

MORALITY, EQUALITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY  
IN CARMEN LYRA'S *CUENTOS DE MI TÍA PANCHITA*

by  
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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham  
for the degree of MA by Research

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February 2017

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study argues that Lyra used *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* as a vehicle to promote her socio-educational vision, whilst also endorsing a distinctive national identity and strong moral messages. Stories are examined for themes including Costa Rican national identity and the author's political ideology with particular reference to morality, and gender and class equality. Subversion of moral and patriarchal values is also explored. Moral contradictions are identified and discussed, leading to the conclusion that Lyra's work includes examples of both positive and negative behaviour. It is suggested that Lyra does not differentiate character traits or domestic situations based on gender stereotypes; her characters are equals. Furthermore, although some stories include various socio-economic groups, they also feature characters that transcend the different social classes. Lyra promotes gender equality for all, and her protagonists present inventive strategies for coping with social inequalities. The moral inferences throughout the text may help children construct their own values and social convictions. Such values, in addition to the cultural authenticity of the text, are seemingly just as relevant to Costa Rican children today, as confirmed by the immense popularity of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* and the continued interest it receives from literary scholars.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the following for their assistance in my work:

Vinicio Gómez Ramírez and the staff at Personalized Spanish, Tres Ríos, San José, without whom I would have struggled to understand some of the more subtle language and old-fashioned expressions in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*. Their local knowledge has been invaluable, as have their humour and continuous support.

Carlos Rubio Torres and Margarita Rojas González who kindly spent time with me discussing Carmen Lyra and *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* in August 2015. I am grateful for their warmth, patience and encouraging advice that steered me back on course at a pivotal point of my research.

Zulay Cespedes Rodríguez of Dos Brazos School who gave up her own teaching time in August 2015 to allow me to deliver lessons linking Tío Conejo stories with the Costa Rican science curriculum (*primer ciclo*). Her suggestions and help in implementing my ideas were much appreciated, as was the enthusiastic cooperation of her pupils.

Anna Wigtil (RIS Research Specialist at University of Nebraska—Lincoln University Libraries) and Amy Witzel (Social Sciences and Humanities Reference Bibliographer at Baker-Berry Library, Dartmouth College) for their help in sourcing early editions of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*.

My family and friends for their love and encouragement, including my 'Tía Panchita' whose own tales of magic and mischievous animals always entertained me.

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## INTRODUCTION

I PROPOSE to speak about fairy-stories, though I am aware that this is a rash adventure. Faerie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold. And overbold I may be accounted, for though I have been a lover of fairy-stories since I learned to read, and have at times thought about them, I have not studied them professionally. I have been hardly more than a wandering explorer (or trespasser) in the land, full of wonder but not of information.

J.R.R. Tolkien, On Fairy Stories.

*Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* (first published in 1920) is a collection of fairy tales and trickster stories, specifically compiled with the intention of promoting folklore to Costa Rican children. These tales were selected and altered by María Isabel "Chabela" Carvajal, who adopted the pen name of Carmen Lyra.<sup>1</sup> The collection received an enthusiastic reception from the critics, who continue to view it with favour. As recently as 2016 Rubio Torres wrote that '*Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* es el libro más celebrado y conocido de Carmen Lyra. Podría considerarse que forma parte del patrimonio nacional de Costa Rica' (Rubio, 2016, no pagination). Dobles Rodríguez states, 'hay que reconocer que los giros del lenguaje, el ingenio y la fisga de la Tía Panchita son inigualables. Esta es una obra de valor universal; no se queda en el folklore' (Dobles Rodríguez, 2007, p.214). González and Sáenz describe it as an 'obra tan costarricense como las *Concherías* de Aquileo J. Echeverría' (González and Sáenz, 1998, p.8). Indeed, Carmen Lyra's *Cuentos de*

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<sup>1</sup>The author will be referred to as Carmen Lyra throughout this study since this is the name by which she is remembered. She wrote under this nom-de-plume from 1925 onwards (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.46).



