

Rewriting Leda and the Swan: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), and Lorna Crozier's "Forms of Innocence" (1985) and "The Swan Girl" (1995)

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Abstract

Angela Carter (1940-1992) and Lorna Crozier (1948) are two examples of contemporary writers who dedicate part of their work to problematizing historically established constructs that undermine the agency of both nature and women. Carter's and Crozier's agenda is, thus, in line with ecofeminist tenets, which are based on the interconnectedness of all living things on a non-hierarchical level. The intention of this article is to conduct a contrastive analysis of Crozier's and Carter's retelling of the account of Leda and the swan originally described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) and later in W.B. Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan" (1928). We contend that both Carter's and Crozier's versions of the myth challenge patriarchal domination by giving voice to and empowering Leda, the young female character in the myth. This empowerment is closely associated to Leda's harmonization with the natural world, since, by going back to nature, the young Ledas in Carter's and Crozier's works come to terms with their adolescent bodies in order to become women stripped of restrictive cultural and social beliefs. Accordingly, the original meaning of the figure of the swan is also subverted to adopt connotations more in tune with the creation of a sense of community that challenge the powerful enclosed violence that Ovid and Yeats attributed to this animal by presenting it as Zeus in disguise.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, domination, patriarchy, myth, demythologize.

Resumen

Angela Carter (1940-1992) y Lorna Crozier (1948) son dos autoras contemporáneas cuyas obras se dedican, en parte, a problematizar constructos históricamente muy arraigados que infravaloran tanto la agencia de la mujer como de la naturaleza. La agenda de Carter y Crozier está estrechamente relacionada con los principios ecofeministas, que se basan en la interconexión de todos los seres vivos al mismo nivel, sin jerarquías. Este artículo pretende realizar un análisis comparativo de la reescritura por parte de Carter y Crozier del mito de Leda y el cisne en relación al mito original descrito por Ovidio en *Las Metamorfosis* (8 dC) así como el poema de W.B. Yeats "Leda and the Swan" (1928). En nuestro artículo, sostenemos que tanto las versiones del mito de Carter como las de Crozier no solo desafían la dominación patriarcal dando voz y empoderando a Leda, la joven protagonista en el mito. A su vez, este empoderamiento está estrechamente relacionado con la armonización de Leda con la naturaleza, puesto que, volviendo al mundo natural, las jóvenes Ledas en las obras de Carter y de Crozier aprenden a aceptar sus cuerpos adolescentes con el fin de llegar a ser mujeres liberadas de creencias socioculturales restrictivas. En ese

sentido, los textos de Carter y Crozier subvierten el significado original de la figura del cisne, que adopta nuevas connotaciones, relacionadas con un sentido de comunidad con el mundo más que humano. Estas nuevas connotaciones cuestionan además la violencia extrema que Ovidio e Yeats atribuyen al cisne al presentarlo como Zeus disfrazado.

Palabras clave: Ecofeminismo, dominación, patriarcado, mito, desmitificar.

Introduction

Angela Carter (1940) and Lorna Crozier (1948) are two examples of contemporary women writers, the former British and the latter Canadian, well-known for their focus on rewriting those myths that have classified (very often randomly and unjustly) groups of people according to specific cultural views. By rewriting these myths, Carter and Crozier endeavour to question patriarchal and anthropocentric approaches to the portrayal of women and family structures and also of nature. At the same time, they also aim to re-inscribe such myths by imagining new options for man/woman and human-being/natural-world relationships. The rewriting of the myth of Leda and the swan within the particular genres in which the authors usually express themselves—narrative, mainly, in the case of Carter; and poetry in the case of Crozier—will prove to be informative of the cultural constructions that Ovid's myth encloses.

Leda and the swan is a myth that has been revisited and retold by a number of authors; the best known of these is W.B. Yeats's "Leda and the Swan." In her analysis of the rewriting of Ovid's myth by a number of Modernist writers, Helen Sword argues that the Modernist fascination with the myth of Leda and the swan can be attributed to two main factors: firstly, its connection with a re-reading of the myth as creative power, since, as Sword argues, "read as a fable of divine inspiration, the Leda myth offers a model of poetic creativity" (305). The second factor Sword identifies is the need to control what was perceived as "dangerous femininity" by either expressing "a male anxiety toward a femme fatale who, so long as her bestial desires remain unfulfilled, can be neither fathomed nor possessed by mortal man" or to "stage a fantasy of sexual abandon" (307). For Sword, Aldous Huxley's and Robert Graves's rewriting of Leda's story enacts a "peaceful idyll" (306) of romantic and sexual ardour devoid of violence and violation. Some critics, on the other hand, agree on interpreting Yeats's poem as "the divine imposition of a mythic design on human existence" (308) translated into the feminine side of creativity represented by divine inspiration enacted upon Zeus through Leda's influence and Leda's power to give life.

