



Of Cats and Crones: Hope and Ecofeminist Utopianism in Leonora Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet*

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RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Both in her visual and written productions, surrealist artist Leonora Carrington depicts mythological interspecies communities, where hybrid creatures embody the hope of a peaceful and non-exploratory relationship between humans and animals. In her novella *The Hearing Trumpet* (1974), Carrington employs the literary devices of surrealist aesthetics to envisage the creation of a geriatric and ecofeminist utopia in the wake of environmental catastrophe. This essay draws on Ernst Bloch's notions of 'revolutionary interest' and the 'Not-Yet-Conscious', as well as on Timothy Morton's concept of dark ecology in order to understand the transformative impulse that inspires the older characters at the helm of this narrative to overthrow the patriarchal system that oppresses them within institutional walls and to establish a posthuman, ecological society in a world entering a new Ice Age. It argues that, in projecting a post-apocalyptic vision of a planet devastated by human activity, and by simultaneously addressing questions of social marginalization and intersectionality, *The Hearing Trumpet* shows an early form of ecological awareness that rethinks human-animal interactions while anticipating concerns with ecological justice.

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The current essay employs Ernst Bloch's theory of hope and Timothy Morton's concept of dark ecology for the purpose of analysing how Leonora Carrington's *novella* *The Hearing Trumpet*, written in 1950 and published in 1974, articulates the intersections between social and environmental concerns, as well as its conception of a new world order, where gender, age and species relations are reorganized to reflect an ecofeminist cosmological vision. First, the social condition of the text's protagonist, Marian, as an older woman, will be considered in relation to her human and nonhuman surroundings. Marian's exposure to the destructive effects of overhumanization, on the one hand, and her resistance to being victimized by her family's demonstrations of misogyny, ageism and speciesism, on the other, will be discussed as the key factors behind the transformative impulse that propels her and the older women who inhabit the nursing home towards group insurgency. Ernst Bloch's notions of 'revolutionary interest' and the 'Not-Yet-Conscious' will be discussed throughout this analysis, so as to shed light on how the text represents the conversion of hope into actual change in the fight for environmental causes and social justice. Finally, the end-product of this revolutionary impetus — the new geriatric and ecofeminist utopia that is established at the end of the narrative — will be interpreted in relation to dark ecology's theory of 'ecognosis', the rise of a new form of collective self-awareness, which would lead humanity to rethink its own role in interspecies relations.

The conclusion will include final remarks on Carrington's use of surrealist aesthetics to challenge the notion of human exceptionalism, as well as to project a hopeful picture of a new world transfigured by and born out of climate catastrophe.

1. OPPRESSED WITH CIVILIZATION: MARIAN'S STRUGGLE WITH AGEISM AND OVERHUMANIZATION

The Hearing Trumpet follows ninety-two-year-old Marian Weatherby as she moves from her son's family residence to a nursing home managed by a Christian organization, called the Well of Light Brotherhood, and by its representative figure, the sinister and tyrannical Dr. Gambit. Marian's first-person account of the increasingly bizarre events that unfold from the moment she is given a hearing trumpet by her friend Carmella, to the climate catastrophe that draws the narrative to a close, also outlines her transformation from a dehumanized and oppressed member of society to empowered founder of a new matriarchy and ecological community.

Marian's alterity, as a retired older woman living within a male-dominated, capitalist society, makes her unapologetic attitude and penchant for defying social norms an inconvenience in her son's home. Even though she still considers herself to be "a useful member of society" (Carrington 1) who "give[s] no trouble at all" and keeps herself "clean with no assistance from anybody" (4), Marian is perceived as a nuisance by her family for her unconventional ways. Her grandson Robert believes that, at her age, "people are better off dead" and describes her as a "drooling sack of decomposing flesh", who "can hardly be classified as a human being" (10). Robert's ageism betrays a specific form of social discrimination against the older population which has been regarded by age theorists as a cultural by-product of market societies, where usefulness is equated with productivity and where older citizens are begrudged for their reliance on the younger population, as well as for their dependence on the Social State (Cruikshank 36). The discursive dehumanization of Marian's body also reveals the possible intersections between ageism and speciesism, as seen in hierarchical views of the biosphere that connect animals and the older population on the lower level of the same power structure. This is perceptible in Marian's description of her living conditions within the family household: she lives with her son, "but mostly in the back yard" (Carrington 3), which she shares with her "two cats, a hen, the maid and her two children, some flies and a cactus plant called maguey" (2). According to Marian, she qualifies as little more than an adornment or a background feature in the everyday lives of her family: "The maguey plant, the flies and myself are things which occupy the back yard, we are elements of the landscape and are accepted as such" (4). Marian's living arrangements, sharing the back yard with animals, insects and plants, is reflective of her status as an inferior being in the family structure and a manifestation of her son and daughter-in-law's resentment towards her for her dependence on their financial support.

