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Towards a Diffractive Reading of the Folkloric Archive: Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* and the Wild Pedagogies

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Abstract "Archive" comes from the Ancient Greek ἀρχεῖον, "house of the ruler": inside, we find what corresponds to the normative framework; outside, everything that dissents and is not conform. This occurs for the heteropatriarchal archive of intimate partner violence, as it is explored by Carmen Maria Machado in *In the Dream House* (2019), and for the archive of folklore, ruled by each (re-)teller's framework. What if we regain the oral dimension of the tale tradition in a diffractive perspective? What if the reader entangles with the text, co-creating a new meaning? In this paper, I propose to shed a light on the possibilities of diffracting the folkloric archive, to shift the archival-ruled narratives in the direction of self-representation and *empoderamiento* for the subjectivities expelled from the archival narratives. Two are the paths proposed: firstly, situated literary retellings, with a focus on Machado's *memoir*; and secondly, wild pedagogy and slow scholarship methodologies and practices, enabling the experience of the reader to entangle with and diffract the tales' narratives.

Keywords diffractive reading; fairy tales; archive; oral tradition; wild pedagogies

Many archives of folklore have been and continuously are collected by researchers and enthusiasts, societies and institutions. Based on physical or online libraries, they may include different forms and genres of the popular tradition (costums, folk songs and tales, proverbs, celebrations…), a specific social-cultural area and historical period, or traditions from all over the world.[1] In this essay, I refer to those archives aimed at collecting specifically tale-genres of folk traditions: folk tales, fairy tales, folk motifs. One of the main examples of this conception of folkloric archive is the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* organised by Stith Thompson (see Thompson 1966), a six-volume "Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends". Based on Antti Aarne's index of European folk types (1910), Thompson's index was published in the 1930s, re-edited in the 1950s, and eventually expanded by Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004 (known as the ATU (Aarne-Thomspon-Uther) index of folk types). It is one of the biggest collections of folk motives, classified by numbered 'types' that refer to one or more specific tales. Another kind of archive is, for example, the fairy tales' collection organised by the Brothers Grimm (1812), who claimed to have collected their stories directly from the voice of the German folk. Nevertheless, this romantic-nationalistic folk pureness has been put into question by folklorists: it is common opinion that the Grimms had few informants coming from the middle-class, besides strongly reworking the tales themselves as collectors (see Haase 2008: 579; Warner 1995: 188-193).

According to Carmen Maria Machado,[2] though, the crucial problem of archives is that they are not neutral spaces, but always shaped by the power structures that host and collect their contents.

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[1] See for example the institutional archive of the Folklore Society (https://folklore-society.com/about/the-folklore-society-library-and-archives/), or the open source collection proposed by Heide Anne Heiner (https://www.surlalunefairytales.com/books.php).

[2] Carmen Maria Machado is a queer author living in the U.S., with Austrian and Cuban origins. She is author of short stories, essays, criticism and poetry, a graphic novel (*The Low, Low Woods*, 2020), and three literary works: *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017), a collection of short stories mixing gothic, gender violence, fatphobia, popular culture, folklore and urban legends; *In the Dream House* (2019), that we are going to explore in the present essay; and *A Brief and Fearful Star,* to be published in 2024. Among her genealogy of feminist/intersectional literary influences, we find Roxane Gay, who explored the topic of fatphobia in her autobiography *Hunger* (2017) (see Machado 2017), and Angela Carter, whose *Bloody Chamber* (1979; see Carter 2006) is recalled in *The Dream House*.

> The word archive, Jacques Derrida tells us, comes from the ancient Greek ἀρχεῖον: arkheion, "the house of the ruler". […] What is placed in or left out of the archive is a political act, dictated by the archivist and the political context in which she lives. (Machado 2019: 2)

As Carolin Jesussek points out, "For Machado, the institutional archive, or the "house of the ruler" […] is a haunted place from the very beginning. She starts her memoir by criticizing the archive as a biased, heteropatriarchal site" (Jesussek 2024: 190). Indeed, if archives are situated under specific systems of power, such as heteropatriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism, they could not but be full of heteropatriarchal, colonial, racist, and capitalistic models and archetypes. Thereby, outside these normative frameworks, some experiences and identities remain unrepresented.

> The late queer theorist José Esteban Munoz pointed out that "queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence […]. When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present". What gets left behind? Gaps where people never see themselves or find information about themselves. Holes that make it impossible to give oneself a context. Crevices people fall into. Impenetrable silence. (Machado 2020: 3)

In this essay, I propose two possible paths towards a diffractive reading[3] of the folkloric archive, since, as a "house of the ruler" itself, it is layered with structures of power and oppression that erase the possibility of certain kinds of non-conforming expressions, but also open, consequently, possible paths of emancipation and e*mpoderamiento*[4], as we are going to explore through the diffraction patterns. The first path will focus on the possibility of diffracting the archive via situated retellings. Folk/fairy tales' retellings are considered here as experiences of diffraction, since they enlighten normative elements in the original tales and often propose different narratives of *empoderamiento*. As a case study, I will focus on Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House.* Published in 2019 in the U.S., Machado's work is a *memoir*[5] based upon her

[3] Cfr. §1.

