

“A REAL FUCKING MAN”: EXPLORING MIGRANT MASCULINITIES IN MEN WITHOUT BLISS BY RIGOBERTO GONZÁLEZ FROM AN ECTOPIC PERSPECTIVE

“A REAL FUCKING MAN”: EXPLORANDO MASCULINIDADES MIGRANTES EN MEN WITHOUT BLISS DE RIGOBERTO GONZÁLEZ DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA ECTÓPICA

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ABSTRACT:

This project introduces the work of the Mexican-American author Rigoberto González into the Spanish literary panorama and focuses on his short story collection *Men without Bliss*. For an exhaustive analysis of his work, the starting point will be the analytical tool established by Tomás Albaladejo (2011) and his definition of “ectopic literature” which provides tools to study the process of reterritorialization as a consequence of migratory processes through literary works. As presented in other studies dealing with this theoretical background, we would emphasize the relationship between gender and migration. A detailed reading of *Men without Bliss* aims to confirm the possibilities to analyze his short-story collection from the prism of ectopic literature. The examination of masculine characters in González’s short-stories, and particularly the way(s) men experience processes of displacement are described are the main objectives of this work. By exploring this short-story collection, we classify characters according to different models of masculinity and identify how González depicts “traditional masculinity” and patriarchy as source for unhappiness.

KEY WORDS: Rigoberto González, Men without bliss, masculinities, ectopic literature

1. INTRODUCTION

The US is one of the most powerful nations and it is the destination for migrants from all over the world who travel in search of the so-called American Dream, seeking prosperity and a better future for themselves and their descendants. Migratory movements are a manifestation of our constantly changing world and a direct consequence of globalization.

Looking at the American continent, especially the relationship between the United States and Mexico, two of the biggest countries in this continent, through the prism of literature allow critics and readers to develop an emphatic vision of migratory processes. Acquiring an appreciation of the transnational and transcultural experiences of others is directly linked to the artistry and literature of those nations, for they play an essential role in capturing the experiences and perspectives of those who have endured unpleasant events though having been migrants.

Apart from migration, gender and sexual identity are further elements inherent to personal experience and are major issues within our contemporary societies. They are enormously important contributors to the definition of one's place in society, especially if individuals do not behave according to common standards or are vulnerable to some sort of oppression. Gender roles and power relations are undoubtedly present in the globalized world and can contribute to friction when migrants with different values interact with native culture. Literature, and in particular short stories, can reveal such conflicts of identity and acknowledge the convergence of various oppressions or the construction of an identity outside of the norms (Brah and Phoenix, 2004).

Among the reasons why an examination of short stories is preferable to the analysis of other genres such as the memoir or the autobiography, we must highlight their brevity and freshness, as they allow writers to represent everyday moments and express naturally specific moments, fragments of reality (Cantizano, 2010). They constitute a perfect material to analyse the representation of realistic events in the experience of characters who have quit their country. Secondly, because the effects and consequences of migration and culture clashes –in which we include gender differences– are common thematic points in contemporary short story writing. Finally, a large corpus, such as the short-story collection of González, provides enough material to enable a thorough comparison and contrasting of diverse, unconnected characters with entirely separate biographical development in a manner which other genres such as novels or memoirs are rarely able to make possible. In all, the short story serves better than most genres at informing the reader about contemporary societies through the vital experiences of its characters.



In order to provide a corpus to study both the representation of migration and gender, the short story collection *Men without Bliss* (2008) by the Mexican American author Rigoberto González (1970–) is a valuable starting point. These short stories reveal his own experience as a Mexican who had to migrate into the US, and that of his community, and his short stories do not only unveil the frustrations of men who have abandoned Mexico in the pursuit of a better life in the North, but also they reveal the struggles of males who do not fit stereotypes, or who are unable to express their emotions in a patriarchal society which discourages men from suffering publicly or displaying weakness.

The thirteen plots in *Men without Bliss* focus on the stories of a handful of men who suffer the conflict between tradition and modernity and who need to cope with their own identities as Latinos, males and, in some cases, as homosexuals. *Men without Bliss* has already been a subject for study as the subsequent articles portray: “Self-destructive embodiment of the “Joto Body” in Rigoberto González’s “The Abortionist’s Lover” (Dahms, 2011), focusing in one of the short stories of the book and explores the violence exerted by the Anglo hegemonic masculinities against the Latinx gay “effeminate” main character and “New West or Old? Men and Masculinity in Recent Fiction by Western American Men” (Peterson, 2011), which introduces Gonzalez’s work as a salient example of contemporary literature representing different masculine models in the first decade of the 2000s. and the doctoral thesis “The construction and performance of masculinity through the voice of Mexican American male authors: Arturo Islas’ *The Rain God* and Rigoberto González’s *Men without Bliss*” (Camacho, 2014) through which the author explores the construction of Latinx masculinities in Gonzalez’s work. Whilst these articles focus on the relationship between masculinity and Latinx/Chicanx literature, there is little emphasis on the intersection of migration and masculinities/homosexuality, as well as how displacement might have an impact on the construction of masculinities outside of the hegemonic molds.

2. RIGOBERTO GONZÁLEZ: MEN WITHOUT BLISS

2.1. RIGOBERTO GONZÁLEZ

Rigoberto González is a Mexican-American poet whose contributions to US contemporary literature are reshaping the literary panorama and whose writing speaks for the feelings, emotions and experiences of migrants and Latinxs¹ in the

1 As accepted in Oxford Dictionary and Cambridge Dictionary, we prefer using “Latinx” to “Latino” when referring to the community, as we prefer a non-gendered biased term. Aware that the term is not exempt from polemic, for more information: Sulbarán, (2020, January 15). “Qué hace que el término «latinx » sea tan controvertido entre los hispanohablantes”. BBC News Mundo. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-50899019>. The usage of “Latino”, as referring to both men and women, instead of “Latinx” has been maintained in literal quotations.

United States. Although born in Bakersfield (California) in 1970, González spent his childhood in Michoacán (Mexico) as his parents wanted him to, in González's words, "understand that they're Mexican first." (American Writers Museum, 2020). Although González was born in the United States, his parents were undocumented Mexican. His story is like that of other Latinxs, marked by poverty and the desire of parents wanting their children to have a better future.

While twelve years later his family would return to Mexico, González remained alone in the United States where he continued studying a B.A. degree in Humanities and Social Sciences Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of California, Riverside, and two graduate degrees from the University of California, Davis, and Arizona State University in Tempe.

