Amiguet’s first remarks, which was reproduced in the written piece, touched upon McMillan’s “beautiful skin” for a woman in her fifties:

L. A. ¿De verdad tiene ya 50 años?

T. M. Sí.

L. A. Pues tiene usted una piel preciosa.

(2002, 80)<sup>235</sup>

While Amiguet’s conversation with the author actually discussed issues such as race, women, and the representation of gender relations in McMillan’s novels, the title chosen for the interview referred to one of the author’s early comments on her impressions of Barcelona: “Here you have more dogs than kids” [Aquí ustedes tienen más perros que niños].

Despite the general growing interest of publishers, readers and critics in black women’s literature and the unquestionable diversification of the literary market at the turn of the century, some reviewers still questioned the validity of these “new literary trends”. A clear symptom of this attitude became manifest in the reaction of several Spanish press media to Knopf’s decision to pay a 4-million-dollar advance to first-time novelist

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<sup>234</sup> L. A. Your son is going to Stanford. Are you one of these nouveau riche African Americans?

T. M. Jesus, rich African Americans? Sounds to me like you have an “African American middle-class” sitcom binge.

L. A. Bill Cosby, “Bel Air” yes, I’ve seen a few.

T. M. Well, don’t trust them. Television is the enemy of reality.

<sup>235</sup> L. A. Are you really fifty?

T. M. Yes.

L. A. Well, you have a beautiful skin.

Stephen L. Carter. According to *El País*, this decision was motivated by the publisher's intention to join the expanding phenomenon of literature about black middle- or high-class characters that had been initiated by best-selling authors Alice Walker and Terry McMillan (González 2001, 37). According to Enric González, the "black writer's trend" [la moda del escritor negro] was also instigated by the success of television shows such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* or *The Cosby Show*—*El príncipe de Bel Air* and *El show de Bill Cosby* in the TL—, which had become very popular in Spain.<sup>236</sup>

More radical was Fernando Iwasaki's view of the matter (2001, 9), whose article published in *ABC* developed the thesis that "some writers are important to the history of literature but irrelevant to literature".<sup>237</sup> In this line, Iwasaki read together Knopf's millionaire bet on Stephen L. Carter and Harper Books's advance to nine-year-old poet Sahara Sunday Spain: "One wishes that both authors had something in common other than the color of their skins, since everything indicates that they are not being promoted because they are writers, but because they are black".<sup>238</sup> According to Iwasaki, the compliments that Sunday Spain's poetry book had received from "public figures of the contemporary Black Power" [figuras del "black power" contemporáneo] such as Spike Lee, Terry McMillan, Bill Cosby, Quincy Jones or Alice Walker were motivated by their relation with Spain's father, Johnny Spain, a former member of the Black Panthers. In the light of new literary "trends" [filones]—among which he named black literature, women's literature, and queer literature—the historian and writer predicted that a new boom of immigrant literature could provide Spanish publishers with generous incomes. Whith this conclusion, Iwasaki referred to the title of his publication "The 'Patera' Novel Award" [El premio "Patera" de novela].

In 2004, Akal published Angela Davis's *Mujeres, raza y clase* (trans. Anna Varela). As had been argued by Mireia Sentís, among others, journalists and literary critics in the Spanish context had repeatedly relegated Davis to the imaginary of the long gone Black Power era (see page 351). In accordance to this belief, a look into the translation history

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<sup>236</sup> Actually, in his conversation with Terry McMillan, journalist Lluís Amiguet referred to these two television shows as his closest referents of the contemporary African American reality.

<sup>237</sup> "Hay autores relevantes para la historia de la literatura y al mismo tiempo irrelevantes para la literatura."

<sup>238</sup> "uno desea que ambos autores tengan algo más en común que el color de sus pieles, pues todo indica que no los promueven por ser escritores, sino por ser negros."

of the author in the TC confirms that no editions of Davis's works had been published since 1977, the year in which Grijalbo released her autobiography. Anyhow, *Mujeres, raza y clase* had a significant impact both on mainstream media and on the academic sphere, probably motivated by the author's visit to the country during the spring of 2005. Indeed, after Davis gave several talks at the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA), local and statal newspapers published reviews of her work and reports of her activity in the country.

On this occasion, *El Mundo* journalist Rafael Rodríguez (2005, 187) devoted a lengthy piece to reviewing Davis's work and career and complemented his say with an interview to the author. Rodríguez's article revolved around Davis's stance on feminism, as the journalist celebrated the publication of "Angela Davis's first essay in Spanish" [el primer ensayo en español de Angela Davis]. However, he also recalled her activism during the 1960s and 1970s, paying special attention to Davis's affiliation with the Black Panther party, which had earned her popularity in Spain at that time.

Also echoing the author's past, Xavi Ayén's brief review for *La Vanguardia* was entitled "Black Panther in Museum" [Pantera negra en museo] (2005, 48). The journalist briefly reported Davis's conference at the MACBA, and described the author as "the FBI's most wanted woman" [la mujer más buscada por el FBI] and "the muse that made political extremism glamorous" [la musa que otorgó glamur al extremismo politico]. Likewise, in this spirit, Manuel de la Fuente's article for *ABC* (2005, 48) devoted a good amount of space to examining the evolution in the author's looks from the 1960s to present day:

Parecía una estrella de rock, pero era una activista de la causa afroamericana [...] Llevaba la minifalda como Mary Quant y Sandie Shaw [...] Probablemente se inventó la moda del pelo afro, pero también fue una alumna aventajada de uno de los popes de la nueva izquierda.

And continued

A la edad en que otras están prejubiladas, la profesora Davis mantiene un fenomenal aspecto, embutida en un elegante traje de chaqueta negro. Aunque algunas de sus opiniones suenan a sesentayochismo y a marxismo refinado por unas capitas de la Sorbona y el existencialismo, Davis derrocha carisma.

All in all, while these Spanish newspapers did report Davis's visit to the country, no reviews of the actual work she was presenting, *Mujeres, raza y clase*, were published. Even if the book was mentioned in the press, articles published at the time provided more holistic views on the author's career and oeuvre, and usually chose to target her involvement in social and political protests during the second half of the twentieth century rather than discussing her more contemporary production and activism.

On a very different note was the interview conducted by feminist activist and journalist Joana García Grenzner for *Diagonal* (2005), a Spanish biweekly alternative newspaper which presented itself as a communication tool for the left-leaning social movements (*Diagonal* 2016, n. p.). García Grenzner's lengthy conversation with the author explored Davis's view of the dynamics affecting each of the three components of her book title. In this spirit, the discussion approached issues related to capitalism and patriarchy, the implications of first-wave feminism, her marxist views on domestic work as well as the creation of alliances between sectors within the contemporary feminist movement, among others.

In the academic sphere, the translated version of Davis's work generated more interest, especially in the Political Sciences. Indeed, reviews were published in *Página abierta* (Martínez 2005) and *Foro Interno* (Moro Coco 2005). Likewise, the essay "La raza y la clase en los albores de la campaña por los derechos de las mujeres", which originally appeared in Davis's volume, was published independently in *Relaciones internacionales* (2005). Moro Coco's review argued for the relevance of Davis's 1981 work in the contemporary era. Indeed, according to the reviewer, the essays collected in *Mujeres, raza y clase* had acquired new dimensions and a wider reach in the light of the new alternative feminist movements that had begun to emerge during the first years of the twenty-first century (2005, 147).

In 2004, several events aroused a renewed interest in Nobel laureate author Toni Morrison. To begin with, the publication of *Amor* in 2004, translated by Jordi Fibla, generated mixed reactions in the Spanish general press. The scope of the news of the author's latest novel was also extended by her visit to Madrid that same year. The novel's positive reception and the interest of national as well as local newspapers in the author's work contrasted with Francisco García Pérez's critical argument about the legitimacy of contemporary Nobel prizes, as he claimed that not long after receiving

the award Morrison had entered the realm of “long-forgotten authors” [autores del todo olvidados] together with Kenzaburo Oé, Wislawa Szymborska and Dario Fo (2003, 60). Valencian newspaper *Las Provincias* coincided with García Pérez’s stance, as their 2004 review of *Amor* described Morrison as “an almost forgotten Nobel prize” [una casi olvidada premio Nobel] (2004, 57).

Contrary to this view was writer and literary critic José María Guelbenzu’s review for *El País* (2004, 103). Indeed, Guelbenzu specifically noted Morrison’s ability to write another masterpiece after having received a recognition that had inevitably raised expectations about her work. Following this line of thought, the critic praised the novel’s “narrative wisdom” [sabiduría narrativa], arguing that the possible lack of originality of the main theme or plotline was extensively made up for by the outstanding character development and the story’s conclusion. To this, Guelbenzu added a comment on the universal character of Morrison’s work. However, the reviewer’s final stance derived in an actual critique of what he referred to as “ghetto writers”:

Toni Morrison es una mujer negra que escribe una novela con personajes de su raza exclusivamente. [...] a contrario de los circuitos cerrados y autosatisfechos en los que se mueven las minorías de cuota, aquí asistimos a una representación del alma humana universal, no del alma negra etiquetada. Pero, claro, Toni Morrison es una creadora universal y no una escritora-gheto. (2004, 103)<sup>239</sup>

On a similar note was Rafael Narbona’s review for *El Cultural* (2004, 19). In this case, Narbona argued that despite the author’s address of racial discrimination in the novel, the reach of her characters was beyond the constraints of race and gender: “These are creatures that speak about ourselves, revealing the closeness of the beautiful and the terrible”.<sup>240</sup> Narbona also praised Morrison’s masterful rendering of emotions and relationships, and coincided with Guelbenzu in celebrating character development in the novel.

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<sup>239</sup> “Toni Morrison is a black woman who only writes about black characters. [...] contrary to the closed and self-satisfied circuits inhabited by quota minorities, here we are witnessing a representation of the universal human soul, not the stereotypical black soul. But, of course, Toni Morrison is a universal creator and not a ghetto-writer.”

<sup>240</sup> “Son criaturas que nos hablan de nosotros mismos, revelándonos la cercanía de lo hermoso y lo terrible.”



In May 2004, the author's visit to Madrid to present the Spanish translation of *Love* was picked up by the state's press. Newspapers such as *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, *ABC* and *El Mundo* took the chance to interview the author about her views on contemporary social and political frictions in her homeland, life after the Nobel prize, as well as, of course, the motives and keys of her latest novel.

Thus, journalists Carmen Sigüenza (2004), Antonio Astorga (2004) and Juan Carlos Merino (2004) discussed with the author the controversy aroused by the publication of photographs of the torture acts against detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison that had been committed by the United States Army and Central Intelligence Agency personnel during the Iraq War. Morrison's open criticism against George W. Bush's administration was reported by the Spanish journalists, and it was actually used as the headline for Astorga's report: "Bush Is a Very American Hero: Straight, Upright, Holy and Sentimental" [Bush es un héroe muy americano: derecho, recto, santo y sentimental] (2004, 54).

In relation to this, the author was also repeatedly asked about the evolution of racial discrimination in the United States, and the representation of this form of violence in *Amor*. In this regard, Raquel Garzón (2004, 46) emphasized the role of memory in the novel, as she reproduced the author's stance against her home country's deliberate policy of forgetting and the significance of the fight to recover its historical memory. Following this line, Merino (2004, 42) presented the author as North America's moral conscience and echoed Harold Bloom's criticism of Morrison's latest works for aiming at political correctness, to which the Nobel laureate replied by questioning the boundaries between the political and the literary.

All the reviews of *Amor* published after Morrison's visit to the country had a general positive tone. These included the ones written in the aforementioned periodicals as well as in other national and local newspapers, such as *La Razón* (2004, 50), *Cambio 16* (2004, 76), *Levante* (L. R. 2004, 45), *El Periódico de Catalunya* (EFE 2004, 86), *El Correo español* (2004, 101), *La Tribuna de Guadalajara* (EFE 2004, 54) and *Avui* (Rubio 2004, 71). These reviews foregrounded key aspects of the novel which, according to the reviewers, were recurrent in the author's oeuvre, namely relationships between women, the use of language and silence, the oppression of racism in the United States and the psychology of emotions. Likewise, most critics coincided in their opinion

that the award of literary prizes had not affected Morrison's excellence as a novelist, therefore acknowledging the quality and value of her latest contribution to North American and world literature.

Further proof of Morrison's canonization is the interest shown by Spanish scholars in her works. Indeed, during the first years of the century the local academia saw a number of publications tackling manifold aspects of the author's oeuvre. Very much at stake was the author's use of magical realism, as discussed by Susana Vega González (2000) and María José García Rufo (2004). Also, concern about this topic prompted the emergence of comparative studies such as García Rufo's (2007 and 2009) and Juan Ignacio Guijarro González's (2009), interested in the dialogue between Morrison's novels and Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. María Ruth Noriega Sánchez's doctoral dissertation (2001) reexamined the traditional identification of magical realism with Latin American male writers and studied the relevance of the genre in African American, native American, Chicano and Mexican contemporary women's writing.

Other scholarly works published at the time analyzed the configuration of otherness and borderlands in Morrison's novels (Bus 2001, Tally 2002 and Sánchez Soto 2002), the rewriting of history (Otero Blanco 2000, dos Santos Moreira 2000, Salto-Weis Azevedo 2005 and Vega-González 2005) as well as the role of womanhood and motherhood (Cohen 2001, Marín Ocaña 2003 and García Rufo 2005), among others. In any case, the proliferation of academic papers, doctoral dissertations as well as graduate and undergraduate works specifically devoted to the author were a clear indicator of the literary quality and value of her work in the global sphere.

Nonetheless, the marginal but existent belief, worded by journalists such as García Pérez (2003, 60), that Morrison was already disappearing from the international literary landscape was further refuted by DeBolsillo's decision to reprint *Beloved*, *La canción de Salomón*, *La isla de los caballeros*, *Ojos azules* and *Sula* in 2004. Likewise, *Amor* was incorporated to the commercial publisher's catalogue early in 2005. Nevertheless, following the line of García Pérez's argument was the critique published in *La Nueva España* about the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature, which resparked once again the debate about the political agenda of the prestigious award. In this case, an unsigned article in the Asturian newspaper argued:

La Academia Sueca siempre nos depara sorpresas: algunas gratas, como cuando premió a Odysseas Elytis, Elias Canetti, Czeslaw Milosz o Joseph Brodsky, y otras simplemente sorpresas, sin más trascendencia, como premiar a un titiritero como Dario Fo, o a mediocridades como Wislawa Szymborska, Toni Morrison o Elfriede Jelinik. (*La Nueva España* 2007, 33)<sup>241</sup>

In this case, the newspaper took the chance of the announcement of the 2007 Nobel laureates to criticize the disadvantage of white male writers in the contemporary literary spheres:

Con esta tendencia de la Academia Sueca de premiar a los escritores no tanto por su obra literaria como por circunstancias externas, de carácter político, racial y sexual, tanto en su bifurcación feminista u homosexual, no sólo quedan en inferioridad de condiciones los varones blancos, heterosexuales y de más de treinta años, sino que el premio se está yendo al garete. (*La Nueva España* 2007, 33)<sup>242</sup>

A similar stance against Morrison was manifested in the review of Phillip Roth's novel *El vuelo corto de Marcus Messner* published in the same newspaper in 2009. In this case, Luis M. Alonso lamented the author's "eternal candidature" to the Nobel Prize, and argued that if Morrison, whom he considered a "bush-league writer" [una escritora de cuarta categoría], had been awarded the prize, it was only reasonable to expect that Roth would eventually receive a similar honor (Alonso 2009, 80).

These claims, though peripheral, were reaffirmed by the progressive loss of interest in marginal literatures experienced by the mainstream Spanish book market. This trend had reached its peak at the turn of the century and even if ever since then it had generated a solid readership, the instability of literary flows in the contemporary period stimulated the shifting interests of the mainstream audience and market.

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<sup>241</sup> "The Swedish Academy always has surprises in store for us: some times they are pleasant ones, such as when Odysseas Elytis, Elias Canetti, Czeslaw Milosz or Joseph Brodsky were awarded, and others they are just surprises, with no further significance, such as awarding a puppeteer like Dario Fo or mediocrities like Wislawa Szymborska, Toni Morrison or Elfriede Jelinik."

<sup>242</sup> "With the Swedish Academy's tendency to reward writers not so much for their literary work as for external political, racial and sexual circumstances, whether in their feminist or homosexual bifurcation, not only are white heterosexual males over the age of thirty left at a disadvantage, but the prize is going down the drain."

By way of example to illustrate these events we can study the reception of Terry McMillan's *The Interruption of Everything*, translated as *La interrupción de todo* (2006) by María Dolores Bueno Camejo. In contrast to previous novels by the author which had been amply reviewed in national and local daily newspapers as well as magazines, no reviews of the novel were published and it was only advertised in some local press media, namely *Avui* (2006, 88), *Huelva información* (2006, 27) and *El Diario de Ávila* (2006, 43). Two revealing facts surround this event and further illustrate the fluctuating interests of the Spanish book market. To begin with, McMillan's two subsequent novels, *Getting to Happy* (2010) and *Who Asked You?* (2013), were not translated in Spain. Actually, it was not until ten years later that Alianza undertook the task of translating her 2016 volume *I Almost Forgot About You*. In 2005, newspapers reviewed or advertised the cinematic adaptation of *Disappearing Acts*, released in Spain as *Actos Desesperados*. Criticism of the movie was mostly negative, and the novel's success in the SC was generally attributed to "an appreciative readership" [un público agradecido] (Molino 2005). However, most significantly, a number of advertisements of the movie referred to McMillan as a male writer: "La HBO, canal de televisión por cable que produce a destajo, se encuentra detrás de esta tormentosa y afroamericana historia de amor que adapta la novela del escritor Terry McMillan (lo que no sabemos si es bueno o malo)" (*El Día de Córdoba* 2005, 58; *Diario de Cádiz* 2005, 62; *Diario de Sevilla* 2005, 58; *Europa sur* 2005, 70; my emphasis).<sup>243</sup> Even if this kind of inaccuracies had occurred more than once in past times—especially when non-Western authors started to gain momentum in the Spanish literary panorama—, they were striking to find in as late as 2005.

In 2008, the publication of Morrison's *A Mercy* coincided with the election of Barack Obama as the first black president of the United States. The apparently casual coincidence boosted Morrison's appearance in the international press, as she had publicly supported Obama's campaign prior to his election that same year. Likewise, the president himself had also cited *Song of Solomon* as one of his all-time favorite books. For these reasons, the interviews with the author and the reviews of *Una bendición*

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<sup>243</sup> I have exceptionally used the original quote in Spanish because the writer's mistake in relation to McMillan's gender cannot be naturally reflected in the translation of the fragment. Anyhow, an English version of the text is provided here: "HBO, a cable TV channel that produces on a piecework basis, is behind this stormy, African American love story that adapts writer Terry McMillan's novel (we don't know if that's good or bad news)."

(trans. Jordi Fibla), which was published in Spain in 2009, naturally incorporated references to the political situation of the writer's homeland. Actually, interviews conducted by different Spanish press media during the spring of 2009 recurrently tried to address the dialogue between Morrison's latest novel and the historical past as a strategy to redirect attention towards the writer's engagement with the recent political developments of the country. A symptom of this agenda is the information disclosed in the headings and subheadings of the manifold articles published at the time. To cite some of them, "“Slavery Still Exists in the United States”" [‘La esclavitud sigue existiendo en Estados Unidos’] and "“Bush Was a Shopkeeper, Not a President; He Spoke Not to Citizens but to Consumers”" [‘Bush era un tendero, no un presidente; no hablaba a ciudadanos sino a consumidores’] (Ayén 2009, 30), "“Toni Morrison: ‘Barack Obama Seduced Me First as a Writer’”" [Toni Morrison: ‘Barack Obama me sedujo antes como escritor’] (Fresneda 2009, 38) and "“Obama Is Thoughtful and Articulate; He Can Talk, and He’s a Good Writer!”" [‘Obama es reflexivo y articulado; sabe hablar, y ¡es un buen escritor!’] (Aguilar 2009, 45).

Anyhow, questions about *Una Bendición* oscilated between gazing into the past and looking forward to a postracial present/future. As for the former, Morrison was insistently asked about her choice to go back to the slavery era, which she had not tackled since *Beloved*. Journalists Carlos Fresneda (2009, 38) and Xavi Ayén (2009, 30), respectively working for *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*, were also interested in discussing the presence of white slavery in preracial America and the reception of this reality by the white readership. The author of the novel took this chance to criticize the country's "great contribution" to the slavery era in bringing to the fore the construct of race as an inescapable and fundamental dividing category (Ayén 2009, 30). As for the latter, Spanish interviewers were eager to discuss the author's views on the recent sociopolitical advances of the country. While both Ayén and Fresneda formulated questions about a current "postracial era" marked by the Obama presidency, Morrison insisted that changes were happening at a slow pace, even if she was hopeful for a better future. In relation to this, one of Ayén's questions was especially revealing, as it could be interpreted as an involuntary—but accurate—revelation about a conception of blackness that prevailed among some part of the Spanish population and readership:

X. A. En sus libros los negros son trabajadores, prostitutas, borrachos, y ahora tenemos un presidente. ¡Vaya cambio!

T. M. Ja, ja. ¿No me pedirá que le responda una pregunta tan absolutamente inapropiada, verdad? A mí me interesan esos personajes ordinarios porque no aparecen en los libros de historia. Es como si no hubieran existido jamás, y yo les devuelvo a la vida.

(2009, 30)<sup>244</sup>

In this same line, Ayén and Aguilar's special notice of the author's braided hairstyle can be read analogously to earlier remarks about Angela Davis's looks (see pages 300 and 368). This, of course, is a further symptom of the estranged perspective from which the reality of the black population—black women, more precisely—was traditionally approached in the Spanish press.

After these initial contacts with the author's latest work, more canonical reviews of *Una bendición* appeared in *El Periódico* (de Hériz 2009, 68), *Cultura La Vanguardia* (Saldrigas 2009a, 9 and 2009b, 8), *El Imparcial* (Martínez Idarreta 2009, n. p.) and weekly magazine *El Cultural* (Gurpegui 2009, 204), as well as in other local newspapers. Enrique de Hériz's analysis aimed at looking beyond the theme of slavery and into "the desire to own and the implicit punishment of being owned" [el deseo de poseer y el castigo implícito de ser poseídos], which according to him was the key to the novel. More precisely, the reviewer considered that these dynamics were tightly linked to the patriarchal society inhabited by the leading characters. Along these lines, de Hériz concluded that *Una bendición* should be considered a tool to explore race relationships, and clarified that the novel's themes had an unquestionable universal appeal.

The reviews published in *El Cultural* and *El Imparcial* also followed this line of thought, as both advocated for the universality of the themes and insights in *Una bendición* and explicitly criticized reductionist views on the novel. In this spirit, José Antonio Gurpegui (2009, 204) determined that the theme of slavery was only a fine narrative threat in what he considered one of Morrison's greatest works. Likewise, the opening lines of Regina Martínez Idarreta's analysis stated that "The magic and genius of *A Mercy* lie in the fact that it goes far beyond being just another story about slavery"

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<sup>244</sup> X. A. In your books blacks are workers, prostitutes, drunkmen... and now we have a president. What a change!

T. M. Ha, ha. You're not asking me to answer such an absolutely inappropriate question, are you? I am interested in these ordinary characters because they don't appear in history books. It is as if they never existed, and I bring them back to life.

(2009, n. p.).<sup>245</sup> However, while de Hériz had examined power relations from a gender perspective, Martínez Idarreta did not consider this variable in her analysis, as she understood the representation of “the desire to own” [el deseo de poseer] in the novel as a human—universal—flaw rather than a product of patriarchy.

On a different note, the two reviews published by Robert Saladrigas in the supplement *Cultura La Vanguardia* focused on the novel’s depiction of white slaves in a preracial America. Saladrigas (2009a, 9) introduced Morrison as “the only major representative of black culture in mainstream North American literature”<sup>246</sup> and argued that her work preserved the memory of a great generation of black writers, among which he considered Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin and LeRoi Jones. Under the subtitle “Women in a Men’s World” [Mujeres en un mundo de hombres], the reviewer parallelly examined the position of women during the slavery era as well as the author’s own role in preserving the country’s historical memory and honoring the legacy of black women.

Indeed, the “Obama effect” generated a renovated interest in and perception of black culture that resonated internationally. In the Spanish context, the years immediately preceding and following the 2009 election saw a number of publications of different nature destined to rethink the history of black America and the analysis of blackness and leadership in the light of recent political events. These publications included newspaper articles, special supplements or magazine issues as well as a number of academic publications on the subject matter.

To begin with, the supplement *ABC Cultural* dedicated a special issue to “The Other America” [la otra América], which included two lengthy pieces that revisited the African American historical, cultural and literary tradition: “The African American Spirit” [El espíritu afroamericano] and “The Black Minority” [La minoría negra]; and two shorter articles that revised the life and work of Barack Obama: “A Unique Life” [Una vida muy singular], which reviewed Obama’s volume *Los sueños de mi padre*, and “Who is Barack Obama?” [¿Quién es Barack Obama?]. In “El espíritu afroamericano”,

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<sup>245</sup> “La magia y el genio de *Una bendición* reside en que va mucho más allá de ser una historia más sobre la esclavitud.”

<sup>246</sup> “la única gran representante de la cultura negra en la corriente principal de la narrativa norteamericana.”

Mercedes Monmany (2008, 4-5) highlighted the role of Richard Wright in the definition of the African American identity, and praised Margaret Walker's autobiography of the author. Monmany described Wright as one of the landmark authors thanks to whom a black person could have been elected president of the United States. In her review of the history of the antiracist fight in the country, the journalist considered key figures such as Martin Luther King, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin or Chester Himes. In addition to Walker, whose *Jubilee* was described as "the black version of *Gone with the Wind*" [la versión negra de *Lo que el viento de llevó*], Toni Morrison was the only female voice cited in the article. In this case, her status as the first black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature made her an indispensable name to cite when reviewing African American history. In "The Black Minority" [la minoría negra], Florentino Portero (2008, 5-6) argued that racism was innate to every human being, and supported his point by referring to "black racism" and "Chinese racism" in the United States. He argued that these reactions were the answer of "those who feel defeated and alienated" [quien se siente vencido y ajeno] and attributed Obama's success to his distancing from extremist political standpoints: "Obama was careful not to be confused with the usual black politicians, racist and always ready to defend the granting of more and more government aid. [...] Obama is and is not. He lives and participates in the contradictions of a community that has not yet assumed the responsibility of living in freedom" (2008, 6).<sup>247</sup>

In November of that year Félix Romeo published an article in the same newspaper where he revisited key aspects and figures in the Spanish reception of black America (2008). Among these, he highlighted Mireia Sentís's *En el pico del águila* as he echoed the journalist's criticism in the scarce interest shown in the TC in this fundamental part of US culture. Romeo also praised Maribel Cruzado's work on the Harlem Renaissance as well as her translation of *Blues* (2003), an anthology of poems by Langston Hughes. As for black authors, the literary critic paid special attention to Chester Himes, Donald Goines and Clarence Cooper Jr., even if he lamented the inexistence of translations of Zora Neale Hurston's, Nella Larsen's, Gwendolyn Brooks's and Eldridge Cleaver's

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<sup>247</sup> "Obama tuvo cuidado de no confundirse con los políticos negros habituales, racistas y siempre dispuestos a defender la concesión de más y más ayudas. [...] Obama es y no es. Vive y participa de las contradicciones de una comunidad que no acaba de asumir la responsabilidad de vivir en libertad."



works, among others.<sup>248</sup> Likewise, Romeo celebrated the contemporary success of writers such as Terry McMillan or Walter Moseley, who “did not face the same hardships as their predecessors” [no han tenido vidas tan difíciles como las de sus predecesores] (2008, 11).

On a similar note, Patricia Godes published the article “La cultura afroamericana saca pecho” (Godes 2010), where she revisited a number of milestones of African American culture, including James Weldon Johnson’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing”, considered the black national anthem; the contributions of personalities such as Frederick Douglass, Spike Lee, Quincy Johnes, Oprah Winfrey, Zadie Smith or Michelle Obama; the magazine *Ebony* and the exhibition “NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom” organized by the Library of Congress.

In her article “La línea del color” Mireia Sentís devoted special attention to the role of first lady Michelle Obama in the 2009 presidential election:

Hay ciudadanos blancos que no se consideran racistas y que, sin embargo, no verían con buenos ojos que uno de sus hijos contrajese matrimonio con una persona de color. Obama les ha ahorrado a esos ciudadanos algo que preferirían no ver: un matrimonio mixto. Frente a los afroamericanos, el senador por Illinois ha subrayado su mitad negra con toda naturalidad. Y entre las mujeres afroamericanas, Michelle, fuerte, inteligente y atractiva, liberada y madre de familia, transmite un mensaje largamente esperado. La imagen de la mujer negra alcanza oficialmente la igualdad. (2008, 87)<sup>249</sup>

Following her stance in the introduction to *En el pico del águila*, Sentís was very critical with the colonialist period and the European influence on current social, religious and

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<sup>248</sup> As a matter of fact, at that time there were translations of Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Colorstruck* and “My people! My People!” published in Spain. Today, the works of Cleaver and Brooks remain unpublished in the country.

<sup>249</sup> “There are white citizens who do not consider themselves racist, yet would frown upon one of their children marrying a person of color. Obama has spared those citizens something they would rather not see: intermarriage. In the face of African-Americans, the Illinois senator has emphasized his black half as a matter of course. And among African-American women, Michelle, strong, intelligent and attractive, liberated and mother of a family, conveys a long-awaited message. The image of the black woman officially achieves equality.”

cultural structures that permeated the United States, such as the well-established practice of “blaming it on the nigger” (Sentís 2008, 87).

Obama’s choice of African American poet Elizabeth Alexander to deliver during his first inauguration was scarcely picked up by Spanish press media. Actually, Imma Monsó harshly criticized the approach of Catalan television channel TV3 to the live broadcast of the inauguration ceremony. According to Monsó, during the event the two commentators took the chance of Alexander’s intervention to summarize the highlights of the ceremony—the poet’s delivery was clearly not among them—while she recited her poem “Praise Song for the Day”, which could not be heard by Catalan viewers. AFP considered that president Obama’s decision to have a poet deliver in his inauguration was a sign of his openness to new ideas as well as a symbol of the start of a new era where culture would become a fundamental milestone (AFP 2009, n. p.). Anyhow, up to present day Alexander’s poems remain unpublished in Spain. A bilingual edition of the text was eventually published in 2009 by Graywolf Press, translated by Chilean poet Rodrigo Rojas.

In 2010, Maribel Cruzado published an article for online magazine *Frontera D* on African American poetry from the colonial period to the Harlem Renaissance. The scholar framed her study in the context of the Obama era: “[a time] when much of white America has not yet digested the triumph of their new president and a large majority of Europeans are surprised that a black politician has come to lead the world’s largest power” (Cruzado 2010, n. p.).<sup>250</sup> Drawing from the pioneer work of Lucy Terry and Phillis Wheatley, Cruzado accounted for the vigor of African American literature from the earliest days. Cruzado also foregrounded the work of Zora Neale Hurston and the more contemporary Virginia Hamilton, paying special attention to their role as anthologists of folklore tales and short stories. After reviewing James Weldon Johnson’s *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) and Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925), both considered landmark volumes in the history of African American Literature, the author devoted the last section of her article to discussing the poetry of Arna Bontemps, presented as “a perfect stranger in our country” [un perfecto desconocido en nuestro país]. From this perspective, Cruzado lamented the lack of translations of African

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<sup>250</sup> “cuando buena parte de la Norteamérica blanca todavía no ha digerido el triunfo de su nuevo presidente y una gran mayoría de los europeos se sorprenden de que un político negro haya podido llegar a dirigir la mayor potencia mundial.”

American poetry in Spanish-speaking countries and the complete absence of anthological works in this genre. The scholar's comment on the paradoxical fact that despite the international acclaim of African American personalities (actors and actresses, musicians, artists, etc.), black culture remained almost unknown in the target country paralleled Mireia Sentís's earlier criticism of Europe's deliberate lack of interest in North America's most genuine culture.

In the academic sphere, the 2008 presidential election was also thoroughly examined. Studies such as "Nacionalismo Negro en los Estados Unidos y el Miedo al 'Black Power'" (López Gutiérrez 2009), "'El Dilema Norteamericano'. De la esclavitud a la institucionalización de la discriminación racial" (Maestro Backsbacka 2008), "Las paradojas de la política estadounidense: de George W. Bush a Barack Obama" (Estévez López 2008) or *Living the Vida Barroca: American Culture in an Age of Imperial Orthodoxies* (Harrington 2014) presented revisions of African American identity and culture in the light of the Obama era. However, academic papers dissociated between political developments in the United States and the study of African American literature, leaving the former to the domain of Political Sciences or Sociology.

The last decade of the twentieth century had already seen the development of a consistent body of scholarly production on black women's writing. Still, once the trend of marginal literature started to decline during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the interests of the Spanish academia progressively distanced from those of the general reading public. Proof of this is the scholarship published on authors such as Alice Walker (Requejo Losada 2002, Espínola 2006, Guerra Palmero 2008 and Raggio 2010), Maya Angelou (Sales Salvador 2003 and Sánchez Suárez 2008, 2010a and 2010b) or Audre Lorde (Sánchez Calle 2000 and 2001 and González García 2001), which were considerably unknown or long-forgotten in the TC. Likewise, the production of collective works offering general perspectives on black women's writing nurtured scholarship on the literary tradition of African American women writers, a research domain that was well-established in the SC. These endeavors included studies about African American pioneer women writers (Arroyo Vázquez 2009 and Gimeno Pahissa 2010) as well as revisions of key literary and historical figures in the shaping of the intersectional feminist movement, including Rosa Parks, Mary M. Bethune, Susie King Taylor, Harriet Tubman, Nina Simone and Maya Angelou, among others (Castro Borrego 2007, Piqueras Fraile, et al. 2007 and Pahissa 2010).

In the midst of the Obama effect, *Precious*, the cinematic adaptation of Sapphire's 1996 bestseller *Push*, reached Spanish cinemas preceeded by the national success generated in the SC. The book had been translated into Spanish in 1998; however, despite its commercial success in the United States, reception in Spain was very limited. In the case of Lee Daniels's adaptation, a good number of popular press media as well as specialized magazines advertised or reviewed the movie, which had received dozens of nominations in award categories, including six Academy Award nominations, not only for the film itself but for the cast's performances, the direction and cinematography, and the adaptation of the novel to the screenplay. Likewise, director Lee Daniels won both awards for which he was nominated at the San Sebastián International Film Festival—the TVE Otra Mirada Award and the Audience Award.

Despite the considerable media coverage in the TC, scarce references to Sapphire's novel could be found in newspaper reviews. In this respect, Gregorio Belinchón (2010, 48) claimed that the original reception of the source novel and Oprah Winfrey's involvement in the project—she was the co-producer of the movie—were the two fulcrums of Daniels's tape. In “*Precious*, otra historia del Bronx”, Agustín Alonso G. (2010) speculated about the the causal relationship between Obama's election and the national and international acclaim of the piece as well as the Academy Award nomination of *The Blind Side*. The article, which accompanied a seven-minute audiovisual review broadcasted by RTVE, contained some inconsistencies affecting the ST, such as referring to it as “the homonymous novel”—Sapphire's original work was entitled *Push*, not *Precious*—. Likewise, Alberto Bermejo, the narrator of RTVE's video review, repeatedly referred to the movie director as Lee Anderson, rather than Lee Daniels (RTVE 2010). According to Alicia Huerta, the key to the movie's success was Daniels's masterful management of the balance between tragedy and comedy:

Claro, que cuando un tremendo drama tiene un final no tan trágico como se espera, que apela a las segundas oportunidades, al coraje y a la autosuperación, la cosa cambia. Y es ese modesto buen sabor de boca que al espectador le queda después de asistir a la terrible existencia de *Preciuos* [sic], la protagonista, el que

hace que uno no se quede sólo con las violentas imágenes de intimidación, menosprecio y dolor que muestra la historia. (Huerta 2010, n. p.)<sup>251</sup>

In relation to this, Huerta claimed that the movie was less harsh than the source work: “Lee knew how far he could go with his public”, and argued that the general audience might not have tolerated seeing the explicitness of the original story represented in the big screen.

The opposite stance was defended by an anonymous contributor to the specialized website *Las Horas Perdidas* (Anonymous 2010, n. p.), which regularly published reviews, documentaries, opinion articles and podcasts about the cinema industry. In this case, the review opened with the verdict: “This movie is t-r-a-s-h” [esta película es b-a-s-u-r-a]. Indeed, the reviewer criticized both the source material as well as Daniels’s reinterpretation, which was deemed “an embarrassing pamphlet on the liberating power of education” [un pamflete embarazoso sobre el poder liberador de la educación]. All together, the article condemned both the excessive harshness and sentimentalism of Sapphire’s text as well as the moviemaker’s attempt at seeking a hopeful tone for the tape through “lies” such as implying that “gays and lesbians are, without exception, cultivated, super cool, very pretty and your best friends”.<sup>252</sup> The author concluded by drawing a parallelism with Spielberg’s *The Color Purple*, which he/she considered exactly the same movie as *Precious* but with better cinematography. In this spirit, the movie was included in *Fotogramas*’s top-10 list of “Great Movies We Don’t Want to Watch Ever Again” [Grandes películas que no queremos volver a ver] under the pretext of the story’s exorbitant excesses, deeming the movie an adaptation of the premise “It’s all right, it’s better than dying” [No pasa nada, es mejor que morirse] (Martínez Mantilla 2020, n. p.).

Remarkably, Elvira Lindo’s account of the adaptation (2009, 107) was the only analysis published in press media (both general and specialized) that examined the storyline of

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<sup>251</sup> “Of course, when a tremendous drama has an ending that is not as tragic as expected, that appeals to second chances, courage and self-improvement, things change. And it is that modest good taste in the mouth that the viewer is left with after witnessing the terrible existence of *Precious* [sic], the protagonist, which helps us remember something else apart from the violent images of intimidation, contempt and pain shown in the story.”

<sup>252</sup> “Los gays y las lesbianas son, sin excepción, cultos, súper enrollados, guapísimos/as y tus mejores amigos”

*Push* and *Precious* from an overt gender perspective. Lindo directly related the story of abuse suffered by the protagonist of the novel to the personal account of one of her readers. Bridging the racial and class difference between her reader and Precious, the author drew parallelisms between the disgrace suffered by the two women as well as the complicit silence of their immediate surrounding. Lindo identified this violence as a direct consequence of a patriarchal system that permeated societies around the globe: “I have seen many Precious on the subway: obese, moody, teenagers who don’t know how to treat themselves and their children, raped girls, illiterate young women. Every once in a while the miracle happens and someone gets their life back on track”.<sup>253</sup>

In 2012, Amado Diéguez’s translation of Morrison’s latest novel, *Volver*, was published in Spain by Lumen. Even if the critical reception of the novel was mainly positive, its impact on the TC was more reduced than that of previous texts by the author. For instance, national newspapers such as *ABC* did not cover the news of the publication of the novel. Likewise, despite the fact that *La Vanguardia* did publish a review of the volume, Robert Saladrigas’s approach drew from the assumption that the Nobel laureate belonged to a generation of forgotten writers. Indeed, he had already brought forward this view in his review of the 2012 Catalan translation of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, rendered as *Un home invisible* (trans. Dolors Udina). On that occasion, he echoed Harold Bloom’s reflection upon the development of African American literature—or rather, the lack of it—since the 1970s:

Una vez hubo en la literatura norteamericana espacio para los escritores negros, algunos extraordinarios. [...] Harold Bloom, devoto de Ellison, opina que “los escritores estadounidenses de raza negra no han estado en situación de fundar un arte literario original”. Eso incluye a la única escritora negra aún en activo, Toni Morrison, de Ohio, premio Nobel 1993. (Saldrigas 2012, 12)<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> “Yo he visto a muchas Precious en el metro: obesas, de mal humor, adolescentes que no saben cómo tratarse a sí mismas ni a sus hijos, niñas violadas, jóvenes analfabetas. De vez en cuando se produce el milagro y alguien reconduce su vida.”

<sup>254</sup> “Once there was room in American literature for black writers, some of them extraordinary. [...] Harold Bloom, an Ellison devotee, writes that ‘black American writers have not been in a position to found an original literary art’. That includes the only black writer still active, Ohio-born Toni Morrison, winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize.”

In this spirit, Saladrigas's review of *Volver* (2013) devoted the first two paragraphs to revisiting Morrison's career as he reiterated that she was the only survivor of a group of black writers who had visibilized the fight against racism and segregation during the 1960s and 1970s but were now long gone and forgotten. Within this group, he included Richard Wright, James Baldwin, LeRoi Jones, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes and Morrison herself, and concluded that they had left an indelible imprint on American literature but no offspring to take over the literary tradition. Anyhow, Saladrigas assessed the novel positively, specially praising the writer's ability to turn mundane components of reality into powerful allegories or symbols that imbricated the sory with meaning. He also brought to the fore Morrison's perspective as a black woman, which, he argued, permeated her works, and concluded that she had righteously earned the acclaim of a universal audience.

In January 19, 2013 a picture of the author filled the cover page of *El País's* cultural supplement *Babelia*, accompanied by the quote "Now It Is African Americans That Are in Charge of US Culture" [Ahora son los afroamericanos los que mandan en la cultura de Estados Unidos]. On that occasion, Winston Manrique Sabogal interviewed the author about *Volver*. In the introduction to the interview, the literary journalist described the novel as a condensation of Morrison's thematic and stylistic universe and praised the writer's intent to "say more with fewer words" (2013, 3). The two-page interview only touched upon artistic matters, rather than discussing more frequent topics—especially in the case of the Spanish press—such as the consequences of the Nobel Prize for the author's career and personal life or the presidential election and her relationship with President Obama. On the contrary, Manrique Sabogal asked the author to carry out an intersectional analysis of the novel which led them to discuss the role of women, capitalism and new migratory waves in contemporary sosciety. Likewise, Morrison's stance on the present role and space of African American culture was highlighted:

Cuando los africanos llegaron aquí como esclavos fueron separados y no permitieron que se casaran, que tuvieran hijos, los separaron por dialectos para que no pudieran comunicarse. Les robaron cualquier idea de hogar, de comunidad. Pero hoy los afroamericanos han infiltrado el sistema. Ahora son ellos quienes mandan en la cultura, el lenguaje, la música, el estilo y lo han

hecho como un virus saludable para la sociedad porque han podido impulsar sus creencias y su cultura...<sup>255</sup>

José Antonio Gurpegui's extensive review for *El Cultural* read *Volver* in the larger framework of the author's oeuvre. Indeed, Gurpegui highlighted the necessity of framing the novel within Morrison's historical review of slavery in the United States and drew attention towards the similarities with *Una bendición*, especially as for the use of short sentences and a more concise narrative style: "To some extent, she sacrificed the colorful writing of his early titles to encourage readers's participation, forcing them to make a much more active reading. These postulates are developed to their ultimate consequences in *Volver*".<sup>256</sup> Likewise, the critic foregrounded the innovation in Morrison's choice of a male leading character, Frank Money, given her traditional preference for female protagonists.

Likewise, the novel was received very positively in online blogs and literary websites. Among these, we can highlight the reviews published in *Un libro al día* (Peig 2017), *El placer de la lectura* (Rodríguez 2012), *Encuentros y desencuentros* (Macpherson 2014) and *Anika entre libros* (Macpherson n. d.). While no online or print sources discussed issues related to the Spanish translation of the novel, both Marc Peig (*Un libro al día*) and Pepe Rodríguez (*El placer de la lectura*) focused their analyses on the role of women in Morrison's work. With this respect, Rodríguez echoed Gurpegui's surprise to find a male leading character in *Volver*. Likewise, both authors commented on the length of the novel, and Peig observed that it did not live up to the literary quality of *La canción de Salomón* and *Beloved*. Inés Macpherson (*Encuentros y desencuentros* and *Anika entre libros*), for her part, foregrounded the novel's problematization of race and womanhood which, she argued, was applicable at a local level.

During the last decade of the twenty-first century, literary blogs such as the aforementioned have incorporated into their catalogues of reviews several entries on

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<sup>255</sup> "When the Africans arrived here as slaves they were separated and not allowed to marry, not allowed to have children, separated by dialects so they could not communicate. They were robbed of any idea of home, of community. But today African-Americans have infiltrated the system. Now they are the ones who rule the culture, the language, the music, the style and they have done it as a healthy virus for society because they have been able to push their beliefs and their culture...."

<sup>256</sup> "Sacrificaba en cierta forma la redacción colorida de sus primeros títulos en beneficio de la participación del lector, obligándole a realizar una lectura mucho más activa. Esos postulados son desarrollados hasta sus últimas consecuencias en *Volver*."



Morrison's earlier works. For instance, *Anika entre libros*, with 20.800 followers on twitter, has reviewed *Beloved* and *La noche de los niños* as well as *Volver*; *Entre montones de libros* (24.000 followers) has published entries on *Beloved* and *La noche de los niños*; *Un libro al día* (41.400 followers) has reviewed *La canción de Salomón*, *Sula*, *Beloved*, *La noche de los niños* and *El origen de los otros*, in addition to *Volver* and digital community *Lecturalia*, which gathers an audience of 901.800 followers, has published recommendations of all of her novels and some of her non-fiction. A further symptom of the continued interest in Morrison's works can be spotted by looking at the publication history of the author in Spain during the 2010s. Indeed, in 2014 DeBolsillo reprinted *Ojos azules*, *Sula*, *La canción de Salomón*, *La isla de los caballeros*, *Beloved* and *Una bendición*, and added *Volver* to their catalogue.

Also in 2014, the Spanish printed press extensively reported Maya Angelou's death. Considering the lack of attention devoted to the poet by local publishers and literary critics—in 2014, only two of her works had been translated into Spanish (see page 363) and, except for very specific occasions such as her participation on the first inauguration of President Bill Clinton, her artistic production had been overlooked by press media—the attention dedicated to the news of the author's death is worthy of consideration. Thus, *ABC* (Ansorena 2014), *El País* (Manrique 2014), *El Mundo del siglo XXI* (2014), *La Vanguardia* (2014), *Público* (EFE 2014g), *20 Minutos* (EFE 2014b), *elDiario.es* (EFE 2014e) as well as regional newspapers such as *Diario de Mallorca* (EFE 2014c), *Diario de Navarra* (EFE 2014a), *Diario Vasco* (EFE 2014d) and *La voz de Galicia* (EFE 2014f), among many others, massively reported the event.

Probably as a consequence of the assumed unfamiliarity with the author by Spanish readers, most news included a picture of Angelou and Obama during the ceremony of reception of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2010. In this spirit, the reports reviewed Angelou's life and professional career, specially focusing on events such as her participation in the television series *Raíces* and Clinton's invitation to recite a poem during his inauguration ceremony. With respect to this, Manrique argued:

alcanzó una popularidad inimaginable para cualquier escritora perteneciente a una minoría. Funcionó, es cierto, el toque mágico de Bill Clinton, que tuvo el acierto de elegirla para que recitara uno de sus poemas en la inauguración de su

primera presidencia, en 1993, colocándola inmediatamente en el *mainstream* cultural. (2014, 46)<sup>257</sup>

Similarly, Ansorena, *La Vanguardia* and EFE foregrounded her work as a writer, claiming that *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*—wrongly translated as *Sé por qué canta el pájaro enjaulado* by Ansorena and Manrique—had become one of the most popular autobiographies of North American literature. In accordance with Manrique, Ansonera also highlighted Angelou’s role as one of the first African American writers to reach mainstream audiences, and argued that “literary phenomena” such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker were heirs to her work.

In 2016, independent publisher Libros del Asteroide reprinted *Yo sé por qué canta el pájaro enjaulado* (the last Spanish edition of the novel had been published in 1993 by Lumen), using Carlos Manzano’s original translation. On that occasion, Angelou’s autobiography was reviewed in a number of specialized press media, namely cultural supplements and literary magazines. Among these, we may highlight Germán Guillón’s reflections on the text (2016, 22), as he called for a reexamination of history and criticized the consequences of a structural violence initiated during the slavery era and still present in contemporary society. In this context, Guillón drew attention to the particular suffering of black women as harshly represented in Angelou’s works. On the contrary, Ricardo Martínez Llorca (2016, n. p.) analyzed the text from a more universalist perspective, arguing that the key theme of the story was the forging of an individual identity, and that Angelou’s addressing of this topic transcended the boundaries of gender and race. The 2016 edition of *Yo sé por qué canta el pájaro enjaulado* was also recommended in *Babelia* (Caballé 2016), *Pérgola* (E. S. 2016) and *El Periódico* (Sánchez 2016).

Also in 2016, Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child* was published in Spain as *La noche de los niños*, translated by Carlos Mayor (pub. Lumen). Remarkable here is the fact that Mayor received the Esther Benítez award for his rendering of Morrison’s novel, a project he undertook after earning a scholarship at the Banff International Literary Translation Centre (BILTC) in Canada. Despite the book received prominent critical

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<sup>257</sup> “She achieved an unimaginable popularity for any minority writer. Something that helped, that is true, is Bill Clinton’s magic touch, who had the good sense to choose her to recite one of her poems at the inauguration of his first presidency in 1993, immediately placing her in the cultural mainstream.”

attention, most reviewers, both literary critics and amateur bloggers, coincided in determining that *La noche de los niños* did not live up to the literary quality of novels such as *Beloved* or *Song of Solomon*. In this regard, Michiko Kakutani, whose review originally published in *The New York Times* was translated for *El Cultural* (2016), argued that the novel did not even aspire to be a historical masterpiece like some of Morrison's previous works. Montuenga (from *Un libro al día*) sentenced that there was no need for Morrison to have published this novel (2018, n. p.).

Moving on from inescapable comparisons with her earlier works, most internet reviews celebrated the novel's setting in the contemporary period. Maria Sánchez (2017), among others, considered this prove of Morrison's capacity to reinvent her literature according to changing values and interests. Similarly, Kakutani argued that the author's work in *La noche de los niños*, which she compared to *Volver*, attested "to her ability to write intensely felt chamber pieces". Rosa Berros Canuria (2018, n. p.), for her part, signaled the "many aspects that separate *La noche de los niños* from what one is used to in [Morrison's] novels" [varios aspectos que separan *La noche de los niños* de lo que uno está acostumbrado en sus novelas], namely the shorter length, the time and setting and the characters' social status. Likewise, Marta Sanz (2016) argued that the conciseness and sleaze of the narration inoculated a suspicion against the culture of political correctness when addressing "the great contemporary taboo" [el gran tabú contemporáneo]: pederasty.

While the vast majority of reviews acknowledged the literary quality of Morrison's work, some critics condemned the lack of authenticity that permeated some passages of the novel. This is especially true of the reviews published in literary blogs such as *Devoradora de libros*, *Un libro al día* or *El blog de la fábula*, which coincided with Iñaki Ezkerra's observations in *El Correo* (2016) about the unrealistic atmosphere governing a number of scenes in the story. More precisely, Cristina Ros (2017) criticized the excessive use of clichés such as prototypical portrayals of racism against the main characters, the superficiality of Bride's social environment and the multiple melodramatic twists. All together, she argued, delivered a feeling of intended deepness that alienated the reader. On a similar note, Montuenga's unfavorable analysis of the novel was especially critical with the "far-fetched" storyline and characters: "A love story? Yes, but so unbelievable, so far-fetched. This applies to love, but also everything else. Protagonists vulnerable in their strength, or vice versa, like in all of her novels"

(2018, n. p.).<sup>258</sup> However, in this case Montuenga contradicted Sanz's argument about the necessity to defy political correctness and criticized the centrality of child abuse as the main theme of the novel:

Un argumento que le podría haber quedado más sólido si no se multiplicasen las coincidencias. Y, sobre todo, si estas coincidencias no se refiriesen a lo innombrable. Porque se puede hablar de (casi) todo, y la clave está en ese adverbio del que, obviamente, no tengo nada que decir. Es más, si hubiese barruntado que la cuestión se abordaba aquí—y más con tanta insistencia—jamás hubiese abierto el libro. (2018, n. p.)<sup>259</sup>

In 2018, Morrison's *The Origin of Others* was also translated by Carlos Mayor as *El origen de los otros* (pub. Lumen). However, this collection of essays—which happened to be the first non-fiction work by the author published in the TC—had a very limited reception, especially among mainstream press media. Indeed, the reception in national dailies *El País*, *ABC*, *La Razón* or *El Mundo*, which usually published extensive reviews of the author's work, was limited to brief mentions of the volume in the literary news section. Similarly, no virtual notices of the volume featured local printed press media.

