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Queer Ecology and Nonhuman Agency in Guiseppe Caputo's *Estrella madre* (2020) and *Un mundo huérfano* (2016)

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A commonly stated goal in the writing of queer ecology scholars has been to integrate the findings of several different disciplines in order to decenter the human in queer theory. In fact, in their introduction to the special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* focused on the topic of Queer Inhumanisms, Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen insist that many of what they consider to be "queer theory's foundational texts" question "the nature of the 'human' in its relation to the queer" and the different hierarchies of what it means to be human altogether (186). By pointing to Gloria Anzaldúa's New Mestizo work, Luciano and Chen suggest that important queer writings offer the chance to deconstruct the meaning of humanity and to use a process of dehumanization that does not simply create a new humanity, but rather shows that humans are comprised of "different entities, different materialities," where humans are "all the different organisms and parasites that live on [our] body and also the ones who live in a symbiotic relationship to [us]" (186). Likewise, Eileen Joy affirms, "the queer and the nonanthropomorphic have been importantly entwined" in a process that shapes a space for what Joy calls the "posthuman interbeing" (223). Jada Ach also proposes that queer ecocritics look for ways to reimagine the multiple manners in which humans and environments not only intertwine, but also "*merge* with one another" (183).

Along similar lines, Anne M. Harris and Stacy Homan Jones contend that just as queer theory aims to reject binaries, recent posthuman and new materialist texts have tried to refute dualisms that pit against one another characteristics such as "human/nonhuman (or animal/nonanimal), animate/inanimate, live/dead" in an attempt to "decenter" the human and, in addition, to "see the human as always and already entangled with other animal bodies, organisms, terra and things" (8-9). This sort of entanglement, according to critics like Jane Bennett, produces a "speaking human body that is not *radically* different from the affective, signaling nonhumans with which it coexists, hosts, enjoys, serves, consumes, produces, and competes," thus creating a field with differentiations "too protean and diverse to coincide exclusively with the philosophical categories of life, matter, mental, environmental" (117).

Within this theoretical context of contemporary queer ecological thought, I explore two recent novels by Colombian writer Giuseppe Caputo and how they engage issues related to queer sexualities, ecology, humanity, and the nonhuman. I analyze the relations among the human, the nonhuman, and their physical environments in order to demonstrate how closely intertwined they are in the two texts. This analysis will allow me to explore the value of nonhuman agency in both literary works and to prove that such agency disturbs traditional family and affective patriarchal structures. Furthermore, it will be useful to consider some new queer ecological paradigms, like the ones proposed by Bennett and Giovanna di Chiro, among others. This permits me to reconsider traditional environmentalism and to establish how Caputo's texts construct new queer ecologies.

The plot of Caputo's *Estrella madre* (2020) centers on the life of a poor young man obsessed with his mother who has recently abandoned him. He is constantly struggling with money but the one bill he manages to pay on time is his landline, where he awaits his mother's phone call, which never comes. Throughout this exasperated narrative of anticipation, the reader learns that his mother used to work in the only factory in town—a shabby business that paid poorly while contaminating the town's air and water supply. One day she decides her son is old enough to take care of himself and she leaves without telling anyone where she is heading. The plot of the novel then moves to the present day where the son lives in the same apartment he shared with his mother while maintaining a close relationship with two of his neighbors, Luz Bella and Ida. The latter, frequently referred to as Madrecita or

Little Mother, has an "impresionante descendiencia" (Caputo 33) that is, she always "seems to be pregnant." Some of her children, like the one she calls Albertico, are completely invisible, while others are cooking pots, easy chairs, and a robotic vacuum cleaner. Two of the cooking pots (Dolores and Caridad), as well as the vacuum cleaner (Ramiro), have proper first names, while many of her other children in the novel are left anonymous.

