

FAMILIES AS ECOSYSTEMS MAPPING MANUEL RIVAS'S FAMILY IMAGINARY

A FAMILIA COMO ECOSISTEMA O MAPEAMENTO DO IMAXINARIO FAMILIAR DE MANUEL RIVAS

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To theorize and reimagine the contemporary web of family relations, this article maps and analyzes the family ecosystems in Rivasian fiction through an eco-critical lens. As one of the most salient contemporary Galician and Spanish authors, well known for his ecologically conscious writing, an ecocritical definition of family must take into consideration the imaginary proposed by his texts. That is, a non-anthropocentric rhizomatic imaginary of family relationships that questions and expands beyond traditional definitions of family as biological, heteropatriarchal and exclusively human.

Keywords: Family; ecosystems; Manuel Rivas; ecocriticism; Galician literature and culture.

Para teorizar e reimaxinar a rede contemporánea de relacións familiares, este artigo mapea e analiza ecocríticamente os ecosistemas familiares na ficción rivasiana. Como un dos autores galegos e españois contemporáneos máis sobresaíntes pola súa escrita conscientemente ecolóxica, unha definición ecolóxica da familia pasa por comprender o imaxinario que propoñen os seus textos. Isto é, un rizoma de relacións de familia non-antrópocéntrico que cuestiona e se expande máis alá das definicións tradicionais de familia biolóxica, heteropatriarcal e exclusivamente humana.

Palabras clave: Familia; ecosistemas; Manuel Rivas; ecocrítica; literatura e cultura galega.

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1. Ecocritical mapping

Any attempt to theorize or reimagine the web of family relations must be intersectional through race, class, gender, sexuality, and other socio-cultural positionalities. Whereas cultural studies opened the world of philology to the human context, ecocriticism has exponentially expanded its realm to include nature in the broadest sense of the word: both outward, into the physical world, and inward, into the human psyche.

It is generally acknowledged by eco-critics that “we need new narratives about who we are, how we’re entangled with the rest of the natural world, and how we might think, feel, and act to preserve a stable biosphere and a livable future with as much justice as possible” (Schneider, 2023, p. 1). Evidently, this includes the concept of family as a basic and integral cog of any society; thus, rethinking family as an ecosystem reveals more inclusive and extensive connections to the natural world where social and biological justice meet.

Undoubtedly, narratives are worthy objects of ecocritical analysis as they potentially shape and inform our understanding of a given issue, or even depict collective cultural views. The interdisciplinary approaches to the study of these narratives have varied, but an awareness of the value that a qualitative approach brings in terms of polyvalence, poetic and aesthetic examination remains. Paul and Nicolette Sopcak, referring to Lyn Richards and Janice Morse’s work, argue that qualitative methods “are most appropriate when concepts and their subjective meanings are yet to be clarified; existing theories are underdetermined or reductive; when the purpose is to gain a detailed understanding of multidimensional and contextualized phenomena without sacrificing complexity; and when the research aims at adding depth to existing, or discovering new, insights, as well as developing new theoretical frameworks” (2023, p. 60). Therefore, a qualitative analysis of Rivasian narratives is most appropriate to clarify the subjective concept of family, in other words, the broader concept of family as ecosystem and its evolving socio-cultural definition, while gaining a more detailed understanding of families’ multidimensional complexities within their physical and socio-cultural environment.

In the same spirit, this qualitative study adopts a holistic, rhizomatic approach. The rhizome is a post-structuralist concept coined by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe a web of connections and organizations that expands much like roots, as the etymology of the word indicates. The rhizome was intended to replace and escape the linear and hierarchical metaphor of the tree with a non-linear network that has no beginning or end to exclusively show alliances. Thus, rather than present a chronological analysis, the rhizome lends itself more to mapping familial relationships, attractions and influences that develop, propagate, shift, die and reconnect. Moreover, the planar and root-like movement of the rhizome resist organization and structure, mirroring the reality of family ties. Both the theoretical and the biological meaning of this concept make it particularly appropriate to achieve a more current and nuanced definition.

