

FROM PENSIVE VEGETABLES TO FEMININE MEN: THE DIALOGICAL POSTHUMAN IN SILKO, MOURE, AND JEN¹

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THINKING ACROSS POSTHUMANISM, DIALOGICS, ECOFEMINISM, AND LITERATURE

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Departing from a criticism of the Enlightenment subject, posthumanism can acquire several forms and encompass diverse disciplines. This article fosters a dialogical approach to posthumanism that puts it together both with ethical currents of thought and with literary texts. In reading Gish Jen's, Erin Moure's, and Leslie Marmon Silko's works from a dialogical posthumanist perspective, I attempt to go beyond the binaries that dominate Western forms of thought, while seeking to build ethical relations. By putting into dialogue literatures from Chinese-American, European-Canadian, and Indigenous backgrounds, I explore the multiple continuities and connections between them. I believe in the power of reading and writing as reflexive modes of rebellion that can transform our ways of thinking and have a social impact. Once we manage to pull down mental hierarchies, there is room for ethical and/or dialogical encounters. Therefore, this article acknowledges and cherishes the ethical continuum, not only between the human and the nonhuman, but also among people and their cultural manifestations. This article also intends to explore dialogical posthumanism as a critical framework through close readings of these literary texts.

The three writers under discussion make innovative uses of literary form through irony, circularity, and hybridity, which epitomizes their search for new epistemologies. Jen's "Birthmates" is a short narrative about a Chinese-American man who breaks with old models of masculinity; Silko's "Yellow Woman" rewrites animal, female, and spiritual life from a modern Indigenous point of view; Moure's "Homages to Water" appears to grant vegetables subjectivity. Reading these works together gives

us access to new ways of thinking about the animal, the man, the woman, the spirit, and the vegetable, which is a starting point to study them through a posthumanist lens. More concretely, these texts denounce the exploitation of nature—including people, animals, *and* plants—in different ways, such as racism, sexism, economic inequality, plant devastation, animal abuse, colonialism, and war. Furthermore, the authors suggest that the only way to escape parameters of domination is by truly embracing a dialogical posthuman way of life, based on the ethical dialogue between categories that were previously deemed hierarchies: West/Rest, reason/body, mind/spirit, man/woman, boss/worker, human/plant, and human/animal; hence the alternatives posed by Jen’s feminine man, female and male pregnancies, and wife-husband imagined conversation; Moure’s thinking cabbage, exemplary carrot, and onion-fog collaboration; or Silko’s life-saving horse, spiritual-carnal beings, and landscape-woman exchange. In advocating for the dialogical posthuman, I draw on Stacy Alaimo, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Katherine Hayles, and Sherryl Vint, who have theorized on the need to provide posthumanism with an ethical base. The critical currents combined in this article—posthumanism, ecofeminism, and dialogics—both stem from and generate ethics.

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In the 1990s, Donna Haraway warned us that the hierarchies “between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically” (*Simians* 163). Encouraging us to perceive humans, nature, and machines in a continuum so as to avoid ranking them into the power structures that produce “practices of domination” (*Simians* 177), Haraway’s premises became foundational for modern posthumanist thought. From a contemporary posthumanist philosophy, Rosi Braidotti contrasts the traditional (binary) approach and the new (posthuman) one, “which rejects dualism [...] and stresses instead the self-organizing [...] force of living matter” (*The Posthuman* 2). She views the current situation as both urging and allowing us “to think critically and creatively” so as “to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation” beyond human, humanism, and colonialism (*The Posthuman* 12). The belief in the imagination is one of the most conspicuous links between Jen’s, Moure’s, and Silko’s oeuvres, as exemplified in Art’s imagined talk with his ex-wife, Moure’s poetic persona’s vegetablizing herself, and Yellow Woman’s project to retell her story in her own way. Braidotti alerts us that new vocabularies are needed to understand, live, and enjoy the present moment. To begin with, her concept of *zoe* or “nonhuman life itself” (*The Posthuman* 168) manifests as a “force” that “reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains” (*The Posthuman* 60), helping us to realize that humans are no longer the centre and that we have much in common with other beings. The concept of *zoe* in Silko’s text is connected with female sensuality, and in Moure’s poems with the immanent force of life. Nevertheless, sharing features with others does not end one’s singularity but facilitates dialogue and collaboration, which is also a feature of ecofeminism.

Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen describe ecofeminism as a way of thinking and acting