As contemporary writers very aware of the need to redefine a patriarchal and anthropocentric vision of the world which clearly affects its organization, Carter and Crozier position Leda center-stage in their rewriting of the myth, while at the same time emphasizing their search for a redefined identity by revising their connections to family and nature. In Carter's and Crozier's rewriting, violence is clearly a means of domination

and subjugation of the young Leda who is expected to enact specific roles within a patriarchal-based organization. The swan's (or Zeus's) attack upon Leda is far removed from romantic and sexual ardour or from creation and creativity. In many interviews, Angela Carter has explained that one of her main aims when writing is to question those "truths" that supposedly form the basis of our world. As she herself stated, "Because I believe that myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I'm in the demythologising business" (Carter, *Expletives* 38). As many critics have argued (Easton; Gamble; Lee; Peach), Carter's works are riddled with literary, cultural and political referents that have shaped our contemporary Western world; as Alison Lee claims: "[h]istorical and literary contexts are important to Carter because her aim is to draw the reader's attention to the way in which those contexts have determined the way we think" (Lee 14). She defines herself primarily as a feminist; thus, she focuses on rewriting those myths, and also those multiple literary and cultural references, that set women within the narrow confines of specific roles.

Likewise, Crozier also follows a demythologizing agenda. In fact, Crozier has rewritten a number of myths, both from the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions. Specifically, seven out of the seventeen poetry collections Crozier has authored so far contain poems devoted to the rewriting of classical stories. In her rewriting of myths, Crozier focuses on giving agency to female characters whose voices, feelings, concerns and opinions were silenced in the original stories. As Crozier asserts in an interview with Elizabeth Philips, "part of my revisioning comes from a feminist stance. In most of the old stories, there's no room for women... The desire to resist erasure is part of the desire to retell" (143-144). By providing different perspectives of the same myth, Crozier's intention is to convey a more thorough understanding of the story, one that breaks with the great master narratives of Western society, as Crozier herself states: "No matter who is telling it, we know there's another narrative that deserves to be heard. And then another. ... They challenge our thinking and understanding of what we thought was the 'truth'" (144). Crozier's revisionist mythologizing offers "not a single sacred feminized vision, but rather a plurality of possible ways of understanding human beginnings" (Gingell 67). In this sense, her poems enclose a celebration of life and diversity.

Crozier's and Carter's retellings of patriarchal domination in Leda's myth focus on the figure of Leda and the relationship she establishes with nature and with her social background in order to build her identity, questioning anthropocentric tenets and putting forward ecofeminist ones. As a young girl who is growing towards womanhood, the Leda of Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* and Crozier's "Forms of Innocence" and "The Swan Girl" will have to evaluate those cultural symbols that define her identity according to male authority, as represented by the original myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as well as in Modernist rewritings of it. Leda's creativity in constructing her own identity as she transitions from a young girl to a woman, as well as in imbuing new meanings to the swan and to her natural and social environment, will prove to provide conscious agency to the female character.

The Myth of Leda and the Swan through Ecofeminism

Whereas the term “myth” may be difficult to define due to its complex connections to the cultural and social background of one community extending back over time, many authors have agreed on defining myths as stories that account for the origin, survival and development of a specific society. Gert Malan refers to Aristotle’s definition of myth in his *Poetica* as “plot, narrative, structure and fable, with logos as its counterpoint” (3). As opposed to discourse or exposition, Malan considers myth to be “any anonymously composed storytelling of origins and destinies, as explanations for reality and behaviour offered by societies to their young” (3). Similarly, in the introduction to *Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel*, José Manuel Losada defines myth as “a relatively simple oral narrative of an extraordinary event with a transcendent and personal referent, theoretically lacking historical evidence and comprising a ritual, a series of constant components, and a conflictive, functional, and etiological nature” (4). In other words, myths are narratives that are transmitted from generation to generation with the aim of creating a sense of community within a specific society. Those narratives not only account for a common origin, but by referring to specific patterns of behaviour that favour a suitable way of organizing themselves, they also enclose values and beliefs that are interpreted as the appropriate ones for that community to follow in order to survive and progress. In this sense, and referring to Paul Ricoeur’s work on the meaning and function of myths, Malan states that myths function as “narratives forming a symbolic universe which legitimised actions on the social plane” (1).