He is a prolific writer and he has published five full-length poetry collections: *So Often the Pitcher Goes to Water until It Breaks* (1999), winner of the National Poetry series, *Other Fugitives and Other Strangers* (2006), *Black Blossoms* (2011), *Unpeopled Eden* (2013), which "documents the lives of migrants, immigrants and border crossers in the form of memorials and prayers" (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 87) (which won the Lambda Literary Award) and *The Book of Ruin* (2019), but his talent spans many genres. In his own words, "I always thought that being a writer meant doing every type of writing, so I never felt compelled to declare myself "a poet" or "a novelist" or "a children's book author." (Sexton, 2009, p.15).

In his novel *Crossing Vines* (2003), he describes the feelings and hardship of Mexican laborers in the Southern California's grape fields. His only collection of short stories, *Men without Bliss* (2008) deals with the lives of Mexican-American characters who grapple with issues and problems related to Hispanic men in the United States. Finally, there is the young-adult trilogy comprising *The Mariposa Club* (2009), in which Maui (Mauricio), an openly gay student at Caliente High School, along with his friends Trini (Trinidad), Isaac, and Lib (Liberace), decide to create "The Mariposa Club", the first LGBTQ+ club of the high school in a largely Hispanic small town during their last year of studies. *Mariposa Gown* (2012) continues with the same characters but new challenges, which sees his characters grow to and enter adulthood –Maui falls in love with Sebastian, the son of a wealthy developer, Trini has to face his homophobic and abusive father, and all of them have to prepare for prom, one of the most important events in the life of an American teenager. Finally in *Mariposa U.* (2015), Maui becomes a freshman at the university and experiences an abusive first love without the support of his old friends and his family. Mixed feelings, loneliness and bad choices fill this book about youth and personal development.



Also remarkable are his memoirs, in which he explores his identity as a gay and Chicano writer², *Abuela in Shadow, Abuela in Light* (2022) in which he explores his own past by recovering the story of his grandmother, *What Drowns the Flowers in Your Mouth: A Memoir of Brotherhood* (2018), which explore the experiences and decisions of men in his own family during three generations, *Autobiography of My Hungers* (2013), *Red-Inked Retablos: Essays* (2013), which combines personal reflections with texts about the writers who inspired him, and *Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa* (2006), winner of the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, in which he explores his coming-of-age as a gay Latinx. González combines his work as a writer and as a book critic, in *Pivotal Voices, Era of Transition: Toward a 21st Century Poetics* (2017). He has also written two bilingual children's books, *Antonio's Card* (2005) and *Soledad Sigh-Sighs* (2003), as well as early reader books in Spanish for Benchmark Education Company.

His brilliant career has been recognised with prestigious prizes such as PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry (2020), Lannan Literary Fellowship (2020), The Bill Whitehead Award for Lifetime Achievement by The Publishing Triangle (2015), American Book Award, The Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize (Academy of American Poets), The Poetry Centre Book Award, The Shelley Memorial Award (Poetry Society of America), and Lambda Literary Award, Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award. González has also been recipient of several fellowships, such as the Lannan (2020), Guggenheim (2000), NEA, NYFA, USA Rolón (2014) fellowships, and he has lived in several countries including Spain, Brazil, Costa Rica, Scotland and Switzerland as a resident artist.

His role as a literary critic has been present throughout his professional background. Evidence of this can be found in his Chicano/Latino book review column for *El Paso Times* (2000-2012) and his contributions to *Poets and Writers Magazine* and *Los Angeles Review of Books*. In addition, he has been on the Board of Directors of the National Book Critics Circle, on the Board of Directors of Fishhouse Poems: A Poetry Archive, and on the Advisory Circle of Con Tinta, a collective of Chicano/Latino activist writers. His involvement with LGBTQ+ and Latinx communities has contributed to him being praised by *Out magazine* as one of the 100 Men and Women who made a Year to Remember, and by *My Latino Voice* as one of the 25 most influential LGTB Latinos in the United States. González defines himself as a committed and political writer:

Writing has never been a luxury or pastime for me, it has always been a passion and a mission. That means that I look at writing as purpose, an expression that's meant to communicate something important enough for the artist that it is to be shared and hopefully appreciated. Writing bears the responsibility to appeal to

2 In this essay we will rely upon Pereira's definition of "Chicano/a/x" as comprising all the authors "que abarcan la temática social y racial de los hispanos de Estados Unidos, así como los México-norteamericanos con interés por otros temas" (Pereira, 2018), thus rendering "Chicano/a/x" and "Latino/a/x" completely synonymous.

the linguistic, intellectual and/or emotional pleasures, and to expand the reader's understanding of the powers and politics of voice, knowledge, and/or identity³ (González, n.d.).

González has served as a professor at several universities in the United States, including The New School, the University of Toledo, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the City University of New York, among them. Nowadays, González is a distinguished professor of English and director of the Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing at Rutgers University–Newark (New Jersey). Alongside his career as a professor, he currently serves as a critic-at-large for the L.A. Times, named in March 2016, as well as a series editor of several publishing houses, supporting new writers from the diaspora. Following in the footsteps of some of his former teachers, including the Chicano writers Gary Soto, Francisco X. Alarcón, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Pat Mora, and Alberto Ríos, and the African–Americans, Clarence Major and Jewell Parker Rhodes, he is committed to giving space to marginalized voices, as well as propelling the careers of young writers coming from the periphery. He is an editor at the University of Arizona Press Camino del Sol Latinx Literary Series, which publishes emerging and well-established voices in Latinx literature. Within its editorial board, we can count award-winning Latinx voices such as Sandra Cisneros or Jennine Capó Crucet. He is also member of the Editorial Board of the Immigrant Writing Series from Black Lawrence Press, which publishes work written by either immigrants or whose work focuses on the immigrant experience.

2.2. *MEN WITHOUT BLISS*

In *Men without Bliss* readers can become immersed in the stories of Mexican men who suffer silently: regardless of their sexual tendencies, they describe men who have to accept their pain and their loneliness. González explores private moments of men who are trapped by stereotypes and criticizes the behaviour of some Mexican–American, who are pierced by fixed assumptions and prejudices. With this collection of short stories, González sheds light on facets of Mexican culture, and provides an opportunity to explore the everyday lives of Chicano men living in the United States.