that “grows out of dialogue” and focuses on “commonality while at the same time respecting difference” and “building coalitions”; these actions must be done “[in] solidarity” in order “to achieve global justice and planetary health” (287). For Vandana Shiva, ecofeminism opposes the domination of nature and the domination of women in western industrial culture as part of the same process of devaluation and destruction derived from the Enlightenment. Moure’s poetry condemns the obliteration of alleged inferior lifeforms such as vegetables. By writing bilingually in a mainstream (English) and a peripheral (Galician) language, the poet questions the artificiality of both borders and hierarchies. Jen’s story also has an ecofeminist goal, to make readers aware of the pain caused by fertility clinics and the industrial profit from this pain. In this situation, Shiva encourages a paradigm shift that realizes, practices, and enjoys the web-like heterarchical character of the Earth and its beings, including women. Thus, in 1993, she collaborated with Maria Mies on *Ecofeminism*. As the authors contend, “the shared concern [i.e. the threat to life on the planet] of countless women worldwide override [*sic*] their differences, and evokes a sense of solidarity that perceives such differences as enriching their experiences and struggles” (5); furthermore, they encourage us to look for “differences, [...] diversities, and interconnectedness among women, [...] men and women, [...] human beings and other life forms” (12) in order to criticize self-centred separatist capitalism and search for a truly ethical system. On the one hand, ecofeminism’s emphasis on interconnectedness is postulated by posthumanism; on the other, its call for a radically inclusive conversation has affinities with Bakhtinian dialogics.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogics has several common grounds with posthumanism, and more specifically, with Haraway’s theories. Bakhtin understands human life as an exercise of responsibility: his theorization of humans’ “non-alibi in Being” (*Philosophy* 42) implies being involved and assuming responsibility for one’s acts, such as abusing an animal, exploiting a worker, or polluting the Earth. Moreover, Bakhtin’s theorization of responsibility, as the double ability and duty to respond to others, can be compared to Haraway’s recommendation of a form of respect derived from *respecere*, to look back. As if extending upon Bakhtin, she calls for the need “to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem” our companion species (*Species* 19). A community in which humans regard each other and other beings with this kind of affective respect would certainly be a sustainable and ethical community; Silko’s, Moure’s, and Jen’s writings also vindicate affect and respect for all natural forms, which would be foundational for what I define as the dialogical posthuman. Bakhtin gives a crucial significance to the other that is listening to (or reading) the self’s discourse and that can answer back. His conceptualization of carnival as a temporary mode of being that turns hierarchies upside down is relevant, not only in its questioning of power structures, but also in its criticism of authority (see Bakhtin, *Rabelais*). Together with popular culture, for Bakhtin the novel seems “the richest form of ethical thought” (*Dialogic* 366); extending upon this idea, this article affirms the ethical potential of other genres,

such as the short story and poetry. Haraway also considers writing a technology that “can reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities” (*Simians* 175). Both thinkers agree that literature can enlighten readers so that we are conscious of injustices, rise up against them, and change the world; in fact, it is mainly due to Jen’s, Silko’s, and Moure’s anti-hierarchical proposals and change-oriented criticisms that I decided to read their works from the perspective of dialogical posthumanism.

These authors’ dialogical posthuman writings challenge us to question the man-centered individualistic logic, such as that currently fostered by capitalist patriarchy, while urging us to build societies based on ethics and hope. Therefore, their choices of formal devices such as ellipses, hierarchy-reversal, nonlinearity, and symbolism, and topics such as animal, spirit, vegetable, and (wo)man, will be approached from a threefold point of view stemming from posthumanism, ecofeminism, and dialogics. Furthermore, Moure, Jen, and Silko have crosscultural family origins that are celebrated in their works. This multitheoretical, crossgenre, and intercultural study also seeks to promote dialogue, sustainability, and peace, given the effects of literature on people’s ways of feeling and thinking.

To contribute to Braidotti’s call for neologisms and “new definitions” (*Posthuman Feminism* 6), I have coined, and will refer to, the term *socioecologic*, with which I wish to emphasize the links between society, ethics, ecology, and the economy that must be identified and transformed to definitively accomplish a radical posthuman change. Substituting the “n” of “economic” for the “l” of “ecologic” aims to revert the tendency of capitalism to sacrifice nature, human and nonhuman health, animal life, and forest conservation, rather than care about it. I thus seek to reflect upon the bonds between all nature’s beings and their doings. First, we must acknowledge that human beings are part of the environment, since not doing so only perpetuates the human/nature hierarchy. From here we can argue that sexism, racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination should be among the concerns of environmental studies. Second, the concept of “anthropocene” has been articulated in the framework of posthumanism to make us aware that human action has consequences on the rest of nature. One way to combine these areas is with the kind of dialogical posthumanism I am here advocating, which encompasses posthumanism, ecofeminism, and Bakhtinian dialogics. Finally, as posed in the texts discussed here, it is vital to understand the connections not only between these fields but also between beings, as in the animal-human-spirit-vegetable continuum.

LESLIE MARMON SILKO’S “YELLOW WOMAN”: FEMALE-ANIMAL-SPIRIT

According to the humanist standard, whose model is western “rational man” and not woman (Haraway, *Simians* 18), “Yellow Woman” goes beyond portraying the woman-

nature equivalence by acknowledging and connecting both; moreover, in accordance with Keres tradition (Allen), a spirit being makes Yellow Woman, the protagonist who embodies this myth, feel, act, and even dream in ways she had never experienced before. The story begins with the unnamed heroine standing by the river, after having spent the night with someone that looks like a man, but could be a spirit, and is definitely not her husband. In fact, the woman leaves her family behind—her husband, baby, mother, and grandmother—to be with the mysterious male being. With him, she has an experience in and beyond the sexual that will be life-enhancing, not only for herself but also for her culture. Silko thus shares with readers Keresan beliefs about the subversion of hierarchies as a way to find the necessary balance that can connect us to each other, to what we usually call nature—the human body, animals, and plants—and to the supernatural.