*mi tía Panchita* has long been celebrated as being emblematic of Costa Rican culture, its popularity spanning the years and the social classes. Whilst they were first published almost a hundred years ago, the appeal and charm of the tales ensure that they still remain as relevant as ever; **literature that 'speaks' to its** readers does not have an expiry date. The tales provide a permanent written record of the oral tradition of storytelling, with global roots being intertwined with local customs and given a strongly Costa Rican flavour. This book may be considered to be a worthy object of study because of the respect its author demonstrated for other literary traditions and the Costa Rican vernacular, narrating magical adventures and creating a protagonist whose behaviour often goes beyond the bounds of mere naughtiness.

While various critics have analysed the text from a range of perspectives, there remain moral contradictions that deserve attention. These moral ambiguities have not been addressed in the existing research and will therefore be explored in this thesis. This study will centre on the issues of morality raised in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, and the repercussions for her portrayal of equality and resistance to authority. The study will build on Jiménez's view that 'even though the general Costa Rican population is not being exposed to her political works they are influenced by her political ideals. By writing about class, gender and equality in *Los Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, she ensured these ideals would reach a greater number of people' (Jiménez, 2009, p.40). Thus, Lyra uses *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* to promote a social vision deriving from her observation of human conduct, political beliefs, and her knowledge of world literature. Her children's stories, whilst rejecting some typical fairy tale elements, can be interpreted as a

way of promoting appropriate conduct and values. *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* thus performs a dual function: if on the one hand the tales constitute an important object of study in their own right, they are also a primary source which corroborates some of the hypotheses put forward in this dissertation.

As regards the structure of this work, the first part will introduce the historical context in which Carmen Lyra lived and worked, contributing to Costa Rican literature, society, culture, education and politics. It goes without saying that her literary works, notwithstanding the perils of biographical fallacy, cannot meaningfully be considered in isolation from her early life, political career and communist convictions.

The second part will focus firstly on external factors such as the genesis of the story collection, publishing history and distribution of tales within the book. A short literature review will follow, summarising existing research in the field and singling out the main themes of study and examples of literary analysis to date. The place and significance of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* in her oeuvre will also be discussed. Key literary movements and the importance of the vernacular employed by Lyra in her tales will be highlighted. Lyra promotes the recently constructed Costa Rican national identity, but effectively goes a stage further, drawing attention to particular aspects of behaviour and attitudes. Identity is one **issue among the many arising out of Lyra's** work, and will be discussed in this section. Webb, in her abstract, states that 'the constructs of culture, national identity and values are embedded in writing for children, no matter where it originates' (Webb, 2015, p.1). **Lyra's** subject matter, writing style and lexical choices will inevitably reflect her Costa Rican context.

Part three emphasises the role of children's literature in promoting and reinforcing social values. It will consider whether *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* is coherent with Lyra's socio-educational vision and ideals. A distinction will be made between Lyra's political ideologies (social values) and her political beliefs **(communist convictions), leading to a discussion of why other critics'** interpretations that *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* has implicit suggestions of the latter should be rejected. It then moves on to internal factors, identifying, grouping and discussing in depth the key themes of morality and human conduct, gender and class equality and touching on resistance to authority.

The fourth part offers a thematic analysis of six of the stories. Comparisons will be drawn between the tales, again focussing on morality and equality, and examining the contradictions and common themes. It is possible that Lyra subverted aspects of Costa Rican society and was trying to reshape or somehow modify social attitudes through the selection, reframing and modifications of the stories in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*. Observations from this final part are expected to reinforce this statement.

The conclusion will reflect on findings and interpretations, with the ultimate aim of answering the question of whether or not there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Lyra used *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* to transmit moral messages, reinforcing her socio-educational vision.

Themes such as religion, death and luck, not considered central to this dissertation, will only be mentioned where pertinent to other observations.

**Likewise, the history of Costa Rican children's literature and the history of**

education in that country, pedagogy, child psychology, sociology and anthropology (folktale derivations, to be specific) may be mentioned in passing to corroborate central arguments, but will not be explored in depth due to the constraints of space. Finally, there are undoubtedly elements in the corpus of tales (as in other works by Lyra, *Bananos y hombres*, for example) that pertain to issues of race ('La Cucarachita Mandinga', 'La negra y la rubia') but given the complexity and ramifications of this topic, it will not be broached in this specific study.