Conceptualizing family as an ecosystem must take into consideration the imaginary proposed by the writings of Manuel Rivas as one of the most salient contemporary Galician, Spanish authors, well known for his ecologically conscious writing and

activism.² As a wordsmith, Rivas sees words as living beings subject to pollution and considers literature as the counter-discourse to recover their essence. Most recently, in “La bioperversidad está en expansión,” his inaugural talk of the XIII National Congress on Environmental Journalism, he reminds us of the importance of environmentalism also in the use of words, that is of “la necesidad de una ecología del lenguaje que preserve el sentido de las palabras frente a la intoxicación, la producción de eufemismos contaminantes y la estrategia del blanqueo de la bioperversidad” [“the need for a language ecology that preserves the sense of words from toxicity, the production of polluting euphemisms and the strategy of bio-perversity whitewashing”].³

The pollution of the word reaches the concept as well and Rivas has expressed his intent to counter this process by exploring the meaning of words through storytelling. In particular, the author recovers the word “soul” in his collection of stories *Ela, maldita alma*:

“O que pretendo con *Ela, maldita alma*”—di Rivas— “é atopar un sentido a palabras que ó longo do tempo foron baleiradas de significado. Son termos, como o da alma, que quedaron como disecados e olvidados. Esta creo que é un dos labores máis bonitos que pode levar adiante a literatura, o de recuperar o sentido destas palabras” [What I intend with *Ela, maldita alma*”—says Rivas— “is to find a meaning in words that through time have been emptied out. They are terms, such as that of soul, that were left desiccated and forgotten. This is, I believe, one of the most beautiful labors of literature, to recover the sense of these words]. (Fernández, 2004)

Aware of this authorial intention, the ecocritical mapping of the concept of family in his writing becomes an organically derived task. In fact, as recently as 2023, Rivas has reclaimed the paramount importance of biodiversity within words themselves, their polysemic meanings, associations and connotations. As a journalist, observing and interviewing people from a wide variety of trades, he has consistently shown his senses are alert and finely attuned to the reality on which he reports, therefore all those meanings are anchored in cultural research.⁴

No less important is it for Rivas to write from the border, a place of exploration and new creativity, a contemporary discursive and power struggle between biodiversity and bio-perversity. In his own words:

Cuando hablamos de ecología de las palabras (...) es prioritario detectar cuándo la bioperversidad utiliza la máscara de la biodiversidad. Estar en la orilla tiene que ver con el lenguaje, porque las palabras también están sometidas a contaminación y tienen peligro de extinción y tienen miedo. Estar en la orilla significa tener todavía algo que decir y mantener esa alerta sensorial para tener vivo el asombro. Lo que te mantiene en la orilla es saber que hay otra orilla. Y que la forma de llegar a la otra orilla es estar en la otra orilla. Porque si estás en otro lugar significa que estás situado en el discurso de la verdad absoluta [When we talk about the ecology of words (...) it is paramount to

² In his inaugural speech for the XIII National Congress on Environmental Journalism, “La bioperversidad está en expansión” (2019), Rivas is presented as writer, journalist and environmental activist and he reflects on the intersectionality of all three aspects throughout his career, his culture and his life. *The Mouth of the Earth/A boca da terra* as well as *The Disappearance of Snow/A desaparición da neve*, *Contra todo isto/Against all this* and *Zona a defender/Area to Protect* and *Tras do Ceo are* also a testament to this. Critically, Castro Vazquez has previously studied Rivas’s works through an ecocritical lens, which was also later explored by Trevathan and Viestenz.

³ This and all subsequent translations into English are mine.

⁴ See Rivasian journalistic compilations such as: *El periodismo es un cuento*, *Galicia, el bonsái atlántico: Descripción del antiguo reino del oeste*, *Galicia, Galicia: Antoloxía dunha década de periodismo crítico (1985-1999)*, *Muller no baño*, *Unha espía no reino de Galicia*, *Os Grouchos*, *A corpo aberto: Unha ollada indie do local universal*, *Contra todo isto or Zona a defender*.

detect when bio-perversity uses the mask of biodiversity. To be on the border has to do with language because words are also subjected to pollution and risk their own extinction and are afraid. To be on the border means to still have something to say, to keep our senses on the alert so as to live in awe. What keeps one on the border is knowing there is another border. And the way to reach it is to be on the other border. Because if you are anywhere else, it means you are placing yourself in a discourse of absolute truth.”] (Rivas, 2013, p. 69)

Rivas warns of the stagnation of absolute truths, as they refer to social issues, for they blind us to complexity and bind us to our blind spots. The counteractive role of writing is precisely that of representing the world through words that are aware of their own polysemy and complexity as living creatures. In fact, the personification of words inaugurates the poetic multilingual volume *A desaparición da neve*: “Veñen as palabras reclamar o seu, / o subtraído” [The words come to reclaim what’s theirs, / what’s been subtracted”] (2009, p. 15).