Although Indigenous conceptualizations of nature cannot be homogenized, a common feature in many of them is that all the elements of the universe are alive and interconnected. This idea is manifest from the beginning of Silko's piece, which may be argued to align with ecofeminist values. The protagonist-narrator is deeply aware of and responsive to her environment as she describes "the sun," "the tamaracks and willows," the "birds" that "bathed in the river silently," and "the black [horse that] whinnied" at her (Silko 31). This horse is vital at the end, as it saves her from a dangerous situation. Although she made it run until it was "breathing deep gasps and there [was] [...] sweat on its neck" (42), the horse was gentle enough to say goodbye on its departure as it "*looked back at her* for a moment" (42; emphasis mine). Thus, Silko's concern involves portraying animals' subjectivity; this time, the horse performs a kind of Harawayian *respecere* toward her companion, a gesture that is commonly ascribed to humans. Later on, the heroine wonders about "who walks on the pine needles in those blue mountains" (36), showing her connection to her surroundings and her care about all animals, including small insects capable of walking on needle-shaped leaves. Observing animals, as Yellow Woman and other people do, can make one "feel the human body as an instrument attuned to peace" (Deming), which describes the protagonist's state at that particular moment. In this way, Silko's dialogical posthumanism shows the links between animals and humans, while encouraging the latter to pay attention to the former to, hopefully, achieve peace.

Silko's story intersperses oral narratives, which are a fundamental pillar in Indigenous cultural traditions, with her own account of the story of Yellow Woman so as to emphasize the latter's mythical quality. One of these narrations repeatedly features Badger and Coyote, whose anthropomorphic features support the relevance of animals in these cultures. Therefore, the text's narrative structure is spiral-like: it is titled "Yellow Woman," comes back and forth to different versions of its eponymous myth, and explicitly names "the Yellow Woman stories" in the last lines (Silko 43). This (multi)circular structure pays tribute to the circle as a sacred figure in several Indigenous religions (Allen; Bill). Being aware of the Indigenous understanding of the life-cycle may help to understand the "socioecologic" nexus of life, since every-

thing that people do, whether or not it is detrimental to the environment, has effects that inevitably come back, such as water pollution, deforestation, or workers' anxiety disorders. The monistic conception of the human-nature-spirit continuum that is present in many Indigenous traditions is also postulated by posthumanism (see e.g. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*).

Another aspect shared by Indigenous and posthumanist worldviews deals with "the relationship to the Spirit world" (Allen 247). Especially in the west, the obsession with rationality, science, and the empirical has led many of us to move away from spirituality. Instead, "[t]he posthuman is entirely open to ideas of 'paranormality', 'immateriality', the 'supernatural', and the 'occult'; it "does not accept that faith in scientific methods is superior to faith in other belief systems" (Pepperell 181). Bakhtinian dialogics and ecofeminism have also defended non-intellectual ways of knowing (Mies and Shiva), while challenging a rationally-based epistemology (Bakhtin, *Philosophy*). Indigenous cultures feature "spirit messengers" called **378** *ka'tsina*s that are usually beneficial to the tribe (Allen 303). Silko portrays the *ka'tsina* spirit as a solitary man named Silva, who is tall, mysterious, and humorous; and Yellow Woman as an unnamed wife and mother, who is sensual, creative, and sensitive. They leave the *pueblo* together and spend a few days having sex in the mountains. According to Patricia Clark Smith and Paula Gunn Allen, "the ultimate purpose of such ritual abductions and seductions is to transfer knowledge from the spirit world to the human sphere, and this transfer is not accomplished in an atmosphere of control or domination" (178). My reading follows this interpretation, while contradicting the notion of Silva as a predator who could abuse the protagonist.² Furthermore, I agree that literature "can be an ethical model [...] of the sorts of challenges both creative and theoretical work need to be responsive to" (Warrior 340). Silko's oeuvre challenges Western readers in a dialogical posthuman way so that they can open to the differences of Indigenous cultures.

In "Yellow Woman," the spiritual and the carnal intertwine in a kind of monistic space that refutes humanism's binary logic. The heroine-narrator states: "I did not decide to go. I just went [with Silva]. Moonflowers blossom in the sand hills before dawn, just as I followed him" (Silko 38). Yellow Woman must have been guided by *zoe*, "an impersonal force that moves us without asking for our permission to do so" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 193), a description akin to the posthumanist belief that "we think with our whole body" (Pepperell 178). In like fashion, "Yellow Woman" makes important points about the human body, our so-called animal side, with regard to female sexuality. First, the protagonist stands for a vitalist conception of life according to which meeting the "other"—her own body, the *ka'tsina*'s male body, and her ancestors' body of knowledge through myth—is more important than artificial norms and conventions, especially those of the West. Second, since she is a married mother who runs away with a strange man, we may wonder à la Lacan, "what does a woman want?" Third, given that she reunites with her family at the end, she must want both sexual pleasure and maternity. In Christian ideology, motherhood

