LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE Vol 49, No 3 (2025)
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press

E-ISSN 2450-4580

Mariola Pietrak, Maria Curie-Sklodowska University, Poland

DOI:10.17951/lsmll.2025.49.3.33-44

Modern Subject in a Countercultural Key: the "Child" in the Work of Valeria Correa Fiz

ABSTRACT

This article explores child cruelty in *Condición animal* [Animal Condition] by Valeria Correa Fiz as a device for dismantling the liberal humanist notion of the subject, through the lens of the ontology of precariousness (Butler) and the notion of human animality evoked in the title. The stories analysed depict violence as inherent to all material existence, including childhood – not to empower the child within the modern logic that equates violence with agency, but rather to deconstruct childhood itself and, with it, the very foundation of the modern subject. The epistemic uncertainty generated by this representation reorients subjectivity toward a corporeal and vulnerable existence, simultaneously capable of inflicting and suffering harm.

KEYWORDS

universal subject; childhood cruelty; human animality; bodily ontology

1. Introduction

This study shares posthumanism's aim of deconstructing the universal subject and the symbolic order that sustains it. However, it does not focus on the main areas of posthumanist interest – such as the feminine, the non-human, or artificial life – but rather on the child.

The impetus for this study is rooted in the current trend in Latin American literature, particularly among women writers (Mariana Enriquez, María Fernanda Ampuero, Jacinta Escudos), who place children at the center of their narratives. What distinguishes this literary corpus from the tradition of the child character as a vehicle for social critique and/or reflections on the human condition[1] is its focus on the arbitrariness of the modern construct of childhood, in the same way that

[1] With titles as diverse as *Periquillo Sarniento* (Fernández de Lizardi), *El llano en llamas* (Rulfo), *La rebelión de los niños* [Kids' Rebellion] (Peri Rossi), or Cortázar's short stories featuring the sick child as a metaphor for liberation from human limitations.

Mariola Pietrak, Katedra Hispanistyki, Instytut Językoznawstwa i Literaturoznawstwa, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Pl. M. Curie-Skłodowskiej 4A, 20-031 Lublin, mariola.pietrak@mail.umcs.pl, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1331-168X

This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0

The journal is financed by the Institute of Modern Languages and Literature of Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

femininity or masculinity are questioned. It echoes critiques such as that of Diana Marre (2013), who argues that childhood studies merge and conflate *children* as human beings with *childhood* as a set of sociocultural ideas (p. 11), or that of Gabriela Magistris (2018), who openly declares: “There are no ‘real’ children in child protection systems” (p. 14).

The latter critique refers to the “child-subject-of-rights”, arguably the most evident example of such arbitrariness (Pietrak, 2020), particularly in contexts of poverty or sexual violence – contexts also reproduced in the narratives of Enriquez (“Chico sucio” [Dirty boy]) and Ampuero (“Subasta” [Auction]) with a clear deconstructive intention. Here, however, I wish to focus on childhood cruelty, which subverts the common perception of childhood as innocent and pure. By challenging the very core of the social order (much like the concept of perverse motherhood), it activates the uncanny – a Freudian notion of the strangely familiar – immediately prompting a reading within the framework of horror and the fantastic. This is also how Valeria Correa Fiz has been interpreted, although the author herself emphasizes, above all, the usefulness of such an approach for “portraying certain aspects of the political, social, and everyday life that interest me. The world is terrifying”.

> The presence of horror in our world is so overwhelming that, at times, we fail to notice it. As I say in the story *Criaturas*: “Horror can also become a habit”. That’s how we live, unfortunately – tolerating injustice, corruption, poverty, and an endless list of miseries. (Gacinska, 2021).

For this reason, I propose to unravel childhood cruelty in Correa Fiz’s short fiction not through the lens of the horror genre, but rather as “a habit”, one that is entirely avoidable – provided that we rethink the cultural construction of the subject. To demonstrate this, I will first examine the historical and discursive condition⁻ of the “child” figure, with particular emphasis on the values ascribed to it in Western thought. Second, I will analyze the place this construct occupies within an anthropo(logo)centric – and fundamentally adult-centric – vision, as well as the *bios* (political life) / *zoē* (bare life) antinomy that underpins it (Agamben, 1998).