Ida or Madrecita's nonhuman children are one example of how *Estrella madre* queers what Harris and Holman Jones call the "onto-epistemology of things in relation to humans" and other bodies (5). Within their work on "the queer life of things," the two scholars revisit Bennett's goal to move beyond a binary that places "dull matter" (things) in opposition to "vibrant life" (us) and look to position objects as willful agents in "the performance of everyday life" (Harris 10). This new perspective allows for a new conversation between queer and ecological politics that positions the human in a place where it is "a simple co-participant in the cosmic queer ecology" (Harris 11). In Caputo's novel, Madrecita accepts as her children not only the previously mentioned Dolores, Caridad, and Ramiro, but also the narrator and their neighbor, Luz Bella. She undertakes her role as mother to all of them and in no point of the text does she differentiate among her human, nonhuman/object, or nonhuman/ intangible/ invisible children. To her they all deserve the same level of love and protection, and she defends them equally when she feels they are hungry or when they are harassed by the building manager, Próspero. The care she exhibits towards them is indicative of how Caputo rejects the opposition between things and humans, between the so called "dull matter" and "vibrant life." In the text they all share a common space and enjoy the same consideration. The human children are not exceptional and become the sort of co-participants in the novel's queer ecology that Harris and Holman Jones propose within their critical exploration. This integration clearly queers the traditional notion of a family as objects are turned into agents infused with affect and special meaning. They are no longer simple *things* that can be used and discarded once they are not new and shiny or replaced with better and more fashionable versions of themselves.

In *Estrella madre* the nonhuman regularly stands on equal footing with the human. The narrator frequently talks about the importance of objects in his own life and in the one he shared with his mother prior to her leaving the city. In thechapter "Máquinas sentimentales," he talks about "seis objetos que me hacen pensar en el tiempo" (Caputo 36). The bed, the door, the fridge, the phone, the dresser, and the little box under the bed are all willful agents that not only convey meaning to the main character's existence but also determine the novel's plot development. They are brimming with affect just like all ofMadrecita's children and figure as the sort of queer objects that Harris and Holman Jones identify with their own "sticky attachments, a queer resonance, history or use" (19). According to the narrator, the six objects signify time: "el tiempo existe por ellos" (Caputo 36). He goes on to explain that while, for example, the bed refers to the past, the phone symbolizes the future, a promise of everything that might still happen, especially the long-awaitedlost mother's phone call. These affective objects are yet another part of the main character's queer family, each one of them instrumental in helping him to cope with his loneliness and abandonment in a society where he is left bereft, poor, and orphaned. In many ways they function as an antidote to what Harris and Holman Jones describe as "the reign of 'dehumanizing' capital" (19).

In their totality, the objects in "Máquinas sentimentales" form a constellation whose name, according to the narrator, would be either "El Deseo o La Esperanza" (Caputo 37). Here, Caputo's character does exactly what Bennett proposes in her own text: by experiencing materialities as actants, he is bound to consider their trajectories and powers (Bennett 62). They form a large natural force, a constellation, which has the ability to affect the human characters in the novel and to change their paths depending on their condition. For example, the little box contains the money that the abandoned son has left. He uses that money to pay rent, to buy groceries, and to make timely payments on the very important phone bill. Every time he takes money out of the box (he rarely seems to put any into it), his heart sinks: "me instalo en angusitas muy profundas" (36). Hence, in their totality the objects in question—Madrecita's children, and the main character and his neighbors—create a queer kinship similar to the one Harris and Holman Jones propose in their study. This kinship "becomes an ecology, a network that reaches far beyond the human-human relationships that sustain LGBTIQ people" (100). It is a kinship akin to the one Karen Barad identifies in her 1994 analysis of Susan Stryker's "empowering" performative piece, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix." In this case, Barad defines queer kinship as a "potent political formation" that allows for an "ongoing radical deconstruction of naturalness" within which queer subjects can be reborn and self-regenerate while questioning the essence of what is natural and unnatural (413-14).