[4] The Spanish word *empoderamiento* is used in feminist contexts to retell and reappropriate the concept of "empowerment", which has been informed by neoliberal discourses, thus losing its radical meaning.

[5] Though, the genre of this work is ambiguous, going from the *memoir* to the fairy tale, from the novel to the short story and essay.

personal experience within an abusive lesbian relationship. The retelling is acted by picking up stories and motifs from the archive of folklore and popular culture, in order to deconstruct heterosexual and gender biases attached to the archive of intimate partner violence in the mainstream narratives. The second path followed by the present essay will consider the possibility of subjectivising fairy tales via an experiential form of diffractive reading based on the oral tradition, oral practices and the personal experience of the readers, as it may be explored via the wild pedagogy methodologies. I will consider, as a case study and point of departure, the "wild swimming methodology" proposed by scholars Vivienne Bozalek and Tamara Shefer (2022).

Though, before focusing on the case studies, I will make some elucidations about the methodology, understanding diffractive reading as a multifaced tool for reading and intra-acting with texts.

1. An overview on diffractive reading: from physical concepts to the folkloric archive

The concept of *diffractive reading* emerged in the context of New Materialisms and Posthumanism.[6] First used by biologist and philosopher Donna Haraway (1992), the concept of diffractive reading has been elaborated afterwards by physicist Karen Barad (2007). The metaphor comes from the physical phenomenon of diffraction, which is usually associated to the wave behaviour.

> […] diffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction. Diffraction can occur with any kind of wave: for example, water waves, sound waves, and light waves all exhibit diffraction under the right conditions. (Barad 2007: 74)

Besides, not only waves but also matter at a quantic level ("electrons, neutrons, atoms, and other forms of matter", Barad 2007: 82) may show the diffraction phenomenon, when "sent through a special diffraction grating" (Merten 2021: 3). That is the case of the two-slit experiment, where quants sent through a two-slit device behave once as matter, once as waves, in the last

[6] As theoretical-philosophical currents emerged at the end of the 20th century, both New Materialism and Posthumanism aim at deconstructing the great dualisms upon which western philosophies are based: human/non-human, mind/matter, and, from a feminist viewpoint, man/woman.

case producing a diffraction pattern. In the two-slit experiment, the role of the observer seems to be crucial for determining the behaviour of quantic matter as waves or as particles, showing that the observer has an influence on what they are measuring. Thereby, the observer is not in the condition of being totally objective on the observed phenomenon. To Barad, this is "a prime example of an onto-epistemological entanglement" (Merten 2021: 3), which they call "diffraction" since "it is centred around the physical phenomenon of 'real diffraction'" (Merten 2021: 3). That carries, consequently, as Bryld and Lykke would remark, a critique of

> the vantage point of the scientific world view in general, and positivist epistemology in particular: the dissociated gaze, which can command and keep everything under control […] placed in the most favourable position for paying the godtrick of modern science (Haraway 1992: 189). The 'God's eye view' (Diamond and Orenstein 1990: 264) […] sustains the illusion that it is possible to act from an allegedly omniscient and omnipotent epistemological position. (Bryld & Lykke 1999: 4)

Nonetheless, diffractive onto-epistemological entanglements of the observer and the observed phenomenon are "momentary situations" (Merten 2021: 4), since "space, time and matter do not exist prior to the intra-actions that reconstitute entanglements" (Merten 2021: 4). Intra-action is to Barad a form of interaction where each participant's action matters, which create all together the "inextricable configurations" (Merten 2021: 4; Barad 2007) of an onto-epistemological entanglement.

To Barad, diffraction enables to exit our habit of thinking knowledge as the reflexion of sameness: "diffractions are attuned to differences – differences that our knowledge-making practices make and the effects they have on the world" (Barad 2007: 72). The importance of valorising difference against sameness is crucial to a feminist critique of knowledge, where knowledge is conceived as a patriarchal reproduction of normativity.

As Merten writes, if "the scientific observer is seen to be diffracted with the observed phenomenon as in Barad's wider sense of diffraction […] then diffractive reading is really the entangled (co-)creation of matter by observing or reading it" (Merten 2021: 6). Observing a phenomenon, such as the act of reading something, means to co-create it, from Barad's intra-active viewpoint. Diffractive reading is a way of reading that creates something new in the intra-action between the text and the reader. As Merten remarks, "Diffractive reading is not a reflexion of the represented in an ideal summary or copy but

rather the (situational) creation of something new next to it, entangled with it" (Merten 2021: 7).

Furthermore, diffractive reading eliminates any possible hierarchy between the text and the reader: "Diffractive reading is either the non hierarchising entangling of two texts […] or the (co-)creating of matter by making it readable" (Merten 2021: 7). Therefore, diffractive reading is an "interfering, participatory" way of reading the text (Merten 2021: 2), where reading is conceived as "part and parcel of the text, of the world, of the matter that is read" (Merten 2021: 1).

