“Structures of Feeling”: On Tenderness and Other Sensations in Carlos Gamerro’s Fiction.

Abstract

An important aspect of the novels of Carlos Gamerro (Argentina, 1962), largely overlooked by critics, is a subtle and nuanced focus on emotions. This paper begins by outlining the “affective technique” – precise, often metaphorical descriptions, of imprecise, hard to describe feelings – in his early works, acknowledging the many insights of the “affective turn” in Latin American studies. Gamerro’s most recent novels – his Jacobean fiction *Cardenio,* and *La jaula de los onas*, based on the history of the Selk'nam, or Ona, people forcibly transported from Tierra del Fuego to be exhibited during the 1889 Paris Exhibition – offer funny and provocative digressions from known historical events but, importantly, rely for their narrative force on a series of moving depictions of human frailty, pleasure, and interdependence. These are linked by a central emotion in Gamerro, namely tenderness. What is more, we find in these novels a “structural tenderness”, and with it a relationship between the vulnerability implicit in this emotion, and a readerly response – an uncertainty or self-doubt – of being pushed into and out of fiction. *La jaula de los onas* uses this depiction of mutual vulnerability to tell a moving and politically acute story of violence and cultural erasure in the far south.

"Structures of Feeling": On Tenderness and Other Sensations in Carlos Gamerro's Fiction.[i]

Introduction

Carlos Gamerro (Buenos Aires, 1962) is one of Argentina's most celebrated contemporary novelists, as well as a prize-winning essayist. Reception of his work has, to date, focused predominantly on his satirical humour, especially regarding critical moments in Argentina's history – the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, the violence of the 1970s and the civic-military dictatorship, and (neo-) colonialist expansion in the south. For Drucaroff (2005), for example, Gamerro's fiction "remite al expresionismo, el esperpento, la desmesura, o al juego que roza la parodia […] a un imaginario desorbitado que proviene de la ciencia ficción."[ii]

This paper shall argue, however, that a key aspect of Gamerro's *ouevre*, largely overlooked by critics, is a subtle and nuanced focus on emotions and feelings. This is signalled openly in his collection of short stories, *El libro de los afectos raros* (2005), full, as the title would suggest, of funny, or strange, feelings. Here we start to see the workings of his "affective technique" – precise, often metaphorical descriptions, of imprecise, hard to describe feelings. The early novels *Las Islas* (1998) and *El sueño del señor juez* (2000, henceforth *Sueño*) rely as much on depictions of intense feelings and emotions – pain, fear, compassion – as they do on the broad-brush satire for which Gamerro is most renowned. Gamerro's investigation of the "disappeared" in *El secreto y las voces* (2002, henceforth *Secreto*) is as much a mordant exploration of small-town hypocrisy and complicity, as it is a moving exploration of maternal love and filial loss; in Gamerro, as Fredric Jameson put it, history "is what hurts" (2002: 88). Similarly, the diptych of novels that revisit the armed left of the 1970s and the subsequent transition to neoliberalism, *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* (2004, henceforth *Bustos*) and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che Guevara* (2011, henceforth *Yuppie*), rework literary classics – Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* – while developing a character, the protagonist Ernesto Marroné, who experiences, in vivid detail, emotions and feelings that run from unbearable pain to deepest love.

Gamerro's most recent works – his Shakespearean novel *Cardenio*, and *La jaula de los onas* (2021, henceforth *La jaula*), based on the history of the Ona or Selk'nam people forcibly transported from Tierra del Fuego to be exhibited in the titular cage during the Paris Exhibition of 1889 – offer funny and provocative digressions from known historical events but, importantly, rely for their narrative force on a series of moving depictions of human frailty, pleasure, and interdependence. These are linked by a central emotion in Gamerro – tenderness. What is more, we find in these novels what might be called "structural tenderness", and with it a relationship between the vulnerability implicit

in this emotion, and a readerly response of being pushed into and out of different works, of fiction, and of self-doubt.

Feelings in Gamerro

In his fiction, Gamerro's depiction of feelings operates in three principal ways. The first is the simple presence of named feelings – and readers who go looking will perhaps be surprised by the sheer number and often density of terms that describe emotions in his work. Often these are "strange affects" – to translate the title of his book of stories – unlikely, even unhealthy or unwelcome, strong feelings that characters experience, seek or suffer.

The second mode can be found in Gamerro's often complex and detailed similes and metaphors, addressing feelings that do not properly fit the available array of terms, often introduced by the formula "como si…" (as if…). In part, this results from the vividness of Gamerro's humour, bringing to life scenes that are absurd, improbable, or bizarre. The most extreme of these are often, if not always, drawn directly from real life, such as the district of Buenos Aires shaped like the outline of Eva Perón, as seen from space, recounted in *Bustos*. The protagonist of this and the sequel novel, Ernesto Marroné, is the butt of a series of jokes about both the armed-left in Argentina and the rise of neoliberalism – but the key moments show his emotional vulnerability, with his comrade and later lover, María Eva, and his physical beat-up-ness – in particular in later scenes in *Bustos*. He is the axis around which complex feelings circulate, feelings caught in the tension between what Hammerschmidt calls the legible and the illegible (2017: 2).

Thirdly, especially in *La jaula*, but also in earlier works, we see Gamerro's increasing interest in feelings that cannot be named, or can only be approached tangentially. In the extreme cases, we see a growing awareness on the part of characters of pre-linguistic or non-linguistic thought and ways of understanding, in particular as the ocean-crossing, multilingual co-protagonist Karl becomes more fully immersed in the culture and beliefs of the Selk'nam, and finds himself between several languages. Non-linguistic feelings are linked to the colonial context, the destruction of the Selk'nam people, language, and culture – and its partial survival in the work of ethnographers such as Martin Gusinde and Anne Chapman – in stories that need to be read for their silences and absences, against the grain, or which, tragically, can never be told. As Gamerro stated in a talk (Gamerro, 2021b), "la voz de los Selk'nam aparece en el silencio."