In fact, in *Estrella madre*, the narrator's relationships with other humans are frequently lacking, unsatisfactory, and hurtful. Even though he has an affective connection with his two neighbors, they are unable to provide him with the material and emotional support he requires. Madrecita accepts him as one of her children but her ability to take care of him is limited by her own economic struggles. When she sees him going hungry, she offers him "un tarrito de compota, que en lugar de compota tiene agua" (Caputo 39). Likewise, Luz Bella complains "Yo también ando sin plata" and warns him that "No puedo estar prestándote" (Caputo 55). It is even worse with the building manager, who is constantly chasing him down for the past due rent he owes, as well as with his own mother who leaves him the moment she feels he is old enough to take care of himself. When he learns she wants to leave town, he quickly suggests they flee together, but her reply is a cold "No. Tú te quedas acá o te vas por tu cuenta a otro lado. Yo quiero hacer cosas que no he hecho" (Caputo 164). Even his sexual escapades are frustrating and rarely leave the realm of the imaginary. They are mostly impossible encounters with some of the construction workers who toil on the building next door. The one real (meaning not imaginary) sex act, where he performs fellatio on a coworker in the factory's bathroom, is quickly interrupted by an insistent knocking on the door. Thus, he only gets to enjoy sex in his fantasies, for example, when imagining two of the construction workers penetrating him without causing him any pain (Caputo 144).

The disappointing human relationships that the narrator experiences throughout the novel emphasize the significance of the interconnected queer ecology he constructs with a combination of human and nonhuman entities. It furthermore reflects the need to examine, in closer detail, the way Caputo's text creates cultural representations of the overlap between queer studies and what Luciano and Chen call "the rising critical interest, across the humanities and social sciences, in nonhuman objects" (184). Such objects, according to these scholars, are not a "mere" backdrop to the actions of human characters, but rather actants that are "equally important, equally in need of inquiry" (Luciano and Chen184). Therefore, ecology is no longer comprised of a "natural world" that stands "apart from humans but a complex system of interdependency" (Luciano and Chen 188), an interconnected structure that, according to Tavia Nyong'o, allows for the creation of an "environment of countercultural communal life, musicking, and polymorphous sexuality" (747). In their study, Luciano and Chen evoke José Esteban Muñoz's conception of "brown commons," which allows for the construction of a "transmaterial space" that is "deliberately minoritarian" and "defiantly queer" (Luciano 192). In it, a variety of "brown people, places, feelings, sounds, animals, minerals, flora, and other objects" produce "a movement, a flow, and an impulse, to move beyond the singular subjectivity and the individualized subjectivities" (Muñoz 2). All of this is at play in *Estrella madre* where the complex ecology of humans and nonhumans previously explored is, in addition, constantly interacting with an outside natural world that is depicted as threatened and diminished by different socioeconomic endeavors and activities.

Apart from presenting its readers with a constellation of affective objects, *Estrella madre* depicts the town's environment as one contaminated by the factory where the narrator and his mother used to work up until it burns down and covers the entire region with dark smoke. Before the fire, the factory spread its poisonous gases all over town. The narrator remembers the wind that "arrastraba el humo a todos lados" (Caputo 70). The pollution did not affect only the air they breathed, it also turned the neighborhood river into "un caño […] de agua negra" (Caputo 70) where no fish could survive and whose waters killed all the trees along its banks. The rapid ecological degradation in the novel is further exacerbated as time passes. Thus, later, when the main character looks through the window, he describes what he sees as “un paisaje negro: son las montañas del fin de la ciudad, pasadas por un fuego que ya se acabó. La hierba no es verde —ha perdido su primer color— y sale humo de los árboles… No hay ciudad después del vidrio” (Caputo 221). Meanwhile, the river has been buried underground. Only “agua sucia” comes out of the town’s tap, and the remaining trees have been replaced by “postes eléctricos grises” with only one little shrub left in the so called “Plaza del Arbolito” (Caputo 170). This nightmarish ecological environment mirrors the sense of sadness and desolation that the abandoned son feels throughout the novel’s plot, hence reflecting Luciano and Chen’s assertion that the natural world is not a simple backdrop to what happens in the text, but rather an interconnected actant that forms a complex and interdependent system among all human and nonhuman entities. It also demonstrates a point that Sallie Anglin makes in her own exploration of queer ecology when she states that “matter that is ‘nonliving’ […] participates in the active and generative relationality that produces ecosystems, landscapes, cityscapes, and even bodies” (347).

