

The many faces of resilience and healing in contemporary narratives

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Resilience, the capacity to adapt to adversity and rebound, has become a ubiquitous and contested concept. Nowadays, resilience is studied by researchers from disciplines as diverse as physics, ecology, disaster research, psychology, neuroscience, genetics, sociology, business, cultural studies, or medical humanities, resulting in varied approaches and definitions. Besides, the notion of resilience gained new currency with the political discourses of global governance that often asked citizens and governments to endure and build resilience during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This pervasiveness calls for a reassessment of the validity and accuracy of resilience as a working concept, as well as a deeper study on the nuanced implications it holds vis-à-vis related notions such as vulnerability, precarity or the ethics of care. Moreover, the alignment of the discourse of resilience and neoliberal ideology demands a critical approach. Literature has not remained detached from this discussion. On the contrary, “narrative is perhaps the major cultural and cognitive scheme through which notions of resilience are currently generated”, according to Michael Basseler (2019, 25). Yet the studies produced in the field of literary studies around this concept are still scarce when compared to others.

The present thematic issue builds on previous research (Fraile-Marcos 2020) and extends the work carried out by the project “Narrating Resilience, Achieving Happiness? Toward a Cultural Narratology” (PID2020-113190GB-C22) by probing the literary representation of resilience as a multifaceted paradigm through which to apprehend contemporary reality and subjectivity. The ten articles gathered here interrogate the global currency of notions of resilience conforming contemporary narratives and theoretical perspectives from as diverse and distant locations as the Philippines, Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany. The articles have been arranged in a way that highlights the dialogical nature of this issue: not only each author offers a productive conversation between distinct perspectives on resilience and related critical thinking – on trauma, vulnerability, precarity, care, environmentalism, race, indigenism, decolonialism, feminism, humanitarianism, post-anthropocentrism, resistance, and healing – but the articles also dialogue with one another in their identification of an aesthetics of resilience,

exposing potential new paths to (self)understanding, knowledge, hope, and positive agency opened by contemporary resilience narratives and the nascent field of critical resilience studies.

In the first article, Belén Martín-Lucas makes the case for a *glocalized* reading of Merlinda Bobis's *The Solemn Lantern Maker* (2008), a novel that offers narrative therapy at the interface between individual vulnerability and the war on terror. The article foregrounds the resilience built in the Manila slums, as well as the potential for healing through affective bonding at the intersections of race, ethnic, class and gender differences, and defends an ethics of reciprocal solidarity and compassion as the means for critical intervention in public discourse and a challenge to dominant narratives.

Marisol Morales-Ladrón's subsequent piece offers a compelling analysis of Colm Tóibín's *The Testament of Mary* (2012), a novella that revises the Passion of Christ from the perspective of a grieving yet empowered and gendered Mary. Challenging traditional binaries as regards body/mind and reason/emotion, Mary's account provides a resilient and self-therapeutic narrative anchored in her corporeal reality, which also vindicates her authority as narrator and subverts the received images of this character as a sacrificing mother. Resilience emerges as a mechanism of resistance against received religious, patriarchal assumptions, and as a means to vindicate the narratives that rest upon the experiencing self.

Miriam Borham-Puyal's article explores the contending notions of individual and relational resilience in two novels by author Emma Donoghue, *The Wonder* (2016) and *The Pull of the Stars* (2020). In these novels, the former emerges as a liberal conception that expects endurance and sacrifice, while the latter is seen as an empathic relation to the other that builds resistance to systemic oppression and abuse. Moreover, the novels seemingly counteract the negative understanding of vulnerability in the aforesaid liberal notion of resilience, by conceiving it as the foundation for an ethics of care or a theory of recognition expressed by sororities that challenge patriarchal narratives on women's bodies and roles.

Lucía López-Serrano approaches the psychosocial narratives of resilience from the medical humanities, focusing on the neoliberal emphasis on recovery as determining personal virtue and worth. Her insightful reading of Miriam Toews's *All My Puny Sorrows* (2014) exposes how this novel problematizes contemporary understandings of the good life and a good death, suggesting a relational mode of resilience based on the acknowledgement of vulnerability and the cultivation of interdependence, and proving how literature can serve as fertile ground for critical approaches to visions of resilience and contemporary narrativizations of illness and healing.