Indeed, place is a relevant issue within this collection as it informs the distribution of the texts: the book is separated into two parts, the first, “Men in the Caliente Valley”, includes short stories which take place in the fictional landscape of Caliente Valley, whilst the second, “Men in Other Places”, contains five short stories located in México (“Nayarita Blues”), and big cities in the United States, Los Ángeles (“Día de las Madres”), Seattle, (“Haunting José”), Albuquerque, “Road to Enchantment”

3 This statement is extracted from his personal webpage at the Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) website. González, R. (n.d.) *Biography*. Retrieved June 7, 2022, from <https://www.plu.edu/mfa/staff/rigoberto-gonzalez/>.

and New York City (“The Abortionist’s Lover”). Caliente Valley is a recurrent location in his writings, as it is also the landscape where *The Mariposa Club*, his first young adult novel, takes place. This setting is a symbol of emigration and poverty. It is also a place where characters must fight against alienation and opposing stereotypes, which become a source of pain. In an interview with Elaine Sexton, González explains, that although fictional, this place is

very similar to the place where my family worked for many years as migrant farm workers. In that place I became aware of my family’s lot in life –poverty and hardship– always the fear of empty pockets and empty stomachs. This was not our promised land or our American dream, by any means, and no one was more surprised by this than me. (Sexton, 2009, p. 14)

González’s writing belongs to a long tradition of Chicano writers who explore the experiences of those living between two cultures, and therefore the notion of “identity” is present in his writings, as characters seem to be torn between two places, two languages or two borders (Stavans, 2011). About this “dual” identity, González expresses

For me duality is being aware that I’m bicultural, I’m bi-national, that I identify as an American as much as I identify as a Mexican ... And that doesn’t mean there is a separation between the two. I don’t see them as excluding each other, as fighting or colliding. They’re actually collaborating. And so that helps me move forward as a writer. (American Writers Museum, 2020)

Not only is “identity” displayed as a cultural element but also from the point of view of gender, the ideas of manhood are questioned through the different short stories. Different male characters struggle with the idea of “being a male” and satisfy the stereotypes associated with masculinity, especially in Mexican culture.

It seems that there is an underlying triangle about identity in González’s stories, as he explores and writes from the perspective of a male, Latinx, and gay writer. It is only by accounting for the implications of being a male, being a Latinx and being gay that some of these stories can be understood. We should bear in mind that identities cannot be dissociated one from the other: one does not stop “being” a male when one “performs” as a Latinx, but rather the implications of “behaving like a (stereotypical) male” can be challenged when more layers are added. Expectations of what defines a man is (or in other words how a man should behave) can be defied when the layers of “Latinx” and “gay” are added. This idea is perfectly expressed in the Preface to *Ambientes: New Queer Latino Writing* (2011), a short story collection devoted to Latinx authors describing and exploring the lives of LGBT+ communities. When he refers to the authors compiled within this collection, he says:

Their writing addresses what it means to be a queer Latino: not only how the colour of your skin, or your accent, or any of a dozen of perceived differences affect not only how you may be treated—demonized, vilified, adored, iconized—but also how you come to perceive yourself. And what happens when, because of your sexual desire, you add yet another layer of difference on top of that. (Picano, 2011, x)

3. THE REDEFINITION OF THE MALE CHARACTER

Men without Bliss questions the conventional images of masculinity and redefines the idea of what “being a male” in the Latinx communities represents. In order to explore the conventional image of manhood in these communities, Camacho (2014) resorts to some examples from media and literature, so as to define such “conventionalities”. For Camacho (2014), a good example of hegemonic masculinity is strongly represented by the images of the “galán” and the “macho” in soap operas (*telenovelas*). In both cases, they represent males who are perceived as positive role models, none of them displaying their sensibility publicly. Only two moments seem to allow “galanes” and “machos” to show themselves as sensitive: when they are in love with a woman, or when they are not sober. In any case, most of the time these men are portrayed as brave, valiant, and heroic, they are desired by everyone, and project a positive outlook to viewers. The idea of displaying “machismo”, defined as an exaggerated masculinity, seems to be entrenched in Latinx media, and therefore, seems to be a crucial influence on the way male and female characters are not only represented in literature, but also how do they “perform” in real life.

These characters of “galán” and “macho” in traditional soap operas are, of course, satisfying heterosexual normativity and shed light on the relationship between men and women and the, mostly negative, consequences of this machismo in straight relationships. Nonetheless, this does not mean that homosexual male characters are not susceptible to suffering from these stereotypes.

Rigoberto González redesigns the conventional images of Latinx manhood, breaking with the conventional images of males displayed in media and literature as defined in the previous paragraphs. Emotion is a crucial element in the construction of different characters, as their suffering comes either from the suppression of it, or the displaying of it publicly. It is by means of questioning the *status quo*, and not performing as men are expected to do, that male characters struggle with their pain and find and redefine the notion of masculinity. Instead of being perceived as a source of weakness, emotions are seen as a sign of acceptance of the male character’s own debilities.

Men without Bliss is about displaying weakness in Latinx cultures, and the way “the masculine” should be represented by means of pain and hardship more usually linked



to ideas of “the feminine” rather than images of power and control. It is through the risk of feeling vulnerable, of exploring new ways to behave like a man and by questioning the extent to which they must succumb to the expectations of others (mothers, friends, and members of their community) that González’ characters grow to wisdom. In an interview with Eleaine Sexton, González (2009) expresses: “The only deliberate strategy was that I wanted to explore the lives of males—gay and straight, Mexican, Chicano—and reveal a few of the many complicated layers of masculinity men have to navigate as members of a culture that doesn’t allow men to express vulnerability or weakness through emotion.” (p. 14)

4. QUEER AND LATINX: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

If there is anything that characterizes *Men without Bliss* it is that the question about maleness and masculinity is found in nearly every short story. According to Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1999, pp. 43-44). Male performativity is therefore considered as the defining element of gender expression and embodiment. González questions himself as to what happens when effeminacy is the definitory feature of this performativity and concludes that there is an existing manipulative force “in the Mexican American and Mexican community that is destroying the happiness of men” (Camacho, 2014, p. 58). All in all, the different short stories depict the “crisis of masculinity”, defined as the delegitimizing of power and dominance entrenched within males (Lemon, 1992). This crisis reveals that there are models and rules of behaviour which have been internalized but which are detrimental to the well-being of men and therefore are a cause for the lack of bliss.

Besides this, Rigoberto González inserts himself into a narrative tradition of Latino writers, from inside and outside the United States, for whom “their outsider status is a double one, queer and Latino, providing an enhanced, more brightly coloured distancing lens from which he so brilliantly examines, exalts, and critiques (...) the gay life of his time.” (Picano 2011, p. x). Just to name a few, Jaime Manrique (*Latin Moon in Manhattan*), Manuel Puig (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*), Reinaldo Arenas (*Before Night Falls*) seem to be representative of the twentieth-century Latino-American literature written in Spanish, but consumed worldwide. In the new millennium works from Gloria Andalzúa and Cherrie Morraga, are great examples of writers who significantly explore the lives of LGBT+ Latinos living in the United States.