Marian's ecological views and hierarchical position in her family household suggest that capitalist, anthropocentric society victimizes the older population (and other minority groups), as well as nonhuman organisms, by keeping them outside of the human social space. However, Marian's experience of living in close proximity to other species is not one of shame or debasement. When listing the beings who share the back yard with her, she does not establish any hierarchy that might differentiate her from the other creatures. Despite the ironic undertone of her self-categorization as one of several objects colouring the landscape, her further observations on the house as a living organism demonstrate that, unlike her family, she does not consider the domesticated animals as inferior to — or even detached from — herself, and therefore does not find their company degrading:

Houses are really bodies. We connect ourselves with walls, roofs, and objects just as we hang on to our livers, skeletons, flesh and bloodstream. I am no beauty, no mirror is necessary to assure me of this absolute fact. Nevertheless I have a death grip on this haggard frame as if it were the limpid body of Venus herself. This is true of the back yard and the small room I occupied at that time, my body, the cats, the red hen all my body all part of my own sluggish bloodstream. (13)

Marian's appreciation of the interconnectedness tying all living beings — aestheticized in the omission of commas to separate the various elements that she considers as parts of herself —, as well as her choice of restricting herself to a vegetarian diet, challenge the power structure produced by an anthropocentric discourse that reduces nonhuman animals to mere externalities and that rates older subjects in the "less-than-human" category. Marian's emphasis on the blurred boundaries between herself and the nonhuman organisms surrounding her reveal her attunement to what Morton designates as the "symbiotic real" (Morton, *Humankind* 54): the interdependent relationships established between all lifeforms on the basis of interspecies harmony, a reality from which people have separated themselves with the division of the social space into the human and nonhuman spheres. Marian's communion with her environment transcends anthropocentrism and enacts a return to solidarity, as "the default affective environment of the top layers of Earth's crust" (13–14). For Marian, being dissociated from humanity and equated with other animals is not an attack on her dignity, but a confirmation of her ecological beliefs. Likewise, her final act of rebellion does not consist of a fight to reclaim her position in human society, but to reunite the symbiotic real, where human and nonhuman forms may once again rely on each other fairly.

The gulf separating Marian's life in the back yard from those of the other beings residing in the house is illustrated by the description of the impact that Robert's decision of buying a television for the house had on her relationship with her family:

Robert is not a pleasant character and even as a child was unkind to cats. He also circulates on a motorcycle and introduced a television set into the house. From that time on my visits to front regions of our residence became increasingly rare. If I ever appear there now it is always rather in the nature of a spectre, if I may say so. (Carrington 3)

By indirectly associating Robert's disagreeable character and his ill-treatment of cats with his use of mechanized apparatuses like the motorcycle and the television, Marian suggests that her detachment from her family and people in general, in full contrast with her increased affinity with her pets, are at least partially a consequence of the duality created by the division of the social space in the anthropocentric era, with those who qualify as proper humans, together with their manmade creations, occupying its centre, and those who do not, like Marian, becoming increasingly invisible as they are pushed to the periphery. Marian's withdrawal from human society also signifies, however, her conscious rejection of an industrialist, rationalistic view of the world and an early sign of her desire to form a posthuman, ecological community comprising nearly exclusively nonhuman beings, where interspecies dualisms have been eradicated. Despite her advanced age, Marian still nurtures the dream of moving to Lapland, where she pictures herself living with wolves and severing ties with Humanity, and makes a pledge to never go to America, because she finds it so "frightfully civilized" (17). Similarly, when told she is to move from her son's house to a nursing home, Marian's greatest affliction is not parting from her family, but leaving her cats and hen behind, revealing how disconnected and untrusting of humankind she has become: "People under seventy and over seven are very unreliable if they are not cats. You can 't be too careful" (6).