Anyhow, Morrison's non-fiction had a greater—though still restricted—impact in sources of essayistic reception. *El Cultural* (2018) argued that *El origen de los otros* was key to understand some of the conflicts that increasingly dominated international politics, namely race, fear, borders, mass movements and the necessity of belonging. However, while the cultural supplement usually published extensive analyses of the author's works, in this case the publication consisted on an unsigned shorter piece (a quote from the book and two brief discussion paragraphs). Likewise, when discussing Ta-Neishi Coates's foreword to the volume, *El Cultural* mistakenly referred to the bestselling author of *Between the World and Me* as “the National Book Award-winning woman, Ta-Nehisi Coates” (2018, n. p.). Parallely, reviews were published in literary

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<sup>258</sup> “Una historia de amor? Sí, pero tan increíble, tan traído por los pelos todo. El amor, pero también lo demás. Protagonistas vulnerables en su fortaleza, o viceversa, como todos los suyos. Un argumento que le podría haber quedado más sólido si no se multiplicasen las coincidencias.”

<sup>259</sup> “The argument could have been more solid if the coincidences were not multiplied. And, above all, if these coincidences did not refer to the unspeakable. Because one can talk about (almost) everything, and the key is in that adverb about which, obviously, I have nothing to say. Moreover, if I had guessed the question that was being addressed here—and even more so with such insistence—I would never have opened the book.”

blogs *Un libro al día* and *Vorágine interna*, as well as in the online platform *Llegir.cat*, which considered both the Spanish and the Catalan rendering of the novel. Following the line of *El Cultural*'s remarks about the current relevance of Morrison's essay, Álvaro Muñoz (2018) foregrounded the text's ability to make readers aware of the dreadful role of white men through history and, consequently, feel deeply embarrassed about it. Marc Peig (2018), for his part, praised the author's rereading of canonical literary works to underline the fundamental role of literature in underscoring representations of the African continent and black population in the Western imagination.

On August 8, 2019 Morrison passed away from complications of pneumonia. The news of her death had a tremendous impact that resonated internationally. In Spain, most national and local press media as well as specialized magazines and other literary platforms published texts to honor the author's legacy. Most of these publications were devoted to reviewing her career, occasionally providing lists of her most recommendable works. Among these, we may highlight the articles published in dailies *El País* (Manrique Sabogal 2019), *El Periódico* (2019), *La Vanguardia* (Peirón 2019 and *La Vanguardia* 2019), *ABC* (Ansorena 2019), *Público* (EFE 2019b), *El Confidencial* (2019), *La Verdad* (Soto 2019a), *El Correo* (Soto 2019b), *Libertad digital* (2019), *Eldiario.es* (Zas Marcos 2019) and *Deia* (Redondo 2019), mainstream magazines *WMagazín* (Manrique Sabogal 2019b) and *Vanity Fair* (Lores 2019) as well as cultural and literary print media and online platforms such as *El Cultural* (2019), *Quimera* (Carabí 2020), *EFeminista* (Sigüenza 2020), *Gato pardo* (Camacho 2019), *Literafricas* (SFQU 2019), *Cultura inquieta* (Yuste 2019) and *Ethic* (Bécares 2019). Especially significant in this case is the fact that a number of sources such as *Libertad digital*, *Público* or *Eldiario.es*, which had never devoted attention to the author, published lengthy pieces reporting her death and revising her oeuvre.

While all sources foregrounded Morrison's fundamental role within the landscape of black literature, only a few provided feminist or intersectional approaches to her legacy. Among these, Francesc Peirón (2019, 26) referred to the problematization of labels such as "black" and "woman", traditionally used to describe Morrison's work. Maite Redondo (2019, 18) recalled the author's "anti racist and feminist Nobel lecture" as well as her work to visibilize the experience of the black woman in the United States. On a similar stance, Estefanía Camacho (2019, n. p.) emphasized the relevance of her being

the first woman of African descent in winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, which, according to the journalist, had been awarded to her as a gesture to reclaim the space of black women writers in the international sphere. Following this line of thought, Carmen Sigüenza (2020, n. p.) argued that Morrison is nowadays recognized by the feminist movement as one of the contemporary authors who has best analyzed the situation of women in today's society. Winston Manrique Sabogal (2019b, n. p.) also discussed the intersecting forms of oppression that permeated the identities of Morrison's characters: "Her low, clear voice hovers over: slavery, racism, memory, the past and the invisible, women and the feminine, friendship and love; all under an absent presence: death".<sup>260</sup>

Other discussions included remarks about Morrison's ability to "bring the reality of black America out of the ghetto to a wide and diverse audience" (Soto 2019b, 40),<sup>261</sup> the deconstruction of stereotypes traditionally assigned to African Americans in literature (Peirón 2019, 26), as well as the author's support to feminist writers such as Toni Cade Bambara or Gayl Jones and new emerging voices such as Tayie Selasie, Richard Ali, Laila Lalami and Mona Eltahawy, among others (SFQU 2019). Parallely to reports about the author's death, Mónica Zas Marcos published an article about Morrison's professional relationship with Angela Davis, honoring the Nobel laureate for prompting Davis to write "one of the great biographies of our time" [una de las grandes biografías de nuestro tiempo] (2019, n. p.) in what she described as one of the most important collaborations in recent literature. In her article, Zas Marcos argued that while most tributes outlined her reception of the Nobel Prize, her work as editor for Random House was not to be overlooked.

With the event of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of literary magazine *Quimera*, Dolors Udina published her translation of an interview made to the author by Àngels Carabí in 1988. The interview was originally published in *Belles Lletres* (1988), and it covered Morrison's production until *Tar Baby*. Carabí, who had recently published her dissertation when the interview was originally circulated, moderated a thorough discussion of the writer's earlier works. The scholar was specially interested in discussing the role of silence, music and nature in Morrison's literary universe.

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<sup>260</sup> "Su voz baja y nítida sobrevuela: la esclavitud, el racismo, la memoria, el pasado y lo oculto, la mujer y lo femenino, la amistad y el amor; todo bajo una presencia ausente: la muerte"

<sup>261</sup> "sacar la realidad de los negros en Estados Unidos desde el gueto hacia una audiencia amplia y variada"

Morrison, for her part, was especially poignant to foreground the relevance of language and the literary power of BE. Carabí also published a tribute to the author in Catalan newspaper *Ara* (2019), where she recounted the author's visit to Barcelona in 1991. Carabí's final remarks gathered the essence of the manifold tribute articles published during the summer of 2019:

Toni Morrison s'ha convertit en un referent cultural de pes internacional. [Morrison] ha inspirat tota una generació d'escriptores de diverses cultures a parlar amb un llenguatge propi, i el multiculturalisme nord-americà s'ha escrit també en femení. Ens ha ensenyat a pensar sobre què és la raça, com es construeix el racisme i, sobretot, quins efectes perniciosos té no solament en la víctima sinó en qui l'exerceix. Unes reflexions que ens ajuden a entendre i a respectar "l'altre" en un moment de complexes relacions interculturals en el món en què vivim. (2019, n. p.)<sup>262</sup>

However, despite great volume of reactions generated after Morrison's death, some articles, mostly published in newspapers, included faulty citations of her works when referring to both the Spanish and the English titles. By way of example, *La Vanguardia* (2019, n. p.) cited *Song of Solomon* as "*Song of Salomon*", Guadalupe Bécares (2019, n. p.) discussed "*The Bluest Eyes*", both *Público* (EFE 2019) and RTVE (2019, n. p.) referred to *A Mercy* as "*Mercy*" and *El Obrero* (2019, n. p.) translated *The Bluest Eye* as "*El ojo más azul*", which does not correspond to the official Spanish translation of the novel. On a similar stance, a number of periodicals, among others, *El Diario montañés* (2019, 28), *El Correo español* (2019, 34) and *La Vanguardia* (2020, 31) misspelled the author's name as "Tony Morrison".

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<sup>262</sup> "Toni Morrison has become an international cultural referent. [Morrison] has inspired a whole generation of women writers from various cultures to speak in their own language, and American multiculturalism has also been written in feminine. She has taught us to think about what race is, how racism is constructed and, above all, what pernicious effects it has not only on the victim but also on those who exercise it. These reflections help us to understand and respect 'the other' at a time of complex intercultural relations in the world we inhabit."

### 3.10. Cultural Micropolitics and the Flourishing of Independent Agents in the Spanish Book Market

With the turn of the century, the Spanish publishing sector witnessed a wave of new independent publishers that progressively contributed to the circulation of unknown or neglected voices in the national panorama. Indeed, while the first decade of the twenty-first century saw the decline of trends promoting minority literatures in the mainstream hegemonic book market, emergent small and independent agents took on the endeavor of securing these literatures a place and a market niche in the country. According to Adriana Astutti and Sandra Contreras,

Si la segmentación del mercado y la homogeneización del gusto son las herramientas de los grandes grupos para obtener el máximo de rendimiento económico, la función de las editoriales independientes aparece, en principio, como la de garantizar la diversidad: no sólo la de asegurar un espacio para la expresión de las producciones “locales” -que escapan al perfil de los productos “internacionales”- sino también la de abrir -o preservar- un espacio para la pluralidad de las manifestaciones culturales -que escapan a la estandarización que requiere un imperativo exclusiva o prioritamente comercial. (2001, 768)<sup>263</sup>

It is in this context that we should examine and understand the work of a number of independent agents that started to circulate translated texts by African American women writers during the early years of the century. Most of these endeavors, however, went unnoticed by the general press, so the reception of these translations in the TC was reduced to very specific contexts. However, the publishers' interest in and willingness to invest in these authors was nothing but a symptom of their transcendence in the international sphere and the literary quality of their works. In this context, the years 2000 and 2001 saw the publication of bell hook's *Todo sobre el amor* (pub. Vergara),

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<sup>263</sup> “If market segmentation and homogenization of taste are the tools used by large groups to obtain the maximum economic return, the function of independent publishers seems, in principle, to guarantee diversity: not only to ensure a space for the expression of ‘local’ production—those which escape the profile of ‘international’ products—but also to open—or preserve—a space for the plurality of cultural manifestations—which escape the standardization required by an exclusively or primarily commercial imperative.”



and Sister Souljah's *El invierno más frío* (pub. Umbriel, trans. Juanjo Estrella), respectively. However, no reviews or mentions of any of the two volumes could be found in the printed press or literary magazines.

In the case of Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *A Lesson in Dead Language*, both plays were translated by Olga Barrios and Cecilio Rodrigo Gasulla and published in a joint edition by Valencian publisher Palmart in 2003. Even if at a global level the impact of the translation was minor, the volume was well received in the Spanish academic sphere, as *La casa de espejos de una negra* and *Lección en una lengua muerta* became the first tokens of black women's theater published in the TC in translation. Barrios, who wrote the foreword to the volume, drew attention to the unprecedented nature of her work, and examined Kennedy's dramatic production in the light of the Black Theater Movement and into the decade of 1990.

During the years following the publication of Kennedy's work, Barrios produced several academic essays on the performing arts in Africa and the African diaspora. More precisely, she focused on the study of black women's theater from different perspectives, such as "El impacto del *Black Arts Movement* en los estudios étnicos, feministas y postcoloniales: Referencia sucinta a Latinoamérica" (2003) and "Mujer, sexualidad y familia en las artes escénicas contemporáneas de África y de la diáspora africana" (2004). These studies added to the ones published during the 1990s by the same author (see section 2.8) and, read together, provided Spanish academia with solid scholarship on African American theater movements. Barrios's work culminated in the publication of the volumes *The Black Theatre Movement in the United States and in South Africa* (2008) and *Panorámica y análisis sobre la mujer en el espacio escénico contemporáneo: creaciones sanadoras, feminismo y diversidad* (2010). The Spanish scholar's expertise in the field of black women's theater even led her to write a chapter on this topic for the *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature* (2010), an international reference work in the discipline.

In 2002 independent feminist publisher Horas y Horas launched the collection *La cosecha de nuestras madres*. Horas y Horas had started its publishing activity in 1991; it was founded by feminist bookstore Librería Mujeres (Madrid) with the objective of circulating the works of women from different cultures and backgrounds. The publisher's clear political agenda involved gathering women's wisdom and offering a

picture of the manifold feminisms that circulated around the globe. Consequently, *La cosecha de nuestras madres* gathered texts about the roots and meaning of womanhood, including the works of Adrienne Rich, Virginia Woolf, Clara Campoamor and Luisa Muraro, among others.

Significantly, the second book published in the collection, following Woolf's *Un cuarto propio*, was Audre Lorde's *Sister, Outsider* (1984), translated as *La hermana, la extranjera* by María Corniero Fernández (2003). According to the translator, the choice of the Spanish title established an intertextual relationship with Catalan author Maria Mercè Marçal's poetry book *La germana, l'estrangera* (1985) (Corniero Fernández 2003, 5). Likewise, in the introduction to the volume, Corniero Fernández lamented the fact that Lorde's work was practically unknown in Spain in spite of enjoying excellent recognition in the SC, having been awarded numerous literary prizes and having been published by commercial houses such as Norton (2003, 8). In this context, the decision to translate *Sister, Outsider* was presented as a fundamental first step in the promotion of Lorde's work in the TC:

¿Por qué leer a Audre Lorde? Las opiniones de Lorde sobre la diferencia y la opresión siguen siendo válidas en una época como la nuestra, en la que la inmigración nos obliga a revisar nuestras relaciones con esas "otras" que antes considerábamos lejanas y ajenas. La dimensión colectiva de esta obra, esa voz que habla desde el "yo" al "nosotras" resulta primordial porque, si el fortalecimiento individual es necesario, sólo la actuación colectiva puede generar cambios sociales, políticos y económicos duraderos. (Corniero Fernández 2003, 12)<sup>264</sup>

Following this spirit, Lorde's *Zami: una biomitografía* was published in the same collection in 2009, translated by María Durante. However, in this case the text was not accompanied by any kind of introduction, foreword or translator's note about the motives or challenges of translating another one of Lorde's most iconic works.

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<sup>264</sup> "Why read Audre Lorde? Lorde's views on difference and oppression are still valid in our era, in which immigration forces us to review our relationships with those "others" we once considered distant and alien. The collective dimension of this work, that voice which speaks from the "I" to the "we" is paramount because, if individual empowerment is necessary, only collective action can generate lasting social, political and economic change."

Anyhow, the impact on the Spanish press and readership was very limited, and no reviews or mentions of any of the two volumes could be found in the printed press. However, with the rise of new technologies and the Internet during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the first literary reviews and articles published in websites and weblogs started to appear. Thus, in 2004, a review of Lorde's *La hermana, la extranjera* was published in the electronic literary blog *Anika Entre Libros*, where literary critic Eduardo Nabal condemned the lack of interest of the Spanish book market in this author:

Esperemos que esta traducción de *La hermana, la extranjera* sirva para que comiencen a traducirse otros textos de esta autora injustamente ignorada por el mercado editorial en lengua castellana. Con las herramientas de la diferencia y el lenguaje de la acción Lorde se adelantó a su tiempo y emprendió a su modo, la tarea de desmontar la casa del amo, indagando en sus pliegues, denunciando su injusticia y desenmascarando su silenciosa violencia. (Nabal 2004, n. p.)<sup>265</sup>

Likewise, further manifestations of interest in Lorde's work could be found in amateur weblogs such as *Poemas para mi estado de ánimo*, an amateur poetry blog where some poems were translated into Spanish (Gonzalo423tenerife 2010) and *Mi feminismo y otras alteridades*, an online feminist site that included an entry discussing Lorde's work in the light of black feminism (Gaelia 2006).

The last years of the twentieth century also saw the emergence of *Traficantes de Sueños* (hereafter *Traficantes*), a political production and communication project that sought to provide content and encourage useful debates for transformative collective action (*Traficantes de Sueños* 2021, n. p.). After opening an associative bookstore in Madrid, in 2000 *Traficantes* launched their own homonymous publishing house as well as the project "Nociones Comunes", conceived as a space for self-training and discussion on social and political issues. In this context, the publisher launched *Mapas*, a collection of non-fiction works addressing contemporary concerns such as urban transformation, cross-border mobility, migratory flows, political philosophy and feminism (*Traficantes*

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<sup>265</sup> "Let us hope that this translation of *Sister, Outsider* will serve to prompt the translation of other texts by this author which have been hitherto unjustly ignored by the Spanish publishing market. With the tools of difference and the language of action, Lorde was ahead of her time and undertook, in her own way, the task of dismantling the master's house, delving into its folds, denouncing its injustice and unmasking its silent violence."

de Sueños 2020, 4). Thus, the collection included works by authors from manifold fields, such as sociologist Saskia Sassen, philosophers and activists Franco Berardi and Montserrat Galcerán Huguet, semiologist Paolo Virno, academic, attorney, and political activist Lawrence Lessing and urban theorist Mike Davis, among many others.

In 2004 Traficantes added *Otras inapropiables: Feminismos desde las fronteras* to the collection. The volume compiled seven works by authors who were considered “peripheral feminists”:<sup>266</sup> bell hooks, Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson, Aurora Levins Morales, Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, Avtar Brah and M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. These writers, as reported by the authors of the prologue, were dislocated from occidental and modern cartographies of identity, politics and language, as they overgrew clear and distinct categorization in favor of difference: “Other inappropriates/inapropiables urge us to make feminisms from and across borders. Feminisms that, as the texts in this collection suggest, do not renounce complexity, but rather, assuming it, recognize themselves as partial and multiple, contradictory and critical” (Eskalera Karakola 2004, 9-10).<sup>267</sup>

The incorporation to the volume of bell hooks’s essay “Mujeres negras. Dar forma a la teoría feminista”, originally published in 1984 and translated by María Serrano Gimenez, Rocio Macho Ronco, Hugo Romero Fernández Sancho and Álvaro Salcedo Rufodrew, drew attention to the particular experience of black feminists in the United States. The authors of the prologue inscribed hooks in a rich tradition of black feminist writers represented by Angela Davis, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins and Barbara Smith, among others, and considered hers a fundamental perspective upon the intersections of race and class with gender oppression (Eskalera Karakola 2004, 10).

However, the reception of the volume was limited to the academic sphere, as no mentions could be found in any national or local press media. The only existing review of the book was published in *Athenea digital. Revista de pensamiento e investigación social*, written by Bárbara Biglia (2004). Biglia’s initial criticism of the lack of attention paid to peripheral feminisms in Europe and more precisely, in the Spanish context

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<sup>266</sup> The term “peripheral feminists” is used here as defined and understood by Pilar Rodríguez Martínez (2011) and Petra Broomans and Margriet van der Waal (2021).

<sup>267</sup> “Otras inapropiadas/inapropiables que nos urgen a hacer feminismos desde y atravesados por las fronteras. Feminismos que tal como nos proponen los textos de esta colección no renuncian a la complejidad, sino que asumiéndola se reconocen parciales y múltiples, contradictorios y críticos.”

paralleled the discussion of critics such as Sentís (1998), Nabal (2004) or Moro Coco (2005). The scholar also praised the publisher's attempt at disseminating "knowledge produced in non-institutional contexts" through the use of a creative commons license, as she pointed towards the need of stepping beyond the specificities of each author's personal stance to stimulate a critical analysis of the reader's experiences (Biglia 2004, n. p.).

As a library, *Traficantes* specialized in the distribution of compromised literature on feminism, history, ecology, social movements and philosophy. In this context, the library's catalogue included—and continues to include—works by African American women writers, both translated into Spanish by other publishing houses and in English. Other specialized bookstores that contributed to the circulation of black women writers in Spain were feminist stores *Librería Mujeres* (1978, Madrid) and *Pròleg* (1991, Barcelona); *Cómplices* (1996, Barcelona), specialized in LGTBQ culture and *La Central* (1995, Barcelona), a bookstore project that aimed at having a real impact on cultural mediation, among others. Even if during the second decade of the twenty-first century other specialized stores were founded, the existence of these spaces at the beginning of the millenium was already a symptom of the changing interests and the new concerns of—at least—some sectors of the Spanish reading public.

Likewise, in 2002 the scholarly collection "Biblioteca Javier Coy d'Estudis Nord-Americans" (hereafter BJC) was founded by writer, translator and scholar Carme Manuel Cuenca. The volumes in the collection, published by the University of Valencia, were framed in two major series. On the one hand, a group of critical titles on specific aspects of American culture and literature and, on the other, a series that recovered for the Spanish-speaking reader fundamental texts of American literature that had never been translated into this language (Manuel Cuenca 2021, n. p.). During the first decade of the century, BJC published a total amount of seventy-two volumes on diverse aspects of American literature and culture.

From the onset of the project, BJC showed a special interest in the role of African American literature within the larger framework of North American Studies. As a consequence, a succession of primary and secondary works on African American and, more precisely, African American women's literature were published in the collection. These titles included two translations of texts of special interest to the American literary

tradition, namely *Iola Leroy, o las sombras disipadas* (2008, trans. Ángeles Carreres) and *Vida y viajes de la señora Nancy Prince* (2008, trans. Sergio Saiz), several full-length volumes, studies collected in larger works as well as bibliographical materials on African American literature published in *Guía bibliográfica para el estudio de la literatura de los Estados Unidos* (Manuel Cuenca 2002).

As for the two translations, the volumes were carefully edited by professor Manuel Cuenca, who also authored the notes and the critical studies that accompanied each text and situated the authors within their respective literary tradition. Despite the unquestionable value of these efforts, the reception of these works by the general reading public was virtually non-existent. Thus, no reviews or mentions of any of the two volumes could be found in any printed or online press media. However, at this point we should consider the fact that BJC was conceived of as a scholarly collection, actually aiming to expand knowledge about the field of North American Studies within the Spanish academia.

The volumes specifically devoted to African American women's literature included *The Image of Women in Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* by African American scholar Maurice A. Lee—one of the few contributions to the collection by a non-Spanish author—and *Planteamientos estéticos y políticos en la obra de Zora Neale Hurston* by Ana María Fraile Marcos. The former examined the images of women during the Harlem Renaissance in a cross selection of literary forms. To do so, Lee also reviewed literature written by men about women, which was described by the author as being “significant in profiling the characteristics, personalities, and psychologies of women during this period” (Lee 2003, 3). Fraile Marcos followed the study undertaken in her doctoral project (1994) and analyzed a selection of ten short stories in the light of three vertebral axes of Hurston's work: orality, folklore and feminism. In her volume, the scholar criticized traditional canon-formation criteria, using the excellence of Hurston's work as evidence of the extraliterary motives governing the literary canon. In this light, she referred to the “homophobic, sexist and xenophobic attitudes that have characterized patriarchal Western societies” (2003, 12)<sup>268</sup>, and claimed that Hurston's restitution as a canonical writer contributed not only to the opening of the North American literary

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<sup>268</sup> “las actitudes homófobas, sexistas y xenófobas que han caracterizado las sociedades patriarcales de Occidente.”

canon but also to the canon of African American literature, which had historically ignored the contribution of women to this literary tradition.

Apart from these major endeavors, several volumes in BJC included specific studies about African American women's literature. To cite some of them, Mar Gallego analyzed "Alternative Historiography and Feminist Ethics of Care in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" in *Ethics and Ethnicity in the Literature of the United States* (2006), Constante González Groba studied Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Walker's "Everyday Use" for his contribution *On their own premises: Southern Women Writers and the Homeplace* (2008) and, most notably, the first part of *The Dialectics of Diaspora: Memory, Location and Gender* (2009), devoted to the articulation of the African diaspora, was constituted by four studies of black women's works, namely "Diasporic Memory in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" by Justine Tally, "Diasporic Consciousness in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*" by Mar Gallego, "The Search for Wholeness in the Construction of Diasporic Identities in Contemporary African American Women's Literature" by Silvia Castro Borrego and "Diasporic Discourses and Cultures: Buchi Emecheta" by Asunción Aragón Varo.

Likewise, the collective volume *Nor Shall Diamond Die: American Studies in Honor of Javier Coy* (2003), which compiled more than fifty studies by some of the most reputed scholars in the field of American studies in Spain, incorporated several chapters on African American women's works. These included Pilar Sánchez Calle's "No City of God: Urban Images in the Fiction of Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset", María Frías's "African-American Women Artists in Paris: Sex and Politics in Josephine Baker's *La Revue Nègre* (1925), and Maya Angelou's *Porgy and Bess* (1954)" and Ana María Fraile Marcos's "Afro-Caribbean Women Writers and US Literary Studies: Maryse Condé, Edwidge Danticat, and Elizabeth Nunez". Other studies such as Mar Gallego's "Revisiting the Harlem Renaissance: Double Consciousness, Talented Tenth and the New Negro" and Ana María Manzanás Calvo's "Magic Realism in Contemporary African American Fiction" also considered, though more peripherally, the works of writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison.

Parallel to her work as editor of BJC, between 2003 and 2008 Manuel Cuenca also translated three nineteenth-century volumes by African American women and a co-edited compilation of short stories by nineteenth- and twentieth-century women

writers for Valencian publisher Ellago. This endeavor is especially significant for the history of translation of African American literature in Spain because of Manuel Cuenca's deliberate effort to recover for Spanish readers a significant body of nineteenth-century literature written by black women. The selected texts were the two short stories "Las dos ofertas" by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and "La hermana Josefa" by Alice Dunbar-Nelson published in *Voces proféticas: relatos de escritoras estadounidenses de entre siglos (XIX-XX)* (2003), Harriet Wilson's *Nuestra negra o esbozos de la vida de una negra libre* (2005), Harriet A. Jacobs's *Peripecias en la vida de una joven esclava: escritas por ella misma* (2005) and Elizabeth Keckley's *Treinta años de esclavitud y cuatro en la Casa Blanca (Entre bastidores)* (2008). Prior to these publications, other translations of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* had been carried out by María José Bacallado Arias in 1992, published by Grijalbo, and Manuela Matas Llorente, who translated fragments of the text for a scholarly publication by the University of León in 1997. The University of León had also published *La vida y experiencia religiosa de Jarena Lee* in 1996, thus completing the corpus of translated nineteenth-century African American women's literature that is available in Spain up to present date.

Predictably, Manuel Cuenca's translations had little impact on press media. While no reviews of *Peripecias* were published in the mainstream press—assumedly because of the existing yet scarce critical material on Matas Llorente's 1992 rendering of the same text—a review was published in the scholarly journal *African American Review* (Fra Molinero and Houchings 2005). Baltasar Fra Molinero's and Sue Houchings's revealing analysis of the book contested the general assumption that attention to nineteenth-century black women's literature in Spain might appear to be an oddity by referring to the country's colonial tradition in Central and South America: "In Spain, today, slavery is not part of the historical imaginary. So, this book is timely indeed" (2005, 835). Likewise, the reviewers also alluded to the blossoming of the field of African American Studies in Spain during the late twentieth century, which they associated with the increased migration to the country from Africa and Latin America. Fra Molinero and Houchings devoted special attention to Manuel Cuenca's critical study of Harper's work as well as her discussion of the serious differences between the author and her contemporary Harriet Beecher Stowe.



Most significantly for our research, the review included a critical commentary on Manuel Cuenca's translation, whose endeavor was described as "a subtle exercise in style" (836). The translator's linguistic choices regarding the translation of Black English in the novel were the focus of the reviewers' analysis:

Not having a corresponding register in Castilian Spanish,<sup>269</sup> Manuel i Cuenca creates a narrative language that is reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish *folletín* novel, serialized melodrama, requiring Black slave characters in *Incidents* to speak only a colloquial Spanish. This strategy entails an unavoidable loss, especially in the important Chapter 13 [...], where the original Black hymns Jacobs records in slave vernacular receive a plain translation into a flat standard Spanish (836, italics in the original).

Despite their lament about the "unavoidable loss" entailed by Manuel Cuenca's translation strategy, the writer's praised the translator's effort to avoid the pitfalls of the characterization of black talk in previous works such as the dubbed version of *Gone with the Wind*, where black characters were assigned a Cuban Spanish accent. The review closed with a critique to the cover image of the volume, which featured six black female kids "peering through the doorway of a shack in the quarters" (836). This image, according to Fra Molinero and Houchings, seemed calculated to foreground the otherness in Jacobs's portrayal of the slavewoman's experience. With this last piece of criticism, the reviewers picked up on their earlier argument about the politics of forgetting the country's own historical past.

As for *Voces proféticas*, despite the general lack of attention devoted to the volume—no reviews were published on any press media or academic journal—Manuel Cuenca and Alberola Crespo's endeavor significantly added to the discussion about US literature from a much-needed gender perspective. The editors and translators of the volume had compiled the narrative works of key women writers from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often overlooked by general accounts of American literature from that period. Their inclusion of writers from different ethnic backgrounds (two African American, one native American, one Asian American and five white authors) added an

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<sup>269</sup> Note here the misuse of the term "register" when referring to Black English vernacular, which at the time of publication of the review had been extensively conceptualized as an English dialect (see Labov 1972, Dillard 1972, Smitherman 1973 and 1977, Baugh 1983 and Taylor 1989, among others).

intersectional perspective to their work. According to the authors, their approach aimed at foregrounding the existence of a literary tradition of women's writing that transgressed race or class differences in the country (Alberola Crespo and Manuel Cuenca 2003, 14).

Apropos the other two translations, *Nuestra negra* and *Treinta años de esclavitud*, a short notice of the former featured in Valencian journal *Levante* (2006, 36), which presented the text as "the first novel written and published by a black woman" [la primera novela escrita y publicada por una mujer negra]. Kekcley's novel was briefly advertised in *La Provincia Diario de Las Palmas* (2008, 35), and it was more extensively reviewed in *Anika entre libros* (Alonso Márquez 2008). Pilar Alonso Márquez, the reviewer, drew from the controversy generated by the publication of the ST in 1868, and harshly criticized the author's self-complacency and lack of empathy in her portrayal of Mary Lincoln. However, the review did acknowledge the relevance of the text as a historical document. Alonso Márquez coincided with the reviewers of *Peripecias* in praising the critical study and footnotes incorporated to the edition by the translator, which, according to the reviewer, were tremendously interesting and vital to grasp the real meaning and value of such a document.

Parallel to her translations for Ellago, in 2005 Manuel Cuenca published the bilingual anthology *L'ànima de les negres. Poesia de dones afroamericanes dels segles XVIII i XIX* for Valencian publisher Brosquil. The volume became not only the first piece of African American women's literature translated into Valencian, but also the first collection of African American women's poetry published in the TC. The endeavor was framed within the revision and reinterpretation of the history of literature from the United States that had started three decades ago. As argued by Manuel Cuenca (2005, 7), this endeavor had prompted the recovery and incorporation of an extraordinary number of authors from different ethnic and social backgrounds to the literary canon as well as the adoption of new critical perspectives that had forced a rereading of canonical literature. In this context, the publication of a volume of translated African American women's poetry, more precisely, poetry by women from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, filled a gap in the the history of translation of American literature in Spain.

Manuel's anthology included works by Lucy Terry, Phillis Wheatley, Sarah Louise Forten, Ann Plato, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Charlotte L. Forten Grimké, Henrietta Cordelia Ray, Mrs. N. F. Mossell and Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, as well as introductory essays on the three different historical periods delimited in the book, namely "Enlightenment, Black Slaves and Poetry", "The Ante-bellum Period" and "The Post-War Period". In the preface to the first edition, Manuel Cuenca criticized the lack of interest in some of these figures shown by both white and African American critics who did not tolerate cases of dissidence in the preconfigured history of the literary production of black writers in the United States. She also pointed towards the relevance of the selected writers as predecessors of better-known contemporary poets such as Margaret Walker, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker or Maya Angelou, among others (10). In accordance with the editor's thoughts, Nieves Alberola Crespo described the anthology as "essential to understand a large part of North American history and to rediscover authors who were doubly forgotten because they were both black and women" (2007, 235).<sup>270</sup>

According to reviewers Fra Molinero and Houchins, the translation into Catalan was not particularly felicitous (2005, 837). Under this premise, they highlighted some questionable choices in Manuel Cuenca's rendering of geographical references and demonyms (such as translating *Ethiopia* as *Àfrica* in Wheatley's "To the University of Cambridge in New England" and Harper's "Ethiopia"). Anyhow, according to the scholars, "the true value of this anthology lies in its introductory essays, which focus on the double bind of gender and race these poets navigated" (837). Indeed, the review, which was published conjointly with the writer's account of *Peripecias*, concluded that notwithstanding the challenges faced by the translator, both books were excellent pedagogical tools for Spanish and Catalan-speaking students of African American literature.

Manuel Cuenca's determination to circulate the works of African American women writers in Spain also led her to translate Pauline Hopkin's *Contending Forces* for Cátedra in 2012. In this case, the translator's good relationship with one of Cátedra's editors was decisive in the publication of this translation (Manuel Cuenca 2019,

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<sup>270</sup> "este libro es imprescindible para poder entender gran parte de la historia norteamericana y reencontrarnos con mujeres doblemente olvidadas al ser negras y mujeres."

personal communication). However, no reviews or any relevant mentions of the volume were published on any press media or academic journals. Actually, the figure and works of Pauline Hopkins—despite being extensively studied in the SC—have been severely overlooked in the TC. Indeed, except for Manuel Cuenca’s 2017 paper “Pauline E. Hopkins’s intertextual aesthetics in *Contending Forces*” no major scholarly production has been published up to date about the author, nor have any of her other works been translated into any peninsular language.

Likewise, through the years 2013 to 2014 Manuel Cuenca published a seminal study on African American women writers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and two anthologies of African American short stories (published in the source language). In his review of *Fuego en los huesos: Afroamericanas y escritura en los siglos XVIII y XIX*, Vicent Cucarella-Ramón (2015b, 236) argued that the volume gathered the testimony of the literary mothers of today’s generation framed in a social, political and literary panorama that had largely ignored their artistic contribution and intellectual commitment. In this context, Manuel Cuenca examined the early poetry of Lucy Terry and Phillis Wheatley and their successors Sarah Louise Forten and Charlotte L. Forten Grimké, the essays of Ann Plato, as well as the main works of Nancy Prince, Harriet E. Willson and Harriet A. Jacobs, namely *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1850), *Our Nig* (1859) and *Iola Leroy: or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), respectively. As a matter of fact, these three narratives had been translated into Spanish by the Valencian scholar during the early years of the twenty-first century. The last chapter of the book was devoted to the figure of Pauline E. Hopkins, whose main novel *Contending Forces* is also available in Spanish thanks to Manuel Cuenca’s work.

The two anthologies, namely *Writing from the Black Soul: Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century African American Short Stories* and *Interrogating Voices: Nineteenth And Early Twentieth-Century American Women’s Short Stories*, were published in 2014 by JPM Ediciones, an independent publishing house focused on the dissemination of academic works in the humanities with special interest in the area of English philology, as well as in the recovery of classic texts of English and American literature (JPM Ediciones updated 2021). Even if these works were published in English in the TC, they added to *Voces proféticas: relatos de escritoras estadounidenses de entre siglos (XIX XX)* (2003), another anthology of short stories that had been published in 2003 and co-edited by the author and Nieves Alberola Crespo (see page 401). While

none of the two anthologies was specialized in African American women's production, both included a representative selection of works by black women writers. In the case of *Writing from the Black Soul*, the volume included Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *The Two Offers* (1859), Alice Dunbar-Nelson's *The Stones of the Village* (ca. 1900), Pauline Hopkins's *Talma Gordon* (1900) and Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman's *The Preacher at Hill Station* (1903). Likewise, *Interrogating Voices* illustrated the complex dynamics between race and gender oppression through the testimony of American women writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Alice Dunbar-Nelson's "Sister Josepha" (1899), together with the works of other contemporaries such as Kate Chopin, Grace King and Louisa May Alcott, was used to examine the "tragic mulatto" tradition in American fiction. According to reviewer Teresa Gómez Reus,

Carme Manuel's compilation appears in the context of an explosion of canonformation studies that, for the last few decades, have constituted an essential component of the feminist challenge to traditional literary study. In that sense, *Interrogating Voices* engages with a still vital strain in feminist scholarship: the need to discover and recover women's voices, and to make a case for their aesthetic and cultural significance. (2015, 237)

In 2010, independent publisher Contraseña was born in Zaragoza with the intention of circulating little-known works by worldwide classic writers as well as—and specially—texts by authors that remained unpublished in Spain. In this context, the publisher took an interest in the work of Harlem Renaissance writer Nella Larsen, and published a translation of *Passing* in 2011: "We came across her in a handbook on '1001 books to read before you die'. We saw that, surprisingly, it was not translated and we jumped on it" explained Francisco Muñoz, editor in Contraseña (in Seisdedos 2015, 23).<sup>271</sup> The text, published in the TL as *Claroescuro*, was translated by Pepa Linares.

As for *Claroescuro*, the novel was mainly reviewed in literature blogs such as *Solo de libros* (Sra. Castro 2012) or *Un oficio peligroso* (Morán 2013), which praised Larsen's work in the framework of the Harlem Renaissance. Similarly, Javier Rodríguez, the owner of Librería Cervantes, wrote a positive review of the novel in the bookshop's website (2011, n. p.), describing it as a "rara avis" in the contemporary Spanish book

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<sup>271</sup> "Dimos con ella en un manual sobre los 1001 libros que hay que leer antes de morir, vimos que, sorprendentemente, no estaba traducida y nos lanzamos a ello."

market. Rodríguez praised the publisher's work in recovering one of the key voices of the Harlem Renaissance as well as the well-cared edition and the work of prologuist Maribel Cruzado in perfectly framing Larsen's story in its particular sociohistorical and literary context.

Likewise, Ana Vega also published a review in the online edition of *La Nueva España* (2012, n. p.), where she foregrounded Cruzado's work introducing and contextualizing the novel for Spanish readers. In this case, Vega was the only reviewer to discuss aspects related to the translation of Larsen's work, as she argued that the implications and signification tied to the term "passing" were lost in the Spanish rendering of the word. Almost as an alternative proposal, Vega entitled her article "Ocultación de la identidad". The critic also praised the universal character of the main conflict in the novel which, according to her, was achieved by Larsen's masterful construction of the two main female characters: "We get to know these women so well that we can only feel for them a kind of sacred bond or universal understanding".<sup>272</sup>

A more succinct account of the translation was published in *Anika entre libros* by Juan Salas Villanueva (2011, n. p.). Despite Salas Villanueva's positive comment on the novel, his review did not include any references to the translation or any other aspect of the Spanish edition. A further symptom of the poor reception of this novel is the lack of mentions of the author's name in Spanish press media until 2019, the year of publication of *Arenas movedizas*. Prior to that date, the only references to Larsen mentioned her in relation to Federico García Lorca's trip to New York, as the Spanish poet wrote about her in his journals. Among these publications, we may highlight Maribel Cruzado Soria's account of the writers' relationship, published in *Clarín* in 2004. Likewise, the presence of studies about Larsen's work in Spanish academia is insignificant. Anyhow, in August 2011—Linares's translation was published in October of that same year—J. A. Masoliver Ródenas wrote an article for *Cultura La Vanguardia* (2011, 8) where he referred to Larsen as a "now-forgotten" writer ["la hoy olvidada Nella Larsen"].

Experts agree that the decade of 2010 saw the outburst of a fourth feminist wave that resonated internationally thanks to the reach of social media movements such as

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<sup>272</sup> "Conocemos tan bien a estas mujeres que tan sólo podemos sentir por ellas una especie de vínculo sagrado o comprensión universal."

#FreeTheNipple, #HeForShe, #TimesUp and especially, #MeToo, founded by African American Civil Rights activist Tarana Burke, as well as #BlackLivesMatter. According to Mari Luz Congosto et al. (2019, 54), we are currently facing an unprecedented landscape regarding social mobilization and the generalized positive attitude towards feminism. In general terms, the increased development of social and political consciousness in mainstream culture favored the emergence of politically compromised literary agents, namely publishers, bookstores, digital communities and even influencers that collaborated in the spread of traditionally marginal foreign literatures in the TC. A clear example to illustrate this phenomenon is cited by Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego in her account of relations between black US and Spain:

#BlackLivesMatter events were held in Madrid in 2014 after the death of African American Eric Garner at the hands of the police. Footage of these events provides evidence that they became an occasion to protest US police brutality and impunity, but also an opportunity to denounce the discrimination facing blacks in Spain and, as a consequence, to build Pan-African alliances. (Cornejo-Parriego 2020, 279)

A symptom of the changing interest of a portion of the Spanish readership was the increase in the publication of non-fiction works, specially after 2015. In this light, in 2021 Traficantes published an anthology of reflections on black feminism entitled *Feminismos negros*, brought together by anthropologist Mercedes Jabardo. Jabardo had previously written about African feminism mostly (2002 and 2005) as well as black feminism in “Desde el feminismo negro, una mirada al género y la inmigración” (2008). In the prologue to the anthology, Jabardo discussed the increasing interest that counter-hegemonic feminisms were awakening in mainstream feminist movements in Spain, as well as in the Spanish academia. In this light, she foregrounded the transcendence of “the particular view that black feminists were incorporating into feminism, in general, or the paths they were opening to the understanding of the resistance strategies of dominated groups, as well as to their recognition” (Jabardo 2012, 13).<sup>273</sup> The anthologist also celebrated the recent compromise of publishers such as Traficantes in circulating works around black feminist thought, namely *Otras*

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<sup>273</sup> “la particular mirada que las feministas negras estaban incorporando al feminismo, en general, o por los caminos que abrían a la comprensión de las estrategias de resistencia de los grupos dominados, así como a su reconocimiento.”

*inapropiables* (2004), *Cartografías de la diáspora* (2011) and *Mujeres, raza y clase* (2004), the latter published by Akal. In this context, *Feminismos negros* gathered texts by feminist pioneers Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells; activists Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis and Carol Stack; second-wave black feminists Hazel V. Carby and Pratibha Parmar as well as Jayne Ifekwunigwe and Magdalene Ang-Lygate, who had written about postcolonial and diasporic identity.

This key volume for our object of study was overlooked by mainstream Spanish press media, as no reviews or advertisements of the anthology were published. Incidentally, an exhibition at the Reina Sofía Museum included the volume in a list of selected readings thought to foster “critical pedagogy” which, according to journalist Iker Seisedos, would not satisfy Spanish education authorities (2014, 41). On the contrary, Jabardo’s compilation generated a very positive response in academic circles. Three reviews of the book were published in journals *Gazeta de Antropología*, *Relaciones Internacionales* and *Quaderns*. The reviewers, María Martínez Lirola (2014), Melody Fonseca (2014-2015, 187) and Alba Barbé i Serra (2013), respectively, coincided in their praise of the anthologist’s work in selecting and arranging a series of texts that representatively accounted for the intersectional concerns of radical black feminism. Only Martínez Lirola evaluated the translation into Spanish, arguing that the work of the translators was impeccable. On another note, both Martínez Lirola and Fonseca acknowledged the significance of such contribution considering the contemporary panorama and the growing concern for counter-hegemonic forms of resistance: “Black feminism, in addition to contributing conceptually from academic spheres, manifests itself through the representations and performativities of subaltern or counter-hegemonic popular culture” (Fonseca 2014-2015, 187).<sup>274</sup>

Likewise, in 2013 Capitán Swing published Assata Shakur’s autobiography, originally released in 1987, translated by Ethel Odriozola and Carmen Valle. The publisher presented the work of the former Black Panther as a key contribution to black American literature, together with the autobiographical accounts of personalities such as Malcom X or Maya Angelou. Despite the historical scarce attention received by Shakur in the Spanish press—until 2015, only 2 mentions of her name could be found on

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<sup>274</sup> “El feminismo negro, además de aportar conceptualmente desde la academia, y de manifestarse a través de las representaciones y performatividades de la cultura popular subalterna o contrahegemónica.”



Spanish press media—, several newspapers and online platforms discussed the translation of her autobiography. According to Jesús Aller, “Assata Shakur emerges from this autobiography with an image far removed from the monster portrayed by the most reactionary media. Her features are those of a woman who, suffering in her flesh the segregation and racism of American society, decided to dedicate her life to fighting them” (2014, n. p.).<sup>275</sup> Most reviews, such as Aller’s, Rivara’s (2020) and Serrano’s (2013) focused on summarizing key events in Shakur’s life as recounted in the volume. Among these, special attention was devoted to the process of re-education in black history that took her to debunk myths of American history, the events leading to her being tried for murder and bank robbery, the time she served in prison and her later escape and exile in Cuba. With respect to the murder charges, *Afroféminas* (2020, n. p.) argued that “given the politics of the time, it is impossible to know whether the State’s accusations [...] were true or full of lies”.<sup>276</sup> Exceptionally, Julia Rípodas (2018, n. p.) was also sensitive about the author’s political use of language in her autobiography, which, she argued, notoriously gathered the strength and the pain of a life’s struggle against racism and institutional violence:

Hasta en el lenguaje invierte Assata Shakur toda su intención personal y política. Hace un uso irreverente de la ortografía (américa, Tercer Mundo, Negros) negando las mayúsculas a quien no las merece y otorgándolas a quién sí, en un afán de justicia lingüística, y resistiéndose a someterse al abuso de poder hasta la última palabra y hasta la última letra.<sup>277</sup>

Adhering to a very concrete editorial line, in 2014 Capitán Swing published Michelle Alexander’s *El color de la justicia: la nueva segregación racial en Estados Unidos*, also translated by Ethel Odriozola and Carmen Valle. The volume was described by Victor Lenore as “the book that explains twenty-first century racism” (2014, n. p.). The

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<sup>275</sup> “Assata Shakur emerge de esta autobiografía con una imagen muy alejada del monstruo que dibujaron los medios más reaccionarios. Sus rasgos son los de una mujer que sufriendo en su carne la segregación y el racismo de la sociedad americana decidió dedicar su existencia a combatirlos.”

<sup>276</sup> “Dada la política de la época, es imposible saber si las acusaciones del estado [...] fueron verdaderas o estaban llenas de mentiras.”

<sup>277</sup> “Even Assata Shakur’s language is permeated with her personal and political intentions. She makes an irreverent use of spelling (‘américa’, ‘Tercer Mundo’, ‘Negros’) and denies capital letters to those who do not deserve them and gives them to those who do. In a quest for linguistic justice, she refuses to submit to the abuse of power up to the last word and up to the last letter.”

reviewer, writing for *El Confidencial*, argued that Alexander's essay had evolved from being a brilliant text to becoming a tool to fight racial discrimination with a remarkable social impact in the SC. In this context, Leonore could not help but verbalize the parallelism with the reality depicted in the volume and local systems of oppression such as the Melilla wall and the Spanish detention centers for migrants (CIEs). In a similar spirit, Benno Herzog (2015, 3) discussed the contemporary systems of oppression accounted by Alexander, especially the war on drugs in the United States. Likewise, both Leonore and Herzog highlighted the role of public figures, especially in the entertainment industry, such as president Barack Obama, show host Oprah Winfrey or actor Will Smith, that perpetuated the strategy of "Black exceptionalism", that is, examples of excellence that circulated as proof of racial progress.

Further proof of the growing interest in new feminist paradigms in the Spanish academia was the publication of the collaborative volume *Intersecciones: Cuerpos y sexualidades en la encrucijada* (2012), edited by Raquel Lucas Platero Méndez. According to Javier Fernández Galeano (2013, 287), this work pioneered in the application of the intersectional framework to study sociological realities in the Spanish context, following the development of similar studies in North America. The volume included translations of the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977) and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color". Drawing from these premises, the collected studies examined current issues at stake in the Spanish territory regarding sexuality, diasporas, and gender subjectivities.

Parallel to these endeavors, in 2011 journalist and photographer Mireia Sentís and poet José Luis Gallero created the collection Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid (hereafter BAAM), published by La Oficina initially and Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo from 2014. The collection, prompted by the interest in disseminating the history of the African American community as told by its own actors, aimed at circulating unpublished works and contribute to expand the scarce supply in the country. In fact, in their review of the collection (2018, n. p.), Radio África Magazine—a Barcelona-based multimedial platform created in 2012 by Tania Adam to circulate culture and thought from the African diaspora—pointed towards Sentís's *En el pico del águila* as a precursor of the catalogue, as both followed a similar didactic nature. Indeed, BAAM was interested in generating a panoramic and introductory view of black

history in the United States, so each translated text dealt with a different period and topic within African American literary history (Sentís 2017, n. p.).

The first four volumes were published by La Oficina. They included two texts covering relations between Afro America and Spain, namely *Escritos sobre España* by Langston Hughes and *De Misisipi a Madrid* by James Yates. The other two works were June Jordan's *Dificultades técnicas* and Ishmael Reed's *Trapos Sucios*. *Dificultades técnicas* was actually the first text by Jordan published in Spain. With this pretext, Angela Davis wrote a prologue specifically for the Spanish edition of the text which, still today, it remains the only full-length volume by Jordan that has been published in Spain.

After 2014, the collection liaised with Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo, a radical and compromised publisher that welcomed BAAM's project into their catalogue. During this new cycle, BAAM translated key works for US and African American literature such as Jean Toomer's *Cane* (2014) or David Lewering Lewis's *When Harlem Was In Vogue* (2015). These two were reviewed in Iker Seisdedos's essay about the Harlem Renaissance (2015), where he extensively praised Sentís's and Gallero's endeavor to disseminate in the TC alternative voices of the period:

La etiqueta [“Harlem Renaissance”], ampliamente difundida en Estados Unidos, también más allá de los círculos editoriales y académicos, ha hecho ciertamente menos fortuna en España, donde aquella explosión creativa suele asimilarse a un leve conocimiento de la obra y la figura del novelista y poeta Langston Hughes (y sus años españoles) y, sobre todo, al Cotton Club de Duke Ellington, genio de la sofisticación sin esfuerzo, o Bill Bojangles Robinson bailando claqué con Shirley Temple. (2015, 23)

Seisdedos also foregrounded the work of translator and Harlem Renaissance expert Maribel Cruzado Soria in her rendering of *Cane*. Significantly, the journalist contributed a bibliography of works of the Harlem Renaissance available in Spanish, where Pepa Linares's *Claroscuro* (2010) stood out as the only translation of a woman author.

In addition to the work of agents such as Sentís or Cruzado Soria, one of the endeavors considered in Seisdedos's review was the collection “Renacimiento de Harlem” published by Sr. Lobo. This small publishing house was founded in 2014 by Araceli

Lobo, who was particularly interested in the Harlem Renaissance since she accessed Hughes's *Escritos sobre España*, published in 2011 by BAAM. Sr. Lobo published James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiografía de un ex hombre de color* (2014) and Nella Larsen's *Arenas movedizas* (2015), translated by Pepa Cornejo Parriego, both of which had a very limited impact on the Spanish readership. Also, the publisher's online blog initiated a series of essays written by Lobo herself about women in the Harlem Renaissance. These entries reviewed the careers of personalities such as Jessie Redmon Fauset, Queen Bess and Ethel Ray Nance. Unfortunately, since 2019 Sr. Lobo remains inactive. Therefore, undertakings such as the collection "Renacimiento de Harlem" and the blog series "Ellas y el Renacimiento de Harlem" have been discontinued.

Anyhow, despite the existence of Cornejo Parriego's 2015 translation of *Quicksand*, Contraseña decided to publish a retranslation in 2019 together with the short stories "Freedom", "The Wrong Man" and "Sanctuary", translated as "Libertad", "No era él" and "Santuario", respectively—the four texts rendered by Pepa Linares, who had already been in charge of *Claroscuro*. Linares herself wrote about the challenges of translating Nella Larsen in *Vasos Comunicantes*. In her article, she discussed translation problems such as the use of very specific adjectivization and rhymes in the ST and most significantly, dialectal variation:

La autora escribe las palabras tal como deberían pronunciarlas sus personajes. [...] En la mayor parte de los casos basta con seguir la fonética en el contexto para comprender el significado, pero la dificultad estriba en crear un texto al menos creíble en boca del personaje, porque no sé si se puede aspirar a otra cosa. (2020, n. p.)<sup>278</sup>

The novel, whose initial print run was around 3.000 copies, had a very limited reception in press media (Linares 2021, personal communication). Likewise, the presence of studies on Larsen's work in the Spanish academia is almost non-existent. However, the translation was finalist for the Esther Benítez Award, which is bestowed by ACE Traductores since 2006 to honor the best translation published in Spain every year.