Besides than a tool for critical textual reading, diffractive reading may also be applied 'practically' as a way of reading that may be entangled with orality and folk/fairy tales' oral tradition. Indeed, diffraction may be done 'orally' through the reader's experience, which, once as a listener, was at the centre of the oral transmission of folk and fairy tales. In fact, it is common opinion among folklorists that fairy tales originated and were initially disseminated orally.[7] Even if the issue is quite more complex,[8] what is particularly interesting for the purpose of our discourse is that orality seems to have something in common with diffraction. In the oral tradition, indeed, the entanglement created by performer and audience, audience and performance, determines the pattern of the performance itself. In the oral domain, the folkloric archive remains very much connected to the experience of the listeners (which would be, in the written form, that of the readers). This chance to entangle orally and collectively with the text, starting from the personal experience of the reader to co-create the meaning of the text, recalls the approach of diffractive reading. In the oral dimension of folklore, indeed, there is what we could call a diffractive dimension: as folklorist Donald Haase states, "Oral-tradition lore is both particle and wave, never solely one or the other" (Haase 2008: 711). As in Barad's entanglements the role of the observer has an influence on the observed phenomena, similarly

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[7] See Zipes (2013: 2; 21). Besides having an oral origin, Zipes' argument is that the fairy tale, even when transposed into print (from the 16th century on), still remained a very fluid genre, and never resigned to the attempt, by literary authors, to fixate it according to their social and cultural values (considered as bourgeois and patriarchal; see Zipes 1979).

[8] Recent debates have brought up the hypothesis of a print-only path for fairy tale origins, dissemination and tradition (see Bottigheimer 2006; 2007). Generally, folklorists agree on the difficulty of defining a specific history for the folk/fairy tale's origins and tradition, since "together, oral and literary tales form one immense and complex genre because they are inextricably dependent on one another" (Zipes 2013: 3).

> [o]ral traditions depend largely upon the face-to-face relationships shared by performer and audience. An audience's attentive comprehension and feedback vitally contribute to the oral-traditional performance; in turn, a skilled verbal artist adapts his or her performance to the context and the responses of those present. (Haase 2008: 711)

In this essay, I would propose to consider orality as a tool to engage with folk and fairy tale literature via a diffractive reading approach, to explore and signify personal and collective experiences through the tales. In order to reappropriate them through diffraction as a way for empowering (*empoderar*) and giving meaning to our experience of the world – especially as socially disempowered subjectivities – I propose to take into consideration the implications of both the lines of the debate on fairy tales' dissemination. On the one hand, indeed, tradition via orality highlights the importance of subjectivising the story through personal experience, which happens via the oral retelling and re-listening. Thereby, structural power biases (such as class, gender and race) would be flattened: fairy tales are for all, and the fact that each one is able to be their teller or protagonist makes of them a precious means for social transformation (see Zipes 1979). On the other hand, though, tradition via print pathways brings up the issues of moralization and spreading of normative values through the tales, as they are determined by the cultural archive – or "house of the ruler" – from the socio-historical and cultural context in which they are put into the written form. If tales are told from a structural power viewpoint, listeners and/or readers would never be able to *empoderar* themselves through the experience of reading/listening, but the normativity of this unchangeable folkloric archive would just keep them into reproducing repressive standards. That is why it is important to keep the focus on the oral approach when it comes to the reading of the folkloric archive. And that is why, in the reading and learning process, literary fairy tales should always be envisioned as entangled with the readers' experience. Diffractive methodologies may be of help in pursuing this objective, as we are going to see in Section 3.

2. *In the Dream House* as a queered diffraction of the folkloric archive

As a case of a queer-situated folklore retelling and diffraction, Machado's *In the Dream House* dig into the original, biased archive to give a representation back to the unrepresented. The text aims at deconstructing the heteropatriarchal construct according to which intimate partner violence may exist only in the

form of man-as-abuser and woman-as-abused. Machado, on the contrary, tells her personal story of abuse suffered at the hand of another woman, with the aim of giving a representation of intimate partner violence in queer – and especially lesbian – relationships, which is missing within the heteropatriarchal-driven framework of cultural discourse.[9]

As Jesussek enlightens, "*Dream House* functions as an archive of the unspeakable that unmakes multiple kinds of silences" (Jesussek 2024: 204). Machado acknowledges how, even if the discourse on violence against women is very recent compared to the existence of gender violence itself, "The conversation about domestic abuse within queer communities is even newer, and even more shadowed" (Machado 2020: 3). To fill these "lacunae", Machado states:

> I enter into the archive that domestic abuse between partners who share a gender identity is both possible and not uncommon, and that it can look something like this. I speak into the silence. I toss the stone of my story into a vast crevice; measure the emptiness by its small sound. (Machado 2020: 4)

To Machado, tossing the stone of her lesbian story of intimate violence into the already huge crevice of the story of gender violence is a way to cover some of the lacunae that heteropatriarchy has left about queer experience. I argue that we could consider the use she makes of popular culture to model the cultural archive of intimate partner violence as a diffractive kind of reading of the whole archive. Her work moves, in fact, from the diffraction of the institutional archive of popular culture (books, movies, tv series, news reports), with a special focus on the closet of folkloric narratives.