As Scott Clive and Robert Dunne, among others, have demonstrated, as fictional stories, myths have also contributed to create canon. Within the Greek tradition, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is clearly one of the most influential works in the communication and dissemination of myths cradled in the Western world. But, of course, as myths have been and are rewritten, they are also imbued with new meanings that, up to contemporary times, seem to have mainly reinforced the values and beliefs as well as the social roles and cultural messages inscribed in those myths. However, following Dunne’s arguments, using myths in contemporary works and partially rewriting them allows not only the aesthetic development of the myth—which Dunne considers to also contribute to the creation of canon—but, more importantly, it allows a re-evaluation of those “truths” that underlie contemporary society. As Dunne states, “when authors recognize that there is a conflict between the static prescriptions of the conservative telling of a myth and the present-day social realities, they will try to re-evaluate the conservative versions in order to come up with an updated or new telling” (138). Dunne concludes that proposed “updates” or “radical alternatives” (139) that authors create are usually motivated “by the need to challenge the status quo” (139). This is precisely what Angela Carter and Lorna Crozier endeavour to do with their rewriting of Leda and the swan. In both Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and W.B. Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan,” Leda is portrayed as Zeus’s conquest through a violent sexual act. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Leda appears briefly as

part of the Arachne's tapestry which represents the sexual conquests of Zeus, where Leda is "lying under a swan's wing" (lines 145, 153). Meanwhile, in Yeats's poem, Leda is attacked by the swan, which takes her by surprise ("A sudden blow" l. 1), and sexually abused by him without her being able to resist his power. In both sources, Leda accepts her fate within the context of her position as a mortal being and also as a young inexperienced woman. The rewriting and fictionalizing of the myth by Carter and Crozier not only offers a new meaning to the character of Leda, but also leaves Leda's future options open. This would respond to Carter's objectives when writing fiction, since, according to Gamble, for Carter "[o]ne of the functions of fiction is to try to present a set of ideas in fictional prose, but at the same time, fiction should be open-ended; you bring your own history to it and read it on your own terms" (Gamble 11). In this sense, both Carter's and Crozier's rewriting of the myth focalized around the character of Leda provide open-ended possibilities for young women growing into adulthood.

Given the centrality of challenging a traditional male-centred view in relation to women and nature, ecofeminism will provide a solid theoretical framework to analyse Carter's and Crozier's rewriting of Leda and the swan. Ecofeminism was introduced in the late 1970s and gained momentum in the 1980s with the work of prominent critics such as Susan Griffin and Ynestra King, who claimed that gender oppression is closely connected to the domination of non-human nature. As Carolyn Merchant argued in her pioneering work in this field, ecofeminism intended to question the belief that "like wild chaotic nature, women needed to be subdued and kept in their place" (132). Despite the different standpoints that have been developed within the field in recent decades, ecofeminism could be defined, in Erika Cudworth's words, as "a range of perspectives that consider the links between the social organisation of gender and the ways in which societies are organised with respect to 'nature'" in order to "confront a range of social inequalities and to theorize shifting formation of power" (1).

Ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard, Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen argue that women are not biologically closer to nature—thus, questioning a more essentially-based understanding of ecofeminism as championed by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva—but that the traditional oppression of both woman and nature by man is one dependent on the social roles and status that women have historically been assigned. According to Plumwood, dichotomies such as man/woman, nature/culture and rational/emotional must be challenged (*Feminism* 46), and in their stead we should "[develop] an environmental culture that values and fully acknowledges the non-human sphere and our dependency on it" (*Environmental Culture* 3). In fact, King, as one of the founders of US ecofeminism, had already established the need to move beyond dualisms as one of the main aims of ecofeminist thought (124). Such a goal goes hand in hand with the core belief of both ecocriticism and ecofeminism that all living and non-living things in the world are interconnected and interdependent, and, therefore, there is no need for hierarchies.