and sexuality are split, as represented in the ultimate female role model: the Virgin Mary, supposed to become pregnant without having sex. On the contrary, for this Indigenous character, sexuality is part of motherhood; the Yellow Woman myth thus respects that mothers both feel sexual pleasure and have a right to do so. From the clause that opens the narrative, “My thigh clung to his with dampness” (Silko 31), “Yellow Woman” is explicit about female sensuality, as well as of its prevalence over rational thought. Moreover, female desire is attuned to nature, for instance: “I remembered that I had meant to go home. But that didn’t seem important any more, maybe because there were little blue flowers growing in the meadow” (39). Above all, the story invites readers to attempt other ways of knowing by turning old hierarchies upside down: intuition/reason—“Last night you guessed my name, and you knew why I had come” (32)—feeling/thinking—“I [...] tried to remember the night, but I could only see the moon in the water and remember his warmth around me” (32)—and myth/reality—“But one day they will talk about us, and they will say, ‘Those two lived long ago when things like that happened’” (36), among others. Reversing the hierarchies is the first step toward balancing the opposites, which are so pernicious to humans’ and nonhumans’ peaceful coexistence, while seeking dialogical posthumanist ways of co-being.

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Silko’s text goes beyond women’s issues to denounce other social problems. For example, Silva is accused by a white rancher of stealing cattle. In the story, there is a tense situation between both men followed by “four shots” that Yellow Woman can hear in the distance (Silko 42). Since the number four is sacred to many Indigenous cultures, this could be symbolic of the *ka’tsina* being unwounded and innocent. Furthermore, Silko structures her narrative into four parts, thus reinforcing the connection between her story and her people’s traditional beliefs. Nonetheless, Silva’s supposed stealing would also be damaging for the displaced cattle, which again encourages the need to approach all beings from a “socioecologic” perspective that fosters the bonds between them.

To return to the heroine, owing to her experience with Silva, she acquires a holistic perspective that reveals humans’ universal ancestral, intimate, and intersubjective relation with nature; hence her feeling of wonder at seeing “every color that a cactus blossom can be; the white [...] the red [...] the purple, and the yellow” (Silko 40). Concurrently, she goes back with her family and decides to tell them her own version of the Yellow Woman myth. This symbolic gift is more important for them than something that could be measured in economic terms, since it reaffirms the value of oral traditions while linking her and her tribe to their ancestors. Ending the story thus, Silko allies with the authors that focus on the role of Indigenous women in keeping their communities together (Child); at the same time, her work contributes to demystify the stereotype of Indigenous people as traditional and disconnected from the modern world (Deloria). In all, Yellow Woman feels content about returning to her ordinary life while hoping that “because I believe it, he [Silva] will come back sometime” (43); nonetheless, this dream is significant since it helps the protago-

nist to be happier both on her own and with her people, which contributes to the “socioecologic” balance of the Earth. This kind of (in)dependent, inter-temporal, earth-becoming, hopeful, and imaginative way of living should be embraced as part of a dialogical posthuman age.

GISH JEN’S “BIRTHMATES”: RESPONDING (TO) MASCULINITY

380 The protagonist of Jen’s “Birthmates” is Art Woo, a divorced fearful and thin Chinese-American man who is about to lose his job. Most of the story is told through his memories during a failed business trip. Art and Lisa, his Californian ex-wife, desperately wanted to have children. Lisa subjected herself to a complicated fertility treatment and they finally got pregnant; unfortunately, the fetus was infected with a disease and she had to undergo an abortion. The couple’s resulting pain was the trigger for their divorce. Jen’s story encourages readers to reconsider issues of race, class, gender, and sex by deconstructing hierarchies—such as white American man/Asian-American man, winner/loser, and masculine/feminine, among others—and opening spaces of dialogue between categories. Therefore, Art represents the antithesis of the heteropatriarchal model of masculinity in the United States, embodied by the brave white and robust self-made man who is also successful with women; the character ends up embracing the values of the dialogical posthuman, by becoming a man that can be a model for those to come.

The title of the story can be interpreted in at least two ways. It may point out that Art and his ex-wife could have become parents and thus somehow the birthmates of their baby, had it only been born. A more literal interpretation refers to Art and Billy, one of his colleagues, having been born on the same day and month (Jen 33); nonetheless, both men are polar opposites of each other: “Billy had been a quarterback in college” (26); his last name, Shore, ironically evokes the supposed sureness of a successful executive. On the contrary, Art experiences professional difficulties due to his Asian-American ethnicity. For instance, he is insulted by his boss, who even hits him, saying: “Don’t talk to me about fault. Bottom line, it’s you Japs who are responsible for this whole fucking mess” (21-22). Although he later tries to apologize, he is neither less classist in his actions, by offering him a salary raise, nor less racist in his excuse: “he knew that Art was not a Jap, but a Chink” (21). Lisa, Art’s wife, is angered by this and urges her husband to sue his boss; despite all this, Art decides to do nothing about it and sees the salary raise as a triumph, from which we can infer that he must have endured racism all his life.