We can talk of "diffraction" regarding Machado's queering of the folkloric archive in *The Dream House* for several reasons. Firstly, as we have seen, "diffractions are attuned to differences" (Barad 2007: 72). Likewise, Machado expands the differentiating possibilities of folk motifs, showing how they can be applied and explored not only through heterosexual images, but also through queer ones. Moreover, as Kaiser highlights, via diffractive reading "reader/author/text/world emerge always in new ways" (Kaiser 2021: 40). That is precisely how the primary text of the folkloric archive emerges

[9] As Phylliss Goldfarb observes, "when a woman reveals that she has suffered intimate violence at the hands of a woman, it may be difficult for the listener to surmount the entrenched gender imagery that links victimization with femaleness to conjure up a new image of woman as abuser" (Goldfarb 1996: 507).

through the queering lens of Machado's experience, and how the world is represented in this entanglement of text and author intra-action, where the new fictional world that arises (as representation and mirror of the real one) is able to consider the possibility of queer experience. Eventually, as we have seen, diffractive reading is not mirroring the represented but creating "something new next to it, entangled with it" (Merten 2021: 7). Indeed, Machado's reading of the folkloric archive is not a mere mirroring of it, but an entanglement with her personal experience, coming from her situated position as a queer person, which creates a new version of the diffracted folk texts.

Two are the paths of diffracting the folkloric archive followed by Machado in *The Dream House.* On the one hand, she makes associations between her autobiography and *Bluebeard* fairytale. On the other hand, she makes several references to Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, connecting episodes of her story to folk motifs.

As the abusive story lived and told by Machado, *Bluebeard* too is a tale about domestic violence. Though *Bluebeard* tells about a heterosexual relationship, Machado adapts it to speak about violence in queer relationships. The fairy tale appeared in the print form for the first time in Charles Perrault's 1697 collection *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, with the title "La Barbe Bleu". The story is about a girl who marries a very rich man with a blue beard, whose previous wives mysteriously disappeared. Once, he goes out for work for some weeks and gives her the keys of all the chambers of his estates. He allows her to invite her friends and neighbours and to enter in all the rooms except for one, which is strictly forbidden. The girl, buzzing with curiosity, disobeys her husband, and discovers a bloody room where Bluebeard keeps the corpses of his brutally killed ex-wives. In the rush and terror, the key falls on the ground, and a bloody spot, impossible to wash, remains on it. Upon his return home, Bluebeard discovers that his wife broke his prohibition, and sentences her to death. Luckily, she will be saved by her brothers' last-minute rescue, who will kill her monstrous husband.[10]

Many are the references to *Bluebeard* in *The Dream House*: I propose here a close reading of Machado's strategy for retelling the tale.

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[10] In Angela Carter's 1979's version of *Bluebeard*, "The Bloody Chamber" (Carter 2006), the girl will be saved by her mother. Carter's tale is another possible reference to *The Dream House*: Machado was aware of Carter's collection, which is referred in the *memoir* (cfr. Machado 2020: 84).

In the chapter "*Dream House as* Bluebeard", Machado offers a sort of re-reading of the traditional tale, proposing that, even if the girl had obeyed Bluebeard's law, he would have found other ways to make her suffer and to abuse her.

> Because she hadn't blinked at the key and its conditions, hadn't paused when he told her footfalls were too heavy for his liking, hadn't protested when he fucked her while she wept, hadn't declined when he suggested she stop speaking, hadn't said a word when he left bruises on her arms, hadn't scolded him for speaking to her like she was a dog or a child, hadn't run screaming down the path from the castle into the nearest village pleading with someone to *help help help* – it made logical sense that she sat there and watched him spinning around the body of wife Number Four, its decaying head flopping backward on a hinge of flesh. (Machado 2020: 67)

According to Machado's interpretation, opposing Perrault's patriarchal moral that condemns the girl's curiosity,[11] the abused can never be blamed for the violence she suffers, but the fault is only inscribed in the abuser. Moreover, she insists on how it is instilled in the abused that, if she tolerates one more violence, she will eventually be blessed with the abuser's love.

> This is how you are toughened, the newest wife reasoned. This is where the tenacity of love is practiced; its tensile strength, its durability. You are being tested and you are passing the test; sweet girl, sweet self, look how good you are; look how loyal, look how loved. (Machado 2020: 67)

This interpretation of *Bluebeard* is diffracted many times over the personal story told by Machado in her *memoir*. In chapter "*Dream House* as a Lesson in the subjunctive", we see how, even if the Dream House shows many warning signs revealing the bloody chamber hidden within, yet Carmen makes herself used to them, unseeing the problematic reality of the supposedly "dreamy" house.

> Yes, there are spiders in the basement, and yes, the floors are so uneven you[12] can feel them pushing your right leg up against your torso if you run too quickly from room to room, and yes she's never unpacked and is

[11] "Curiosity is a charming passion but may only be satisfied at the price of a thousand regrets […]. Curiosity is the most fleeting of pleasures; the moment it is satisfied, it ceases to exist and it always proves very, very expensive." (Carter 1977: 10). The English version of Perrault's tale used here is in Angela Carter's translation.