With regard to the conceptualisation of feelings, it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a full assessment of what has been called "the Affective (or Affect) Turn" in literary studies.[iii] We find a useful summary of some of the issues at play in an introduction by Geoffrey Kantaris and Rory O'Bryen:

> The concept of affect (*affectus*, as distinct from *affectio*, i.e. affection) derives ultimately from the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, although its contemporary revival is usually credited to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and subsequently to Hardt and Negri. Within these later accounts, affect, like the multitude, is also immanent to capitalism, for the latter has colonized the immaterial and virtual worlds of the mass media, together with the affective intensities produced at their biopolitical interface, as the latest manifestation of the quest for a "spatial fix" to its internal contradictions. The production of hegemony has always been intimately bound up with the capture of affect (Kantaris and O'Bryen, 2013: 33).

They describe the key distinction between affect – non-subjective, non-linguistic – and emotion – subjective and linguistic; at the same time, they underline the contextual and political factors constraining the passage from affect into emotion.

Affect, or a version of it, has been important for the study of literature probably for as long as the latter has existed. As Rabat states, "we have known since Aristotle and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing that the recurrent problem of aesthetics hinges around the management of emotions, whether by sublimation or by redirection of bodily functions" (2015: 230). The term adopted for the title of this essay, "structures of feeling," is drawn from Raymond Williams, and describes the way in which a study of literature, and in particular the emotions found therein, can be of value to a political understanding of the history of a society. As Williams puts it, we can detect "changes of presence" and these "do not have to await definition […] before they exert a palpable pressure and set effective limits on experience and on action […]. Such changes can be defined as changes in *stuctures of feeling*" (1977: 132). This paper proposes a move from, or a twist on, Williams' concept, to argue that feelings can structure an artwork, that a novel's structure can echo or mirror the feelings it explores, and that this gives insight into the political conjuncture depicted in a work.

As in the wider humanities, there has occurred within Latin American studies an "affective turn".[iv] As Macón, Solana and Vacarezza put it in a very recent work, with "the expansion of feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements, on the one hand, and that of reactionary and neoliberal forces on the other—many Latin American authors are turning to affect to understand our present situation, revisit our history, and imagine new possibilities for the future" (2021: 1). The authors offer an overview of the "affective turn" in Latin American studies, including its origins and critics. They go on to state that, "it is important to observe that although the distinction between affect and emotions (like so many others) may appear useful at a glance, [but also to] reiterate how problematic this distinction

proves. Actually […] the Latin American approach to the topic of affect and emotions defies this strict differentiation" (8). This, as we shall see, is highly relevant for Gamerro's work.

A small number of critics have examined feelings and emotions in Gamerro's work. Macarena Areco, writing on *Las Islas*, highlights the importance of trauma and guilt in the novel (2015: 22-23). Claudia Hammerschmidt draws particular attention to the corporal elements of the novel, in particular the vulnerability of the body, be it of the protagonist Felipe, or of other characters, physically damaged by the crimes of the 1970s and '80s (2017: 6). Where our analysis differs from the turn to "affect" as documented so widely and criticised by, for example, Leys (2011) or Cronan (2012), is in its focus on a named and identifiable sensation or emotion: tenderness. For what unites these many and disparate feelings in Gamerro's work, and multiple ways of approaching them is, it shall be argued, tenderness, that strange feeling that incorporates the mental and the physical, emotional love and bodily vulnerability. As Corominas ("TIERNO", 1973: 567) reminds us, *ternura* in Spanish has its Latin roots in *tĕner* (soft, delicate, tender), and has links to meat and animals – *ternero*, calf, veal; *ternilla*, cartilage – as well as human emotions. Many academic papers on tenderness/*ternura* refer to bodily flesh, including that of animals to be served as meat. Tenderness in Gamerro transcends the three models listed above. More broadly, in the theories of emotions and affects that have been so prominent in literary and cultural studies in recent years, tenderness is something of an odd fit, seeming to conform to affect theory's ideas about non-personal, non-subject-based feelings (which often cannot be defined precisely, or at all, in language) but at the same time being an emotion – in English and in Spanish, as *ternura* – with a name and a person to which it can be ascribed. It is a term simultaneously associated with the individual and that which exceeds her; with the self and its *extension* (with which *tenderness* shares etymologically roots).

Few theorists have broached in depth the subject of tenderness in literature. Jacques Derrida, in his book on touch in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, writes of the "disarming peace […] in the tender caress, where the caress would renounce possession"; tenderness he states, relates to questions of ownership and personal limits; in tender acts, one says, "take what I do not possess, nor you!": "This will not be properly our own; of this, we shall never be the masters and owners" (Derrida 2005: 93). The term *tendre* implies both "oriented activities" and "passive vulberability" (94). Elsewhere, Eric Langley explores "the vocabulary of tenderness (from Lt. *tendere*, to stretch) in order to examine Shakespeare's depiction of an 'extended-subject', one whose willingness to extend tenderly out towards the other becomes the condition of their generous, piteous, compassionate nature" (2018: 17). Langley's study unpacks the many literary meanings of tenderness: "to be tender towards the other is not only to attend to their needs, to tender oneself to them, or to extend towards them, but also to tenderly flinch (Lt. *tenerum*, delicate), to retract into oneself, refusing the pathetic contacts

previously understood as so integral to undividable in-dividual identity" (17). At play is a struggle between "an awareness of affective influence […] a sense of porous corporeality, […] a sense of extended tender existence" and "a real need for a comforting and often regressive illusion of completeness" (36). Tenderness, as we shall see in Gamerro's work, is the shared experience, and awareness, of vulnerability and porosity, stretching over the physical and the emotional, the personal and the shared. And, as we shall see, it is at once thematic and formal.