As these examples show, Billy and the boss are portrayed as very unpleasant human beings, whom Art surpasses both morally and emotionally given their contemptuous demeanour. Silko also criticizes this kind of behaviour by portraying the white rancher as an unpleasant character who accuses Silva of being a thief for no

apparent reason. The scornful attitudes that both writers denounce are typical of ethnocentrism and racism, and represent the limitations of humanism that dialogical posthumanism wishes to circumvent. Therefore, the new scenario would be one of “socioecologic” balance, where human relationships matter as much as the economy and there is no room for workplace abuse.

Braidotti comments that “global economy does not function in a linear manner, but it is rather web-like” (*The Posthuman* 165). Her reflection invites us to connect economic and literary patterns in the “socioecologic” fashion I am proposing, so as “to adopt [...] [new systems of thought] that account for the paradoxes of the posthuman era” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 165). Displaying the non-linearity that is characteristic of postmodernism, Jen’s narrative allows her protagonist to move back and forth in his mind in order to evaluate his past. Readers learn that Art and Lisa repeatedly try and fail to be parents. It is due to Art’s decision that Lisa subjects herself to fertility treatments that cause her intense suffering: “Lisa’s arms were black and blue from having her blood drawn every day [...] her ovaries swelled to the point where he could feel them through her jeans” (Jen 26). While fertility clinics are a highly profitable business around the globe, their economic benefits derive mostly from using the female body. In relation to this, ecofeminists have denounced the use of reproductive technologies in industrialized societies to medicalize women instead of focusing on the toxic byproducts that ruin health and may be the cause of infertility (Gaard, “Reproductive”). Although unconsciously, Art is complicit with these gender-biased processes too. This kind of scientific intervention threatens the “socioecologic” sequence by favoring the economic at the cost of risking people’s health, while reinforcing the man/woman hierarchy. Lisa’s trajectory as a mother-to-be contrasts significantly with that of the mother of “Yellow Woman,” who is granted a pleasurable experience that demonstrates her culture’s respect for the body.

In “Birthmates,” readers are invited to reflect upon the similarities and differences between the female and male bodies. Ethical posthumanist scholars emphasize the role of embodiment in the development of masculine and feminine identities. Katherine Hayles suggests that the rejection of embodiment has been the key to making the liberal humanist subject universal, since erasing the body implies rejecting sex, race, and other features that make each of us different. While sexual and other differences are rejected, gender hierarchies are produced and “maintained [...] by gender body practices that serve to discipline and incorporate bodies into the complex significations and performances that constitute gender within a given culture” (200). In Jen’s story, Lisa is recommended to abort a fetus with brittle-bone disease; she is sent to group therapy afterwards in order to overcome her depression. Art is not offered help, as he is supposed to be free from emotional pain, something he also believes at first. In the ironic description of Lisa’s group therapy sessions, even “the potted palms were female, too, nodding, nodding, though really their sympathy was just rising air from the heating vents” (Jen 27). Pushing men away from the pregnancy processes contributes to a fruitless way of essentializing femininity;

moreover, it reinforces men's identification with the model of traditional masculinity that teaches boys that to show their feelings is a sign of weakness, which is to say, is feminine. This situation offers another contrast with "Yellow Woman": when the heroine returns home, her husband is "playing with the baby" (Silko 43), which proves his involvement in his child's care. Like Silko's story, Jen's text suggests that radical models of identity, which are either sex- or gender-based, are wrong; her narrative blurs the line between categories, such as through Art's (peculiar) pregnancy and motherhood.

382 However, "Birthmates" also highlights the need for female organs such as "ovaries" (26) to develop actual pregnancies, advocating for both the similitudes and particulars that exist between the sexes. As Sherryl Vint advises, the "challenge for an ethical, embodied posthumanism [...] is how to retain a notion that the body is integral to subjectivity without falling into the trap of validating an essential and reified body morphology and identity at the same time" (184). A posthumanist writer, Jen is apt enough to put forth a sort of strategic essentialism (Spivak) that, while denying the possibility of absolute essentialism, can temporarily rely on the latter in order to achieve concrete ends: to denounce the maltreatment of mothers-to-be. A dialogical posthuman society should be aware that our similarities do not make us the same, nor do our dissimilarities make us unequal; a dialogical posthumanist viewpoint acknowledges, respects, and even cherishes the commonalities and differences that exist not only among people, but also between people and the rest of nature.

Once divorced, Art goes through the aforementioned memories in a hotel room during a failed business trip. While experiencing feelings of uncertainty, frustration, and loneliness, he can also mourn his proto-child, something that he had not done before. His way of looking back could be read in terms of Haraway's *respecere*, since he will be able to be respectful with and respond to those he had not paid attention to before, including himself. He especially remembers one argument with Lisa: "she called the fetus a baby, though it was not a baby, just a baby-to-be [...]. She said he didn't understand [...], it was something you understood with your body" (Jen 27). Her words thus emphasize the particularity of the female body during pregnancy, a particularity that may be extended upon the male body in the last lines of the story. Towards the end of the narrative, Art has an imaginary dialogue with Lisa, and even responds to her: "Yes, that was a baby we had together, it would have been a baby" (36; emphasis in original). Therein, he embodies the Bakhtinian "third," "the one who understands" (Bakhtin, *Speech* 126), and becomes a different person who comprehends the situation from the other's perspective. Thanks probably to the distance of that memory, Art is finally able to empathize with his ex-wife in a dialogical manner that does not suppose a fusion of individual consciousnesses (Bakhtin, *Philosophy*).