[12] For the first part of the novel, the narrator refers to herself in the second-person singular.

> using tall cardboard boxes filled with bric-a-brac as furniture, and yes the couch is so old you can feel the springs in your back, and yes she wants to grow pot in the basement, and yes every room has bad memories, but sure, the two of you could raise children here. (Machado 2020: 13)

Besides, many references are made to the character of Bluebeard and its untrustworthiness. In describing the Dream House, for example, the narrator talks about the "stories about the landlord": "I daresay you have heard of the Dream House? […] You may have heard stories about the landlord but I assure you they are untrue." (Machado 2020: 7). In another description of the house, it is said that nearby the house there were "houses occupied by strangers who either never heard or didn't want to get involved" (Machado 2020: 81). Similarly, in Perrault's *Bluebeard*, nobody knows how all the previous wives of Bluebeard disappeared, still nobody questions the reason: "They were even more suspicious of him because he had been married several times before and nobody knew what had become of his wives" (Carter 1977: 5). Neighbours also try as much as possible to avoid meeting the scary man with the blue beard: "[…] neither of them [the sisters to whom Bluebeard was proposing] wanted him; both felt a profound distaste for a man with a blue beard" (5); "Her [of the new wife] friends and neighbours […] were all eager to see the splendours of her house [but] [n]one of them had dared to call while the master was at home because his blue beard was so offensive" (6).

In another description of the Dream House, it is clear how the place goes from being a 'dream' place to a place of horror (the discovery of the bloody chamber):[13]

> The Dream House was never just the Dream House. It was, in turn, a convent of promise (herb garden, wine, writing across the table from each other), a den of debauchery (fucking with the windows open, waking up mouth on mouth, the low, insistent murmur of fantasy), a haunted house (*none of this can really be happening*), a prison (*need to get out get out*), and, finally, a dungeon of memory. (Machado 2020: 83)

[13] The same shift happens in Perrault's Bluebeard: "They climbed into the attics and were lost for words with which to admire the number and beauty of the tapestries, the beds, the sofas, the cabinets, the tables, and the long mirrors, some of which had frames of glass, other of silver or gilded vermilion – all more magnificent than anything they had ever seen" (Carter 1977: 6).

Moreover, several references are made by Machado to the bloody chamber itself: "The inhabitant gives the room its purpose. Your actions are mightier than any architect's intentions" (7); "The bedroom: don't go in there" (16). When Carmen goes to the basement she is scared by spiders, "dozens of them", "You don't know what kind but they are big enough that you can see details on their bodies – their faces! Their spidery faces! - even in the dim light" (85). A scene that reminds the girl in Perrault's *Bluebeard* going down to the bloody chamber and meeting the ex-wives' corpses. Indeed, the bloody chamber in *Bluebeard* is "at the end of the long gallery on the ground floor" (Carter 1977: 7), and when Bluebeard's wife gets in, the room is dark as the basement of the Dream House:

> The windows were shuttered and at first she could see nothing; but, after a few moments, her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom and she saw that the floor was covered with clotted blood. In the blood lay the corpses of all the women whom Bluebeard had married and then murdered, one after the other. (Carter 1977: 7)

The feeling of fear is the same in the basement of Dream House and in Bluebeard's room: "She thought she was going to die of fright and the key fell from her hand. After she came to her senses, she picked up the key, closed the door and climbed back to her room to recover herself" (Carter 1977: 7); "You run back upstairs, laundry basket abandoned, and beg her to do your laundry for you" (Machado 2020: 85).

Eventually, the bloody chamber is recalled in chapter "*Dream House as* Queen and the Squid". Here Machado tells a fairy tale that diffracts together her own story and *Bluebeard*'s pattern. In this tale, it is the queen's zoo, where all her non-human ex-lovers are kept in horrible conditions, that recalls**,** as Jesussek remarked (Jesussek 2023), *Bluebeard*'s bloody chamber. At the end of the chapter, the Squid, who has seen the queen's zoo and thus decided to leave her, replies to one of the queen's letters[14] asking her to please come back.

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[14] As Machado said in an interview, the queen's letters were an expedient to report some of the things her ex told her in her emails but that she couldn't report in her *memoir* for reasons of copyright: "there's a chapter in the memoir where I had wanted to include these e-mails that my ex had written me, and my editor explained to me that you can't reproduce someone's letters because that is copyrighted to them. […] Finally, I decided to write a fairy tale, about a queen and a squid. And I used that to tell the story of the emails without actually using the emails." (Howard 2019)

""My queen," the letter said, "your words are very pretty. And yet they cannot obscure the simple fact that I have seen your zoo"" (Machado 2020: 235). The acknowledgement of the violence faced is reached by Carmen, though, only time later, when the separation from her abuser would have created the time and space necessary to see things from above.[15]