Marian's dreamlife shows the resentment she feels towards humankind, for its growing disconnection from the environment and for its possessive and utilitarian attitude toward its resources. The narrative often alludes to capitalist society's fixation with productivity and technological progress as the main source of the bigotry that targets both older subjects and nonhuman animals, regarding them as "useless" participants in the flow of modern life. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker refer to the injustices and other damaging consequences of humanity's commitment to "world-making" (13) as 'overhumanization', mentioning that, while "the triumph of human power in shaping reality" (14) has had a positive impact in several areas of human life, namely in tackling diseases and in the construction of democratic societies, its destructive side is just as impactful:

(...) it has also led to the profaning of life through wars, ecological endangerment, and cultural banality. Part of overhumanization is the unjust distribution of its goods – say, medicine, clean water, stable social orders – and the unfair distribution of destructive features of modern societies: pollution, environmental damage, lack of access to hi-tech resources, astonishing poverty. Overhumanization is a term for the inner distortion or flaw of humanism. (14)

If *The Hearing Trumpet* presents nonhuman lifeforms, along with older women, as the main victims of the harmful excesses underlying the project of material progress, it assigns the blame for this unjust and oppressive system to a complex network aligning capitalist forces, patriarchy, and Christianity, all symbolically converging in Lightsome Hall, the nursing home for older women, into which Marian is admitted by her family's decision. The geographical location of the institution is in itself representative of the unfair distribution of destructive forces caused by overhumanization, exemplifying how older subjects may be at greater risk of exposure to environmental damage. Lightsome Hall is situated in an industrial suburb in the outskirts of an unspecified Mexican city, and it is described as having "a certain charm if it did not smell so strongly on wet days of the paper factory, Gomez and Company" (Carrington 23). The nursing home's location in a peripheral and heavily polluted area of the city spatializes old age by conveying the logic of the "disengagement theory", described by literary gerontologist Celeste Loughman as the process of "withdrawal of the older person from the social system" (80). This spatial marginality that ironically deprives the older women of contact with human society while subjecting them to the most harmful effects of overhumanization confirms the inside-outside opposition (Morton, *Humankind* 19) that structures the anthropocentric social space and serves as a form of debasement that reflects the women's less-than-human status in the modern world.

This suggested correspondence between disempowered communities and nonhuman organisms, as the primary victims of the maldistribution of environmental ills also reflects a comprehensive understanding of the concept of environmental justice, which encompasses concerns both with social inequality, planet sustainability and animal welfare, thereby warranting the broader designation of "ecological justice" (Schlosberg 6). It is the convergence of both these forms of environmental awareness that animates the older women's rebellious movement against the intersectional powers of patriarchy and anthropocentrism by the end of the narrative.

The conjunction of these socially dominant forces the women aim to defeat is epitomized in Lightsome Hall and in the coalition in charge of its operation, which comprises the group Well of Light Brotherhood and the sponsor Bouncing Breakfast Cereals Co., a notable American cereal company. In *The Hearing Trumpet*, overhumanization does not emerge as a strictly secular vision of human supremacy within world order, nor is it associated with an exclusively materialistic form of scientism, but as a project in which organized religion, specifically Christianity, plays a complicit part. Even though Dr. Gambit is often shown preaching to the residents about the corruptive effects of succumbing to egotism and greed, his hypocrisy is exposed by his actions and his very management of the institution. Lightsome Hall is supported by private investment, but it employs only three servants, since Gambit assigns the tasks of cooking and cleaning to the residents themselves, as a strategy to save resources, justifying his policy by arguing that working is part of the women's preparation for physical death, their last chance to save their souls for eternal life. When the residents organize a hunger strike to protest this situation, it is ironically stated that Dr. Gambit and his wife "must have found the spectacle (...) a pleasant and economical way of keeping down expenses in the kitchen" (Carrington 122). Considering the poor living conditions at Lightsome Hall, it is suggested that Dr. Gambit keeps at least part of the funds allocated to the Well of Light Brotherhood for himself, engaging in a manipulative rhetoric to persuade the residents

and their family members of his pure and devout intentions and thus serving as a narrative device to satirize the moral corruptibility of religious, patriarchal institutions and their hidden collusion with the exploitative mechanisms of the capitalist system that they criticize.

This particular episode in Marian's journey towards emancipation shows how the responsibility for the positivist project of "overhumanization" is assigned in the *novella* to Man, not as a "universal", gender-neutral representative of humankind, but as a distinctively white, male, young, middle-class, heterosexual, healthy subject — embodied by Gambit in the narrative —, who places himself on top of a hierarchical scale from whence he alienates and exploits both his anthropomorphic and zoomorphic 'Others'. In this regard, the mistreatment of the older women in Lightsome Hall is yet another manifestation of the ironic proximity between human and nonhuman animals in a capitalist system: both are commodified, disposable bodies, targetable for market exploitation. The women who live in Lightsome Hall get to retain their place in the institution in exchange for unpaid labour, a contractual bond that reflects the impact of their advanced age on their low rating as human capital (Foucault 225). If overhumanization has brought profit and productivity to the fore of human concerns, then old age, connoted with idleness and inactivity, is to be prized accordingly.