2. Innocent Childhood

As Valeria Llobet (2013, p. 212) states, childhood is nothing more than a word. Indeed, it is difficult to find this concept prior to the eighteenth century, at least not in the terms we accept today. A panoramic view of history reveals a biological existence of children as human offspring considered the property of the father, and thus susceptible to whatever fate he might impose upon them, including impunity for death (Antiquity) or abandonment (Middle Ages) if they were deemed of no value. In other cases, they often functioned as commodities in the sexual market of arranged marriages.

Visual art provides evidence that children were regarded as "miniature adults", held legally responsible for their actions. It was only after the thirteenth century that perceptions of childhood began to evolve, culminating in the Enlightenment with the establishment of childhood as a distinct social category with an independent identity. As Duran Strauch (2015, p. 3) notes, religious art after this period – particularly depictions of saints or the Christ Child – demonstrates that a concept of childhood (as distinct from adulthood) existed. However, abstract thought about childhood became more concrete with Rousseau, who asserted that man is born good, and society corrupts him.

An initial conceptualization of childhood (classical, Enlightenment-era) emerged alongside ideas of population control, obedience, and discipline. This framework, in addition to shaping psychiatry and pediatrics, informed an education system structured around the needs of the Industrial Revolution (Marre, 2013, p. 20) – or, more precisely, the new mechanisms of individual subjugation within the emerging paradigm of capitalist modernity. A second conceptualization, termed "romantic childhood," stemmed precisely from Rousseau's notion of the "noble savage", which linked childhood irrationality to innocence and vulnerability, situating these traits within the natural order. The naturalization of childhood as pure, in need of protection and love, also served as a pretext for redefining motherhood, imposing procreation, caregiving, and child-rearing as central to the construction of female identity (Badinter, 1980; among others).

This process of infantilization of childhood[2] gave rise to two key phenomena. First, it fueled the proliferation of disciplines that constructed an "ideology of childhood" (Cunningham, 1999), which framed it as "an unfinished, fragile, and vulnerable product […] an object of protection and care", while simultaneously portraying the child as "malleable and educable", thereby justifying "intense pedagogical and moral intervention" (Duran Strauch, 2015, p. 13). Ultimately, this led to the *sacramentalization* and *sentimentalization* of childhood, which intensified "as adult society became increasingly cold, urbanized, and alienated" (Cunningham, 1999).

Second, many authors (Cunningham, 1999; Duran Strauch, 2015; Magistris, 2018, among others) emphasize that romantic childhood is an ideal constructed on the basis of bourgeois children and serving bourgeois interests. At the time, this social class was engaged in consolidating a new order that required child governance to shape free yet controllable citizens through the internalization of social norms. As a result, this theorization diverged significantly from the reality of many children, whose experiences were never accounted for in this bourgeois conception of the "universal child". This exclusion remains the central critique

[2] Moreover, a larger period of life is infantilized by extending the transition to adulthood to the age of 18 through the distinction of adolescence ($19^{th}/20^{th}$ century).

articulated by contemporary scientific and literary narratives on childhood in Latin America.

3. Toward a New Subject

Among these narratives is the short fiction of Valeria Correa Fiz. The Hispano-Argentine author initially gained recognition for her poetic work, although her popularity seems to stem more from her contributions to the short story genre, particularly *La condición animal* [Animal Condition] (2016; hereafter CA) and *Hubo un jardín* [There Was a Garden] (2022; hereafter HJ). This study focuses on selected stories from the first volume, specifically those most relevant to the present discussion. However, it is important to note that both collections largely depict less privileged childhoods that challenge the bourgeois conception of the child.

"La vida interior de los probadores" [The Inner Life of Fitting Rooms] serves as an inaugural story – not because it is the first in the collection, but because it critically examines the myth of children's innate goodness, a notion the author further emphasizes through the neuroatypical condition of the protagonist-narrator. He is described as "lo que se dice un buen muchacho" [what one would call a good boy] (CA, p. 31)[3], who, despite his disability, leads a life fully adapted to the social norm, much to his mother's pride: in the afternoons, he attends a special education school; at night, he works at a shopping mall cleaning the floors of the women's fashion department; and on weekends, he takes care of his cat and masturbates while watching Japanese pornography. The text provides no details regarding his exact age or specific disorder, yet he is portrayed as the son of a single mother from a disadvantaged social background, as suggested by his obligation to contribute his entire salary to the household economy. He is also depicted as a young man attending an adult high school while undergoing the full sexual awakening characteristic of early adolescence[4].