Besides *Bluebeard,* the other way Machado diffracts the folkloric archive is via a double work on Stith Thompson's archive of folk motifs collected in the *Motif-Index*. On one side, she uses the archetypal motifs as bricks whereon to ground the structure of her queer experience of intimate partner violence, to recognize and signify it. On the other, she enters her own queer experience within this archive, thus dismantling the heteropatriarchal gaze that rules the archive itself. Her diffraction of the folkloric archive is quite evident in here: Machado co-creates her own *memoir* as a cultural archetype for the acknowledgement of violence in lesbian intimate relationships, and this co-creation happens in the intra-active entanglement between her personal experience of lesbian violence, and existing folk motifs about violence. Machado's diffraction is an interference with the archive of folklore, with whom her experience intra-acts, thus co-creating a new text (or motif) that keeps together her experience as a reader (and writer, or re-teller), and the text read (the folkloric archive). One of the main interesting aspects of Machado's diffractive reading of Thompson's *Motif-Index* is that, if put together, the main cited motifs reveal a *fil rouge* allowing to read a sort of parallel version of the *memoir* through a fairytale lens.

Some of the more recurrent motifs in *The Dream House* concern taboos and the consequences of their breaking. This recurrence recalls the idea that the relationship represented in the *memoir* is based on a normative system of unwritten laws. Those norms allow the relationship to keep its good mask, but, when they are broken (and to break them is very easy, since they are quite absurd), the mask falls revealing the hidden violence. Within the taboos we can find: "Type C420.2, Taboo: not to speak about a certain happening"[16] (Machado 2020: 47); "Type C752.1, Taboo: doing thing after sunset

[15] "[…] time and space, creatures of infinite girth and tenderness, have stepped between the two of you, and they are keeping you safe as they were once unable to." (Machado 2020: 271)

[16] It refers to when the woman of the Dream House has a fit of anger and violence. Later, she tells Carmen: "You're not allowed to write about this" (Machado 2020: 47).

(nightfall)"[17] (100); "Type C745, Taboo: entertaining strangers"[18] (115); "Type C481, Taboo: singing"[19] (120); "Type 411.1, Taboo: asking for reason for an unusual action"[20] (175); "Type C482, Taboo: weeping"[21] (219); "Type C423.3, Taboo: revealing experiences in other world"[22] (255).

Consequences for breaking taboos – there is the idea that Carmen makes continuous mistakes, and that she is responsible for the abuses she suffers – are disparate and quite harsh: "Type C961.2, Transformation to stone for breaking taboo"[23] (95); "Type C940, Sickness or weakness for breaking taboo"[24] (117); "Type C947, Valuable object turns to worthless, for breaking taboo"[25] (219); "Type C949.4, Bleeding from breaking taboo"[26] (221); "Type C947, Magic power lost by breaking taboo"[27] (238).

The breakings of taboos and their magic consequences may be connected to the overlapping between the woman of the Dream House and the figure of an enchanting lover, a sort of magic spirit living in the Dream House. Therefore,

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[17] Note after "Midnight comes" (100): it refers to an episode where the woman of the Dream House drives so fast that Carmen fears they will both die.

[18] The woman of the Dream House forces Carmen to cook for a last-minute Thanksgiving dinner, while Carmen does not have money to buy ingredients, nor they do have cooking stuff or time to cook (115).

[19] Carmen sings in the shower, while washing the dishes or getting dressed, but "You do not realize how much you sing until she tells you to stop singing" (120).

[20] Note after Carmen saying to the woman of the Dream House: "You threw things at me […]. You chased me. You destroyed everything around me. You have no memory of any of it. Doesn't that alarm you?" (175).

[21] Note after "You cry and cry" (219). The woman of the Dream House left Carmen for another woman.

[22] Note after "When you try to talk about the Dream house afterward, some people listen. Others politely nod while slowly closing the door behind their eyes; you might as well be a proselytizing Jehovah's Witness or an encyclopaedia peddler" (255).

[23] Carmen dresses up for Halloween as a fictional character representing an "ancient life force that disguises itself as the statue of a weeping angel", but her partner does not understand and is annoyed by her costume. At one more of her questions "What the fuck are you supposed to be again?", Carmen answers "A statue […]. Just a statue" (95).

[24] Carmen suffers of a nervous stomach sickness (117).

[25] Breaking of the "weeping" taboo (cfr. note 14). After breaking with the woman of the dream house Carmen cries so much that "You cry into your phone, flood it with saltwater. It stops working" (219).

[26] Right after the breakup with the woman of the Dream House, Carmen climbs on a bookcase to hang Christmas lights for a party, but she falls through it and starts bleeding (221).