In both following Rivas’s footsteps and attempting to recover the meaning of the word family, this article will map and analyze the Rivasian imaginary’s rhizomatic relationships that have been subtracted from more traditional definitions of family as biological, heteropatriarchal, hierarchical, and anthropocentric.

2. Animals and Literature

Let us begin with animals within the family ecosystem. The short story “Todos os animais falan” [All animals speak], from *As chamadas perdidas*, sets up the story of love and heartbreak between a dog and a woman. Its title clearly indicates a scientifically proven facts as well as a cultural assumption because such a premise is not merely an authorial choice;⁵ in a very autoethnographic fashion,⁶ Rivas himself reminds us in a recent interview that “en la tradición gallega, el equivalente al «érase una vez» para empezar a contar un cuento es «cando os animais falaban...», cuando los animales hablaban..., el tiempo ese, el tiempo mítico,” “in Galician tradition, the equivalent of ‘Once upon a time’ at the beginning of a story, is ‘cando os animais falaban...,’ when animals used to speak... that time, mythical time” (Tíscar, 2023, p. 64).

Nevertheless, far from choosing a mythical or whimsical approach, “Todos os animais falan” is narrated in a scientific tone by a veterinarian who refutes a sensationalist and mocking article from the magazine “To Pick On.” The magazine does what its own name states, it picks on the veterinarian’s comments with an anthropocentric discourse of superiority over animals. The whole short story is the veterinarian’s rebuttal letter to each comment in the article picking on her own statements as she discussed the state of famous singer Penelope’s dog, Ulises.

The literary reference evoked by their names, serves as a counter-discourse. Choosing such a parallel quickly equates the contemporary love story between dog and human to the love of this classical couple which survived despite their odyssey. Moreover, it unleashes the power and cultural validation of Homer’s *Odyssey*, as well as its affective connotations, into the reading of this short story, thus impacting the reception of the family depicted in it.

The narrator’s extremely cultivated tone asserts not only her animal specialty, but also her literary knowledge. When she clarifies that her clinic “Metamorphosis” is not named after Kafka’s, but rather Ovid’s, Rivas keeps the reader in a classical mindset, reminded

⁵ See Garrard.

⁶ Rivas is both the observer of the culture under study, and an integral part of it. Reporting his observations from within makes his ethnographic work autoethnographic.

of mythological gods and heroes with whom to equate the protagonists of our contemporary love story.

The veterinarian then proceeds to confirm that animals do speak, that Ulises has an ear for music, that he can experience feelings such as love, heartbreak and depression which lead to an attempted suicide. In other words, triggered by the new drummer, Flannagan, joining Penelope's band, the veterinarian observes that Ulises "has a broken heart. Refuses to eat. And hates folk music" (2002a, p. 161). This short story incorporates an animal as a complex family member with not only the ability to communicate, but also to love, feel heartbreak, and to demonstrate artistic preferences. All of them are traits that had been hailed as exclusively human, but have since been discredited by science and cultural traditions.

Moreover, art, and literature in particular, is a powerful force within the family ecosystem in that it showcases models of past families that contribute to the creation of the current family imaginary that Rivas is shaping in his narrative. The rhizomatic family ecosystem allows for the incorporation of all connections and forces that affect family dynamics for a more nuanced understanding of their innerworkings.

3. Predators and Prey

A family ecosystem can be destabilized by external forces, such as war and autocracy, resulting in predatory behaviors. When political autocracy takes over in 1930's Galicia, Spain, it shapes most of the twentieth century. The short story "A lingua das bolboretas" [Butterfly's tongue], set during the thirties, portrays this very political moment through the perspective and voice of a six-year-old boy, Pardal (whose nickname means 'Sparrow'). The butterfly and the sparrow's ecosystem that is created throughout the first nine pages, will be completely undermined in just the last four.