2. (DAY)DREAMING OF LAPLAND: THE 'NOT-YET-CONSCIOUS' AND THE RISE OF THE UTOPIAN VISION

Even though Marian's admission into the nursing home seems at first to worsen her social position, as she transitions from a situation of family neglect to one of manipulative abuse, the protagonist finds within this community the same rebellious spirit she had previously shown and which will enable the rise of a new world order by the end of the narrative. The hope of overturning patriarchy and bringing to life a geriatric, ecofeminist, transspecies community seems to inhabit Marian's mind on a subliminal level from the beginning of the story, emerging disconnectedly in her discourse and imagination, until it reveals itself through her encounters with the strange reality of Lightsome Hall and, especially, with the looming figure of Abbess Doña Rosalinda.

Marian's (as well as the remaining older women's) journey of increased awareness and growing empowerment mirrors what is described by Ernst Bloch in his work *The Principle of Hope*, as a transformation occurring within human consciousness from a state of "forward dawning" or "Not-Yet-Conscious" (77) to the rise of a "revolutionary interest" (95), which drives people to reach for a vision of utopia. According to Bloch, the future form of the 'Not-Yet-Conscious', an anticipatory utopian appetite which "has not even broken through as a word, let alone as a concept", reveals itself when the human mind is not dwelling on what has been, or is not fixed on the static dimension of the known world, but instead contemplates the possibilities afforded by "venturing beyond" (6). The 'Not-Yet-Conscious' is born out of "expectant emotions arising from hunger, that which possibly diverts and fatigues us, or which possibly also activates and galvanizes us towards the goal of a better life" (76). Bloch states that this feeling of something that is lacking eventually leads to projections of a blissful future by means of daydreams, and not night-dreams, since the latter are regressive and evoke what has been repressed, whereas the former express a desire for self-expansion and paint the hopeful picture of a world yet to be.

Marian's experience of the 'Not-Yet-Conscious' matches Bloch's description as she first gets a glimpse of the utopian reality she longs to build and live in by means of a daydream, after realizing that her family is planning on admitting her into Lightsome Hall. Marian is sitting in the back yard, "crushed with despair" (Carrington 15), when her imagination wanders into a diffused world that she first identifies as England, her native country and therefore as a symbol of her past, only to realize it is some unknown and not-yet-visited landscape after all. In this dreamlike state, Marian sees herself as the beautiful Snow Queen of the *Tales of Hans Christian Anderson*, "strong and happy" and with hair "like cat's fur" (15–16). She also meets "the Sphinx of the North with crackling white fur and diamonds on the ten claws of every foot" (16), who gives her "a mathematical problem" which she admits she cannot solve, although she somehow feels she has been trying to do so for several years (15). Marian realizes that this riddle has for long existed but remained untapped in her unconscious mind, only now revealing itself and infusing her with a galvanizing feeling, much like Bloch's daydreams.

This picture of a Goddess with animal-like features, as well as Marian's own physical comparison to a cat, are complemented by the description of an idyllic forest, "full of wild anemones, (...)

flowers, hundreds and thousands of wild flowers all over the ground under the trees, (...) [with] no smell, but with a presence just like a perfume and quite as obsessive" (16), which Marian pictures herself entering, leaving behind the memory of her presumably deceased husband. In this daydream, the masculine voice that continuously undermines Marian's confidence and hopeful intentions and which fades away as she approaches the woods, is representative of the dominant social forces repressing her revolutionary interest and of the internalized pressure to conform to these norms, which she now chooses to ignore. Marian's daydream thus foreshadows the geriatric, ecofeminist world order that will come to life by the end of the narrative, anticipating the blurring of the lines that separate human from nonhuman animals, as well as signalling her first contact with the half-woman/half-animal Goddess that will rise to power in this new society and that will enable Marian's liberation from her male-dominated life.

Marian's dream entry into the forest, which happens at the exact moment she is awakened from her reverie by her son, seems to unleash from her subconscious the revolutionary interest that Bloch theorizes, as her attitude to moving to the nursing home begins to change and as more signs of the upcoming cosmic and social transformation reveal themselves to her. Marian's anguish is turned into hope and self-assurance — "I had too many things to find out before falling stark into the grave" (19) — and her inconveniently large hearing trumpet, a gift from her friend Carmella to serve as a hearing aid, suddenly reminds her of Angel Gabriel, "although (...) he is supposed to blow his and not listen through it, that is, according to the bible, on the last day when humanity rises to ultimate catastrophe" (20), indirectly proclaiming Marian as the Angel who will herald the rise of the new world, in the wake of climate catastrophe. Revealingly, when packing her bag before leaving to the nursing home, Marian purposefully chooses to fill her trunk with items that would be useful in Lapland and not, presumably, in a long-term care institution, such as a screw-driver, a hammer, nails, self-woven ropes, strips of leather, needles, threads and matches. Marian's decision of packing the same construction tools she planned on taking to Lapland reveals the extent to which the recently dawned utopian impulse is informing her process of decision-making, encouraging her to perceive the nursing home as a place she can reimagine and rebuild with the use of her own hands, so as to recreate the object of her most profound desires. Marian's initial dismay at the prospect of institutionalization has thus been replaced by industriousness and by a feeling of empowerment that conveys the rise of the revolutionary impulse within her.