For Cudworth, ecofeminism's *raison d'être* is precisely "to map the connections, the means by which formations and practices of difference and domination interlock"

(1). Such concepts of the domination of both women and nature by patriarchy that Cudworth develops were originally posited by French feminist philosopher Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la mort*, in which she coined the term eco-feminism. Cudworth identifies three types or degrees of domination, namely: oppression, exploitation and marginalization. Oppression is seen as the toughest level of domination, while marginalization is seen as the least harsh. Cudworth explains that patriarchy can be considered "a system of social relations based on gender oppression in which women are dominated and oppressed by men" (9) in a similar way that natural resources are used for the sole benefit and economic empowerment of men/human beings. Currently, oppression may not only be linked to patriarchy but also to capitalism; since, as Cudworth states, "men are associated with commercial production and women with unpaid labour and reproduction" (115); a socially and culturally-based connection that is depicted in Carter's story. Therefore, socialist feminists argue that capitalism benefits from "women's socioeconomic roles," and, as such, capitalism is partly responsible for gender oppression. Similarly, exploitation "refers to the use of something [or someone] as a resource for the ends of the user" (Cudworth 7), whereas marginalization implies deeming something or someone unimportant, which often leads to its invisibility. In feminist and ecofeminist thought, heterosexual marriage and family have been pinpointed as one of the main sources of gender oppression, in any of its degrees of domination (Mulder 37), as the analysis of the texts will exemplify. This (ill) treatment originates in human-created hierarchies "used to justify oppression" (Bianchi 7). When marriage is based on patriarchal tenets, it promotes the subjugation of the wife and children to the husband/father and the devaluation of the tasks they carry out (Griffin, "Ecofeminism" 221).

The social and family oppression to which women have been and are subjugated takes an even more violent turn when sexual abuse is not only present, but normalized, with the myth of Leda as a clear example. Actually, Griffin argues that society considers women as "targets of rape" (224) because of the social construction of gender. The reasoning that lies behind the subordination of women, which justifies men's abuse, is closely connected to nature, as Karen J. Warren explains: "Animalizing or naturalizing women in a (patriarchal) culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans (men) thereby reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status" (12). In line with Warren, Griffin draws a parallel between men's desire to gain control over women through sexual abuse and ecological destruction, with the metaphorical raping of forests as a clear example. Griffin goes on to explain that the yearning to colonize and rape originates in the fear men have of both nature and women, who are regarded as wild entities. In this sense, sexual abuse is understood "more as an act of domination and aggression than as an expression of an irrepressible, uncensored sexuality" (224). Accordingly, sexual abuse has to do with the male's sense of possession of his own women, and, in turn, the dispossession of pride of other men. This is the case of Leda in the original myth, in which Zeus destroys the pride of King Tyndareus (Leda's husband) by possessing his wife. In Carter's novel and Crozier's poems, the position of domination

and oppression in the grand narratives as something explained only by men is called into question.

Leda and the Swan in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*

The Magic Toyshop, Carter's second novel, was published in 1967. The novel is narrated by a third person narrator focalized through the main character, a fifteen-year-old girl named Melanie. The novel starts with Melanie scrutinizing her body and "discovering" her adolescent sexuality in front of the mirror, with a number of cultural references in her mind. Melanie's situation changes completely when her parents die in a plane accident and she, together with her younger brother and sister, have to leave their comfortable upper-middle-class life and beautiful possessions to move in with Uncle Philip and his family. In Uncle Philip's house, Melanie discovers a patriarchal-based household in which Philip's puppets receive better treatment than Philip's own family, composed of his wife Margaret, her two brothers Finn and Francie, and Melanie with her brother Jonathon and sister Victoria. Although the novel includes references to a number of literary texts such as the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman*, the myth of Leda and the swan is placed centre-stage within the story in order to highlight the violence and senselessness of the predominant patriarchal organization of a household and, by extension, of society. As Gamble points out, the main themes in Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* are "a problematic interest in female victimisation—Melanie, the heroine, is 'a good screamer'—and intertextuality, which is the process whereby new texts are created through the reworking of older ones" (33). The changes that Melanie experiences in her body as well as in relation to her role as a young woman against two contrasting social backgrounds—that is, her comfortable position when living with her parents, and her role as practically that of a servant when living with her uncle—are constantly compared with the natural world. Thus, the significance of ecofeminism in analysing Melanie's construction of femininity in the novel. Ultimately, Melanie's main role in Philip's household is that of performing the Leda that will be sexually abused by the swan, which, at the end of the day, represents the powerful Zeus, that is, the patriarchal figure.