Next, Peter Arnds engages the dialogue between Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) and a selection of recent Anthropocene fiction that politicizes the cockroach as *bestia sacra* in the context of trauma and resilience. Arnds posits that Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), Marc Estrin's novel *Insect Dreams: The Half-Life of Gregor Samsa* (2002), Scholastique Mukasonga's *Cockroaches* (2006), and Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* (2008) draw on the resilience of this species to construct a model

for human agency in the face of adversity, thereby destabilizing biopolitically charged species metaphors and diverting from Kafka's narrative of defeat.

In line with the analyses by Martín-Lucas and Arnds of literary narratives of resilience vis-à-vis humanitarianism and de/humanization, Sara Casco-Solís's approach to Sharon Bala's fictionalized account of a real-life event involving a cargo ship full of refugees in her novel *The Boat People* (2018) further discusses the alignment of resilience with neoliberal discourses on national security and the self-adaptative skills of migrants. Building on previous work on socioecological resilience, as well as Lauren Berlant's and Sara Ahmed's exploration of optimism and happiness, Casco-Solís deconstructs the neoliberal resilience discourse's investment in these latter notions, placing it in dialogue with other politically loaded concepts such as hospitality, hostility and national security.

Vicent Cucarella-Ramón then engages with an understanding of resilience as a relational concept, as the basis for an ethics of responsibility and care, especially among communities facing ubiquitous risk and ongoing crisis. In his reading of David Charriandy's novel *Brother* (2017), Cucarella-Ramón explores issues of belonging, identity, prejudice, and racial capitalism, and how the Black family at the core of the novel must develop strategies of resistance through care when facing tragedy. In the dialogue between articulations of resilience and ethics of care, the author proposes how the interplay of the two concepts acts as a healing mechanism and a more ethical mode of survival to resist racial capitalism.

Martina Horáková's article is concerned with contemporary Indigenous literatures' engagement with and critique of the notion of resilience, both as a positive trait for the survival of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, and as an instrument to perpetuate settler-colonial dominance. Exploring an Australian Indigenous novel, *The Yield* by Tara June Winch (2019), Horáková brings to the fore the entangled notions of resilience emerging from a multivocal narrative that juggles two languages, and hence the colonized-colonizer discourses and realities, while highlighting alternative ways of living involving respect, responsibility, gentleness, and kindness.

Silvia Martínez-Falquina's ensuing article continues the study of Indigenous resilience narratives by focusing on *Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land* (2020) by Métis US writer Toni Jensen and emphasizing relationality (to others but also the land, to the past as well as to the present) as a form of activism which deconstructs settler colonial violence, the waste of lives and resources. In Martínez-Falquina's analysis of the first piece, "Women in Fracklands", the intertwining stories create an aesthetic relationality that becomes explicitly decolonial, involving the reader through the use of a second person narrative and enabling a recovery of agency that paves the path to healing.

Finally, Kendra Reynolds wraps up this issue collecting many of the threads woven in the previous articles. Her focus on the practice of "affective bibliotherapy", in which reading fiction serves the purpose of enabling readers to establish connections through a process of identification – or recognition – closes the circle that began with Martín-Lucas's reference to Bobis's novel as a form of narrative therapy. Reynolds identifies how this practice can be used in schools to enhance the learning

of resilience coping mechanisms, thus conceptualizing resilience as a replicable and transferrable trait. In her selection of texts – “Grace” by Darcie Little Badger and an extract from *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas – literature not only exposes models of overcoming universal obstacles, but also enables an exposure to external cultural, social, and political factors that shape these characters’ need to develop resilience mechanisms, as they face racial and gender discrimination.

In summary, these articles weave intricate connections between different notions of resilience and enrich this critical tapestry by expounding on its entanglement with other relevant concepts such as vulnerability, precarity, resistance, memory, or healing. Moreover, they make an important theoretical intervention in the field of resilience thinking by suggesting new terms and concepts that are geographically, historically, and culturally situated. All in all, these articles place value on literature’s power to speak to the reader from the place of the *other* and engage the audience in relevant discussions that address important issues of our time.

REFERENCES

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