The narrator got his animal nickname from the sweeper, a voice of the community, as the boy ran around under the trees and through the leaves. Pardal, describes his biological family very concisely: "o meu pai era republicano, a nai non" ["my father was a republican, my mother wasn't"] (1995b, p. 30). This difference in political ideology between the progenitors is not a problem when forming a family or during the Republic, a democratic period. However, political polarization at the onset of the Spanish Civil War will prove an insurmountable rift that results in the annihilation of the father's core belief system. When political prisoners are loaded onto trucks, the whole village gathers to watch and can be seen insulting the prisoners, thus supporting the oppressors. The narrator's mother nudges the father to do just that in order to save face, and the father complies:

E entón oín como o meu pai dicía "¡Traidores!" con un fio de voz. E logo, a cada vez máis forte, "¡Criminais!" (...) "¡Fillo de mala nai!" Nunca lle escoitara chamar iso a ninguén nin sequera ao árbitro no campo de fútbol. "A súa nai non ten a culpa, ¿eh, Moncho?, recorda iso. Pero agora volvíase cara a min entolecido e empuxábame coa mirada, os ollos cheos de bágoas e sangue. "Bérralle ti tamén, Monchiño, bérralle ti tamén!" [And then I heard my father say "Traitors!" with a reedy voice. And then, louder each time, "Criminals! (...) Son of a bad mother!" I had never heard him call anyone that, not even the referee on the soccer field. "His mother is not at fault, ok Moncho? Remember this." But now he was turning towards me in a frenzy and was pushing me with his eyes injected in blood and tears. "You too, little Moncho, yell at him!"] (1995b, p. 33-34)

The last insult, in contrast with his son's memory of how he was raised, articulates the self-destruction of the father, even if to save himself and his family, as he betrays his

core values and beliefs. Joining his family, the narrator participates in this symbolic patricide which is accompanied by yet another one.

The republican teacher, the intellectual father figure that Pardal, although fearful at first, grows to admire, trust and love, is taken away, most likely to be executed. Thus, the final act of the narrator, a symbolic patricide in the form of stoning, is overwhelming: “Cando os camiões arrincaron cargados de presos eu fun un dos nenos que corría detrás lanzando pedras. Buscaba con desespero o rostro do mestre para chamarlle traidor e criminal” [When the trucks left, loaded with prisoners, I was one of the children who ran behind throwing stones. I was desperately searching for the teacher’s face to call him traitor and criminal] (1995b, p. 34). Amidst the wrath and confusing feelings, Pardal could only murmur the three words that had framed the animal metamorphosis of the teacher in his eyes: a toad, a bird and a butterfly. The narration links the alternative family member, the teacher, to the narrator through their animal alter-egos. This animalization of characters is not a simplification or a stereotype; quite the contrary, it brings about the personal, poetic and symbolic complexity of the characters, even if it ends in a predator-prey interaction.

In another example, *Os libros arden mal* [*Books Burn Badly*] whose diegesis also takes place mainly during the Spanish Civil War and its resultant dictatorship, is populated by families articulated and disarticulated by the oppressive times. Predator and prey metaphors permeate the novel. In fact, it contains yet another allusion to patricide amidst political, gender and family violence. The character Manlle appears dead, killed by a harpoon. It just so happens to have been one of his gifts to his son, who was raised by his mother, a character represented as the woman in the window, a Penelope-like figure, ever waiting in an apartment by the city’s port. However, far from a passive observer, she turns out to be more of a prisoner, a sexual slave who must also watch out for ships’ movements to aid with Manlle’s contraband activities. The son, who witnesses this abuse as he grows up, seems to become the person responsible for his father’s violent murder.

If in the above example we witness the destruction of the father figure, later in the novel we see its recreation through the example of two children and their mothers: O and her mother Olinda, who wash clothes for Gabriel and his parents, the painter Chelo Vidal and a fascist judge. Unfortunately, the judge is completely adherent to the politically alienating ideology that deems the stuttering of his son Gabriel, most likely caused by the surrounding violence, as a defect. On the other extreme of the political spectrum, Olinda was pregnant with her daughter out of wedlock. It is hinted at that her child’s father was killed at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. The replacement of the symbolically and literally absent father figures for both children is Francisco Crecente, alias Polka. He ultimately marries Olinda, thus officially becoming O’s stepfather. He also actively helps Gabriel with his speech, in contrast to the shame and disengagement of Gabriel’s father. This makes him the father of two diametrically opposed families on the political spectrum: the predatory class represented by the judge, and those upon which they prey, represented by Olinda.