The reference to the natural world in relation to Melanie's growth towards womanhood seems to be permanently enacted by the nature/culture dichotomy. The novel starts with Melanie inspecting her changing body at fifteen: "Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood. O, my America, my new-found land. She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her own mountain ranges, penetrating the moist richness of her secret valleys" (1). Whereas her changing body portrays the simplicity and, at the same time, awe-inspiring beauty of the natural world, the references by which she constructs her femininity are clearly cultural and, as such, based on the male perception of female beauty and sexuality: "She also posed in attitudes, holding things. Pre-Raphaelite, she combed out her long, black hair to stream straight down from a centre [...]. A la Toulouse Lautrec, she dragged her hair sluttishly across her face and sat down in a chair with her legs apart and a bowl of water and a

towel at her feet" (1). Thus, Melanie disguises her adolescent natural beauty by transforming it to iconic models of accepted femininity. Through this process of investigation of her own identity as a woman, Melanie tries on her mother's wedding dress, as symbolizing one of the roles within accepted femininity, that of the wife and future mother. However, not only is the dress uncomfortable and limiting in movement, Melanie also hurts herself wearing it: "The dress was very heavy. The sliding satin had a sheen on it like that on the silver teapot which never went out of the drawing-room cabinet except to be polished. All the moonlight in the room focused on its richness and mysterious folds" (15). It is through contact with nature—by going into the garden—that she loses the dress by trying to get back into her room by climbing a tree and, once in her room, she is naked again in front of the mirror; thus, it is natural elements that shred the dress to pieces and symbolically free Melanie from having to fulfil the role of the virginal wife: "The tree had completed the work the cat started. The skirt hung in three detached panels and the scored and tattered sleeves hung to the bodice by a few threads only. Besides, the dress was filthy, streaked with green from the tree and her own red blood" (22). In the *Magic Toyshop*, as in many of her writings, both her essayistic and fictional ones, Carter aims to protest against the "naturalisation" of sexual inequalities, since, for Carter, "[i]f women can achieve autonomy with their sexuality and their sexual relations, then equality [...] can be achieved in economic and other spheres of society" (Rubinson 320). In this sense, Melanie's journey from her parents' home to Uncle Philip's toyshop to her freedom, symbolized by the burning of Philip's house at the end of the novel, is one in which the exploration of her sexuality and feminine roles goes side by side with her identity being deposed of social and cultural undertones through direct contact with the natural world represented by gardens in the novel.

The identity that Melanie barely envisages when naked in front of the mirror in her parents' home is one she will have to recover and stick to when she moves to her Uncle Philip's house. Once there, Melanie is not only not allowed to have luxuries, such as perfumed soap, but she actually becomes one of Philip's servants not permitted to go to school and, instead, having to work hard, both in the house and in the shop, side by side with her Aunt Margaret. In Philip's house, Melanie feels as if she would be "in limbo" "for the rest of her life, if you could call it a life, dragging out its weary length with no more great joys or fearful griefs for her" (76). Following Cudworth's concept of domination, oppression and marginalization, Melanie feels that she is turning into the ghost-like presence that her Aunt Margaret already represents in the house, since her life revolves around working hard to avoid Philip's bouts of rage when things are not accomplished the way he instructs. Thus, the house, representing Philip's domination, is described as a dark place abounding with old-fashioned and decrepit objects, grotesque toys and puppets. However, when Uncle Philip is not there, the three siblings, Margaret, Finn and Francie seem to flourish under their red-haired Irish spell. For Melanie, "[t]hey were an entity, the Jowles, warm as wool. She envied them bitterly" (76). The happy spells of music and dancing that Melanie experiences with the Jowles when Philip is

away allow her—and also the readers—to envisage a different family structure based on mutual love and respect, rather than constant tyranny.

The episode in which Melanie becomes Leda with a puppet swan constitutes the climax of the novel. The swan is presented as a “grotesque parody of a swan” made of “plywood painted white and coated with glued-on feathers” (165) and with strings pulled by Uncle Philip. Although Melanie initially feels the need to laugh at the absurdity of the situation, she soon realizes that she is actually being “raped” by the puppet. As Morrison argues, “[a]t first she is dismissive of Philip’s home-made model of wood, rubber and feathers, a pathetic parody of the ‘wild, phallic bird of her imaginings’. But as she rapidly discovers, power and violence still remain in the ancient narrative it represents” (165). Similarly, Gamble and John Sears agree on interpreting the scene as containing violence when defining the feminine and sexual pleasure from a male perspective. Uncle Philip, himself a grotesque version of the patriarchal figure, aimed to subvert Melanie’s natural maturation into womanhood not only by being symbolically raped, but by trying to enforce a sexual encounter between Melanie and Finn, Margaret’s brother. As Finn explains to Melanie: “He wanted me to do you and he set the scene” (152). Philip pulls the strings of all the characters in the novel in the same way as he does with his puppets. Gamble has actually interpreted Carter’s swan as “a joke on patriarchal mythmakers who dress up the principle of male domination in grandiose poetry” and adds that whereas “Yeats mystifies rape as a moment of divine transcendence [...] Carter shows it to be an act of brute force” (40). In this respect, Philip not only subverts women but also the natural world to his own purposes, as other men have done before him. The swan, an animal that has been associated with purity and beauty due to the svelteness of its shape and its white colour, becomes a perpetuator of rape in Greek mythology, a characteristic which is repeated and enhanced in Yeats’s poem, and which Uncle Philip represents in his grotesque puppet show in front of his family.