[27] After the breakup, "You try to imagine sex with other people, and struggle to visualize it; masturbation is near impossible" (238).

we find "Type T3, Omens in love affairs"[28] (23); "Type C942.3, Weakness from seeing woman (fairy) naked"[29] (30); "Type T92.4, Girl mistakenly elopes with the wrong lover"[30] (75); "Type T11, Falling in love with person never seen"[31] (87). The Dream House is in fact connected several times to the image of a haunted house, and its inhabitants to ghosts. When the woman of the Dream House, after Carmen went to sleep to the sofa because of a fight they had, "peels the sheet away from your body; you shiver", the motif-reference is "Type E279.3, Ghost pulls bedclothing from sleeper" (143). Carmen herself is once represented as the haunting ghost:

> And then it occurs to you one day, standing in the living room, that you are this house's ghost: you are the one wandering from room to room with no purpose, gaping at the moving boxes that are never unpacked, never certain what you're supposed to do. […] If anyone is living in the Dream House now, he or she might be seeing the echo of you. (Machado 2020: 147)

Footnotes after the word "ghost" in the previous quotation recalls to typical ghost motifs, referred to Carmen's habits, such as Types E. 402.1.1.1 to 6: "Ghost calls", "Ghost moans", "Ghost cries and screams", "Ghost sings", "Ghost snores", "Ghost sobs" (Machado 2020: 147).

Carmen is so magicked that once she thinks that she is experiencing a mystic pregnancy, though "You cannot be pregnant, you cannot be pregnant, you literally absolutely could not be pregnant under any circumstances" (Machado 2020: 188). Some of the mystic pregnancy motifs referred to in the notes are "Type T511.1.3, Conception from eating mango", "Type T513.1, Conception through another's wish", "Type T521.1, Conception from moonlight", "Type T532.1.4, Conception by smell of cooked dragon heart" (Machado 2020: 188).

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[28] After the woman of the Dream House telling Carmen "We can fuck […] But we can't fall in love" (23).

[29] When Carmen's partner says "I love you" while they are having sex, "You look down at her, confusion muddled with the vibrations of orgasm" (30).

[30] The woman in the Dream House just broke up with Val, her other partner: "From now on, it will just be you and the woman in the Dream House

[31] Note after Carmen realising that the woman of the Dream House is an abuser "I didn't know her, not really, until I did. She was a stranger because something essential was shielded, released in tiny bursts until it became a flood – a flood of what I realized I did not know" (87).

Eventually, the spell of the taboo "not to speak about a certain happening" is broken when the magicking woman of the Dream House leaves her victim (actually leaves her for another woman) and only from now on the magicked protagonist could be able to speak again, and to speak of the violence she suffered. The process of writing her *memoir* is a part of it: "I wrote a large part of this book in rural eastern Oregon", she writes: the reference is to "Type D2161.3.6.1, Magic restoration of cut-out tongue" (Machado 2020: 276), with a recalling of the silenced female characters of fairy tales.[32]

Folk motifs from Thompson's *Index* and *Bluebeard* tale are thus diffracted in *The Dream House* through the queer lenses of Machado's experience, co-creating together with each other a new meaning for the same old motifs. At the same time, this re-actualization of folk motifs makes it evident how they are not monoliths, but fluid matter, ready to entangle itself with other matter, thus helping each one to make sense of their own story, even and especially outside the binary frame of normative values, such as heteropatriarchy. Thereby, the (diffracted) folkloric archive may be seen as a way not to reduce our identities into fixed categories, but to explore the huge complexity of thousands and thousands of motifs to be used as bricks to build a sense for our own story.

3. Oral diffractive patterns: slow scholarship and the Wild Pedagogies for an entangled reading of folk/fairy tales

As mentioned, the second possible path for a diffraction of the folkloric archive will be related in this essay to a practical way of engaging and entangling with texts in the reading process. As a possible model, I propose the wild pedagogy (see Jickling et al. 2018) methodologies used by Bozalek and Shefer for the reading of decolonial and antiracist theory and fiction. The chance to entangle orally and collectively with the text has been explored within their "Wild Swimming Methodology" for a "decolonial feminist justice-to-come" scholarship (Bozalek & Shefer 2022). Focusing on some

[32] In chapter *"Dream House* as Folktale Taxonomy", Machado recalls silenced fairy tale female characters such as the Little Mermaid, Eliza from the "Wild Swans" and the Goose Girl (Machado 2020: 38). An association is made between Carmen's story and the silenced heroines: Carmen's tongue was cut out as "In Hans Christian Andersen's story, the Little Mermaid has her tongue cut out of her head", the *Motif-Index* reference being "Type S163, Mutilation: cutting (tearing) out tongue" (38).

problems concerning higher education, they propose a "post qualitative, embodied, affective and mobile" methodology (28), "a wild pedagogy, which learns from and listens to the more-than-human-world" (27). The "wild swimming workshops" are set in the South-African seaside, where participants are invited to read decolonial theories and history about slavery, to swim[33] in the same seas where the slave trade happened, to engage in free writing sessions, and eventually to share collectively about their experience.[34] The wild swimming workshop is a form of embodied learning and "doing academia differently" (Bozalek 2021). Swimming "incorporates wildness to recognize the importance of knowing/becoming/doing outside of the boundaries of academic convention and its normative geophysical locations" (Bozalek & Shefer 2022: 31), which are based on "disembodied, disaffect/ive/ed, speeded-up, instrumentalist, consumerist, extractive scholarship, ignoring and erasing relationality and response-ability" (37). On the contrary, the way of thinking brought up by wild swimming methodologies is embodied and affective.