The story's last words contain more details about Art's dialogical posthuman change: "Yes, that [...] would have been a baby [...] a boy [...] but he would have, in being born, broken every bone in his body" (Jen 36). Although apparently referring to the baby's bones, the demonstrative "his" could refer to Art's too; in fact, many men

somatize their partners' pregnancy effects such as osteoporosis, nausea, or weight gain. Hence, I read Art as a symbolic mother, not of the unborn baby (Soria-Somoza), but of himself. First, Art has to go through a psychological crisis or death; there is even a mysterious "shadow" that threatens to kill him (Jen 36), which could be a metaphor for his own past. A transitional space, the hotel room is not only an appropriate site for a rite of passage but also a symbolic womb, where Jen's protagonist is reborn as a dialogical, empathetic, and feminine man. Jen thus acknowledges the qualities conventionally attributed to women—compassion, sensitivity, and so forth—in other beings. Finally, at the end of "Birthmates," Art Woo embodies a model of (a future) dialogical posthuman masculinity.

ERÍN MOURE'S "HOMAGES TO WATER": SOUP(POSING) VEGETABLES

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Moure's poetry cycle "Homages to Water" (in *Teatriños* or *Little Theatres*) stars the ingredients of Eastern European borscht soup: beets, cabbage, carrots, garlic, onions, and potatoes. This vegetable version of the soup could be taken as a rejection of animal slaughter for human consumption, which is supported by vegetarian ecofeminists (Gaard, "Vegetarian"). If this soup pays homage to Moure's relatives in Ukraine, the poems' bilingual format in English and Galician honours her Galician ancestors in Spain.³ Furthermore, the content of the poetry cycle invites readers to reconsider vegetables as capable of thinking and feeling while being worthy of Haraway's *respectere*. Moure, who is on a quest for new categories, considers that the "plant [is] itself a 'hortizen'" (*Cidadán* 47); her poetry also questions conceptual borders such as those between English and Galician, or humans and nonhumans, while giving artistic shape to the intersubjective self that is the model of the dialogical posthuman.

It must be added that, by writing about the ingredients of her mother's soup recipe, Moure is appraising not only the generational bond between women, but also the work they have been doing for centuries in the private sphere. Usually unacknowledged, housework is the basis for carrying out other activities, which reaffirms the "socioecologic" connections pointed out in this article. For instance, if a room has not been cleaned, no political meeting can take place there; and if politicians are not fed, they will not have the energy to meet either. The public sphere, however, is controlled by male chefs, who are paid for doing a task that the majority of women do for free. As discussed in both the introduction and the readings of Silko's and Jen's texts, fighting against the exploitation of women and the (so-called) natural world is one of the main goals of ecofeminism. Accordingly, besides revaluing vegetables, an ecofeminist close reading of Moure's poems incites readers to revalue domestic labour as it deserves.

"Homage to the Basic Mineral of Borscht," which opens the collection, is dedicated to Marja Grędyś, Moure's mother. The lyrical voice both personifies the beet—which

appears to have “blood” and “humility” (24)—and vegetablizes herself—“I had beet / when I had corpulence / when I was loam of the earth” (24)—while postulating that humans and vegetables have bodies. Pointing out this interconnection exemplifies “trans-corporeality” (Alaimo 2), since all beings are interwoven with each other and the environment. The poems that follow abound with personifications too: the cabbage is “pensive with heaven” (26), the onion is helpful, the potato is forceful, the garlic has an eye, and the carrot looks joyful. Moure’s personification of vegetables could be wrongly deemed unethical, given the implicit identification of the other with herself. On the contrary, as argued throughout this article, commonalities do not erase differences; in addition, Moure’s respectful attitude toward the other, which can also be appreciated in Silko’s and Jen’s works, lies within the values of dialogical posthumanism. In “Soidade” (“Solitude”), the poem that links the cycle to the rest of the book, the speaker turns to carrots in order not “to live with sadnesses” (36). She finds out that the solution lies in learning how to breathe by listening to the earth’s breathing. This idea is more evident in the Galician version, “aprendelo da terra” (37). The last verse, “escoitar o alento da terra,”⁴ supports the posthumanist notion of “life as vitalist, self-organizing matter” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 191). That is, not only does nature have subjectivity and agency, but it can also be a teacher of dialogics. In agreement with this, Moure’s neologism “sadnesses” derives from the plural form *tristuras* that exists in the Galician language and that opens the path for intercultural dialogues such as those encouraged here. As Moure explains: “By writing in Galician, I caused a change in the tone and style of what I was writing [...] which I then tried to bring over to English” (Coppins). She continues that she chose to write about the ingredients of borscht because “sharing a national soup is a good alternative to war!” (Coppins). Her concern with war and other forms of violence is more conspicuous in her poems about the onion, the potato, and the garlic.