## **PART ONE**

### **THE AUTHOR AND HER CONTEXT**

#### **Nation, nation building and national identity**

Costa Rica was officially named and colonised by the Spanish in 1539 and granted independence on September 15, 1821. In 1823, Costa Rica declared itself a separate nation (Helmuth, 2000, xx) and helped create the Central American Federation along with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. However, Costa Rica severed its ties with these other states in 1838, by which time intellectuals and politicians were engaged in the process of defining a national identity.

Construction of the Costa Rican national identity was largely driven by the growth of the coffee industry that afforded the coffee exporters considerable wealth and political dominance (Singer, 2006, p.95). The resulting international relations, economic and political dependence and restricted democracy contributed to the formation of a new national and cultural identity as the country wrestled with managing its own needs and foreign, capitalist interests (Quesada Soto, 1992, pp.98-100). In 1848, its first president, José María Castro, unsuccessfully proposed that Costa Rica become a British protectorate (Van Aken, 1989, p.238). By the late nineteenth century, Costa Rica's love affair with Europe, a major coffee market, was in full swing. The coffee elite sought to obtain art, household objects, magazines, newspapers and fashion from Europe, and became increasingly interested in European society and events (Rojas and Ovaras, 1995, p.30; Tyler Mitchell and Pentzer, 2008, p.276). Some of the children of rich Costa

Ricans were educated in France and on their return brought with them a nostalgic preference for European cultural models and trends. Rubio Torres explains that 'el modelo de las artes, de la educación, la cultura en general era el modelo francés, verdad. Entonces un límite entre lo inglés y lo francés. El inglés para lo más duro, lo más económico y el francés para la cultura y las artes' (Personal communication with Rubio Torres, 2015). The idealistic representation of Europe contrasted with the perceived lack of culture and civilisation in 'la representación de lo autóctono: el indígena, el campesino, las voces criollas y, aparentemente, ignorantes' (Rubio Torres, 2012, p.26). With the oligarchy primarily obsessed with the literature of Europe, national literature was dismissed as unimportant. Those books that were published were usually school texts and official government documents, and 'libros de contenido literario sólo se comenzarán a publicar en la década de 1890' (Quesada Soto, 1992, p.99). Furthermore, the Costa Rican government commissioned European artists to design 'national' public buildings, including the National Theatre, National Archives, National Museum, National Library and the National Monument (Rubio Torres, 2012, p.26). The official discourse also focused on Europe, as exemplified by the National Theatre being described as a 'símbolo de las aspiraciones culturales de la oligarquía' (Quesada Soto, 1992, p.101). Inaugurated in 1897, its first performance was a French opera performed by a French company, showcasing the 'fine modern tastes of the elite', as opposed to illustrating 'the country's own achievements' (Tyler Mitchell and Pentzer, 2008, p.279).

### ***La generación del Olimpo***

However, this emulation of European culture was relatively short-lived, with competing, contradictory discourses, especially regarding the creation of an identity distinct from the European models and the need to shake off traditional values in order to enter the international market (Singer, 2006, p.97). A small group of intellectuals within the oligarchy – the so-called *generación del Olimpo* – deliberately set out to create a national literature, using it as the basis for a new national identity. Members of the *generación* engaged in energetic theoretical discussion and debate on the possible shape of a national literature, and thus a Costa Rican national mythology. Their endeavours coincided in time with the consolidation of the state and, in historical, literary and ideological terms, supported the political project of the liberal oligarchy (Quesada Soto, 1992, p.92). Rojas and Ovarés point out that 'la polémica sobre el nacionalismo en la literatura iba más allá de los límites literarios: al igual que en otras prácticas culturales contemporáneas se estaba definiendo la identidad nacional' (Rojas and Ovarés, 1995, p.33). The ultimate purpose of the new national identity they were proposing was to promote Costa Rica on its own merits and as a distinct nation, rather than replicate the ideals and cultural values imported from Europe (Quesada Soto, 1995, p.44).

Gold notes that 'it is possible to read the literary history of Costa Rica as a dialectic of the nurturing and rejection of these myths of identity'. She highlights the importance of the periodical press in disseminating social, political topics, as well as developing ideas and opinions (Gold, 1997, p.229). Other forms of expression, such as school songs and civic ceremonies, should also be taken into

account (Acuña Ortega, 1999, p.238). Arguably the arts were collectively instrumental in the process, as the state did not exclusively use literature as a vehicle through which to promote cultural values and practices (Rojas and Ovaes, 1995, p.33). However, the important role played by literature in the formation of a national identity has been widely acknowledged by Costa Rican literary critics.