> Rather than hindering the thinker's rigour, as we are made to believe by dominant masculinist and colonialist logics of academia, swimmers describe the way in which the liquidity, fluidity and relationality of water facilitate clarification and inspiration in thinking. (Bozalek & Shefer 2022: 39)

Swimming is thus considered as a *slow scholarship* (see Mountz et al. 2015) methodology, which is

> one of the identified ways in academia that has actively shown resistance to neoliberal markets by invoking an anti-corporate agenda. It does so by disrupting dualisms through engaging in alternative and ethical ways of being/becoming, doing and knowing, emphasising qualities such as discernment, depth, pleasure, longing, yearning, desire, curiosity, maintaining meaningful connections with others – be they human or more-than-human – or with the environment. (Bozalek & Shefer 2022: 31)

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[33] Moreover, snorkelling equipment is used "to better engage a 'methodology of encounter'" with the more-than-human, "to observe and think with other species, as well as experience the affective and tactile experience of being in/with the sea and its shifting moods" (Bozalek & Shefer 2022: 31).

[34] For better understanding the development of the workshop, see the video realized by Bozalek, Romano and Shefer (2021).

By focusing on affective qualities such as "discernment, depth, pleasure, longing, yearning, desire, curiosity", these learning methodologies are directly connected to the individual experience of the learners, thus being considerable as diffractive methodologies, for the entanglement they enable between the learning ground (texts, theory) and the experience of the learners (who are also engaged in collective sharing groups with other learners). In fact, as Bozalek and Shefer highlight, the very act of swimming is diffracted through written sources and art. They argue that more is learned and more is faced around colonialism and apartheid by reading and diffracting texts and poetry through the wild swimming experience, than through "sanitised history books" or "critical left-wing theory" (Bozalek & Shefer 2022: 35).

As we have seen, in Kaiser's words, reading diffractively means not to stop at what the text does, but to explore "how reader/author/text/world emerge always in new ways" (Kaiser 2021: 40). In this regard, if we keep the focus on Machado's *Dream House*, the diffractive reading proposed in section 2 may be extended beyond the relationship author's experience/folkloric archive (*Bluebeard* and the *Motif-Index*)/retelling (*In the Dream House*). That means connecting this first entanglement with the one created by the reader's experience in its intra-action with the text of the *memoir*. Thereby, reader/author/text(s)/world(s) entangle with each other co-creating a multiplication of differences/differentiated worlds and meanings.

The folkloric archive is an interesting written archive to focus on while talking of diffraction, because it already involves itself a yet-full-of-differences multiplication of worlds and worlding dimensions. If diffraction is "a practice of making a difference in the world and consider what differences matter and for whom" (Bozalek 2021: 3), thus meaning to differentiate, multiply and entangle with the differences of otherness and to train "our perception of co-implication and entanglement" (Kaiser 2021: 32) – our standpoint always being in a non-objective, but situated intra-action with the workfield – then reading diffractively the folkloric archive is a way to multiply and let flourish a whole encyclopaedia of narratives that are limited and silenced in the normative gaze of each binary power that rules the archive – such as heteropatriarchy does.

If queer and feminist retellings play their part in giving back this blossoming of differences to the folkloric archive, it is undeniable that a "decolonial, feminist, justice-to-come" scholarship should go beyond a kind of reading that do not take in consideration the many layers hidden within the archive, and how the material and embodied experience of the readers intra-

acts with them. What should be done in this perspective is to "wildly" engage with that corpus, such as Bozalek and Shefer do with the archive of decolonial theory on slavery past and its present hauntings. Regaining the oral dimension of the folkloric archive (was it or was it not the effective main tool of dissemination of the tales, we are indeed mostly interested in its potential as a more-or-less historically grounded metaphor) in collective reading, writing, material and experiential workshops may be a possible further exploration for a feminist and decolonial folklore scholarship.

I conclude my discourse with a proposal for an embodied and oral diffractive reading of the folkloric archive, to be further explored. If Machado based her diffractive retelling on folkloric motifs such as the haunted house and *Bluebeard*'s bloody chamber, then a possible pathway for a slow-academic and wild methodology of reading Machado's *memoir* may be through a collective self-consciousness practice around suffered violences and oppressions, the haunted houses and bloody chambers inhabiting our memory. This may help in bringing out the ghosts left by these violences within our personal inner and outer spaces, the lack of representation we have faced due to some structural powers ruling the archive of representation in our personal and political lives. Reading and writing and sharing about our ghosts and the taboos we thought we should not have broken, about the complications we encountered in recognizing them because of the lacunae in the archive of representation, may just be some ideas for a diffractive reading of the text through our experience, to co-create new meanings, new bricks for a justice-to-come archive.

To sum up, a diffractive reading theory of the folkloric archive cannot ignore the oral dimension of tales, and this dimension may be an important element to add to close readings and literary analysis to make them more meaningful and socially engaged, as in the feminist milestone that "the personal is political". I conclude my essay by calling for more "wild swimming methodologies" in the way we approach literary and folklore studies as scholars, and with the aim of finding a space to further explore this last proposal for a wild-pedagogic diffractive approach to the folkloric archive.

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