Moure includes two poems about the onion, whose etymology comes from Latin *unionem* (“union”), revealing her wish to join all beings in a rhizomatic equalizing manner. “Homage to the Mineral of the Onion (I)” reminds us of the entries of a dictionary: there is a “fire” that leads to a “fog” that leads back to the “onion” (Moure 28). This could be the author’s way of criticizing established categories, which lead to implied oppositions such as human/onion. Her criticism of hierarchies becomes clearer in personifications that attribute “generosity” to “the onion,” “[a]ir,” and “fog.” The poem thus ends: “In these bellicose days that promise wars, / look how the onion helps fog / to sustain the earth” (28). It is human beings who pollute the air and make wars, while nature takes care of itself and us; hence, we are required to imitate the onion’s peaceful life and work.⁵

In “Homage to the Onion (II),” farmers “clad / in work boots” produce “songs [that] pass” through “the leaves of the onion” (30). This kind of artistic collaboration only takes place, the lyric voice insists, when the “feet are clad / in [...] gum boots. / Never with feet clad in boots worn by soldiers,” which confirms her condemnation of violence, including environmental crimes. If war is often due to the economic greed

of some, the “Onion” poems tag war as the biggest crime against the “socioecologic,” which is to say that war is a crime against life in all its manifestations: vegetable, animal, human, and so forth; apart from that, war provokes fear, division, and death, whereas the onion provides nourishment, bond, and creation. This admiration for (so-called) nature, which we saw in “Yellow Woman,” seems pertinent and even necessary to both ecofeminist and posthumanist scholars (see e.g. Pepperell; Shiva).

“Homage to the Force of the Potato” includes a dedication “for X.L. Méndez Ferrín,” the Galician author of *Con pólvora e magnolias* (*With Gunpowder and Magnolias*), a title that invokes the need to support the arts in revolutionary movements. By knowing this detail, we can make the link between his verses and Moure’s: “When someone speaks of gunpowder and magnolias / the implicit message is that of the force of the potatoes” (Moure 32), which praise the miraculous power of nature. As in the previous poem, the artist’s rejection of violence is explicit: “Gunfire without wound.” When asked about “Homages” in general and this poem in particular, Moure replied: “Potatoes feed people [...] It is an ingredient in [...] borscht as my mother made it” and “[s]oup is more powerful than firearms in nourishing human beings” (Coppins). Therefore, I interpret “the force of potatoes” as the ability to accomplish the greatest revolution: ending world famine, thus also ending a crucial form of violence. Moure’s intertextual use of Méndez Ferrín’s words continues to inspire us to pursue intercultural dialogues in the quest for a peaceful, famine-free planet. This dialogical urge to build bridges instead of borders is among the aims of ecofeminism, posthumanism, and Bakhtinian dialogics.

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Finally, “Anthem to Garlic (without Water)” includes blank spaces, which are represented here by ellipses (Moure 34). The blanks in the poem seem gifts for the reader to participate in its dialogical creation, since both dialogue and creativity are necessary to recognize and tackle our posthuman present (Braidotti, *The Posthuman*). Accordingly, I will use my imagination to posthumanly respond, starting by making an effort to listen to those whose voices have been and continue being silenced. A blank space can also symbolize what we cannot understand (about vegetables) but should be open to; it can take us to the baby’s bond with the mother in the pre-Oedipal phase, as well as to the matrilineal tradition of cooking borscht in Moure’s family; related to this, a gap can represent an open mouth that is ready to eat soup or to converse in an alleged minority language.

As for other rhetorical figures in “Anthem,” “each tiny tooth of garlic” is an image for a “tear” (Moure 34). Paradoxically, although the poem’s title includes the phrase “(without Water),” it revolves around a tear; its title also contrasts with the cycle’s “to Water.” One of the four elements—with earth, air, and fire, all of which are present in “Homages”—water implies both motion and emotions; therein, the self can be transformed to empathize with the other thanks to a tear, vegetablized here as a garlic tooth.⁶ The Galician version expands upon this trope with a play on words, since “*allo*” and “*ollo*” respectively mean “garlic” and “eye” (34-35). The poem ends with an ethical message: “A single tear, fallen, is enough / to tearstain the earth. / If you can

see it [...] *flee* / If you see something [...] *flee* / If, finally, at last, you are able / this, this [...] *to see*" (blank spaces and emphasis in original). On the one hand, we are made conscious that the suffering of every being, even the supposedly least important ones, matters; on the other, the lyrical voice advises us not to be passive when witnessing others' suffering, and to do something about it. Making connections between Moure and Bakhtin, humans have no alibi in being and must take responsibility for what happens around them, which includes being in solidarity with others. Furthermore, taking Art Woo and Yellow Woman as models, apart from dismissing hierarchies and putting categories into a dialogue, people must not deny but cherish our need for affective contact, a need that is posthumanly shared by other beings. Dialogical affection may not use words, but may use sight or touch, as represented by the gaps in Moure's poetry.

Two pages after "Homages to Water," we encounter a prose fragment signed by Elisa Sampedrín (the poet's avatar) that reads, "The play starts now: after it's over" (Moure 38). From a Bakhtinian point of view, readers are reminded of our duty to perform ethical "gesture[s]" in the social sphere (38). After denouncing several injustices against the "socioecologic" through her verses, such as the mistreatment of nature, famine, or war, Moure urges readers to act for peace.