Reflecting on *Las Islas*, and his depiction of post-Malvinas trauma, Gamerro (2013: 110) observed: "The returning soldiers were unable to speak of what had taken place in the trenches because what they had lived through had never happened before". He contrasted this to the crisis of 2001: "I lost my house… And yet it's not something that left an especially deep impression on me: it scratched my skin, it bruised my muscles, but it didn't churn up my insides or shake me to the core. Writing needs those deeper roots. It feeds above all on what we cannot perceive, or understand, as it takes place…" (2013: 111). Gamerro's work explores these feelings on the cusp or paradoxically beyond language, in situations of shared vulnerability – Langley's "porous corporeality" – in short, tenderness.[v]

His novels, however, go beyond simply listing or depicting characters in various emotional states, some of which defy dictionary definition. Key to his work is what can be called *structural* tenderness. If tenderness relies on a mutual vulnerability, permeability, or porosity – the basis for our feelings of tenderness is that we recognise in each other the same breakable bodily limits to those of our own – then Gamerro's stories and novels increasingly operate through such a permeability of literary styles and modes. We see this in his approach to literary genre, mixing sci-fi, detective fiction, *testimonio*, epistolary novel, theatre, and so forth, often via literary rewritings or pastiches. *Sueño* rewrites not just *Martín Fierro* or Juan José Saer's *La ocasión* (1988); the depiction of the protagonist, Rosendo, relunctantly resigned to dying alongside his friend, the tough-guy Musaraña (2017: 68), reworks the final moments of Juan Dahlmann, from Borges's short story "El sur" (1953). *Bustos/Yuppie*, furthermore, references other famous two-parters – from the *Quixote* through *Martín Fierro* to Arlt's *Los siete locos*/*Los lanzallamas*. We witness, too, the growing permeability and porosity among his own novels, with characters (and character types), forms, and situations increasingly overlapping from one work to another. Gamerro's novels *need* each other, and they need other novels, an experience that heightens emotion for readers. In short, thematic and structural tenderness play vital roles in Gamerro's work; the mutual vulnerability and interdependence of different literary modes and forms, of literary works, and the themes and characters they portray, is what creates this "structural tenderness". Given the weight of critical attention to date, this article will focus on two recent fictions, *Cardenio* and *La jaula*.

Tenderness in *Cardenio*

Gamerro's novel *Cardenio* tells a fictionalized story about William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. Central to the action is their lost collaborative play, based on a sequence in Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, *Cardenio.* We read too of their later lives, and that of Fletcher's erstwhile writing partner, Francis Beaumont.[vi] Fletcher approaches Shakespeare after Beaumont retires to Kent, engaged to an (in his mind) wealthy heiress. John Aubrey, in his *Brief Lives,* recorded that Fletcher and Beaumont were bed-fellows, and that they shared a wench. It is likely that this was both a practical and a sexual arrangement; at least Gamerro reads it thus, in a threesome that echoes the fantasies of Marroné and María Eva in *Yuppie* and looks ahead to events in *La jaula*. Gregory Doran (2011), in his book about the RSC production of a "re-imagined" *Cardenio*, styles Fletcher as a gay writer. Gamerro does not offer such a definition, though Fletcher speaks openly of the love between him and Beaumont (154). Fletcher tells Will that "[Beaumont] dice que a veces soy delicado como niña" (157). He uses the same comparison later, in another conversation with Will, "Me hará sonrojar como a una niña" (181). But the feelings on display do not necessarily fit anything like a concept of sexual identity; Shakespeare's sexuality, in Gamerro's portrayal, is especially hard to pin down.

Cardenio focuses on what Lewis Theobald called "friendship's holy law".[vii] Shakespeare urges Fletcher to read Montaigne's essay dedicated to Éstienne de La Boëtie, but with the caveat that such strong affections necessarily break, fade, or end in death. The classical model for the friendship between Fletcher and Beaumont is that of Damon and Phintias (or Damón and Fintias in Spanish). This is a friendship so strong that one is prepared to sacrifice one's own life. Friendship, for Fletcher, is valued above all – discussing theatrical business ventures in a letter to Beaumont, he writes that "la ganancia […] consiste sobre todo en la felicidad y el bienestar de mi amigo [Beaumont]" (60). The laws of friendship – devotion, selflessness, reliability – are much discussed in Fletcher's work and his conversations with Shakespeare: he describes his character Fernando as "devoto seguidor de las leyes de la diosa de la amistad". Fernando, voiced by Fletcher, then speaks of his own "estricta observancia de las leyes y los principios de la diosa amistad o Amicitia" (67). Later, Fletcher himself reads (annoyed by a chatty a boatman): "La perfecta amistad es indivisible" (77). Montaigne becomes Fletcher's night-time companion, reading Will's copy as if it were his own, feeling he has earned the right to do so because of the "mucha lectura" and "mucho amor" he has dedicated to it (283).

Friendship in the novel breaks down the very limits of personhood. As Fletcher writes to Beaumont after their separation, "mi mente ya no es capaz de regresar al momento en que éramos dos y no uno" (2016: 12). In a later letter he adds, "En la amistad de la que hablo se enlazan y confunden uno en el otro de modo tan íntimo que ya no hay modo de hallar la costura" (80-81). Later, Fletcher and

Shakespeare confuse their own identities, referring to “John Shakespeare” or “Will Fletcher” as the author of their play (216). But from Sancho Panza and Don Quijote, Fletcher also learns of a friendship in which “tu amigo no es un cristal [*sic*] que te devuelve tu propia imagen mejorada sino, simplemente, el cristal límpido donde ver a otro ser […] una amistad capaz de saltar barreras y sortear abismos” (286). Fletcher calls Cervantes “nuestro amigo español”, and on hearing news of the latter’s death, “toda mi alegría se trocó en desazón” (285). A key element of the strong feelings in *Cardenio* is vulnerability. Justifying the apparent vacillation of his hero, Fletcher speaks of the need to “Poner [la] vida en manos de la persona amada” (43). There are mentions of tenderness in drafts of the play that they compose – that Cardenio and Fernando “se abrazan tiernamente” at the conclusion of one of the (albeit abandoned) versions (85).