Estrella madre similarly reflects Muñoz’s point that there are no singular or individualized subjectivities in the minoritarian, queer space (2). The brown bodies inCaputo’s fiction are subject to the complex and deteriorating ecological reality they face. This affects even Próspero, the narrator’s building manager and his main foe who pesters him for late rent payments while threatening to evict him. In fact, Próspero frequently complains that he is unable to water the flowers he has planted in his small garden since the water that comes out of the hose is always black and dirty (Caputo 212).

Additionally, the novel’s brown bodies appear as a single intertwined mass as they wait in lines to take care of even the most minuscule and mundane of businesses. The narrator informs us that there are long queues at the loan office, at the credit union, at the bank, and to pay the phone or any other bill. There are also long lines of statues, soldiers, and policemen who turn the rest of the townsfolk into stone with their guns (Caputo 170-75).

The only place that does not have a queue is the dried-up fountain that, without water, is just "una pileta con basura" (Caputo 173). It used to be a wishing well into which people tossed coins until the general population's lack of money forced them to start lobbing any object they had at their disposal: a rock, a bottle cap, a plastic cup (Caputo 174). The mass of lined up brown people, places, feelings, and objects in the text produces the type of movements and flows that Muñoz identifies in his work—the ones that disrupt individualized subjectivities and reveal the interconnectedness of all the different parts of the novel's queer and marginalized ecology. No element of this ecology exists on its own and the human element is just one entity in a complex constellation of organic and nonorganic matter.

In her work on queer ecology, Nicole Seymour advises that the fiction she studies clearly demonstrates that there is a close relationship between "oppressed humans (including working-class individuals and people of color, in addition to queers) and oppressed nonhumans (degraded landscapes, threatened natural resources, and other flora and fauna)" (*Strange Natures*1). Anti-racist, queer, and environmental justice movements are concerned with the future, without falling into the "imagined future" traps set up by white supremacist and heteronormative groups that dream about the procreation of racist and patriarchal capitalism. Queer ecology activists make us aware of the fact that any "inevitable" contamination ends up having "a disproportionally greater impact on the poor and people of color" (*Strange Natures* 8). In fact, in her most recent research, Seymour asserts that environmental crises are "actually *expected* for some" (*Bad Environmentalism* 9). In a similar fashion, Jinthana Haritaworn highlights that poor people of color, Indigenous people, and people in the global South "are forced to bear the harmful effects of the extraction of resources, the siting of hazardous facilities, the dumping of toxic wastes, and other forms of environmental violence" (211). All of these findings confirm Laura Barbas-Rhoden's assertions that in Latin America, just like in other parts of the world with a colonial past, "hierarchies of ethnicity, class, race, and gender organize and control landscapes, and knowledge of landscapes and territories have been constituted by means of a dynamics of power inflected by the interplay of ethnicity, race, class, and gender" (71).

Caputo's novel presents this factory pollution as an integral part of the main characters' lives, marginalized both in terms of their socioeconomic class and race, as well as their queerness. The smoke that comes out of the old plant is so inevitable and closely connected to their daily existence that the narrator's mother, when she needs to leave him home alone and go work at the plant, points at it and describes it as the one thing that connects them in her absence: "'Mira ese humo' […] Si te sientes solo y quieres llorar, piensa que el humo nos conecta —es nuestro cordón —. Tú estás acá y yo estoy más lejos; nos une, sin embargo, la espiral que ves'" (Caputo 162). And when, subsequently, the factory shuts down due to a fire, the narrator feels sad, even though the entire space previously occupied by it is now a contaminated, post-apocalyptic landscape with "vidrios y pedazos de baldosas; bolsas de basura, unas encima de otras; tubos rotos de plástico y de hierro, pedazos de la chimenea…" (Caputo 169). The life of the poor characters in the novel is so closely intertwined and dependent on spaces that produce deadly contamination that it becomes painful for them to continue living when such places become destroyed. In addition, when said sites collapse, their lethal fallout is not cleaned up and the environment does not heal either. On the contrary, these factories continue poisoning and affecting their underprivileged neighbors who rarely have the opportunity to leave—the one exception in this case being the main character's mother. Hence Caputo's novel underlines the parallels between oppressed humans and oppressed nonhumans by clearly delineating the great impact that factory pollution has on working-class communities within the global South in which residents do not have the opportunity to escape the ecological fallout of harmful economic activities. Instead, these residents are forced to adapt to a degraded environment while barely surviving both in socioeconomic and in affective terms.