In *Men without Bliss*, effeminacy is treated as a weakness and therefore, a source for suffering. According to Dahms (2011, p. 17), “effeminacy is never a sought-after characteristic. It is so anti-male, that most characters equate crying or expressing

emotions as effeminate and in their attempts to erase effeminacy from their gender repertoire, close themselves off to any emotional display.” Just to highlight some examples, in “Good Boys”, effeminacy is equated to illness as the character of Baltazar is described as someone who is not able to work like a man, and in homosexual encounters, men who perform as “passive” in same-sex male encounters suffer the submission for a male “active” partnership, whose performativity as a male is more akin to the traditional stereotypes, as it happens in “Men of Calliente Valley” and “Your Malicious Moons”. Certainly, the depiction of these characters aligns with Octavio Paz’s depiction of female Mexican imprisonment: “La mujer vive presa en la imagen que la sociedad masculina le impone” (1981, p. 205). *Men without Bliss* depicts how patriarchy can also create masculine prisoners, entrapped due to this male-constructed society.

When we ask ourselves why we should focus on queer Latino writing, as focusing on its triple intersection: race, gender and sexual orientation, Picano observes of the emerging figures in literature, cinema and pop culture who are no longer accountable to the cultural references of previous decades: “There was, there is, an exploding gay population with Iberian heritage, and they’re on the lookout for role models, seeking people to identify with, to help build a queer Latino community and culture.” (Picano, 2011, p. x). In fact, the lack of male referents is a source for unhappiness and struggle for teenage characters in González’s short stories, as will be further discussed in the next pages.

5. GENDER AND SEXUALITY FROM AN ECTOPIC PERSPECTIVE

The depiction of “migration” through literature (Albaladejo, 2008) as well as in other studies dealing with migratory issues and fictional narratives (Bayraktar, 2016) is vastly productive. The emergence of a new concept like “ectopic literature” reveals the need for new terminology to classify works in which the migration experience is involved. As defined by Albaladejo (2011, p.3), we can classify as ectopic:

la literatura que ha sido escrita por autores que se han desplazado de su lugar de origen a otro lugar, implicando ese desplazamiento en muchos casos inmersión en una realidad lingüística distinta de la de origen e incluso cambio de lengua. Es la literatura que es producida fuera del lugar propio, fuera del espacio o territorio, en sentido geográfico y también en sentido cultural, en el que ha nacido o se ha formado el sujeto productor de dicha literatura. Es la literatura que está fuera del que sería su tópos propio y se sitúa en otro tópos, que también es lugar, espacio, pero distinto del previsible. Es la literatura que, a falta de su territorio habitual, encuentra otro territorio; es ectópica en relación con el tópos primero, el habitual (Albaladejo, 2011, p. 3).



Although there are other terms such as “deterritorialized literature”, “exile literature”, “intercultural literature”, or “migration literature” the focus of study, and the works which can be classified within these frameworks differ significantly. A discussion about the differences between the three first terms can be found in Mora (2020) and Luarsabishvili (2013). Succinctly, the term “ectopic” focuses on the notion of “reterritorialization” and the construction of literature located in a new topos. This term is not interested in the reasons for the displacement, as it might happen with terms such as “exile literature” and is particularly interested in the people who have experienced personally the displacement, paying no attention to the literature written, for instance, by descendent of migrants unlike “intercultural literature” does.

On the other hand, “migration literature” refers to those works that reflect upon migration; that is, whose discourse has ‘migration’ as a macro-structural element. It is therefore a broad concept, within which more specific categories can be found. The “literature of exile” is “migration literature”; however, they are not assimilable terms, but rather they present a hypernymy relationship. While, as Soren indicates “migration is not only to be understood in relation to authorial biography. Rather, the concept of migration is able to encapsulate the overall thematic and stylistic elements of the novels” (2008, Soren, p. 9), an ectopic perspective requires a deep understanding of the experiences of the authors.

Another of the signs why “ectopic literature” becomes an efficient perspective to analyze *Men without bliss* is the fact that apart from racism and cultural shocks, the question of “gender” is an issue commonly explored within ectopic literature, especially within the intersection of gender, class and race which is derived from the migration processes as the works of Hellín (2021) and Alfaro (2016) exemplify.

From a textual point of view, gender and sexuality are often represented as problematic issues, because sometimes there must be a process of redefinition of categorizations such as “masculine” and “feminine”, which obliges individuals to accept the space assigned to men/women in the new space, in terms of performativity or culture/political issues, as a consequence for reterritorialization. Added to that, when dealing with sexualities outside of the heteronormative space, the degree of acceptance of these sexualities varying between the ‘source space’ and ‘target space’ –understood as the two poles of the migration process– (Albaladejo, 2011) is relevant when analyzing the representation of the intersection between *queer* (understood as outside the heterosexual normative spectrum) and migrant.

Oppression due to gender or sexual orientation could be inherent before the displacement, for instance, oppression for being part of the LGBTQ+ communities could exist before the displacement, and it can be attenuated or emphasized depending on the political and cultural environment of the target space. Therefore, it is not only

the resulting multiplicity of oppressions which should be studied when dealing with an ectopic text, but we should also recall the plausible existing oppressions before the migration process even if these original oppressions were not the reason for the displacement. We are not considering here, because of the nature of the textual material we are evaluating, texts in which homosexual characters migrate because of their sexual condition, more appealing to “exile literature” approaches; but rather how the perception of homosexuality in the source place, shared by family and members within the same community, can be a source for (un)happiness in the target place as well as considering how masculinity becomes redefined as a result to reterritorialization.

When dealing with *Men without Bliss*, we can observe that although some of his characters are first-generation migrants who have experienced migration first-hand, others are well-established second or third-generation Mexican-Americans who have not experienced migration but suffer the consequences of being migrated people’s sons. For them, tradition and family can be accepted positively or negatively, but the status of their ancestors as migrants determines their ideas about gender and sexuality. According to Hurtado and Sinha (2016), Latinx men living in the US

occupy a contradictory position within a system of privilege, one that offers them advantages but concurrently disadvantages those belonging to devalued social categories, that is, men who come from working-class backgrounds, who are immigrants, who speak Spanish, who often look racially non-white, who have a Latino background, and who may be gay—all statuses that contribute to experiencing racism, ethnocentrism, classism, and heterosexism (p. 12).

Characters in González’s short stories are not only marked by their experience as migrants but also as belonging to other relevant categorizations (“male” and sometimes “gay”), which are the source of their oppression and suffering. Hence, not all men share the privileges the same way, even if every man can benefit from patriarchy (Connell, 1995), but rather “the disadvantages increase because of the convergence of these categorical assignments.” (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016, p. 12).

6. REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANT MASCULINITIES IN MEN WITHOUT BLISS

Male characters are the pivotal element in each of the short stories of *Men without Bliss*. As the title says explicitly, these thirteen stories recall the experiences of ordinary men whose emotion is repressed. Although being very different, due to factors such as age, cultural background, sexual preferences, social class or belonging to a rural or urban area, there are two factors which unify different characters of the stories: they are all Mexican-American men who suffer silently and must accept their pain alone. Their status as Mexican links them to a culture in which suffering seems to be associated exclusively with women, leading men to hide their emotional pain and



to avoid displaying any kind of weakness publicly. By describing the emotions and frustrations of Latino males who succumb to displaying weakness, González critiques how traditional behaviours which are entrenched within a certain community can contribute to suffering and hopelessness. It seems that it is only by questioning this assigned role and breaking with the alienation that they produce that these male figures can overcome their lack of bliss.