After the performance, which results in Melanie half-naked on the floor and very upset because of the violence with which the puppet swan attacks her, Finn destroys the swan; thus, defying Philip’s authority. As at the beginning of the novel, when Melanie is deposed of the roles she is supposed to adopt to become a grown-up woman, the scene takes place in the garden. Finn takes the swan to “the pleasure garden,” as he explains it to Melanie: “somehow it seemed best of all to bury it in the pleasure garden. Do you know, though, I was almost delirious in the pleasure garden? I was that bad, Melanie... the stone lioness was tracking me. I was sure of it. I heard her growl. And the queen was upright on her pedestal” (173). Finn cuts the big puppet swan into many pieces and buries it just below the statue of the queen, an action that Gamble has interpreted as Finn’s “own castration” (41) in order to escape the negative model that Philip represents, not only in his relation to women and the family, but also in his neglect of the natural world. In the same way as Melanie is deposed of her culturally informed femininity, Finn is stripped of his narrowing patriarchal inheritance. Whereas, at the beginning of the novel, Melanie is naked and bleeds while trying to climb the tree, at the

end of the novel, Finn feels strongly grounded on the earth after symbolically killing the swan as representative of male domination: "The grass was wet and got over the top of my shoes and wet my socks. It was very long, the grass" (174).

Melanie's and Finn's connection to mother earth—in the form of a garden within a big urban space such as London—metaphorically frees them from the cultural inheritance and gender roles they are supposed to fulfil as a young woman and a young man as mirrored in the characters of Uncle Philip and Margaret. The novel finishes when the house is finally burnt down together with all the grotesque toys and puppets that perpetuated the patriarchal interpretation of stories in the performances directed by Philip. Although it is Philip himself who burns the house after finding his wife Margaret in the arms of her brother, the destruction of the house clearly represents the destruction of the "old order," as Morrison refers to it, with the future "left as an undefined space of newness and possibility" (166). Melanie and Finn have the possibility of establishing a different kind of relationship and of creating their own version of stories and myths. The very last sentence of the novel points to the "garden" as a natural space where the young protagonists "faced each other in a wild surmise" (200). Once again, nature, in the form of a garden, represents the place where the two protagonists can start anew after having rejected the interpretations of those narratives that steered them towards the fulfilment of specific roles as a young man and a young woman.

Leda and the Swan in Crozier's poems

The myth of Leda and the swan has been retold by Lorna Crozier in two poems, namely "Forms of Innocence" and "The Swan Girl," included in *The Garden Going On Without Us* (1985)—Crozier's sixth poetry collection—and *Everything Arrives at the Light* (1995)—Crozier's ninth collection—respectively. Both "Forms of Innocence" and "The Swan Girl" are written from Leda's perspective although the speaker is not Leda herself in either of the two poems, but an omniscient narrator focalized through the Ledas, similar to the narrative voice in Carter's novel. With this narrative technique, Crozier attains some poetic distance, which enables her to discuss all the contextual elements that affect Leda's sexuality and subsequent changes in her sense of identity, without falling into the trap of sentimentality. "Forms of Innocence" revolves around an unnamed teenage girl's decision to lose her virginity by practising sex with an unnamed teenage boy. The Leda of this story chooses a black swan she sees flying away through the window of the car where she is having sexual intercourse as the symbol of her "innocence t[aking] flight" (ll. 2–3). The story is also contextualized by the static image of her house, in which her mother keeps a book always open on the coffee table; in it, there is a photograph of a black swan swimming among white swans, symbolizing the fact that the "norm" is not always the fairest choice for a woman, in this case, a young girl. "The Swan Girl," by contrast, deals with sexual abuse and the feelings of confusion and social alienation that Leda experiences as a result of the attack she suffers from the white swan, and the impossibility of being understood by her community. Such a feeling

of misunderstanding is mostly due to her mother's and brothers' regular hunting of swans in the lake for food. This perception of swans as their prey makes it very difficult for this family to associate a swan with a sexual attacker. On the other hand, the fact that her mother keeps the dead swans hanging in their house in readiness for being eaten, may also represent a double symbology of the swan in relation to the young woman's sexuality: while she is attacked by the swan when trying to protect it from her family, in a similar manner to the original Leda in Ovid, the mother in Crozier's poem divests the swans of the meaning of subjugation attributed by previous male poets who revisited Ovid's myth, such as W.B. Yeats.