Gabriel’s reconciliation with words is central to the story. This rhizome of language does not only connect the two mentioned families, but also repairs relationships. Before Gabriel’s mother is denounced to the fascists by his father and ends up dead, she builds up Gabriel’s communication skills by drawing souvenirs, as she calls them, on his hands. They are little drawings from nature that he associates with letters, words, and writing. Polka, on the other hand, provides him with long words and coffee to overcome stuttering. Both parental figures help Gabriel reconcile with language. Although a quiet character who grows up in an autocratic regime without freedom of speech, Gabriel resorts to

writing in order to make sense of his reality. He would even go on to take stenography or shorthand writing classes to be more efficient and code his observations of the predatory environment created by the political polarization of society. Thus, he delves into some mysteries. One of them is his father's obsessive collecting of books looted from public libraries and private collections from republican prisoners. One of those political prisoners was Santiago Casares Quiroga. Many of his books ended up burned or even imprisoned, which elevates them to the category of human as representation of human ideology. By the end of the book, Gabriel, aware of the stolen goods, and in a fraternal symbolic gesture, returns the books to the daughter of their rightful owner who had already died. This restitution of the written word, the stolen objects containing ideas, creates another rhizomatic connection towards the reparation of human and ideological family ties.

Yet another predatory relationship emerges in chapters 16 to 19 in the same novel. Crossing ideological and sexual borders, fascist censor Dez is fascinated by republican street singer Terranova and his gifted voice.⁷ Their queer relationship stems from the fear and control Dez imposes on Terranova: "Tomara posesión del. Gobernaba a súa vida e gozaba o seu corpo. E mantendo o poder, o cargo, a consideración social" [He owned him. He was ruling his life and enjoying his body. And all the while keeping his power, his position, social respect] (2006, p. 236). To keep up appearances their relationship is passed off as that of godfather and godson, which allows them to live together under the religious and autocratic regime. It is, however, a sadistic relationship: "O censor estaba cómodo nese xogo. As espiñas dos celos producíanlle un pracer irado. Saboreaba eses seus celos como a antesala do que el chamaba sesións de adestramento, de doma e conquista" [The censor was comfortable with this game. The thorns of jealousy generated an irate pleasure. He was savoring that jealousy as the prelude to what he called training sessions, of taming and conquest] (2006, p. 234). Terranova, who entered the relationship partly to avoid prison, endures such subjugating animalization and objectification that he eventually risks death to escape.

Contrary to appearances, they are not just a couple, but rather part of a love triangle. Terranova has been good friends since childhood with the boxer, Hercules. The triangulation, that is the relationships that Hercules has with Dez and Terranova, stand diametrically opposed to one another. For the latter, Hercules is a friend, a beloved human being. For the former, he is a political and love adversary in the broadest sense, because he is simplified as a republican and an interest of Terranova's who falls outside of Dez's control. Hercules should be read as a Dombodán,⁸ a recurrent symbolic character in the Rivas imaginary who does not speak much, or at all, but affects the course of the story. He is described as watchful prey, quiet and observant with the wide range vigilant gaze of the woodcock (2006, p. 213). Besides, as his alias indicates, Hercules is strong. In fact, he was going to become a boxer before the war, but he only got to fight once. The second

⁷ This name translates as "new land".

⁸ Dombodán, not coincidentally phonetically close to "dumb", is a quiet secondary character with great impact in the (Hi)story. Rivas has stated that he is sensible and quiet because he knows things, and that he seems dumb because he is not cynical. (Entrevista electrónica El País.es). This character first appears in "Meu curmán o robot xigante" and "Un deses tipos que ven de lonxe" from *Un millón de vacas* as well as *Os comedores de patacas*, "A lingua das bolboretas" in *Que me queres, Amor?*, and *O lapis do carpinteiro*. He also appears with similar characteristics as Simón in *En salvaxe compañía* and as Felix in the short story "O partido de Reis" contained in *As chamadas perdidas*. As a rural teenager, a fisherman, a hunter and a worker in a woodshop, a boy with Down syndrome, a boxer, etc, Dombodán showcases a variety of ages and professions that make him the embodiment of the community that does not speak but knows. (Castro Vázquez, 2007, p. 85-103).

fight is the one that alters the course of Terranova's life. Hercules purposefully and painfully loses an arranged boxing match, in exchange for paperwork that frees Terranova. Whereas Hercules sacrifices himself for his friend, Dez had ensured Terranova got a terrible beating. Dez subscribes to fascist heteronormativity which induces self-hatred, a closeted unsatisfactory life, anger, and predatory violence against the object of his desire. On the other hand, Hercules and Terranova care for and protect one another in a life-giving way and narrowly escape annihilation.