In the nursing home, these tokens and premonitions intensify and elicit the formation of a collective force of insurgency among the female residents who come to recognize the principles and living signs of a posthuman world-balance already existing under the surface of Lightsome Hall, as well as the workings of a mystical power operating unbeknownst to them inside the walls of the institution, driving them towards this new dream of the future. Marian's favourite spot in Lightsome Hall is the bee pond, a secluded space in the home's large gardens. Marian's kinship with the bees and the frequent gathering of the older women around the pond anticipate the rise of the Queen Bee and of the upcoming matriarchal community. However, it is only when Marian comes across the eerie painting of medieval Spanish nun Doña Rosalinda that her consciousness begins to awaken. She discovers that the other residents at Lightsome Hall have also had vivid daydreams of a "whispering birch forest somewhere in the North" (57) and that they have all read an ancient scroll, containing the written account of the heretic Abbess' quest to recover the Holy Grail, which she believed had belonged to Mother Venus before being appropriated by Christian mythology and stolen by the Crusades. This new ecofeminist, pagan perspective on the myth of creation to which Marian and the other residents adhere and in which Venus often appears as a Queen Bee, seems to be elicited by reading the ancient piece of Literature that contains the nun's story, matching Bloch's theory that Art and cultural artifacts may aesthetically encode the "Real-Possible" (144) that precedes the utopian vision and contribute to induce this image of the future in the minds of those who come in contact with them.

Inspired by Doña Rosalinda's story and moved by a seemingly invisible force, Marian and her friends take on the challenge of retrieving the Holy Grail in order to return it to the Goddess, converting a recurrent trope in surrealist art into a symbol of "an alternative to pious, patriarchal Christianity in the form of a cosmology dominated by goddesses, animals, and alchemical transmutation, (...) an anti-patriarchal and anti-anthropocentric goal" (Noheden 245). Within the feminist world of *The Hearing Trumpet*, the Christian deity is regarded as a "Revengeful Father God" (Carrington 146) and Christianity itself as a dishonest project — "Everybody knows that the whole bible is inaccurate" (64) —, which is aimed at empowering and bolstering m/

Man's position in the hierarchical pyramid of earthly beings. By contrast, there is the suggestion of an ancestral spiritual connection between Nature and femininity, with the emphasis on the figure of Venus, and a recurrent analogy between the community of older women and a beehive, showing what some feminist theorists would criticize as the gender essentialism typical of early ecofeminist discourse,¹ of which Carrington has been considered a prominent figure (Eburne and McAra 5). However, this seemingly totalizing perspective on the concepts of Nature and the feminine is also consistent with surrealism's reproach of scientism and with its commitment to representing alternative scenarios of interhuman and human-animal coexistence.

The portrayal of Venus as a shape-shifting figure, who alternately appears as the Medieval Spanish Nun and as a bee, may therefore signify not a naturalization of the female body, but "trans-corporeality", the entanglement of the human and non-human worlds and the materialist notion that "the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from «the environment»" (Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal" 238). In their exploration of "the continuities between humans and non-human life forms" (Roberts 218) and in their representation of zoomorphic hybrids that dissolve Man/Nature and male/female binaries, the surrealist aesthetics employed in the *novella* subvert the master/slave logic of anthropocentric interhuman and interspecies relationships, suggesting that, because human bodies are inseparable from their biological relations, environmentalism and social justice cannot be dissociated. Women emancipation must happen in tandem with the liberation of all of m/Man's Others, including the nonhuman, which explains the suggested correspondences between the diligence shown both by the bees in their daily work, and by the women in their fight for freedom.