The sources of pain can be different but they are primarily derived from their condition as male and/or Latinx, or social and economic injustice, like in their workplace, sexual repression, or the inability to handle emotional grief because of the necessity of acting according to a learned and well-established masculine role. Even if every character in *Men without Bliss* is contributing to picturing how Latinx males can feel trapped in a society which obliges them to show virility and power, González depicts realistic situations showing how men carry the weight of a sexist tradition which imposes certain stereotypes upon them. The unfulfillment of the expectations of masculinity can therefore only be questioned in private, leading to a silent suffering, but also to a space to purge their emotions.

Although not showing their weakness to other characters in the story, readers are allowed to learn about different moments of vulnerability of these male figures, which contributes to presenting the men not as mere alienated figures, but as members of society who must recognize that it is only by expressing their feelings and allowing themselves to be vulnerable that they can find happiness.

6.1. CHICANO/LATINO MASCULINITIES IN CRISIS

Men without Bliss presents characters who are far from representing the hegemonic ideas about masculinity entrenched in Mexican communities and entrenched within Latinx pop culture (Baker, 2005). Characters in *Men without Bliss* are not *galanes* in their attitudes to women, as represented in soap operas, and neither are they stereotypical *machos*, in the sense that they are often mere victims of cultural expectations derived from family and society. They represent, as we stated some lines before, a “crisis of Latino masculinity”, should we understand Latino masculinities as sharing specific cultural attributes distinguishable from other kinds of white masculinities. Therefore, the main characters of these short stories tend to suffer from the power others exercise against them or because they must revolt (voluntarily or not) against their own assumptions about masculinity and *machismo* entrenched within their origin culture. Therefore, this crisis reveals that there are models and rules of behaviour which have been internalized in Chicano/Latinx backgrounds and hence, prevent men from achieving bliss. This is not a book with unhappy endings, but rather one whose characters learn through their suffering and who remain hopeful until the end.

Along with this idea, in *Men without Bliss*, characters struggle to find a place in which to purge their emotional pain, and this lack of release becomes a major cause for lacking bliss. In the author's words, González "wanted to explore and reveal a few of the many complicated layers of masculinity men have to navigate as members of a culture that doesn't allow men to express vulnerability or weakness through emotion" (Sexton, 2009, p.14). Displaying emotion is generally assumed to be a sign of men accepting their weakness, and therefore some characters are only able to express (or at least to think over) their phantoms when they are alone. Hence, loneliness is a common motto in different characters, who need a space to vent their sorrows. Characters are presented as reflective human beings who use intimate spaces such as cars (Gaspar in "Good Boys", Jesse in "Your Malicious Moons", Helio in "Día de las madres"), the shower (Marcos in "Mexican Gold", Baltazar in "Good Boys"), or solitary landscapes (Rolando in "Cactus Flowers"). This impossibility of expressing emotion is explicitly mentioned in "Good Boys", Gaspar is alone in his car, but he suffers because he is not able to cry:

At that point in his journey he feels the urge to cry but can't, even though his eyes are ready to tear. Tiny spasms force his lids to pound as if they can't keep open any longer. His throat becomes raspy, choked up with bitter bile that crawls up from his stomach. But he can't cry. Just as he's about to release a pent up wail –the kind he imagines only women are capable of–the grief deflates in his chest. The courage to burst open is lost. Why can't he cry now that there's no one near enough to hear him? Even that's become trapped. (p. 70)

In general, as male dominance and privilege are threatened, we can classify characters in the different short stories into one or more of these categories suggested by Peterson (2011):

(a) Men who are trapped by place and poverty, as happens with Rolando in "Cactus Flower" who is unable to escape from the wooden shack in the middle of the desert, or the three brothers in "Good Boys", whose behaviour is clearly determined by their low social status;

(b) Men who struggle with tradition and family, as happens in "Your Malicious Moons" in which Rolando comes out during a family event to frustrate his brother's objective of being the future mayor of Caliente Valley, or in "The Call" or "Men without Bliss", in which the father-son relationship is also worth to analyse;

(c) Men who suffer because they regret (not) having done something, as happens with the character of Marcos who regrets not having done something to prevent his brother's death in "Mexican Gold", or "Road to Enchantment", in which Arturo decides to start a new life and regrets not having pursued his dreams when he was younger;



(d) Men who struggle with desire and sexuality, as happens in “Plums” or “The Abortionist’s Lover”;

(e) Men who must confront “machismo” and similar models of normative masculinity like the character of Maclovio (“Confessions of a Drowning Man”) and the impossibility of asking for help due to his cousins’ judgemental attitudes reveals; and

(f) Men who suffer from not being able to express weakness publicly, as happens with Gaspar in “Good Boys”.

It is indeed in this short story where we can find three examples of men which are sufficiently relevant to be worthy of further comment, specially as they are presented as male characters entrapped by their status of Latinxs and migrants. In this story, three brothers who work in the fields picking onions, live alone with their mother, Doña Gregoria, who dreams about winning the lottery in order to clear the debts of her dead husband “left behind for her sons to pay” (p. 59). The three male characters in “Good Boys” represent different models of masculinity and the three of them suffer from their social oppression in different ways. None of them are able to publicly express their feelings or emotions, as they are trapped within stereotypes and models of normative masculinity. Melchor and Gaspar, the older brothers, are presented as toxic masculine characters who exercise their power against their younger brother Baltazar. Gaspar is described like this:

Even as a boy Gaspar has been a hateful person. He has always been vain about his good looks and trim body, admiring himself in front of any reflection he comes across. Years of flattery and compliments from friends and strangers have made him self-righteous and resentful of his plain-faced brothers. People’s eyes open wide to take in perfection of Gaspar’s features. Little do they know about his heavy, spiteful heart and cruel tongue (p. 63).

Their conversations evidence these stereotypes and their vision of masculinity. Melchor showers the first, and, later on, Gaspar enters into the bathroom. In the middle of this, Melchor says:

«You love me so much, Gasparín. Why don’t you get behind me and fuck me in the hole?». Melchor drops the towel on the floor on top of Gaspar’s good shoes. Gaspar leaves the room with his clean towel across his arm.

«Pinche maricón» says Melchor. «If it wasn’t for Doña I’d have kicked his puto ass years ago. I hate guys like him» (p. 63).