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<sup>278</sup> "The author writes the words as her characters should pronounce them. [...] In most cases it is enough to follow the phonetics in context to understand the meaning, but the difficulty lies in creating a text that is at least credible in the character's mouth, because I do not know if you can aspire to anything else."

As was anticipated elsewhere, the decade of 2010 saw the emergence of a number of online platforms and communities devoted to study and spread Pan-African cultures from the Spanish context. One of the earliest projects in this respect was Radio Africa Magazine, a Barcelona-based multimedial platform created in 2012 by Tania Adam to circulate culture and thought from the African diaspora. This site published content about music, performing and visual arts, literature, fashion, cinema and TV as well as interviews with relevant personalities from the African diaspora, both from Spain and other foreign countries.

Most significantly for our object of research, the platform Afroféminas was founded in 2014 by Antoinette Torres Soler. Afroféminas is an online international community for women of African descent and black or racialized women. According to the editorial team, “we encourage women through opinion, journalism, literature and poetry to engage in honest and constructive dialogue about the complexities, circumstances and lives of black and racialized women. We aim to educate, inspire and entertain” (Afroféminas n.d., n. p.).<sup>279</sup> Thanks to the work of a strong network of collaborators and their presence in social media, the platform progressively expanded the scope of their work. Today, the community has established several delegations in Spain (Madrid, Basque Country, Galicia, Andalusia and Catalonia) as well as in Latin America (Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Chile, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Uruguay).

Since 2014, Afroféminas has undertaken several projects, among which we may highlight the homonymous online magazine. *Revista Afroféminas* publishes content on diverse areas with a special interest on racialized women and feminism(s) of color. Thus, some of the spheres covered by the magazine include culture, beauty, fashion, education and history. Likewise, the platform has developed an online store that sells books around black culture, history and literature, beauty products specially intended for black women, toys and other miscellaneous merchandising. Since 2015, Afroféminas also organizes workshops and seminars “to implement the afrofeminist, intersectional and decolonial vision in daily life” [para implementar la vision afrofeminista, interseccional y decolonial en la vida diaria] (Afroféminas 2021, n. p.).

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<sup>279</sup> “Animamos a las mujeres a que, a través de la opinión, el periodismo, la literatura y la poesía a entablar un diálogo sincero y constructivo sobre la complejidad, circunstancias y vida de la mujer negra y racializada. Aspiramos a educar, inspirar y entretener.”

These activities consider topics such as approximations to afrofeminism, intersectionality, the history of the turban, interracial families, and lesbianism and bisexuality in the framework of black feminism, among others.

Likewise, the year 2014 also saw the onset of the project United Minds in Valencia. This cultural initiative, developed by artist, songwriter and musical producer Ken Province and researcher and activist Deborah Ekoka, came out of the necessity to disseminate African and Pan-African culture in the Spanish context. One of the key endeavors initiated by the co-founders was the bookstore, specialized in African and Pan-African literatures. Among many others, United Minds commercialized the volumes published by BAAM. Likewise, during the last five years United Minds has also hosted workshops, cultural encounters, a feminist school and other collaborative activities around the reivindication of visibility for the Afrodescendant community. With respect to this, founder Ken Province claimed: “I was asked the other day about the African clients that came to United Minds; I answered that it was not only people of African descent who had to learn about this part of Universal history we are offering” (in *Afroféminas* 2015, n. p.).<sup>280</sup>

Over the last years, the work of United Minds has been reviewed in some newspapers as well as—and specially—in specialized online sources as an unprecedented initiative in the country. Indeed, Marta Moreira wrote about the initiative for *Alicante Plaza* (2018, n. p.), and accompanied her article with a selection of fundamental works of black literature made by the library owners. The list included two works published by BAAM—*De Mississippi a Madrid* (2011) and *Cuerpo político negro* (2017)—as well as several volumes on black feminism such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Cómo educar en el feminismo* (2019) or Sylvia Serbin’s *Reinas de África y heroínas de la diáspora negra* (2017). Likewise, with the event of the festival Afroconciencia organized in Madrid during the summer of 2016, Sónia Fernández Quincoces (2016, n. p.) described the enterprise as a fundamental initiative to claim the space of black culture in the Spanish literary panorama. In this respect, Fernández Quincoces foregrounded the founders’ determination to give voice to “those who speak *from* and not *about* Africa” [aquellos que hablan *desde* y no *sobre* África]. She also pointed out

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<sup>280</sup> “Me preguntaron el otro día sobre la clientela africana que venía a United Minds, respondí que no solo era la gente afrodescendiente la que tenía que aprender sobre esta parte de la historia Universal que ofrecemos.”

the increasing demand of books on black feminism(s), partly thanks to the worldwide recognition of black women writers such as Adichie. Likewise, online platforms *Afribuku*, *Por fin en África*, *Afroféminas* and *Radio África Magazine* also published entries about the work of United Minds. In the interview published in *Afribuku* (de los Santos 2016), Province and Ekoka criticized the dramatic disinterest in African and black cultures permeating the Spanish publishing market:

solo se publica lo vendible, únicamente lo que se puede explotar. [...] El desinterés es descarado, puedo decir que algunas de las obras más importantes se editaron por última vez en los 70 y no se ha vuelto a saber más de ellas después de haber sido descatalogadas, para mí esto es un claro ejemplo de la poca importancia que se le dan a estos autores (2016, n. p.).<sup>281</sup>

Another symptom of the growing interest in visibilizing Pan-African identities in the TC is the organization of the aforementioned festival, *Afroconciencia*, which took place from June 11 to 12, 2016. The event brought together afrodescendant people—born or residents in Spain—who organized and participated in activities around black politics, aesthetics, culture, literature, music, entrepreneurship and pedagogy. *Afroconciencia* hosted various workshops and talks on black feminism and black masculinities, such as a round table on afrofeminism moderated by Nair Macedo, Antoniette Torres Soler (founder of *Afroféminas*), Asha Ismail and Jane Oma and a talk on patriarchal patterns in afrodescendant communities given by writer Edjanga Jones Ndjoli and psychologist Francisco Sánchez.

As has been shown, the progressive reclaiming of spaces for Pan-African identities and cultures and, particularly, black feminisms in the TC was tightly linked to the development of a solid body of literary works that fundamented these premises. Indeed, recently not only have translations proliferated, but also Spanish black feminist writers such as Desirée Bela-Lobedde, Lucía Asué Mbomío Rubio, Antoniette Torres Soler or Deborah Ekoka are gaining space in the local literary market. Bela-Lobedde and Mbomío Rubio, particularly, have been published by reputed houses such as Ediciones

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<sup>281</sup> “they only publish what is marketable, only what can be exploited. [...] The lack of interest is blatant, I can say that some of the most important works are not edited since the seventies and have not been heard of again after being out of print. For me, this is a clear example of the little importance given to these authors.”

B (*Ser mujer negra en España* [2018] and *Minorías: historias de desigualdad y valentía* [2021]) and Grijalbo (*Hija del camino* [2019]).

It is in this context that we should examine developments in field of translated African American women's literature during the last five years. Experts such as Congosto et al. (2019) and Guiomar Rovira Sancho agree that, in the last years, the feminist movement has suffered a tremendous outburst in Spain. Although protest actions date back much earlier, this recent phase has been particularly relevant in terms of mobilization and public perception of the concept of feminism itself. This approach, generally known as the fourth feminist wave, is based on the use of new technologies, especially social networks to promote the fight for gender equality. As has been argued by Congosto et al. (2019, 15), a key distinctive feature of the new wave is its intersectional nature, together with the deconstruction of gender as well as postcolonial and decolonial approaches. In this context, viral movements of global impact which began to emerge in the SC during the first half of the decade of 2010 have reached international scope in recent years. This has generated subsequent reactions of transnational solidarity and allegiance that have both nurtured and built upon cultural and literary manifestations.

Taking this into consideration, it seems only reasonable to refer to Andrea Aguilar's article for *El País* "The Canon Changes Its Color" [El canon cambia de color] (2017). The article, which revolves around its opening stance "the invisible became visible" [lo invisible se volvió visible] (n. p.), discusses the increasing prominence of African American artists in the North American cultural and literary panorama in the context of Donald Trump's election as 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Almost as a response to Saladrigas's comment on the lack of development of African American literature after the Black Power era (see page 384), Aguilar sentences:

En estos agitados tiempos de lucha y resistencia política, los autores afroamericanos han saltado a primera línea y junto a artistas como Kara Walker, Lorna Simpson y Kerry James Marshall abren el canon. El talento literario y artístico de la comunidad afroamericana no es nuevo, pero alcanza ahora una apabullante visibilidad. Fruto de la cosecha del primer presidente negro y



también reacción al nacionalismo blanco que ostenta el poder, la resistencia cultural tiene color. (2017, n. p.)<sup>282</sup>

Also symptomatic of the increasing space reclaimed by black women's literature in the TC are the latest publications of BAAM. The collection, which started circulating key works of African American literature both by female and male writers, has progressively shown preference for women's voices. Indeed, up to 2015 BAAM had translated *Trapos sucios* (Reed), *Dificultades técnicas* (Jordan), *Escritos sobre España* (Hughes), *De Mississippi a Madrid* (Yates), *Clotel o La hija del presidente* (Brown) and *Caña* (Toomer). Since 2016, BAAM has published *Una historia de la conciencia: Ensayos escogidos*, *Cuando Harlem estaba de moda*, *Una cata de poder*, *Cuerpo político negro*, *El final de la negritud*, *Jugando en la oscuridad*, *Esta vez el fuego: una nueva generación habla de raza* and *Fragilidad blanca*. Out of these eight titles—which also indicate an increase in the publication pace of the collection—five have been written by women. *Cuerpo político negro* and *Esta vez el fuego: una nueva generación habla de raza* are collections of essays, the former edited by Sentís (originally published in Spain) and the latter by the prestigious American author Jesmyn Ward. The essays collected in *Cuerpo político negro* are evenly authored by men and women writers, while Ward's volume compiles 14 texts by women and 5 by men. *Cuando Harlem estaba de moda* is the only volume published by BAAM since 2015 entirely written by a male author.

Anyhow, taking a closer look at the titles published by BAAM, Sentís herself claims that their reception in the TC has been restricted to a specialized readership (2021, personal communication). However, among this minority sector, the collection has been received with generalized acclaim. As for Davis's *Una historia de la conciencia: Ensayos escogidos*, the volume brings together 17 texts, most of them unpublished in Spanish, covering four decades of reflection and activism on issues such as racism, feminism and prisons, but also on blues and photography. While Davis has been a recurrent figure in the Spanish press media during the last years, this compilation,

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<sup>282</sup> “In these troubled times of political struggle and resistance, African American authors have come to the forefront and alongside artists such as Kara Walker, Lorna Simpson and Kerry James Marshall are opening up the canon. The literary and artistic talent of the African American community is not new, but it is now reaching an overwhelming visibility. Fruit of the harvest of the first black president and also as a reaction to the white nationalism that now holds power, cultural resistance has color.”

gathered by Sentís and translated by Inga Pellissa, was only written about in *Frontera D* by the editor herself, who published the foreword to the volume as a summary of the collection (2016, n. p.).

A similar reception was experienced by Sentís's compilation, *Cuerpo político negro*, published in 2017 and translated by María Enguix and Malika Embarek. The volume gathered texts by eighteen authors from different periods. According to the editor: "Each of them approaches a specific subject from a different point of view, tone and literary genre. However, they draw from a common experience that undoubtedly unites them in a single collective: one that constitutes North America's *black body politic*".<sup>283</sup> In this context, the volume includes the following texts by black women writers: Zora Neale Hurston's "Qué se siente al ser yo de color", June Jordan's "Eres lo que más me importas", bell hook's "Negritud Posmoderna", Lisa Jones's "¿Ser biracial es suficiente?", Patricia J. Williams "Kabuki americano", Leigh Raiford's "El consume de imágenes de linchamientos" and Carol Anderson's "Astillas". Despite the limited reception of this work in Spain, specialized agents such as Ken Province and Deborah Ekoka (2018) as well as Afroféminas (2019) have identified it as a landmark volume in the landscape of translated African American literature.

In the case of Elaine Brown's *Una cata de poder: Historia de una mujer negra* (trans. Javier Lucini), the book was presented at the Catalan book fair Literal in 2018 by the ex-leader of the Black Panther Party. Indeed, with the event of the book presentation, Brown participated. The event was reported by EFE for *Público* (2018d) as well as by Catalan press media such as *Ara* (Europapress 2018), *B Magazine* (2018), *L'Express de Sant Andreu* (2018) and *Núvol* (Parreño Mont 2018). While *Público* foregrounded Brown's call to action in the feminist fight and focused on her intersectional discussion of feminist movements at a global level, Catalan media such as *Núvol* emphasized her stance on "the sovereignty of nations", as during the presentation of her book she specifically argued that the fight for Catalonia should be a transnational concern.

In the light of the unsuccessful commercialization of Toni Morrison's collection of essays *El origen de los otros* in 2018, Lumen sold the rights to translate *Playing in the*

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<sup>283</sup> "Cada uno de ellos aborda un tema tan específico desde un punto de vista, un tono y un género literario diferentes. Sin embargo, parten de una experiencia común que sin duda los une en un solo colectivo: el que constituye el *cuerpo político negro* de Norteamérica."

*Dark* to BAAM following Sentís's interest in adding this non-fiction work to the collection (2021, personal communication). The essay was translated by Pilar Vázquez (†) and published in 2019 as *Jugando en la oscuridad: el punto de vista blanco en la imaginación literaria* two months after Morrison passed away. Despite the book is recommended in online platforms such as *Librotea* or *Lecturalia*, it was mostly overlooked by Spanish press media as well as online platforms. However, despite the apparent lack of interest in Morrison's essayistic work, after the author's death the volume featured several lists of key works to understand contemporary protests against racism such as Andrea Aguilar's (2020).

While no reviews or critical material were published on Dickerson's *El final de la negritud* (trans. Isabela Herranz), *Esta vez el fuego: una nueva generación habla de raza*, the volume edited by Jesmyn Ward and translated by María Enguix generated more interest in online platforms. Indeed, in addition to being advertised by communities such as *Afroféminas* or the online bookstore of *United Minds*, *Esta vez el fuego* was reviewed in *Un libro al día* (Peig 2021) as well as Sevillian magazine *Mercurio* (2021). In his analysis, Marc Peig praised the editor's endeavor in putting together such different approaches to racism. Among the eighteen essays collected in the volume, Peig draws attention towards Wendy S. Walters "Sola en América", Isabel Wilkerson's "¿Adónde vamos a partir de aquí?", de, Carol Anderson's "Furia blanca", and Jesmyn Ward's "Descifrar el código" as well as Kevin Young's "Más negro que tu" and Garnette Cadogan's "Black and Blue", which he compares to Claudia Rankine's *Ciudadana*. In addition to the aforementioned essays, the collection also gathers the works of other black women authors, namely Kima Jones's "Camino a casa, d. C.", Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah's "El peso", Honorée Fanonne Jeffers's "Las caras promesas de nuestro amor: Una defensa del esposo de Phillis Wheatley", Claudia Rankine's "El duelo es ley de vida para las personas negras", Emily Raboteau's "¡Conozca sus derechos!", Natasha Trethewey's "Teorías del tiempo y el espacio" and Edwidge Danticat's "Mensaje a mis hijas". Peig closes his review aligning himself with Ward's hope to reach an international readership: "I hope this book makes each one of you, dear readers, feel as if we are sitting together [...] and that we are composing our story

together.’ Hopefully it will be so”.<sup>284</sup> *Mercurio*, for their part, recommended the volume for the current relevance of its subject matter: “A joint cry for equality in a volume that, we fear, will not lose its relevance or be forgotten as part of a mere trend of social debate”.<sup>285</sup>

However, a comparative look on the reception of Ward’s collection of essays and her novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, rendered in Spanish as *La canción de los vivos y los muertos* (2018) by Francisco González López may bring some light into the role played by extraliterary factors in publishing policies in the reception of a foreign literature. In the case of Ward’s novel, it was awarded the 2017 National Book Award for fiction. Consequently, Ward became the first woman and the first black writer to receive the honor twice, as she had also been awarded for *Salvage the bones* in 2011, a novel that was translated as *Quedan los huesos* (2013, trans. Celia Montolío Nicholson) even if it remained unnoticed by Spanish literary critics. In the case of *La canción de los vivos y los muertos*, it was published by Sexto piso after the novel had received the National Book Award, and it was extensively reviewed and cited in most Spanish press media, among others, *El Periódico* (S. Sánchez 2018), *El Cultural* (Seoane 2018), *El País* Aparicio Maydeu 2018 and Fernández 2018), *elDiario.es* (Pujante 2019) and *ABC Cultural* (Ferrero 2018); local press media such as *Mediterráneo* (2018), *El Correo español* (EFE, 2018a), *El Diario montañés* (EFE 2018b), *Hoy* (EFE 2018c) and *Diario de noticias* (2018) as well as digital platforms, namely *El asombrario & Co.* (Fides 2018), *W Magazín* (2018), *Libros y Literatura* (Mera 2019), *Culturamas* (Martínez Llorca 2018), *Encuentros y desencuentros* (Macpherson 2019) and *El descodificador* (Pérez de Albéniz 2018).

Virtually all reviewers coincided in acknowledging Ward’s talent and described the two National Book Awards as well-deserved. Indeed, Sergi Sánchez prevented potential readers from approaching the novel from a political perspective, given its literary and artistic quality. In this respect, both Sánchez, Laura Ferrero, Martínez Llorca and Andrés Seoane drew comparisons between Ward’s *La canción de los vivos y los*

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<sup>284</sup> “‘espero que al leer este libro cada uno de vosotros tenga la sensación, queridos lectores, de que estamos sentados juntos [...] y de que estamos componiendo nuestra historia juntos.’ Ojalá así sea.” Note that the English version of Ward’s quote has been retrieved from the ST.

<sup>285</sup> Clamor conjunto de igualdad en un volumen que, mucho nos tememos, no va a perder vigencia ni va a ser olvidado en el marco de una mera tendencia de debate social.

*muertos* and the works of canonical American authors, namely Faulkner's *Mientras agonizo* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, especially concerning their exploration of trauma and the impact of racism and other forms of oppression. In this respect, Martínez Llorca emphasized the novel's capacity of "bringing us back to Faulkner and reminding us everything we still have to learn from the great masters".<sup>286</sup> In contrast, Inés Macpherson was reluctant to evaluate the novel in terms of its comparability to the classics. In this spirit, she argued: "Even if, in their discussion of the award and the reasons why it was given to this novel, many seek to compare Ward's prose to that of the great classics, I think it deserves to be appreciated on its own".<sup>287</sup>

Anyhow, in his discussion of the universal values of Ward's oeuvre, Seoane echoed the author's hopeful stance about her achievement: "[I hope] it is a sign that the horizon of interests covered by literature has broadened and the definition of universal can contain stories about people of color, working-class people and women".<sup>288</sup> In relation to this, Seoane's conversation with the author finished by asking her about future plans to write a novel that was not located in the South. This inquiry inevitably evokes the polemic question posed to Toni Morrison by journalist Jana Wendt in 1998 about her willingness to incorporate substantial white characters into her novels.<sup>289</sup> In this case, Ward saw no offence in the premise, and answered that despite the hardships of permanently navigating the presence of racism and loss in her works, she wanted to claim visibility for this reality.

*W Magazine* described Ward as "one of the true literary revelations of the decade in the United States" and highlighted the positive reviews worded by internationally acclaimed women writers such as Margaret Adwood. In this spirit, Macpherson and Sonia Fides brought to the fore the import of the vision of racism and discrimination displayed in the novel. From a more pessimistic approach, Martínez Llorca argued that the recurrent

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<sup>286</sup> "nos regresa a Faulkner y nos recuerda todo lo que nos queda por aprender de los maestros"

<sup>287</sup> "aunque al hablar de dicho premio, y las razones por las que se lo han dado a esta novela, muchos buscan comparar la prosa de Ward con la de grandes clásicos, creo que merece ser valorada por sí misma."

<sup>288</sup> "[espero que] sea una señal de que el horizonte de intereses que abarca la literatura se ha ampliado y la definición de universal puede contener historias sobre personas de color, personas de la clase trabajadora y mujeres."

<sup>289</sup> Note the inescapable parallelism in the formulation of the two questions: "Will you ever write a novel outside the South?" and "Will you ever write about white people in a substantial way?"

portrayal of racism in literature seemed to indicate that this form of discrimination was destined to remain perpetuated in society.

Anyhow, despite the different approaches to the novel showed by journalists, literary critics and readers, *La canción de los vivos y los muertos* was extensively talked about and very well received in Spain, especially among literary circles. Indeed, in her review for *Libros y Literatura*, Victoria Mera observed:

Normalmente, todos esos libros que te encuentras hasta en la sopa suelo empezar a leerlos con cautela. No porque quiera ser yo más *mainstream* que nadie, sino porque sueles crearte unas expectativas en torno a él que después son difíciles de cumplir. [...] Algo así me ocurrió con este libro, que empecé a verlo por todos lados: recomendaciones, Instagram, reseñas... Y me he dejado llevar, porque quería conocer de primera mano por qué se había creado tanto revuelo en torno a él. (2019, n. p.)<sup>290</sup>

However, going back to our initial comparison of the reception of Ward's 2018 novel and her 2020 collection of essays, a flagrant discontinuity in the readership's interest in the author can easily be observed. Thus, we may conclude that the reception of a foreign literature or writer also depends on the internal needs of the target system and responds to a specific horizon of expectations that has little or nothing to do with the quality of the work. In this respect, the reception of a literary prize with international prestige (given the position of American literature written in English in the global literary landscape) placed Ward's novel in a position of representativeness of a national literature within the frame of reference of target readers. Indeed, this assumption can be confirmed by looking at the marginal reception of *Esta vez, el fuego*, which had not received any literary recognition—in terms of literary prizes—in the SC. As a consequence, media coverage of the publication was nearly non-existent and its circulation was restricted to a specialized readership. In relation to this argument, the digital community *Lecturalia* only lists *Solo quedan los huesos* and *La canción de los vivos y los muertos* as works by Ward published in Spain. At this point, we should also

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<sup>290</sup> Normally, I usually start reading with caution all those books that you can find everywhere. Not because I want to be more mainstream than anyone else, but because you tend to create expectations around them that are difficult to fulfill. [...] Something like that happened to me with this book, I started to see it everywhere: recommendations, Instagram, reviews... And I got carried away, because I wanted to know first hand why there was so much hype around it.”

consider the fact that the presence of BAAM in social media and other digital platforms is very limited, thus potentially hampering its market niche. With respect to this, Sentís contends that massive circulation was never among their main goals: “those who are interested in this literature will end up finding BAAM anyway” (2021, personal communication).

In 2016, the young independent publisher Palabrero Press published a translated collection of Ann Petry’s short fiction entitled *Los huesos de Louella Brown y otros relatos*. The work was translated by Teresa Lanero and prefaced by Dámaso López. Even if Petry is nowadays considered a canonical author in the SC (her works have been included in the catalogue of Library of America), she had never been translated into Spanish before. In this case, Palabrero Press selected the short stories “The bones of Louella Brown” (1947), “Has anybody seen miss Dora Dean?” (1958), “The witness” (1971), “Like a winding sheet” (1945) and “The migraine workers” (1967), rendered as “Los huesos de Louella Brown”, “¿Alguien ha visto a la señorita Dora Dean?”, “El testigo”, “Como una mortaja” and “Trabajadores denigrantes”, respectively.

While the endeavor received no virtual attention from Spanish media, several online blogs celebrated the circulation of Petry’s work in Spain. Writer and editor Cristina Ros (2017) lamented the fact that Petry’s masterpiece *The Street*, which was the first novel by an African American woman writer to sell more than one million copies, remained unpublished in Spanish, and argued that despite *Los huesos de Louella Brown y otros relatos* only included five texts, these were still representative of the author’s interests and registers. Most reviewers conveyed a common feeling of guilt for their lack of knowledge of this author before her collection of short fiction was published in Spanish. With respect to this, writer and journalist Raquel Moraleja’s reflections about her personal library are of special interest:

Y entonces sentí una sacudida: nunca, hasta este verano, había leído a una escritora negra. Jamás. Fue la misma sacudida de hace algo más de un año, cuando pasé el dedo por mis estanterías y me di cuenta de que más del 80% de los libros estaban escritos por hombres. [...] La cuestión del género siempre me había preocupado, y ahora me encontraba de vuelta en Madrid, volviéndome a sentir muy estúpida al darme cuenta de que no había leído a ninguna escritora

negra. Ser mujer. Ser negra. Ser escritora. Cuántos handicaps. Cuánta lucha. (Moraleja 2016, n. p.)<sup>291</sup>

Likewise, both Moraleja and Cristina Ros coincided to draw attention to the contemporaneity of Petry's work. According to Ros,

A pesar del tiempo transcurrido desde que se escribieron, estos cuentos mantienen su frescura [...] y su pertinencia, porque los conflictos raciales en Estados Unidos (y en el resto del mundo) siguen a la orden del día, y la discriminación y las condiciones infrahumanas para una parte de la población no están (por desgracia) tan lejos de las realidades plasmadas en textos como “El testigo” o “Trabajadores denigrantes”. (2017, n. p.)<sup>292</sup>

Likewise, *Papel en Blanco* (2016) and Raúl Jiménez (2016) emphasized the singularity of Petry's view of racial conflicts in the United States, as well as the publisher's good taste in choosing to translate Petry's short fiction at the onset of their activity in the book market. With this respect, according to Jiménez, the sole text “Los huesos de Louella Brown” justified the publication of the collection, just as it also accounted for the necessity to claim visibility for its author in the TC. In relation to this, the reviewer also discussed the inevitable parallelism between the reality depicted in Petry's work and several present issues at stake both in the SC and at an international level:

Y uno piensa en pateras, espaldas mojadas o seres humanos huyendo del horror de la guerra. Se acuerda de monstruos presentándose a presidente del país más poderoso del mundo hablando de muros grotescos. [...] O de instituciones supranacionales que presumen de su defensa de los derechos humanos mientras ponen precio a cada refugiado para que otros se encarguen de ellos. Y uno no puede dejar de sentir la rabia y la revuelta constante del estómago mientras lee

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<sup>291</sup> “And then it struck me: I had never, until last summer, read a black woman writer. Ever. It was the same stroke I felt over a year ago, when I ran my finger along my bookshelves and realized that more than 80% of the books were written by men. [...] The issue of gender had always bothered me, and now I was back in Madrid, feeling very stupid again, realizing that I hadn't read any black women writers. To be a woman. To be black. To be a writer. So many handicaps. So much struggle.”

<sup>292</sup> “Despite the time that has passed since they were written, these stories are still fresh [...] and relevant, because racial conflicts in the United States (and in the rest of the world) are still commonplace, and the discrimination and subhuman conditions suffered by some part of the world's population are (unfortunately) not so far from the realities captured in texts such as ‘El testigo’ or ‘Trabajadores denigrantes’.”



estos relatos. Porque siguen vigentes. Siguen vivos. Siguen siendo necesarios. Porque el arte también debería servir para remover conciencias. Descubrimiento mayúsculo el de Ann Petry. (Jiménez 2016, n. p.)<sup>293</sup>

Also remarkable is the endeavor of other politically compromised independent publishers such as Capitán Swing, Katakarak or Traficantes de Sueños—which, in addition to the bookstore have their own publishing project—, among others, in circulating contemporary dissident voices in Spanish. Probably as a result of the marked political agenda of these agents, most of the texts written by black women writers that have been translated recently are essays.

To begin with, Capitán Swing is responsible for the circulation of most of Roxane Gay's translated production in Spain, namely *Mala feminista* (2016), *No es para tanto: Notas sobre la cultura de la violación* (2018) and *Hambre* (2019). In the case of *Mala feminista*, translated by Ana Monplet, the volume was published in Spanish a year before the global eclosion of the #MeToo movement which, as noted by Leticia Blanco (2019, n. p.), has progressively built a bubble of books on feminism. According to Blanco, in Spain this boom has prompted the circulation of bestsellers by local and international contemporary feminist authors such as Leticia Dolera or Virgine Despentes, among many others, as well as it has generated a renovated interest in pioneers such as Simone de Beauvoir or Mary Wollstonecraft. With respect to this recent phenomenon, Isabel Sucunza has foregrounded the relevance of intersectional approaches to the new feminist wave: "Feminism is more transversal than it may seem: it has to do with social class, with LGBT and trans activism, with a struggle against what we now call heteropatriarchy, which is much brader. It will not go away so easily" (Sucunza in Blanco 2019, n. p.).<sup>294</sup> Following Sucunza's line of thought, Andrea Valdés's article "Todos los feminismos del feminismo" (2016) discussed the different perspectives on the contemporary feminist debate. Among these, the author drew

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<sup>293</sup> "And one thinks of pateras, wetbacks or human beings fleeing the horror of war. One thinks of monsters running for president of the most powerful country in the world talking about grotesque walls. Or of supranational institutions that boast of their defense of human rights while they put a price on each refugee so that others can take care of them. And one cannot help but feel rage and a constant stomach ache while reading these stories. Because they are still relevant. They are still alive. They are still necessary. Because art should also serve to stir consciences. Ann Petry, a major discovery."

<sup>294</sup> "El feminismo es un movimiento mucho más transversal de lo que parece: tiene que ver con la clase social, con el activismo LGTB y trans, con una lucha contra lo que ahora llamamos heteropatriarcado que es mucho más amplia. No pasará tan fácilmente"

attention to new cultural contributions that brought to the fore the intersection of conditions such as sexual identity or race with womanhood.

In this context, a number of publications introducing Gay to local readers appeared in Spanish press media. Leticia Blanco described the author as “one of the most refreshing voices of the new feminism in the United States” (2017, 38)<sup>295</sup> and praised Gay’s fearless treatment of contemporary issues at stake, such as misogynistic lyrics in popular music or the portrayal of black characters in movies such as *Django Unchained* or *The Help*. In a similar stance, María Unanue praised the author’s use of plain language to discuss complex intersectional dynamics in her essays:

Sin palabras pomposas tras las que escondernos, porque no hay ni rastro de: “generar”, “visibilizar”, “gestionar”... (¡puaj!) Porque no me cansaré de decirlo: que ya es hora de que empecemos a utilizar un lenguaje claro y directo para llamar a las cosas por su nombre y no liarnos con generalidades que entorpecen la comunicación. (2017, n. p.)<sup>296</sup>

Both Unanue and Carmen Herrera (2017) made special mention of the author’s fresh and dynamic style. According to Herrera, the prospects of Gay’s collection of essays were broader than they may initially look like. In this light, Herrera highlighted the author’s perspective as “other” (a woman, black, a lesbian and brave, she added). Likewise, most lists of recommendations of feminist books published at the time included Gay’s *Mala Feminista*, such as the ones published by Gómez Urzaiz (2016), Ventura (2017), *Diario de Pontevedra* (2017) and Jarque (2017).

*Hambre*, published in 2018 and translated by Lucía Barahona also caused a considerable impact among the Spanish readership. Indeed, different press media picked up Gay’s criticism against a patriarchal culture that constantly tries to discipline women’s bodies, as she recounted her personal trauma being raped at age twelve and her subsequent eating disorders. In her review of the volume, Blanco discussed the

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<sup>295</sup> “una de las voces más refrescantes del nuevo feminismo en Estados Unidos”

<sup>296</sup> “No pompous words to hide behind, because there is no trace of: ‘generate’, ‘make visible’, ‘manage’... (yuck!) Because I will never get tired of saying it: it is time we start using clear and direct language to call things by their name and not get bogged down with generalities that hinder communication.”

fundamental role of accounts like the author's to gain understanding of the manifold forms of violence and abuse suffered by women:

El testimonio de Gay es espeluznante, uno más que añadir a estos tiempos del #MeeToo, aunque fue escrito mucho antes y publicado el pasado junio en Estados Unidos, antes de que el escándalo Weinstein saliera a la luz y desencadenara la ola de denuncias y movilización contra la cultura de los abusos. Leerla ayuda a entender que no existe una manera única o ideal de cómo reaccionar a ellos. (2018, 28)<sup>297</sup>

In this spirit, Julia Rípodas (2018) drew parallels between Gay's *Hambre* and Angela Davis's *Mujeres, raza y clase*, arguing that the work of the former could as well have been entitled *Women, Body and Weight* [*Mujeres, cuerpo y peso*]. According to Elena Sierra (2018), Gay's testimony denounces the reality that still today, we refuse to learn how to treat people who escape normative conventions regarding weight, health, race or sexual orientation: "She writes from her own experience, but it is also the experience of millions, the experience of others, which means all of us. She speaks of empathy and dignity, of the subjugation of women's bodies, of feminism".<sup>298</sup>

Indeed, most reviewers coincided in concluding that *Hambre* is not only a story about trauma, but also a sharp sociocultural analysis of the cruelty with which obesity is condemned in contemporary Western societies. In this respect, Noelia Ramírez (2018) foregrounded the necessity to understand that Gay's testimony is not a healing story with a cathartic resolution, because the author's wounds are still open and the consequences of trauma are present in her daily life. However, Antonio Díaz Oliva's interview with the author (2018) attested her optimistic stance on contemporary feminist movements and the evolution of a politically compromised society, as she acknowledged that despite the fact that there is still a lot of work to be done, feminism is becoming more inclusive and sensitive to convergent forms of oppression affecting women around the globe.

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<sup>297</sup> "Gay's testimony is terrifying; one more to add to these #MeeToo times, even if it was written much earlier and published last June in the United States, before the Weinstein scandal came to light and triggered the wave of accusations and mobilization against the culture of abuse. Reading her helps to understand that there is no single or ideal way of reacting to them."

<sup>298</sup> "Escribe desde su experiencia, pero es la de millones, la de los otros, que somos todos. Habla de empatía y de dignidad, habla del sometimiento de los cuerpos de las mujeres, vamos, de feminismo."

Also in 2018, Capitán Swing published a third volume by Gay shortly after it started to circulate in the SC: *No es para tanto: Notas sobre la cultura de la violación*, translated by Gemma Deza. In the midst of social reactions generated by the #MeToo movement, this anthology of first-person essays tackling rape, assault, and harassment quickly joined the wave of feminist literature circulating in Spain at the time. Indeed, articles such as Leticia Blanco's "Un año del #MeToo: cómo el acoso y los abusos sexuales inundaron los libros" (2018, 18) discussed the space reclaimed by feminist literature in the contemporary literary market in the light of the most recent social movements. In this context, Belén Remacha described *No es para tanto* as an anthology of "women who wrote their own rape stories to help other women" (2018, n. p.). According to the reviewer, one of the key contributions of the volume edited by Gay was its visibilization of manifold types of sexual violence—such as child abuse, date rapes or the vulnerability of refugee women, among others—exerted upon different types of bodies.

Both Remacha and José S. de Monfort (2019) framed works such as Gay's *No es para tanto*, Joana Connors's *Te encontraré* or Jana Leo's *Violación Nueva York* in the context of a transnational struggle against rape culture. In the local context, de Monfort examined the impact of events such as the "La Manada" rape case (2016) or the rape and murder of Laura Luelmo (2018), which drew intense public scrutiny and resonated internationally through social media, encouraging hashtags such as #Cuéntalo or #NiUnaMenos. According to the reviewer, read together, the multiple forms of denounce and shared experiences of struggle that have already acquired international reach portray "a horrifying mosaic of what it means to be a woman today; a multiple mirror of the myriad threats that beset women just because they are women" (de Monfort 2019, n. p.).<sup>299</sup> Likewise, picking up the relevance of the testimonies collected in *No es para tanto*, fashion magazine *SModa* published Ally Sheedy's essay "Estasy", originally collected in the volume, where the actress charged against Hollywood's toxic culture of sexism (2018).

Following the impact of Gay's work in the TC, Alianza published *Mujeres difíciles* in 2019, translated by María Enguix. In this case, reviews published in *Deia* (EFE 2019a), *La Vanguardia* (Mataix 2019) and literature blog *Las lecturas de Miss Iracunda*

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<sup>299</sup> "Se trata de un mosaico horripilante de lo que significa ser mujer hoy en día; un espejo múltiple de las mil amenazas que acechan a las mujeres por el mero hecho de ser mujeres."

(Rodríguez 2019) emphasized the universality of the stories collected in the volume. In this regard, Mataix echoed the author's own view on the popular comments about the relatability of her characters and stories: "Everyone has moments when they are hurt and don't know how to survive and overcome that pain. It is more infuriating than frightening that many women see themselves reflected in the characters in the book because of the way they have suffered" (Gay in Mataix 2019).<sup>300</sup> In this regard, Rodríguez praised the author's refusal to victimize the women of her stories in spite of their suffering: "Gay does not entertain in the pain but rather shows us real characters with very human strengths and weaknesses. The author writes and describes the lives of all these women in a clear and photographic way. Reality, the truth, hurts. But it makes you stronger" (2019, n. p.)<sup>301</sup> More recently, Beatriz García (2021) has examined the role of trauma in Gay's work, arguing that the author's struggle as retold in her fiction and non-fiction bonds women readers in their shared experiences of violence and abuse.

While Gay's work has been received in the TC in the context of mainstream feminism mostly, her name and oeuvre are usually referenced in academic papers that examine contemporary feminist movements worldwide. Among these we may cite Álvaro Botías "Breve análisis del feminismo actual" (2019), Ignacio Álvarez Rodríguez's "Diez tesis sobre el feminismo del siglo XXI" (2019) and Lola Fernández Hernández "El feminismo como producto mediático: la paradoja Beyoncé" (2017).

Another author that has sparked the interest of contemporary publishers in Spain is bell hooks, who had never attracted the attention of mainstream readers. Indeed, until 2015, a total amount of 12 mentions of the author's name could be found in Spanish press media (source: Archive of the National Library of Spain). However, only from 2016 to 2020, the number significantly rises to 111. To begin with, in 2017 *Traficantes* published *El feminismo es para todo el mundo*. This publication was the result of the transatlantic endeavor of the five translators that contributed to the volume, namely Beatriz Esteban Agustí, Lina Tatiana Lozano Ruiz, Mayra Sofia Moreno, Maira Puertas Romo and Sara Vega González. Published in the midst of a feminist wave that saw its

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<sup>300</sup> "Todas las personas tienen momentos en los que les hace daño y no saben cómo sobrevivir y sobreponerse a ese daño. Es más exasperante que aterrador que muchas mujeres se vean reflejadas en los personajes del libro por la forma en la que han sufrido." (Quote originally published in Spanish).

<sup>301</sup> "Lo que hace Gay no es recrearse en el dolor sino mostrarnos personajes reales con fortalezas y flaquezas muy humanas. La autora escribe y describe las vidas de todas esas mujeres de manera clara y fotográfica. La realidad, la verdad, duele. Pero te hace más fuerte."

climax in the 2018 8M strike, the volume generated a considerable amount of reactions both in local newspapers as well as in online media. Periodicals such as *Diario de Navarra*, *Diario de noticias*, *El Día de Córdoba* and *Europa sur* published notices of the publication. Likewise, Imma Muñoz wrote a full review for *El Periódico* (2017), which she started by criticizing the late translation of hooks's work (*El feminismo es para todo el mundo* was published in Spain seventeen years after its publication in the SC). However, the reviewer emphasized the relevance of hooks's arguments with respect to the role of men in the feminist movement and the multiple forms of discrimination that intersected sexism. Following Muñoz's line of thought, feminist online magazine *Pikara* described *El feminismo es para todo el mundo* as "a map to find intersection points" [un mapa para encontrar puntos de intersección] (Sánchez Jiménez 2017). Indeed, Josue Sánchez Jiménez's review offered a revision of traditional intersections between gender, race and class in the light of hooks's positioning, foregrounding the relevance of the author's approach to the contemporary momentum. Both Muñoz and Sánchez Jiménez drew attention to the applicability of hooks's perspective to the current situation at a transnational level:

la traducción al castellano de *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* no llega a las librerías para recordar lo que pasaba o lo que hacía falta en el movimiento feminista del siglo XX en Estados Unidos; [...] sigue revelando las cosas que pasan y que hacen falta hoy en día y en todas partes. (Sánchez Jiménez 2017, n. p.)<sup>302</sup>

and "her book does not only speak about what was happening in the United States 50 years ago: unfortunately, 20 years ago she was talking about today. Not there, then, with them. Now, here, with everyone" (Muñoz 2017, n. p.).<sup>303</sup>

In this spirit, Máriam Martínez-Bascuñán (2018) disclosed the motives of the so-called fourth feminist wave in a comprehensive article published right before the international 8M feminist demonstrations. To illustrate her points, Bascuñán drew from the tenets of international thinkers, writers and activists spanning from Simone de Beauvoir to Mary

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<sup>302</sup> "the Spanish translation of *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* does not arrive to bookstores to remind us of what was happening or what was needed in the twentieth century US feminist movement; [...] it continues to reveal what is happening and what is needed today and everywhere."

<sup>303</sup> "el libro de hooks no solo habla de lo que pasaba en Estados Unidos hace 50 años: por desgracia, hace 20 años estaba hablando de hoy. No de allí, entonces, con ellas. De aquí, ahora, con todos."

Beard, Paul Preciado, Gayatri Spivak, Virgine Despentes, Judith Butler, Angela Davis or bell hooks, as she defended the necessity to bring forward alternative gazes to traditional hegemonic discourses both inside and outside feminism. In this spirit, she claimed that the Spanish society should follow the model of the US, where “the idea of equality has been interiorized as the way of being of society itself” (11).<sup>304</sup> Likewise, also in 2018, *Culturamas* rescued the translation of hooks’s “Mujeres negras. Dar forma a la teoría feminista”, originally published in *Otras inapropiables: Feminismos desde las fronteras* (2004), and published it independently in the section “Pensamiento” [Thought] of their website. Afroféminas has also written extensively about the author, with articles such as “bell hooks: ‘Lo más importante es lo que digo en mis libros, no quién soy’” (Afroféminas 2018), which presented a detailed account of hooks’s professional career and reviewed the main principles defended through her oeuvre and “Bell Hooks: para una pedagogía interseccional” (2019), where Andresa Ribeiro da Silva drew from “La teoría como práctica liberadora”—a translation of “Theory as Liberatory Practice” published in Colombia in 2019—to criticize contemporary education models and reclaim the necessity to introduce critical, reflective and deconstructive thinking in the classroom.

Further prove of the reach of hooks’s feminist theory in the TC is the publication of articles about her work in mainstream magazines such as *Harper’s Bazaar*, where Paka Díaz (2018) described her as an international referent in the contemporary feminist movement. While reviewing hooks’s work, Díaz was especially interested in debunking traditional prejudices against radical feminism, especially the popular idea that feminism is an anti-male movement. The divulgative character of Díaz’s text prevented her from looking into key insights to hooks’s theory, such as intersectional oppressions. However, the sole discussion of her work in the Spanish edition of a popular fashion magazine is indicative of the expanding influence and visibility of alternative feminist discourses in all dimensions of social life in the TC.

Likewise, while the translations of hooks’s work did not receive much attention in the academic sphere, her feminist theory was indeed a fundamental reference both in American Studies as well as in other research fields. In this respect, through the last years the Spanish academia has seen a considerable increase in the amount of

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<sup>304</sup> “EE UU ha interiorizado la idea de igualdad como una manera de ser de la sociedad misma.”

publications that combine social and cultural analyses. In this context, we may highlight Maya Del Puig Zalbidea Paniagua's comparative study of Ngozi Adichie's *Todos deberíamos ser feministas* (2015) and hooks's *El feminismo es para todo el mundo* (2000). Likewise, Alicia Herraiz Gutiérrez (2020) has examined gender roles in Ana Caro's *Valor, agravio y mujer* drawing from a theoretical framework that combines the theories of Judith Butler, bell hooks and Michel Foucault.

Significant of the future directions of transnational feminist movements is the recent translation of four texts by hooks, all published during 2020: *Teoría feminista: De los márgenes al centro*, translated by Ana Useros Martín and published by Traficantes de Sueños; *¿Acaso no soy yo una mujer? Mujeres negras y feminismo*—significantly, hooks's first essay on black feminism—, translated by Gemma Deza Guil and published by independent Basque house Consonni; *Funk sin límites: Un diálogo reflexivo*, translated by Javier Sáez and published by Bellaterra Edicions and *Enseñar a transgredir: La educación como práctica de la libertad*, translated by Marta Malo and published by Capitán Swing. While these works have received very limited critical attention, both *Teoría feminista* and *¿Acaso no soy yo una mujer?* appeared among the recommendations at the 2021 Literal book fair which, as a matter of fact, used Angela Davis's image in some of the promotional posters featuring the quote “Radical simply means ‘grasping things at the root’”<sup>305</sup> [Radical vol dir simplement anar a l'arrel de les coses].

Likewise, several online platforms did produce reviews or articles around the translations of hooks's works. Among these, Irene Bebop published a thorough analysis of *Teoría feminista* (2019) where she examined the author's perspective on intersectional feminism, which inevitably led her to revise traditional stereotypes assigned to the notion of family, men, labor and capitalism. In this context, and once more, Bebop emphasized the connections between hooks's feminism and the claims of contemporary Spanish activist:

A pesar de los años que nos separan de la publicación y de pertenecer a un contexto social completamente diferente al de la sociedad americana de la autora, son muchos los puntos en común, con la lucha feminista actual en

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<sup>305</sup> This is actually the original sentence pronounced by Davis, which was retrieved from Davis's *Women, Culture, & Politics* (1989, 14)



nuestro país. En algunos aspectos no hemos avanzado ni un solo milímetro desde los 70. (2019, n. p.)<sup>306</sup>

In this light, Beatriz Silva (2021) has discussed the relevance of black feminisms in the contemporary era, also arguing that hooks's reflections definitely apply to present times. In this case, Silva considers that the contemporary feminist movement has progressively accepted that other factors apart from gender govern the fundamentals of patriarchal oppression. Afroféminas, who have repeatedly shown a clear concern for the implementation of feminist perspectives in the Spanish educational system, have reviewed *Enseñar a transgredir*, bringing forward the necessity of reconsidering the notion of freedom in the contemporary society.

Another African American feminist writer whose works have recently entered the target system is Michele Wallace. In this case, it is Katakarak the publisher that has translated her masterpiece *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* as well as *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*. Both texts were translated into Spanish by Ivana Palidrk, the former rendered as *Macho Negro y el mito de la Supermujer* (2018) and the latter as *El blues de la invisibilidad. Teoría feminista negra y cultura popular* (2020). Despite the centrality of these works to feminist theory in the SC, they received no virtual attention in the TC. Perhaps as a result of the sudden interest in the author, neither press media nor academic circles have written significantly on Wallace or her work. Actually, only Beatriz Silva (2021) has published a review of *El blues de la invisibilidad*, where she discusses the volume parallelly to hooks's *¿Acaso no soy yo una mujer?* and *Teoría feminista*. According to Silva, this key volume has set a turning point in the black feminist fight, as it tackles fundamental concerns of the contemporary American—and probably global—society. As she explains, Silva chose to discuss the three aforementioned texts parallelly in order to bring forward the common ground of both authors and foreground the significance of alternative visions—black feminisms, in this case—to the global feminist and racist fight (2021, n. p.).

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<sup>306</sup> “Despite the years separating us from the volume and the fact that we belong to a social context completely different from the American society, we can find many common grounds with respect to the current feminist struggle in our country. In some aspects we have not advanced a single millimeter since the 70s.”

Likewise, the figure and fight of Angela Davis has received a renovated attention during the past years. Indeed, in the last five years twelve editions of her works have been published: five in Spanish, four in Basque and three in Catalan. As a matter of fact, the languages of translation of Davis's work already hint to the political interests involved in the circulation of the author's insights in local contexts. As for the Spanish translations, all of them were financed by independent publishers. To begin with, Trotta published the volume *Democracia de la abolición: prisiones, racismo y violencia* (2016) in collaboration with Philosophy professor Eduardo Mendieta, translated by Irene Fortea. The volume compiled two essays, namely “¿Están las prisiones obsoletas?” and “La democracia de la abolición: más allá del imperio, las prisiones y la tortura”, originally published in 2003 and 2005, respectively, as well as a number of interviews made by Mendieta to the author. *Democracia de la abolición* was reviewed in a number of print and online press media, which also picked up her visit to Arnaldo Otegi at the Logroño prison in February of that same year.

Pablo Ximénez de Sandoval, whose interview with Davis featured in the cover page of *Babelia* (2016), summarized her insights about the US prison complex, paying special attention to the author's criticism of Europe's population of imprisoned immigrants. Ximénez de Sandoval also discussed the writer's view on the #BlackLivesMatter movement, as she defended the need to place the focus on the perpetrators of racism, rather than the victims. In the light of the Trump presidency, the journalist also reflected Davis's argument for the need to compromise with other fights—all fights—against any form of discrimination or injustice. Eventually, this stance would be very much cited in later accounts of the activist's involvement in local political struggles, such as the Basque or the Catalan fight for self-determination. Likewise, Helios F. Garcés focused on Davis's intersectional approach to the Prison Industrial Complex:

las intersecciones producidas entre dominación racial, heteropatriarcal, las estrategias estatales de represión política y las agresiones corporales sufridas por las mujeres -especialmente por las no blancas- fuera y dentro de las prisiones han sido poco atendidas desde la crítica anticarcelaria. [...] Tal realidad explica algunos de los vehículos de transferencia entre violencia estatal y violencia

machista, así como nos empuja a penetrar en algunos puntos ciegos de la naturaleza estructural del patriarcado. (Garcés 2016, n. p.)<sup>307</sup>

According to Garcés, *Democracia de la abolición* was a clear candidate to become a reference text in the Spanish-speaking world, as it supplied the necessary tools to imagine a reality where prisons would no longer be necessary.

After her visit to Otegi in February 2016—which was unsuccessful, as she was not allowed to meet the prisoner—, manifold local newspapers picked up the event. Among these we can cite the reports published in *El Correo español* (Ugalde 2016), *Deia* (P. 2016), *Diario de noticias* (EFE 2016a), *Noticias de Gipuzkoa* (EFE 2016b), *La Rioja* (Europa Press 2016b) and *Naiz* (Salgado 2016). Likewise, Davis’s visit to the country was also reported by national press media such as *El Mundo* (Castro Villacañas 2016) and *20 Minutos* (Europa Press 2016a) and *Contextos* (Camacho 2016). These sources reported identified Davis as an open endorser of the “Free Otegi, Free Them All” campaign presented at the European Parliament. Most regional reports explained that Davis had taken all the necessary steps to be allowed into the prison, and that she was denied access by the local authorities in the last moment. Conversely, national newspapers *El Mundo* and *ABC* argued that despite having been advised about the limited chances of being allowed into the complex, Davis decided to show up at the prison door seeking media resonance: “The ‘Free Otegi’ collective (like her old-fashioned ‘Free Angela’) had informed her that she would surely be denied the meeting by the penitentiary institutions” (Belmonte 2016).<sup>308</sup> In this case, Javier Castro Villacañas sentenced that Davis was no longer what she used to be [“Davis ya no es lo que era] and harshly criticized Otegi’s and Davis’s common use of the term “political prisoners” to designate actual terrorists. According to Castro Villacañas, both figures personified a way of understanding politics that identified alleged goals of justice with violent thought.

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<sup>307</sup> “the intersections affecting racial and heteropatriarchal domination, state strategies of political repression and the physical aggressions suffered by women—especially non-white women—outside and inside prisons have received little attention from anti-prison critics. [...] Such a reality explains some of the vehicles of transfer between state violence and sexist violence, as well as it pushes us to penetrate into some blind spots of the structural nature of patriarchy.”

<sup>308</sup> “El colectivo ‘Free Otegi’ (como su viejuno ‘Free Angela’) le había informado de que seguramente Istituciones penitenciarias le denegaría el encuentro.”

During the spring of 2016, Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo published *Una historia de la conciencia: Ensayos escogidos*, where, as has already been discussed, Mireia Sentís collected 17 essays that reflected the authors' thought on diverse matters spanning from racism to blues or photography. Shortly after its publication in the TC Capitán Swing reprinted Esther Donato's translation of Davis's autobiography, whose last edition had been published in 1977. In this case, the autobiography came with a prologue written by Otegi. The circulation of these volumes also coincided with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Black Panther Party which, all together, rekindled interest in the figure of Davis.