This implied correlation between the different forms of oppression of women, older subjects, and nonhumans within the same logic of domination becomes clearer in *The Hearing Trumpet* as the events unfold. In the days prior to ecological catastrophe, Marian and her friends, moved by Doña Rosalinda's rebellious spirit, organize a hunger strike to protest the exploitation they are daily subjected to, fulfilling their revolutionary interest and overturning the prevailing power balance:

"(...) we have absolutely no intention of letting ourselves be intimidated by your beastly routine ever again. Although freedom has come to us somewhat late in life, we have no intention of throwing it away again. Many of us have passed our lives with domineering and peevish husbands. When we were finally delivered of these we were chivvied around by our sons and daughters who not only no longer loved us, but considered us a burden and objects of ridicule and shame. Do you imagine in your wildest dreams that now we have tasted freedom we are going to let ourselves be pushed around once more?" (Carrington 122)

Even though the residents' insurgency and the mystical events that accompany it do not appear to be related to the catastrophe that gives rise to a new Ice Age, this act of defiance represents the empowering moment the women take charge of their lives and acquire the necessary freedom to fulfil their utopian dream of a posthuman community, where animals and people, mostly women, coexist peacefully. The event that triggers the changing of the Earth's poles and, subsequently, the melting of the Arctic ice caps and the forming of new ones in the Equator region, is left unspecified, although it is suggested by Carmella that it was "all the fault of that dreadful atom bomb they were so proud of" (126). By implying that the atomic bomb has precipitated climate catastrophe — despite not offering any scientific explanation —, the text exposes the destructive forces of the Anthropocene and of risk society, where "the state of emergency threatens to become the normal state" (Beck 79), criticizing scientism as well as a positivist faith in linear human development through science and technology as danger-fraught fantasies that have legitimized Man's proprietary relationship to the environment.

3. INSIDE THE BEEHIVE: DARK ECOLOGY AND THE NEW DEMOCRACY OF BEINGS

With a large percentage of the world population dead and the survivors severely weakened, humanity is left at the mercy of the elements and of wild animals. This is not entirely perceived as a tragedy by the miraculously saved older women, whose recently dawned ecofeminist

¹ For more on the deconstruction of gendered dualisms and on the denaturalization of the female body, see, for example, Alaimo (Bodily, 2010), especially chapter one, titled "Bodily Natures", and Gaard ("Ecofeminism Revisited", 2011).

thought inspires them to find hope in the prospect of a world delivered from the ideology of human exceptionalism and where nonhumans are finally set free from oppression, going so far as to suggest a sense of karmic retribution for the harm people, particularly powerful men, had done to their surroundings:

“I really believe the poles are changing places,” said Carmella. (...) “Naturally elephants living in Africa and India would have to grow long fur and become mammoths again, to survive the cold. (...) I feel most upset about the animals. Happily most of them have fur that grows quickly, and carnivorous animals would have plenty of human beings to eat. (...) I must say that I do feel it is poetic justice if all those horrible governments are frozen stark in their respective governmental palaces or parliaments. Actually they always sit in front of microphones, so there is a good chance that they might all get frozen to death. (...) Men are very difficult to understand. (...) Let’s hope they all freeze to death. I am sure it would be very pleasant and healthy for human beings to have no authority whatever.” (Carrington 125–126)

The triumph of Marian’s originally deviant biocentric perspective, which relativized humanity’s position in interspecies relations, is therefore accomplished, much to the satisfaction of Carmella’s anarchic and vengeful spirit. Contrary to the few other remaining people, the older women thrive under the new circumstances, as the most recent changes allow them to carry out their revolutionary impulse and to build a transspecies commune where the (now completely destroyed) nursing home used to be, subversively locating the last hope for humankind’s long-term survival in a site commonly associated with notions of finitude, death and decline and thereby challenging culturally prevalent ageist views. For Marian, the forming of ice caps in Mexico allows her to recreate the dream of going to Lapland, joining the Snow Queen and living among the wolves, liberating her from a life ruled by the social expectations traditionally imposed on those experiencing late life.

Planetary disaster shatters the illusion of human as a transcendental category and destroys interspecies hierarchies, paving the way for the rise of a more productive form of post-anthropocentrism and opening “an ontological gap” for other species to “come galloping” (Braidotti 67). In Noheden’s words, “the reversal of the poles is cultural as well as geographical, and bound up with a new conceptualisation of human–animal relations and even of what humanity is and ought to be” (248). The *novella* thereby formulates a generative narrative of quasi-extinction by suggesting that the decentralization of humankind in the biosphere will bring about the dissolution of the boundaries between Man and his multiple “Others”, both older women and nonhuman animals, empowering them to emancipate themselves from exploitative relationships and to create a posthuman community, based on transspecies empathy (Braidotti 78).