It is precisely this awakening that initiates a shift in narrative focalization, opening the door to the character's interior life, typographically marked by italics. While Quinn (2020) interprets this inner voice as the subconscious of "a sexually perverse and wild criminal" (p. 93), the present study proposes an alternative reading: this voice represents the profound essence of his being, concealed from the anthropo(logo)centric and adult-centric rationality of Western thought. In this way, the story challenges the abstraction of cultural constructs by juxtaposing

[3] All English translations are by the author.

[4] Regardless of whether he is a child in strictly chronological terms, he is clearly associated with the stereotypical view of intellectual disability as a form of eternal childhood, a perception also reflected in legal categories such as "legal incapacity" or "deprivation of legal capacity" (which, fortunately, have been reconsidered in recent decades).

them with the true nature of individuals in their diversity–including those who are not yet adults.

The mother undoubtedly embodies the first of these confronted realities, shaped by the discursive mechanisms that produce and reproduce meaning around childhood as an inherently defenseless state. She perceives her son as extremely vulnerable despite his physical strength, exposed to the cruelty of the outside world due to his condition.

> Mi madre me miró con esa cara de lástima que nos ponen las madres a todos nosotros. Me dijo: —No te preocupes si alguien te juzga mal, hijo. *Nadie te conoce; todos te imaginan sin saber lo que vales*. […] —Si hasta conseguiste un trabajo y de los de uniforme. —Me enseñó con orgullo el guardapolvo de ordenanza recién planchado. [My mother looked at me with that expression of pity that all mothers give us. She said: "Don't worry if someone judges you wrongly, son. *No one knows you; they all imagine you without knowing your worth*. [...] You even got a job, one that requires a uniform." She proudly showed me the freshly ironed work coat.] [emphasis added]. (CA, p. 33)

"No one knows you; they all imagine you" lends itself to a reconfiguration of its meaning in relation to childhood as a discursive construct – one defined independently of real individuals and their lived experiences, ultimately imagined and idealized. In this regard, it is worth mentioning Marre (2013, p. 19), who presents the findings of various studies in the field of childhood studies and concludes that children not only act according to adult-imposed norms but also develop their own patterns of knowledge, behavior, and emotions. These remain largely inaccessible to the adult world when analyzed through the traditional lens centered on socialization and/or cultural transmission.

This same statement, in fact, resurfaces at the end of the narrative, echoing once more and closing the diegesis with a final, definitive resonance.

> "Nadie te conoce, todos te imaginan", ahora sí podía escuchar su voz conmigo. "Qué por qué lo hice, en qué estaba pensando, que qué había en mi cabeza", me decía. ["Nobody knows you, they all imagine you," now I could hear her voice with me. "Why did I do it, what was I thinking, what was going through my mind?" she told me.] (CA, p. 41)

The sources cited by Marre (2013, p. 18) also reveal a fact that Western societies – some more than others – are well aware of yet prefer to taboo or pathologize, attributing it to so-called "bad families" (Llobet, 2013, p. 218): that those, whom we regard as innocent and defenseless, can be not only victims of violence but also its perpetrators, that cruelty and violence exist within the highly idealized realm of childhood.

In this context, the second part of the statement – "without knowing your worth" – opens an epistemic gap concerning real children. This is the truth the mother must confront, and with her, the readers. As previously mentioned, the

protagonist's sexual awakening drives the exploration of his inner life. This process begins on the day he discovers he is the only one in his class who has yet to have sexual relations with a girl, and he is subjected to mockery and humiliation by his peers. From that moment on, his episodes of masturbation become more frequent, occurring in different places and with increasing urgency; his sexual drive spirals out of control, and every effort to restrain it fails, yielding to a single obsessive thought: "*Que yo también podía ir con una chica*, me susurraba el Pterodáctilo hasta casi no dejarme pensar en otra cosa" [*That I too could be with a girl*, the Pterodactyl whispered to me, until it left almost no room for any other thought.] (CA, p. 34).

It is significant that the protagonist's inner life takes the form of a pterodactyl – a dinosaur he had seen in a science book, an animal form, in other words – as well as that its first appearance references Gregor Samsa. First, this evokes the message already noted by Marre: that cruelty, in its many forms (as an agent or as an object), is inherent to all human beings, without distinction: "el sistema podía ser cruel con los distintos o que nosotros podíamos ser muy crueles con nosotros mismos" [The system could be cruel to those who were different, or we could be very cruel to ourselves.] (CA, p. 35). In fact, having himself been the victim of psychological aggression, he ultimately perpetrates sexual violence against a girl, a customer in the shopping mall, in one of the fitting rooms. He pierces her with pins, replicating what he had observed in pornographic productions.