In Caputo's first novel, *Un mundo huérfano* (2016), the protagonist is another young man with a complex and queer relationship with one of his parents—in this case, a father who is present throughout most of the narrative. His death at the end, however, produces the same feeling of abandonment in his son as the one experienced by the narrator of *Estrella madre*, as a result of profound grief over the loss of a parent. In *Un mundo huérfano*, father and son have an extremely close bond and frequently exhibit their affection in a very public fashion. Their relationship challenges traditional patriarchal conventions where fathers appear as absent, emotionless, and uncaring for their offspring. Furthermore, throughout most of the text the son is the one who takes care of his dad, thus subverting the role of the father figure as breadwinner. Their affection queers traditional family relations and they are often described as hugging, kissing, and expressing their unconditional love towards each other. From the novel's very beginning, the main character remembers his father drawing pictures of the two of them in their corresponding rooms, telling him "'Te amo mijito,'" and then kissing him tenderly on the forehead (Caputo 11). In addition, the father is completely accepting of his son's queer sexuality. Their life together, however, is marked by the type of poverty and lack of resources as the one shared by mother and son in *Estrella madre*, an important detail that forces them to live in an inhospitable neighborhood described as "un barrio sin faroles, oscuro, es decir en las noches" (Caputo 11).

In many ways, *Un mundo huérfano* also displays the type of close relationship between oppressed humans and oppressed nonhumans that Seymour examines in her study of queer ecology. Apart from being destitute and queer, the father and son dyad is often victim of institutional and direct violence as that enacted by the electric company, which rushes to turn off their electricity when they fall behind on their bills, or by the police, who on several occasions threaten to murder them in their own neighborhood. Throughout most of the text the part of the city where they live, the only one they can afford, is the epitome of what Seymour calls a degraded landscape. The streets are completely dark at night, there are practically no commercial activities as all businesses have shut down—and hence there are no jobs of any sort available—and the seacoast, which stands right by it, is covered in trash. The dirty beach, just like the smoke and pollution created by the factory in *Estrella madre*, is an essential part of the main characters' lives who try to salvage whatever they can from this beach. There they find different objects, some of which prove to be useful, and the narrator describes it in rather romanticized terms when he exclaims that "era bella, de tan sorprendente, la suciedad del mar" (12). In many ways, the inhabitants of this landscape are expected to live through environmental crises, as suggested by Seymour, that are not seen in an exclusively negative light, but rather as something that can alleviate their constant struggle with poverty.

It is not until the end of the novel that the neighborhood finally improves, undergoing a process of gentrification, as new construction rapidly takes on. At this point a new "ciudad de hierro" is built and this growth leads to the installation ofstreet lights and produces jobs and entertainment in their part of the city. Nonetheless, these transformations take place precisely because of the gentrification of the area—an inherently predatory development that is part of globalization and as such preys on poor communities and their residents. Importantly, the neighborhood's gentrification becomes possible due to a bout of widespread violence that the area suffers early in the novel, a process that drives out many of the long-time residents. The most shocking part of said violence is the massacre of the clients of a gay club, Luna, culminating in a scene with dead bodies and body parts scattered all over the small entertainment district of the area. The murdered are completely dehumanized and their cadavers sadistically transformed into objects that aim to terrorize the neighbors and those members of the community who survived the carnage. Some of the victims have been decapitated and have their heads enclosed by the streetlights' glass, turning them into what the narrator describes as "bocas-bombillo," while others have had their genitalia removed and hung from the adjacent trees as "fruta." In even more terrifyingly complex ways, others have been turned into a "columpio: le amarraron los brazos a un poste y las piernas a otro, y desgonzado, formando un arco, se mecía" or into "maniquíes de piel amoratada, abierta en partes, [que] posaban obligados en rincones o esquinas—: unos sin manos ni pies, otros un busto solamente" (Caputo 42).