Gaspar represents another type of masculinity, more appealing to a seducer, and a “galán”. Although also representing a type of stereotypical masculinity, he is certainly different to his brother. While Melchor decides to make money by breaking into the



houses of wealthy people, Gaspar is more inclined to liquidate his assets and, by so doing, renounce his marriage ambitions: "That was then, when even Gaspar, that cold-hearted sissy, had pawned what little strips of jewellery he had saved up for his future girlfriend." (p. 68)

For instance, in "Good Boys", the younger brother, must confront poverty, as he has not a bedroom on his own, nor can he share with his two brothers. We should add that he is constantly insulted by his brothers. And that he refuses his mother's suggestions to sleep with her in her bedroom:

With his brothers out of the way, Baltazar relaxes on the couch, where he sleeps. He doesn't mind sleeping with his legs over the armrest. When he tires of the couch, he sleeps on the living room floor. Doña has asked him repeatedly to move into her room, but Baltazar has enough problems fighting off the mam's boy image already (p. 64).

Poverty is presented as a reason for masculine characters not to achieve happiness, but González's characters also struggle with tradition and family, as they have to face the stereotypical roles assigned to masculinity. Suffering arrives when these men are unable to fulfil these standards, and the impossibility of recognizing them defines these characters as "men without bliss".

6.2. TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

As Peterson (2011) states, *Men without Bliss* contains several short stories which explore adolescents growing up to become men. There are some common ideas within all these short stories: families are not described as functional and there is a lack of effective male role models (father, brother). The most salient cases to examine from this perspective are the characters of Marcos ("Mexican Gold"), a young boy who has recently lost his brother and who has decided to join the army, and Abismael ("Plums"), a young boy who has sexual secret intercourse with an old man in a motel. In some other short stories, young characters must confront issues derived from their own condition as Latinos, such as Helio ("Día de las madres") who comes across an accident involving a truck full of undocumented and illegal Mexicans and who has to deal with the death of his mother, or such as Baltazar, who suffers from being the youngest of three masculine brothers, for whom expressing emotion is practically forbidden. I would focus primarily on the transition to adulthood in "Mexican Gold" and in "Plums" as both consider implicitly the ideas of learning through suffering and deciding to make the right choices.

In "Mexican Gold", the character of Marcos, who has lived under the shadow of his brother, Roger, suffers his loss as he has died in a fight with Tino, which started because



Roger had stolen his girlfriend. Although it went against the rules, Roger takes out the knife he carries with him, but Tino catches him, and it has terrible consequences for his attacker. Marcos feels guilty about having screamed out to warn the young boys about the existence of the knife, which will have fatal consequences for his brother. The ideas of vulnerability and guilt are presented as negative characteristics of male characters, and the mere idea of being humiliated during a brawl represents the traditional vision of masculinity. When there is a recreation of the typical procedures of wrestling between young men, the idea of honour appears to be associated with a violent masculinity.

And when he gets tired of watching Roger's bloody face wave in front of him he euthanizes him with a solid right hook and a swift kick in the stomach. It's how a real man puts his competitor out of his misery, and it's considered honourable. And Roger writhes in pain a bit and then the crowd loses interest quickly and disperses some guys complaining this wasn't much of a match. (p. 9)

Certainly, it is this feeling of guilt which articulates the whole short story, and which will demonstrate the coming of age of the character. The character of Marcos is not presented as a model of this masculinity and neither is he as violent as his brother. This does not mean that he does not have negative thoughts about his brother, but they have never been explicitly voiced. Indeed, the fact that the image of Roger is constantly repeating in his head, is evidence that Marcos is a sensitive character who feels guilty for not having done anything.

The death of Roger, who is presented as his mother's favourite, will be the catalyst for Marcos' decision to enlist the military, as he feels lost and alone. The figure of the mother is relevant as his final conversation with her will enhance this feeling of not belonging anywhere. It is only his grandfather –who he calls Abuelo–, who persuades him not to enlist in the military.

The revelation of his mother, who tells him that he was supposed to leave the house when he was a child and go with his father, is fundamental to Roger's feeling of loneliness and his existential void. Nearly at the end of the story, when Marcos looks for a photograph of his dead brother, there is a striking revelation about his mother: "She has faded from his personal belongings, having made herself irreversibly invisible as if she too were dead" (p. 22).

"Mexican Gold" is a cyclical story in which feelings are only expressed in places where the character of Marcos is alone, like the bathroom or his own bedroom, when Roger is no longer with him. At the end, Marcos is presented as a vulnerable character, and a simile can be established when referring to the roach at the beginning of the story. A new cockroach appears while he is glancing over the photos of his brother, but

instead of killing it, he lets it live: "a few roaches scurry out. His impulse is to crush the insects, to chase them down before they disappear beneath the bed, but he doesn't move". In a way, it seems that Marcos accepts pain and his status as a defenceless man who has to take decisions, and who has to grow up by his own means.

The fact that Marcos pierces his ear, even though he knows it is forbidden to enlist in the army with a piercing: "The tip stings a little, but when he pushes it through he doesn't feel any pain other than the brief surprise of the warm penetration of metal" (p. 22), might imply that he is experiencing an evolution, and that he is closer to finding his own place in the world. The idea of his perforating his ear might suggest that he would not finally go into the army and will instead consider the people who care about him, especially his Abuelo. The idea of expressing pain and being able to feel vulnerable is also positive in terms of achieving bliss, as it seems that it is only through personal knowledge and the acceptance of it that he can make good choices.

In "Plums", personal knowledge is directly linked with the idea of choosing between fantasy and reality. In the same fashion Abismael, like Marcos, has to confront toxic masculinity and the appearance of new masculinities. Both characters are victims of the absence of a male role model. In "Mexican Gold" we learn that:

the truth is Marcos didn't like going to work with his father. He only pretended. He knew nothing more painful than getting up at dawn to go to the desert, where his father drove the bulldozers and cleared the ground for new roads. It wouldn't have been so bad if his father didn't insist on forcing the pedals and gearshifts on him while he had a beer. Marcos hated that, especially when he forgot which lever did what and his father slapped him on the head, sometimes knocking him off the bulldozer and into the stones the machine had broken down to sharp gravel (p.11).

Regarding "Plums", the character of Abismael learns to choose between a toxic masculinity, represented by the character of Gilberto, who is a violent man who abuses his wife, and who represents the stereotypical depiction of a man behaving in an overly aggressive way, and Tony-R, who is a "geeko" and represents the opposite of Gilberto. A brilliant depiction of Gilberto is provided when Abismael describes his wife: "When she comes near enough for Abi to detect the smell of her body lotion, he's stunned to discover a bruise on her chin. For a brief second, he feels for her because her father must beat her also, but then he realizes she doesn't live with his father. She lives with Gilberto. (p. 47)"

Apart from the brilliant lyricism of González in this passage, in which the reader can notice the contrast between the "plums", in the title of the short story, defined as "a sweet disguise for a love bite" (p. 43) and the "bruise", the character of Gilberto is as violent as Abismael's father, establishing both figures as being far from depicting role models.