In this line, Maria Colera published a thoughtful interview to the author which started by reviewing key insights in her works (not only the most recent translations, but also volumes like *Mujeres, raza y clase*) and continued to discuss the author's view on contemporary international conflicts—such as Ferguson, Palestina, or the Basque Country—as well as her hopes and predictions for the future. The interview offered profound analyses of Davis's understanding of intersectionality, womanhood, race and freedom, as she also argued for the key role of literature, art and imagination in social and political struggles worldwide. Other media, such as *Pikara* (Sangre fucsia 2016), focused on certain aspects of her fight, such as her identity as a lesbian or her open defence of the rights of trans people. Likewise, Raül Jiménez (2016) wrote a very positive critique of both *Autobiografía* and *Una historia de la conciencia*, arguing that despite none of the volumes was an easy read, they constituted the foundations of an unwavering activism. Jiménez's argument about the relevance of Davis's work in the current international juncture paralleled previous reviews of the works of other black feminist authors that had been recently rendered into Spanish, such as Audre Lorde or bell hooks, among others. Mari Àngels Cabré, writing for *El País*, questioned the choice of Arnaldo Otegi to write the prologue to the activist's autobiography, although she did acknowledge the legitimacy of his arguments about the intersectional oppression historically perpetuated on black women.

While neither *El Mundo* nor *ABC* reviewed any of the two translations, both newspapers wrote on Davis in the light of the renovated interest in her character. In an article for *El Mundo*, Darío Prieto discussed the events that had led to the political activist's incarceration, as he recalled the impact of the author's iconic image in mainstream social movements during the 70s. In a similar stance to that asserted by Javier Castro

Villacañas, who several months before had argued that “Davis was no longer what she used to be” (2016, n. p.), Prieto concluded that “Perhaps Davis’ true value is precisely as a stylized icon on a badge or a T-shirt” (2016, n. p.).<sup>309</sup> On a similar note, Rosa Belmonte published an opinion article in *ABC* where she ironically criticized Davis’s looks and diminished her ideals: “I believe that people live in that bushiness. [...] When people don’t change their hairstyle they get old better. [...] Angela Davis now looks like Rita Moreno, but she still wears the same hair. Also the same communism. It is touching that she continues to defend that dead dog of which Solzhenitsyn spoke” (2016, 12).<sup>310</sup> As a matter of fact, Belmonte referred again to the author’s hairstyle in a later publication for the same newspaper where she condemned the expanding criticism of racist advertising campaigns: “There are also those who see racism in the Cola Cao ad because at the end a black guy with Angela Davis’ messy hair comes out of the glass shaking the drink. The new version of ‘aquel negrito del África tropical’” (Belmonte 2017, 12).<sup>311</sup>

Capitán Swing has also recently published Angela Davis’s *La libertad es una batalla constante: Ferguson, Palestina y los cimientos de un movimiento* (2017), translated by Ethel Odriozola, Alejandro Reyes and Luz Gómez. According to Marta Moreira, the essays collected in *La libertad es una batalla constante* “do not reveal much new about the African American philosopher’s thought, but they are an introduction to one of the most fascinating figures in the defence of minorities” (2017, n. p.).<sup>312</sup> In her review of the volume, Moreira argues that the reception of the translation was partly overshadowed by Davis’s visit to Barcelona only a week after the Catalan Referendum on Self-determination was held—the volume was published during the fall of 2017. During her stay at the Catalan capital, Davis presented the volume and gave a talk

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<sup>309</sup> “Quizás el verdadero valor de Davis es precisamente el de un icono estilizado en un pin o una camiseta”

<sup>310</sup> “Creo que en esa frondosidad vive gente. [...] Cuando la gente no se cambia de peinado rejuvenece mejor. [...] Angela Davis se parece ahora a Rita Moreno, pero sigue llevando el mismo pelo. También el mismo comunismo. Es conmovedor que continúe defendiendo ese perro muerto del que hablaba Solzhenitsyn.”

<sup>311</sup> “También hay quien ve racismo en el anuncio del Cola Cao porque al final sale del vaso (y agitando la bebida) un chico negro con los pelos de Angela Davis. La nueva version de aquel negrito del África tropical.”

<sup>312</sup> “no revelan grandes novedades del pensamiento de la filósofa afroamericana, pero son una introducción a una de las figuras más fascinantes de la defensa de las minorías.”

entitled “Revolution Today” [La revolució avui] at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB). According to the reviewer, virtually all the headlines related to Davis published in Spain at the time focused on her open support to the Catalan right to self-determination. However, Moreira still argued that the crucial tenets of *La libertad es una batalla constante* were not to be overlooked. While Moreira placed the focus on Davis’s depiction of the intersections permeating social fights, Andrea Romanos, writing for Catalan web site *Hemisfèria* (Romanos 2017), combined some of the insights present in her work with the author’s arguments at the conference in Barcelona to conclude that the struggle for freedom necessarily implied fighting against all kinds of injustices all around the globe.

Regarding her talk in Barcelona, which significantly attracted more attention than her latest publication in Spanish, while Elena Hevia (2017, n. p.) considered that Davis had tried to avoid taking a clear position in the Catalan conflict, Blanca Cía (2017, n. p.) and Matías Néspolo (Néspolo 2017) argued that the author had clearly endorsed the Catalan right to self-determination.<sup>313</sup> The Spanish press also highlighted Davis’s open condemnation of police repression during 1-O, which she compared to police brutality against black men in the United States. Hevia took the chance to review the activist’s endorsement of independent causes in Spain, specially emphasizing her bond with Otegi: “Both share their past endorsement of armed struggle, a term that the African American writer today handles without guilt, justifying the revolutionary atmosphere of the time with Vietnam, the African liberation wars and the Cuban revolution as a backdrop”.<sup>314</sup> Despite the obvious interest of the author’s view on local conflicts, which was vastly picked up by Spanish press media, Clara Felis (2017, n. p.) defended the need to relocate the actual focus of her fight which, according to Felis, revolved around five main axes: black feminism, restorative justice, working class development, the renewal of the historical vocabulary for Black Freedom and the creation of a new Marxist movement against racism.

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<sup>313</sup> “no se lo pensó ni un segundo para afirmar que todos los pueblos tienen derecho a la autodeterminación.”

<sup>314</sup> “Ambos tienen en su pasado la aceptación de la lucha armada, un término que la afroamericana hoy maneja sin culpa, justificando el ambiente revolucionario de aquel momento con Vietnam, las guerras de liberación africanas y la revolución cubana como telón de fondo.”

In the academic sphere, feminist discourses have been very much influenced by organizations such as the Institute of Feminist Research of the Complutense University founded in 1988 (with Celia Amorós, Ana de Miguel and Amelia Valcárcel as main exponents) as well as the different research centers, groups and institutes of specific territorial areas. In Catalonia, the Interuniversity Institute of Women's and Gender Studies [Institut Interuniversitari d'Estudis de Dones i Gènere], founded during the decade of 2000, is one of the main exponents regarding the creation and transmission of knowledge within this field of research. Likewise, recent approaches to Black Studies in Spain have favored feminist and intersectional readings of both contemporary and classic texts:

The institutionalization of Black Studies has come about through a gradual but assertive shift within Spanish academia over the last two decades. Mainly coming from either Anglophone or Francophone disciplines, the impact of Black Studies has been crucial for developing a multicultural agenda, both in specialized research and in new curricular trends for many Spanish scholars in recent times. My main argument ties up the proliferation of Black Studies scholarship in this country to the adoption and development of new methodologies that attempt to cover a wide spectrum, from race-oriented to intersectionality theories. (Gallego Durán 2016, 153)

In this context, we should consider the continued work of BJC in publishing scholarly studies on North American Literature. As has already been discussed, since its foundation in 2002 the collection has published both critical studies on specific areas of North American Literature and translations of primary texts from this literary tradition (see page 399). Among the most recent publications, we can highlight Vicent Cucarella-Ramón's *Sacred Femininity and the Politics of Affect in African American Women's Fiction* (2018), a book-length study where the author examines dynamics between religious sacredness and the black female aesthetic in Hannah Crafts's *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* and Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*.

Likewise, volumes from the collection tackling literary representations of identity and womanhood in the United States usually include chapters on African American women's literature. Among these, we can find "Female Friendship and a Narration of

Self-Discovery in Twentieth-Century Southern Women's Writing" (Niewiadomska-Flis 2012), which comparatively studies the reformulations of female comradeship displayed in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Gail Godwin's *The Odd Woman*, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, and Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster*; "La reinención de Estados Unidos a través de las escritoras y críticas afroamericanas contemporáneas" (Gallego Durán 2013) and "Sureña y subalterna: narrando la rebelión de la mujer en Alice Walker" (Varela Zapata 2012). These works are hereby cited together inasmuch as they share a manifest gender perspective to the study of a specific literary tradition. Parallely to this approach, other authors who have collaborated in volumes for BJC have studied works by black women writers drawing from different frameworks. Among these, we may cite "Lori Tharp's *Kinky gazpacho*" (Ramos 2015), which studies the author's memoir in the context of African America travel writing about Spain, "Life writing in poetry and prose: Natasha Trethewey's personal and national revelations" and "The self elsewhere: Alice Walker's identity in the wider world", both of which are included in the volume *Constructing the Self: Essays on Southern Life-Writing* (Rueda Ramos and Jiménez Placer 2017). Likewise, Márgara Averbach's *Contra la muerte en vida: Literatura y cine contemporáneos estadounidenses e instituciones totales* (2017) includes several chapters addressing issues such as the African gaze in Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, the institution of family in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Lorraine Hansberry's portrayal of the United States during the twentieth century in her 1970 play *Les Blancs*.

Likewise, the volume of works that have taken intersectional approaches to the study of feminist and women's literature has dramatically increased through the last years. Papers such as "Transdeseantes: de la heterosexualidad obligatoria al deseo lesbiano" (Mateo Gallego 2011), "Topografías domésticas en el imaginario femenino. Una visión comparativa, transnacional y hemisférica" (Durán Giménez-Rico, et al. 2015), "Feminismos periféricos, feminismos-otros: Una genealogía feminista decolonial por reivindicar" (Medina Martín 2013), "De los márgenes al centro: una aplicación del feminismo postcolonial a los derechos humanos" (Rodríguez Prieto 2015), "Polymorphous Eroticism: New Paths yo Survival in Black Women's Writings" (Castro Borrego 2016) and "African and African American Women Writers: Between Violence and Healing" (Castro Borrego, et al. 2020), among many others, have nurtured Spanish academia with general perspectives on contemporary feminist intersectionality theories.



In this context, endeavors to study black women's literature from the aforementioned approaches have only multiplied during the last years. To cite some instances of this production, Mar Gallego Durán (2016) has studied the search for alternative models for black female identities in two classic novels, namely *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* by Ntozake Shange and *Bailey's Café* by Gloria Naylor as well as the more contemporary *Home* by Toni Morrison; Silvia Martínez-Falquina (2020) has brought forward a comparative analysis of Toni Morrison's and Louise Erdrich's fiction from a transethnic, intersectional perspective; Vicent Cucarella-Ramon (2017) has examined the reconstruction of feminist transnational subjectivities in Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet* and Toni Morrison's *Desdemona*; Yeni Hechavarría Urquiaga and Yadelys Garriga Cruz (2015) have offered a characterization of the valuating subjects in Alice Walker's poetry; Aitor Ibarrola-Armendáriz (2012) has revised gender, class and racial issues in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Maika Aira Gallardo (2013, 2014a and 2014b) has analyzed the representation of women and gender violence in Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls* (2013, 2014a, 2014b).

Likewise, as noted by Mar Gallego Durán (2016, 154), Black Masculinity Studies have also profoundly marked Spanish scholars' endeavors in recent years. Proof of this is the publication of works such as "Black Masculinity and Plantation Patriarchy in Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*" (Lobodziec 2015) as well as the collaborative volumes *Hombres soñados por escritoras de hoy: Figuras masculinas en la literatura norteamericana* (Alsina Rísquez, Carabí and Andrés González 2009) and *Masculinidades alternativas en el mundo de hoy* (Carabí and Armengol 2015). The volume edited by professors Alsina Rísquez, Carabí and Andrés González offers a transethnic examination of the representations of masculinity in North American literature through nine studies written by some of the most reputed scholars in the field of North American Studies in Spain. Among these, we can find Gallego Durán's insights on "The Men of Brewster Place", Manuel Cuenca's revision of black masculine identities in *Push* and Ozieblo Rajkowska's comparative study of the masculine identity crisis in the plays of Suzan-Lori Parks, Paula Vogel y Cherríe Moraga. *Masculinidades alternativas en el mundo de hoy* introduces a series of interdisciplinary approaches to Masculinity Studies.

Through the previous pages we have discussed a representative selection of the work that is currently being carried out in the field of Black Women's Studies and North American Studies in Spain. However, even if intersectional and feminist approaches to

the study of literature definitely occupy a major place in contemporary scholarship, other aspects of the works of African American women writers have been brought to the fore in recent years. For instance, Morrison's novels have been exhaustively studied paying attention to issues such as the representation of identity (López Ramírez 2013 and Villa Jiménez 2017), trauma (Ibarrola 2014), motherhood (López Ramírez 2014 and 2015) and child abuse (López Ramírez 2016 and Ibarrola-Armendariz 2018). Likewise, studies have been published on authors such as Octavia Butler (Mesegué Molina 2016) (Barba Guerrero 2019), Jacqueline Woodson (Reyes Torres 2012), Suzan-Lori Parks (Rodríguez Gago 2012), Elizabeth Keckley (Gimeno Pahissa 2012) or Hannah Crafts (Cucarella-Ramón 2015a, 2015b and 2019), who remained relatively absent from Spanish scholarship until recently. Representations of memory and trauma have also been the subject of two doctoral dissertations: "Dimensiones traumáticas en la ficción de Toni Morrison" (Yagüe González 2016) and "The Call of the Past: Trauma and Cultural Memory in Contemporary African American Literature" (San José Rico 2013), which examines history and myth in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, repression in *Beloved*, and recovered memory in *Song of Solomon* and David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*. Also, Maria Rocío Cobo Piñero has produced prolific work on the influence of music—jazz and blues, more precisely—in black women's writings (2014, 2015a and 2015b).

Recently, both the Spanish academia and some independent artisans, in the words of Teresa Gómez Reus (2015, 237), have taken an interest in the poetry of African American women. Pioneer studies such as the aforementioned "Black Women Through Alice Walker's Poetry (A Characterization of the Valuating Subjects of her Poems)" (Cruz and Garriga 2015) as well as "Les paraules que ens manquen. Audre Lorde: Poesia i injustícia hermenèutica" (Pétriz Haddad 2021)—published in Catalan—and "Women's Poetry that Heals across Borders: A Trans-American Reading of the Body, Sexuality, and Love" (Núñez-Puente 2021) have opened the door to a much unexamined line of research in Spain. Likewise, in 2017 the literary magazine *Ánfora Nova* dedicated its issue 109-110 to contemporary African American poetry. The issue included the STs as well as José de María Romero's translations of poems by seven key African American authors, namely Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Amiri Baraka, Audre Lorde, Nikki Giovanni, Lucille Clifton and Tracy K. Smith.

In 2019 an anthology of Maya Angelou's poetry was published by Valparaíso Ediciones, a young independent publishing house that has quickly become an international reference in the field of poetry in Spanish. Even if the volume was considerably overlooked by the Spanish printed press—only *El Cultural* (Valverde 2020) reviewed the volume—, online communities and literary web pages received the volume with generalized acclaim. Both Carlos Alcorta (2020) and Santos Domínguez (2020) praised the publisher's endeavor to circulate in Spanish Angelou's complete poetry. Likewise, Alcorta, Domínguez and Álvaro Valverde, the latter writing for *El Cultural*, foregrounded the literary quality of Angelou's poetry and praised the accuracy of Nieves García Prados's translation. However, the actual focus of these reviews was the relationship between Angelou's life and multifaceted career with her literary production. In this context, Alcorta's review accentuated not only the literary worth of this contribution to translated literature in Spain but also the significance of the political and social implications of Angelou's life work.

Also in 2019, Audre Lorde's poetry collection *The Black Unicorn* was translated into Spanish and published by Ediciones Torremozas, a reputed independent publisher founded in 1982 dedicated to the dissemination of women's works in Spain. The text was published in a bilingual edition translated by Jimena Jiménez Real. While it is true that Lorde's work has never raised much attention among mainstream press media, her translations have been very well received by specialized readers, especially in the field of feminist and LGTBIQ+ literature. Indeed, *El unicornio negro* was reviewed in online sites such as *Revista R@mbla* (Sigüenza 2019a), *Kaosenlared* (Sigüenza 2019b), *Parole de queer* (Nabal 2019), *La Publicidad* (Redacción 2019) and *Efeminista* (Sigüenza 2020).

In his review of the collection, Ricardo Nabal foregrounds the exceptionality of the publisher's decision to translate Lorde's poetry:

¿Un poemario de Audre Lorde? ¿Por qué ahora? ¿Por qué Audre Lorde en una colección de poetas mujeres casi todas en lengua castellana? Lorde ha forjado y revisado nuestra forma de hablar y pensar desde el feminismo negro de los sesenta y algunos de sus versos y textos son verdaderos lemas del movimiento

feminista como aquel de “Las herramientas del amo nunca desmontarán su casa”. ¿Por qué no se hizo antes? (2019, n. p.)<sup>315</sup>

As a sort of reply to Nabal’s interrogations, Carmen Sigüenza, who reviewed *El unicornio negro* for several online platforms, discussed the increasing visibility of Lorde’s work in Spain, especially after the 2019 8M feminist demonstrations in the country, where banners with the poet’s face were used. Likewise, Sigüenza drew attention to the difficulties involved in translating Lorde’s poetry as discussed by Marta Porpetta, chief editor of Ediciones Torremozas, and the translator herself. These involved the lack of punctuation, her particular use of capital letters and “the will to subvert grammatical and discursive structures tightly linked to the social and political oppression suffered by African American women” (Jiménez Real in Sigüenza 2019b). As hinted by the reviewer, the complexity of her language may be one of the reasons why Lorde’s poetry had never been translated in any Spanish-speaking country before.

Following the endeavor of Ediciones Torremozas, Visor Libros published in 2020 a translated anthology of Lorde’s poetical production, edited and translated by Michel Lobelle. The volume was titled *Entre nosotras*, which paralleled the title of her 1978 collection *Between Our Selves*, and included a selection of texts spanning from her early production to those written during the final months of her life, published posthumously in the SC in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*. In this case, the volume did not receive much attention by any print or online media, with the exception of three reviews published in *Núvol* (Mur 2020), *Animal Sospechoso* (Roa 2020) and *Zenda* (2020). Sincerely enough, Gerard E. Mur started his thorough review by admitting his lack of familiarity with the author, whose poetry collection he had spotted at the notice board of the Catalan bookstore La Central. The journalist continued to signal the parallelism between Lorde’s and Maria-Mercè Marçal’s poetry; a dialogue that had been previously examined by María Corniero Fernández, the translator of *Sister, Outsider* and Lobelle herself. The reviewer praised the representativeness of Lobelle’s selection with respect to Lorde’s oeuvre, as well as the poet’s tone and lyricism. He also (re)interpreted the anthology in the light of recent developments in the United States, such as the spread

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<sup>315</sup> “A collection of poems by Audre Lorde? Why now? Why Audre Lorde in a collection of women poets who are mostly Spanish-speaking? Since the black feminist fight of the sixties, Lorde has forged and revised our way of speaking and thinking. Some of her verses and texts, such as “The master’s tools will never dismantle his house”, are true slogans of the feminist movement. Why wasn’t this done earlier?”

reach of the #BlackLivesMatter movement after George Floyd's assassination that same year. Mur concluded:

La força indiscutible de Lorde hauria de despertar ara—en plena revolta per la justícia racial—la lucidesa puntual d'alguns assessors. L'obra de Lorde es mereix una revifada. Aquest és el seu (nou) moment. “Entre nosotras” i “Para cada una de vosotras” són poemes que s'haurien de difondre, fer córrer. Lorde és una d'aquelles autores que, de sobte, amb valentia, intel·ligentment, podrien apareixer en una lletra (o un storie) de Beyoncé, implicada (a distància) en la revolta (en aquest últim “Juneteenth” ha publicat el tema “Black Parade”). Pensar això, però, és ingenu. Alguns la poden llegir com una poeta eixordadora, massa combativa, incòmoda.<sup>316</sup>

Following Mur's line of thought, Juan Pablo Roa argued that his main goal in discussing Lorde's anthology was to claim visibility for the author's work in Spain without resorting to the usual categories imposed by the latest sociopolitical trends. However, the reviewer acknowledged the problematic endeavor of separating her poetry from her personal standpoints, as he argued that Lorde, together with Adrienne Rich and Marilyn Hacker were key contemporary poets as well as pillars of “the canon of contemporary feminist theory” [el canon de la teoría feminista contemporánea] (Roa 2020, n. p.). While *Zenda* also discussed Lorde's key role in the articulation of contemporary feminism, the magazine's review emphasized the contemporaneity of the poems collected in *Entre nosotras*: “today, Lorde continues to be a living, burning reference. Her words sparkle from the past and reach the present to continue to have an impact; a present that continues to need her” (2020, n. p.).<sup>317</sup>

BJC has also contributed to the dissemination of black women's poetry in Spain by publishing Rita Dove's *Thomas y Beulah* (2020, trans. Margara Averbach)—the first

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<sup>316</sup> “Lorde's undisputed strength should now—in the midst of a racial justice revolt—awaken the punctual lucidity of some advisors. Lorde's work deserves a revival. This is her (new) moment. “Entre nosotras” and “Para cada una de vosotras” are poems that should be circulated. Lorde is one of those authors who, suddenly, bravely, intelligently, could appear in one of Beyonce's lyrics (or stories), who has (distantly) been part of the revolt (this last Juneteenth she released the single “Black Parade”). Still, to believe something like this is naïve, as some may still read her as a thunderous poet, too combative, uncomfortable.”

<sup>317</sup> “hoy Lorde sigue constituyendo una referente viva, ardiente. Sus palabras centellean desde el pasado y llegan al presente para seguir incidiendo; a un presente continúa necesitandola.”

translation published in the TC of the US poet laureate's work. The volume was published after Dove visited Spain in 2019 with the event of the XXII Festival Barcelona Poesia, where she was invited to read her poems at the Palau de la Música. While the 2020 translation of *Thomas and Beulah* had no virtual impact on mainstream readership, most press media did pick up the poet's participation in the Catalan festival. Indeed, after the traditional poetry reading held at the Palau, Elena Hevia (2019) concluded that she had been the star of the ceremony: "Undoubtedly, the highlight of the evening was the participation of Rita Dove. The undisputed star of the event, the Ohio poet and Pulitzer Prize winner, is, like Mashile and Sönmez, a reference in the struggle for human rights" (Hevia 2019, n. p.).<sup>318</sup> Articles published in *El País* (Agències 2019), *ABC* (M. 2019) and *La Razón* (Sala 2019) emphasized the diversity and hybridity of voices as well as the reivindicative spirit of the festival. In this light, Rita Dove was cited together with South African poet and activist Legoban Mashille, Palestine journalist Rafeef Ziadah, among others, as referent political, social and literary figures. Some of Dove's poems have also been translated by Pedro Larrea and published together with the STs in *Poéticas. Revista de estudios literarios*. These include "Esta vida" and "Casualidad", originally published in *The Yellow House on the Corner* as "This Life" and "Happenstance"; "Maternidad" and "Pastoral", from *Thomas and Beulah* and "Lamentaciones", included in *Mothe Love*.

As has been evidenced through the chapter, the inescapable connection between the works of African American women writers and the current momentum of international fourth wave feminisms has brought to the fore the contributions of these authors which are resonating at a global level. Indeed, the poignant circulation of black feminist works in Spanish has not only evidenced the necessity to take interdisciplinary approaches to the study of these texts (and the sociopolitical realities they reflect), but it has also generated a growing feeling of empathy and sorority that tightly links cultural and political manifestations transnationally.

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<sup>318</sup> "Lo mejor de la noche fue sin duda la participación de Rita Dove, la estrella indiscutible de la velada, la poeta de Ohio y premio Pulitzer, es también como Mashile y Sönmez un referente en la lucha por los derechos humanos."

## 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The complexities imbricated in processes of reception of a literature permeated by a sociocultural reality so different from that of the TC are numerous and manifold. However, recollecting the backdrop of the studies presented through Part III, it is an undeniable fact that recent international endeavors are evidencing the growing interest in studying the different forms of circulation of non-dominant literatures in translation. These undertakings are essential to understand more general dynamics between center and periphery as well as processes of canon formation.

Chapter one focused on the study of the translation history of African American women's literature in Spain so as to explore the different factors involved in decisions governing the translation, publication and circulation of texts in a literary system. I started by providing a general overview of the evolution of the Spanish book market from the second half of the twentieth century to present day, which highlighted the most relevant developments in the country's literary market and publishing industry. This preliminary work supplied a contextual framework to draw the Spanish history of translations of African American women's literature.

Chapter two turned to the study of contexts of comparison and frames of reference in relation to the circulation of African American women's literature in the TC. Rosengren's mentions technique was used to trace author mentions in sources of journalistic and academic criticism with the aim of drawing an overall picture of the main features of development of the literary frame of reference of Spanish reviewers and critics. In this context, the mentions technique offered a sensitive quantitative instrument to measure fluctuations in the positioning of authors within the literary repertoires of reviewers in the TC.

Finally, chapter three examined the reception of African American women's literature in the national context. This was described by reconstructing the values that underlie judgements in different peritexts, thereby understood as sources of reception of the source literature. In this context, the research conducted through the third chapter delved into the transformation of meaning and the changing values resulting from the dialogue between the SC and the TC in relation to the set of texts which are the object of my study.

The data examined through chapters one, two and three evidenced the influence of external factors such as trends in national book markets, literary prizes and globalization, among others, on the reception of a foreign literature by a target community. However, this study also evidenced the fact that agents in the Spanish publishing industry are now making considerable efforts to rescue indispensable pieces and spread the circulation of translated works by contemporary authors. These new trends will hopefully redress or supplement the traditional biased and partial representation of a fundamental domain within the larger framework of US and universal literature.



## **PART IV**

### **THE TRANSLATION OF LINGUISTIC VARIATION: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SPANISH TRANSLATIONS OF *THE COLOR PURPLE* AND *BELOVED***



# 1. AN APPROXIMATION TO THE LITERARY USE OF BLACK ENGLISH IN NORTH AMERICAN FICTION

In literature, dialect can usually be observed in dialogues and to a lesser extent in the novel's narrative voice. This leads us to consider the literary use of "feigned orality", that is, any written text or piece of text that tries to reproduce oral speech, most usually a conversation. According to Michael J. Toolan (1988, 249-250), "no such single architect stands behind real interaction, and concomitantly there is a covert monologue underlying fictional dialogue of a kind impossible in natural talk". Toolan's remark draws attention to the non-spontaneous character of dialogue in literature, which parallels the use of other literary elements to represent reality in fiction. These devices are purposefully used to signal an element of difference in the characterization of certain situations or characters.

Much scholarship has been written on the limitations in the literary use of dialect. Nelson W. Francis argues that "the literary dialect, by its very nature, has certain limitations, and that it can never be authentic as a full and adequate representation, but can at best merely suggest authenticity" (1958, 540-541). Drawing from this notion, Ramos Pinto considers that "the degree of linguistic mimicry depends on the author's aesthetic, narrative, thematic, stylistic or functional objectives" (2009, 292). That is, to Ramos Pinto, the literary recreation of dialect does not intend to fully represent reality, but rather to imbricate the text with an element of difference that can be motivated by diverse linguistic or extralinguistic factors.

In his study of the literary use of Black English—also known as African American Vernacular English or AAVE—, William Dahill-Baue points to James Weldon Johnson's preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, where he articulates the dilemma of black writers "in the seeming impossibility of adopting an authorial voice that neither ignores the power of Black English in deference to Standard English, nor invalidates Black English by misrepresenting it" (Dahill-Baue 1996, 463). In his preface, Johnson urges black American writers

to find a form that will express the racial spirit by symbols from within rather than by symbols from without, such as the mere mutilation of English spelling

and pronunciation; a form that is freer and larger than dialect [...] expressing the imagery, the idioms, the peculiar turns of thought, and the distinctive humor and pathos too, of Negro. ([1922] 2008, 41-42)

Lisa Cohen Minnick (2007, 2-3) argues that the first instances of linguistic varieties of spoken English incorporated into literary texts were used by Geoffrey Chaucer when he differentiated between the dialects spoken by the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*. Thus, Chaucer initiated a tradition of resorting to literary dialect as a marker of the characters' social status. However, it was not until the nineteenth century when dialect began to appear more frequently in works by American authors. At that time, the literary use of dialect was usually identified with "a component of humorous writing" (Blair 1983, xi). Actually, Blair argues that prior to the decade of 1830 "few American writers showed much interest or ability in trying to demonstrate authentic popular speech" (1983, xxiv).

In relation to this, Sanz Jiménez (2020) highlights the influence of nineteenth-century English literature in the development of a tradition of literary dialect in North American novels. Among many others, Sanz Jiménez has discussed the influence of Walter Scott's *Waverly*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. In her doctoral dissertation on the translation of dialect, Tello Fons (2011) has also examined the use of literary dialect in nineteenth-century English novels *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, *Stalky & Co.* by Rudyard Kipling and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll.

As for the literary use of BE, the history of American literature written in black dialect also dates back to at least the middle of the nineteenth century. Initially, writers of slave narratives tried to adhere to standard norms in their writings looking for acceptance among the general (white) public. However, already in 1853 William Wells Brown used elements of BE in *Clotel: Or, The President's Daughter* such as phonological simplification, uninflected verb forms and copula omission:

"Dat may be," replied Pompey; "But now you is only thirty years old; dat is what marsers says you is to be."

"I know I is more den dat," responded the man.

“I knows nothing about dat,” said Pompey; “but when you get in de market, an anybody axe you how old you is, an you tell ‘em forty-five, marsers will tie you up an gib you de whip like smoke. But if you tell ‘em dat you is only thirty, den he wont.”

“Well den, I guess I will only be thirty when dey axe me,” replied the chattel.

“What your name?” inquired Pompey.

([1853] 2012, 10-11)

Likewise, Harriet Beecher Stowe used eye dialect (i.e. nonstandard spelling to reproduce oral features of dialect on the written page) to try to recreate black oral speech in her world-famous *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Harriet E. Wilson’s *Our Nig* (1859), the first novel published by an African American in the United States (*Clotel* was first published in England), used black English in its treatment of black characters in the North:

“Come into the house with me,” implored aunt Abby.

“I ain’t going in any more,” sobbed the child.

“What will you do?” asked aunt Abby.

“I’ve got to stay out here and dia. I ha’n’t got no mother, no home. I wish I was dead.”

“Poor thing,” muttered Aunt Abby.

([1859] 2005, 27)

These representations of dialectal variation set black speech apart from standard language, and were primarily used to give authenticity to dialogue voiced by folk characters. As a consequence of the increasing immigration and racial heterogeneity in the Post-War period, interest in the literary representations of linguistic diversity increased (Sanz Jiménez 2020, 85). A classic example of this is Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), which ventured to portray a range of nonstandard English varieties, including the language spoken by black characters. Some critics have argued that Twain’s work opened the doors for black dialect to be used by African American writers in the twentieth century. According to Arnold Rampersad, by

trying to reproduce black speech in his novel Twain “endowed dialect with a degree of prestige unheard of in black fiction until recent times” (1984, 47). On the other hand, other critics, including Toni Morrison, condemned the stereotypes reproduced in Jim’s character, including the use of eye dialect to portray the features of the Missouri negro dialect in his speech. Jim, as well as other minor slave characters, make use of this dialect, which strongly differs from the Pike County dialect, the most prominent variant in the novel. The following passage illustrates Twain’s use of eye dialect for Jim’s character and reflects the differences between Huck’s and Jim’s speech:

It was getting gray daylight now. Pretty soon he gapped and stretched himself and hove off the blanket, and it was Miss Watson’s Jim! He bounced up and stared at me wild. Then he drops down on his knees, and puts his hands together and says: I bet I was glad to see him. I says:

“Hello, Jim!” and skipped out.

“Doan’ hurt me—don’t! I hain’t ever done no harm to a ghos’. I alwuz liked dead people, en done all I could for ‘em. You go en git in de river agin, whah you b’longs, en doan’ do nuffn to Ole Jim, ‘at ‘uz awluz yo’ fren’.”

([1884] 2016, 31)

Likewise, eye dialect was also used in Frances E. W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy: Or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892):

“Did you see de fish in de market dis mornin’? Oh, but dey war splendid, jis’ as fresh, as fresh kin be.”

“That’s the ticket,” said Robert, as a broad smile overspread his face.

“I’ll see you later.”

“Good mornin’, boys,” said another servant on his way to market. “How’s eggs dis mornin’?”

“Fust rate, fust rate,” said Tom Anderson. “Bob’s got it down fine.”

(1892, 154)

In the twentieth century, both black and white writers continued to experiment with the literary use of BE in their works. Most notably, William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the*

*Fury* incorporated morpho-syntactic and lexical features of the Southern black dialect for the characters of Dilsey and Luster. Other works by Faulkner, such as the short story “That Evening Sun” also incorporated black characters who made use of dialect. Critics have praised Faulkner’s interest and ability to reproduce dialectal speech in his works. In relation to this, Toni Morrison considered that Faulkner was “the only [white] writer who took black people seriously” (in Dreifus 1994, 73). However, some critics have questioned the author’s linguistic aptitude. Among this, we may refer to Edwin R. Hunter’s radical contention that “Faulkner is not by intention or in any scientific way a recorder of dialect; indeed, he might be more properly called a neglecter of it, perhaps because he himself is so used to it as to be relatively indifferent to it” (1973, 235).

A series of plays by black women writers produced during the first half of the twentieth century also evidence the varied uses of literary black dialect. Eulalie Spence’s *Undertow* (1929), set in Harlem, exemplifies the transfer of vernacular to the urban North. In the play, Hattie, a Harlem resident, uses expressions such as “‘cept” for “accept” and “sence” for “since”. Georgia Douglas Johnson’s *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925) also contains features of BE. Actually, a good number of folk plays produced at the time incorporated black dialect in their characters’ speaking voice. Some examples of these are Jean Toomer’s *Balo* (1924), John Matheus’s *‘Cruiter* (1926) and Randolph Edmonds’s *Bad Man* (1934).

However, the most prolific representations of BE in literary works in the modern era have come from African American writers. During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, writers faced a dilemma in their search for a genuine form of expression, as they also wanted to avoid the association with plantation stereotypes. As Michael Grimwood states, “to be published, [black writers] had had to adopt one of two equally dishonest voices: they could pass for white, writing in colorless, genteel English, foreign to their own roots; or they could imitate the Negro dialects that had been invented for them by white authors” (1989, 260).

In her 1937 poignant novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston, who had questioned existing representations of black speech through eye dialect, deliberately deviated from conventional Standard American English in order to achieve a realistic voice for her characters. The following excerpt illustrates a conversation between Janie Mae Crawford—the novel’s protagonist—and her husband:

“Logan, you ‘sleep?”

“If Ah wuz, you’d be done woke me up callin’ me.”

“Ah wuz thinkin’ real hard about us; about you and me.”

“It’s about time. Youse powerful independent around here sometime considerin’.”

“Considerin’ whut for instance?”

“Considerin’ youse born in a carriage ‘thout no top to it, and yo’ mama and you bein’ born and raised in de white folks back-yard.”

([1937] 1991, 62)

As Dahill-Baue contends, “In her fiction, Hurston represents black speech with phonetic accuracy; her characters speak not in gibberish but rather in distinct dialects with uniform rules of usage, inflection and construction” (1996, 462). Likewise, in his discussion of the role of language in the characterization of Janie in the novel, Dahill-Baue concludes that the protagonist’s use of a genuine voice empowers her and endows the novel with integrity.

After the Harlem Renaissance, the representation of BE in literary texts kept changing as several key African American novelists, such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison or Ann Petry, used it in their groundbreaking stories of black life. These authors used dialect to signal difference in black characters’ speech, as nonstandard variants were usually contrasted against the normative speech of non-black characters. Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* relied almost exclusively on the use of dialect for the characters’ speech. The author’s literary representation of dialect is illustrated in the passage below, which is part of Aunt Sally’s monologue on starting menstruation:

My Maw say that us colored folks knows what we knows now fore us come here from Affiky and that wisdom be your business with your womanhood: bout not letting your foots touch ground barefooted when your womanhood is on you. They useta hang up the young gals in the swinging trees and take them off way way from everybody else and they don’t take no bazing with water and they don’t let they footses straddle the reows in the fields less the crops will shrivel up and die. [...] ([1966] 1999, 54)



In the aftermath of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, black writers resumed using BE in literature “for a broader spectrum of purposes and in a wider array of genres” (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 14), including fiction and poetry. Indeed, some novels such as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* were almost completely written in BE.

In relation to this, June Jordan’s *His Own Where* (1971) incorporated literary representations of dialect in the narrative voice as well as in dialogues. This strategy problematized traditional conceptions of oral and written genres, as it substantially incorporated BE in the text, not only as a resource to convey feigned orality, but as a valid written mode:

Cars make Buddy mad. Right now his father lying in the hospital from what they call A Accident. And was no accident about it, Buddy realize. The street set up that way so cars can clip the people easy kill them even. Easy.

“What you say?” she ask him.

“Damn,” he answer her. “Another one. Another corner. Street-crossing-time again.”

“You crazy, Buddy? What you mean?”

“I hate them. Corners. They really be a dumb way try to split the people from the cars. Don’t even work. Look how a car come up and almost kill my father, minding his own business, on the corner. Corners good for nothing.” Buddy frown so bad that Angela start laughing. Buddy swing around her waist.

([1971] 2010, 3)

Jordan’s landmark decision to write her first novel entirely in BE was considered controversial at the time of publication. Indeed, some detractors argued that the language deployed in the text encouraged a target young adult readership “to shrink the mastery of standard English” (Sapphire 2010, vii). However, the novel was actually finalist for the National Book Award, it was ranked among “*The New York Times* Most Outstanding Books”, and was included in the American Library Association’s list of Best Books in 1971.

As Sanz Jiménez explains (2020), neo-slave narratives published in the late twentieth century have entered a process destined to reclaim the silenced voices of slaves.

Accordingly, these novels deliberately incorporate dialectal features in the characters' speech, and even use linguistic variation to subvert traditional dynamics between center and periphery. In the early twenty-first century, linguistic features of BE are not only represented in literary texts, but also in audiovisual products such as films and TV shows, as they contribute to the configuration of images of blackness and sociocultural identity (Green 2002, 214).

According to Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé, BE can be considered the most complex sociolect in American English. However, the relevance of the linguistic study of this variant does not only lay in its formal complexity, but also in the fact that

presenta unas peculiaridades sintácticas, semánticas y fonológicas que la convierten en el dialecto más homogéneo del inglés americano, lo cual, unido a la enorme solidaridad lingüística y cultural que presenta la comunidad negra por su especial situación social en los EEUU, confiere a este dialecto una importancia tal que numerosos lingüistas preconizan ya la posibilidad de que en un futuro próximo esta nación se convierta en un país bidialectal, en el cual el Black English no podría seguir recibiendo el calificativo de Non-Standard. (1990, 97)<sup>319</sup>

This chapter initiates the work that fundamentals the fourth part of this dissertation. We have provided a general overview of the use of Black English in North American literature, which situates and contextualizes our textual analysis. Chapter 2 will provide a detailed account of the method used as a framework for our translational study as well as the selected materials that will be subject to analysis. The model proposed will be a useful tool to study the translation of dialect from a functionalist approach, as it considers both textual and contextual aspects in the analysis. Chapter 3 will introduce the STs. Each novel will be contextualized by discussing information about its author, literary background, plot, characters and linguistic features. The external study of the texts will thus set the milestones that will enable us to undertake the textual analysis in

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<sup>319</sup> “it presents a set of syntactic, semantic and phonological peculiarities which make it the most homogeneous dialect of American English. This, together with the enormous linguistic and cultural solidarity of the black community due to its particular social situation in the United States, makes this dialect so important that many linguists are already advocating the possibility that in the near future this nation will become a bidialectal country in which Black English could no longer receive the qualification of Non-Standard.”

the subsequent chapter. The novels' reception will not be explicitly dealt with at this point, as extensive data on this aspect can be found on Part III of the dissertation. However, at this point we may highlight, once more, the determinant relation between reception and translation to the present study. Indeed, the decisions made concerning the rendering of black literary dialect and the language of certain characters in translation are key to understand the reception of a text in any TC. Thus, far from being a complement to the study of the translation history and critical reception of African American women's literature in Spain, this internal approach to the texts is hereby understood and treated as fundamental to obtain a complete understanding of the function and place of the studied works in the receiving system.

Thus, Chapter 4 will descriptively examine the solutions brought forward by the translators to deal with the rendering of black dialect in the peninsular Spanish versions of the texts. This analysis will follow the aforementioned model, which considers both microlinguistic and macrolinguistic features of the translated texts. The extracts analyzed in the following chapters are representative of the use of dialect and its translation in each novel, both at the phonological, lexical and/or syntactic level. We will study translation choices and their effects on the TTs, as well as the source—may this be literary, political, social or economic—of the motivation for the choices made during the translation process. These features will ultimately allow us to identify and compare the function of the texts in the SC and TC. As suggested by Tello Fons (2011, 171), an analysis of this kind will ultimately lead us to discuss possible trends in the translation of dialect in Spanish in the light of Toury's norms.



## 2. METHOD OF ANALYSIS AND SELECTED MATERIALS

### 2.1. Method of Analysis

Our translational study is structured around the descriptive empirical analysis of a selection of two STs and their translations into peninsular Spanish. The goal of this analysis is to extract information regarding the techniques used to deal with the translation of BE, a social dialect bound to a political and cultural context distant from the receiving system. More precisely, we will examine how a concrete stylistic feature of the ST is translated in a TL, paying special attention to its function in the new context and its repercussion in the target culture. In the context of the present research, our model for analysis must consider the particularities of the relation between ST and TT, so as to enable us to examine not only the use and translation of this dialectal variant but also the translated text in its own context.

As was already advanced in Part I of the dissertation, our methodological framework for the analysis of translations follows Hatim and Mason's work as well as Boisier's stylistic approach to translation. In their seminal work, *Discourse and the Translator* (1990), Hatim and Mason define translation as a communicative process and consequently base their model on the analysis of context, which is configured according to three dimensions: the communicative dimension (related to linguistic variation and elements of register); the pragmatic dimension (related to discourse intentionality); and the semiotic dimension (related to cultural value systems).

Despite the fact that Hatim and Mason's model is not specific to the study of linguistic variation and its translation, the authors do consider the weight of this feature in their proposal. Likewise, their assumption that "principles of equivalence demand that we attempt to relay the full impact of social dialect, including whatever discursual force it may carry" works here as a fundamental concern for our study. Indeed, researchers such as Tello Fons (2011) have successfully adapted this model to the analysis of dialectal variation in translation. Thus, our model for studying the translation of literary black dialect will privilege the role of communicative and pragmatic aspects of translation. Even if linguistic features will necessarily be tackled within this framework, our analysis considers dialect a suprasegmental element in the selected texts.

The guidelines for linguistic analysis provided by the aforementioned authors will only be applied to the study of a limited representative selection of excerpts extracted from the selected works. This choice is motivated by the will to examine particular representations of BE—and thus, black identity—in translation, rather than come up with an exhaustive quantitative analysis. Following Tello Fons, this approach comprises from the study of concrete fragments to the comparative analysis of literary and cultural contexts at a macrolinguistic level: “We cannot forget that the evaluation of dialectal interventions must be considered within the global perspective provided by the translated text itself”. (2011, 102)<sup>320</sup>

Likewise, Jean Boase-Beier’s perspective (2006) calls for a comparative approach to the study of translation oriented both to the source and the target poles, where the relations between source and TTs are crucial to understand the result of the translation process. Thus, my work studies both the source and the target systems framing the texts, as well as the dominant canons regarding production and translation. As noted by Tello Fons (2011, 164), a study of the translation of dialectal variation can benefit from the stylistic perspective inasmuch as it allows the researcher to transcend a purely linguistic approach to the texts.

## 2.2. Selected Materials

The selected STs are Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. These texts have been chosen as representative examples of African American women’s literature where the use of BE and its translation into Spanish can be traced and descriptively studied. As mentioned before, we hereby designate as African American women’s literature assumed literary works authored by US-born or nationalized black women. The two selected works were written by two of the most relevant authors of the twentieth century. The selection of *The Color Purple* and *Beloved* as representative samples of African American women’s literature is not only justified by the key role performed by these texts in the SC, but also by their position in the translation history of African American women’s literature in Spain. Indeed, as data taken from AfroBib

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<sup>320</sup> “No hay que olvidar que la evaluación de las intervenciones dialectales debe considerarse dentro de una visión global que es el propio texto traducido”

evidences, these are the two most translated works from our corpus. Currently, 16 editions of *El color púrpura* and 11 editions of *Beloved* have been published in Spain. However, only *Beloved* has been translated to another peninsular language, that being Basque. No Catalan or Galician versions of any of the two texts have been published in the TC.

Our research is centered in the narrative genre. More precisely, the texts can be characterized as fiction novels. According to Tello Fons (2011, 166), this genre is eligible for studying the translation of linguistic variation because dialect can be used for different purposes, thus complicating its rendering in a different sociocultural and linguistic context. The selected works were published in a similar timespan; both being authored by twentieth-century writers. *The Color Purple* was published in 1982 and *Beloved* in 1987. Thus, it is not the goal of this study to examine diachronic changes in the approaches to the translation of dialect into Spanish, but rather to study two particular texts where dialect and consequently, its translation, play a determining role in the reception of the literary work. Both works are extensively popular in the SC. Indeed, even if the popularity of the two novels is more reduced in the TC, the authors' achievement of literary awards and the novels' international acclaim have granted them a secure place in the canon of universal literature. Thus, the main goal of this part of the dissertation is to examine the results in the translation of a particular social dialect in works of universal literary impact and the effects of this process on the reception of the texts in the target literary and cultural system.

The selected novels display a use of dialect whose function can be usually located within Mair's continuum of mimesis and symbolic gesture (1992, 118). The mimetic function refers to the use of dialect as a vehicle to reflect the cultural and linguistic reality of a group, while the symbolic use of nonstandard language aims at executing an "expressive gesture" against established linguistic norms. Likewise, both texts are polydialectal. That is, they display tokens of standard and nonstandard variation. Monodialectal texts, that is, texts written completely in a nonstandard variant, are less problematic for translation; according to general consensus, in these cases dialect can be neutralized as there is no need to signal contrast between standard and nonstandard language in the text. However, in the case of BE, the human, cultural and social significance of the literary representation of dialect would still require some degree of representation in the TT (Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé 1990, 98).

Even if dialectal variants can rarely be assigned closed categories, as a character's linguistic universe usually encompasses features of manifold linguistic variant typologies, the dialectal interventions that feature in the selected novels are defined here as sociolect or social dialect. Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé identifies BE as the most complex American sociolect, not only because of its linguistic features but also because of the cultural, historical and political implications of dialect for the black community in the United States:

Existen ciertas normas sociales, políticas, económicas y religiosas dentro de la comunidad negra totalmente distintas de las de los blancos, lo cual se refleja en su lenguaje, no solo en la forma de significación de las palabras (el modo necesariamente diferente en que cada palabra adquiere su contenido), sino en el empleo de este dialecto que los une, y en su propia actitud hacia el lenguaje. (Mateo Martínez-Bartolomé 1990, 100).<sup>321</sup>

Cited below are the complete editorial data of the source and TTs that have been used for this study:

Morrison, Toni. 2010. *Beloved*. London: Vintage.

Morrison, Toni. 2016. *Beloved*. Barcelona: Debolsillo.

Walker, Alice. 2019. *The Color Purple*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Walker, Alice. 1993. *El color púrpura*. Barcelona: RBA.

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<sup>321</sup> “There are certain social, political, economic and religious norms within the black community that are totally different from those of the white community, and this is reflected in their language, not only in the meaning of words (the necessarily different way in which each word acquires its content), but in the use of a dialect that unites them and in their own attitude towards language.”



### 3. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE SOURCE TEXTS

The central theme of this part of the dissertation is to explore the ways in which the African American female identity is represented in the translation of two literary texts: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. To do so, I will first present a general examination of the language employed in Morrison and Walker's narratives. We will then proceed to undertake a textual examination of the STs, especially focusing on the authors' rendering of dialect. Finally, selected excerpts of the Spanish translations will be analyzed with the ultimate goal of examining the possibilities offered by the Spanish language to render the sociocultural implications of the dialectal variant in the TC. Now, it is not the goal of this study to evaluate the quality of the selected translations, but rather to obtain a better understanding of the different devices used to represent dialect in each case, and the effect they generate on the TT and target readers.

As critics such as Madhu Dubey (1994, 2) or E. Shelley Reid (2000, 313) have pointed out, since the mid-1970s writers Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have dominated the African American literary discourse in the United States. In this context, both Morrison and Walker have worked to give voice to the black community through their works, paying especial attention to the historical role of the African American woman. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker's fiction works have consistently grappled with the heritage of a past marked by slavery, racial discrimination and gender inequalities while at the same time acknowledging the revolutionary potential of language as a form of liberation. Central to their work, therefore, is an attempt to explore the ways in which black language might provide a discourse in which both their gender and their ethnicity will be a source of strength rather than defilement (King 2000, 152).

#### **3.1. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple***

Writer and activist Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia. As a child, Walker lived in the southern United States and had to attend segregated schools, although a scholarship enabled her to change schools and even travel to Africa during her time as an undergraduate at Sarah Lawrence College. After graduating, she

became active in the Civil Rights Movement and went on to become one of the most notable voices in the black feminist movement. As an author, Walker has explored various forms of writing, such as the short story, poetry and children's literature. However, it is her work as a novelist that has earned her worldwide recognition, especially after the publication of *The Color Purple* in 1982, for which she won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award in 1983. Following this success, Walker wrote *The Temple of my Familiar* (1989) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) which, although critically acclaimed in the U.S., caused some uproar because of their treatment of the subject of female genital mutilation. Recently, continuing her work as an activist, Walker has published *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine/Israel* (2010), which adds to her body of work on denouncing traditionally silenced injustices in contemporary society.

Walker defines herself as a womanist, a term she first coined in *In Search of our Mothers's Gardens*, where it was defined as "A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'You acting womanish'" (Walker 1983, 11). This conception of her identity would lead her to express a primary concern with the situation of African American women, although she also acknowledges that a womanist must be committed to the survival of her people, both men and women (Walker 1983, 279). Nevertheless, her literary work notably emphasizes the exceptionality of the double identity (and, therefore, double discrimination) experienced by these subjects, women and African Americans. Thus, this positioning has led her to recreate in her works the recurrent figure of those who have experienced life "not only as a black person, but as a black woman" (Walker 1983, 275). This approach has led some critics to oppose the alleged one-dimensional nature of male characters in her works, considering that, as Mel Watkins explains, the revival of African American literature in the 1970s and 1980s led to a series of stereotypical portraits "of black men as thieves, sadists, rapists and ne'er-de-wells" (1986, 1).

However, there is a general consensus that her work also transcends the boundaries of race or gender, and appeals to the public on a universal level: "[Walker] comes at universality through the path of an American black woman's experience. [...] She speaks the female experience more powerfully for being able to pursue it across boundaries of race and class" (Steinem 1982, 36). Thus, one of the merits of Walker's

style and vision is that she has managed to reach an interracial audience in her struggle for gender and racial equality, a fact that has prompted critics to study the variety of perspectives from which she approaches the recurring themes in her works. This universal character, which has become one of the milestones of her international acclaim, has also earned her the reputation of, in the words of Jeanne Fox-Alston, “a provocative writer who writes about blacks in particular, but all humanity in general” (Fox-Alston 1982, 5).