Second, this imagery allows the protagonist's animal condition to surface. Unlike Kafka's character, there is no metamorphosis in this narrative. Instead, there is a fusion between the animal and human elements, which humanist ontology had traditionally kept in a radical dichotomy: by the end of the story, the pterodactyl's voice – his animal consciousness – merges with the protagonist's own in a first-person plural narration. At this point, it is crucial to clarify that Correa Fiz does not conceptualize "the animal" in terms of "the bestial" – as Quinn (2020) suggests – but rather as the corporeal dimension of human beings. This dimension has been denigrated within the modern-capitalist order, reduced to its reproductive function, and thus effectively denied to children's bodies. As Foucault demonstrated throughout his intellectual trajectory, Modernity has never ceased its efforts to regulate children's bodily impulses – such as masturbation – through methods like imposing the asexual childhood model or enforcing confession. Both of these are strongly present in Correa Fiz's work, which, in a confessional style (Quinn, 2020, p. 92), narrates:

> Todos –hasta los más lerdos […] desde los quince que lo hacían. Muchos tenían una cita fija a la semana, como con el kinesiólogo o la logopeda, eso supe. Sus padres lo arreglaban todo, y mi madre –porque padre nunca tuve– ni siquiera sabía lo que yo hacía viendo a las japonesas y los pulpos. [Everyone – even the slowest ones... since they were fifteen, they had been doing it. Many had a fixed appointment every week, like with the physiotherapist or the speech therapist

> – that much I found out. Their parents arranged everything, and my mother – because I never had a father – had no idea what I was doing while watching the Japanese girls and the octopuses.] (CA, p. 32)

The other stories problematize this notion of the animal condition within the context of childhood cruelty and its social conditioning (friends, the system, culture). "Una casa en las afueras" [A House on the Outskirts] draws upon the trope of gang members, a figure widely represented in cultural productions. Violence – foreshadowed by numerous associations with this archetype of juvenile delinquency present in the narrative (CA, pp. 18, 20) – arrives one hurricane-ridden afternoon at the protagonist's home. She, an Argentine woman, is living her American dream on the outskirts of Miami until a group of young men violently intrude upon it with their initiation rite, which is not so different from Christian rituals. Stunned and horrified, she can do nothing but watch as the neophyte – his "manos blandas, como de estudiante, poco habituadas a las tareas manuals" [soft hands, like those of a student unaccustomed to manual labor,] trembling as he suppresses his gag reflex (CA, p. 26) – attempts to pierce the leg of her cat, Philip, hangs it, and then drinks the blood from that sacrificed body.

This scene leads Quinn (2020) to reflect on the human/inhuman divide and to argue that the story humanizes cats while animalizing gang members. In doing so, Quinn suggests, it alludes to the animal condition inherent in every human being, that which remains "hidden within culture" and whose ominous eruption – through the dehumanization and animalization of the human – challenges the dominant bourgeois rationality (pp. 89, 97).

Undoubtedly, this archetypal portrayal of youth violence distorts the pastoral conception of the child figure and, in turn, calls into question the very logic of the reality order forged by bourgeois rationality. The cognitive dissonance it generates and the unease it provokes open an oblique perspective on the entire set of cultural categories that had structured the protagonist's (and the readers') tedious bourgeois life. This is why she ultimately declares that nothing and no one was what they seemed to be (CA, p. 29).

Any attempt, like that of the Cuban shopkeeper, to reduce that disturbing presence to a reassuring "pathology" ("fucking kids", "garbage", "assholes," CA, p. 19; Llobet, 2013, p. 216) proves futile: the neophyte's bloodstained hands betray his privileged background, and his ability to hesitate preserves a trace of his humanity (CA, p. 27).

This discussion inevitably leads to a revision of the established human/inhuman/animal categories, which have been shaped by the biases of classical humanism, raising fundamental questions: What does it truly mean to be *human*? What does it mean to dehumanize or animalize? Is cruelty an inherent trait of the animal kingdom, as the verb "to animalize" in this context suggests, or is it rather

a characteristic of the human realm, as Hobbes once claimed? Ultimately, is there a definitive boundary between human and animal life?