The character of Tony-R, who works as a receptionist in the motel and is only a few years older than Abi, prevents Abismael from keeping on meeting Gilberto, who waits for him two nights consecutively. Each time the married man asks for his lover in the motel, Tony-R tells him that his lover is absent. The second day, when the receptionist decides to talk with Abi and sort of introduce him to some new revelations about masculinity, sex and homosexuality are discussed. Tony-R looks for Abi in his room, who later on accedes to going with Tony-R to see the stars in his cars. It is then when Abi learns that Tony-R had his first sexual experience by performing a fellatio on Mr. Hartnett, his former social studies teacher at the high school. When Tony-R tries to approach him, Abi aggressively compares him to Gilberto:

How dare you suggest that I—haven't you been watching the stud who comes to see me? A *real* fucking man. All fucking muscle and cock, if you want to know. Shit, when he enters me I feel like a goddamn cathedral. And that's something you or that pencil-dick social studies teacher will never do for me. You got me? No wonder Mr. Harnett came after you. He saw what a dumb little unattractive fag you were, and he didn't have to finish his sentence when you were probably already on your knees with gratitude (p. 56).

Suddenly, after the revelation, Abi recognized his aggressive manners and apologizes to Tony-R. The last lines of the short story reveal somehow an epiphany in the character of Abi who "rests his head against the tattooed cushion of Tony-R's shoulder and breathes in the musk of a cologne that probably didn't cost very much, but for Abi, it's quite valuable and deliciously real" (p. 57). This moment is presented in opposition to the motel, "a place for desperate fantasy and people who enter its walls for escape" (p.57). It seems that Abi learns to distinguish fantasy from reality, and therefore he implicitly escapes from the toxic masculinity Gilberto illustrates.

6.3. HOMOSEXUALITY AND MIGRATION

Regarding the main characters of the different short stories, we account Jesse ("Your Malicious Moons", Abi ("Plums"), Heriberto ("Día de las Madres"), José ("Haunting José") and Arturo ("Road to Enchantment"), but we should add their male counterparts or the gay male figures with whom they have sexual and/or romantic intercourse. These characters differ in age, in social class, and their relationships to sex and desire cannot be equated. Nevertheless, three major topics can be distinguished regarding homosexual characters in *Men without Bliss*: the idea of coming out and family acceptance, which can be perceived as "negative" such as in "Your Malicious Moons", or rather positive, in "Día de las Madres" or "Haunting José" (positive); the impossibility of achieving a "fulfilling" relationship, such as happens in "Your Malicious Moons" or in "Road to Enchantment", or the idea of men trapped in a toxic

relationship, due to racial oppression, or the attachment to male counterparts who represent toxic masculinity, as it happens in “The Abortionist’s lover” and in “Plums”.

6.3.1. COMING OUT / ACCEPTANCE

Positive or not, the presence of the topic of “coming out” in almost every short story concerning gay characters reveals the importance of this topic, as it emphasises the importance of this moment for homosexual people in general. “Your Malicious Moons” deals with the revelation of Jesse. In “Plums”, the coming out is not explicit, but the non-acceptance of his family is a major concern for Abi. Although not focusing on the idea of “coming out”, the relationships of Heriberto and the positive acceptance of his mother as well as with José, are also mentioned in the short stories. In “Road to Enchantment”, the idea of “coming out” appears in reference to a secondary character, Walter, the ex-boyfriend of Cecilia, one of the friends of Arturo, who has sex with him because of curiosity. Finally, the traumatic discovery of Lorenzo’s affair with his brother-in-law becomes the reason for his to escape from Mexico and seeking a new life in the States.

The central idea in “Your Malicious Moons” is that of coming out publicly during the mayoral candidacy of Jesse’s brother Víctor. Apart from his “self-pity, anger, victimhood” (84) as Peterson (2011) describes, the feeling of lack of acceptance by his mother is explicitly expressed in the short story when he assumes that he is compared to Teresa’s ex-lover who turned out to be homosexual. “That’s how she wants to hurt you for not being Víctor since, unlike your gullible half-brother, your mother figured out long ago you are just like the shoe-store boyfriend. The hickeys on your neck –men bites through and through. She always knew. She was Teresa Talamontes, mother, mayor, sage.” (p. 27)

The idea of family acceptance is portrayed throughout different short stories. There are characters who have not come out publicly, as happens with Víctor in “Your Malicious Moon”, as they know their sexual condition comes into conflict with their parents’ ideology and stereotypes. By the same token, Abi is conscious of the problems he can generate because of his sexual condition. Abi assumes that the response of his Catholic parents will be negative and that the community will be ashamed of his sexuality. Hence, the character feels trapped between his own desires and the expectations of his family and his community. This reflection appears when Abi says:

My parents are perfectly healthy, and they’ll both have long lives and that pisses me off because that means that all three of us will grow old together. Do you know how much that sucks? I’ll never be free of them. And I’ll be much more of a burden to them because all of their friends will look at them with pity for having had one child-a faggot at that-who will never marry or have kids or a profession. They



might as well have been barren. I might as well have been born handicapped (p. 52).

The “coming out” as homosexual, is not always treated as a conflictive issue, as the characters of José (“Haunting José”) and Heriberto (“Día de las Madres”) portray. The explicit mentioning of the coming out in almost every short story concerning gay characters is relevant as it sheds light about the importance of this moment in the life of a homosexual person. Regarding Heriberto, we learn about his ex-partners, Lamont, Kyle and Charlie, through Helio’s words. In fact, the whole story deals with the visit of Catarino, an old lover who has come back from New York to bury the ashes of Heriberto’s mother.

When talking about the former couples of the character, Heriberto’s mother’s rejection of Lamont is not due to his sexual condition, which she accepts, but because he is a black male, which shows the stereotypical prejudices of the mother: “Ma didn’t care for Lamont because he was black. I didn’t care for him because he was such a wimp” (p.154). Although Kyle is also a black male, he is accepted by his mother as “he was patient, masculine, and polite as hell to Ma, who took a great liking to him. She changed her mind about the black issue, though she qualified it by saying Kyle was a black man from the South and not from Compton” (p. 154). With Catarino, there is a complete acceptance of his mother, “She said he was a perfect match for Heriberto because my brother’s fire organ was his heart” (p.161). Similarly, José’s homosexuality is accepted as it is expressed in “She has certainly given me the space to be who I am. Not only does she overlook the whole gay thing, she’s never objected to my tattoos” (p. 171).