The Hearing Trumpet’s surrealist conception of ecological utopia and of the path that leads to it is consistent with Timothy Morton’s notion of dark ecology, in that it suggests that in order to achieve ecological awareness, humanity must first experience an “ontological mystery” (Morton, *Dark* 160), a potentially painful “attunement to ecological reality” (159) through the disruption of normative concepts that have been crystalized in political and philosophical discourse and taken for granted for a long period of time. This profound transformation would eventually force humans to reposition themselves as a species in relation to nonhuman beings and to adjust to a new notion of coexistence between all living creatures:

Ecological reality requires an awareness that at first has the characteristics of tragic melancholy and negativity, concerning inextricable coexistence with a host of entities that surround and penetrate us, but which evolves paradoxically into an anarchic, comedic sense of coexistence. (160)

From the beginning of the narrative, Marian displays a deep ecological awareness which, however, does not become truly transformative until catastrophe hits the planet, seemingly as a dramatic result of humanity’s *hubris*, helping her to accomplish her Blochian revolutionary interest. As the planet engulfs itself in Morton’s symbolic darkness, the depressive stage in which humankind is forced to face the consequences of its “anthropocentric mania” (125), Marian too undergoes a ritualistic transformation that awakens her to the productive nature of her ecological mindset. Marian’s communion with the Goddess and consequently with

the ecofeminist utopia the latter will impose, entails the completion of a ritualistic sacrifice in a cave under the ruins of the institution. Marian, like the other residents before her, must step into a fuming cauldron that is being stirred by the spectral figure of her younger self, and experience temporary death, being then reborn into a merged, three-faced version of herself, the Queen Bee and Abbess Doña Rosalinda. When describing her new self, Marian states that she is “as spry as a mountain goat” and that she “could see through the dark like a cat” (Carrington 140). Marian’s metamorphosis and newly developed sense of selfhood then mirrors the process of ‘ecognosis’ described by Morton, namely in the way that she is forced to confront her own mortality. Morton claims that one of the key causes of environmental degradation are humanity’s endeavours to cheat or deny its own demise. Dark ecology, on the other hand, demands precisely the acceptance of the “truth of death” (Morton, *Dark* 160) through the experience of ‘ecognosis’, an extreme form of ontological crisis without which it would not be possible to achieve a truly revolutionary ecological consciousness. By facing her younger self and willingly plunging into the certainty of death, Marian comes to terms with her own finitude and accepts her cosmic insignificance, completing the first stage of the process towards a deeper ecological awareness.

Additionally, and perhaps more significantly, Marian’s and the other women’s transformation seems to blur interspecies borders as they come to physically embody this communion with the animal world that is spiritually mediated through the figure of the Goddess. This physical and spiritual metamorphosis experienced by the women symbolically captures that which Braidotti considers to be one of the productive aspects of the posthuman predicament: the process of “becoming-animal” (66) or, in other words, the recognition that humanity lives and thrives on the basis of its symbiotic relations with other species. The posthuman community that animals and women (and any combination thereof) establish after the conclusion of this transformative process is the ultimate manifestation of this new collective awareness. The group first composed of crones and their cats, is soon expanded to include a herd of goats, whom the women at once feed and extract milk from, in a symbiotic, non-exploitative relationship that symbolizes the compassion and solidarity underlying this new form of human-animal cohabitation. The women’s diet is mainly comprised of mushrooms and wheat, since they refuse to hunt the wild animals roaming the abandoned streets of the city, believing that “the New Ice Age should not be initiated with the slaughter of our fellow beings” (Carrington 142). The interdependence that governs the relationships established in the group therefore bespeak not an anthropocentric community, where nonhuman organisms are reduced to mere commodities and where, “for the sake of the whole, parts might be left to die” (Morton, “*Queer*” 277), but a collectivity built upon a commitment to peaceful coexistence and mutual appreciation.

In addition to the goats, the women also take in a pack of wolves, which includes a wolf fathered by a lamb, and a hybrid, wolf-headed woman, named after the Egyptian God Anubis, the ultimate embodiment of the new form of human-animal interconnectedness.² These anthropomorphic and zoomorphic hybrids aestheticize that which queer ecology describes as the liquidity of all life forms, the “nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment” (Morton, “*Queer*” 275–276). In their grotesqueness, these figures symbolically capture the interconnectivity tying all life forms in the symbiotic real. The radical prospect of a transspecies democracy in which wolves mate with lambs and live in cohabitation with goats, bees and people, on a strictly vegetarian diet in which all beings thrive by association, instead of by feeding on each other, is the first glimpse of the society of the future, which Marian hopes, “will be an improvement on humanity” (Carrington 158). Her expectations concerning a world in which animals have been fully liberated and humanity has both rethought and redeemed itself from its destructive past, mirrors the spiritual shift that accompanies ‘ecognosis’: a transition from the “dark-uncanny” to the “dark-sweet” (Morton, *Dark* 5), the painful process of reckoning with oneself that humankind must undergo in order to reach a new and harmonious understanding of environmental balance and interspecies coexistence.