4. The Reincarnated and the Haunted

The dead relatives reincarnated as animals expand the rhizome of familial relations into the afterlife. As part of the family ecosystem, they interact with the living and affect their lives in *En salvaxe compañía [In the Wilderness]*. The protagonist, Rosa lives with her family in the valley of Aran. She is the illegitimate daughter of a dead priest reincarnated as a mouse. When he was alive, during the war and dictatorship, he determined who would live and who would die. The transition from living predator, to reincarnated prey incites in himself reflection about family among, other issues.

Rosa's brother, Simon, quite like Hercules, cannot speak with humans but has the ability to communicate with animals, which is seen by some as a miracle when he meets the wild horse, Alvar: "Simon, Aran's mute, was talking with a horse" (1995a, p. 57). After that, they would be inseparable. But Simon's gift transcends talking to animals, for Alvar also belongs to the afterlife and was sent to protect him. Simon works hard as a farmer and helps his sister, Rosa, at home and with her three little children. He likes horses and Mexican music. Other family members are defined by their relationship with Simon. Whereas, his sister loves him and actively appreciates his work, his patriarchal and heteronormative brother-in-law, Cholo, considers him stupid and lazy. He finds the perennial smile and peaceful happiness in Simon's face annoying, but most of all, he is jealous of the mutual love and protection between the siblings (1995a, p. 79). Thus, without taking into consideration how much Rosa needs his brother's help at home, Cholo sends him out to work, "to be a man" (1995a, p. 78). Cholo's lack of morals is also demonstrated when he uses Simon's name to launder the money he obtains from shady arrangements with corrupt politicians. Cholo demonstrates predatory attitudes and insecurities that will culminate in the raping of his own wife.

The mostly absent and predatory husband leaves Rosa alone with the children at home for extended periods of time, and she welcomes the visits of the elderly lady from the manor, Misia, a mother figure who shares her love stories with all of them. The women's relationship, bonding around storytelling and Misia's reminiscing, empowers Rosa to finally leave her husband

This family ecosystem expands its rhizome through space and beyond biological family ties, with the motherly presence of Misia from the neighboring manor and her life stories outside of Aran; through time, in the prior lives of the reincarnated some of whom have been there since the Middle Ages; and through realms, as the dead and the alive converge. The humans reincarnated as animals bring to the foreground the intrinsic animality of all the human characters, as well as the nobility of animals; after all, the last king of Galicia and his court had been reincarnated as crows.

From the world of the dead, also come haunted objects as portrayed in the novel *O lapis do carpinteiro* where the carpenter's pencil from the title itself is haunted. The carpenter's pencil is a special kind of pencil easily recognized by its red color and larger size, and in this novel, it has its own rhizome of family ties linked to human rights. Firstly,

it belonged to several carpenters who fought for worker's rights and, early in the novel, was removed from the dead republican painter whose spirit haunts it. Herbal will then carry it until the end of the novel when he will pass it on to a young woman from Cabo Verde who is most likely a victim of human trafficking and prostitution. Even though "Herbal hardly ever spoke" (1991a, p. 9), and much like a paternal figure, he proceeds to tell his life story to her, which is the novel itself in a way.

Herbal's life has also been marked by the prey-predator dichotomy. He grows up abused by his biological father, both physically and psychologically. In their family visit to Santiago Cathedral, the father beats Herbal's head against a stone image under the expectation that it would enlighten him, thus, both insulting him as dim witted and violently knocking him. In lieu of his biological father, Herbal finds two alternative paternal figures. One is his uncle, a fox hunter who used to apologize to the animals before shooting them dead. Such is the strategy that Herbal, who had joined the fascists, mirrored when he shot the republican painter to save him from torture. Picking up the carpenter's pencil from the painter's ear, he also picked up his spirit who accompanied him and spoke to him throughout his life, becoming another father figure to Herbal. Thus, a haunted object found its way into the family ecosystem.

The pencil lives behind Herbal's ear and sometimes speaks to him. Usually, this is to indicate to him how to save a life, specifically that of republican doctor Daniel Da Barca whom he helps on several occasions. Although Herbal indicates that he was in love with Da Barca's girlfriend, Marisa Mallo, he spends a good part of his life following Da Barca from prison to prison, saving his life, and listening to him with fascination and admiration. One cannot but see a strong affective bond between Herbal and Da Barca. Their relationship, despite their belonging to different sides of the very polarized political spectrum, foreshadows that of Dez, Terranova and Hércules.