These inquiries take on new meaning in light of the short story "Perros" [Dogs]. The very title introduces an epistemic ambiguity, referring to "dogs" in the plural when, in fact, only one dog appears in the narrative: Duque, named as such because "he had class" (CA, p. 82). Who, then, are these "dogs"? Are they the group of children demanding revenge for Fran's murder at the hands of the local mafia boss, Duque's owner, and who, like a "pack", await Matías's execution of the dog? The word "pack" once again attributes base human emotions to the animal world. Or does it refer to the two orphaned brothers who take in the abused and injured dog, with the three of them caring for each other in a shared recognition of their exposure as living beings, made vulnerable by their very corporeality?

These stories reveal an understanding of the corporeal dimension of human life. According to Butler (2004), every human being participates in life as an embodied existence, which entails exposure to vulnerability and loss. Contrary to rationalist traditions and their dualisms, we are socially constituted bodies, "attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (p. 20). It is precisely by virtue of this constitutive vulnerability of human existence that political organization emerges. As Fromm (1964) pointed out, biological community (*bios*) arises in response to what presents itself as the fundamental existential conflict: the recognition of the human being as the most vulnerable animal, the only one incapable of surviving alone.

However, as many scholars (including Foucault, Butler, and Agamben) have warned, this *bios politikos* degenerates into a *precarious bios* within the anthropo(logo)centric ontology of modernity, whose biopolitical projects impose a distinction between *bios* and *zoe*, reducing bodies deemed superfluous or expendable to their pure biological condition (*zoe*), to bare life.

In this regard, Butler's (2004, 2013) ontology of the body insists on the *material existence* shared by all living beings and, consequently, on the reciprocal and contiguous precarity that arises from it. She reclaims this vulnerability (along with the violence that engenders it) as the necessary point of departure for political life (2004, p. xii), asserting that all embodied existence is embedded in a network of interrelation and interdependence with other bodies. Thus, she rescues *zoe* as an ethical principle – the ultimate goal of a *bios politikos* oriented toward the recognition of vulnerability as a fundamental condition of all beings.

This reasoning ultimately leads her to a reassertion of human animality:

> we cannot understand human life without understanding that its modes are connected up with other forms of life by which it is distinguished and with which it is continuous. If we are moving toward a relational view, then it would follow that the human not only has a relation to animals

> (conceived as the other), but is itself implicated in its own animality. That animality is its own and not yet its own, which is why both animality and life constitute and exceed whatever we call the human. (Butler, 2013, p. 35)

This is how the concept of the animal condition is understood in Correa Fiz's eponymous volume. In these terms, the short story "Lo que queda en el aire" [What Remains in the Air] serves as the crowning piece of both the collection and the present analysis. At first glance, it appears to be the least unsettling of the stories – perhaps even sweet, insofar as it operates within the register of childhood innocence. However, it harbors significant degrees of violence. This is not subtle violence, yet it remains unnoticed precisely because it belongs to the realm of the familiar, to the fabric of ordinary life – one that we, too, most likely enacted in childhood: a familiar violence, though no less cruel for being so.

Above all, the story embodies an undeniable truth in light of Butler's ontology: the (omni)presence of death as a constitutive feature of life, an extreme vulnerability stemming from the simple fact that every living body is exposed to other living bodies.

This truth is distilled in the narrative through a short and, once again, seemingly unremarkable phrase: "me estremecí al ver cómo temblaba" [I shuddered at the sight of its trembling] (CA, p. 60). The trembling, fragile body in question belongs to a baby sparrow that two children rescue at their grandparents' country house, where they spend their summers. Sherry, as they name him, falls from the gap in the shutters onto the windowsill and is immediately picked up by the narrator's cousin. What culture interprets as an act of love or compassion – an expression of the purest childhood innocence – is, in reality, an encounter with death, an unintentional killing amid many intentional ones: fishing for frogs, hunting blood-red butterflies, stoning mice from the heights of a plum tree (CA, p. 57). Their grandfather does not conceal from them the fact that they have condemned the sparrow to death:

> —Al tocarlo lo hiciste huérfano —fueron las palabras del abuelo—, que los gorriones no son gallinas y repudian hasta sus hijos, si tienen olor a hombre. Así que mi primo Tomás era un hombre… ¿desde cuándo? [By touching it, you made it an orphan," said my grandfather. "Sparrows are not chickens – they reject even their own young if they carry the scent of a man." So my cousin Tomás was a man… since when?]. (CA, p. 59)

The foretold death occurs:

> Yo lo saqué de la caja y me tumbé boca arriba en la cama. Me puse a Sherry en el pecho – todavía me arrepiento – *Lo sentía latir como un segundo corazón*. Con el meñique le acariciaba la cabeza suave y lampiña. Los pitidos de hambre se fueron haciendo más espaciados hasta calmarse, hasta el sueño. Desperté de lado, con el sándwich de algodones vacío a la altura del cuello y Sherry, sin vida, debajo del hombro. [I took it out of the box and lay on my back in bed.