In this context, Walker’s use of language can be understood not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument to “empower the dispossessed”, in the words of Wirba Ibrahim Mainino (2000, 60). Mainino has argued that a linguistic revolution rages in Walker’s works, as she seeks “to reclaim language from male hegemony and use it to open up new spaces of representation for black women” (2000, 62). According to Madhu Dubey, the fundamentals of Walker’s experiments with narrative voice were set in the 1970s by Gayl Jones’s novels *Corregidora* (1975) and *Eva’s Man* (1976), “which first validated black women’s vernacular speech as a literary language in its own right” (1994, 34).

Other scholars, such as Laurie McMillan (2004), have studied Walker’s construction of a linguistic universe that works both on a specific and symbolic level. With this respect, Nancy K. Miller suggests that symbolic language is particularly suited to writing that calls for social change:

Metaphors are to be taken very seriously [...] as an economical way both to theorize outside of systems dependent on a unitary signature [...] and to imagine in the material of language what hasn’t yet come [...] into social being. [...] Perhaps what seems most “feminist” to me about the uses of both metaphor and narrative criticism is the self-consciousness these modes of analysis tend to display about their own processes of theorization. (1991, 25)

According to Miller, as the personal is presented by means of metaphorical language, “readers are encouraged to interpret the narrative both literally and figuratively rather than reduce it to a single person’s experience” (1991, 8). In this context, Walker’s narrative prompts readers to actively interpret each story in order to gain awareness and perspective upon their own lives. The language used in her novels calls for figurative

readings that transcend single stories and directly confronts each individual, encouraging them to question their personal experiences.

*The Color Purple* was published in 1982 and brought Walker the 1983 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The novel explores various social and cultural aspects of the African American community of the Southern United States in the 1930s. In *The Color Purple*, Walker dismantles the sexist tradition rooted within the black community by means of a comprehensive psychological analysis of male and female characters living in a traditional patriarchal southern family. The novel provides an alternative to this model through the construction of a narrative that leads the main character to build a modern matriarchal family, in which the woman takes the prominent role. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, many critics were disturbed by Walker's depiction of black men, which they found recreated negative stereotypes which nurtured racist ideologies still present in the country's collective imagination. However, critics also valued her powerful representations of black women, her groundbreaking use of the epistolary form, her language and, particularly, her representation of black folk English. As Elizabeth Fifer argues (1985), it is in the act of writing that Celie enters the public world, struggling to understand her situation by forming it into language. Indeed, her self-expression allows her to enter a thorough process of examination of other women's lives, which ultimately help her gain awareness of her own circumstances and liberate herself:

Celie participates in the creation of meaning for herself through language. Without language, silence would have ensured madness or, as in her mother's case, an early death. It is not an exterior adventure that frees Celie, or the people she meets through her extended family, but the language that she makes of them. Her letters shape her experience and thus transform it. (Fifer 1985, 155-156)

*The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel containing the stories of different black women told in the letters that Celie, the protagonist, writes first to God and then to her loving younger sister Nettie. Celie is a poor, uneducated fourteen-year-old girl when she begins writing letters to God to relieve her pain and shame at having been raped by the man she believes to be her father. The novel begins with a warning from Celie's stepfather related to the sexual abuse to which he subjects the girl: "You better never tell nobody but god. It'd kill your mammy" (Walker 1993, 1). These words are followed by Celie's

letters to God, which constitute about half of the novel. Eventually, Celie is forced to marry Mr. \_\_\_, who also abuses her physically and sexually, and she is also compelled to separate from her sister Nettie.

Celie's life changes when Mr. \_\_\_ brings his sick mistress into the house for Celie to care for. The mistress, Shug, is everything Celie is not: sexy, fresh and independent. Celie falls in love with Shug, as she is finally able to enjoy sex, romance and friendship. Together with Shug, Celie discovers the mystery of Nettie's silence for so many decades: Mr. \_\_\_ had been hiding Nettie's letters from her. Her sister's letters help Celie realize the extent of the abuse she has suffered from Mr. \_\_\_, so she decides to leave him and move to Memphis with Shug to start a new life. From this point on, Celie will no longer write to God but to her sister.

Nettie's letters explain that she eventually befriended a couple, Samuel and Corrine, and accompanied them to Africa to do missionary work. Nettie also explains that the couple adopted both Celie's children, Adam and Olivia, whom she had with her stepfather. Celie also learns of Pa's death and that the house Pa used to live in actually belongs to her and Nettie since their mother's death. Celie, now an independent woman, keeps a close friendship with Shug, even if the latter has other romantic interests apart from Celie. Parallel to these events, Celie learns that Mr. \_\_\_—whom she now calls by his first name, Albert—suffering from a considerable decline in fortunes after Celie left him, has changed dramatically, turning into a decent man.

After several decades in Africa, Nettie returns with Samuel, whom she married after he was widowed in the continent, and Celie's two children. The sisters have a joyous reunion and, despite their advanced age, they seem to have just begun to live the best years of their lives.

Although Walker's first two novels had not received much attention from the American press prior to the publication of *The Color Purple*, scholars did highlight her work in academic contexts. However, as Maria Lauret (2000, 35) explains, the subordination of plot and character development to the articulation of the "feminist ideologeme" was condemned on the grounds that this had originated certain inconsistencies in her early novels. However, with the critical acclaim of *The Color Purple* after its publication in 1982, a new wave of criticism and reviews was generated in press media such as *The*

*New York Times*, which also praised *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *Meridian* (her first two novels), even if there was a general consensus regarding the superiority and maturity of *The Color Purple*. Although Walker won the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1982, which consolidated her as a key figure in the American literary tradition, *The Color Purple* also gave rise to a series of critical reactions which, as Emmanuel Sampath Nelson (2002, 464) points out, focused on two main issues: that Walker's status as a representative voice for African American women was largely due to the novel's sales success rather than its literary quality, and that it perpetuated racial and gender stereotypes. On the latter issue, many intellectual personalities of the African American community expressed their radical opposition to such representations:

While I know that some black men have raped their daughters, I know that the vast majority have not. Although many black men have difficulty loving—period—because much of the love has been drained out by the brutality of a society panic stricken over black masculinity, enough has been salvaged to make most black women today happy. (Brown 1986, 16)

In this context, The American Library Association placed the novel on the list of top hundred banned and challenged books in the United States from 1990 to 1999 (ranked number 17), 2000 to 2009 (ranked number 17), and 2010 to 2019 (ranked number 50), as well as the top ten list for 2007 (ranked number 6) and 2009 (ranked number 9). Commonly cited justifications for banning the book include sexual explicitness, explicit language, violence, and homosexuality.

The novel received yet greater scrutiny amidst controversy surrounding the release of the homonymous cinematic adaptation in December 1985, which was directed by Steven Spielberg. Even if the movie grossed more than seven million dollars in its first three weeks on theaters and even accumulated eleven Oscar nominations, it sparked the debate about the depiction of explicit violence and sentimentality. In this context, Lauret poses the question, “Did it achieve canonical status because of such controversy or in spite of it?” (2000, 93). However, as Lauret herself points out, the controversy generated after the movie's release was much greater in the United States than in the rest of Europe, where literary canons had already embraced Walker's work much more readily than in her country of origin. Despite all this, the magnitude of the work's reach

has incorporated it into most contemporary canons of both African American and international literature. In this regard, writer bell hooks states “Unlike most novels by any writer it is read across class, race, gender and cultural boundaries. It is truly a popular work a book of the people a work that has many different meanings for many different readers” (1981, 215). Likewise, on November 5, 2019, the BBC News included *The Color Purple* on their list of the 100 most influential novels.

*The Color Purple* was first published in Spain in 1984, a year after Walker received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The Spanish version of the novel, *El color púrpura*, was translated by Ana María de la Fuente Rodríguez and published by Plaza y Janés.

De la Fuente Rodríguez’s translation of Walker’s masterpiece is just a small sample of her successful career as a translator. Born in 1932, de la Fuente Rodríguez started her professional activity as a translator in the decade of 1960 and ever since, she has translated French, German and English-speaking writers into Spanish. Among these, we may cite, Aimé Michel, Christiane Collange, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, Michael Crichton, John Le Carré, Zadie Smith and Stephen King. According to the ISBN database of books published in Spain, de la Fuente Rodríguez has translated more than 200 works through her career. Some of the most popular titles include Crichton’s *Sol naciente* (1993), Fowles’s *La mujer del teniente francés* (1971), King’s *Cementerio de animales* (1986) and more recently, Smith’s *Dientes Blancos* (2002), *El cazador de autógrafos* (2003) and *Sobre la belleza* (2009) as well as Jane Austen’s *Orgullo y prejuicio* (2015). While there are currently five novels by Alice Walker published in Spain, *El color púrpura* is the only one translated by de la Fuente Rodríguez. Notwithstanding, de la Fuente Rodríguez’s 1984 rendering of *The Color Purple* is the only translation available to Spanish audiences. De la Fuente Rodríguez has not exclusively dedicated to the translation of narrative fiction, but she has also translated non-fiction works and historical novels, such as *El misticismo: el hombre interior y lo inefable* (1979) or *La caída* (1982).

As already mentioned above, *El color púrpura* was first published by Catalan publisher Plaza y Janés, which reedited the novel in three occasions, namely 1986, 1988 and 1989—all of them after the movie adaptation had been released. However, other Spanish publishers have circulated editions of Walker’s novel, all of them using de la Fuente Rodríguez’s original translation. Círculo de Lectores published two editions of

the text, in 1987 and 2002. Likewise, RBA published editions in 1994, 2004 and 2008. Mediasat Group published two editions in 2002 and 2003, respectively and Debolsillo published one edition in 2001, the year when the house was founded, and in 2018; this is the most recent version of the novel available up to date. Also noteworthy is the fact that *El color púrpura* has been included in collections devoted to universal literature, bestselling works as well as women writers.

The target reader of the translation is the general public. In Spain, the novel had a good acceptance by mainstream readers, especially after the movie was released in 1986. Indeed, the numerous reeditions published after 1986 are symptomatic of the repercussion of the adaptation on the impact of this literary work.<sup>322</sup>

### 3.2. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Toni Morrison was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Unlike Walker, Morrison grew up in an integrated community, so she did not become aware of racial divisions until she was a teenager. After graduating from Cornell University, she worked as an editor for Random House. During this period, she played a key role in the circulation of black literature in the United States, promoting authors such as Toni Cade Bambara, Gayl Jones and Angela Davis. She made her debut as a novelist at the age of thirty-nine with *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Her first novel, which portrayed the problems of African American identity through the eyes of a young girl, was not a bestseller. *Sula* (1973), her second novel, was nominated for the American Book Award, and thanks to *Song of Solomon* (1977) the author was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award. However, it was not until the publication of *Beloved* in 1987 that Morrison began to gain significant recognition, especially after she became the first black woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. In 1999, after publishing other novels such as *Jazz* (1994) or *Paradise* (1998), she decided to devote herself to writing children's literature together with her son Slade, with whom she published several books of short stories. In addition to her fiction, Morrison has published several non-fiction works, including *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary*

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<sup>322</sup> To read more about the critical reception of *El color púrpura* refer to Part III, Chapter 3.



*Imagination* (1992), *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction* (2008) and *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (2019). Considered the great chronicler of black America, her novels portray a fundamental part of the history of the United States, addressing themes such as the construction of otherness, memory, the past and identity, especially female identity. Her direct and emphatic style and her literary representation of the African American identity have made her one of the most relevant writers of the twenty-first century.

Morrison's novels are characterized by their depiction of the violence generated by the conflict between the black and white communities, as well as within the African American community itself. Because of the latter, Rajan Anju and J. K. Sharma consider that "the violence and bloodshed within the black communities have been presented nowhere so effectively in the entire American fiction" (2011, 173). Her works portray different manifestations of violence, such as the psychological conflict in *The Bluest Eye*, revenge and hatred in *Song of Solomon*, and slavery in *Beloved*. A good number of studies have undertaken feminist approaches to the analysis of her works, and even some scholars have read Morrison's novels from womanist perspectives. In relation to this, Morrison expressed her desire to distance herself from limited categorizations: "In order to be as free as I possibly can, in my own imagination, I can't take positions that are closed" (Morrison in Jaffrey 2008, 140).

Another key feature for the study of Morrison's work is her use of language and narrative technique as a means of constructing black identities. As Marc C. Conner explains, both in terms of language and narrative technique Morrison deliberately chooses not to facilitate the task of reading for her audience: "Indeed, Morrison is frustrated at the tradition of 'explanation' in African American literature [...] For Morrison, explanation is part of the critical, not the creative, process" (2000, 28). Through her use of language, Morrison challenges traditional representations of BE by incorporating implicit meanings in the discourse of characters belonging to the African American community. This reinvention of literary black acts—to use Ritashona Simpson's terminology (2007)—is specifically addressed to members of the black community rather than to the white mainstream readership. Through her mastery of linguistic expression, the author achieves an intimacy with her target readers that excludes anyone who is not willing to accept the conditions imposed by the genre.

In her key essay “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature”, Morrison herself calls for attention to the craft of language formation and her theory about the representation of race in language:

My choices of language (speakerly, aural, colloquial) my reliance for full comprehension on codes embedded in black culture, my effort to effect immediate co-conspiracy and intimacy (without any distancing, explanatory fabric) as well as my (failed) attempt to shape silence while breaking it are attempts (many unsatisfactory) to transfigure the complexity and wealth of Afro-American culture into a language worthy of the culture. (1989, 23)

According to Simpson, Morrison can be framed within a generation of writers that have exploited “what is not often immediately visible in grammar, syntax or spelling”, but rather what “sounds black” (2007, 237), thus creating an atmosphere associated with oral black culture rather than reproducing grammatical features of BE on the written page. To Dexter Fisher and Robert Stepto, this oral tradition should also be interpreted as a language itself, with its own grammar, syntax and standards of eloquence: “The Afro-American artist is just as bicultural, just as much heir to legitimate linguistic traditions, in the area of language as he is in the area of literary forms: Black speech is to formal English as the oral tradition is to the literate tradition” (1978, 34).

Indeed, Morrison herself spelled out her reasoning for avoiding the use of eye dialect in her work, arguing that “the dialogue of black characters is construed as an alien, estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spellings contrived to defamiliarize it” (1992, 52). William Dahill-Baue has comparatively studied Morrison’s, Baldwin’s and Hurston’s theorizations on the literary function and use of BE which, as he contends, expose extreme poles: “on the one hand they validate its power over and above Standard English in practical and aesthetic expression; on the other hand, they expose its potential to misrepresent and minstrelize African-American characters” (1996, 463).

In this respect, Morrison questions her own status as a black artist:

The principle reason these matters loom large for me is that I do not have quite the same access to these traditionally useful constructs of blackness. Neither

blackness nor “people of color” stimulates in me notions of excessive, limitless love, anarchy, or routine dread. I cannot rely on these metaphorical shortcuts because I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive ‘othering’ of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work. My vulnerability would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it. (1992, x-xi)

The implicit task Morrison is setting out here is to determine in what ways art can represent blackness while resisting stereotypical portrayals and avoiding stigmatizing racial identities.

Published in 1987, *Beloved* tells the story of Sethe and her eighteen-year-old daughter Denver as they escape from slavery. The narrative time of the novel occupies barely ten months (from August 1873 to May 1874) and the place is centered in Cincinnati, Ohio; more specifically, in 124 Bluestone Road and its surroundings.

Sethe’s and Denver’s home is haunted by a revenant, who they believe is the ghost of Sethe’s infant daughter, who died as a baby. Because of the ghost, Denver is shy, friendless and housebound. Sethe’s sons, Howard and Buglar, left home at age thirteen. Baby Suggs, the mother of Sethe’s husband, Halle, died in her bed shortly thereafter, eight years before the start of the novel’s narrative time. Paul D, one of the slaves from the plantation where Baby Suggs, Sethe, Halle and other slaves worked in the past, arrives at 124 Bluestone Road, where Sethe and Denver live, to begin with her the life that he had dreamed of for twenty-five years.

Upon returning from the Carnival, the three meet the unexpected arrival of a woman dressed in black named Beloved. The woman seizes Sethe’s affection, throws Paul D out of the house and brings initial joy to Denver, who was too used to loneliness. Eventually, an old man in town named Stamp Paid shows Paul D a newspaper clipping recounting Sethe’s murder of her infant daughter Beloved and her subsequent imprisonment, eighteen years ago. Paul’s disbelief turns to incomprehension when Sethe confirms the news and explains that the reason for her crime was her love for her daughter and her desire to free her from a life in chains.

With Paul D out of 124, Beloved is now free to collect her debt to his mother by demanding all her love, attention and care, filling her with an unbearable sense of guilt. The situation of human deterioration becomes so insufferable that Denver decides to seek help from the community. When the neighbors discover Beloved's true identity, they come to the house to perform an exorcism on the ghost. These events coincide with the arrival of Mr. Brodwin, a white man who was ready to employ Denver as a housekeeper. Unaware of the man's intentions, Sethe throws herself upon him ready to commit a new homicide to destroy once and for all the root of evil: the white man. The women stop her before committing the crime and Beloved disappears. The novel resolves with Denver becoming a working member of the community and Paul D returning to Sethe and declaring his love for her.

Regarding its structure, *Beloved* is divided in three large sections that are, on the whole, subdivided in twenty-eight unnumbered chapters which unfold multiple narrative voices corresponding to the novel's main characters. The novel is generally considered a neo-slave narrative. The plot of *Beloved* is driven by interrelated love stories, ranging from family to romantic relationships. This structure challenges traditional representations of time in nineteenth-century slave narratives as the story "engages the reader not just with the physical, material consequences of slavery, but with the psychological consequences as well" (1993, 357). According to Miguel Sanz Jiménez (2020, 283): "By mixing dialogues, thoughts, dreams, and flashbacks, *Beloved* revisits slave narratives and explores issues of memory and maternity within an African-American family that tries to survive to the consequences of slavery during the Reconstruction and it condenses half a century of black history in ten months".

Sethe's story is actually based on Margaret Garner's, a slave from Boone County, Kentucky, who managed to escape across the frozen Ohio River in 1856. She took her four children to freedom in a settlement just outside of Cincinnati but, when they were chased and about to be captured by slave catchers, Margaret killed her own daughter because she did not want her child to be sold again into slavery but she only got to wound the others with a knife. When she was imprisoned and later taken back to Kentucky, Garner said she was glad that her daughter had died because "now she will never know what a woman suffers as a slave" and that she would "go singing to the gallows rather than be returned to slavery" (as quoted in Condé 1996, 216).

According to Leroy Staggers (1989, 109), “as a Pulitzer Prize-winner, *Beloved* must be placed in a different category from Morrison’s previous four novels”. Indeed, it was not until *Beloved* was published in 1987 that scholarly criticism elevated Morrison to a different status within the American literary tradition. Following its publication, a group of African American writers and critics, including Alice Walker, wrote a letter that was published on January 24, 1988 in *The New York Times Book Review* arguing that, despite the author’s international prominence, her novels had not received sufficient national recognition, calling for the academy to consider awarding her the National Book Award or the Pulitzer Prize. This open letter may have had some impact on the final decision to award the 1988 Pulitzer Prize to *Beloved*. However, even before the prize was awarded, reviews were almost unanimous in praising Morrison’s novel. In 1993, the author reached the highest peak in her professional career, obtaining the Nobel Prize for Literature. These events also resonated in the attention paid to her earlier works, especially among literary circles.

Perhaps Margaret Atwood’s comment in *The New York Times Book Review* best captures the general tone of the early critical responses to *Beloved*. Thus, Atwood wrote: “If there were any doubts about her [Morrison’s] stature as a pre-eminent American novelist, of her own or any other generation, *Beloved* will put them to rest” (1987, 1). Likewise, most critics find admirable the author’s ability to skillfully control technical and literary elements simultaneously while also incorporating into the text references that appeal specifically to the African American community. Likewise, ever since the publication of the novel, critics have also brought forward feminist readings of Morrison’s work. As scholars such as Nancy J. Peterson (1997) and Philip Goldstein (2009) have pointed out, ironically, Morrison’s masterpiece both contributed to and benefitted from the evolution of black feminist criticism that took place through the 1980s.

In 1998, the movie *Beloved*, based on the author’s homonymous novel, was released. Directed by Johnathan Demme, initial reviews of the adaptation positively valued both Ophra Winfrey’s leading performance—who, as a matter of fact, had debuted in 1985 with a supporting role in *The Color Purple*—, and the director’s and the scriptwriter’s work in adapting the ST. In her review for *The New York Times*, Janet Maslin concluded: “Beloved works on its own, with only occasional confusing junctures. But it is much enhanced by familiarity with the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. In so

ambitiously bringing this story to the screen, Ms. Winfrey underscores a favorite, invaluable credo: read the book” (1998, 11). However, the film ended up being a box-office flop and still today, it is ranked among the least profitable films in Hollywood history.

*Beloved* was first published in Spain in 1988, after Morrison was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction earlier that year. The Spanish version, which preserved the English title, was translated by Iris Menéndez Sallés and published simultaneously by Círculo de Lectores and Ediciones B.

Now a well-reputed translator in Spain, Menéndez Sallés started her professional career during the decade of 1970 and she soon specialized in fiction books written in English, even if she has also translated a good number of non-fiction works. Menéndez Sallés has translated literature by Noah Gordon, Charles R. Jackson, John Irving, Graham Green, Margaret Weis, Jackie Collins Joseph Wambaugh, Alan Dean Foster, John Updike, P. D. James, Agatha Christie and Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer. Though her career, Menéndez Sallés has translated more than 300 works, according to the ISBN database of books published in Spain. Bestselling works translated by her include P. D. James’s *La calavera bajo la piel* (1983), Nadine Gordimer’s *La hija de Burger* (1986), John Updike’s *El regreso de conejo* (1973), John Irving’s *El mundo según Garp* (1980), Billie Holliday’s autobiography *Lady sings the blues* (1988), several titles for the young adult series *Resuelve el misterio* and most notably, Noah Gordon’s *El médico* (1993). As was the case with *El color púrpura*, Menéndez Sallés’s rendering of *Beloved* is the only translation of the novel published in peninsular Spanish to date. However, Menéndez Sallés was not in charge of the translation of any of Morrison’s remaining production, but rather this was distributed among several different translators.

As was already indicated, *Beloved* was first published by Círculo de Lectores and Ediciones B, the latter of which reedited the novel in 1993—right before Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize—and in 1995. Punto de Lectura also published an edition of *Beloved* in 2000, and most significantly, Debolsillo reedited the novel in an affordable paperback format in 2001, 2004, 2011 and 2020. Likewise, Lumen recently published a new paperback edition of Morrison’s novel in 2021, still adhering to Menéndez Sallés’s translation.

Morrison's achievement of international recognition thanks to honors such as the Pulitzer or the Nobel prize was a decisive factor in the popularization of her fiction works among mainstream audiences in the TC. However, her work has had a greater impact among a more specialized readership as well as in academic circles in Spain, where she is currently acknowledged as one of the most vibrant voices of contemporary American and international literature.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> To read more about the critical reception of *Beloved* in Spain refer to Part III, Chapter 3.





## 4. TRANSLATOLOGICAL STUDY

Syntax, the structure of an idea, leads you to the world view of the speaker and reveals her values. The syntax of a sentence equals the structure of your consciousness.

(Jordan 1988, 160)

This chapter encompasses the translational study of linguistic variation in the selected texts. To do so, we will base our analysis on the model brought forward by Hatim and Mason (1990), previously detailed in Chapter 2. This model has necessarily been adapted to accommodate the specific needs of our particular analysis of dialectal variation. However, as was anticipated, the study will consider both micro and macro linguistic aspects of the source and TTs, paying especial attention to the communicative, pragmatic and semiotic dimensions of context.

The use and translation of linguistic variation in *The Color Purple* and *Beloved* has been the object of study of a number of papers and dissertations published recently. Among these, we may highlight the work of Miguel Sanz Jiménez (2020), who has examined the translation of dialect in Neo-Slave narratives, among which *Beloved* is included; Mackenzie R. Campbell (2020), whose Master's Thesis studies linguistic variation in *The Color Purple* and Abla Ahmed Kadi and Ilhem Serir Mortad (2018), who have analyzed the literary use of dialect in Walker's novel from a corpus-based approach. These studies have undertaken quantitative approaches to the analysis of dialect use and translation, and have provided solid evidence of the occurrence and role of linguistic variation in the novels under scrutiny. Likewise, other approaches have been suggested by scholars such as Meena Pydah (2016), who has paid attention to the "language of discord" in Walker's novels and José Endoença Martins (2012), who has discussed the Brazilian translations of *Beloved* in the light of Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s theory of "signifyin(g)".

Of special interest for our study are Roberta Abela (2012) and Marcin Jurkowicz's (2015) doctoral dissertations. While the former proposes a translation into Maltese of several passages in Morrison's *Beloved*, the latter undertakes a comparative analysis of the English and Polish versions of Walker's *The Color Purple* and Morrison's *Song of*

*Solomon, Beloved* and *Jazz*. These works share a view of language as an inseparable part of culture, and thus interpret the literary dialect displayed in the novels as a cultureme imbued in the context of production. From this viewpoint, both Abela and Jurkowicz put the emphasis on the transfer of one culture to the other and identify BE as a fundamental descriptor of the source culture. Jurkowicz, particularly, argues that Morrison's and Walker's use of dialect is key to their articulation of a womanist ideologeme and approaches the analysis of dialect as a womanist theme in the authors' novels.

#### **4.1. *El color púrpura***

Varying in content, length, function and time of composition, the letters in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* provide a personalized format and a flexible vehicle for narration that produces a triumph of storytelling. As observers of Celie's intimate relationships with God—her foremost audience—and her sister Nettie, we must relate the letters of both women to one another. As the main narrator, Celie's use of dialect allows readers to enter into her consciousness as her self-awareness grows; and by considering the effects Walker achieves through the development of two distinctly different narrative voices—Celie's black dialect and Nettie's conventional, educated speech—readers can come to understand the main character's plight within a larger cultural context.

Hans Sauer has identified a lack of critical attention to language usage in Walker's novel. In his article "The American Black English of Alice Walker's Novel *The Color Purple*: Its Structure and Status" (1994), Sauer thoroughly examines Walker's usage of BE and documents it against known phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical properties of the dialect. This work pays particular attention to the "very conscious use of language [in the novel] and its effect, which is in no small part due to its linguistic peculiarities" (Sauer 1994, 124)

Following this line of thought, Fifer (1985), Jurkowicz (2015) and other scholars have signaled the relevance of language and dialect, more precisely, in the novel's epistles as

it unravels a powerful tool in the development of self-awareness and self-expression. This phenomenon can be traced by comparatively studying Celie's and Nettie's writing:

The languages of Celie and Nettie, her sister, each honed fine within its oddly formal conventions, are both stylized and fluid. Their letters possess personal interior voices, but Celie's dialect adds an insider's language that immediately establishes a sense of community [...] When Nettie's letters are finally opened and read, it is the educated language of the outside world that must be translated, not the other way around. (1985, 158)

However, Walker's use of eye dialect in *The Color Purple* received a good amount of mixed criticism at the time of publication of the novel. Indeed, several authors and linguists suggested that phonetic (mis)spelling signaling difference did not necessarily enhance realistic representations of blackness in literature. In relation to this, Holton (1984, 19) suggested that the employment of eye dialect evidenced the author's patronizing attitude toward a character, and even deemed racist its use to represent oral black speech. However, from the beginning of her writing career in the early 1970s, Walker defied public criticism with a radical stance:

The writer—like the musician or painter—must be free to explore, otherwise she or he will never discover what is needed (by everyone) to be known. This means, very often, finding oneself considered 'unacceptable' by masses of people who think that the writer's obligation is not to explore or to challenge, but to second the masses' motions, whatever they are. Yet the gift of loneliness is sometimes a radical vision of society or one's people that has not previously been taken into account. (Walker 1973, 340)

In this context, our analysis will be centered in Celie's dialect. We will also compare Celie's speaking voice to that of her sister Nettie, in an attempt to examine the differences between the sisters' language and to ascertain whether these differences have been rendered in the Spanish version of the text.

The linguistic material presented in Celie's first letter foregrounds her illiteracy. Being a young uneducated girl, black folk dialect is the only language Celie knows. However, her speech is "personal, difficult but precise" (Fifer 1985, 158), inasmuch as it is her only vehicle of self-expression. However, as can be seen by comparing the ST with its

respective target excerpt, BE has been rendered as unmarked Spanish, so the translation strategy chosen by de la Fuente Rodríguez has been standardization. Consequently, in the target version of the novel *Celie* speaks normative peninsular Spanish:

<b>Excerpt 1</b>	
Walker 2019, 3	De la Fuente Rodríguez 1993, 9-10
<p>Dear God,</p> <p>I am fourteen years old. <del>I am</del> I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.</p> <p>Last spring after little Lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say It too soon, Fonso, I ain't well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain't gonna. Can't you see I'm already half dead, an all of these children.</p> <p>She went to visit her sister doctor over Macon. Left me to see after the others. He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it.</p> <p>But I don't never git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook. My mama she fuss at me an look at me. She happy, cause he good to her now.</p>	<p>Querido Dios:</p> <p>Tengo catorce años. Soy. He sido siempre buena. Se me ocurre que, a lo mejor, podrías hacerme alguna señal que me aclare lo que me está pasando.</p> <p>La otra primavera, poco después de nacer Lucious, los oía trajinar. Él le tiraba del brazo, y ella decía: Aún es pronto, Fonso. Aún no estoy bien. Él la dejaba en paz, pero a la otra semana, vuelta a tirarle del brazo. Y ella decía: No puedo. ¿Es que no ves que estoy medio muerta? Y todas esas criaturas.</p> <p>Ella se había ido a Macon, a que la viera la hermana doctora, y me dejó al cuidado de los pequeños. Él no me dijo ni una palabra amable. Sólo: Eso que tu mamá no quiere hacer vas a hacerlo tú. Y me puso en la cadera esa cosa y empezó a moverla y me agarró los pechos y me metía la cosa por abajo y, cuando yo grité, él me apretó el cuello y me dijo: Calla y empieza a acostumbrarte.</p> <p>Pero no me he acostumbrado. Y ahora me pongo mala cada vez que tengo que guisar. Mi mamá anda preocupada, y no hace más que mirarme, pero ya está más contenta</p>

But too sick to last long.	porque él la deja tranquila. Pero está demasiado enferma y me parece que no durará mucho.
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Celie’s speech in the ST contains several grammatical dialectal markers. Among these, we can identify unmarked past forms (e.g. “Last spring after little Lucious come”, “She say It too soon”, “Then he push his thing inside my pussy”), auxiliary deletion (e.g. “he pulling on her arm again”, “You gonna do what your mammy wouldn’t”), multiple negation (e.g. “I don’t never git used to it”), subject-verb nonconcord (e.g. “now I feels sick”), use of the negative marker “ain’t”, copula absence for present tense actions (e.g. “She happy, cause he good to her now”) and invariant habitual *be* (e.g. “And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook”). As for the phonological features, we may identify the merger of /ɛ/ and /i/ (“git”), word-final consonant cluster reduction (e.g. “an”, “kine”) and deletion of initial unstressed syllable (“gainst”). The lack of refinement of Celie’s language is evidenced by the recurrent inconsistencies in her use of BE. By way of example, copula deletion does not always occur in similar constructions; compare “He was pulling on her arm” to “A week go by, he pulling on her arm again”.

The tenor of the ST is informal, as Celie’s belief that only God is going to read her letters liberates her to speak confidently, confiding in a secure environment. As argued by Hema Nalini Raghunath and R. Saravana Selvan (2014, 100), Celie’s speech “brings in some natural discourse element into the treatment of the novel”. The use of simple syntactic structures and deliberately short, direct sentences also conveys both Celie’s lack of linguistic proficiency as well as the familiar, informal tenor of her speech. In relation to this, Fifer has praised Walker’s representation of the protagonist’s illiteracy: “it does not reduce, it compresses; it does not simplify, it focuses” (1985, 159). Likewise, the lexicon used by the writer further evidences the informal and unrefined character of her speech. By way of example, we may refer to a passage from the first excerpt: “First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy.”

However, the translated version provides a standardized rendering of Celie’s speech, where no markers of difference or deviation from the norm are to be found. Likewise, the perception of Celie’s (lack of) mastery of language is distorted, as the narrative style

is deliberately altered. While no linguistic variation can be traced, the spontaneity and conciseness of the source syntax is also adapted to conventional standards in peninsular Spanish. Compare, for instance, the passage relating Celie's rape, where the translator uses polysyndeton to render the expressiveness of the ST. Thus, the fragment

First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it.

is rendered as

Y me puso en la cadera esa cosa y empezó a moverla y me agarró los pechos y me metía la cosa por abajo y, cuando yo grité, él me apretó el cuello y me dijo: Calla y empieza a acostumbrarte.

The loss of Celie's compressed, focused language is especially poignant in de la Fuente Rodríguez's rendering of the last sentence of the letter, where "But too sick to last long." is translated as "Pero está demasiado enferma y me parece que no durará mucho". Even if we consider that, by general rule, the English language uses less words per sentence than Spanish, Celie's personal writing style is erased from the Spanish version of the text. Likewise, several lexical choices also contribute to alter the perceived level of formality—and thus, the tenor—of the TT. Note, for instance, the rendering of "titties" as "pechos"; the omission of the term "pussy" and its subsequent compensation with "por abajo"—a much less colloquial and specific term in the TL—and the translation of "She say Naw, I ain't gonna" as "No puedo". Consequently, the tenor is altered in the TT, resulting in a higher level of formality. This occurs not only because of the neutralization of dialectal speech—which eliminates the oral character of Celie's discourse—but also by affecting the text's syntactic, lexical and stylistic features.

The field of the text is a non-specialized autobiographical account, even if the novel does contain several key culture-specific items that may challenge the specialization

continuum.<sup>324</sup> Field is not altered through translation process, so the TT can also be considered a non-specialized autobiographical account.

As for the mode, in her essay “*The Color Purple: Writing to Undo What Writing Has Done*” (1986), Valerie Babb delivers a detailed characterization of features of oral expression in Celie’s writing. These include “rhythmic balanced patterns, repetition-antithesis, assonances, use of proverbs known to a large body, [and] conservative use of language due to the need for repetition of tried and true expressions” (1986, 110). Following Babb’s study, the text can be categorized as a written to be read as if spoken monologue addressed to God. However, at this point it should be noted that Celie’s letters also contain instances of direct speech in the form of dialogue. The excerpt above presents an example of the narrator’s reproduction of other characters’ voices in her writing:

Last spring after little Lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say It too soon, Fonso, I ain’t well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain’t gonna. Can’t you see I’m already half dead, an all of these children.

Walker’s technique to construct feigned orality in the novel has been examined by Henry Louis Gates Jr., who argues that Celie’s use of black folk speech is crucial in creating the illusion “that we are overhearing people speak, just as Celie did when the words were in fact uttered” (1988, 251). However, as Gates points out, readers can never be certain whether the conversations occurred as Celie is recounting them or if they have been (intentionally or unintentionally) distorted by her, as “in the speeches of her characters, Celie’s voice and a character’s merge into one” (1988, 251).

Considering the fact that, in choosing to neutralize dialect most features of orality are lost, we may determine that the mode of the TT is also modified. Indeed, de la Fuente Rodríguez’s version of the text may be classified as written to be read, rather than to be spoken. At this point we should also examine the reproduction of dialogue or direct speech in the TT:

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<sup>324</sup> To expand on the challenges of translating culture-specific items in *The Color Purple* refer to Justine Tally’s “White over black problems in the translation of *The Color Purple*” (1989).

La otra primavera, poco después de nacer Lucious, los oía trajinar. Él le tiraba del brazo, y ella decía: Aún es pronto, Fonso. Aún no estoy bien. Él la dejaba en paz, pero a la otra semana, vuelta a tirarle del brazo. Y ella decía: No puedo. ¿Es que no ves que estoy medio muerta? Y todas esas criaturas.

As can be seen, the Spanish translator chose to use a colon to introduce direct speech in Celie's letters. If this is compared to the ST, direct speech is not originally introduced by punctuation marks or any other kind of marker, only a capital letter in the first word corresponding to oral speech. In this case, the translator's decision further contributes to construct a more organized and structured text which presents no deviation from any standard linguistic or stylistic norms.

Let us examine now some excerpts from Celie's last letter, where she retells the arrival of her sister Nettie to their house in Georgia:

<b>Excerpt 2</b>	
Walker 2019, 259	De la Fuente Rodríguez 1993, 249-250
<p>Wonder who that coming yonder? Ast Albert, looking up the road. Us can see the dust just aflying.</p> <p>Me and him and Shug sitting out on the porch after dinner. Talking. Not talking. Rocking and fanning flies. Shug mention she don't want to sing in public no more well, maybe-a night or two at Harpo's. Think maybe she retire. Albert say he want her to try on his new shirt. I talk bout Henrietta. Sofia. My garden and the store. How tilings doing generally. So much in the habit of sewing something I stitch up a bunch of scraps, try to see what I can make. The weather cool for the last of June, and sitting on the porch with Albert and Shug feel real pleasant. Next week be</p>	<p>¿Quién viene?, pregunta Albert mirando a la carretera. Se ve volar el polvo.</p> <p>Yo, él y Shug estamos sentados en el porche, después de cenar. Charlando. O callados. Moviendo las mecedoras y espantando las moscas con el abanico. Shug ha dicho que no piensa volver a cantar en público, a no ser alguna noche en casa de Harpo. Que quizá se retire. Albert le pide que se pruebe la nueva camisa. Yo hablo de Henrietta. De Sofia. Del jardín y de la tienda. De cómo van las cosas. Por la fuerza de la costumbre, coso retales, a ver qué sale. Hace fresco para últimos de junio, y da gusto estar en el porche con Albert y Shug. Dentro de una semana, el cuatro de julio, pensamos celebrar una reunión</p>



the fourth of July and us plan a big family reunion outdoors here at my house. Just hope the cool weather hold.	familiar en el jardín de mi casa. Ojalá se mantenga fresco el tiempo.
Could be the mailman, I say. Cept he driving a little fast.	Podría ser el cartero, digo. Pero conduce muy de prisa.
Could be Sofia, say Shug. You know she drive like a maniac.	Podría ser Sofia, dice Shug. Es muy loca conduciendo.
Could be Harpo, say Albert. But it not.	Podría ser Harpo, dice Albert. Pero no es Harpo.
By now the car stop under the trees in the yard and all these peoples dress like old folks git out.	El coche se ha parado debajo de los árboles del patio, y bajan unas personas vestidas como los viejos.

While the ST evidences that Celie continues to use dialect in her letters, her communicative skills have developed as a result of her personal journey. Through the course of the novel, Celie learns to express her feelings and understand the world around her. Formally, this is conveyed by her ability to use language skillfully, construct more complex sentences, make descriptions and use humor. Despite Celie's refusal to use standard English to communicate, her letters remain "stylized and fluid [...] within its oddly formal conventions" (Fifer 1985, 158), thus elevating the status of BE as her chosen vehicle of communication and representation.

Again, the selected excerpt displays grammatical features of black rural dialect such as the use of "us" in place of the personal pronoun (e.g. "Us can see the dust"), auxiliary deletion (e.g. "Me and him and Shug sitting out on the porch"), subject-verb nonconcord (e.g. "Think maybe she retire", "Albert say he want her to try on his new shirt", "You know she drive like a maniac"), multiple negation (e.g. "Shug mention she don't want to sing in public no more"), copula absence for present tense actions (e.g. "The weather cool for the last of June", "Could be Harpo, say Albert. But it not."), *-ly* absence in adverbs (e.g. "sitting on the porch with Albert and Shug feel real pleasant") and *a-* prefixing (e.g. "Us can see the dust just aflyng"). We can also identify phonological features, namely deletion of initial unstressed syllable (e.g. "bout" for "about", "cept" for "except") and merger of /ɛ/ and /ɪ/ ("git").

While Celie's black folk dialect remains the main vehicle of communication, the excerpt illustrates the evolution of her writing skills. Towards the end of the novel, readers are presented with more syntactically complex sentences (e.g. "The weather cool for the last of June, and sitting on the porch with Albert and Shug feel real pleasant.", "By now the car stop under the trees in the yard and all these peoples dress like old folks git out"). Likewise, Celie's language becomes more descriptive as she also engages in psychological analysis of other people's state of mind.

While dialect remains neutralized through the Spanish version of the novel, the syntactic structure of the passage is closer to the ST than it was in the first excerpt. In this case, de la Fuente Rodríguez parallels Walker's style in combining the concise phrasing of some passages with the elaborateness of others. Note, for instance, the contrast between

Hace fresco para últimos de junio, y da gusto estar en el porche con Albert y Shug. Dentro de una semana, el cuatro de julio, pensamos celebrar una reunión familiar en el jardín de mi casa.

and

Yo hablo de Henrietta. De Sofia. Del jardín y de la tienda. De cómo van las cosas. Por la fuerza de la costumbre, coso retales, a ver qué sale.

This technique brings into the TT the spontaneity and fluidity referred to by Fifer when discussing the uniqueness of Celie's writing style. However, as can be inferred from our analysis of the first excerpt, this technique is not systematically used throughout the novel, as several passages are modulated so as to adjust the source material to stylistic norms in Spanish.

While the field and mode remain invariable in the second excerpt—this applies both to the source and target versions—, de la Fuente Rodríguez's decisions in this case do evoke the oral features that inform Celie's writing in the ST. Even if the most eminent feature of orality in the ST—that is, the use of dialect—is neutralized in translation, the asyndetic descriptive passage together with the use of a more relaxed, colloquial language—including expressions such as "a ver qué sale" or "bajan unas personas

vestidas como los viejos”—brings some oral character into the TT. Therefore, the tenor of the TT becomes more informal than that of the first excerpt.

In order to discuss the pragmatic function of black dialect in the novel, we may refer to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s seminal essay “Color Me Zora: Alice Walker’s (Re)Writing of the Speakerly Text” (1988), where he defines what he considers to be the dominant concern in African American literature: “the curious tension between the black vernacular and the literate white text, between the spoken and the written word” (1988, 143). In this case, the tension between orality and literacy is materialized through Celie’s use of folk speech in her letters, which represents the construction of her identity and her self-awareness as a black woman. Thus, the social and political implications of BE permeate the text and represent the black rural community. In the words of Fifer:

Celie’s dialect adds an insider’s language that immediately establishes a sense of community, an efficient capacity to express forbidden subjects, and a disarming exterior effect. [...] Celie’s ability to express herself in dialect and her pride in her language are possible because she functions in a closed society, in which only one language is spoken. (1985, 158-159)

Walker’s use of dialect helps her emphasize the context of the characters in the story: “they are outsiders, strangers, speakers of a foreign language” (Fifer 1985, 161). Thus, by using dialect, Celie makes difference the norm in her universe. A norm that readers must accept to engage with the novel’s journey.

The intention of using dialect in the novel is mimetic, to use Mair’s terminology (1992, 118), as Walker tries to imitate the linguistic features of black folk speech in Celie’s language. In this case, it must also be considered that Celie is a poor uneducated child, so the representation of black speech interacts with the rendering of her lack of linguistic skills. Dialect in *The Color Purple* is not exempt, however, from a substantial symbolic intention. Actually, Walker was heavily criticized for her use of eye dialect to characterize black speech, as some critics argued that it perpetuated negative stereotypes and provided caricatured portrayals of her characters. In relation to this, Fifer discusses Walker’s ability to convey “primitive and childlike effects” through the use of black folk dialect as a strategy to prompt empathy with the narrator (Fifer 1985, 160-161). However, Celie’s primitive, uneducated speech—which actually represents her personal

view of the world—also keeps her from the destructiveness of her immediate environment. In relation to this, Fifer concludes: “Walker’s use of dialect retains its positive virtues without relinquishing its sinister possibilities or its painful history” (1985, 161).

As dialect is standardized in the Spanish translation, neither the mimetic nor the symbolic functions are rendered in the TT. In this line, considering that the tenor is more formal in the TT—partly as a result of the neutralization of the oral features of Celie’s speech in the novel—, the formal features of the Spanish translation do not convey Celie’s lack of linguistic proficiency. While this feature of the main character is otherwise rendered through content—as several passages explicitly discuss her illiteracy—this, in turn, contrasts with the proficient speech displayed in her letters in the translation.

Authors such as Sanz Jiménez (2020), among others, have described *The Color Purple* as a monodialectal novel, implying that it is entirely written in black dialect. Many scholars, most notably Rosa Rabadán (1991, 111) have defended the standardization of linguistic variation in monodialectal texts, arguing that dialect can thus be equated to a standard form in the TL. However, a key feature of *The Color Purple* is precisely the tension between difference and norm, which is represented when Nettie’s voice directly intervenes in the narrative. Even if Celie’s speech predominates through the novel, the pragmatic function of dialect in the ST problematizes its neutralization in any target version. Indeed, the “insider’s view” referred to by Fifer is lost in translation, as the nonstandard talk of Celie and her community becomes an unmarked majority language in translation. Likewise, the contrast between Nettie’s and Celie’s use of language is also neutralized, so the two sisters appear to share a common mode of expression in the TL; there is no communication gap between them. Let us illustrate this phenomenon with textual evidence from the novel by comparing Excerpts 3 and 4:

<b>Excerpt 3</b>	
Walker 2019, 117	De la Fuente Rodríguez 1993, 111
Dear Celie, I wrote a letter to you almost every day on the ship coming to Africa. But by the time	Querida Celie: En el barco que nos traía a África, te he escrito una carta casi cada día. Pero,

<p>we docked I was so down, I tore them into little pieces and dropped them into the water. Albert is not going to let you have my letters and so what use is there in writing them. That's the way I felt when I tore them up and sent them to you on the waves. But now I feel different.</p> <p>I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart. I am so <i>lonely</i>, Celie.</p>	<p>cuando llegamos, estaba tan triste que las rompí todas y las tiré al mar. De qué sirve escribir, si Albert no te da mis cartas. Eso pensaba cuando las rompí y te las mandé con las olas. Pero he cambiado de parecer.</p> <p>Recuerdo que un día dijiste que te daba tanta vergüenza tu vida que no podías hablar de ella ni con Dios y que por eso tenías que escribirla, a pesar de que te dabas cuenta de que escribías muy mal. Ahora comprendo lo que sentías. Y tanto si Dios lee cartas como si no, sé que tú seguirás escribiéndolas, y eso me basta. De todos modos, cuando dejo de escribirte me siento tan mal como cuando dejo de rezar, encerrada en mí misma, ahogándome con mis pensamientos. Estoy tan <i>sola</i>, Celie.</p>
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<b>Excerpt 4</b>	
Walker 2019, 133	De la Fuente Rodríguez 1993, 125
<p>Dear God,</p> <p>Now I know Nettie alive I begin to strut a little bit. Think, When she come home us leave here. Her and me and our two children. What they look like, I wonder. But it hard to think bout them. I feels shame. More than love, to tell the truth. Anyway, is they all right here? Got good sense and all? Shug say children got by incest turn into dunces. Incest part of the</p>	<p>Querido Dios:</p> <p>Desde que sé que Nettie vive, he empezado a pisar más fuerte. Pienso: Cuando ella llegue, nos iremos de aquí. Ella y yo y nuestros dos hijos. Me pregunto cómo serán. Pero se me hace duro pensar en ellos. Me da vergüenza. Siento más vergüenza que amor, la verdad. Y, después de todo, ¿se encontrarán bien aquí? Dice Shug que los hijos del incesto se crían idiotas. El incesto entra en el plan del</p>

devil's plan. But I think bout Nettie. It's hot, here, Celie, she write. Hotter than July. Hotter than August and July. Hot like cooking dinner on a big stove in a little kitchen in August and July. Hot.	diablo. Pero yo pienso en Nettie. Hace calor aquí, Celie, escribe. Más calor que en julio. Más calor que en agosto y julio juntos. Es como estar guisando en una cocina pequeña con un fogón muy grande, en agosto y julio. Calor.
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The different linguistic profiles of the two sisters are clearly delimited in the source version of the texts, where Nettie writes in a perfectly grammatical standard English with few, if any, dialectal markers and Celie uses her usual folk black dialect. However, the striking contrast marked by the sisters' different upbringing disappears in translation, where both characters use standard peninsular Spanish to communicate. The only sizeable difference between the two speeches is Celie's preference for shorter and more concise sentences, while Nettie makes use of complex syntax and a wider range of verb tenses and aspects. In this case, preserving Celie's writing style and punctuation in the TT is key to render some contrast between the sisters' modes of expression and underscore the underlying pragmatic implications of linguistic difference in the novel.

Anyhow, even if we accept that Celie's black folk dialect is the predominant mode of expression in the novel, the neutralization of difference in her speech still challenges the transfer of the pragmatic dimension of the ST. More precisely, the function of linguistic variation cannot otherwise be preserved in the TT. Thus, the cooperative principle—understood as the cooperation between interlocutors to ensure effective communication (Hatim and Mason 1990, 240)—is not abided in the TT. Indeed, as the linguistic features of the ST are altered (standardized) in translation, the intended purpose and effect of dialect cannot be fulfilled. Thus, the representation of the black community that is linguistically effected in the ST can only be conveyed in the TT through content and meaning.

We shall turn now to the semiotic dimension which, according to Hatim and Mason (1990, 64), studies texts as signs within the value system of a given culture. This perspective allows for an integrated view of the text which considers the categories of genre and discourse. In our particular analysis, we will pay attention to the way in

which these categories affect and are affected by the use and translation of dialectal variation in the novel.

We hereby understand by genre the conventionalized forms of texts, which are culturally determined, and reflect the functions involved in particular social occasions. This definition is shared by Hatim and Mason who, in turn, take it from Kress (1985, 19). The notion of genre is relevant to our analysis because it may influence transfer between semiotic systems. Further argumentation for the influence of genre in TS is provided by Tello Fons (2011, 313), who argues that, while it is not common in Spanish novels to use a local dialectal variant to translate dialect, this option is more widely accepted in drama, where the oral character of the genre facilitates such a rendering.

Mae G. Henderson has explored Walker's use of particular generic conventions in relation to her gender politics and the black oral tradition. According to the author,

Celie's letters transpose a black and oral mode into a Western epistolary tradition (a form also adapted effectively by modern African writers such as Camara Laye [1928-80] and Ferdinand Oyono [b. 1929], whom Walker acknowledges as influences). Walker's use of the vernacular (sometimes called Black English) has invested an old and somewhat rigid form with new life. (2014, 68)

Indeed, Walker's engagement with various oral and literary traditions calls for a reexamination of traditional and static conceptions of genre. Thus, "Walker creates a new literary space for the black and female idiom within a traditionally Western and Eurocentric form. In the process of merging two forms and two traditions, *The Color Purple* extends both" (Henderson 2014, 80). Furthermore, Walker's representation of black dialect further challenges traditional conventions of the narrative genre, where dialect is reserved for direct speech while the narrator conventionally resorts to standard language. In the case of *The Color Purple*, Celie uses her black folk speech both in direct and indirect discourse, as it is the only language available for her to communicate either in written or oral form.

In this case, the implications of Walker's challenge of traditional subgenres within the narrative form are very much in line with the discourse underlying the use and representation of dialect in the novel. Indeed, a good number of scholars have given

thought to the political implications of Walker's treatment of the spoken and the written word in the novel. In using Celie's black folk speech as the main vehicle for the narration, Walker destabilizes traditional dynamics of center and periphery, as dialect becomes the only possible means of communication. While Celie's language is notably a consequence of her personal context and upbringing, her deliberate refusal to improve her speech by learning normative English acts as the author's own political statement:

Darlene trying to teach me how to talk. She say US not so hot. A dead country give-away. You say US where most folks say WE, she say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amuse.

What I care? I ast. I'm happy.

(2019, 193)

This position is reinforced when Celie reflects upon the implications of being forced to speak in what can almost be understood as a foreign language:

But she say I feel more happier talking like she talk. Can't nothing make me happier than seeing you again, I think, but I don't say nothing. Every time I say something the way I say it, she correct me until I say it some other way. Pretty soon it feel like I can't think. My mind run up on a thought, git confuse, run back and sort of lay down.

You sure this worth it? I ast.

She say Yeah. Bring me a bunch of books. Whitefolks all over them, talking bout apples and dogs.

What I care bout dogs? I think.

Darlene keep trying. Think how much better Shug feel with you educated, she say. She won't be shame to take you anywhere.

Shug not shame no how, I say. But she don't believe this the truth.