More collaborations follow, but the mood of the play turns increasingly sombre. Beaumont, it transpires, has not married into great wealth. He then suffers a series of strokes, depicted so as to echo earlier scenes from Gamerro: in *Sueño* we have seen the victim of a brain haemorrhage, “fulminado, como si lo hubiera partido al medio un rayo” (2017: 42), the same fate suffered by *el viudo* Gius in *Secreto.* Fletcher writes of “el peso de la melancolía” that weighs on him as a result (249). Emotions are not always easily described; writing of a visit to the now bed-ridden Beaumont, Fletcher asks, “¿Cómo hablaré de lo que he visto, y sentido?” (276). Beaumont cannot speak, but Fletcher infers his understanding, “por el angustiado temblor de la mano que no alcanzaba a levantar” (276). Unable to talk, barely able to move, Beaumont is an image of vulnerability, his former beauty now a memory, or found inherited by his young daughter, Elizabeth. The Globe theatre burns down, and Beaumont dies. Fletcher describes Beaumont’s death with a mix of precise and imprecise feelings: “Úrsula [Beaumont’s wife] me miraba con una mezcla de terror y alivio que me llenó de compasión” (280). In his last moments, Beaumont has, rather like Cervantes after his injury, only one hand that can still feel. Back in London, writing, Fletcher leaves off to tend to Joan, crying in the next room, to offer her “algo de consuelo” (280). Readers will find here an etymological joke, with “consuelo” sharing an origin with the “consolador” (dildo) of Shakespeare and Fletcher’s riotous adaptation of *Don Quixote*.

The *ménage à trois* is a recurring motif in the novel, from Fletcher-Beaumont-Joanie, to Shakespeare’s own troubles in love, to various scenes in the plays they write, often with comic undertones; in one draft, Cardenio and Fernando fight, and Luscinda intervenes, only to find herself “atravesada por las espadas de ambos” (86). Joan insists on the triple nature of their “republic”, that they are “tres socios” together (197). The trio is not, in and of itself, a healthy arrangement; there are moments that might not be out of place in, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men*; as Shakespeare puts it: “¿Qué gracia hay en burlar a una doncella si no puedes jactarte de ello con

otros hombres luego?" (96). But it demonstrates further the breaking down of personhood by strong feelings.

Literary and linguistic boundaries are distinctly porous in the novel. Gamerro composed *Cardenio* in English and then translated it, with material from Shakespeare and his contemporaries, into Spanish, consulting Golden Age sources – Cervantes most obviously, as well as Góngora and Quevedo. But literary anachronisms abound, including references to Gamerro's own novels throughout. Fletcher paraphrases Freud, and wants to give the character Fernando a proto-Oedipus complex. Chronology is reversed: Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, mentioned by Will in passing, sounds suspiciously like a Borgesian joke, rather than a real epic poem (2016: 47). The writing process, of a play by "John Shakespeare" or "Will Fletcher," recalls Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares' fashioning of a third man, H. Bustos Domeqc, or Biorges, as author of their shared works. We see porosity between ages, works, and languages.

The novel is full of often surprising metatextual moments, Fletcher commenting, for example, that Sir Francis Drake "hace las comparaciones menos apeticibles" (68) – as we have seen, Gamerro's narration relies on precisely such comparisons. We have an appearance from "Tamerlán" (91) – a name shared with a recurring character in Gamerro – and to a test of truthfulness involving a finger in *The Faithful Shepherdess* (29), a reference to the memorable scene from *Bustos*, Ernesto Marroné's job interview (and rectal examination) with the business magnate Fausto Tamerlán, a life-altering experience of vulnerability for the protagonist. And "Govianus", a minor character in *Bustos* and *Yuppie,* is named too (156). Moments from the earlier works fall into place in a wider, but constantly shfting, literary constellation. *Cardenio* relies for its humour and its emotional punch more broadly, on its relationship to other works, real and imagined, including Shakespeare's sonnets, *Don Quixote*, and Theobald's "discovered" (or forged) Shakespeare. The nods to the rest of his work, like his intertextual amplification of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *oeuvre*, mirror the tender opening up of mutually dependent, vulnerable, characters. Theatre, as well shall see, comes to play an important role in his next novel, *La jaula*.

La jaula de los Onas: Tenderness and Theatre

If *Cardenio* represented a shift in Gamerro's work – away from Argentina, further into the past – *La jaula* lends this move epic tones.[viii] Ranging over two centuries, across continents, and deeply informed by research in history, anthropology, and literature, *La jaula de los Onas* tells the story of Kalapatke, one of the members of the group of Ona or Selk'nam people captured in Tierra del Fuego and shipped by an entrepreneur to be exhibited – in the guise of primitives and cannibals – at the

Paris Exhibition of 1889. At the novel's heart is a relationship, between Kalapatke and Karl, characterised by friendship, love, and tenderness.