In "The Swan Girl," Leda is faced first with her own coming to terms and psychological healing process following her traumatic experience. Leda is described as being "changed by something / more than [the wild swans floating on the lake] and less" (ll. 21-22), and "the wounded one" (l. 41). As a teenager and village girl, with innocence as a defining trait of her character, Leda's experience with Zeus undoubtedly changed her because she was suddenly and violently forced into an adulthood defined by domination and submission. Despite the fact that the Leda in Ovid's poem is married and part of the Spartan aristocracy as king Tyndareus's wife and a princess by birth, both Ledas—the village girl and the princess—suffer the same fate. Thus, Crozier's poem puts forward the assertion that irrespective of a woman's social status, according to our mythological Western tradition, she will be treated in accordance with Cudworth's description of patriarchal societies based on oppression, domination and marginalization.

Leda is also changed because the hideous crime was committed by the king of the Greek gods, Zeus, and, therefore, her experience is even more confusing for her, as "she felt the heavens in her womb / but had no word for it / and wondered what to say" (ll. 12-14). As in the original myth, her attacker takes the shape of a swan, an animal which Leda's family killed for its meat. Therefore, regarding the second issue Leda has to face, Leda is made a victim by another victim, or rather by a god disguised as a victim, in the form of a swan. Hence, socially speaking, Leda has descended to the bottom of the social ladder, as she is oppressed by a creature which is also the subject of human oppression. Leda also experiences social alienation arising from her far-fetched account of the rapist swan: "Now she was ... / the village crazy girl / with the story of the swan" (ll. 40-43). This social attitude stems from the ambiguous perception of rape, as Norfolk has evidenced in his research, according to which the woman who has been raped is held partially responsible for the crime by certain parts of the population. In fact, in the poem, Leda's name is not mentioned; on the contrary, Leda's identity is defined by the figure of the swan, as the title of the poem makes evident, "The Swan Girl." In line with post-colonialism, the theories of which ecofeminism has in part adopted and adapted, the other—the one who has been colonized, as Leda's body is metaphorically colonized by brute force—is seldom given a name that grants them a personal and genuine identity, but is rather presented as an abstract, a mysterious and different being. Similar to the Leda in Carter's story, the Leda in Crozier's "The Swan Girl" will have to fight to

keep her identity in the face of the patriarchal supremacy represented by the power of the myths into which the character of Leda is drawn.

Whereas "The Swan Girl" voices the female experience regarding the unspoken and taboo subject of sexual abuse, the poem "Forms of Innocence" both subverts and transcends the original myth. What specifically subverts the original myth is the fact that the female persona links her own innocence to a swan, thus, subverting the meaning that Ovid and Yeats give to the swan as a perpetrator of sexual abuse: "A strange shape for innocence / when you think of Leda" (ll. 7–8). The persona wishes to transcend this ancient myth by describing a black swan, not a white one, breaking with "whiteness," the colour associated with purity and virginity in Western societies: "but the girl insists / it was a swan, black / not white as you might expect" (ll. 9–11). The use of the swan as a metaphor liberates the swan in the mythology of all its negative connotations, and, in turn, the female persona is also liberated of her submissive and passive role. In the poem, the female persona is presented as a young woman, freed from social constraints regarding sexuality, and from the social expectations of women in traditional societies, as shown in the analogy between the black swan's free flight and Leda's orgasm: "...the swan's / dark flight across the snow so beautiful / she groaned and the boy groaned with her, / not understanding the sound she made" (ll. 18–21). A second layer of meaning is found in the unexpectedness of the colour of the swan's plumage in the geographical context of the poem, namely Canada, where black swans are rare. Although black swans are an Australian species, some black swans can be spotted in the province of Ottawa, where the descendants of a pair of black Australian swans donated by the Montreal zoo in 1974 live. In this sense, Crozier also directs the attention of the reader to the real swans in Canada, the animals themselves, which the female persona in the poem could never have either sexual intercourse with or be sexually abused by. This is the reason why Leda only sees the swan from a distance, through the car's windshield, thus establishing a clear separation between the myth of Leda—together with its associated patriarchal attitudes towards women—and the contemporary Leda, whose identity only she defines. Such a separation between myth and reality also allows for the swans to be acknowledged in all their animality, thus lifting the burden of anthropomorphism that the Leda and the swan myth had imposed on them. Hence, Crozier is, throughout the poem, playing with the swan on three different imaginary levels, namely the mythological swan, the swan as a metaphor, and the swan as an actual animal.