This exceedingly cruel transformation of human beings into nonhuman objects undoubtedly symbolizes the brutal treatment that queers face in contemporary society. In an interview with Gabriela Sáenz Laverde, Caputo affirms that this part of the story was his response to the violence that LGBTQ people have faced throughout the 20th century including their internment in concentration camps and gulags, their deportations, and their experiences with the AIDS epidemic (Sáenz Laverde). At the same time, said transformation blurs the difference in the text between what is human and nonhuman. Harris and Holman Jones believe that "non-binary enactments of material agency […] offer openings for escaping binaries completely" and allows them to find agency in objects that not only "have their own lives, but more so have their own impetus linked to affect and emotion" (23). In this sense, the agency of *Un mundo huérfano*'s human queers does not expire when they are murdered but is transformed into a new type of nonhuman affective agency that Harris and Homan Jones call "agentic resonance"—one that "moves beyond nature/culture or material/discursive debates, or indeed any notion of a 'pure' idea of agency" (23). In their work, the two scholars explore two particular inanimate things, a bridge and a type of fade, in order to demonstrate that theseobjects have the ability to decenter the human and to queer the so-called *activist affect*.

Similarly, the massacre of queer humans in Caputo's novel does not halt their agency, but rather converts it into a different one that surpasses the binaries human/nonhuman and live/dead, thus creating new queer intersections and relationalities between "things and things-with-humans." This transformation in turn allows an understanding of the connections between nature and sexuality and, in addition, lets us see that things have their own affect and are engaged in a practice "whether [they are] observably a performance with or for any human collaborator or audience" (Harris and Homan Jones 10-11). In Caputo's text, the scattered bodily remains paint a powerful picture of the existence and extermination of human queers and create their own meaning and agency. They construct "un espectáculo" within a space described as "ese estar sin estar" (Caputo 42-43), whose initial purpose is to terrorize and warn about the dangers faced by subjects who do not subscribe to traditional patriarchal values, such as the narrator and his father. The killers leave a large ominous sign written in blood that reads, "Sigan baliando, mariposas" (Caputo 43), which once again relates the human and the nonhuman by connecting the remaining living members of the queer community with the dead bodies and with animals—in this case, butterflies.

The two main characters are left horrified and bereft, being robbed of any semblance of peaceful existence within their own neighborhood, the only one they can afford. In this case, the affect that the dead bodies produce is mainly fear and sadness. Later on, when the authorities finally decide to clean up the area, they generate feelings of anger and indignation in the community who witness disrespect in the way their deceased neighbors are treated. Those who are present see policemen carelessly tossing body parts in plastic trash bags, which in turn are flung into compactor garbage trucks. The body parts are ultimately compressed and turned into easily manageable refuse. The witnesses of this new act of violence towards the queer remains are understandably enraged and insist that their friends and neighbors be treated with care: "[p]ero cójanlos con cuidado —repite alguien—. Ellos sienten" (Caputo 128). The crowd keeps shouting these demands, once again blurring the binaries between human/nonhuman, live/dead, and thus challenging the status of the remains as something that is simply dull matter, according to Bennett's epistemology (vii), that may be discarded without any concern.

One of the questions that Bennett poses in her book is what would happen if "we experienced materialities as actants and how would the direction of public policy shift if it attended more carefully to their trajectories and powers?" (62). In *Un mundo huérfano* the human remains of the massacred queers end up being the type of actants that receive the necessary attention by the authorities, who want to get rid of them as quickly and efficiently as possible. They are also noticed by the neighbors who refuse to turn their backs on them and, instead, see the dead bodies as important materialities that deserve respect and serve both as a reminder of the terrible massacre and as a symbol of the need for justice and significant change.

