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Reseñas / *Book reviews*

Discourses on the Edges of Life (V. Salvador, A. Kot'átková & I. Clemente, eds.), Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2020, 196 págs. ISBN 9789027205377. 90€. *Reseñado por Esperanza Morales López, Universidad de A Coruña*. ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2976-1172>.

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The title of the book shows, based on a metaphor, the use of euphemism to refer to death. The reader can obtain a transversal vision of this subject: from traditional thought to the great change that took place in the 19th century with the professionalization of health and death, and finally, in the present time, the interweaving with technology. The result is the unfolding of a wide variety of discourses: from thinkers, health professionals, patient testimonies through their narratives, stories from the doctors themselves and writers of diverse genres. A brief account of its chapters is given next.

Josep Barona analyses the conception of death from its traditional origin based on mythical-religious thought (Vico's "poetic logic"). Barona places the change of this conception in the middle of the 19th century, when the organization of modern states began to develop institutions and/or public health campaigns and international statistics on this topic. Later on, the scientific and technological pro-

gress of the 20th century contributed to the total change of paradigm, a perspective that managed to completely eclipse traditional thinking, (except in the indigenous and/or more impoverished populations).

In the second chapter, the following commentary by Lolas Stepke seems important: "Since people live nowadays in sociotechnical systems, no human being is isolated from other fellow humans and no one can escape the web of technical devices associated with modern life". The technification of death is a fully accepted aspect of modern human life, although this does not prevent critical reflection on the different ways in which this process is being carried out. Hence the need to integrate them into a dialogue based on ethics (a truly *tanathoethics* or *necroethics*).

The chapter by Gil-Juliá and Ballester-Arnal focuses on the analysis of the painful process after the death of a loved one, based on the definition of *grief*, *mourning* and *bereavement*, which can differ in their clinical manifestations, in their response as

an adaptive or non-adaptive process, as well as in the main nuances linked to the conceptualization of loss. Approximately 10% to 20% of the individuals going through bereavement struggle, sometimes for a prolonged period, which can lead to various pathologies. This is an evidence of the narrow connection between psychological and physical processes in human life.

Antonio Bañón addresses the topic of organs transplant discourses in the Spanish press. At an international level, those discourses have been the subject of interdisciplinary research and have been oriented towards four main themes in which death plays a major role: a) the number of organ transplants performed by public health professionals through donation; b) the textual frameworks used to narrate the consequences derived from the reception of organs; c) the discursive representation of organ donation; and d) the discourse on rejection to donate. In the case of Spain, the press has always taken a positive role in the defence of them, but the term “death” and its reflection are recurrently avoided.

Domínguez and Sapiña’s chapter analyses online stories from the websites of four associations of AYA (adolescents and young patients) with cancer, collected in Spanish and English during 2017, focusing on narratives that contain the terms “death”, “end of life” and “pass away”. There are more narratives that refer to death written by women than men. Regarding the categories, the most striking fact is that Spanish stories do not include references to the acceptance of death; this is so because none of these young individuals narrates their experience from the perspective of the end of their life. Data show a more widespread acceptance of death as a part of life in the Anglo-Saxon context than in the Spanish context.

Ignasi Clemente continues with the topic of cancer disease in young patients. He describes the case of a five-

year-old child and examines the different communicative strategies used by their parents and doctors to discuss the topic of death while attempting to conceal bad and uncertain news from the child. In discussions in which the child is not present, the research shows also differences in the discourse used by doctors, who may advocate to keep fighting and prefer to use additional treatment, and parents, who may be more open to the possibility of death and prefer the use of palliative treatment.

Koťátková’s paper analyses clinical case reports (CCR), as a discursive subgenre in medical practice. CCR incorporate real, often unusual, life stories and have a greater capacity than scientific articles to arouse curiosity and attract readers’ attention. A related subgenre is the clinical tales (CT), which represent a step closer to the literaturization of illness (i.e. Oliver Sacks). The strategy employed in CT is different. Here, patients become characters that require all manner of characterizations in order to give life to a literary text. In this context, death becomes a resource at the service of stylistics and literature.

David Pujante analyses Seneca’s *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, a consolatory discourse for men who have no hope and have decided to give up everything except for their human condition. These letters are surprising to the modern reader for their accessibility. One can recognise in them the genre of a self-help book. They also connect to the modern tradition that Montaigne began with his essays (see next chapter). Using the example of Lucilius’ grief for his friend’s death, Seneca advocates his stoic approach. The letters to Lucilius contain both personal elements and philosophical-moral elements.

Skelton’s chapter presents what Montaigne’s reflections on death and dying. The author considers Montaigne, not as a writer who writes about death, but as writer who writes about the potential for consolation for anyone who is saddened by

death. Skelton's interpretation is that Montaigne foreshadows both the kind of stream of consciousness one finds in Joyce and the magic realism of García Márquez. His belief is that reason is not a good guide here; life must be accepted and filled with some activity, just as he has done in observing, thinking and writing.

Lunati analyses the Catalan female writer Maria-Mercè Marçal's concept "desnéixer" ('to become unborn'), a word that not only refers to a strategy to come to terms with an imminent death by seeking refuge in the mother's womb, but it also indicates the desire to go back to the mother, whose body will be both "life and shroud". It is a way of acknowledging the cultural discrimination against mothers, a discrimination mostly derived from the role given to the maternal in classical psychoanalysis. A similarly unattainable, impossible mother is also desired by the narrator and protagonist of another Catalan writer, Mercè Rodoreda's short story "Nit i boira" (1947). The nameless protagonist of Rodoreda's story is a prisoner who has lost the will to live, a man destroyed by the abhorrent logic of the concentration camp. There is one aspect of the story that has gone unnoticed: the presence *in absentia* of the maternal. The connection between identity and memory, both individual and collective, allows for the interaction of both traumas: the extermination camps and the cultural discrimination of the maternal.

Salvador and Mira analyse the relationship between death and spaciality in the poet Vicent Andrés Estellés. In the last few decades, the human and social sciences have experienced what has often been

termed the "spatial turn", the adoption of an epistemological perspective that prioritizes space-related aspects over the time-related aspects. In this new phase, space is no longer seen as an empty, inert and external receptacle but as a culturally defined human construction. Human beings are no longer just "beings in time" but ones that evolve across certain spaces with which they interact dialectically as subjects. Specially *Spatiality* is therefore a social construction (with emotions and identities) in which a more humanized concept acquires importance. Salvador and Mira focus on the poet's dead family album, which enables him to trace a typology that is symptomatic of Estellés' main approaches to death in the domestic environment (similar to *The House of Bernarda Alba* and Hitchcock's *Psycho*).

In the last paper, Molpeceres discusses, based on posthumanist thinking, two ways of extending the human life-span that have been used in science fiction. The first is the transformation of human beings into hybrids between machine and human. The second is the creation of simulacra or simulations of human beings. Both of them invite profound reflections on the ethical, epistemological and ontological implications of such "beyond death" scenarios. At the same time, according to Science Fiction, the elimination of death appears to be a chimera that entails either the loss of humanity or the loss of identity.