MOURE-JEN-SILKO: PRACTISING DIALOGICAL POSTHUMANISM

Texts such as these make readers aware of the maltreatment of nature—animal abuse, classism, famine, plant devastation, racism, and sexism—and encourage us to demand changes. Jen, Moure, and Silko challenge hierarchies such as European-American/Chinese-American, boss/worker, man/woman, man/animal, mind/body, rational/sentient, and human/vegetable, among others. By putting these three authors into dialogue, we realize the continuum of vegetable-animal-spiritual-human, where equal subjectivities come together through dialogue. Acknowledging this continuum helps us to identify others such as society-ethics-ecology-economy, which I term the "socioecologic" nexus of life. Imagination is vital in a posthuman era, which is full of uncertainties and fears and yet has a promising potential. Writers and literary scholars play crucial roles in making people willing to dream about new modes of "socioecologic" organizing that discard binary oppositions, while relying on ethical dialogue and affective respect.

By using postmodernist narrative, spiral storytelling, and experimental poetry, these three writers manifest their rejection of capitalist progress, concern for their families, and affective respect for others' existence. Moure, Silko, and Jen challenge conventional literary techniques by choosing the kind of non-linear narrative and poetry that feast on memory and reunion. This is evident in Moure's poems on her European-peripheral origins, as well as in Silko's writing about her (protagonist's)

ancestors; by diving into his past, Jen's Art Woo also reunites with himself and his previous family. Looking back and learning from past errors by respecting, listening to, and collaborating with others is necessary to devise a more livable planet for humans and nonhumans.

The writings examined in this article invite readers to rethink the body as much more than a chaotic unintelligent structure. Art had assimilated into the heteropatriarchal capitalist system that ends up killing him emotionally; at the end, he manages to adopt a different perspective by metaphorically somatizing his ex-wife's pregnancy and thus being born as a new man. Yellow Woman breaks the rules of white morality to live a spiritual-sexual experience that also revives her people's cultural traditions. Moure's speaker metamorphosizes with vegetables to provide readers with examples of commonality and togetherness. These authors argue that the body is an agent capable of knowing and transmitting knowledge: from Lisa's and Art's (differently) pregnant bodies, to Yellow Woman's culturally-informed bodily pleasure, to the female hand stirring soup behind Moure's poetry.

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Jen, Moure, and Silko instill into us the importance of empathy, humility, and sensuality: from Art's dialogical way of empathizing with his ex-partner, to Moure's feeling of awe towards vegetables, and to Yellow Woman's embodiment of *carpe diem*. These values are gained thanks to dialogue: between Art, himself, and his (imagined) ex-family; Moure, vegetables, and European-peripheral languages, literatures, and cultures; Yellow Woman, the *ka'tsina* spirit, the surrounding flora and fauna, and her tribe. The aforementioned values correspond to a posthuman sense of community, where differences are not obliterated by similarities; that is, a sense of community where differences both provide access to and result from the ethics of dialogical posthuman encounters.

Silko, Moure, and Jen foster making peace with the self, the others, and the past, as well as clearing the path for the present and future. Art reconciles with himself and Lisa, Yellow Woman restores harmony with her ancestors, and Moure chants for world peace. The three writers have multiple cultural origins, which perhaps facilitates their comprehension of and bonds with the ecosystem's myriad facets, be they biological, ecological, linguistic, literary, social, or spiritual. By reading Silko, Moure, and Jen together, we realize the need to reach a manifold interconnected way of thinking, feeling, and living in order to gain new ways of being in balance with the rest of the environment of which we are a part. Finally, the dialogical posthuman epitomized in literature urges us to reflect on the need to affectively respect each other, in accordance with the "socioecologic" justice that sustains life.

NOTES

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2. Reading this Indigenous text through a feminist lens does not suggest ignoring the sexism to which Indigenous women might be subjected within their own cultures (Ramirez); for example, in Silko's story, once Silva and the heroine arrive at his home, he orders her to cook for him. Women's relations with the domestic sphere are discussed in a different light in the section on Moure.
3. At this point, two notes must be added: Moure wrote "Homages" in a bilingual format; other poems in the book were translated into Galician by the also poet María Reimóndez. The poem "Soidade" ("Solitude"), which focuses on carrots, is placed right after the cycle; given its ecocritical topic and message, I suggest reading it together with the other five.
4. Listening to the earth's breathing (my translation).
5. The preoccupation with war remains constant in Moure's oeuvre, such as in her book *Kapusta* (*Cabbage*), which includes a protest against genocide, and also features Elisa Sampedrín, a voice from *Teatriños* (*Little Theatres*).
6. Another poem in *Teatriños*, Moure's "Araos" (Guillemots), deals with the environmental accident of *Prestige*, an oil tanker that shipwrecked on the Galician coast in 2002. A deeply affected voice states: "I must urgently adopt your latin" (Moure 137). At the end of the poem, the italicized *araos* turn into non-italicized ones; the English-speaking self is able to empathize with the Galician-speaking other: "In my latin now they are araos too" (137).

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