In addition, it is important to recognize that Bennett asks her readers to move beyond environmentalism towards a "vital materialism." She wants them to go from protecting and wisely managing "an ecosystem that surrounds us" to accepting a new paradigm of action—one that engages "more strategically with a trenchant materiality that is us as it vies with us in agentic assemblages" (Bennett 111). Caputo's first novel, I would argue, offers a path towards such a change and becomes an example of vital materialism through the combined agency of the human and the inhuman, the living and the dead. The collaboration between the massacred bodies, their agency and potent symbolism, on the one hand, and the members of the community who escape the gruesome killings, on the other hand, produces the type of strategic shift that Bennett suggests is possible when readers switch from environmentalism to vital materialism. The scholar informs that such a move allows readers to answer questions like: "How can humans become more attentive to the public activities, affects, and effects of nonhumans? What dangers do we risk if we continue to overlook the force of things? What other affinities between us and them become apparent if we construe both us and them as vibrant matter?" (Bennett 111). In *Un mundo huérfano*, one can clearly see that humans are becoming attentive to the affects and effects of nonhumans as they go out and protest the authorities' abuse of the dismembered bodies even though they are threatened with violence and possible death. When one of the policemen orders them to disperse, warning that "Dígales que a la cuenta de tres, saco el arma. Dígales esto," all he gets in return as a response from the angry crowd is a loud "abucheo" (Caputo 131). It is not until he actually fires his gun in the air that people start leaving the scene of this double crime—the first one being the massacre and the second one, the violent desecration of the deceased.

These interactions create significant affinities between human and nonhuman in the novel that end up transforming the entire ecology of the neighborhood where the killings took place. In the last chapter, "Luz," the main character strolls through an area that has changed noticeably. There are plenty of people walking up and down the previously dark and empty streets and they are all openly queer. The reader sees a man who tosses a blue dildo that falls into a puddle and his partner, an "hombre-perro," quickly retrieves it with just his teeth. Further down, the narrator encounters "dos muchachos sin camisa, velludos, ambos con una peluca rizada, altísima, y unos tacones de punta tan rojos como empinados" (Caputo 180). They call themselves "piñatas vivas" and the protagonist dives into their exuberant wigs to find his reward: a condom. Finally, he is greeted by Roboteta who "tiene la piel pintada de verde eléctrico y se mueve mecánicamente, como si a todo su cuerpo lo unieran tornillos" (Caputo 180). She promptly asks him for his heart so she can learn how to feel.

All these and many of the other queer beings the main character meets on his stroll through the renewed neighborhood mix human and nonhuman elements as an essential part of their identities. The three examples mentioned above appear as intricate combinations of humans and nonhumans including dogs, piñatas, and robots. This transformation of the neighborhood and its inhabitants shows how the original affinities created by human and nonhuman, by dead and alive create a brand-new space where everyone is accepted. Their differences are embraced and celebrated. This space represents an invigorated queer ecology where Bennett's vital materialism emerges and, consequently, both human and nonhuman are construed as vibrant matter. This, additionally, creates the type of new affinities that the scholar proposes when she affirms that vital materialism is the necessary next step in a post-environmentalist world.

Moving beyond traditional environmentalism is also Giovanna di Chiro's main argument when she calls for "an *embodied* ecological politics" that considers "the body as home/ecology, especially in consideration of those bodies, communities, and environments that have been reviled, neglected, and polluted" (200). The goals of thisnew politics align with recent environmental justice movements, namely to "construct a more inclusive vision of human-nature interaction" and to affirm clearly that destitute and low-income neighborhoods are "*environments* worthy of recognition and protection" (di Chiro 200-1). The critic also asks if this new politics has the capacity to recognize and protect all queer and disabled bodies, homes, and environments that are frequently unseen, poisoned, or murdered. She concludes that this is possible if oneemploys a queer ecology "based on reclaiming and learning from those stolen bodies that have been deemed out of place, against nature, broken, and deformed" (di Chiro 200).