> I placed Sherry on my chest – I still regret it. *I could feel it beating like a second heart*. With my little finger, I gently stroked its soft, featherless head. Its hungry chirps grew fainter, stretching further apart, until they quieted, until sleep came. I woke up on my side, the cotton cradle empty at my neck, and Sherry – lifeless – beneath my shoulder.] [emphasis added]. (CA, p. 63)

Without a doubt, this scene evokes Butler's thought: the exposure of one body to another results in the death of one and the mourning of loss in the other. Moreover, in accordance with the American theorist, those who render others vulnerable can themselves be rendered vulnerable: the protagonists' bodies are also portrayed as fragile, constantly threatened by death in the countryside house. This is the law of living bodies, a shared condition – or *human animality* – that Correa Fiz conveys through the evocative image of the sparrow as the protagonist's "second heart", an image that is also featured on the cover of the 2016 edition.

However, unlike the other stories, here, childhood cruelty is barely perceptible – familiar, part of the realm of "habit". The narrative's distortion of reality shifts, in this case, to the formal aspect: "Lo que queda en el aire" initially suggests a fairy tale convention, only to immediately embrace fictional revisionism (or *cyborg writing*, in Haraway's 1991, p. 300 terms) in an explicit gesture of deconstructing these normative cultural texts. This affects the bucolic vision of childhood and the meaning-making industries that reinforced it, such as Disney with its "children's adaptations" of the grim tales of the Brothers Grimm (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937):

> Los veranos de mi infancia transcurrieron en el campo, en la casona de mis abuelos. Sé que imaginarán una vieja casa estilo Tudor con la fachada de enredadera, un piar amable de pájaros y el olor a pan recién horneado por la mañana. […] sé que imaginarán todo eso pero les advierto: no lo hagan. [The summers of my childhood unfolded in the countryside, in my grandparents' old house. I know you must be picturing a Tudor-style home, its façade covered in ivy, the gentle chirping of birds, and the scent of freshly baked bread in the morning. […] I know you must imagine all that, but I warn you – don't.] (CA, p. 55)

This *little countryside house* is inhabited by grandparents with the physiognomy of "ogros de cualquier cuento de los Grimm" [ogres from any Grimm tale,] who "nos besuqueaban y apretaban –igual que a los cerdos justo antes de sacrificarlos–" [covered us with kisses and squeezed us – just like pigs right before slaughter] and put them to work: there, "se era niño a tiempo parcial" [one was a child only part-time] (CA, pp. 56–57).

4. Conclusion

Thus, Correa Fiz does not construct fictional worlds where cruelty is sealed off, soundproofed from our consciences. As stated in the introduction, horror, according to her, is the most viable rhetorical strategy for rethinking the modern subject and the violence that defines their reality.

In this regard, she first deconstructs the ideal of childhood, thereby highlighting the arbitrariness not only of the liberal humanist notion of the subject but of all the categories that intersect it. Her narrative reveals that cruelty knows no age barriers: in the last story analyzed, the scent of a child is no different from that of a man. Elsewhere, she confirms this: "me puedo imaginar casi todas las cosas de este mundo –cualquier bajeza, violencia o cobardía de las que somos capaces los hombres–" [I can imagine almost everything in this world – any baseness, violence, or cowardice of which we humans are capable] (HJ). Given that these words are spoken by a child and refer to children, their deconstructive potential is amplified.

Thus, Correa Fiz challenges the notion of childhood as the last bastion of human innocence (Rousseau) and calls into question the social order upheld by the values of classical humanism and rationality. The epistemic uncertainty she seeks to provoke – *nothing is what it seems* – weaves through all these stories, brought into this discussion with a single purpose: to instill doubt because, as one of her characters asserts, it is the only thing that still makes us human.