What is perhaps most striking about the novel in formal terms is its cultivation of a variety of genres and forms: epistolary novel, nineteenth-century realism, theatrical *sainete* or one-act farce, memoir, Puig-esque conversations, and Arguedas-inspired "translated" dialogues. In the case of the latter, Gamerro stated that he intended to "darle la voz a los Selk'nam sin que sea falsa o condescendiente" (Gamerro, 2021). Kalapatke's Selk'nam is rendered in elegant, rather poetic Spanish, peppered with precise, near-untranslatable terms from his native language, while Karl's speech "in" Selk'nam is characterised by mis-conjugated verbs and stilted syntax. Each literary mode, as becomes apparent, is appropriate to the moment and the context it describes; again, as Gamerro stated, "[su] ideal no es un tono sino muchos". Importantly, the relationship between the material in these distinct modes is one of porosity and permeability.

The novel revolves round a central problem: the simultaneous similarity and difference between Selk'nam cultural practices, especially the Hain ceremony (a form of initiation rite), and northern/western ones, and the impossibility of resolving such questions because of the genocide committed against the Selk'nam over the course of the last 140-plus years.[ix] One section, describing a massacre of striking workers, adopts the highly realist tone and point of view found in the "Banana Massacre" sequence at the centre of García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967), with echoes, too, of classic cinematic realism, as in Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (1925). Chapter 12 consists of an extraordinary *sainete*, or one-act farce, set in a *conventillo* (multiple occupancy sub-divided/tenement house), and featuring a range of both typical and highly inventive characters. These permit rewritings of Argentine history and literary tradition, going as far as reworking *Martín Fierro* as firstly a (fake) anarchist and then, it becomes clear, a police double agent (in *Sueño*, the character had been killed in an alternative retelling of Hernández's epic poem).

The second chapter tells a story within a story – a second-hand recounting of a Conrad-esque tale first told to the narrator by one of the sailors who accompanied the Selk'nam to Europe, Sam Marsh, and his difficult-to-classify feelings – paternal love, fraternity, sympathy, obsession – for a young girl member of the group whom he meets and, briefly, cares for, on that journey. We get only one side of the story, and that filtered through the perception and retelling of the world-weary seadog who voices the tale; but even so, we have some sense of Sam's tenderness towards the girl he sees as his young charge, again with a typical Gamerro simile: "Sam sintió que se establecía un entendimiento y un como puente entre la niña y él" (70). When Sam is made to hose down the Onas – obeying orders, the narrator notes, connecting one genocide with another, unwittingly (but on Gamerro's

part, almost certainly deliberately) – “fue la mirada traicionada de [la] niña lo que más [le] dolió” (71). When sickness hits the ship, and the girl lies between life and death, Sam dedicates himself to her care: “Su mundo entero, hasta ese momento tan ancho y tan indiferente como el mar, se había encogido ahora a las escuetas dimensiones de esa niña y ese lecho, pero por esa niña habría dado el mundo entero” (79).

Sam’s feelings become almost a model of tenderness:

> […] la revolución que puede operarse en el alma de un hombre cuando descubre que también se puede vivir para los demás. Todo el amor y la ternura que ha venido atesorando, sin advertirlo, tiemblan un instante al borde del alma y luego se derraman, y es intolerable que lo hagan en la tierra árida: es necesario que haya un recipiente, real o imaginario, en el cual verter el precioso licor. (86)

The narrator goes on to recount how the girl – read against the grain, one could say very sensibly – abandons Sam; this offers a warning to the listening sailors of the risks of heeding the call of an indigenous person for their “compasión y su generosidad” (90). Much of the rest of the story – the friendship and love between Karl and Kalapatke – goes to prove this wrong. In the interaction between what one narrator tells us – echoing Conrad, Melville, and other seafaring novelists of the imperial age – and the rest of the novel, resides the emotional and intellectual experience of the work.[x]

A key technique here is what might be called literary montage (Gamerro is an experienced writer for the screen). Not only is the mode or genre of each chapter appropriate to the material it covers, but there are significant – particularly emotional – effects created by the interaction between them. The comic, even burlesque interview between police investigators and the pompous human trafficker Maurice Maître (Chapter 4), is followed by one of the most moving chapters, the death of an elderly Selk'nam woman as recounted by the nurse who tends to her at the end. The self-righteousness and bad faith of the *impresario* is shown as having real human consequences in the sad, lonely death of an old woman; while the implicitly racist attitudes of the medical staff are revealed as being of a piece with perhaps the most egregious case of colonialism in the novel.

> Yo no dije nada, ninguno me pidió mi opinion y no sería bien visto que una simple enfermera discrepara con tan eminentes doctores, pero como yo soy una de las que la recibió cuando la trajeron, y pude ver el terror que se reflejaba en su rostro, las miradas de desesparación que echaba a uno y otro lado, y escuché sus gruñidos y gritos, siento que hubiera preferido las fieras. As menos con ellas hubiera sabido a qué atenerse. (140)

It is in the nurse's *silence* that *La jaula* operates, telling these untold stories of thoughtless violence.

The novel is marked not only by its multiple modes of narration, but also by the porosity between the stories, with characters and anecdotes appearing and reappearing in different guises or versions across chapters. The novel is osmotic to both history and Gamerro's other fictions. The presence of Maître is but one of a number of real, historically documented figures in the novel, including Eugenio Cambaceres, the Selk'nam themselves, Gustave Eiffel, E. Lucas Bridges, and many others; alongside real historical events, including the Pullman strike, "la Patagonia rebelde/trágica", or the attempted assassination by anarchists of President Quintana in 1905, as featured in Chapter 12. Gamerro, in contrast to, for example, Mario Vargas Llosa, and his oft-cited notion of "la verdad de las mentiras," works through detailed research and a desire to fill in the gaps, thus leaving the reader constantly flicking between his fiction and reality.