(2019, 193)

The passage illustrates Darlene's utmost concern with Celie's self-betterment through education. However, this contrasts with Celie's attitude towards her dialect, as she is proud of it and even displays a critical attitude towards Darlene's position.



The position of standard, normative English is further compromised by its representation through Nettie's letters. As Linda Abbandonato notes,

By incorporating Nettie's letters into Celie's text, Walker illuminates the contrast between Celie's spare suggestiveness and Nettie's stilted verbosity. Thus the expressive flexibility of the black vernacular, a supposedly inferior speech, is measured against the repressed and rigid linguistic codes to which Nettie has conformed; the position of standard (white) English has been challenged, and Celie's vitality is privileged over Nettie's dreary correctness. (1991, 1108)

Ultimately, it is precisely the use of BE what allows the author to convey her personal discourse in the novel. Far from providing a neutral account, Walker takes a politically and socially compromised position in her challenge of linguistic and generic conventions.

Consequently, the semiotic dimension is affected by the standardization of dialect in the target version of the novel. To begin with, the tension between the black oral mode and the Western epistolary tradition is not present in the TT, which only preserves reference to the latter. However, in this case we should also consider the cultural and historical gap between the source and target cultures, which complicates any attempt at successfully transferring reference to the black literary tradition in the TC. Thus, as far as generic conventions are concerned, the rendering of Celie's speech in the Spanish version adjusts to more traditional standards within the narrative genre. Likewise, the tension between conventions for direct and indirect speech in the ST is also eased in the TT, as the narrator's language and style conform to norms in the TC.

In order to illustrate the various ways in which the standardization of linguistic variation influences the author's original discourse, let us examine de la Fuente Rodríguez's translation of the aforementioned passage discussing Celie's refusal to learn normative English:

Darlene quiere que afine mi lenguaje, como dice ella. Que este acento mío huele a tierra muerta. Que la gente te toma por retrasada. Los de color piensan que estás caduca y los blancos, que eres muy graciosa.

¿Y qué?, le digo. Yo soy feliz así.

Pero ella afirma que seré más feliz hablando como habla ella. Yo pienso que lo único que puede hacerme más feliz será volver a verte, pero no se lo digo. Y ella no para de corregirme, hasta que me parece que no puedo ni pensar. Cuando me viene algo al pensamiento, empiezo a darle vueltas, buscando la forma de decirlo, hasta que pierdo el hilo y me quedo como antes.

¿Te parece que vale la pena?, le pregunto.

Ella dice que sí. Me ha traído un montón de libros. Todos, llenos de blancos que hablan de manzanas y perros.

¿Y qué me importan a mí los perros?, pienso.

Darlene vuelve a la carga. Imagínate lo contenta que se sentiría Shug si tú fueras una persona instruida, me dice. No se avergonzaría de llevarte a los sitios.

Shug no se avergüenza de mí, le digo. Pero ella no me cree.

(1993, 185-186)

While the source excerpt discusses a) Celie's use of BE and b) Celie's lack of linguistic skills, the TT omits any explicit reference to formal features of black speech or ungrammatical language, as no linguistic markers of difference or illiteracy are portrayed through the novel. Thus, Darlene's reference to Celie's misuse of "us" as a personal pronoun is omitted. In contrast, the translator does incorporate an explicit mention of Celie's "accent": "Que este acento mío huele a tierra muerta". This becomes the first explicit representation of the singularity of the character's speech in the TT.

The challenge of translating Celie's metalinguistic reflections on her use of language can be further appreciated if the source and target passages are examined comparatively. Indeed, in trying to discuss the character's lack of linguistic skills without making explicit reference to formal features of her black folk speech, de la Fuente Rodríguez applies a considerable degree of adaptation to the text. Compare the following excerpts:

<b>Excerpt 5</b>	
Walker 2019, 194	De la Fuente Rodríguez 1993, 185-186
Darlene trying to teach me how to talk. She say US not so hot. A dead country	Darlene quiere que afine mi lenguaje, como dice ella. Que este acento mío huele

<p>give-away. You say US where most folks say WE, she say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amuse.</p> <p>What I care? I ast. I'm happy.</p> <p>But she say I feel more happier talking like she talk. Can't nothing make me happier than seeing you again, I think, but I don't say nothing. Every time I say something the way I say it, she correct me until I say it some other way. Pretty soon it feel like I can't think. My mind run up on a thought, git confuse, run back and sort of lay down.</p>	<p>a tierra muerta. Que la gente te toma por retrasada. Los de color piensan que estás caduca y los blancos, que eres muy graciosa.</p> <p>¿Y qué?, le digo. Yo soy feliz así.</p> <p>Pero ella afirma que seré más feliz hablando como habla ella. Yo pienso que lo único que puede hacerme más feliz será volver a verte, pero no se lo digo. Y ella no para de corregirme, hasta que me parece que no puedo ni pensar. Cuando me viene algo al pensamiento, empiezo a darle vueltas, buscando la forma de decirlo, hasta que pierdo el hilo y me quedo como antes.</p>
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While the whole reference to Celie's faulty use of "us" is necessarily omitted in the TT—as Celie's speech in Spanish is perfectly grammatical—, other expressions are also adapted in de la Fuente Rodríguez's translation. Thus, "Darlene trying to teach me how to talk" becomes "Darlene quiere que afine mi lenguaje, como dice ella" and "A dead country give-away" is amplified to "Que este acento mío huele a tierra muerta", as the translator adds explicit reference to the issue under discussion. Likewise, the sentences "Every time I say something the way I say it, she correct me until I say it some other way. Pretty soon it feel like I can't think" are merged into "Y ella no para de corregirme, hasta que me parece que no puedo ni pensar". The adaptation of content in the Spanish rendering of this particular passage may be related to the translator's will to omit specific allusions to Celie's flawed speaking performance, as no linguistic evidence of this feature is provided through the novel. Thus, by reorienting the discussion towards Celie's *accent*, the translator provides justification for the character's standard normative writing style, assuming that accent is not formally represented in her epistles.

Notwithstanding, the standardization of dialect and the omission of metalinguistic reflections on the use of linguistic variation inevitably hamper the author's political discourse. In prioritizing content over form, Walker's implicit critique of the dynamics between center and periphery and her normativization of difference through Celie's dialectal speech are neutralized in translation. Thus, while the novel's content is successfully transferred into the target literary system, the particular connotative implications of the signifier—in this case, BE—, are not rendered in translation. Again, the cultural, political and historical differences separating source and TCs should not be disregarded at this point, especially considering the time of publication of the novel. Indeed, the gap in the conditions of production of the ST and reception of the TT further complicate the successful transfer of Walker's political discourse in a context that was—and somehow still is—distant from the sociopolitical reality of the source material.

Following this line of thought, R. Erin Huskey summarizes the way in which *The Color Purple* discloses the author's sociopolitical and literary project:

Alice Walker demonstrates that social change begins on a very personal level. By telling the stories of these characters through their letters, she offers an intensely personal and individualized engagement with the revitalization of language and form—both literary and bodily—to signal that alternatives for community start with individual growth and commitment to the self. Through the form, language, and content of the novel, she transforms historically oppressive dominant literary forms and asserts voice as represented by the tangible object of the novel. [...] The novel is a textual act of testifying and witnessing to inspire the reader to transform his/her life and the terms in which he/she thinks about the self. (2009, 95)

## **4.2. *Beloved***

Sharon P. Holland argues that *Beloved* “represents one of Morrison's most profound and complex manipulations of the boundaries of language” (1995, 89). To Holland, *Beloved* becomes a “linguistic hyperbole” that utterly challenges the dichotomy between

the power and powerlessness of language. While Morrison deliberately refuses to represent BE in literature through eye dialect, the writer is committed to creating a language that indisputably represents the features and identity of the black community.

To Ritashona Simpson (2007, 92), the linguistic representation of blackness in *Beloved* is based on two aspects. First, Morrison uses a language that generates the effect of the sounds usually heard in spoken black dialect, so her style is “speakerly and “colloquial”. To this end, Morrison necessarily plays with the arrangement of grammar, syntax and even spelling to suggest blackness in the character’s speech. Second, the author focuses on representing “what cannot be explicitly related by ‘Black’ features of language at all: the creation of a character’s voice which is never heard: shaping a silence while breaking it” (2007, 93). According to Simpson, standard English is used for this second purpose in the novel, as the writer challenges conventional representations of blackness in literature: “[this] language may be called Black—not because it has the looks conventionally associated with Black language [...]—but because it serves the goal she has defined for achieving a language worthy of black culture” (2007, 93). In accordance to Simpson’s argument, Smiley also describes Morrison’s language in the novel as “graphic, evocative and unwhite without veering towards dialect” (2006, n. p.).

While, following Simpson and Smiley, we may argue that Morrison makes use of both standard and nonstandard language to portray blackness in *Beloved*, our study will concentrate on analyzing the use and translation of grammatically, syntactically and phonologically marked passages.<sup>325</sup> In his study of linguistic variation in the Spanish translations of African American neo-slave narratives, Miguel Sanz Jiménez compiles a total of 161 fragments that display morphosyntactic or phonological features of BE in *Beloved* (2020). This evidences the fact that while Morrison does resort to a wide range of stylistic devices to depict blackness in the novel, the literary representation of linguistic variation is present through the text, and consequently challenges the rendering of linguistic markers of difference in the TL.

In this context, our analysis will consider the language used by three key women characters, namely Baby Suggs, Sethe and most significantly, Beloved. These women represent three different generations. The different contexts from which the three

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<sup>325</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Morrison’s representation of blackness through standard language refer to Simpson (2007).

characters come are reflected through their use of language and their modes of self-expression. Drawing from this frame of reference, dialect in the novel becomes key to understand interpersonal relationships and represent different expressions of womanhood and feminism. Our study will first examine the textual material concerning the character’s use of dialect and then proceed to undertake a macrotextual approach to analyze the pragmatic and semiotic dimensions, understanding the whole text as a unit of analysis.

To begin with, scholars such as bell hooks, Cyntia Dobbs, Jacqueline Trace and Emily Griesinger, among others, have foregrounded the significance of Baby Suggs’s sermon in the reclaiming of African American bodies from the nineteenth-century white imagination. More precisely, Trace proclaims Morrison the founder of a new “religion of Blackness”, as she argues that Baby Suggs’s sermon theologizes a unique “secret, feminine style of grace” (1991, 21). Scholars also agree that the language used by Baby Suggs is key to convey the social and political implications found at the roots of her message. In this light, José Endoença Martins (2012) has comparatively studied the translation of Baby Suggs’s sermon in two Brazilian versions of the novel from the perspective of Gates’s notion of signifyin(g). Martins’s analysis relies on notions of “fluency” and “resistance” to characterize the Brazilian renderings of the aforementioned passage.

The representation of BE in Baby Suggs’s speech significantly differs from Walker’s rendering of dialect in *The Color Purple*. In this case, Morrison only uses a limited number of grammatical and phonological dialect markers to portray difference in the character’s speaking voice. However, these features are neutralized in the Spanish rendering of the passage, where Menéndez Sallés uses standard peninsular Spanish through the whole sermon. Excerpt 1 displays the translation of Baby Suggs’s sermon:

<b>Excerpt 1</b>	
Morrison 2010, 103-104	Menéndez Sallés 2016, 126
“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh.	—En este lugar, carne somos—decía—. Carne que llora y ríe, carne que baila con los pies descalzos en la hierba. Amadla. Amadla intensamente. Más allá no aman

They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. You got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and

vuestra carne, la desprecian. No aman vuestros ojos, quisieran arrancároslos. No aman la piel de vuestra espalda. Más allá la despellejan. Y oh, pueblo mío, no aman vuestras manos. Sólo las usan, las atan, las sujetan, las cortan y las dejan vacías. ¡Amad vuestras manos! Amadlas. Levantadlas y besadlas. Tocad a otros con ellas, unidlas con otras, acariciaos la cara con ellas, pues más allá tampoco aman vuestra cara. Vosotros tenéis que amarla, ¡vosotros! Y no, no aman vuestra boca. Más allá, la verán rota y volverán a romperla. No harán caso de lo que digáis con ella. No oirán lo que gritéis con ella. Os arrebatarán lo que le pongáis dentro para alimentar vuestro cuerpo y os darán sobras, no aman vuestra boca. Vosotros tenéis que amarla. Estoy hablando de la carne. Carne que es menester amar. Pies que necesitan descansar y danzar, espaldas que necesitan apoyo, hombros que necesitan brazos, brazos fuertes, os digo. Y oh, pueblo mío, allá, oídme bien, no aman vuestro cuello sin dogal y recto. De modo que habéis de amar vuestro cuello, cubrirlo con vuestra mano y acariciarlo, mantenerlo erguido. Y vuestras entrañas, que preferirían echárselas a los cerdos, tenéis que amar vuestras entrañas. El hígado oscuro... amadlo, amadlo, y amad también vuestro apaleado y palpitante corazón. Más que los ojos o los pies. Más que los

<p>your lifegiving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.”</p>	<p>pulmones que nunca han respirado aire libre. Más que vuestro vientre que contiene la vida y más que vuestras partes dadoras de vida, oídme bien, amad vuestro corazón. Porque éste es el precio.</p>
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On the one hand, the text displays several unmarked grammatical and phonological features, such as subject-verb concord (“flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass”), single—rather than double—negation (“They don’t love your eyes”, “No more do they love the skin on your back”) and use of auxiliaries (“And all your inside parts that they’d just as soon slop for hogs”), among others. Still, a number of features of black oral speech can be traced. As for the grammatical markers, the opening stance “we flesh” already features copula omission. Likewise, we may observe auxiliary deletion in “You got to love it” and “You got to love them”, which are repeated through the monologue, as well as use of the negative marker “ain’t” in “And no, they ain’t in love with your mouth”. As for the phonological features, initial consonant deletion (“pick em out”), deletion of initial unstressed syllable (“‘cause”) and alternation of final unstressed /n/ for /ŋ/ (“leavins”) can be observed.

Likewise, other characteristics of the text add to its oral character and contribute, in turn, to the representation of feigned orality. To cite some examples, in addition to the constant interpellation of her audience (e.g. “O my people”, “Love your hands! Love them”, “You got to love it, you!”), which evokes the call/response rhetoric of the black oral tradition, we may identify several colloquial expressions which usually take the form of appositions, such as “I’m telling you”, “hear me” (as in “out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight”) or the phrasing “This is flesh I’m talking about here”. These interventions also add some spontaneous character to Baby Suggs’s sermon. Altogether, the formal and stylistic features displayed in the passage illustrate what Simpson describes as “black looks and black acts” in Morrison’s literary representations of blackness.

As was anticipated above, the translated version provides a standardized rendering of the monologue, where no markers of deviation from the standard norm are perceived. Likewise, several indicators of orality in the ST, such as the aforementioned colloquial



expressions, the repetitions or the punctuation are adapted in the target version. For instance, “This is flesh I’m talking about here” becomes “Estoy hablando de la carne” and “The dark, dark liver” is rendered as “El hígado oscuro...”.

A second excerpt will provide further evidence of the features of Baby Suggs’s speech in both source and target versions. The passage below displays a conversation between Mr. Garner—the owner of Sweet Home plantation—and Baby Suggs:

<b>Excerpt 2</b>	
Morrison 2010, 167	Menéndez Sallés 2016, 196
<p>Baby Suggs thought it was a good time to ask him something she had long wanted to know.</p> <p>“Mr. Garner,” she said, “why you all call me Jenny?”</p> <p>“‘Cause that what’s on your sales ticket, gal. Ain’t that your name? What you call yourself?”</p> <p>“Nothing,” she said. “I don’t call myself nothing.”</p> <p>Mr. Garner went red with laughter. “When I took you out of Carolina, Whitlow called you Jenny and Jenny Whitlow is what his bill said. Didn’t he call you Jenny?”</p> <p>“No, sir. If he did I didn’t hear it.”</p> <p>“What did you answer to?”</p> <p>“Anything, but Suggs is what my husband name.”</p> <p>“You got married, Jenny? I didn’t know it.”</p>	<p>A Baby Suggs se le ocurrió que era un buen momento para preguntarle algo que hacía mucho quería saber.</p> <p>—Mr. Garner, ¿por qué todos ustedes me llaman Jenny?</p> <p>—Porque eso decía en tu etiqueta de venta. ¿No es tu nombre? ¿Cómo te llamas?</p> <p>—Nada, yo no me llamo nada.</p> <p>Mr. Garner se puso morado de risa.</p> <p>—Cuando te saqué de Carolina, Whitlow te llamaba Jenny y Jenny Whitlow es lo que decía la etiqueta. ¿Él no te llamaba Jenny?</p> <p>—No, señor. Y si lo hacía yo nunca lo oí.</p> <p>—¿A qué respondías?</p> <p>—A cualquier cosa, pero Suggs es el nombre de mi marido.</p> <p>—¿Estás casada, Jenny? No lo sabía.</p>

As might be seen, Baby Suggs's speech displays several recurrent nonstandard features. Among these, we may identify noninverted questions (e.g. "why you all call me Jenny?"), multiple negation (e.g. "I don't call myself nothing") and copula deletion (e.g. "Anything, but Suggs is what my husband name."). However, at this point we should note the inconsistent representation of dialect markers in the character's speech, as features such as negation or questions are used according to standard norms in the sermon, while in the passage below they adhere to BE norms. Likewise, Mr. Garner's speech also features the nonstandard markers of his southern idiolect, even if the study of geographic dialect falls outside the scope of this work. Anyhow, the passage displays a clear contrast between Mr. Garner's and Baby Suggs's marked speech, on the one hand, and the narrative voice, on the other, which uses normative standard English.

This contrast is neutralized in translation, where the characters' language is neutralized into the same standard variant used by the narrator. Thus, the TT displays no significant difference between the linguistic features of the narrative voice and the two characters—both of which are portrayed as speakers of a particular nonstandard variant in the ST—. Note, for instance, the rendering of:

"Mr. Garner," she said, "why you all call me Jenny?"

"Cause that what's on your sales ticket, gal. Ain't that your name? What you call yourself?"

"Nothing," she said. "I don't call myself nothing."

as

—Mr. Garner, ¿por qué todos ustedes me llaman Jenny?

—Porque eso decía en tu etiqueta de venta. ¿No es tu nombre? ¿Cómo te llamas?

—Nada, yo no me llamo nada.

While the double negative is preserved in the TT ("yo **no** me llamo **nada**"), this is due to the internal structure of standard peninsular Spanish, which allows multiple negation in constructions such as the aforementioned. Other than that, the translator neutralized all nonstandard markers in the character's speech, so no linguistic difference between the omniscient narrator, the black slave Baby Suggs and the Southern white plantation owner Mr. Garner are perceived in the Spanish version of the text.

The field of the first excerpt is an exhortative sermon on the reclaiming of black bodies. Even if terminology particular to the slavery period is mentioned, the text cannot be classified as specialized. Likewise, the field of the second passage is a non-specialized dialogue around the topic of Baby Suggs's name. The field of the two excerpts remains unaltered through transfer into Spanish.

As for the mode, both texts were written to be read as if speech. Note that we are hereby referring exclusively to Baby Suggs's interventions rather than considering other voices in the novel such as the narrator, which would be assigned a different textual mode. Before moving on to examining the mode of the translated text, we should first delve into Morrison's construction of this feature in the studied excerpts. To begin with, readers can clearly identify the character's interventions as texts to be read as speech thanks to the narrator's say, as he/she announces the character's direct interventions through expressions such as "she said". Likewise, the use of inverted commas to encompass direct speech also aids readers in identifying the mode of such passages. Last but not least, the rhythm and dynamicity in Baby Suggs's language further reinforces the oral character of her interventions. Morrison herself has reflected on the challenge posed by BE to traditional conceptions of oral and written language:

There are things that I try to incorporate into my fiction that are directly and deliberately related to what I consider to be the main characteristics of black art, wherever it is. One of them is the ability to be oral and written literature at the same time: combining these two aspects so that the stories can be read silently, of course, but also heard. (1984, 59)

In the Spanish rendering of both fragments, the mode is preserved as written to be read as if speech. However, this mostly occurs thanks to the formal conventions of Spanish, which signal the characters' direct interventions through em dashes, as well as because of the transfer of some exhortative assertions, such as "oídme bien". Other than that, the neutralization of dialectal markers subtracts some of the dynamism and spontaneity which characterize Morrison's use of literary dialect. Thus, despite mode remains invariable in the TT, the Spanish translation does not achieve equivalence in the

rendering of the tension between written and oral language originally conveyed by the author.<sup>326</sup>

The tenor of the two excerpts is informal. In the case of the monologue, Baby Suggs, an uneducated slave, addresses her community in a solemn but familiar language. In the dialogue, the woman feels relatively comfortable talking to Mr. Garner, as she believes to be in a safe environment. Actually, it is Baby Suggs herself the one who starts the conversation inquiring about her naming. However, as noted by Sanz Jiménez (2020, 304), the standardization of dialect in the TT results in an alteration of the tenor, as the Spanish rendering of Baby Suggs’s spoken voice is more formal than the ST. This is especially true of the first excerpt, where the lexical choices made by the translator also contribute to a more formal—or, say, a less informal—register. By way of example, “they will snatch away [...]” is rendered as “os arrebatarán [...]”, “Flesh that needs to be loved” becomes “Carne que es menester amar” and “all your inside parts” is translated by using more specific terminology, namely “vuestras entrañas”. Likewise, “your lifegiving private parts” is rendered as “vuestras partes dadoras de vida”, so the explicit sexual reference to a “private” area of the body is also omitted.

Excerpt 3 examines Sethe’s use of dialect. As occurred in the case of Baby Suggs, all the instances featuring nonstandard linguistic markers come from direct speech, and thus contribute to the construction of feigned orality in the novel. The passage below illustrates a conversation between the protagonist and Paul D. Even if our main focus falls on Sethe’s language, it is also interesting to examine the dialectal features in Paul D’s interventions, as both characters come from a similar social and cultural background.

<b>Excerpt 3</b>	
Morrison 2010, 19-20	Menéndez Sallés 2016, 35-36
“Men don’t know nothing much,” said Paul D, tucking his pouch back into his vest pocket, “but they do know a suckling can’t be away from its mother for long.”	Los hombres no entienden mucho—dijo Paul D mientras volvía a guardar la bolsita en el bolsillo del chaleco—, pero saben que a un niño de teta no se lo puede separar

<sup>326</sup> I shall return to this point when discussing genre as a component of the semiotic dimension of analysis.

<p>“Then they know what it’s like to send your children off when your breasts are full.”</p> <p>“We was talking ‘bout a tree, Sethe”</p> <p>“After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn’t speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.”</p>	<p>mucho tiempo de su madre.</p> <p>—Entonces saben lo que es que alejen a tus hijos cuando tienes los pechos llenos.</p> <p>—Estábamos hablando de un árbol, Sethe.—Después de que tú y yo nos despedimos, entraron esos muchachos y cogieron mi leche. Por eso fueron allí. Me sujetaron y me la quitaron. Los denuncié a Mrs. Garner. Ella tenía el bulto y no podía hablar, pero se le llenaron los ojos de lágrimas. Los muchachos supieron que los había delatado. Maestro hizo que uno me abriera la espalda a latigazos y cuando se cerró se formó un árbol. Todavía crece.</p>
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Both Sethe’s and Paul D’s direct interventions display formal features of BE. To begin with, Paul D uses multiple negation (“Men don’t know nothing much”), subject-verb nonconcord (“We was talking”) and deletion of initial unstressed syllable (“‘bout”). Parallely, Sethe’s language displays initial consonant deletion (“pick em out”), and use of the object pronoun “them” in place of the demonstrative “those” (“Them boys found out”). All the phonological and grammatical dialect markers are standardized in translation. Double negation is not preserved either (“Los hombres no entienden mucho”), unlike in the translation of Baby Suggs’s speech in excerpt 2, where the Spanish version also rendered multiple negation in the target sentence.

Both field and mode remain unaltered in translation. In this case, the field is a non-specialized dialogue around Sethe’s biographical account and the mode is written to be read as if spoken. However, the lexical choices made by the translator modify the tenor of the fragment, which displays a higher degree of formality in the TT. While Menéndez Sallés’s rendering of “suckling” as “niño de teta” preserves the colloquial register of the situation, her choices regarding the translation of the phrasal verbs that impregnate Sethe’s speech with dynamicity and spontaneity elevate the tenor of the passage. Note, for instance, the rendering of the informal “tell on” as “denuncié” and

“delatado” and compare the Spanish translation of “Them boys found out I told on em” as “Los muchachos supieron que los había delatado”. All in all, the neutralization of dialect markers together with the lexical choices made by the translator fail to convey an equivalent tenor in the Spanish version of the text.

Likewise, the standardization of the characters’ speech also affects the dynamicity and fluency which characterize black talk through the novel. This is especially poignant when analyzing the intertwining of dialect and idiolect in Beloved’s speaking voice. As noted by Simpson, “Beloved’s language is the result of a beginner’s attempt to become familiar with and articulate in the English language. [...] Since Beloved rarely talks, her string of nonstandard sentences constitutes significant portions of her language” (2007, 80-81). Indeed, the most characteristic feature of Beloved’s language is her inconsistent use of nonstandard English, which includes infrequent lexical choices, unusual nonstandard grammatical forms and inconsistent past tense markers (2007, 80). Consequently, Beloved’s personal use of dialect significantly differs from the language spoken by the other inhabitants of the house and their community at large. In this context, language becomes a further indicator of difference and alienation surrounding her character, as it sometimes hampers communication with her environment. This reality is illustrated in the two consecutive passages displayed in excerpts 4 and 5, where several communication breakdowns between Beloved, Sethe and Denver occur shortly after the former’s arrival at 124 Bluestone Road:

<b>Excerpt 4</b>	
Morrison 2010, 69-71	Menéndez Sallés 2016, 89-92
“Where your diamonds?” Beloved searched Sethe’s face.	—¿Dónde están tus diamantes?—Beloved escudriñó el rostro de Sethe.
“Diamonds? What would I be doing with diamonds?”	—¿Diamantes? ¿Qué haría yo con diamantes?
“On your ears.”	—En tus orejas.
“Wish I did. I had some crystal once. A present from a lady I worked for.”	—Ojalá tuviera. Una vez tuve unos de cristal, regalo de una señora para la que trabajaba.
“Tell me,” said Beloved, smiling a wide happy smile. “Tell me your diamonds.”	—Cuéntame—Beloved sonrió

<p>[...]</p> <p>“I never saw you in no earrings,” said Denver. “Where are they now?”</p> <p>“Gone,” said Sethe. “Long gone,” and she wouldn’t say another word.</p>	<p>ampliamente, dichosa—, háblame de tus diamantes.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>—Yo nunca te vi con pendientes—dijo Denver—. ¿Dónde están?</p> <p>—Desaparecieron—replicó Sethe—. Hace mucho.—Y no agregó una sola palabra.</p>
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<b>Excerpt 5</b>	
Morrison 2010, 72	Menéndez Sallés 2016, 92-93
<p>“Your woman she never fix up your hair?” Beloved asked.</p> <p>Sethe and Denver looked up at her. After four weeks they still had not got used to the gravelly voice and the song that seemed to lie in it. Just outside music it lay, with a cadence not like theirs.</p> <p>“Your woman she never fix up your hair?” was clearly a question for Sethe, since that’s who she was looking at.</p> <p>“My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don’t remember. I didn’t see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks—that’s the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was. So to</p>	<p>—¿Tu mujer nunca te peinó?—preguntó Beloved.</p> <p>Sethe y Denver levantaron la vista y la miraron. Después de cuatro semanas todavía no se habían acostumbrado a la voz arenosa y a su deje sonoro. Era música con una cadencia distinta de la de ellas.</p> <p>«¿Tu mujer nunca te peinó?» era una pregunta dirigida a Sethe, evidentemente, pues la miraba a ella.</p> <p>—¿Mi mujer? ¿Te refieres a mi madre? Si lo hizo, no me acuerdo. Sólo la vi unas veces, en el campo, y un día que estaba haciendo tintes. Cuando yo despertaba por la mañana, ella ya estaba en la fila. Si brillaba la luna, trabajaban con su luz. Los domingos dormía como un tronco. Debí darme la teta dos o tres semanas... como hacían todas. Después volvió al arrozal y me amamantó otra mujer, que trabajaba de eso. Que yo recuerde, no.</p>

answer you, no. I reckon not. She never fixed my hair nor nothing. [...]"	Calculo que no. Nunca me peinó ni nada por el estilo. [...]"
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As both passages illustrate, while the three interlocutors use nonstandard varieties, Sethe and Denver feel the need to translate into their own language Beloved's speech. In excerpt 4, the two marked constructions used by the ghostly woman are "Where your diamonds?" and "Tell me your diamonds". The two constructions feature syntactic deviations from standard English: while the question displays copula deletion, the exhortation omits the preposition "about" (as in "tell me *about* your diamonds"). However, the most problematic aspect of Beloved's language in this case is her lexical choice, as she uses the word "diamonds" for "earrings". Eventually, Sethe and Denver are able to interpret Beloved's words, and Denver rephrases the original sentence in her own language: "I never saw you in no earrings [...] Where are they now?". Even if Denver's phrasing is still marked, as she uses multiple negation, her construction adheres to the conventions of black oral speech in a way that Beloved's does not.

While Menéndez Sallés's rendering of the fragment does transfer the communication breakdown derived from Beloved's lexical choices, the neutralization of dialect does not convey the extent to which her language differs from Sethe's and Denver's. Thus, the strikingly unfamiliar construction "Tell me your diamonds", is plainly rendered as "háblame de tus diamantes", which does not convey any deviation from normative peninsular Spanish. Likewise, the contrast between Beloved's initial phrasing "Where your diamonds?" and Denver's paraphrase "Where are they?" is neutralized in Spanish, as the sentences are rendered as "¿Dónde están tus diamantes?" and "¿Dónde están?", respectively. Indeed, the target version standardizes both Beloved's idiolect as well as the dialectal features in Denver's speech, so the characters' language is homogenized into a single shared standard variant.

Excerpt 5 displays a similar situation, where Beloved's unconventional use of lexicon and syntax is reinterpreted by Sethe. The question "Your woman she never fix up your hair?" displays several nonstandard features. To begin with, pronoun apposition can be identified, where both "your woman" and "she" stand as the subject of the question. We may also observe lack of subject-verb inversion and use of an unmarked past form. Likewise, the lexicon is also problematic for Beloved's interlocutors, as the terms



“woman” and “fix up” deviate from their conventional meaning. This is noted by Sethe, who explicitly reinterprets “woman” as “mother”. Likewise, the choice of the phrasal verb “fix up” in place of the more conventional “comb” strikes as a further marker of difference in the character’s speech. Menéndez Sallés’s translation does convey Beloved’s peculiar use of “woman”, which is rendered as “mujer” in contrast with Sethe’s preference for the term “madre”. However, the Spanish translator opted for the unmarked Spanish verb “peinar” to render Beloved’s “fix up”, thus bringing the ghost’s language closer both to standard Spanish as well as to Sethe’s and Denver’s shared mode of communication.

The dialect markers present in Sethe’s reply are neutralized in translation. Sethe’s speaking voice in the ST features a noninverted question (“You mean my mother?”), alternation of unstressed auxiliary “have” for “of” (“She must of nursed me”) and multiple negation (“She never fixed my hair nor nothing”). Note that Sethe deliberately avoids paraphrasing the verb “fix” as “comb”; instead, she makes use of Beloved’s original wording and reinterprets it so as to imply that her mother was not able to take care of her in any way. As the translator initially used the more specific—and conventional—option “peinar”, Sethe’s wordplay cannot be literally transferred into Spanish, so the translator seeks equivalence of content by modulating the character’s original wording: “Nunca me peinó ni nada por el estilo”.

The field of both excerpts is a non-specialized conversation around the topic of Sethe’s past experiences as a slave. The mode, just like other dialogues previously examined, is written to be read as if spoken. In this case, both field and mode are preserved in translation, even if the Spanish version does not render linguistic variation as a further strategy to convey feigned orality in direct speech fragments. Likewise, as occurred in previous passages, the translator’s lexical choices have a direct effect on the tenor of the dialogue. In the second excerpt, Sethe uses a number of colloquial expressions and lexicon, such as “slept like a stick”, which evidence the informal register of the conversation. While Menéndez Sallés’s translation does use several colloquialisms, the translator tends to resort to a more specific vocabulary, which sometimes conveys a less informal tenor than the ST. Note, for instance, her use of popular phrasings such as “dormía como un tronco” or “debió darme la teta”, which do render the conversational context of the ST while, in contrast, the translation of “went back in rice” as “volvió al

arrozal” or “I sucked from another woman” as “me amamantó otra mujer” does not convey the spontaneity of Sethe’s speech.

Moving on to examining the pragmatic dimension of black dialect in the novel, we may refer to Yvonne Atkinson’s insights on Morrison’s reinterpretation of code-switching in the black oral tradition. While the scholar examines Morrison’s use of this strategy in *The Bluest Eye*, her insights can be extrapolated to our object of study. As Atkinson argues, the stark contrast between the narrator’s language and the spoken voice of the characters in the novel duplicates the alternating use of different languages—or different varieties, in this case—used in the African American oral tradition. Thus, Morrison’s use of code-switching in *Beloved* may be interpreted as an indicator of “inclusion and exclusion” from the community (Atkinson 2000, 15). In contrast with the narrative voice, which can be understood by the non-black audience, users of BE in the novel “are associated with the Black English oral tradition and are controllers and extollers of the power of the spoken word” (16).

In this context, Morrison’s use of BE in *Beloved* functions at two different levels which are intrinsically related. First, it fulfills a mimetic intention, as the characters are represented and defined by their language and, more precisely, by their idiolectal use of black talk. This intention is especially distinguishable in the character of Beloved whose unconventional language mirrors the exceptionality of her personal circumstance. Second, the author’s representation of the BE oral tradition works as an identifying marker of “those who are part of the community and those who are not” (Atkinson 2000, 15). Interestingly enough, Atkinson holds that “In the African American culture *correct* Black English usage demonstrates group identification” (15, my italics). Following this remark, the representation of Sethe, Denver and Paul D’s dialect identifies them as members of the community and grants them control of the spoken word, a key feature of the African American literary tradition. In his/her use of normative English, the omniscient narrator is consequently excluded from the group and with him/her, the white readership is also displaced from the center of this literary universe.

According to the author’s own thoughts, literary representations of black dialect do not need to resort to the technique of eye dialect, which construes dialogue “as an alien, estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spellings contrived to

defamiliarize it” (Morrison 1992, 52). Thus, the Morrison’s intention in representing black oral speech in her work is manifestly symbolic, as dialect is bestowed a place “over and above Standard English in practical and aesthetic expression” (Dahill-Baue 1996, 460).

As black dialect is neutralized in the Spanish translation of the novel, the key role of language as an indicator of group identification is not preserved. Borrowing Clifford E. Landers’s terminology (2001), we may conclude that Menéndez Sallés’s version of the novel tends towards fluency rather than resistance, as no deviation from standard peninsular Spanish is displayed in the characters’ language. This decision is criticized by Sanz Jiménez, who reads Menéndez Sallés’s neutralization of dialect against her decision to preserve proper names untranslated. Indeed, proper names in the novel are loaded with important connotations. For instance, *Beloved*, which literally means “Amada” was the only word Sethe could afford to have written on her dead daughter’s sepulcher. In the Spanish translation, information related to proper names is supplied in footnotes, where the translator explicitly expands on the load of each proper name. According to Sanz Jiménez,

The predominance of neutralization contrasts with the decision to include several footnotes that get readers’ attention and explain—quite literally—the loaded names in the target text, which have not been adapted in the Spanish version, as in the cases of *Beloved*, *Stamp Paid*, *Here Boy*, and *Sweet Home*. (2020, 304)

Indeed, there is no formal difference between the language used by the narrator, the members of the community and the stranger *Beloved*. Even if the translation does resort to some strategies to portray feigned orality in Spanish—for instance, the use of colloquial, mundane expressions—language in the TT does not bear any reference to the African American oral tradition or to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, which Atkinson describes as a fundamental axis in Morrison’s oeuvre. Even if these elements are somehow contained in the novel’s plot, the narrative that underscores the fundamental role of language to the black community is distorted and retold in the Spanish rendering of the novel.

This phenomenon necessarily demands an examination of the effects of translation in the semiotic dimension of context, which entails a revision of the categories of genre and discourse. As for the former, critics agree that Morrison's masterful crafting of language in *Beloved* infuses the written word with the sounds, rhythm and power of the black oral tradition. This, of course, relates to our discussion of the challenges posed by *The Color Purple* to static conceptions of genre in the American literary tradition. In her discussion of *The Bluest Eye*, Atkinson explicitly refers to this conundrum:

The story being told is defined by the systems of language that are evident in the oral tradition. Fitting the intricate oral tradition of language into a written form is problematic. Written language does not contain symbols to represent the inflection, tone, and non-verbal gestures of Black English. (2000, 17)

However, Morrison's novel does convey the orality of the black tradition through a number of strategies, such as the representation of the dynamics of call/response and witness/testify; the reproduction of conversations with short and quick interventions, thus signaling a turn-taking process; the recurrent allusions to music and songs and, of course, the representation of literary dialect (Atkinson 2000, 17). While some of these features are more likely to be transferred into the TT and successfully interpreted by target readers, others are not present in the Spanish rendering of the novel. Thus, while the fundamental conventions of the narrative genre are similar in the source and target cultures, the particular challenges posed by the author's juxtaposition of the oral and written literary traditions are hardly transferred into the TT. At this point we should also note the fact that some of the aforementioned strategies use implicit values and shared experiences of the African American imagination, which problematize their transfer into a different cultural and social context. For instance, implicit reference to musical patterns or folk songs may not be interpreted as such by the non-black reader.

While the literary use of dialect in *Beloved* might perform several functions and represent manifold authorial intentions, reading the novel as a semiotic unit (i.e. a sign) may bring some light into the social and political discourse conveyed through the text. As noted elsewhere, dialect in *Beloved* serves as a marker of difference. However, conventional conceptions of center and periphery are thereby subverted as BE speakers are relocated at the center and users of other linguistic variants are displaced toward marginal positions in the novel. This hierarchy functions at different levels, as it applies

to white characters, who are assigned peripheral roles in the novel; the character of Beloved, who is stigmatized by her unconventional use of language; and the white readership, who is deliberately placed in a position of discomfort through Morrison's recurrent reference to tropes and cultural modes belonging to the African American community. Thus, dialect serves to identify insiders and outsiders; only in the novel's literary universe BE users are identified as those who belong to the community, rather than those who are marginalized by it. This sociopolitical project is better phrased by Morrison herself who, upon being asked about the effects of her work entering the mainstream, sentenced: "I can't tell you how satisfying it is to know that I have earned a readership that is that large. [...] I stood at the border and claimed it as central and let the rest of the world move over to where I was." (1998, n. p.)

In constructing a new literary language to represent black speech, Morrison draws attention to the centrality of the word to create meaning and identity. According to Dahill-Baue,

Morrison resists employing the reductive technique of eye dialect, instead choosing to represent her black characters as speakers of a language identifiably their own but also identifiably intelligent, deriving its power not from playing against standard English, not "playing in the dark," but from its playing on its own ground within the common ground of shared language. (1996, 472)

Thus, literary representations of BE become central for the articulation of the author's literary and political project. In neutralizing all signs of difference in the characters' language, the translator makes a deliberate choice between form and content, thus renouncing to transfer the social and political implications of dialect in the novel. Again, the tendency of the translation towards fluency in Spanish contrasts with the translator's intervention in the form of explanatory footnotes, which are exclusively used to refer to the loaded proper names coined by the author. The rendering of the dynamics between center and periphery which permeate the novel's structure is thus jeopardized, as this discourse can only be conveyed through the plot of the narrative and the preponderant presence of black characters in the storyline.



## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The table embedded in the following page, which has been adapted from Tello Fons (2011, 395), summarizes the findings of our translational analysis. The communicative dimension considers features derived from language use, namely the general technique used to translate dialect in both novels and users, which includes reference to the rendering of field, mode and tenor in the TTs. The pragmatic dimension comprises the rhetorical purpose or the intention of the TT, the type-text focus and the communicative principle. Finally, the semiotic dimension considers the rendering of genre and discourse in translation. As argued at the beginning of the chapter, while these features can be used as descriptors of a translation in general terms, in our particular study the focus is placed upon the consequences effected to these categories by the translation of dialect into Spanish.

	Communicative dimension				Pragmatic dimension			Semiotic dimension	
	User-related	Use-related							
	Technique for translating dialect	Field	Mode	Tenor	Rhetorical Purpose	Type-text focus	Cooperative Principle	Genre	Discourse
<i>El color púrpura</i>	Neutralization	Non-specialized	Written to be read (affected by the neutralization of dialect)	More formal than the ST	Not equivalent to the ST	Narrative (not affected by the neutralization of dialect)	Not fully achieved in the TT	Sub-genre altered by the neutralization of dialect	Affected by the neutralization of dialect
<i>Beloved</i>	Neutralization	Non-specialized	Written to be read as if spoken (not affected by the neutralization of dialect)	More formal than the ST	Not equivalent to the ST	Narrative (not affected by the neutralization of dialect)	Not fully achieved in the TT	Not affected by the neutralization of dialect	Affected by the neutralization of dialect

**Table 14.** Summary of the translational analysis. Adapted from Tello Fons (2011, 395).



In light of these results, it may seem fair to argue that the target norms see standardization and suppression of literary dialects as the most acceptable strategy, at least for translating BE in the peninsular Spanish context. Indeed, the two translations lean towards acceptability, as no attempts to re-create dialect or signal difference in the TL could be identified. A marked translation including unconventional modifications of standard writing would be less fluent for target readers who are not used to nonstandard literary uses of language (Sánchez Galvis 2013, 152). With this respect, multiple scholars in the field of TS have discussed the influence of editorial policies and publishing houses in translation choices. Lawrence Venuti considers that “publishers, copyeditors, [and] reviewers have trained us, in effect, to prefer translations with an easy readability” (2013, 110). On a similar stance, Mayoral Asensio argues that the translation of linguistic variation can be influenced by the initiating clients as well as the recipients of the product, who may determine the contents or the form of the text (1999, 184).

In this context, we may consider the role of Spanish publishing houses in the reinforcement of standard norms and the established literary canon as far as translated literature is concerned. The worldwide success of *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* and their popularization as prize-winning bestsellers has probably determined their dissemination as formally homogeneous and conventional translated texts. This is further supported by the fact that while there currently exist eleven Spanish editions of *Beloved* and sixteen editions of *El color púrpura*, no retranslations of any of the two works have been published in Spain, and no apparent revisions of Menéndez Sallés’s and de la Fuente Rodríguez’s initial work have been encouraged by the Spanish book industry. As phrased by Sanz Jiménez, “they [publishers] want a target text that features lineal and structured syntax, univocal meanings, and a normative use of standard language, thus leaving aside idiomatic uses, polysemy, slang, and any other linguistic variety that may distract readers and make them notice an uncommon use of language in the text” (2020, 108). This compares to the production of smaller independent publishing houses that have also edited works of African American fiction written by women. These agents, in contrast, have allowed translators to produce more resistant versions of a literature marked by linguistic variety. By way of example we may cite Pepa Linares’s translation of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, published by Contraseña, or María

Enguix's rendering of June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan", published within the volume *Cuerpo político negro* by Ediciones de Oriente y del Mediterráneo.

Still, preference for a fluent translation closer to the TC deeply affects the representation and reception of black female identities. Indeed, the linguistic analysis of Walker's and Morrison's novels reveals a continuum between standard and nonstandard use of language. Within this framework, the particular idiolects of the characters of Celie and Beloved use linguistic expression to convey a political and cultural agenda. The characters' personal molding of BE to illustrate and reflect upon their particular circumstance is key to articulate the authors' underlying discourse. Thus, the standardization of dialect in both novels affects the reception of the TT at two different levels: first, it hampers the representation of a sociolinguistic reality that is presented as a fundamental component shaping the texts. Second, neutralizing linguistic varieties in the TTs affects characterization as it makes all characters speak the same standard modality, regardless of their gender, race, class or personal differences. As discussed by Sanz Jiménez, "the predominance of standardization also conveys that the narrative Us vs. the Other is refracted and even removed from the Spanish versions" (2020, 471). In the case of *Beloved*, this narrative was reinforced by having slaves and masters speak different social and geographic varieties. By turning the polidialectal source material into standard and linguistically homogeneous texts, the conflict can only be followed by the progression of the novels' plots and the characters' actions, not by the interplay of diverse spoken voices which permeates both STs.

Similarly, in conventionalizing not only dialectal but also idiolectal variation—which is particularly poignant in Celie's and Beloved's use of language—the translated texts cannot convey challenges to traditional notions of norm, difference and otherness that directly relate to linguistic form. The language of women protagonists is explicitly signaled as different in the STs. Indeed, the characteristic formal features of women's language are key to shape the authors' feminist agendas in both texts. However, as the Spanish versions homogenize women's distinctive speech with that of their male counterparts, the articulation of the feminist ideology in both novels is inevitably hampered by the neutralization of dialectal variation.

The conclusions drawn in this section summarize the findings of our study and close the fourth part of this dissertation. This section studied the translation of dialectal variation—more precisely, BE—in two key novels within the framework of African American women’s literature. The methodology used to analyze the selected texts allowed us to contemplate textual aspects of the source and target works as well as their conditions of production and reception within the source and target literary and cultural polysystems. Indeed, by considering the interplay between the communicative, pragmatic and semiotic dimensions we have been able to discuss the causes and effects of choices regarding the rendering of linguistic variation. Likewise, our multidimensional framework has also considered the effects of microtextual choices in the larger structure of the final literary product. This textual approach adds to the work developed in previous chapters, as the use and translation of dialect in both novels necessarily affects—and is affected by—their reception and interpretation in different cultural contexts. Consequently, our textual analysis is not presented as a complement to previous work on the topic, but rather as a fundamental component to the study of the translation and reception of African American women writers in Spain.



## CONCLUSIONS

Everything I've ever done, in the writing world, has been to expand articulation, rather than to close it, to open doors. [...] I think it's a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things.

Morrison (2008, 139)

In relation to everything that has been discussed, translation is hereby considered an act of communication bound to a double sociocultural context, that of the ST and that of the TT. Translation is thus conceived as a very complex form of reception traversed by manifold factors and agents belonging to two different communicative environments. The ideological implications of this process of rewriting play a determining role in the ways we perceive and approach the other. For this reason, I contend that observing literature from the prism of its rewriting(s) has allowed me to make a significant contribution to the history of translation in Spain from a plural perspective that also participates in decentering the literary canon. Thus, this work has undertaken a relational approach to the study of the authors, their work and the conditions of production and reception, which has been key to gain a complete understanding of the position and role of the source literature in the target system.

This section discusses the outcomes of the work carried out through the previous chapters and reviews the circulation of meaning in the rewritings of the selected corpus of texts. I will also address the general contributions of this PhD dissertation to TS and I will close this work precisely by opening possible avenues of research and suggesting future projects that may derive from this study.

### **1. Summary and Assessment of Results**

The initial chapters of this dissertation set out to study the translation and reception in Spain of literature written by African American women. Far from aiming at making value judgements about the ways in which the translated texts have been received in the TC or assessing the quality of the translations, the preferred descriptive approach

allowed me to examine concrete problems derived from intertextual, transtextual and paratextual relations, as well as a specific translation problem: the translation of literary dialect.

Part I tackled the theoretical foundations underpinning this study, which are to be found in the framework provided by Comparative Literature, DTS and new cultural fields of social, political and ideological interest that are currently gaining ground in contemporary TS. More precisely, polysystem theory has laid at the foundation of my work, as it presupposes an ordering of the world literary polysystem that implies dynamic and unequal relations between subsystems. This research has aligned with the aforementioned argument, inasmuch as it problematizes the literary politics and the dynamics of circulation of texts between systems under unequal conditions. Likewise, Part I also disclosed the theoretical foundations for the translational analysis, as it reviewed key definitions of linguistic variation as well as the most relevant approaches to the translation of literary dialect and models of analysis of this practice. This initial work not only contextualized and delimited my object of study, but it also brought to the fore specific problems—oftentimes essentially paradoxical—which can only be tackled precisely by adopting a dialogical approach to translation and a methodology of an interdisciplinary nature.

In this light, the development of an integrative methodological framework that associated the contextual and textual analysis of translations was fundamental to vertebrate my analysis. Thus, the combination of Even-Zohar's *repertoire* theory (as reformulated by Andringa) with Lépinette's sociological-cultural model provided a solid and integrative paradigm. Likewise, while the initial review of models of textual analysis evidenced the diversity of approaches to the study of the translation of linguistic variation, the methodological framework for my analysis drew from Hatim and Mason's model based on the dimensions of context, which was adapted to the specific study of the translation of BE.

The second part of this dissertation delved into the conditions of production of African American women's literature in the United States, focusing on the authors, the texts and the position occupied by the latter in their original context of production. While it was not the aim of this section to carry out a comprehensive study of the source literature—as there currently exists a good number of reference works on this domain,

so my contribution would hardly add to the work that has already been published—the chronological examination of the development of this literary tradition gave me insight into the literary and extraliterary factors by which it was shaped. Knowledge of these factors, in turn, was essential to understand the multidirectional dialogical relations between source and target literary, cultural and ideological systems.

In this sense, the study of the literary tradition of African American women writers confirmed the profound social and political compromise of these authors, which necessarily manifested through their writings. Indeed, the cultural and historical context of black women writers in the United States, which is deeply related to their double burden as black and women, became both a cause and a consequence of much of their literary production. While the authors' perception and representation of their identity developed from initial revindications of basic human rights to a problematization of the multidimensional intersections and contradictions that characterize contemporary societies, the efforts to conduct constant revisionist work have generated a dialogue between past and present that is at the core of this literary tradition. Indeed, the constant neglect suffered by black women writers both from outside and inside the African American community has prompted the upsurge of a literature that is deeply concerned with negotiating its own space of existence and vindicating black women's entitlement to self-definition and representation.

One of the experiences that profoundly impacted the literary production by these authors is the horror of slavery. While an overwhelming number of nineteenth-century texts written by black women navigated this topic from different perspectives (all of them characterized by the singular experience of the black woman), slave and neo-slave narratives continued to be published well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

While a growing number of black women writers emerged during the Reconstruction era, it was with the dawn of the Harlem Renaissance when these authors finally entered the mainstream of US culture. Likewise, the radicalization of black society during the Civil Rights Movement and the women's movement of the 1960s significantly impacted the literary production of this cohort. During this time, the conception of the black woman as a victim bound to her own condition was abandoned in favor of a celebration of the intersections that informed her identity.

However, it was in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries when the literary production of African American women writers found a wider audience. From the perspective of reception, the national acclaim manifested through the award of literary prizes and the proliferation of best-selling works by these authors during the last decades of the twentieth century contributed to an opening of the canon that acknowledge their literary tradition as a fundamental part of American literature. In turn, the success of these writers inspired a generation of younger novelists whose works aligned with the literary tradition started by their predecessors. In this regard, these texts both contributed to and were shaped by the third and fourth feminist waves that resonated internationally.

In relation to these developments, the study conducted in Part II has provided solid evidence of the inextricable relation between African American women's literature and black feminism. Indeed, even if this dissertation was interested in studying African American women's literature in translation, my analysis of the conditions of production of this literature in the SC revealed the necessity to conceive of and examine this literature alongside—if not through the lens of—black feminism and intersectionality theories.

The third part of the present work has analyzed the conditions of reception of African American women's literature in the Spanish peninsular field, understanding translation as a form of rewriting that enables and encourages such phenomenon. This study aimed at describing the place of the translated literature in the TC, paying particular attention to the consequences of the discrepancies between the original conditions of production of the texts and the reality of the local system as well as the influence of ideological factors in the translation and circulation of this literature. In this context, my initial hypothesis defended the existence of two types of rewriting of African American women's literature: one that sought to accommodate the foreign text to TL and cultural norms and one that understood rewriting as a form of resistance to vernacular values and, in doing so, it discovered the representation of otherness in translation. The following pages will synthesize the results of the contextual and textual analysis of translations, which drew from a comparative and relational perspective that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of the selected materials.