Second, her work precisely invites doubt, and from there, it reconfigures the concept of the "subject" through the lens of cruelty – not as a "pathology" or a deviation from the humanist model but as a product of such a conception of the subject itself. The subject she proposes comes to recognize their corporeal and thus relational existence, exposed to other bodies/matter – capable of harming and being harmed. This is, therefore, a subject aware of their own animal condition, which is not understood as a "bestialization in the sense of a diminished or degraded human state". On the contrary, it "entails rethinking the dimension of the organic and inorganic in interrelations within which anyone recognizable as human may emerge" (Rucovsky, 2018; cf. Quinn, 2020).

Ultimately, it becomes clear that Correa Fiz's work translates into literature Butler's ethical-political commitment to an inclusive, *zoé*-centered community. The ontology of precariousness (Butler, 2004), which clearly underpins her work, confronts both the terrifying reality of violence and the comfortable trajectory of those who believe themselves to be on the side of *bios* – not *zoé* – without yet recognizing their own precarity.

References

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer*. Stanford University Press.

Badinter, E. (1980). *L'Amour en plus : histoire de l'amour maternel (XVII*e*–XX*e *siècle)*. Flammarion.

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life. The power of mourning and violence*. Verso.

Butler, J. (2013). *Dispossession: The performative in the Political. Conversations with Athena Athanasiou*. Polity Press.

Correa Fiz, V. (2016). *La condición animal* [Animal Condition]. Página de Espuma.

Correa Fiz, V. (2022). *Hubo un jardín* [There Was a Garden] (ePub). Página de Espuma.

Cunningham, H. (1999). Los hijos de los pobres. La imagen de la infancia desde el siglo XVII [The Children of the Poor. The Image of Childhood since the 17th Century]. In *Derecho a tener derecho. Infancia, derecho y políticas sociales en América Latina* [[The Right to Have Rights: Childhood, Law, and Social Policies in Latin America] (pp. 251–256). UNICEF-IIN.

Duran Strauch, E. (2015). *Construcción sociohistórica de la infancia moderna* [Sociohistorical Construction of Modern Childhood]. https://aularedim.net/diplomado/docs/M1/M13.pdf

Foucault, M. (1976). *La Volonté de savoir* [The Will to Know]. Gallimard.

Fromm, E. (1964). *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*. Harper & Row Publishers.

Gacinska, W. (2021). Entrevista a Valeria Correa Fiz [Interview with Valeria Correa Fiz]. *Contrapunto*. https://revistacontrapunto.com/entrevista-a-valeria-correa-fiz/

Haraway, D. (1995). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* Routledge.

Llobet, V. (2013). La producción de la categoría "niño-sujeto-de-derechos" y el discurso psi en las políticas sociales en argentina [Producing the "Child as a Rights-Holder": Psi Discourse in Argentine Social Policy]. In V. Llobet (Ed.), *Pensar la infancia desde América Latina: un estado de la cuestión* [Thinking about Childhood from Latin America: a State of the Field] (pp. 9–25). CLACSO.

Magistris, G. (2018). La construcción del "niño como sujeto de derechos" y la agencia infantil en cuestión cuestión [The Construction of the "Child as a Rights-Holder" and the Question of Child Agency]. *Journal de Ciencias Sociales*, *11*, 6–28. https://doi.org/10.18682/jcs.v0i11.819

Marre, D. (2013). Prólogo. De infancias, niños y niñas [Prologue: On Childhoods and Children]. In V. Llobet (Ed.), *Pensar la infancia desde América Latina: un estado de la cuestión* [Thinking about Childhood from Latin America: a State of the Field] (pp. 209–235). CLACSO.

Pietrak, M. (2020). El niño como sujeto de derechos en ¿Quién te creés que sos? de Ángela Urondo Raboy y "Chicos que faltan" de Mariana Enriquez [The Child as a Rights-Holder in *Who Do You Think You Are?* by Ángela Urondo Raboy and "The Missing Children" by Mariana Enríquez]. *Moderna språk*, *2,* 188–204.

Quinn, P. P. (2020). Animalización y deshumanización en dos relatos de Valeria Correa Fiz [Animalization and Dehumanization in Two Stories by Valeria Correa Fiz]. *Entropía*, *1*(1), 85–98.

Rucovsky, M. M. (2018). La vaca que nos mira: vida precaria y ficción [The Cow that Looks at us: Precarious Life and Fiction]. *Revista chilena de literatura* [Chilean Journal of Literature], *97*, 175–197.