We also flick between this and Gamerro's other works. Vera, the Russian militant befriended by Karl and Kalapatke, with her red hair, patrician looks, and plan to travel the world taking the toughest jobs available, in order to "hacerse uno con el pueblo y transformar su cuerpo y su mente en herramientas para la revolución" (227) is a female, nineteenth-century version of Marroné's old schoolfriend Paddy, from *Bustos*. Kalapatke's extraordinary ability to find his way ("Recorre un barrio una vez y ya nunca se pierde", observes Karl in conversation with a fictionalised Lucas Bridges [321]) recalls a running joke in *Las Islas* and the *Bustos-Yuppie* diptych about characters who are and are not able to navigate in the city, in particular taxi drivers, who fall into the latter category.

What is especially striking is that, for all the formal dexterity, the emotional charge is never lost. Indeed readers are made to perform a sort of emotional dance, with the novel opened up in various ways. As emotions intensify, and limits between individuals blur, so too do those between novels. Despite the change of era and setting, *La jaula* shows both overlap with other novels and various instances of metatextuality. Don Urbano Pedernera, Malihuel's first Justice of the Peace, appears (21). Pullman's butler, accidentally shot in the face by Vera in her attempt on the magnate's life, must endure a similar, though less severe, version of the paralysis and deformity suffered by Beaumont and others in earlier novels. Marcelo, the epistolary protagonist of the first section, enjoys imaginative sexual encounters with his lover, Camille, that also recall those between Marroné and María Eva in *Yuppie*. These are accompanied by a powerful heightening and even rearrangement of the senses; "su olor me marea y su contacto me electriza […] cuando estoy con ella el grito de la carne retumba en mí con más violencia que nunca, porque tengo hambre de ella" (42).

In Chapter 3 we are first introduced to Rosa, the anthropologist Mary, and their interpreter, Felisa, and another version of Kalapatke's story (Rosa's brother, it turns out), as well as the history of the

damage done to the Selk'nam people by colonialism. This is, no doubt, a sad story – one of death, loss, betrayal, violence, in which families are destroyed, homes are lost – and in Felisa's retelling both the bare facts and her distinctive linguistic touches (in particular, her diminutives: "niñita", "pobrecito", "chiquitito" and "perrito") underscore this terrible sadness. And, as such, the many moments of vibrancy and joy – often centred around the wonderful character of Kalapatke, but also in the humour of Rosa's story or Vera's vivacity – stand out against yet accentuate the sadness. The exchanges also blur languages, with Felisa interpreting in Spanish, and questions about terms in Selk'nam that Rosa's interviewer does not understand. The connections between different genocides across time and space are signalled, with the Selk'nam being loaded into a train wagon on their arrival in Europe – it will take them to Paris, but it is an icon of the fate of their people in the South. Chapter 18 refers to the appropriation – illegal or clandestine adoption – of children, linking the southern genocide to the civic-military dictatorship of 1976-83. In Chapter 3 we start to see the blurring of the lines between, anthropology, and Selk'nam/Ona philosophy and culture; the latter shall come to its climax in Chapter 16, on the "Hain" ceremony in which Karl and Kalapatke achieve full status as adult male Selk'nam.

Many of those parts of the novel detailing the relationship between the German anarchist Karl and Kalaptke deal with attempts to reach an understanding across cultural and linguistic boundaries. At first, Karl possesses many of the prejudices of his era, at best a benevolent condescension – when seeing Kalapatke on the Eiffel Tower realise that he cannot find his homeland on the horizon, Karl describes witnessing "una tristeza profunda, una decepción como de niño" (150). His decision to "adopt" Kalapatke is "difícil de explicar", but is likened to that of one finding a baby in a basket on their doorstep (151). But we see here another example of the fellow-feeling as moral obligation on which Karl and Kalapatke's relationship will build. At this stage, Karl's decision to help Kalapatke get home is "un capricho" (151), but it will develop into an all-consuming obsession, and an unbreakable bond of love and duty between the two men.

In this and the previous novel, love triangles take centre stage (Fletcher-Joan-Beaumont; Karl-Vera-Kalapatke), but stripped of negative feelings such as jealousy or covetousness, and with homoeroticism and homosexuality "depsychologised" (a term once used by Leo Bersani in a discussion of Freud) – that is to say, portrayed as simply one feeling or act among many. The relationships between Fletcher and Beaumont and between Karl and Kalapatke offer lessons in a kind of tenderness that includes and exceeds same-gender desire. Like Fletcher and Beaumont, Karl and Kalapatke come to share a bed (232), and later a lover, in scenes that recall those between the two playwrights and Joanie, between Shakespeare and his two lovers, and also those imaginary fantasies played out by Marroné and María Eva in *Yuppie,* in which, left to their own devices in a

Montonero safe-house, they explore increasingly imaginative scenarios, often sexualising the political figures – Perón, Che Guevara, the oligarchy – they are meant to admire or despise. In *Jaula,* as the three of them make love in various combinations, Karl is moved to tears, "porque supo que nunca en su vida volvería a ser tan feliz" (232).

And yet, desire is not always healthy in the novel. Karl and Kalapatke have a kind of sickly mirror-image in the relationship between Marcelo and Jorge, or Jorgito, whom we first meet in the epistolary opening chapter, and who then reappear throughout the novel (and are eventually responsible for Karl and Kalapatke's murder/summary execution during "La Patagonia trágica"). We read of Jorge's obsession with Marcelo, and his convoluted schemes to bring them – eventually with success – together; but this is matched by another, equally unhealthy obsession: Marcelo's conviction that the Ona are the cause of his various misfortunes, not least the loss of a leg in a duel in Paris (178). This motivates the eventual execution of Karl and Kalapatke.