The first chapter of Part III focused on the study of the translation history of African American women's literature in Spain so as to explore different factors involved in decisions governing the translation, publication and circulation of texts in the target literary system. This endeavor was carried out through the development and subsequent analysis of AfroBib, an open access database that compiles bibliographical information about works by African American women authors that have been translated and published in Spain. My study paid special attention to three elements of analysis: the texts, the languages of translation and the agents involved in the circulation of translated literature.

Facing the task of developing a resource like AfroBib revealed several fundamental inescapable shortcomings related to the endeavor of database construction. To begin with, I confronted the paradox of using concepts and categories that have been shaped precisely by the same history I set out to trace. Likewise, the partiality and selectiveness of criteria implied in binary choices of inclusion/exclusion also posed a challenge to the undertaking of building and using a solid and reliable tool. In relation to this, a further complication derived from the growing multialignment of writers in more than one literary system, as a number of recent studies on Pan-African women's literatures have demonstrated. However, the delimitation of my field of study through a controlled system of categories and descriptors together with the explicit acknowledgement of the limitations entailed by the selective character of the study at hand provided a solid ground to fundament my research.

As for the texts, the data examined showed the influence of external factors such as trends in national book markets, literary prizes and cinematic adaptations, among others, on the reception of a foreign literature by a target community. However, this study also evidenced the fact that agents in the Spanish publishing industry are currently making considerable efforts to rescue unpublished pieces and promote contemporary authors. Indeed, nearly 35% of the total amount of editions and 42% of the translations registered in AfroBib were published over the last five years. These new trends will hopefully redress or supplement the traditional biased and partial representation of a fundamental domain within the larger framework of US and universal literature.

Regarding the languages of translation, while the vast majority of the works examined were translated into peninsular Spanish, several translations into co-official languages

were found—particularly Catalan and Basque, although two translations into Galician were also traced—. Looking at these texts revealed a lack of correspondence between the most published volumes in Spanish and the works selected for translation into other peninsular languages. Particularly in the case of Catalan, I ascertained that the local book industry only finds profitable outcomes when translations into Catalan are published before or parallel to the Spanish versions of the texts. However, at this point, the ideological implications involved in the decision to translate works such as Angela Davis’s non-fiction, which has been published both in Catalan and Basque, cannot be overlooked.

As for the agents that have participated in the circulation of these translated works, looking into the translators revealed a scarce specialization and a general lack of interest from the publishers to promote specialization in this type of literature. There are some notable exceptions, however, of Spanish publishers, editors and translators who have worked—and continue to do so—to promote the circulation of African American literature in the country. Still, most times the prevalent criterion to circulate this literature in translation is the success granted by external factors such as the award of internationally prestigious literary prizes or the popularization of certain works through their movie adaptations.

In this regard, while medium and big publishing conglomerates have traditionally shown preference to circulate classic works of fiction which have obtained a certain degree of international recognition, recent developments in the publishing market have seen the proliferation of smaller independent publishing houses which are interested in disseminating unpublished works, particularly non-fiction displaying strong sociopolitical imbrications and directly challenging dominant discourses of racism and sexism.

However, the approach presented in Chapter 1 is still only a rough introduction to the potentials of this field of research, which has yet to be exhaustively explored. Indeed, tracing the translation history of a certain author or piece of literature is only a first step in the study of their reception in a target culture. Thus, this undertaking needs to be supplemented by other elements of analysis that may add further insight into the position held by the source literature in the receiving culture, such as the study of critical reception, changes in meaning and representation and frames of reference.

So far, AfroBib has provided unprecedented relevant data about the canon of African American women's literature that is being shaped within the Spanish historiographical framework. As a research tool, it has proved to facilitate the analysis of the reception of African American women's literature from the perspective of translation history as well as it has shed light into the relationships among different literary polysystems. These results are expected to map the space of translated black women's literature in Spain as well as to encourage research within this field of study.

The second chapter of Part III delved into the second element of analysis of my methodological proposal, namely the frames of reference of Spanish reviewers of African American women's literature. This task was carried out by applying Karl Rosengren's mentions technique, which consists on computing the mentions of a given writer or work in a set of reception materials so as to study the works or oeuvres that are used as standards in perception and judgment in the minds of the reviewers and literary critics. Even if the results obtained in this chapter were highly schematic, the goal of using this method was not to render as faithfully as possible the details of the development of the literary frame of reference, but to produce an overall picture of the main features of that development.

The results of the mentions analysis are promising. Comparing the evolution of author mentions in the two sources of reception material, namely journalistic and academic criticism, provided clear evidence of the interest in this writer cohort in the TC. The proliferation not only of mentions, but also of the number of authors mentioned during the last decades confirms the alignment of both journalistic and academic criticism with recent developments concerning transnational sociopolitics which inevitably shape and are shaped by literature and literary criticism.

On the one hand, my analysis of mentions in journalistic reception sources exposed a stable upward development in the presence of African American women authors in the lexicon of Spanish reviewers since the decade of 1980, even if nearly half of the total amount of mentions occurred during the past ten years. Likewise, numbers also indicated that the mentions of the five most cited authors—with Morrison topping the hierarchy of fame since the 1990s—represented nearly 90% of the total amount of mentions of African American women writers in the Spanish press, even if a recent diversification in the interest of reviewers was identified, as numbers relative to the

authors mentioned per decade experienced a significant increase during the twenty-first century. My study also revealed that Toni Morrison is readily used as a frame of reference when discussing the work of other African American women writers. In this respect, Morrison's fame has prompted associations with other writers; most notably, Alice Walker. Partly thanks to her notorious association with Morrison, Walker, in turn, has also become a referent figure in the frame of reference of Spanish reviewers, as she is readily used as reference in reviews of works by other black women authors in the TC.

On the other hand, the study of frames of reference in sources of academic criticism revealed an even more significant increase in the presence of this author cohort during the decade of 2010, which gathered 75% of the total amount of mentions. In this case, while Morrison and Walker were at the top of the fame hierarchy until 2009, the past ten years have witnessed a dramatic increase of the mentions of other contemporary writers. These data also shed light into the latest developments and trends in the fields of humanities and social sciences, as evidenced by the recently acquired prominence of writers such as Angela Davis, and most notably, Audre Lorde and bell hooks. Indeed, data relative to the distribution of their mentions and their association with other authors revealed the growing interest of Spanish academia in black women writers in relation to intersectional feminisms, queer theory and postcolonial theory. Thus, this shift prompted the prominence of authors who belong to a repertoire that is more readily activated in connection to the aforementioned fields of study.

Likewise, putting together the results obtained in Chapters 1 and 2 provided further insight into the relation between the publication of translated works by African American women writers and the mentions of these authors in journalistic and academic sources. Indeed, this comparison revealed a number of coincidences, such as the increase in the publication of editions and mentions during the 1990s, the decade that saw the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Morrison, the premiere of a number of cinematic adaptations of works by black women writers (such as *Esperando un respiro* or *Precious*) as well as the expansion of postcolonial and non-Western literatures towards the end of the decade. Also notable is the fact that the peak of editions, translations and mentions both in academic and journalistic sources is to be found in the decade of 2010, thus confirming the growing interest of national publishers, readers and reviewers in African American women's literature.

While data relative to the total amount of documents compiled in the different archives consulted for this study revealed that literature written by African American women still occupies a peripheral position in the Spanish literary polysystem, numbers also evidenced that the twenty-first century has witnessed a dramatic increase in the popularity of these writers who are progressively being associated with different literary (sub)systems. In relation to this, my analysis also determined the existence of different subsystems for this cohort of writers. Indeed, while some authors belong to a repertoire that is more readily activated when critics write about literature and literary studies, others are more easily associated with a repertoire that relates to contemporary social and political developments. Thus, a recent shift in the thematic interests of both readers and reviewers may be noted, which probably originated as a consequence of the progressive escalation of social fights and intersectional feminisms at a global level.

All in all, the mentions technique offered a sensitive quantitative instrument to measure fluctuations in the positioning of authors within the repertoires of reviewers of a given TC. A more precise analysis of how these references are used as standards of perception showed the divergence between two subsystems. Indeed, a subsystem of agents (writers, reviewers) rooted in sociopolitical fights has recently emerged, actively staying apart from the subsystem of writers, essayists, and reviewers concentrating on literary developments and the aesthetic value of literature written by black women.

Having looked into the history of translation of African American women's literature in Spain and the frames of reference of local reviewers and critics, the third chapter of Part III turned to the reception in the Spanish context. This was described by reconstructing the values that underlie judgements in different peritexts, thereby understood as sources of reception of the source literature. In this context, the research conducted through the third chapter delved into the transformation of meaning and the changing values resulting from the dialogue between the SC and the TC in relation to the set of texts which are the object of my study.

The early contacts with black women's literature in the TC supported the claim that the reception of a foreign literature does not necessarily start with its translation. Even if the first translation of a novel by an African American woman writer was Margaret Walker's *Jubileo*, published in 1968, the political context in which the country was imbued at the time prevented the novel from attaining a certain degree of recognition in

the local context. Actually, even if some anecdotal mentions of authors such as Angelou and Davis reached the Spanish press during the following years, together with a small number of publications tackling African American women's literature, it was not until the cinematic adaptation of *The Color Purple* achieved international recognition between the years 1985 and 1986 that Spanish reviewers started to pay attention to this literature. In this context, the presence of authors such as Walker or Morrison—who had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988—in the local literary context began to be justified by the international repercussion of their works.

In this regard, my study has evidenced that the impact of Spielberg's adaptation was key to popularize the novel in the TC and, in turn, to reclaim a space for the acknowledgement of the literary tradition that framed Walker's work. While the influence of this phenomenon on the circulation of Morrison's work in Spain cannot be denied, as the publications associating both authors as representatives of their cohort proliferated during the following years, the award of the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature to the author inevitably turned her work into a frame of reference for Spanish reviewers. While this event was not exempt of controversy—both at a national and international level—, it automatically sparked book sales as well as it prompted the establishment of literary relations between Morrison and other Nobel Prize winners and canonical authors of international prestige.

Likewise, my study evidenced the effects of these developments on the acknowledgement and circulation of other contemporary African American women voices who were translated and publicized in mainstream press media during the following years. In relation to this, the end of the century witnessed the publication of a number of translations of Terry McMillan's works, whose reviews generally celebrated the lighter tone of her novels with respect to Walker's and Morrison's works. However, at this point the interests of Spanish academia started to diverge from that of publishers and press reviewers. Indeed, even if the introduction of American Studies in Spain was delayed by the political circumstances of the country, the last decades of the twentieth century saw the proliferation of a number of full-length studies on the literary tradition of black woman writers, which were in fact symptomatic of international developments within the discipline and pointed to the changes in the book market that took place at the end of the century as a result of the progressive decentralization of the literary canon.

The expansion of postcolonial and non-Western literature in the TC had two visible effects on the circulation of African American women's literature. On the one hand, the readership's redirection towards "exotic" literatures and cultures, usually related to developing countries or young nations, diminished interest in "first world" black literature. In this regard, a key factor in the Spanish book market of the time was the readiness to assign a particular national origin to a literary text, which prompted the promotion of "locally-colored" bestsellers. This strategy laid at the foundation of many book marketing campaigns at the end of the century which built upon the feeling of national belonging in the midst of a globalized world. Within this framework, the complex status of African American literature as a subsystem inevitably tied to the texture of the internationally dominant system of US literature hampered its reception in a context where interest in discovering "other worlds" and promoting "exoticism" prevailed.

On the other hand, the condition of writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker or Gloria Naylor as black women prompted their association with women writers from other non-Western contexts. Indeed, the readership's interest in women's and minorities literature (and specially, the intersection between the two) did in fact prompt the association of certain figures who started to be considered representatives of this cohort. By way of example, several articles which addressed the topic of the increased circulation of translated women's literature cited African American writers Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Terry McMillan and Toni Morrison alongside authors such as Nadine Gordimer, Zadie Smith, Doris Lessing or Edwidge Danticat. These intercultural encounters of "minorities" around the globe may be interpreted as a natural consequence of the politics of particularization and localization of race, gender and class differences that were starting to take hold in the collective social conscience. In relation to this, the progressive establishment of a solid market of transnational women writers at the verge of the millennium was tightly associated to "high literature" and to the authors' achievement of a certain degree of international prestige, usually signaled by the award of literary prizes.

Symptomatic of this second paradigm was the proliferation of translations and editions of works by different African American women which received considerable attention from Spanish press media during the first years of the twenty-first century. However, my study also revealed a progressive loss of interest in marginal literatures in the

mainstream Spanish book market. This trend had reached its peak at the turn of the century and even if ever since then it had generated a solid readership, the instability of literary flows in the contemporary period stimulated the shifting interests of the mainstream audience and market. Still, a number of extraliterary factors such as the 2008 presidential election renewed sporadic interest in black women's literature. In this context, the conception of black women authors as founders of a solid literary tradition was progressively reinforced in press media. In relation to this, while the first decade of the twenty-first century saw the decline of trends promoting minority literatures in the mainstream hegemonic book market, emergent small and independent agents took on the endeavor of securing these literatures a space and a market niche in the country.

In general terms, the increased development of social and political consciousness in mainstream culture and the international reach of fourth-wave feminisms favored the emergence of politically compromised literary agents, namely publishers, bookstores, digital communities and even influencers that collaborated in the spread of traditionally marginal foreign literatures in the TC. In this sense, the rise of literary blogs, online libraries and specialized internet portals played a decisive role in the circulation and dissemination of texts published by independent agents. Likewise, a further symptom of the changing interests of a portion of the Spanish readership was the increase in the publication of translations of non-fiction works, especially after 2015, and the diversification of authors that saw their works translated into national languages.

Still, while manifold approaches to the field of African American women's literature had been advanced in the Spanish academia, no significant work on the study of translated literature was published until very recently. In this sense, research on black women authors, African American women's literature as well as the intersection between the latter and other areas of study has proliferated during the past twenty years. These studies followed global developments in the field and advanced the current international landscape where intersectional feminisms and counter-hegemonic social movements are present in all social and cultural spheres. Likewise, recent advancements have turned attention to the representation of Pan-African identities and the reclaiming of local literary and cultural spaces for their expression, such as the Valencian bookstore United Minds or the online platform Afroféminas.



Finally, Part IV of this dissertation turned to the descriptive empirical analysis of a selection of two STs and their translations into peninsular Spanish, namely Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *El color púrpura*. The goal of this translational study was to extract information regarding the techniques used to deal with the translation of BE, paying special attention to its function in the new context and the consequent effects of translation choices on the reception of the literary texts.

My descriptive analysis brought light into the possibilities offered and the challenges posed by the Spanish language to render a socially and culturally imbricated dialect, as well as the effects of its standardization at a micro and macrotextual level. As could be observed, the preferred technique to deal with BE was standardization, which occurred in the two novels. These results conformed to those obtained by scholars such as Sanz Jiménez (2020) and Tello Fons (2011), whose studies on the translation of dialect also identified standardization as the preferred technique to deal with language variation in Spanish. In light of these results, it may seem fair to argue that the target norms see neutralization and suppression of literary dialects as the most acceptable strategy, at least for translating BE in the peninsular Spanish context. Indeed, the two translations lean towards acceptability, as no attempts to re-create dialect or signal difference in the TL could be identified.

In this context, I shall attend to the role of Spanish publishing houses in the reinforcement of standard norms and the established literary canon as far as translated literature is concerned. The worldwide success of *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* and their popularization as prize-winning bestsellers has probably determined their dissemination as formally homogeneous and conventional translated texts. This is further supported by the fact that while there currently exist eleven Spanish editions of *Beloved* and sixteen editions of *El color púrpura*, no retranslations of any of the two works have been published in Spain, and no apparent revisions of Menéndez Sallés's and de la Fuente Rodríguez's initial work have been encouraged by the Spanish book industry. This compares to the production of smaller independent publishing houses that have also edited works of African American fiction written by women. These agents, in contrast, have allowed translators to produce more resistant versions of a literature marked by linguistic variety. By way of example I may cite Pepa Linares's translation of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, published by Contraseña, or María Enguix's rendering of June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie

Jordan”, published within the volume *Cuerpo político negro* by Ediciones de Oriente y del Mediterráneo.

Still, preference for a fluent translation closer to the TC deeply affects the representation and reception of black female identities. Indeed, the linguistic analysis of Walker’s and Morrison’s novels reveals a continuum between standard and nonstandard use of language. Within this framework, the particular idiolects of the characters of Celie and Beloved use linguistic expression to convey a political and cultural agenda. The characters’ personal molding of BE to illustrate and reflect upon their particular circumstance is key to articulate the authors’ underlying discourse. Thus, the standardization of dialect in both novels affects the reception of the TT at two different levels: first, it hampers the representation of a sociolinguistic reality that is presented as a fundamental component shaping the texts. Second, neutralizing linguistic varieties in the TTs affects characterization as it makes all characters speak the same standard modality, regardless of their gender, race, class or personal differences. As discussed by Sanz Jiménez, “the predominance of standardization also conveys that the narrative *Us vs. the Other* is refracted and even removed from the Spanish versions” (2020, 471). In the case of *Beloved*, this narrative was reinforced by having slaves and masters speak different social and geographic varieties. By turning the polydialectal source material into standard and linguistically homogeneous texts, the conflict can only be followed by the progression of the novels’ plots and the characters’ actions, not by the interplay of diverse spoken voices which permeates both STs.

Similarly, in conventionalizing not only dialectal but also idiolectal variation—which is particularly poignant in Celie’s and Beloved’s use of language—the translated texts cannot convey challenges to traditional notions of norm, difference and otherness that directly relate to linguistic form. The language of women protagonists is explicitly signaled as different in the STs. Indeed, the characteristic formal features of women’s language are key to shape the authors’ feminist agendas in both texts. However, as the Spanish versions homogenize women’s distinctive speech with that of their male counterparts, the articulation of the feminist ideology in both novels is inevitably hampered by the neutralization of dialectal variation.

## 2. Degree of Attainment of the Objectives

The initial chapters of this dissertation disclosed a number of general and specific objectives, whose attainment I shall now assess. In this case, I will undertake an inductive approach, examining first the degree of fulfillment of specific goals which will take me to evaluate the achievement of the general aims of this dissertation.

To begin with, I set out to trace the history of translation of African American women's literature in Spain. This aim was tackled by developing AfroBib, an unprecedented resource that was used to compose a comprehensive editorial map including all the texts written by African American women that have been translated into national languages and published in Spain. In turn, the quantitative and qualitative study of the data compiled in AfroBib allowed me to pay detailed attention to the changing strategies in translation policies and the shifts in interests in the local literary market. Indeed, by approaching the study of translated literature from a diachronic and multidisciplinary perspective, I was able to identify not only the literary, but also the extraliterary factors that influenced choices related to the languages, the genres, the authors, the texts and the agents that have participated in the circulation of African American women's literature in the TC. However, the very nature of this database binds it to a constant process of revision and update. Indeed, this work has also evidenced the current proliferation of translations, which are published not only as full-length volumes, but also in the form of compilations of shorter pieces or works of an anthological nature. Thus, so as to preserve AfroBib's comprehensiveness and systematicity, thorough revisionist and methodical work will be required.

This project also intended to examine the topicality of the authors and works that circulate locally so as to come up with an overall picture of the main features of development of their reception in the TC. My analysis of the presence of African American women writers in a number of reception sources through the mentions technique shed light into the hierarchies of fame and contexts of comparison in which this cohort of writers participates. In relation to this, the study of the contexts of the mentions as well as the connections between and among writers provided further insight into their position within the target cultural and literary system as well as it disclosed the mental lexicon available to Spanish reviewers and critics. While this research work provided a general overview of the position of African American women writers in the

receiving system, the study is not exhaustive, as sources of essayistic criticism were not considered in my analysis. Indeed, the lack of a reliable portal that compiled enough essayistic material so as to conduct a relatively representative study became an inescapable pitfall that prevented me from including this element in the analysis. Still, the qualitative examination of reception materials conducted in the third chapter of Part 3 did integrate the study of reviews and articles published in literary and cultural magazines, thus supplying some portion of the missing data relative to this source of reception.

This project also set out to describe the sets of values and interests that determine the selection, classification, and judgment of textual material. To do so, attention was paid to the paratextual apparatus of the translated works as well as the metatexts appearing in a wide range of reception sources, namely press media, cultural and literary magazines, academic publications and online literary blogs and websites. Likewise, this study also considered the impact of other forms of rewriting such as film adaptations as well as the influence of extratextual phenomena such as the award of literary prizes or international sociopolitical developments on the circulation of the TTs.

The last specific objective aimed at bringing forward the textual analysis of translations as a key element in the study of the reception of a foreign literature. In this case, the descriptive-comparative analysis of the translation of BE confirmed the necessity to consider the conditions of production of the STs as an essential first step in any translational study. Through this work I was able to observe the manifold ways in which translation choices may intentionally or unintentionally manipulate the representation of foreign identities and thus directly affect the perception and the experience of alterity. Thus, the combination of a contextual and textual analysis of translations provided a comprehensive overview of the literary and extraliterary factors as well as the intertextual, textual and extratextual elements that may inform the reception of a foreign literature.

Compliance with these objectives also led me to gather enough evidence so as to confirm my initial hypothesis, which contemplated the existence of two different types of rewriting of African American women's literature in the TC. On the one hand, homogenizing tendencies in the presentation of texts and authors have been observed. Indeed, my analysis of the translation history of the source literature revealed a number

of peaks in the circulation of translations and editions that was readily associated to their international recognition. In this regard, the dissemination of translated texts as works that transcended national borders and appealed to a universal audience prompted a decontextualization which was also reflected in textual aspects such as the neutralization of dialectal variation. This type of rewriting and representation of the foreign literature was restricted to a small portion of texts, which were introduced in the TC as representative of a literary tradition.

On the other hand, the aforementioned homogenizing tendency contrasts with the existence of a second type of rewriting; one that used translation as a form of resistance to vernacular values. Indeed, research has also evidenced the progressive development of a space in the local cultural and literary system that is interested in the source literature precisely because of its foreign character, rather than in spite of it. This space, which was—and continues to be—steadily reclaimed by a number of publishers, translators, reviewers and scholars, aligned with recent sociopolitical developments in the international sphere which are interested in celebrating literary, cultural and ideological difference. In this context, circulating unpublished works and dissident voices within the cohort of African American women writers directly challenges traditional norms and ultimately contributes to a decentralization of the canon.

### **3. Contributions and Further Research Lines**

Drawing from the specific objectives derived from studying a foreign literature from the perspective provided by its multiple receptions, this work has made more general contributions to the fields of Literary Translation and Reception Studies in Spain.

To begin with, the approach to translation as a form of rewriting views this phenomenon as a key element in the reception of a foreign literature. Thus, I advocated a relational model of analysis that could integrate different spaces—not only in relation to the source and the TCs, but also within the TC—and times (i.e. transnational and diachronic). My approach also combined both contextual and textual elements of analysis, as well as it incorporated different structural levels of analysis of the selected materials.

Likewise, the methodological approach undertaken through this research has demonstrated the convenience of relating the conditions of reception of a given text or oeuvre with those of production of the source material, as this perspective allows for the study of the circulation of meaning between cultures, the ideological implications behind translation choices as well as the norms that may be set in motion through this process. This multidimensional relational approach revealed data which might have been overlooked in a more restricted analysis that tackled source or target elements, contextual or textual material in isolation.

As for the study of translation, I believe that my work has contributed to the study of a translation problem that had moved in the margins of the discipline until very recently: the translation of dialectal variation—BE, in particular— from a perspective that brings together linguistic and extralinguistic elements of analysis. Likewise, this endeavor allowed me to attend to Theoretical Translation Studies, which were used as a framework to conceptualize my object of study. The description of a specific translation problem combined with the examination of individual practical cases has provided a greater theoretical knowledge of this borderline case of (un)translatability. This, in turn, evidences the tight relation between translation theory and practice.

All in all, I would like to think that this work has proven the interest, relevance and pertinence of its main research topic, considering the paradox between the new directions of scholarly work within the discipline and the current gap that surrounds this area of study. Indeed, while there is a considerable amount of research published on African American women's literature in Spain, work still needs to be done in the field of Translation and Reception Studies at a local level.

Following this line of thought and to conclude, I shall discuss the different areas of development that naturally derive from the research hereby conducted, in the hope that this PhD dissertation will be conceived of as a point of departure rather than an end in itself.

To begin with, recent research in the field of Black Women Studies has problematized the delimitation of closed categories such as “African American” or “woman”. As was already pointed out elsewhere in this dissertation, during the last decade several authors have brought forward new approaches which interpret the works of black women

writers within the larger framework of a transnational female Pan-African identity. Among these, I may highlight Margaret Busby's *Daughters of Africa* (1992) and *New Daughters of Africa* (2019), which compile works by women of African descent, thus transcending geographical borders, as well as the contemporary anthologies *Well Read Black Girl: Finding Our Stories, Discovering Ourselves* (2018) and *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (2016). While time and space constraints have prevented this research from adopting such Pan-African approach to the study of black women's literature, the aforementioned works provide an insightful understanding of literature which may also be adopted within the field of TS.

In relation to this, the scope of the database of translated African American Women's literature may also be expanded to align with this Pan-African approach. Thus, future work may entail incorporating into the database translations of other voices within the landscape of black women's literature so as to approach the study of translation and reception from the larger framework of this transnational perspective. This perspective also aligns with my relational conception of the study of translated literature, as it necessarily draws from cross-cultural literary contacts and an integrative view of the relation between literary products, ideology and cultural values.

Regarding the descriptive analysis of translations, the corpus of texts could be expanded to consider further variables in the translation of literary dialect. Indeed, future research on this field may consider undertaking a diachronic approach in order to examine the evolution of translation choices through time. Likewise, the analysis may also focus on translation across national languages so as to comparatively study Spanish, Catalan, Galician and Basque versions of selected texts. This work would be an invaluable asset to the local development of the discipline, as it would bring to the fore the mechanisms governing these subsystems as well as the ways in which intranational relations may influence or be represented in literature.

As may be seen, this dissertation only opens the door for further work into a developing research area within Descriptive Translation and Reception Studies. It still remains to broaden the range of observations and to find out what other subsystems may play a role in the reception of a foreign literature, how they interact and how they relate to developments in society at large. This would require more case studies of foreign and national, major and minor writers and texts but also of the role of mediators such as

publishers, critics and translators and, of course, the way in which these agents interact with and influence processes of rewriting. In this regard, this work also aims at bridging the gap between the scholarly study of translation and professional practice, as it was my foremost contention that the analysis of the conditions of production of a source literature as well as the norms and ideology governing the target system provide useful tools for translation practice. After all, this insight leads us into the inescapable conclusion that the way in which we translate the other reveals a basic truth about the way in which we write the self.



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## INTERVIEWS<sup>328</sup>

Carabí Riera, Àngels (university professor and researcher). Barcelona, 2 April, 2020, e-mail.

Enguix Tercero, María (translator). Valencia / Barcelona, 25 September, 2020, telephone.

Linares, Pepa (translator). Madrid / Barcelona, 19 February, 2021, telephone.

Manuel Cuenca, Carme (translator, university professor and researcher). Valencia / Brussels, 8 October, 2019, telephone.

Mayor, Carlos (translator). Barcelona, 31 October, 2020, telephone.

Sarriugarte, Danele (translator and writer). San Sebastian / Barcelona, 10 February, 2021, skype.

Sentís, Mireia (translator, writer and editor). Madrid / Barcelona, 12 February, 2021, telephone.

Tally, Justine (university professor and researcher). Graz / Barcelona, 5 April, 2020, skype.

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<sup>328</sup> The interviews that were granted permission for publication are included in the annexes of the dissertation.



## ANNEXES

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## 1. Interview with María Enguix Tercero

María Enguix Tercero holds a degree in Translation and Interpreting from the UJI in Castellón. She studied Modern Greek at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and at the University of Malaga, where she completed her PhD studies, specializing in Greek and French literature. She also obtained a University Expert in Literary and Humanistic Translation. She has been working exclusively as a literary translator for the last fifteen years and her specialties are narrative and essays. She has translated into Spanish works by Roxane Gay, Sara Ahmed, Veroniki Dalacura, María Efstaciadi, Miquel de Palol, Alafair Burke, Cas Mudde, Deborah Cameron, Gilad Atzmon, Zora Neale Hurston and Jasbir Puar, among others. In 2016 she was a finalist for the XII Esther Benítez Translation Award for the novel *Cuando el diablo salió del baño*, by Sophie Divry. She is also the translator of *No soy vuestro negro* (2021), *Fragilidad Blanca* (2020) and the collections *Cuerpo político negro* (2017)—together with Malika Embarek—and *Esta vez el fuego: Una nueva generación habla de la raza* (2020).

**S. L.:** Antes de comenzar, quisiera preguntarte sobre tu trayectoria profesional. ¿Cómo surge tu interés por la traducción de literatura feminista, en especial por la literatura feminista negra?

**M. E.:** La verdad es que fue la literatura feminista la que vino a mí. Es decir, yo me licencié en traducción e interpretación, hice un doctorado, me puse a trabajar y en 2005 salieron mis primeras traducciones, aunque no tenían nada que ver con este género. Al principio traduje literatura muy variada: desde un autor palestino a un libro sobre la historia de los Estados bálticos. Al cabo de los años, una de las editoriales con las que solía trabajar, Edicions Bellaterra, me empezó a encargar trabajos sobre estudios de género, autoras feministas de color como Sarah Ahmed... Fue precisamente a través de estos encargos que pude empezar a especializarme en literatura feminista. Más en concreto, mi contacto con el feminismo negro a nivel de traducciones fue a través de la editorial Oriente y Mediterráneo, para la que había traducido dos libros de literatura griega en 2005. Aunque a raíz de esto trabajamos una buena relación de amistad, pasó bastante tiempo hasta que, hace tres años, se pusieron en contacto tanto conmigo como

con Malika Embarek para encargarnos la traducción de *Cuerpo político negro* (2017). La relación con José Luis Gallero y Mireia Sentís, directores de la colección Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid (BAAM), fue tan estupenda que desde entonces no hemos parado de colaborar; ha sido a través de ellos que me he aproximado a la literatura afroamericana. Al trabajar exclusivamente como traductora literaria, hago encargos de todo tipo, aunque sí es cierto que en los últimos años me he acercado más a cuestiones feministas, el ensayo de raza... que son temas que me interesan muchísimo.

**S. L.** A pesar de que en nuestro país el interés a nivel editorial, académico e institucional por la literatura afroamericana parece aumentar paulatinamente, los expertos coinciden en que todavía queda mucho camino por recorrer. ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre el tema, como traductora de algunas de las voces más pujantes de esta literatura?

**M. E.:** Como se están creando tantas editoriales medianas y pequeñas que están interesadas en cuestiones feministas y en publicar a mujeres escritoras, yo considero que ahora es un momento de auge de esta literatura. Un ejemplo claro es el caso de BAAM en Madrid, pero también está Consomni en Bilbao, Capitán Swing... También hay librerías especializadas como United Minds en Valencia, que se enfoca a culturas y literaturas panafricanas, o librerías feministas que no se rigen por criterios tan comerciales como ocurre con las grandes editoriales. Ejemplos de estas son La Rosa, en Valencia; Mujeres y cía., en Madrid o Traficantes de Sueños, entre otras. En mi opinión, gracias a focos como estos actualmente se está fomentando el interés por estas literaturas. Por otro lado, también se encuentran en alza los estudios interseccionales, así que yo soy optimista.

También es cierto que estos son unos círculos a los que yo soy muy cercana, pero creo que sí hay un fenómeno gracias al cual nombres o títulos que antes tenían muy poca difusión o eran muy difíciles de publicar en el contexto nacional, como, por ejemplo, el caso de Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, ahora son superventas, o circulan con mucha más facilidad. Otro factor determinante es la concesión de premios, como ha sucedido en el caso de Toni Morrison, de la que se acaban de editar varias traducciones de volúmenes ensayísticos al castellano.

Sin ánimo de ser demasiado optimista, ya que, por otro lado, está claro que los grandes grupos editoriales van a seguir haciendo apuestas seguras, sí creo que estamos presenciando el crecimiento de toda una constelación de editoriales medianas y pequeñas que apuestan por esta literatura.

**S. L.:** En su volumen seminal *En el pico del águila* (1998) Mireia Sentís reflexiona sobre el hecho de que para que un autor afroamericano sea traducido a nuestro idioma, debe alcanzar en su país una difusión muy superior a la media de los escritores normalmente traducidos. ¿Crees que esta afirmación es aplicable hoy en día? ¿Hay suficiente interés en España por promover la literatura afroamericana como parte fundamental del panorama literario estadounidense?

**M. E.:** Creo que, en gran medida, sigue primando el canon blanco occidental. No obstante, poco a poco el contexto local ha ido recibiendo a escritores de otras procedencias que han tenido un impacto notable, como por ejemplo Junot Díaz, del cual se han traducido muchas obras. También hay un interés creciente en literaturas periféricas; por ejemplo, en España existen varias librerías especializadas en literatura africana y panafricana traducida.

A parte de esto, yendo más allá de la literatura afroamericana femenina, a raíz de movimientos como el Black Lives Matter, en España están surgiendo voces de mujeres afrodescendientes que también demandan reconocimiento y critican el racismo institucional hacia ellas. Muchas de estas mujeres afroespañolas también escriben, y, por ejemplo, la librería United Minds organiza frecuentemente charlas y presentaciones de escritores y escritoras afrodescendientes. Con esto quiero decir que, inevitablemente, esto tiene un efecto sobre la recepción de literatura afroamericana en España, del mismo modo que esta literatura afecta a la producción de escritoras y escritores locales.

**S. L.:** Al revisar la historia de la traducción de literatura afroamericana femenina en España salta a la vista que la novela de ficción es el género más publicado, especialmente teniendo en cuenta el éxito internacional de obras como *El color púrpura* o *Beloved*. Sin embargo, la Biblioteca Afro Americana de Madrid ha empezado a editar volúmenes como *Cuerpo político negro* (2017) y *Esta vez el fuego* (2020), entre otros, que articulan el pensamiento político negro a través del género ensayístico. ¿Cómo

surge la idea de traducir los textos que constituyen estos volúmenes? ¿Quién te propuso realizar las traducciones?

**M. E.:** Yo siempre trabajo por encargo, y en este caso no fue diferente. No obstante, al tener una relación tan buena con la editorial y con los directores de BAAM, el proceso de traducción siempre resulta mucho más fácil y satisfactorio. Normalmente no me piden plazos fijos, me dan mucho tiempo para traducir, hay mucho diálogo... Esto hoy en día es un lujo; es un proceso muy diferente al de otras editoriales de mayor envergadura.

Inicialmente, cuando empecé a traducir me decantaba por la literatura griega moderna. En esa época sí que era yo quien llamaba a las puertas de las editoriales y presentaba informes, propuestas... Pero ahora tengo trabajo continuo, así que no me queda tiempo para poder traducir por mi cuenta, por placer. No obstante, la verdad es que justo los libros que he traducido para BAAM me interesan mucho, y con Mireia Sentís siempre intercambiamos opiniones, información... pero ellos tienen muy clara su línea editorial, igual que pasaba en Bellaterra, con la que el diálogo también era muy bueno, así que son ellos los que deciden en última instancia.

**S. L.:** ¿Cómo intervienen el corrector y el editor en una obra traducida? ¿Cuál es su papel? ¿Qué relación tienes con ellos?

**M. E.:** En mi caso, siempre he trabajado con editores que revisan y opinan sobre mi trabajo. Ellos me devuelven la traducción con sus observaciones y yo acepto, rechazo, argumento o justifico todo lo necesario antes de devolver la nueva versión a la editorial. Teóricamente, es el traductor quien tiene la última palabra.

Ahora bien, precisamente con Oriente y Mediterráneo el proceso suele ser mucho más dilatado. Al acabar la traducción, yo se la envío a Mireia para que la revise y me la devuelva con sus comentarios. Después de eso, vuelvo a revisarla y la reenvío para que la lea José Luis Gallero, codirector de BAAM, que me la devuelve una vez más con sus sugerencias. Al acabar todo este proceso, que es específico de las obras que se editan para esta colección, envío la traducción a Inma Jiménez Morell y Fernando García Burillo, los editores de Oriente y Mediterráneo, que prestan más atención a detalles como las cuestiones ortotipográficas, algún problema de léxico, etc. Una vez la han revisado ellos, me la mandan una última vez para que acabe de implementar estos

cambios y les devuelva, por fin, la versión definitiva. No considero que sea un proceso más cuidado que en otros casos, porque las tareas de edición y revisión de otras editoriales también son muy meticulosas, pero sí que, inevitablemente, es mucho más dilatado en el tiempo. En este caso, los editores se involucran mucho en el proceso, aunque las decisiones finales siempre son consensuadas; la comunicación con ellos es muy fluida. Normalmente, por lo general, en el proceso previo a la publicación de un texto traducido solo interviene un corrector externo y el editor de mesa, además del traductor, claro.

**S. L.** ¿A qué tipo de público están destinadas las traducciones de volúmenes como los de la BAAM? ¿Es un público diferente al de, por ejemplo, *Mujeres difíciles* (2017)? ¿Hasta qué punto influye, en este caso, el lector potencial en el proceso traductorio?

**M. E.:** La verdad es que es algo que no me había planteado, pero sí es cierto que, al tratarse de géneros diferentes, el proceso de traducción varía. Por ejemplo, en el caso de la novela de Gay, la necesidad de usar notas al pie fue mucho menor que en los textos ensayísticos. En este segundo caso, los editores me pidieron explícitamente que usara este recurso para clarificar algunos aspectos de los textos, porque existía la voluntad de ayudar al lector en la medida de lo posible a entender la realidad del contexto de origen.

También es cierto que los ensayos de *Cuerpo político negro*, por ejemplo, en ocasiones se refieren a conceptos o situaciones culturales que aquí no existen o no tienen equivalente directo. Por ejemplo, recuerdo un texto de este volumen que estaba plagado de referentes culturales, nombres propios y referencias a hechos concretos que habían tenido lugar en Estados Unidos y que no han tenido prácticamente ninguna difusión en nuestro contexto, por lo que es probable que resulten ajenos al lector medio español. No obstante, si consideramos individualmente los diferentes textos que traduje para este libro, se puede apreciar que algunos, como el de Zora Neale Hurston, son mucho más literarios. En esos casos no ha sido necesario o he preferido no abusar de las notas aclaratorias y solucionar posibles problemas de referentes culturales mediante otros recursos no necesariamente paratextuales.

**S. L.:** A lo largo de tu carrera profesional has traducido tanto a hombres como mujeres. ¿Crees que existe la escritura femenina?

**M. E.:** No creo en la escritura femenina. Se me ocurren varios casos, como el de la escritora feminista francesa Virginie Despentes, cuya trilogía *Vernon Subutex* tiene un estilo difícilmente identificable con el de una mujer escritora. En todo caso, sí creo en la escritura *feminista*. Por ejemplo, hoy en día en España hay toda una corriente de escritoras feministas que escriben tanto ensayo como narrativa y que abordan tantas vivencias personales como reivindicaciones políticas. Estos textos son sensacionales; yo creo que vivimos un momento muy bueno para la escritura feminista.

En relación a esto, la traductora Celia Filipetto dio una charla recientemente en la que citaba unas palabras de Elena Ferrante sobre el “gineceo literario”. El gineceo literario se refiere al lugar en el que se encierra o encasilla a las mujeres que escriben, debido al cual, por ejemplo, resulta tremendamente difícil encontrar un comentario en el ámbito de los estudios literarios que rastree la influencia de una mujer en la obra literaria de un hombre. Es decir, tradicionalmente nos hemos enfrentado a la tendencia de apartar a las mujeres del canon masculino y encasillarlas en una suerte de “escritura femenina”. Yo no puedo estar más en contra de esto.

**S. L.:** En relación con la pregunta anterior, desde hace algunos años se están desarrollando trabajos de investigación en el campo de los Estudios de Traducción que estudian el modo en que el género del traductor/a puede influir en una traducción. No obstante, esto nos podría llevar a extrapolar que otros factores como la etnia o la clase social, e incluso la intersección de todos los anteriores, también serán determinantes a la hora de desempeñar la labor traductora. ¿Cuál es tu visión sobre esta problemática?

**M. E.:** Creo que un traductor profesional traduce de todo, ya sea la obra de mujeres u hombres. En ocasiones una se siente más identificada con lo que está traduciendo y en otras puedes estar en completo desacuerdo, pero ante todo hay que ser profesional y, sobre todo, documentarse. Especialmente en el caso de escritores como James Baldwin o escritoras como las de *Cuerpo político negro*, es imprescindible hacer un trabajo previo de documentación sobre ellas, empaparse de su escritura, consultar traducciones ya publicadas y armarse con un aparato que te permita acercarte a su obra para poder traducirla.

Respecto a la extrapolación que sugieres, quizás lo ideal sí sería que fueran mujeres negras las que tradujeran a mujeres negras, es algo que sí me había planteado, pero es una cuestión muy problemática y de difícil solución.

**S. L.:** En «Feminismo y traducción: Más allá del lenguaje inclusivo» hablas del uso de prácticas intervencionistas en el lenguaje de destino como medio para expresar una posición o pensamiento sociopolítico concreto. Pensando especialmente en las traducciones de autoras como Zora Neale Hurston, June Jordan, bell hooks o Carol Anderson, ¿dónde está el límite entre lo literario y lo político? Es decir, a la hora de abordar la traducción de sus textos, ¿cómo se prioriza entre forma o contenido?

**M. E.:** El caso que trato en «Feminismo y traducción: Más allá del lenguaje inclusivo», que es *Vivir una vida feminista* de Sarah Ahmed, intervine en el texto por petición explícita del editor. En este caso se me dio la consigna de prestar especial atención al lenguaje inclusivo y desdoblar el genérico masculino en castellano. En esta ocasión, intervine usando muchos sujetos femeninos, incluso más de los que había en el texto de origen, porque consideré que en su libro la autora se dirige claramente a las mujeres, no creo que le interese interpelar a hombres en su discurso. Ahora bien, si en otras escritoras no he visto ninguna marca de género clara, o ningún posicionamiento político en el lenguaje, no he intervenido como en los casos anteriores.

Respecto a la priorización entre forma y contenido, en mi experiencia, al traducir es algo que no me planteo. Creo que cualquier traductor siempre intentará traducirlo todo, es decir, preservar tanto la forma como el contenido. Eso es, precisamente, una de las complejidades de nuestro trabajo: intentar mantener el equilibrio entre la forma y el contenido. No obstante, textos como los de June Jordan o Carol Anderson, que son de tanta calidad literaria, te llevan de la mano. Sarah Ahmed, en *Vivir una vida feminista* utiliza millones de juegos de palabras, muchos que recurren a la etimología y son casi poéticos. En estos casos he intentado dar rienda suelta a todo el abanico de recursos disponibles para tratar de lidiar con estos problemas de traducción, no me he dejado nada en el tintero, intentando siempre trasvasar tanto forma como contenido porque, a fin de cuentas, esa es la realidad de su obra, es lo que ella ofrece. Por eso no veo una disyuntiva real entre ambas opciones, al menos desde el punto de vista de la traducción.

**S. L.:** Esto, necesariamente, me lleva a pensar en la problemática de la traducción del *black English*. Teniendo en cuenta la distancia cultural entre el público lector español y el contexto en el que se enmarcan las obras de autoras como June Jordan o Kima Jones, así como el modo en que estas utilizan la lengua inglesa, ¿qué dificultades se encuentra el traductor o, en este caso, la traductora de este tipo de literatura?

**M. E.:** La verdad es que, en las traducciones que se me han encargado, no me he encontrado con muchos casos de Black English (BE). Por lo general, los ensayos de *Cuerpo político negro*, *Esta vez el fuego* y novelas como *Mujeres difíciles* estaban escritos en un inglés totalmente estándar, sin marcas de dialecto. No obstante, hay dos casos concretos en los que el lenguaje utilizado por las autoras se desviaba de la norma: Para empezar, “Eres lo que más me importas”, de June Jordan es, en realidad, el resultado de un experimento que la autora hizo en una clase, donde intercala fragmentos en inglés normativo y otros escritos en BE. Para mantener esta dicotomía en la traducción, la única opción que tuve es intentar traducir el inglés estándar como español normativo, utilizando un lenguaje totalmente rígido, y el BE mediante un registro más bajo que, en este caso en particular, equivale al efecto que causan los pasajes en los alumnos de la clase. De todos modos, también mantuve una copia del texto en inglés dentro de mi traducción. Recuerdo que este ensayo nos pareció especialmente difícil de traducir tanto a Malika Embarek como a mí. También en *Esta vez el fuego*, en el texto de Kima Jones intenté utilizar un registro algo más popular y colorido, menos normativo, para reflejar el uso del lenguaje de la autora. No sé si es lo más adecuado, pero creo que el texto pedía marcar de algún modo el particular uso del lenguaje que hace esta escritora.

En general, otras traducciones que se han publicado de textos que hacen mayor uso del BE tienden a bajar el registro o, en todo caso, hacer uso de expresiones más disidentes de la lengua normativa; creo que en España esta es una de las prácticas más generalizadas para el problema de esta dialectología. Por suerte, soluciones más radicales como la práctica de traducir las variantes del inglés con variantes del castellano como el andaluz, por ejemplo—algo que era muy frecuente hace años—ya están muy en desuso. En cualquier caso, es una de las cuestiones más complicadas de la práctica traductora.



**S. L.** ¿Crees que es necesario acompañar este tipo de obras con paratextos como prólogos, glosarios o notas aclaratorias que puedan favorecer su lectura?

**M. E.:** No estoy para nada en contra de esta práctica. Existe una frase popular en el mundo de la traducción que cita “una nota es una derrota”; yo no estoy de acuerdo. A mí, como lectora, me gusta conocer la “voz” del traductor, los matices que se revelan en las notas... Sucede lo mismo con los prólogos y glosarios, no veo ningún problema en añadirlos. Incluso, desde el punto de vista del traductor, suponen material que podemos aprovechar en posteriores trabajos. Recuerdo un caso de un traductor que desarrolló un glosario extensísimo de los diferentes nombres que reciben las mujeres lesbianas en toda Hispanoamérica. Ese trabajo tiene un valor inestimable, tanto para el lector como para los compañeros de profesión. No creo que haya nada negativo en llamar la atención sobre la condición del texto como traducción. En relación a esto, Salvador Peña Martín, traductor y profesor en la Universidad de Málaga, habla de la “etnografía de la traducción”, que me parece un concepto muy interesante. La idea de conocer más sobre el traductor, el agente a través del cual accedemos al texto.

Es cierto que otros traductores tendrán opiniones contrarias; mucha gente cree que las notas al pie tienden a sacar de contexto al lector, a cortar el ritmo de la lectura. No es mi caso, ni como traductora ni como lectora. De hecho, hay ocasiones en las que incluso los propios autores recurren a las notas al pie en sus novelas, como es el caso, por ejemplo, de Junot Díaz.

**S. L.** ¿Hay alguna autora que te haya resultado especialmente difícil de traducir, ya sea por cuestiones lingüísticas o conceptuales?

**M. E.:** Zora Neale Hurston, sobre todo por el hecho de que pertenece a una época anterior, lo cual no solo afecta a la temática sino también al lenguaje y a la forma de expresarse. También recuerdo especialmente el texto de Kima Jones, al tener un estilo marcadamente literario y tan cargado de contenido. También los de bell hooks y Patricia Williams, en estos casos debido a la complejidad del contenido. En el caso de Roxane Gay, a nivel lingüístico no me resultó especialmente difícil, pero, por otro lado, varios de sus relatos abordan temas durísimos de forma muy explícita.

En lo que respecta al ensayo, el texto más difícil que he traducido en mi vida es “Ensamblajes terroristas: el homonacionalismo en tiempos queer” de la escritora

estadounidense de origen pakistaní Jasbir Puar. También acabo de entregar la traducción de un texto de Baldwin que es el guion para la película documental de 2016 *I Am Not Your Negro (No soy vuestro negro)* de Raoul Peck. En este caso, la dificultad de la traducción se halla en la oralidad del lenguaje.

**S. L.** En una entrevista con otra traductora, ella observaba que el interés económico de las grandes editoriales dificulta sobremanera la incorporación de nuevas voces poco comerciales al panorama literario nacional. ¿Cuál crees que es el futuro de la literatura de mujeres negras en países como el nuestro, cuya realidad sociocultural es tan distante de aquella del país de origen?

**M. E.:** A nivel editorial, sí es cierto que las grandes casas son las que dominan el panorama nacional. Aunque hay muchas medianas y pequeñas editoriales que se esfuerzan por publicar autores y autoras menos comerciales a fin de cuentas estos agentes tienen una capacidad de publicación y un alcance limitado. También ocurre que, aunque por lo general las ediciones que publican estas editoriales son muy cuidadas y el producto final es excelente, cuentan con menos medios promocionales para comercializar los títulos.

Por otro lado, no creo que hoy en día la realidad sociocultural del contexto de origen sea tan distante. Al fin y al cabo, hablamos de países occidentales y de una literatura que se produce en inglés, la lengua hegemónica por excelencia. Aunque las experiencias de estas autoras sean diferentes que las de los lectores y lectoras locales, en realidad ellas no dejan de pertenecer a un sistema literario dominante dentro del canon occidental lo que, en mi opinión, facilita su recepción en contextos extranjeros. También es necesario contar con el impulso de las redes sociales, internet y la facilidad con la que viaja la información alrededor del mundo hoy en día, lo que, evidentemente, propicia el contacto entre culturas y realidades que quizá en otra época sí se consideraban más ajenas.

Lo que es indudable es que actualmente nos encontramos en un buen momento para la difusión de esta literatura. Estas pequeñas editoriales están publicando continuamente títulos y autoras inéditas en España y, aunque es difícil llegar a conocer el arraigo real que estos textos puedan tener en el contexto receptor, cuanto más literatura tengamos a

nuestra disposición los lectores, más posibilidades de que se alcancen ciertos niveles de difusión a nivel nacional.

**S. L.:** Muchas gracias, María.

Barcelona / Valencia, September 25, 2020.

Transcribed and edited by Sandra Llopart



## 2. Interview with Pepa Linares

Pepa Linares de la Puerta (Madrid, 1948) studied Italian and Hispanic philology at the Complutense University. She has translated fiction by English and American authors such as Peter Viertel, Edith Wharton, Bernard Malamud, Muriel Spark and George Meredith as well as Italian authors such as Camillo Boito, Luigi Bartolini, Giuseppe Bonaviri, Scipio Slataper and Beppe Fenoglio. She has also directed several translation workshops. Linares won the 2014 Angel Crespo award for her translation of *El partisano Johnny*, by Beppe Fenoglio and was shortlisted for the 2020 XV Esther Benítez award for *Arenas Movedizas*, by Nella Larsen. Linares has also translated Larsen's *Claroscuro* (2011) as well as her short stories "No era él", "Libertad" and "Santuario", all published in the 2019 Spanish edition of *Arenas Movedizas*.

**Sandra Llopart:** Teniendo en cuenta tu extensa trayectoria profesional (has traducido a autores de la talla de Edith Wharton, Bernard Malamud, Muriel Spark, Joyce Carol Oates o Luigi Pirandello), ¿qué papel juega tu gusto personal en la elección de los textos?

**Pepa Linares:** Fundamentalmente trabajo por encargo, como la gran mayoría de traductores literarios. Al principio siempre resulta más difícil plantear tus gustos personales a los editores, pero, en mi caso, de un tiempo a esta parte sí que puedo permitirme sugerir textos que he leído y me han parecido interesantes. El editor siempre podrá aceptar mi propuesta o rechazarla.

**S.L.:** Has traducido dos novelas de Nella Larsen y tres de sus cuentos para Contraseña, además de varios otros títulos que ha publicado la misma editorial. ¿Cómo surgen estos encargos?

**P.L.:** En el caso de Larsen, fue la editorial la que encontró los textos, posiblemente buscando en la biblioteca de alguna universidad americana. La verdad es que yo no conocía nada de la autora hasta que me propusieron la traducción de *Passing*. Además, la editorial también contactó con Maribel Cruzado Soria, que es especialista en el renacimiento de Harlem, para escribir el prólogo de la traducción y ella aceptó encantada. Como decía, personalmente no conocía la obra de Larsen, pero me he

sentido muy bien trabajando con esta autora, con sus luces y sus sombras e incluso con sus personajes, que a veces no le caen bien a la gente ya que los han llegado a acusar de ser un poco superficiales, especialmente en *Arenas Movedizas*, pero a mí me parecen bastante verosímiles. Precisamente por eso, porque están llenos de defectos.