This new embodied ecological politics is clearly at play in Caputo's first novel whose plot takes place precisely in a community/environment that has been "reviled, neglected, and polluted" as di Chiro defines it (200). Its beaches are covered in trash, and nobody bothers to clean them up; the streets lack lighting, and all other infrastructure is unkempt. Finally, its businesses are brutally attacked by outsiders who wanto to exterminate a specific group—gay men—who are frequently ostracized for what is framed as their sins against nature. The body of the other, the one who is different, also plays a critical part as seen in the prior analysis on the importance of the dismembered queer cadavers that end up spread throughout the area after the massacre at Club Luna. They are the kind of "stolen bodies" that di Chiro writes about, as they have been "broken and deformed" (200). The reader also sees how these bodies are being reclaimed by their friends and neighbors in a process that matches the use of queer ecology that the scholar proposes. As part of this process Caputo's characters learn from the broken bodies and they strive to create a new community—one that challenges traditional patriarchy and the violence it produces.

Right after the massacre, the perpetrators write the already-mentioned threat on one of the walls where it takes place: "Sigan bailando, mariposas" (Caputo 43). It is an ominous warning that aims to offend, intimidate, and dehumanize the victims even further. The assassins use the word "mariposa" as a term that mocks and strives to emphasize the perceived weakness of those who have been murdered. At the end of the novel, however, when the community employs queer ecology as di Chiro proposes, the narrator informs the reader that the threat that had remained for a long time has been finally erased: "el muro estaba pintado todo de blanco. En lugar de la amenaza había ahora una placa que decía: 'En memoria nuestra"' (Caputo 198). Sergio Mora Moreno and Jorge Sánchez Noguera assert that this new phrase functions a palimpsest that does not erase history, but rather "genera un despertar de la consciencia colectiva" (135). Thus, the physical place where the queer bodies have been broken, deformed, and dismembered, has been reclaimed as part of the collective memory of the community and now serves as a queer environment worthy of protection.

Within this new queer environment, the newly reopened Club Luna presents to its guests a show that features men who come down from the ceiling enclosed in huge cages. Then, upon Luna's order, the music stops, the cages open, and she directs the male dancers to fly like butterflies: "Vuelen, vuelen… ¡mariposas!" (Caputo 192). The community now embraces the word that was used to insult and terrorize it and shows that these "mariposas" are capable of flight. Luna ends the show with a new "¡Sigan bailando mariposas!" (Caputo 193) that finishes reclaiming the notorious phrase, the one previously written as a menace on the neighborhood square's wall. Thus, she shows that this environment is worth preserving and it is possible to safeguard it by using the embodied ecological politics that di Chiro constructs in her work. Held up by rope, Luna's male dancers "abren los brazos, al tiempo todos, y muestran al público sus alas de colores –saben hincharse con el aire, las mariposas" (Caputo 192-93). They are not afraid and they know how to celebrate who they are in a neighborhood that functions as a queer ecology.

In conclusion, the two Caputo novels discussed here suggest an important connection between the human and the nonhuman, a connection that challenges traditional patriarchal values and produces new queer ecologies. *Estrella madre* disturbs the conventional meaning of family and shows that objects can function as willful agents that influence the world they inhabit. The binary that divides "vibrant life" and "dull matter" does not reflect the reality of the world the reader inhabits, and humans and nonhumans create significant constellations that affect all. *Un mundo huérfano* showcases the importance of nonhuman agency as well. It reveals the need to move beyond simple environmentalism by embracing a more profound outlook of the world that surrounds. The new paradigms that critics such as

Bennett and di Chiro propose allow a shift towards a more complete understanding of the environment and to explore new queer ecologies that are more just and inclusive. The two texts demonstrate the importance of connecting queer humans, nonhumans, and their physical environments, in order to understand better their affects and how such affects are intimately intertwined.

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