6.3.2. GAY MALE FACING TRADITIONAL MASCULINITIES

There are two short stories in the collection in which homosexual characters are involved in sexual intercourse with men who depict a toxic masculinity. They represent the stereotypical conceptions of a *macho* and are presented as violent characters. On the one hand, in “Plums”, as we have already mentioned, Abi, is a teenager who has sporadic sexual encounters secretly in Palm Tree Motel with Gilberto, a man who abuses his wife. On the other hand, in “The Abortionist’s Lover”, Lorenzo is trapped in a relationship with his husband Adam, who abuses him, and with whom there is sexual intercourse marked by violence and social rejection.

In *The Abortionist’s Lover*, the main character, Lorenzo, is presented as an effeminate man who is trapped in a relationship with Adam, a Jewish doctor who practices abortion procedures on poor women coming mainly from Latin-American countries. From the very beginning of the short story, the discomfort and the dependent relationship are

explicitly described. “The more we sweat, the quicker I want this to end, so I recall a time when I actually enjoyed the sex, when it was still spontaneous, before he made it a duty –mine, in exchange for living in his home without paying a rent” (p. 194)

This short story reveals the struggles between homosexuality and class. Lorenzo suffers from the intersection of being Chicano and gay, as he is considered as an “inferior” man in comparison to Adam. The conversation between Lorenzo and Adam at the beginning of the short story shows this dominance of Adam by Lorenzo, who silently accepts his husband’s insults. When Adam talks aggressively about an abortion he has practiced, and Lorenzo asks him to change the subject, he contemptuously says: “Oh, pobre Papi,” Adam says in that gringo accent that annoyed me. “Have I hurt your little ears?” (p. 195). Violence in the life of this couple is not only verbal, but also physical, but Lorenzo is trapped due to his economic dependence. These two characters are in the kitchen preparing the soup when suddenly Adam hits Lorenzo with his fist and, although Lorenzo is in shock, he lets his lover penetrate him.

Without warning, I feel the hot sting of his fist across my face. It’s the surprise of the blow that knocks me down, not the force. Adam drops beside me immediately. “You see what you made me do?” he says.

I’m stunned into paralysis. He rolls me over on my stomach and lifts the robe up over my ass. He continues to coo apologies and to kiss the back of my neck as he squirms his way on top to penetrate me. The adrenaline has excited him, and though I’m not prepared to receive him, I let him exhaust himself. I let his breath distract me from the pain. (p. 196)

As shown in these lines, in “The Abortionist’s Lover”, the migrant homosexual male is presented as a penetrated subject. Sex is presented as a domination-dominated situation in which the passive counterpart suffers from the abuses of their active partners. This abuse is represented by means of different social classes, as in the “contractual” relationship of Lorenzo with Adam but is a common topic in all the relationships presented in this short story. Readers also learn from the different lovers of Lorenzo, which shows that the character is trapped within toxic relationships: Jayson, who is about to marry but with whom he has been having sexual intercourses; Robbie, Ahmed and Shiraz, with whom he practices sex at the end of the short story and her sister Dalia’s husband, who motivated him to move to the US. As happens with Jesse and Arturo, Lorenzo is unable to have a fulfilling relationship.

When Adam is on call for twenty-four hours at the hospital, Lorenzo wipes out every trace of him and waits until his lover Jaysen appears ready to give him a fellatio. But this time is different, as Jaysen announces to him that he wants to stop being Lorenzo’s lover, and that he is going to marry and he is going to have a baby. The relationship



with Jaysen does not seem to emotionally fulfil Lorenzo. Their conversation is based upon sex and there is no reference to an emotional or romantic attachment.

After we learn of this encounter, a flashback lets us know how Lorenzo ended up in the United States because of the secret sexual encounters with his brother-in-law. As Dahms (2011) points out, "Lorenzo differs from these other Mexican and Chicano men in that he had to flee because of his promiscuousness with other men, notably, with his future brother-in-law". In short, homosexual men are presented as figures dominated by other men who are either masculine, or heterosexual, which emphasizes the domination of what is traditionally considered "masculine" or normative against other vulnerable positions.

CONCLUSION

Rigoberto González's short story collection portrays the struggles of migrant Chicano men in different places of the United States and reveals a deep understanding of suffering and oppression due to the conditions of "male" and "migrant". This approximation of *Men Without Bliss* raises awareness about the situation of the Chicane community in the USA, and helps us to understand the feelings, attitudes and worries of men who have suffered the process of migration, and/or who struggle with notions such as "cultural identity" or "alterity".

Regarding the purposes this essay aimed to cover, it should be highlighted that it has served to introduce the author Rigoberto González and his work to the Spanish and European literary panorama, where there is no available research yet. This essay contributes to the few academic projects made on González's short stories and further explores their main topics and symbols of their main topics and symbols, focusing on the ideas of migration and masculinity. As his experience is directly connected with his artistic process, we have collected data about his biography from several sources, accounting several interviews already registered. This material has been key to clarify some of the hypotheses of our research and have also draw our attention to new ideas. By the same token, González expresses through his fiction his own experience as a migrant and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, which has provided us with a better understanding of the depiction of these topics within his creative process.

By considering the notions of "Chicane", "male" and "homosexual" as relevant labels to examine the construction of individual and collective identity, we can resort the importance of such labels in the writing process for authors whose literature is based on these categories. Authors such as González express through their literary process their awareness of his belonging to these previous categorizations and



challenge the pre-established notions of what they mean. It aligns González with other Chicano and gay authors who share the idea that it is through writing about their experiences as belonging to oppressed groups, that they will raise awareness of these injustices among their readers, thus becoming committed authors.

Ectopic literature is a theoretical framework which has allowed us to examine the traces of migration in *Men Without Bliss*, a collection of thirteen short stories in which Chicano men living on the US are in the search of happiness, and struggle with the construction of their identity. As some papers concerning ectopic literature suggest, the experience of migration is directly linked to the experience of gender and sexuality, as the feeling of otherness usually challenges the notion of gender performativity. In fact, the characteristics attributed to gender might vary within the process of migration and reterritorialization, and these cultural differences are explored in González's narrative. His male characters are complex human beings who suffer from pain in a culture which do not accept their emotional pain as licit and expressible. The depiction of homosexual characters introduces new ideas such as the "coming of age" and explores, among others, the notion of family acceptance. In sum, thanks to the representation of male characters who break the moulds of the traditional masculine archetypes, readers can give thought to the necessity of fulfilling the exigencies of patriarchy as an impossibility for men to achieve a fulfilling life.

In light of the above, this research paper has met its goals in demonstrating that Rigoberto González is one of the most compelling voices in the contemporary panorama of the short story in the United States, and his work is worth being read and analysed. Finally, this dissertation opens a door for new directions, which include the study of his poetry, his memoirs and young adult novels.

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