**S.L.:** Tu traducción de *Claroscuro* (2011) fue la primera obra de Larsen publicada en España. ¿Cómo encaras la traducción?

**P.L.:** *Claroscuro* se considera la novela de Larsen más lograda. Al hablar con los editores, estuvimos valorando por qué novela empezar y la verdad es que coincidimos en considerarla la que mostraba una mayor madurez y mejor estructura. Aunque, personalmente, también me gusta mucho *Arenas movedizas*, la opinión general considera que los personajes de *Claroscuro* están mejor acabados, son más complejos y verosímiles.

Por otro lado, el movimiento del Renacimiento de Harlem y la cuestión de *passing* es un tema apasionante que se conocía muy poco en España. Sí que se había tratado algo más en el cine, pero la idea del fenómeno socioeconómico que supuso en esa época no había trascendido en nuestro país, por lo que esta novela verdaderamente suponía una novedad en el mercado español.

**S.L.:** Existe una edición (descatalogada) de *Arenas Movedizas*, traducida por Pepa Cornejo Parriego en 2015 para la editorial Sr. Lobo. ¿Tuviste acceso a esta traducción antes de enfrentarte a tu propio encargo (2019)?

**P.L.:** No tuve acceso a la obra completa, pero sí pude leer las primeras páginas y tanto el editor como yo opinamos que podíamos seguir adelante con nuestro propio proyecto de traducción la novela.

**S.L.:** ¿Para qué tipo de público crees que están destinadas las traducciones de Larsen? ¿Hasta qué punto influye, en este caso, el lector potencial en el proceso translatario?

**P.L.:** En mi caso, no suelo pensar demasiado en el perfil del lector potencial de los libros. Creo que lo importante a la hora de traducir un texto literario es el propio texto en sí mismo; el estilo, el nivel artístico, el vocabulario y todos los detalles que pueden resultar relevantes para una traducción. Algo que sí intento siempre, especialmente pensando en los lectores, es cuidar aspectos como la sintaxis española y el vocabulario,

evitar falsos amigos, etc. A mi modo de ver, no hay mayor fidelidad y respeto por el lector que el que se demuestra al tratar de escribir en paralelo al autor original. Es decir, no generar extrañezas en el lector español si no están presentes en el texto original.

En el caso de Larsen, al leer sus textos en inglés sabes que su uso de la lengua es correcto y normativo; no hay nada que llame la atención, excepto cuando quiere caracterizar a los personajes o un habla determinada expresamente. Pero por lo general el inglés que utiliza es estándar, por lo que se debe traducir utilizando también un lenguaje sin marcas y dándole al texto en tu idioma la vida y la expresividad que tiene en el suyo. Personalmente, creo que esta es la mayor demostración de respeto y consideración hacia el lector.

**S.L.:** A lo largo de tu carrera profesional has traducido tanto a hombres como mujeres. ¿Crees que existe la escritura femenina?

**P.L.:** En cuanto a la temática, he traducido a muchas mujeres que han escrito sobre mujeres; por ejemplo, Penelope Lively, Alba de Céspedes o la propia Nela Larsen son mujeres que es cierto que se decantaban por escribir sobre problemas femeninos, sobre su propia condición de mujer. Ahora bien, también hay casos como el de Paola Masino, una autora italiana muy desconocida de los años veinte que pertenecía al movimiento surrealista italiano y a la que traduje hace tiempo. En su caso, aunque el propio título de la novela parecía revelador (se titulaba *Nacimiento y muerte del ama de casa*), resultó un texto surrealista que alternaba géneros como la narrativa y el teatro con escenas oníricas, por ejemplo. Hago uso de este ejemplo porque tradicionalmente se ha considerado que algo tan vanguardista como la obra de Masini en principio no se asocia con la escritura femenina y, sin embargo, ella utilizaba todas las técnicas impulsadas por otros autores surrealistas de la época.

En mi experiencia profesional, todo lo que he visto en materia literaria es idéntico para mujeres y hombres. Eso sí, en cuanto a los contenidos, es cierto que las autoras a las que he traducido estaban especialmente preocupadas por las mujeres, por contar historias sobre la condición femenina y desde la propia condición femenina.

**S.L.:** En relación con la pregunta anterior, desde hace algunos años se están desarrollando trabajos de investigación en el campo de los Estudios de Traducción que estudian el modo en que el género del traductor/a puede influir en una traducción. No

obstante, esto nos podría llevar a extrapolar que otros factores como la etnia o la clase social, e incluso la intersección de todos los anteriores, también serán determinantes a la hora de desempeñar la labor traductora. ¿Cuál es tu visión sobre esta problemática?

**P.L.:** Personalmente, opino que esta afirmación es una entelequia, una utopía. Yo he traducido novelas muy masculinas, como novelas de la resistencia italiana, novelas que transcurrían en África, la historia de un médico en Sicilia, la historia de un fiscal en Milán... Estos textos no solo estaban escritos por hombres, sino que sus personajes también eran mayoritariamente masculinos, y nunca he tenido ningún problema a la hora de abordarlos. Como decía Umberto Eco, nuestro problema son los adverbios; es decir, el lenguaje y el arte, venga de un hombre o de una mujer. En mi experiencia profesional, nunca he conocido a ningún traductor o traductora que se haya planteado esta problemática.

Por otro lado, es probable que mi género se perciba en las traducciones, pero igual que el género, también cabe la posibilidad de que se perciban otros aspectos de mi personalidad y mi lenguaje que puedan localizarse (o localizarme) en un tiempo y espacio concretos. No obstante, esto es algo que sucederá tanto con traductoras como con traductores.

**S.L.:** En tu artículo sobre la traducción de *Quicksand* para *Vasos Comunicantes* hablas de la dificultad añadida del papel fundamental que juegan el registro y las hablas dialectales en textos como *Arenas movedizas* o “Santuario” y de la necesidad de expresar esta diferencia lingüística sin caer en hablas pertenecientes a nuestro ámbito lingüístico (una práctica que, por otro lado, ha sido frecuente en el pasado) ¿Qué dificultades ha supuesto tratar con este estilo, o con esta literatura?

**P.L.:** En mi caso, al enfrentarme a este gran problema de traducción decidí consultar con traductores como Carlos Mayor y José Luis López Muñoz, entre otros, que habían traducido literatura estadounidense e incluso también textos de autoras negras en los que se hacía uso de un registro más popular o cotidiano. Al discutir sobre el tema, finalmente todos llegamos a la misma conclusión, y es que es imposible trasladar una variante como el *black English* a un texto en español. El problema principal es que los rasgos fonéticos no concuerdan con los de ningún habla en España, no son equivalentes ni en lo que respecta a la forma ni al fondo. Partiendo de esta base, cabe la posibilidad



de modificar rasgos morfosintácticos para, por ejemplo, caracterizar a una persona que habla relajadamente, como hablamos cuando estamos en privado, en confianza. Por ejemplo, en el cuento de “Santuario” utilicé este recurso para caracterizar un poco al personaje del negro, que era un negro pobre, por lo que era necesario remarcar el habla como reflejo de la clase. Sin embargo, esta no deja de ser una solución, pero una mala solución.

**S.L.:** ¿Crees que es necesario o recomendable acompañar este tipo de obras de paratextos como prólogos, glosarios o notas aclaratorias que puedan favorecer su lectura?

**P.L.:** En mi caso, aunque no suelo utilizar las notas aclaratorias, en las traducciones de Larsen sí que incluí bastantes, ya que consideré que eran de gran importancia. Por ejemplo, cuando en *Arenas Movedizas* se nombra a los músicos de jazz y blues de la época, el lector no tiene por qué conocer sus nombres. A mi parecer, en estos casos el lector agradece un pequeño detalle, recibir algo de información al respecto. Sucede lo mismo cuando se habla del ferrocarril subterráneo o, como yo lo llamé, el ferrocarril clandestino (ya que no es un transporte físico), que es algo que muy poca gente fuera de Estados Unidos conoce. Son datos importantísimos que en las novelas se lanzan con toda naturalidad y con los que es necesario que el lector español se familiarice.

En el caso de los prólogos de ambas traducciones, resultan muy interesantes y necesarios, sobre todo teniendo en cuenta que Larsen tuvo una gran repercusión social en su época. Mucha de la información que se proporciona en los prólogos es clave para comprender mejor el contexto sociocultural de las novelas. Especialmente en textos con una carga sociocultural e histórica tan grande, creo que el uso de recursos como notas o prólogos resulta muy enriquecedor para el lector ideal.

**S.L.:** ¿De las obras de Larsen que has traducido, contando con *Claroscuro*, *Arenas Movedizas* y los tres cuentos que acompañan esta edición, hay alguna que te haya resultado particularmente complicada o interesante?

**P.L.:** En términos generales, todos son interesantes desde el punto de vista de la traducción. En cuanto a la dificultad, todos ellos cuentan con fragmentos que me han resultado más complicados o laboriosos. Por ejemplo, la cuestión de las tonalidades del color de la piel, para lo que no hay equivalencias en nuestro idioma. También hay

muchos fragmentos descriptivos en los que se habla de texturas, colores, luces... por ejemplo, en las escenas colectivas de los interiores de los cabarets o en la escena del local convertido en iglesia donde la protagonista tiene un arrebató místico. Todos estos pasajes cuentan con una adjetivación tremenda, que puede resultar problemática a la hora de trasladar a una lengua románica.

**S.L.:** ¿Qué relación profesional tienes con Contraseña, la editorial para la que has realizado los dos encargos de traducción de Larsen?

**P.L.:** Tengo muy buena relación y un trato muy fluido. Solemos comentar posibles títulos para traducir e incluso a veces tomamos decisiones juntos. Por ejemplo, recientemente me descubrieron a Joyce Carol Oates, de la que traduje un texto breve que se publicará en primavera, y yo les descubrí a Alba de Céspedes.

También tengo muy buena relación con grupos editoriales algo más grandes. Ese buen trato en el ámbito profesional resulta fundamental para trabajar, tanto en el mundo de la traducción como en cualquier otro oficio.

Para mí también es importante el hecho de que con las editoriales con las que he trabajado siempre tengo libertad absoluta a la hora de tomar decisiones respecto a la traducción. Evidentemente, un libro necesita que lo miren muchos ojos, por lo que al acabar mis traducciones la editorial siempre lo revisa y me hace propuestas, correcciones y sugerencias que yo puedo aplicar o desestimar según mi criterio. No obstante, tal y como comentaba, cuando la relación profesional con la editorial es buena, esto se convierte en un proceso muy natural y fluido.

**S.L.:** A pesar de que en nuestro país el interés a nivel editorial, académico e institucional por la literatura afroamericana parece aumentar paulatinamente (en los últimos años se han publicado varias traducciones de autores y, sobre todo, autoras negras menos conocidas en España como Angela Davis, bell hooks o Elaine Brown; Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo está publicando colecciones de ensayos sobre el cuerpo político negro...), los expertos coinciden en que todavía queda mucho camino por recorrer, ¿cuál es tu opinión sobre el tema?

**P.L.:** De un tiempo a esta parte, yo creo que sí que ha aumentado el interés por esta literatura en España. Las traducciones de Larsen, por ejemplo, han tenido muy buena

acogida. Si bien es cierto que el público lector de estas novelas continúa siendo minoritario y no podemos saber cómo evolucionarán los gustos de los lectores en el futuro, en comparación con la difusión que tenían autoras como Larsen hace ocho años, por ejemplo, la mejora actualmente es innegable.

**S. L.:** Muchas gracias, Pepa.

Barcelona / Madrid, February 19, 2021

Transcribed and edited by Sandra Llopart



### 3. Interview with Carme Manuel

Carme Manuel Cuenca is a writer, translator, and professor of North American literature at the University of Valencia. She is also the director and literary editor of Biblioteca Javier Coy d'Estudis Nord-americans. She is the translator of *Voces proféticas: relatos de escritoras estadounidenses de entre siglos (XIX-XX)* (2003); *Nuestra negra o esbozos de la vida de una negra libre* (2005); *Peripetias en la vida de una joven esclava* (2005, 2021); *L'ànima de les negres: poesia de dones afroamericanes dels segles XVIII i XIX* (2005), *Treinta años de esclavitud y cuatro en la Casa Blanca* (2008); *Conflicto de fuerzas* (2012); *Ciudadà: Poema líric nord-americà* (2018); the author of *Guía bibliográfica para el estudio de la literatura de los Estados Unidos* (2002) and *Fuego en los huesos: afroamericanas y escritura en los siglos XVIII y XIX* (2013) and the editor of *Teaching American Literature in Spanish Universities* (2002); *Vida y viajes de la señora Nancy Prince* (2008); *Iola Leroy, o las sombras disipadas* (2008), among many others.

**Sandra Llopart:** La producció literària d'autors i autores afroamericans/nes als Estats Units és molt gran. En relació amb això, podríem dir que l'interès per aquesta part fonamental de la cultura nord-americana s'ha anat renovant amb el temps, no només a través de la literatura sinó també en altres modes d'expressió com, per exemple, el cinema. Des d'*El color púrpura* als anys noranta fins a films més recents com *Push* (2009), *Django* (2013), *Selma* (2014), *Moonlight* (2016), *Green Book* (2018)... No obstant això, malgrat l'èxit internacional d'aquestes produccions, la realitat és que a Espanya ens arriba una part molt limitada de la producció cultural i literària d'aquests autors i autores. A què creus que es deu això?

**Carme Manuel:** Si et sóc sincera, a Espanya no hi ha cap interès pel tema. En el cas de les pel·lícules, aquí arriba el contingut dictat per Hollywood, però totes les produccions de cinema lliure o independent ni interessen ni arriben. Des de l'era Obama, les pel·lícules que s'han anat estrenant obeeixen una voluntat de reescriure la història des dels paràmetres del segle XXI, però cap d'elles podrà superar l'impacte planetari que va tenir *Raíces* en els anys setanta; aquest cas sí que va ser significatiu. Primer als Estats Units: la primera vegada en la història de la televisió que, en horari de màxima

audiència, es passava una èpica sobre negres. A Espanya, parlem del context de finals dels anys setanta i principis dels vuitanta, quan només hi havia disponibles dos canals de televisió. La història de Kunta Kinte va tenir un gran impacte. Jo no crec que des de llavors fins avui dia hi hagi hagut una altra producció fílmica sobre el tema amb el mateix impacte al context espanyol.

Pel·lícules com les de Tarantino, que estan una setmana o dues als cinemes, passen sense pena ni glòria. Això succeeix perquè no tenim una educació general sobre la nostra pròpia història—molt menys sobre la d'Estats Units, i l'interès cultural o històric que desperten és mínim. Altres, com *Dotze anys esclau* o *Push*, han estat una setmana i prou i, tot i així, la gent no arriba a conèixer realment la història, el llibre, l'autor o autora... A nivell fílmic, veiem el que Hollywood vol que veiem, que reforça la gran narrativa d'Estats Units: la lluita, l'esforç, el treball... Normalment, aquestes produccions no arriben més enllà de la reconciliació final entre el propi negre i el seu país.

**S.L.:** I pel que fa als llibres?

**C.M.:** Sempre pots trobar títols dispersos en algunes col·leccions, és clar. Tenim també en castellà la magnífica col·lecció BAAM (Biblioteca Afro Americana Madrid) dirigida per José Luis Gallero i Mireia Sentís, que tenen des de 2014 títols com ara *James Yates, De Misisipi a Madrid: Memorias de un afroamericano de la Brigada Lincoln* (2011), *Langston Hughes, Escritos sobre España (1937-1956)* (2011); June Jordan, *Dificultades tècniques: Ensayos políticos (1986-1992)* (2012); Ishmael Reed, *Tapos sucios* (2012); Jean Toomer, *Caña* (2014); Elaine Brown, *Una cata de poder* (2015); Angela Davis, *Una historia de la conciencia: Ensayos escogidos* (2016); William Wells Brown, *Clotel o la hija del Presidente: Relato de la vida en esclavitud en los Estados Unidos de América* (2017); 10, Debra J. Dickerson, *El final de la negritud* (2018); i Toni Morrison, *Jugando en la oscuridad: El punto de vista blanco en la imaginación literaria* (2019).

Jo he contribuït a la traducció d'algunes obres però sempre he hagut de convèncer els editors. L'any passat, per exemple, vaig traduir *Ciudadà: Poema líric nord-americà*, de Claudia Rankine per l'editorial Alfons el Magnànim de la Diputació de València, perquè el director de la col·lecció de poesia, amb qui ja havia publicat la traducció d'un

recull de poemes d'Emily Dickinson, em va confiar la tria d'un títol actual per a la col·lecció. En el cas de *Conflicto de fuerzas* (2012), per a Càtedra, també vaig insistir molt en que es publicués l'obra. A Càtedra tinc diverses edicions: *La cabaña del Tío Tom* (2013); algunes obres de Mark Twain, com *Un yanqui en la corte del Rey Arturo* (1999) o *La tragedia de Wilson Cabezahueca* (2013); les dues obres de narrativa de Walt Whitman—*Franklin Evans, el borracho* (2011) i *Relatos* (2018)—, que no s'havien traduït ni editat mai en castellà i també l'única obra que no s'havia traduït mai al castellà de Louisa May Alcott: *Trabajo. Un relato de vivencias* (2009). D'algunes n'he fet jo la traducció i d'altres l'edició, però les propostes sempre han estat meves.

**S.L.:** Com sorgeixen els diferents encàrrecs o propostes de traducció?

**C.M.:** Vaig començar amb una companya de la universitat Jaume I, Nieves Alberola, a l'editorial Ellago, que actualment està extinta. Amb Ellago vàrem començar amb moltíssima il·lusió un projecte que consistia en una biblioteca d'autores nord-americanes. Però, malauradament l'editorial va fer fallida i ara tot això ha desaparegut. De fet, jo no vaig firmar cap contracte durant aquella època, així que tinc els drets de les traduccions i estic tractant de publicar-les en altres editorials però és molt difícil, hi ha molt poc interès. D'altra banda, jo m'havia proposat traduir tota la literatura afroamericana del segle XIX. Així doncs, em vaig encarregar, entre d'altres, de la traducció i l'edició crítica de *Vida y viajes de la señora Nancy Prince* (2008) i de l'edició de *Iola Leroy, o las sombras disipadas* (2008), una altra obra fonamental per al període.

Pel que fa a Càtedra, jo sempre he tingut bona relació amb l'editorial, així que vaig decidir proposar la traducció de la novel·la de Pauline E. Hopkins, que és una obra moderníssima. Gràcies a l'amabilitat i la generositat de l'editora general, l'obra es va publicar tot i que, evidentment, a nivell comercial no dona beneficis. Tot i així, he tractat de fer moltes presentacions i anar a clubs de lectura per donar a conèixer l'autora i la novel·la. És un llibre del que jo estic molt orgullosa, perquè col·laborar amb Càtedra sempre és un privilegi.

Ara sembla que es van publicant algunes novetats per causes diverses. Per exemple, els guanyadors del Booker Prize acostumen a traduir-se al català i castellà. Tot i això, la meva opinió és que són llibres que no tenen un gran impacte al nostre país. Al contrari,

aquí continuen llegint-se els clàssics; hi ha molt poc interès per donar difusió a noves veus. És cert que avui dia tothom coneix el nom de James Baldwin o Toni Morrison, però són autors mal llegits; molt poca gent realment ha estat en contacte amb la seva obra.

**S.L.:** La realitat és que a Espanya s'ha donat visibilitat a una selecció molt concreta d'autores a través de les seves traduccions: Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Angela Davis... Creus que aquesta imatge és representativa?

**C.M.:** No sé si ho és, però més val això que no res. Sí que és cert que força gent coneix *El color púrpura*, però Morrison, per exemple, no té tant de renom aquí. Les seves obres estan traduïdes en gran part gràcies als premis que ha guanyat, però fins i tot als Estats Units no és una literatura que es llegeixi tant. Allà, *Ophra's Book Club* funciona molt bé i quan ella recomana una novel·la, tots els seus adeptes la llegeixen, però la realitat és que en moltes universitats nord-americanes encara no existeixen els estudis afroamericans.

En relació amb això, una altra cosa amb la qual jo estic completament en desacord és l'estudi de la literatura afroamericana en sí mateixa. En les universitats aquesta temàtica es reflecteix en algunes optatives però, personalment, crec que és imprescindible la comparació i la imbricació total de qualsevol literatura dins la literatura general del país—tractar d'evitar els “ghettos” dins la pròpia literatura.

**S.L.:** De fet, ets la directora de la Biblioteca Javier Coy d'Estudis Nord-Americans, que ha editat diversos volums d'autores negres en el marc de la literatura nord-americana.

**C.M.:** Exactament, és una qüestió fonamental. Sempre s'ha de tenir en compte el marc general i la relació d'aquestes autores amb el seu context.

També s'ha de tenir en compte que jo, personalment, estic molt involucrada amb la qüestió de la llengua i la literatura, i sóc conscient que la situació general és molt diferent. A Catalunya, d'altra banda, el món editorial té molt més moviment que al País Valencià. A Barcelona contínuament s'estan publicant llibres, ja que els consorcis amb editorials estrangeres fan que els volums premiats circulin ràpidament en català. A València això no passa. Per exemple, el volum *L'ànima de les negres: poesia de dones afroamericanes dels segles XVIII i XIX* el va publicar una editorial valenciana que



també va fer fallida, i el text no va tenir gaire promoció ni difusió. Tot i així, tinc la sort que aquests llibres a Catalunya sempre han estat molt ben rebuts, dins del desinterès general per la temàtica.

**S.L.:** Com sorgeix l'interès per publicar autores pràcticament desconegudes i, per descomptat, inèdites al context espanyol i catalanoparlant?

**C.M.:** Sempre he tingut clar que volia contribuir a canviar les coses i esforçar-me en les dues besants, tant en castellà com en català i valencià. Tot això m'ha interessat com a ciutadana i com a persona compromesa amb la meua societat, el meu país, la meua llengua; la meua contribució, en aquest cas, és haver pogut posar sobre la taula escriptores negres en valencià. També, en aquest sentit, he rescatat i traduït al valencià la poesia de Melville, que mai ha despertat l'interès del públic lector. Tanmateix, una de les darreres publicacions que he fet a València (Balandra Edicions) ha estat la traducció d'una obra de Gordon Henry, *El fracàs de certs encanteris i altres senyals disperss de vida* (2018), que és trepidant. Això és el que em satisfà. Em sembla molt trist que, des de la universitat—que és el lloc on es poden fer més coses a aquest nivell—només parem atenció a uns pocs autors. No és una tasca fàcil, però penso que és la única manera d'expandir el coneixement. La Biblioteca Javier Coy també em dona molta feina, però m'interessa moltíssim perquè tot és cultura i de veritat penso que l'educació és de les poques coses de què disposem millorar el món i donar sentit a la vida. Malauradament, els projectes que em proposo cada vegada costen més de tirar endavant, però jo m'hi deixo la pell en cadascun d'ells.

**S.L.:** Quina és la teua visió del panorama futur de la literatura negra femenina al nostre context? Creus que l'interès per aquestes obres i autores va en augment?

**C.M.:** Cada vegada hi ha més editorials que publiquen. Per exemple, trobo simptomàtic que les darreres publicacions d'autors com Ta-Neishi Coates o Colson Whitehead s'hagin traduït al castellà. Com a mínim, les obres estan a l'abast, cosa que abans no passava. Suposo que aquestes editorials que aposten per noves veus tenen una política que els permet arriscar amb aquests títols. A Catalunya és cert que hi ha un determinat sector de la població que sí que llegeix, però, en general, els nivells de lectura són molt baixos. De totes maneres, la disponibilitat dels textos en la llengua local és un primer pas—després s'hauria de plantejar la qüestió del nínxol de mercat real, que és molt petit,

però publicar traduccions és un símptoma positiu. Tanmateix, la qualitat d'aquestes traduccions també és un factor a tenir en compte. Sabem que, avui dia, traduir un tipus de literatura com l'afroamericana és una feina molt complicada i les circumstàncies laborals dels traductors literaris no són les òptimes per enfrontar aquest tipus d'encàrrecs.

D'altra banda, la presència de la literatura afroamericana a blogs literaris en castellà o català sobre literatura nord-americana és mínima o inexistent. Per què una obra d'aquesta literatura tingui un cert reconeixement al context local ha de venir avalada per un gran volum de crítiques positives i altres elements paratextuals com premis o adaptacions cinematogràfiques. Si això no succeeix, el públic general en té prou amb conèixer en línies generals la història de l'esclavitud i el patiment dels negres a Estats Units. No hi ha un interès per sortir d'aquestes nocions simplistes. Són les editorials les que marquen el gust literari, perquè molt poca gent llegeix les versions originals. Així doncs, aquests llocs en línia acostumen a prendre com a referència les traduccions que es publiquen a Espanya per als seus comentaris literaris i estranyament paren atenció a escriptors negres; escriptores negres, encara menys.

També trobo necessari poder proporcionar a aquells lectors que tinguin una apreciació més profunda de la cultura i les arts mostres d'altres vessants dins la literatura dels Estats Units. Per exemple, la literatura del segle XIX és molt potent, amb un tractament de la poesia i la narrativa més avantguardista i experimental, més enllà dels relats victimistes de "bons i dolents". Per exemple, l'obra de Claudia Rankine és excepcional en aquest sentit. Si tot va bé, també tinc previst publicar una traducció de la poesia de Rita Dove, que ens ha cedit els drets per traduir-la al català. No obstant, vull recalcar que tot això ho faig com a afició, gràcies a que la meva feina a la universitat em permet dedicar-m'hi.

**S.L.:** Quin és el paper de les editorials en la difusió (o la falta d'aquesta) de la literatura afroamericana femenina com a part fonamental de la literatura nord-americana?

**C.M.:** Com comentava, les editorials marquen el gust, al menys pel que respecta a literatura estrangera traduïda. No obstant, el suport econòmic en aquests casos és clau, ja que és el que els permet fer apostes més arriscades i produir traduccions de qualitat. Amb Ellago, per exemple, es va intentar donar difusió i sortida a obres excel·lents com

*Nuestra negra: esbozos de la vida de una negra libre, Peripecias en la vida de una joven esclava i Treinta años de esclavitud y cuatro en la Casa Blanca* que és un llibre interesantíssim, però malauradament no va funcionar. Amb això vull dir que tot comporta molt voluntarisme; la nostra és una tasca molt difícil, però, des del meu punt de vista, també molt necessària.

També és cert que el panorama a Catalunya és més alentidor que al País Valencià. A Catalunya és més fàcil construir xarxes de contactes que donen peu a col·laboracions remunerades. Aquesta és una diferència molt gran respecte de València, perquè aquí és molt difícil viure d'aquest sector. Jo sóc conscient de la conjuntura, i que, en aquest sentit, estem molt lluny de Barcelona, però a mi personalment aquesta feina m'entusiasma i de veritat crec que hem de treballar per canviar la situació actual.

Aquesta és la realitat segons jo l'he viscut i encara la visc. Altres persones podran explicar altres relats, però la meua història com a traductora de totes aquestes escriptores és aquesta. És un privilegi tenir una feina que em permeti dedicar-me a la traducció i l'edició.

**S.L.:** Moltíssimes gràcies pel teu testimoni i dedicació, Carme.

Valencia/Brussels, October 8, 2019

Transcribed and edited by Sandra Llopart



## 4. Interview with Carlos Mayor

Carlos Mayor is a writer, journalist and lecturer at the Pompeu Fabra University. He has translated over 400 titles, focusing on fiction, essays, graphic novels and illustrated books. He also writes for several publications, such as *El Trujamán*, at the Centro Virtual Cervantes, and *Vasos Comunicantes*. He was co-editor of *Dos.Dos* magazine and he has contributed to *Out*, *El País*, *El Temps* and *Granta en Español*. He has translated contemporary authors such as Tom Wolfe, Doris Lessing, Andrea Camilleri, Paolo Giordano, Bruce Chatwin and Toni Morrison, and also classics by Vita Sackville-West, Saki, Emilio Salgari, Thomas Hardy, Gianni Rodari, John Steinbeck, Carlo Collodi, Oscar Wilde and Rudyard Kipling. Among many other titles, he is the translator of Toni Morrison's *La noche de los niños* (2016), for which he won the Esther Benítez Award (ACE Traductores) in 2017, *El origen de los otros* (2018) and *La fuente de la autoestima: ensayos, discursos y meditaciones* (2020).

**Sandra Llopart:** Teniendo en cuenta tu extensa trayectoria profesional (has traducido a autores de la talla de Andrea Camilleri, Doris Lessing, Tom Wolfe, John Steinbeck o Rudyard Kipling), ¿qué papel juega tu gusto personal en la elección de los textos?

**Carlos Mayor:** Muy poco. En el mercado español, los traductores de los idiomas más habituales, que son con los que yo trabajo (inglés, italiano, catalán y francés), no solemos tener poder de decisión sobre los textos. Eso quizás ocurre más con otros idiomas en los que los editores pueden aceptar al traductor como prescriptor. Por ejemplo, un editor al que acude un traductor con una propuesta sobre una obra sueca o persa, posiblemente se dejará asesorar más. En cambio, con los idiomas con los que yo trabajo habitualmente, son los editores quienes rigen el catálogo. De hecho, nunca he traducido una propuesta mía, todo ha sido por encargo. La verdad es que tampoco he hecho muchas propuestas, básicamente porque, por suerte, he podido orientar mi trabajo hacia líneas que me interesan.

Por otro lado, está el caso de traductores que realizan una traducción académica de una obra de su elección o que llevan propuestas menos comerciales a editoriales independientes. Es cierto que hay traductores y estudiosos que han dedicado mucho

tiempo a traducir un volumen concreto o la obra de determinados autores por su interés personal en estos textos, pero normalmente son casos en los que el traductor no se gana la vida con ese trabajo y lo desempeña como una afición o como una labor secundaria.

**S.L.:** Has traducido una novela y dos volúmenes ensayísticos de Toni Morrison. ¿Cómo surgen estos encargos?

**C.M.:** La verdad es que, tradicionalmente, las traducciones de Toni Morrison en España han sido bastante erráticas. Morrison es una autora con una obra muy importante, aunque no muy extensa. En el contexto español, sus novelas siempre las han traducido traductores diferentes. Con frecuencia, esta falta de especialización ocurre no por un problema con el traductor, sino porque, sencillamente, este no está disponible en el momento preciso. También ocurre que, en algunos casos, el editor no advierte que existen ediciones previas o no las revisa antes de proponer el nuevo encargo de traducción, por lo que cada nueva publicación se asigna a un traductor diferente. En resumen, esta diversificación de traductores puede darse por varios factores: a veces por desidia, por falta de interés o por falta de disponibilidad. En mi caso, el anterior traductor fue Amado Diéguez, pero habían pasado ya varios años desde la publicación de *Volver* (2012). Yo tengo conocimiento de esta información porque, para la traducción de *La fuente de la autoestima* (2020), tuve que trabajar con traducciones de obras anteriores que se citan en el volumen del que yo me ocupaba. Fue una situación bastante excepcional teniendo en cuenta la dinámica general de los encargos profesionales.

**S.L.:** En el caso de *La noche de los niños* (2016), obtuviste una beca del Banff Centre para trabajar en este proyecto. ¿Puedes hablarme un poco más sobre esta experiencia?

**C.M.:** *La noche de los niños* fue un trabajo de traducción muy particular. Cuando di con la posibilidad de solicitar la beca, solo quedaba una semana de plazo para presentarse y pensé que sería imposible encontrar un libro que se adaptara a los requisitos de la convocatoria. Tenía que ser un texto de un autor americano o cuyo traductor fuera originario de Canadá, Estados Unidos o México (que son los países anfitriones del programa). Como yo no cumplía esta última condición, tuve que acudir a algunos editores para buscar un proyecto de traducción viable dentro de los requisitos marcados por la beca. Finalmente, contacté con la persona que gestiona las traducciones en

Penguin Random House, que me informó de que tenían previsto traducir el próximo libro de Toni Morrison, que aún no se había publicado en inglés. Por supuesto, este era un proyecto interesantísimo para mí, personal y profesionalmente, que además me permitiría optar a la beca.

El programa del Banff Centre tiene la particularidad de que invita a quince traductores, de los cuales la mitad son canadienses, estadounidenses o mexicanos y la otra mitad del resto del mundo. Además, en algunos casos incluso invitan a los autores durante una semana para trabajar con los traductores y poder hacerles consultas, asistir a charlas o conferencias... De hecho, Morrison estaba invitada el año en que yo obtuve la beca, aunque, por desgracia, no pudo aceptar la invitación por motivos de salud. No obstante, el programa ha acogido a otros grandes autores como Margaret Atwood o Anne Carson, entre otros. También me proporcionó la oportunidad de dedicar más tiempo del que normalmente se dispone para un encargo de traducción literaria, lo que fue estupendo y muy gratificante. Antes de aceptar el encargo, yo había leído alguna novela de Morrison, pero gracias a esta oportunidad me pude documentar bastante y encarar el encargo muy bien preparado.

Más adelante, en 2017, también obtuve el premio Ester Benítez por esa traducción, así que fue un trabajo muy reseñable para mí. Además, he seguido traduciendo textos posteriores de la autora y sumergiéndome más profundamente en su universo literario, lo que es una gozada.

**S.L.:** ¿Cómo encaras la traducción de una autora como Morrison? Es decir, piensas en ella como premio nobel, como afroamericana, como mujer... ¿Hasta qué punto influye eso en tu traducción?

**C.M.:** El hecho de que un autor tenga un Premio Nobel, o cualquier otro premio, en realidad no es relevante a la hora de enfrentarte al libro. No obstante, en su caso, lo que representa su figura, el hecho de haber sido la primera mujer afroamericana en ganarlo y también la importancia que adquirió tras obtener el Pulitzer son hitos fundamentales para comprender su trayectoria, así como la relevancia y evolución de la literatura afroamericana desde los años ochenta hasta ahora. Todo esto, sumado al hecho de que sea mujer y afroamericana podrían no ser rasgos relevantes en la obra de otros autores, pero se vuelven fundamentales si pensamos en su caso concreto. Por ejemplo, en el caso

de Doris Lessing, a quien traduje antes de que obtuviera el Nobel, podríamos decir que ganar este premio no le cambió la vida ni tuvo una repercusión tan significativa en la manera de leer y en la recepción de su obra. También es cierto que el hecho de haber traducido los ensayos de Morrison me ha permitido obtener un conocimiento profundo de su obra y su pensamiento. Así, por ejemplo, he podido apreciar que los rasgos más relevantes de su obra literaria están presentes en cada una de sus novelas.

**S.L.:** A la hora de encarar los encargos de traducción de obras de Morrison, ¿utilizaste como referencia las traducciones al castellano de obras anteriores de la autora?

**C.M.:** Cuando traduje *La noche de los niños*, más que consultar traducciones anteriores me empapé de su obra en versión original. También investigué sobre qué traducciones se habían publicado y, como decía, me sorprendió que hubiera habido distintos traductores para todas las obras, aunque no creo que esto responda a ningún motivo concreto. Muchas veces no hay grandes explicaciones de por qué ocurren esas cosas. No obstante, fue con los ensayos cuando consulté con más detenimiento las traducciones anteriores de sus novelas, porque había varios pasajes autorreferenciales donde la autora citaba fragmentos de sus propias novelas para estudiar el proceso de creación literaria. En ese contexto, me resultó fundamental conocer a fondo las traducciones publicadas en español de los textos citados.

**S.L.:** Es cierto que en *La fuente de la autoestima* Morrison cita varios pasajes no solo de sus propias novelas, sino de otros textos literarios, como *La cabaña del tío Tom*, entre otros. En estos casos, ¿realizabas tu propia traducción del fragmento o recurrías a traducciones ya publicadas?

**C.M.:** Por lo general, acudía a traducciones publicadas, excepto en los casos en que los textos a los que se refería no estaban publicados en español. En esas ocasiones, citaba el libro con el título original y entre paréntesis o entre corchetes proporcionaba una traducción literal o aproximada. Es lo que se suele hacer, sobre todo en ensayo, al dar referencias de obras inéditas. Una situación diferente sería, por ejemplo, si un personaje de una novela menciona un libro. Es ese caso el planteamiento sería distinto, porque habría que considerar la importancia de la fluidez de la narración.

En todo caso, la cuestión de las citas y referencias resultó bastante problemática porque, al ser los textos transcripciones de conferencias, a veces las citas textuales eran



inexactas o no estaban referenciadas. Por eso, tanto en *Jugando en la oscuridad* como en *La fuente de la autoestima* añadí una nota indicando que algunas traducciones de citas se habían modificado ligeramente. Por ejemplo, al analizar *Tener y no tener* de Hemingway, Morrison examina el uso de un término que no aparece traducido en la versión española de la novela, por lo que era necesario añadirlo y, con ello, modificar la traducción original ligeramente.

**S.L.:** ¿Para qué tipo de público crees que están destinadas las traducciones de Morrison? ¿Crees que hay diferencias entre el perfil del lector de sus novelas y de los ensayos? ¿Hasta qué punto influye, en este caso, el lector potencial en el proceso translatório?

**C.M.:** En España no es una escritora de masas como sí ha sido en Estados Unidos o en el mundo anglosajón. De hecho, hoy en día *Playing in the Dark* está entre los libros más recomendados en las universidades americanas en general; no me refiero al ámbito de los Estudios Afroamericanos o los Estudios Literarios, sino al panorama general de las universidades. Esto, entre otros indicadores, evidencia que en Estados Unidos ella es una figura conocidísima. No obstante, en el contexto local *Beloved*, por ejemplo, es una novela que se ha vendido bastante y que mucha gente conoce, pero el resto de su obra no ha tenido tanta difusión, especialmente los ensayos, que son libros difíciles de leer. Aunque haya ganado el premio Nobel y el Pulitzer y sea una autora relativamente conocida, no creo que tenga un público muy amplio en España.

**S.L.:** En otra ocasión hablaba con otra traductora sobre la expresión del género en inglés y en español, y sobre la necesidad del traductor de intervenir directamente sobre el texto para lidiar con estos problemas. En relación a esto, por ejemplo, en *La fuente de la autoestima* hay dos títulos: “The Individual Artist” y “The Writer Before the Page” de los cuales traduces el primero en masculino (“El artista original”) y el segundo en femenino (“La escritora ante la página”) ¿Qué te lleva a tomar estas decisiones?

**C.M.:** Es una cuestión importantísima. De hecho, una de las dificultades de *La fuente de la autoestima* es la diversidad de procedencia de los textos y el momento de su publicación. Por ejemplo, si el texto era una transcripción de una conferencia impartida en un colegio de mujeres, utilicé el femenino no genérico, sino exclusivo, porque la autora se estaba dirigiendo a un grupo de mujeres concreto. De igual modo, si el público

receptor era chicas de veinte años, el trato pasaba a ser de tú. En cambio, en “La patria del forastero. Los muertos del 11 de septiembre” hablo de usted al público, porque me parecía pertinente en ese contexto.

En el caso de “La escritora ante la página”, considero que en ese ensayo Morrison habla de ella misma y de su labor, no creo que hable de la profesión en general, sino de su trabajo concretamente. En cambio, en el caso de “El artista original” sí que habla en términos más genéricos. Aunque es cierto que en textos como estos la traducción de la expresión del género se puede abordar desde muchas perspectivas, en este caso no identifiqué ningún indicio que me llevara a desviarme de la norma. No obstante, fui consciente de esta problemática en todo momento, dado que la propia autora en ocasiones sí alterna el femenino con el masculino genérico. En esos casos, por supuesto, traduje los pronombres que ella escogía y subrayé el femenino siempre que el original lo hiciera, pero también consideré que traducir el genérico neutro en inglés como femenino en todos los casos sería una intervención propia en su texto.

**S.L.:** A lo largo de tu carrera profesional has traducido tanto a hombres como mujeres. ¿Crees que existe la escritura femenina?

**C.M.:** Lo único que puedo afirmar con certeza es que cada libro es distinto. En el caso del ensayo y del pensamiento de Morrison, el género es un tema fundamental. Es evidente que ella tiene una perspectiva de género y racializada, y que, al margen de la universalidad de los conflictos que plantea, su perspectiva está claramente marcada por estos condicionantes. En el caso de la ficción, depende mucho del libro. Creo que, desde la perspectiva del traductor, lo más importante es saber captar la intención del autor o la autora en un texto concreto y saber plasmar esa intención en otro código, en otro idioma, para que también sea deducible y comprensible por los lectores meta. Generalizar sobre la literatura masculina o femenina es muy peliagudo. Supongo que sí que habrá grandes diferencias, pero no me atrevería a delimitar dos categorías separadas, independientes, sino un enorme abanico de posibilidades.

**S.L.:** En relación con la pregunta anterior, desde hace algunos años se están desarrollando trabajos de investigación en el campo de los Estudios de Traducción que estudian el modo en que el género del traductor/a puede influir en una traducción. No obstante, esto nos podría llevar a extrapolar que otros factores como la etnia o la clase

social, e incluso la intersección de todos los anteriores, también serán determinantes a la hora de desempeñar la labor traductora. ¿Cuál es tu visión sobre esta problemática?

**C.M.:** Yo no lo llamaría problemática, sino que es una cuestión muy interesante para estudiar y considerar. En mi opinión, la legitimidad está muy marcada por el trabajo de la persona que traduce. Es decir, si el traductor es capaz de meterse en la piel del autor y del narrador en un texto concreto, no veo por qué su género tendría que ser más importante que sus capacidades profesionales. Esto podría extrapolarse, por ejemplo, a la literatura de James Baldwin, que, siguiendo esta línea de pensamiento, debería traducirse por una persona gay, negra y, en última instancia, también estadounidense. El traductor no tiene por qué provenir de un contexto similar al del autor, pero sí tiene que saber comprender las circunstancias de producción del texto y la intención concreta del emisor original. Diferencias como las culturales, entre otras, normalmente son enormes, pero esto no deslegitima la traducción de realidades diferentes a la propia.

**S.L.:** He leído en otra entrevista que hablas de la dificultad añadida del papel fundamental que juegan el registro y las hablas dialectales en las novelas de Morrison. Quizás en *La noche de los niños* el uso del *black english* no es tan latente, pero sí que hay un innegable ritmo reforzado por la narración en primera persona. ¿Qué dificultades ha supuesto tratar con este estilo, o con esta literatura?

**C.M.:** La verdad es que la novela que yo he traducido no es la que presenta más dificultades en este sentido, hay otras que son mucho más complejas y es cierto que es un problema de traducción que no siempre se ha resuelto bien. Por ejemplo, la traducción española de *Beloved* (1988) presenta varios problemas relacionados con la representación de la variación lingüística. A este respecto, sería muy interesante poder contar con una nueva versión de la novela en español, especialmente considerando que en el momento en que se publicó la traducción la obra de Morrison aún no se había estudiado con la profundidad y seriedad con la que cuenta hoy en día.

En mi caso, he tenido que lidiar con la cuestión de la variación lingüística en varios de los pasajes citados en *La fuente de la autoestima*; no solo textos propios, sino también de otros autores. Por ejemplo, en el caso del cuento “El negro artificial” de Flannery O’Connor (2019), en la traducción que cité se notaba que el traductor, Marcelo Cobián, había hecho un esfuerzo especial para solucionar esta cuestión, aunque el resultado era

muy malo y, en mi opinión, rozaba el ridículo. En este caso, se había realizado un trabajo muy concienzudo para buscar diferentes maneras de reflejar el habla de personajes de distinta clase social; no solo negros, sino también blancos, *red necks*, por ejemplo, o personajes negros de extracción social baja. Aunque se notaba que había un gran trabajo detrás de esa traducción, el resultado final, como lector, da la impresión de que están hablando en andaluz. En resumen, es muy difícil encontrar una buena estrategia para reproducir la variedad dialectal en diálogo. De hecho, a día de hoy no conozco ninguna solución perfecta. El español, a diferencia del catalán o del inglés, por ejemplo, tiene muy pocos recursos para reflejar la variación oral por escrito. Se puede marcar el ceceo, el seseo, alguna letra que cae y poca cosa más. En cambio, en inglés hay mucha tradición de reproducción de acentos e incluso dialectos como parte de la representación de la oralidad fingida; en español esto es muy difícil de hacer.

Por otro lado, algo que me parece básico en este punto y que considero que es la clave del asunto es la necesidad de tener en cuenta que el autor original ha hecho un trabajo encomiable de investigación y de reproducción fiel de una forma de hablar—por ejemplo, de los agricultores del algodón del Mississippi—. Por lo tanto, soluciones como que los personajes hablen con la “u” o no pronuncien la “s” final o cualquier otro rasgo propio del idioma de destino que se refleje en la traducción estará traicionando el espíritu con el que el autor ha desempeñado su tarea de reproducción fiel del habla. Es decir, utilizar recursos propios del español, en este caso, implicará inventarse una forma de hablar que en ningún caso refleja de manera equivalente la realidad de origen. Por supuesto, esta reflexión no soluciona el problema, pero opino que es una consideración clave y, de hecho, es lo que me hace pensar que no existe una solución clara y evidente.

Mi preferencia personal consiste en utilizar otros recursos, o incluso explicitar información que está implícita en el texto original, sobre todo cuando se trata de una intervención anecdótica. Por ejemplo, cuando un personaje secundario de una novela es escocés y tiene una intervención breve en la que, no obstante, se refleja su acento escocés en el texto de origen, el narrador de la traducción tiene la opción de añadir una puntualización del tipo “contestó con su marcado acento escocés”, aunque esto no esté explicitado originalmente. Este solo es un pequeño recurso del que dispone el traductor para reflejar la diferencia. Por el contrario, si se traduce una frase que representa el acento escocés como “voy a la ciudadá”, por ejemplo, el texto meta no refleja ni se refiere de ningún modo la procedencia escocesa, irlandesa, o a cualquier otra variante del habla

inglesa. De igual modo, si el registro o la extracción social son rasgos relevantes que se ven representados mediante el habla, el traductor deberá hacer un esfuerzo por incorporar esta información al texto meta, aunque esto no implique utilizar los mismos recursos que el autor original.

Sea como sea, la representación de la variedad dialectal es un problema de traducción que no tiene una solución clara. Se ha escrito bastante sobre el tema y hoy en día disponemos de un amplio abanico de posibilidades que se han puesto en práctica, aunque personalmente considero que hay muchas propuestas que no funcionan.

**S.L.:** Uno de los temas recurrentes en mi tesis es el de la dificultad de trasladar una literatura propia de un contexto tan particular a un marco receptor en el cual esta experiencia no tiene equivalente directo. ¿De qué recursos crees que dispone el traductor para solventar o lidiar con esta problemática?

**C.M.:** Es otro de los grandes problemas de la traducción de esta literatura. Actualmente, tenemos la ventaja que nos otorga la globalización y la difusión internacional de la cultura y el cine anglosajón. En este sentido, aunque en el contexto local la experiencia afroamericana mayoritariamente sea ajena, ya es una realidad bastante conocida. Todo esto ayuda al traductor a dar por sentadas una serie de nociones que puede sobreentender que el lector conoce, como la guerra de secesión, el funcionamiento básico de las plantaciones, la existencia de la esclavitud, el abuso al que estaban sometidas las esclavas que muchas veces daba lugar a hijos mulatos, etc. Por otro lado, hay cuestiones muy concretas como, por ejemplo, la variedad de tonos de piel—un tema fundamental en novelas como *La noche de los niños*, *Jazz* o *La isla de los caballeros*—, con las que el lector medio español no está familiarizado. De hecho, durante mi estancia en Canadá, hacíamos una serie de talleres en los que los traductores exponíamos nuestro trabajo y yo contaba que mi principal preocupación era poder reflejar realidades como la cuestión del tono de piel como marca de extracción social que no existían en el contexto de llegada. En el grupo había un traductor neoyorquino de familia dominicana, completamente bilingüe, que me desglosó algunos términos que sí existían en la cultura dominicana. No obstante, estos equivalentes—que resultaban mucho más precisos que cualquier término del español peninsular—no funcionan en nuestro contexto local por no existir aquí la realidad que describen. En el caso de mi traducción, opté por utilizar una terminología menos marcada a la que llegaba a través de una descripción de la

situación y sus implicaciones. Este es un recurso bastante frecuente para lidiar con pasajes en los que es preciso acercar al lector a una realidad tan distinta.

**S.L.:** ¿Crees que es necesario o recomendable acompañar este tipo de obras de paratextos como prólogos, glosarios o notas aclaratorias que puedan favorecer su lectura?

**C.M.:** En el caso de las novelas, como la mayoría de traductores literarios, no soy partidario de las notas. En el caso de los ensayos es distinto. Por ejemplo, en *La fuente de la autoestima* Morrison hace una reflexión metalingüística sobre el uso del término *nigger* en varios textos de épocas distintas. Al consultar las traducciones, observé que las soluciones para trasladar el mismo término al español eran muy diversas, por lo que me vi en la necesidad de unificarlas para poder trasladar el planteamiento de la autora respecto al uso de ese término (que en inglés siempre era recurrente mientras que en español se traducía de formas variadas). En ese caso, sí que utilicé una nota, que reutilicé en *El origen de los otros*, para aclarar la problemática de este término concreto y mi solución. Más adelante vi que en su traducción de *Playing in the Dark* (2019), Pilar Vázquez citaba mi nota y argumentaba que había solucionado el problema de forma análoga en su texto. No obstante, no me gusta concebir las notas como un “comodín” al que recurrir siempre que nos enfrentamos a un problema de traducción, aunque en este caso concreto sí que funcionó.

**S.L.:** ¿De las tres obras de Morrison que has traducido, hay alguna que te haya resultado particularmente complicada o interesante?

**C.M.:** Todas son muy interesantes, especialmente en mi caso dado que, gracias a varios factores, he podido sumergirme en el universo de la autora. *La fuente de la autoestima* es uno de los textos más difíciles que he traducido en mi vida: por la complejidad del texto, porque es muy largo y también porque lo tuve que trabajar con relativa prisa ya que su fallecimiento el verano pasado hizo que la editorial quisiera adelantar la salida del libro.

**S.L.:** Antes del fallecimiento de la autora, ¿ya estaba prevista la publicación de su último volumen de ensayos?

**C.M.:** A mí no me lo habían encargado. De hecho, el libro se publicó en inglés en invierno de 2019 y la editorial española me indicó que, en principio, no estaba previsto sacarlo. No obstante, después de verano me llamaron para proponerme el encargo.

El hecho de que la traducción se publicara justo antes del confinamiento también fue un poco decepcionante, porque no tuvo una acogida tan grande como de la que hubiese podido gozar en circunstancias normales. Es una pena que después de todo el trabajo y el esfuerzo que había detrás de este volumen haya quedado olvidado, pero, personalmente, valió la pena. Como comentaba, ha sido uno de los libros más difíciles que he traducido, necesité documentarme mucho más de lo habitual y trabajé a un ritmo bastante lento por la dificultad del texto. Para mí es un libro importantísimo entre los que he traducido, estoy muy orgulloso y no puedo quejarme de nada. He sido muy afortunado de haber dado con esta autora a nivel profesional, ojalá hubiese podido traducir más textos suyos.

**S.L.:** Para acabar, ¿hasta qué punto crees que el éxito internacional de Morrison puede incitar al lector español a interesarse por la literatura de mujeres negras?

**C.M.:** Sin duda, el éxito internacional de Morrison puede tener una gran repercusión en el interés general por la literatura afroamericana. De hecho, tras obtener el Pulitzer y, sobre todo, el Nobel, la autora adquirió una categoría de “escritora entrañable” que gustaba a todo tipo de lectores en Estados Unidos; se convirtió en una persona venerable con una gran autoridad moral, tanto para la población general como para la población culta y lo novedoso fue que fuera una mujer y que fuera afroamericana. Hoy en día su obra y su pensamiento son muy influyentes a nivel internacional. De hecho, editoriales independientes como Capitán Swing están publicando a bastantes autoras afroamericanas, como Angela Davis, por ejemplo. Falta conocer el alcance y la repercusión real de los libros, pero es cierto que cada vez se está dando más difusión a esta literatura.

**S.L.:** Muchísimas gracias, Carlos.

Barcelona, October 31, 2020

Transcribed and edited by Sandra Llopart