The liberation of the swan from its mythological negative connotations as abuser enables Crozier to focus on the swan as the animal per se. Each poem presents swans in two different situations, which run parallel to Leda's experiences. The poem "Forms of Innocence" presents swans that, like the girl, are free. Whereas, in "The Swan Girl," both Leda and the swans are presented as victims of abuse. However, while Leda may be able to overcome the psychological and social effects of the assault, the swan's fate is inescapable, as it seems to be a main source of meat for local families: "These were the swans / her brothers caught with nets. / Her mother stuck them / ... [so that they] could

be plucked and roasted" (ll. 23–25, 28). Unlike the rest of her family, Leda states clearly her own connection to swans in their shared suffering. Specifically, a simile compares the blood issuing from Leda's vagina after the sexual assault she endured and the swan's bleeding to death: "long necks drooping above pools / of blood, feathers streaked with red / like the flesh of her inner thighs" (ll. 29–32). Such a negative analogy may point to Leda's suffering following the crime that was perpetrated against her, but also to Leda's questioning of the social construction and power relations of both women and animals (swans) in her community. The conclusion she reaches is that she is more attuned to the natural world, as only she can understand the connections between herself and the swans, as the following quotation suggests: "the dead [swans] hung, / their necks feather clappers / in a clear glass bell / only she could see ..." (ll. 45–48). Thus she "would not eat [the swans'] wildness" (l. 35); eating the swans' meat would mean Leda's validation of a system of domination that she has already rejected.

Conclusion

Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* and Crozier's "The Swan Girl" and "Forms of Innocence" clearly present three different versions of the myth introduced in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and made popular in literature through Yeats's "Leda and the Swan." The three texts focalize around Leda as a young girl who is moving into adulthood and who is in the process of exploring her own sexuality as part of the building of her identity as a woman. Whereas in Carter's novel and Crozier's "The Swan Girl," Leda is metaphorically attacked and sexually abused by the swan, in Crozier's "Forms of Innocence," Leda, the young girl, is the one who decides to have sexual intercourse with the person of her choice; thus, in this case, Leda is empowered by making her own decisions. Melanie, the Leda in Carter's novel, starts enacting her femininity by taking into account those cultural references that define positive and accepted images of female beauty and behaviour. Thus, by observing herself in the mirror, she becomes the beauty icons of the time and also a wife corseted in an uncomfortable dress that limits her movement. In Crozier's "The Swan Girl," the village girl whose mother and brothers live off swans' meat, will have to face her own shame after having been sexually abused by a swan while trying to hide him under her skirt. This innocent and well-intentioned act is translated into a rite of passage that is not only painful, but also enhances the girl's loneliness in relation to her family and community. Ultimately, the girl is empowered by resorting to nature; by means of establishing a connection between her suffering and that of the hunted swans, Leda does not feel lonely or misunderstood any longer. Such a feeling of companionship, the poem seems to suggest, promotes Leda's gathering of strength to start a process of psychological recovery.

The three Ledas are empowered by strengthening their connection to nature and by the fact that growing into adulthood devoid of cultural constraints in relation to womanhood is the only way to reach a more egalitarian society in terms of gender and also in the relationship between nature and human beings. For Melanie, going into the

garden, as the only natural space within a big metropolis such as London, deposes her not only of the cultural images to which she tried to conform, but also of the patriarchal pressures represented by Uncle Philip and his grotesque puppet swan. Whereas the swan is the family's means of subsistence in "The Swan Girl" and, thus, initially a source of life, the swan also represents a menace and a perpetuation of patriarchal conceptions of womanhood when it inadvertently attacks the girl. In this poem, what is significant is the fact that the mother is the one who slays the swans, an image that may also stand for Crozier's intending to grant some power to the mother who metaphorically kills the meaning of the swan adopted through male-dominated tales, in other words, that of the rapist. In this respect, Carter's novel and Crozier's poems try to defeat the patriarchal domination inscribed in the myth of Leda and the swan, with Crozier's "Forms of Innocence" presenting a Leda that chooses the person with whom she will lose her virginity.

Submission received 13 January 2018

Revised version accepted 7 September 2018

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Author: Oró-Piqueras, Maricel; Mina-Riera, Nuria Title: Rewriting Leda and the Swan: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop (1967), and Lorna Crozier's "Forms of Innocence" (1985) and "The Swan Girl" (1995)

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