Karl, like his author, resorts to metaphor in his attempts to capture complex feelings: speaking of Vera's funeral, at which a violinist plays the piece Vera has spent years trying to perfect (by Giuseppe Tartini): "el arco nos rasgaba las cuerdas del corazón" (334). Later, Bridges, who has spent years living with the Selk'nam, explains to him Kalapatke's behaviour during the funeral, at which he cuts himself with a piece of glass while singing a lament: "Nosotros nos laceramos por dentro, ellos por fuera" (335). Bridges highlights the simultaneous similarity and difference between different cultures. The incident echoes an observation found in the real-life Bridges' memoir, *Uttermost Part of the Earth* (1948), that the Selk'nam do indeed self-wound with sharp objects as part of their mourning for the dead.[xi]

Chapter 16 describes the Hain, or initiation ceremony that Karl and Kalapatke take part in to become full members of the community. Before the ceremony proper, we see Karl's increasing immersion in Selk'nam life – a scene that echoes one earlier, from *Yuppie,* of Marroné and comrades cutting sugar cane with *campesinos*. In the earlier novel, the apparent camaraderie is shown later to be false; not so in *La jaula*. For Karl, life in the south involves a greater sense of connection to the physical environment around him, and with it a confusion of senses and subjectivity. As he hunts: "la primera vez que una flecha suya se hundió hasta las plumas en el flanco del guanaco sintió en el plexo solar el coletazo del impacto" (403). This is part of the "felicidad" of "[e]l mundo cazador y nómade" – a happiness that ends with the arrival of cultivation and grain farming, an argument that echoes James C. Scott's *Against the Grain* (2017).

Living among the Selk'nam, emotion for Hans becomes increasingly physical, ever harder to put into words. Wrestling matches offer, above all, the occasion for "la cálida comunión de los cuerpos

desnudos en contacto" (406). His feelings increasingly escape language, requiring the physical to address the philosophical: "no hubiera sabido decir qué era ese miedo sin forma ni causa que lo embargaba" (446); and "una sensación de lejanía" (445); or "ese wa wa wa que le subía de las tripas" (447). As Karl begins to understand the complex workings of the Hain, with its gender politics and theatre, he feels this comprehension in his body: "la revelación se dio en su cuerpo de una vez y completa, y su traducción en palabras en sucesivas oleadas, en efecto dominó o en cascada" (434). He comes to understand that the women – who are not meant to know the secret of the Hain – in fact do, and that this double falsehood is part of the secret of the ceremony: "Hacía semanas que estaba asistiendo a una representación teatral" (437). This does not make it *false* or unreal, any more than one might say so of what Gilles Deleuze referred to as the plane of the "virtual"; the crossover with the experience of theatre, as we see in *Cardenio,* as well as drug-fuelled performance in *Sueño*, is striking.

Anne Chapman, on whose work Gamerro's novel draws, also explored the gender politics of the Hain; "such mocking [by women] of the 'official' Hain strongly suggests that the women knew that [the] spirits were men in disguise, though they, like the men, firmly believed that the spirits really existed" (1997: 107). Bridges also describes the Hain – both the lodge or tent and the activities that centre around it – as well as the important question of its "secrets" (2000: 442ff), with reference to the "drama" of the act, to its actors, and to the dramatic ability required to take part (444). He also recalls incidents that suggest the women's ignorance of the reality behind the theatre was feigned (456) – or perhaps also acted.[xii]

In Gamerro's telling, and as Kalapatke explains it to Karl, the Hain is a form of theatre in which we turn the world inside out to question or mock our own belief systems – rather like a number of works by Calderón de la Barca; or the version of *Cardenio,* the scandalous "dildo play", penned by Will, John and Joanie, that we glimpse in the earlier novel; or the revolutionary piece of immersive theatre laid on for the abusive judge in *Sueño*. For Karl this comes with a realisation that language can be profoundly disappointing: "como todo lo hecho con palabras apenas arañaba la superficie" (449): "el hain era el mundo dado vuelta, el hain revelaba el revés de la trama; era el telar donde se tejía y destejía, noche y día, el entramado de la vida" (449). For Karl, the Hain culminates in an out-of-body of experience and, with it, an understanding not only – or even – of the mind: "antes había entendido, pero con la cabeza apenas" (457). As Barbara Christian once put it, "sensuality is intelligence, […] sensual language is language that makes sense" (1987: 62).

Chapman refers to the Hain's "'actors'": "I use the term 'actor' in quotation marks because the performers were not just impersonating the spirits […they] were somehow imbued with the

supernatural personality of the spirits they were impersonating" (90). Gamerro's novel might respond that, some decades early, the Selk'nam had discovered Method Acting. Chapman is constantly pulled between accepting that the Hain is a form of theatre, and asserting that it is something more, or less: "The locale of the Hain could be compared to a theatre, and the ceremony to a play" (90). It boasts a "theatrical aspect" and its "highly dramatic content" pulls it away from being a rite or ritual (105). The Hain's "universal theme" situates it and its mythology "on a par with the classical literature and theatre of the Old World" (99). From this form of theatre, we move, at the end of the Hain chapter, in another section "translated" from Selk'nam, to the subject of love, in this case between Karl and Kalapatke: the latter says, "¿Te acordás, que te dije que había subido para ver si encontraba el camino a casa? Tenía razón […] Te encontré a vos" (461). This relationship has driven the novel. They find their deaths together too, victims of political repression. For David Viñas (1982), the "indio" was Argentina's first *desaparecido*; Gamerro's work draws connections between the histories of annihilation in the far south – made especially moving by the friendship and tenderness we have seen between the two men, the depiction of which relies on the novel's permeability, its porosity, to other stories and writings, for its emotional impact.