2 Images of human-animal hybrids and interspecies relations are recurrent in Carrington’s work, not only in her paintings and illustrations but also in her fictional texts. In the short story “The Debutante”, for example, the shy protagonist befriends a hyena at the zoo. Wishing to avoid a ball in her honor, the girl asks the hyena to dress up in her clothes and to go to the party in her place. In “The Seventh Horse”, a horse-woman, named Hevalino, saves a man from his evil wife. For more on Carrington’s portrayals of blurred interspecies boundaries, see Levitt (1996).

The rise of this geriatric, ecofeminist utopia at the end of the narrative, in a world where a group of older women are among the few human survivors, where Venus (or the Queen Bee) has taken possession of the Holy Grail and recovered her stolen power from the Christian God and where human and nonhuman organisms not only coexist democratically but have converged to the point of erasing the lines between species, is the ultimate fulfilment of Marian's revolutionary interest and the physical manifestation of the hopeful, 'not-yet-conscious' ideas that gradually reveal themselves to her in the first half of the narrative. Marian's growing ecological awareness starts as an appreciation of the interdependence tying all life forms and as a feeling of solidarity towards animals, born out of a perception of shared injustice. Subsequently it evolves into a utopian impulse, an active search for a posthuman, ecological order. This process is consistent with Ernst Bloch's idea of forward dawning, of an unconscious urge that pushes humanity forward, towards the accomplishment of an ideal vision of the future, whilst also conveying the transformative and painful process of 'ecognosis', the metaphysical transformation which would lead humankind to reposition itself in the social space. This now fully dawned and accomplished dream of a utopian future dissolves interspecies dualisms and replaces them with an awareness of the vital bonds that connect all living organisms in the biosphere, outlining a new political model for posthuman coexistence.

Reading *The Hearing Trumpet* in relation to both Bloch's and Morton's theories highlights the role of hope and the imagination as the characters' driving forces throughout the narrative, thereby also foregrounding the text's proposition that, for a truly productive form of ecological awareness to be achieved, not only must the relationship between humans and nonhumans as well as humanity's position in the cosmos be radically rethought and reconceptualized, the very notion of 'human nature' as unequivocally distinct from other forms of organic life must be deconstructed. Post-anthropocentrism must therefore also embrace the posthuman and awaken to a "nature-culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self" (Braidotti 65), brought to life in the *novella* in the shape of interspecies hybridization. In its precursory concern with questions of intersectionality and ecological justice, *The Hearing Trumpet* exposes "the ecocidal mythologies of techno-modernity" (Oziewicz 9) that have defined the Anthropocene, encoding the tenets of a new environmental approach driven by the prospect of social revolution and the disruption of artificial interspecies lines.

CONCLUSION

The successful implementation of a geriatric, ecofeminist community at the end of *The Hearing Trumpet* signifies hope for a post-anthropocentric world, which, however, does not completely exclude the possibility of ultimate human extinction, since it is suggested that there are nearly no survivors, apart from the older women themselves. The text hence raises the question of what exactly may be classified as hope in ecological thought. In this respect, for Marian and her friends, the prospect of a planet freed from human exploitation is the promise of a brighter future, thereby complying with the posthumanist premise "that human beings live in a more-than-human world" (Curry 72), and emphasizing the intrinsic worth of all life forms, regardless of their value or utility in a market economy.

The characteristically surrealistic representations of human-animal hybridity and of nonviolent interspecies cohabitation compel the reader to think critically about the discourse of human exceptionalism, the symbiotic relations between living organisms in the biosphere and the complexity of a social system built upon uneven interhuman and interspecies power structures. By recurrently emphasizing Marian's age and gender identities and the different forms of oppression and destitution that consequently victimize her, as determinant factors for the rise of her revolutionary impulse (the sense of "lack" that Bloch refers to in his work), the text suggests that a truly transformative ecological awareness would also necessarily entail profound social reform. In making use of the formal and creative possibilities afforded by speculative fiction in order to project a future moulded by environmental catastrophe, and to problematize the patriarchal and anthropocentric system that has framed human activity in the era of the Anthropocene, *The Hearing Trumpet* contributes to the ongoing discussion among eco-critics regarding the role played by storytelling and the imagination in raising ecological awareness without losing the mobilizing thread of hope.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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