There is yet another blood relative of Herbal's, his sister who is physically abused by his brother-in-law, also a fascist. Herbal eventually kills him to end his sister's suffering, of which he has extensive personal experience. Herbal, in many regards, is both predator and prey.

5. The Environment

To conclude our journey, let us incorporate "A negra terra" [Black Dirt], that is, the environment, to the family ecosystem. It is a love poem to dirt, the land and the Earth as the original word "terra" carries all three meanings. The poetic persona refuses to speak except with her, the black dirt, and proceeds to describe the kind of communication desired: "De falar, só con ela falarei/ e falarei coas mans, / docemente coas unllas/ coa paixón dun amante,/ como falan, cando albiscan a morte, os xabaríns feridos"[If I spoke, I would only speak with her/ I'd speak with my hands, /softly with my nails/ with a lover's passion,/ just how they speak, on the brink of death, hurt, wild boars] (1996, p. 64). This passionate image follows a rather grim description of true dirt, black dirt as fertile and suffering "where the root takes hold", dirt "treaded upon", "burnt" and "pierced," used by men or humanity as an "old prostitute" to finally conclude "that it spits, as if it was blood from its chest, every spring" (1996, p. 64).

It seems appropriate to let the "last" root of this rhizomatic journey take hold in the 'black dirt.' although it is one of the earliest poems by Rivas. This metaphorical love poem shows a complex, affective relationship with the dirt itself as a metaphor of the land and the environment. Black dirt is also part of the family ecosystem; it is the environment

personified as a lover and as a mother figure, giver of life, of every spring after the winter, feeding the family.

6. Family Ecosystems

Integrating the human animal into its ecosystem allows us to rethink the organic connections that create and affect families. The wide variety of members such as humans, animals, reincarnated spirits, haunted objects, predator-prey, the forces that disrupt and condition the perception of the ecosystem and therefore bring about change within it, the psychological, spiritual and cultural traditions transmitted through storytelling, and literature, all have a role in the family ecosystem. And just as the rhizome has no beginning and no end, the family ecosystems interrelate. Such conception of family is holistic and allows for an inclusive perspective, not only of its members but of its dynamics, be them from within or from the outside, thus blurring its borders as families expand, adapt and evolve.

It is worth emphasizing the variety and diversity of narratives that impact the family ecosystems. In addition to art, literature, traditions and political discourse, media plays a key role. Rivasian imaginary brings up television and radio as representative forces of a wider media web in expansion. They are shown as powerful conditioning forces in the perception of familial reality and even of the world. The short story “A luz da Yoko”, from *Que me quieres, amor?*, includes the television set named Yoko as a beloved item, that shows the child’s favorite cartoon. The cartoon conditions the view of the child’s own family dynamics, to the point that both the world inside and outside the Yoko converge at the end of the story. In *Os comedores de patacas*, DJ Help becomes the psychological guide of the protagonist, Sam. Almost hypnotically, his words coming through the radio determine how Sam feels. That control is aided by Sam’s constant attempts to disengage by taking drugs. Drugs are also family ecosystem disruptors in *Todo é silencio* and *Vivir sen permiso* in which trafficking is also integrated as a theme. The rhizome of storytelling, much like familial connections, is powerful, ever expanding and adapting. Both of those stories have been adapted to the screen: a movie (Cuerda, 2013) and a show (Gabilondo, 2018-2020) distributed by Netflix. They join the previous filmic adaptations of “La lengua de las mariposas” (Cuerda, 2000) and “El lápiz del carpintero” (Morais, 2003). Thus, in addition to the literary translations into numerous languages, Rivas’s narratives also appear on screens around the world.

These narratives impact the concept of family. After all, humans, as “storytelling animals” (Gottschall, 2013), have tried to make sense of the world through stories as far back as prehistoric times. Those narratives condition our perception of the world and drive our actions in the form of policies and laws, for example. In light of this, we can conclude that the Rivasian narrative about family distributes biodiverse images of families as ecosystems that expand beyond traditional definitions of family as biological, heteropatriarchal, hierarchical, and exclusively human, and render such limiting definitions as bioperverse notions that are out of touch with complex reality.

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