La jaula ends, quite fittingly, on a song that we never hear (476), in a Puig-inspired retelling of Chapman's ethnographic interviews. Lola Kiepja's songs were collected by Chapman before the former's death in Tierra del Fuego in 1996. In her 90s, she was the last female Selk'nam shaman, as Cristian Aliaga states, "el vínculo físico final con la cultura de sus antepasados" (2010: 4). As a "klóketen mujer" (i.e. one initiated into the Hain), she was able both to enter the Hain and embody male characters, including "K'oin-xo-on," "varón propietario del canto" (Aliaga 2010: 20). Anthologised today as poetry – much as Gamerro's novel sees the Hain as theatre – rather than ritual or folklore, Kiepja's songs are the basis for a contemporary poetry of resistance and cultural affirmation. As the Mapuche poet Eliana Pulquillanca writes, Lola Kiepja and others are "[v]oces que a la muerte resistieron" (in Aliaga 2010: 120).

Importantly, *La jaula* implicitly follows Michael Taussig in obliging readers to reflect on the processes that underpin Western/Northern state-formation and politics, in particular the role of mimesis and alterity, with their shuttle between self and other. Taussig (1993) writes of "the ritual power of the theater of the men's house [i.e. the Hain]" (85); "[Martin] Gusinde refers to it as the sovereign power of an invisible state"; "a performative theory of the state as a mighty theater of male fantasies, illusions generated by potent male fear of women." This leads him to reflect on "the power of the mimetic faculty as a socially constitutive force" (85). Taussig concludes that "Mimesis sutures the real to the really made up—and no society exists otherwise" (1993: 86). He notes the chilling fashion in which "the whites [deployed] mimicry in genocide" (87), and with it "the elusive

pattern of mimesis and alterity underscoring colonialism" (95). For Taussig, "modernity stimulated primitivism along with wiping out the primitive" (231); at the same time, in this colonial meeting, "the self is inscribed in the Alter that the self needs to define itself against" (252). But there is a power to be found here: "the exuberance with which [mimetic excess] permits the freedom to live reality as really made-up" (255). And he observes elsewhere, looking back on his work, in terms that would likely appeal to Gamerro, that, "In trying to explain the strange and the unknown, we must never lose sight of how truly strange is our own reality" (Taussig 2010: xiv). Mimesis and alterity, to live reality as really made-up, are terms that could describe the workings of Gamerro's porous, open, and tender fictions.

Conclusion

Tenderness in Gamerro's novels is a mutual awareness of shared vulnerability: in *Cardenio* as strong friendship in the face of ill-fortune and death; in *La jaula* of belief systems, but also of personhood, dreams, and desires. Karl and Kalapatke's relationship underscores the violent political context to their tenderness, from European colonialism, to worker repression in the US and Argentina, to neo-colonial expansion. The novel, like *Cardenio*, features a structure of mutual porosity, alongside illusions of completeness (Langley 2018) – Marcelo's lost leg, Beaumont's fortune, the burnt-down theatre, Karl's attempts at a Marxist analysis of the Hain; thus it acts out a theory of tenderness, and relies on structural tenderness for its intellectual effect and emotional resonance. Perhaps there is something more significant here for how we think about the emotional work of novels, as they draw readers into and out of fiction, creating certainty and doubt, feelings in a web of text.

Gamerro portrays feelings and emotions, particularly tenderness, throughout his novels. To do so, he invents and stretches language and literary form. At times, words themselves are insufficient for what he and his characters wish to describe. This is even more the case in *La jaula de los Onas*, in its attempts to tell a story of colonial violence, centring Kalapatke and his family for today's resistance and decolonial struggles.

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Notes

[i] I am grateful to Ian Barnett and Jonathan Thacker for their detailed comments and suggestions on an earlier draft and to Carlos Gamerro for sharing a pre-publication copy of *La jaula de los onas*.
[ii] See also Gerber and Fonsalida (2016) and Rogna (2017).
[iii] See e.g. Gregg and Seigworth (2010), Sharma and Tygstrup (2015), Ibbett (2018, 2014), Watkins (2010), Anderson (2010), Terada (2001); for critique of the subject with regard to affect, Clough (2010). On affect and masculinities, see Brickell (2014); and on affect and gender more widely, see Reeser and Gottzén (2018). See the critique from Grossman (2010) and Ngai (2005); on affect and political context, Reber (2017); and for a dissection of affect theory from a radical left perspective, Cronan (2012).
[iv] As Beasley-Murray puts it, *pace* Fredric Jameson, "Affect is back (if it had ever gone away)" (2010: 126). See also Podalsky (2018); on tenderness in the poetry of Manuel Bandeira, MacMillan (2007); and the earlier study, addressing tenderness in the work of José María Arguedas, by Juan Marcos (1984).
[v] We might add that tenderness has a particular importance in Argentina. As the poet and essayist Sergio Raimondi put it, "la ternura […] es muy apropiada en principio para este país ganadero, porque remite a una cualidad de la carne, a su ternura, a su carácter tierno, pero de ahí también a ternera, ternerillo, y, por supuesto, al proceso mismo de ablandar la carne, de enternecerla" (Raimondi, 2021).
[vi] I have written about *Cardenio* in the *TLS*: "A doe-eyed idealist, a grizzled punk," 5 Aug 2016, p20.
[vii] Theobold claimed to have discovered Shakespeare's theatrical version of the Cardenio sequence in *Don Quijote*, which he published in 1727 as *Double Falshood, or the Distrest Lovers*.
[viii] I am grateful to Ian Barnett for this observation.
[ix] And which continues today, as Gamerro's recognises in an endnote (482).
[x] On Conrad in the "global world", see Jasanoff (2017).
[xi] Bridges' memoir was written and first published in English. For reasons of availability, the edition consulted is the Spanish translation by María Magdalena Briano (2000).
[xii] Chapman also writes that the Selk'nam's "one great ceremony, known as Hain" is an expression of "male dominance" (1997: 82).