Desai states that '**defining the core elements of one's national identity is not an** easy task. In fact, it is probably impossible because it would mean finding adjectives that apply to everyone in the society while at the same time distinguishing that society from all others' (Desai, 2006, p.175). In addition, the coffee oligarchy still depended on Europe, the very inspiration for the paradigm that they were seeking to reject (Rojas and Ovaes, 1995, p.32). It also, unsurprisingly, sought to base the new national identity on life in the coffee-producing zone of the Valle Central. They neglected to include indigenous cultures and other geographically and economically diverse regions of the country (Quesada Soto, 1994, no pagination). As if this were not complicated enough, the writers struggled to present popular culture and the proletariat in a way that positively included them within the new national identity whilst simultaneously neither denigrating nor discriminating against their mannerisms and everyday life (Quesada Soto, 1994, no pagination).

*La generación del Olimpo* focused on emphasising distinct traditions and customs in their work, amidst the opposing on-going development of the emerging capitalistic society (Quesada Soto, 1994, no pagination). Texts that did not promote the national identity – those outside of the newly desirable traditional



local ideals – were rejected and ostracised, as were their 'Europeanised' authors. 'Por el contrario, aquellos que se dedicaron a escribir sobre lo que ya se había definido que era "Costa Rica", fueron declarados los escritores nacionales y sus obras, los clásicos de la literatura costarricense' (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.35). Authors reinforcing the value of the national model based on local observations were termed 'los nacionalistas', and they argued for the inclusion of 'la pintura de lo costarricense, la descripción fotográfica de lo campestre y la copia de la lengua popular' (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.33). The belief also existed that such locally-inspired texts would appeal to foreign readers (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.34) as leaders were looking for external investors and, among other strategies, were turning to literature to promote the country. The *nacionalistas* of the early twentieth century aimed to produce a national literature for one nation, that of the Costa Rican people as a whole. Singer suggests that the coffee elite had to convince 'una población tan heterogénea, de su pertenencia a una nación única', regardless of differences in class, race or political affiliation. However, a new national identity was successfully created, visible 'en la convicción de cada ciudadano de que es posible crear una Costa Rica más solidaria y más justa, es decir, la patria del futuro' (Singer, 2006, p.105). However, there are inequalities and social divisions in every society. Gold notes that 'Costa Rica as seen through its literature is more complex, less homogeneous, less complacent and less egalitarian than the myth' and that 'these national myths survive and continue to be exploited' (Gold, 1997, p.232).

## ***Repertorio Americano***

By the start of the 1920s, the nostalgia created by the *generación del Olimpo* was starting to wear thin, with interests switching to social realities and change, rather than an idealistic representation of the national discourse. Carmen Lyra had not been one of the *Olimpo* generation, rather she belonged to the generation associated with the magazine *Repertorio Americano*, 'un semanario literario, político y cultural que da cabida a diversas posiciones estéticas e ideológicas, tanto nacionales como continentales' (Ovares, 1992, p.137). The magazine was edited by Joaquín García Monge in San José from 1919 to 1957; he is a pivotal player in Costa Rican literature to whom we will return later (CIICLA, 2012, no pagination). Those intellectuals who wrote for *Repertorio Americano* and became known by its name, 'desarrollaron una constante actividad político-educativa en favor de los sectores populares y expresaron un fuerte sentimiento antiimperialista' (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.61). Lyra was one of the key literary, political and public figures within this movement.

As elsewhere in the world, political and economic events at the start of the twentieth century rocked Costa Rica. The effects of World War I and the subsequent impact on the coffee industry led to economic crisis. *Campesinos* and craftsmen struggled to compete against importers and larger companies, while workers in the cities battled low wages and poor living conditions (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.61). During this time, the European model, which had been systematically diminished by the oligarchy, was slowly replaced by that of the politically and economically dominant United States. These national conflicts started to be observed in the country's literature, where 'los grupos sociales

marginados surgen ya con cierto protagonismo y se habla del dolor y el desamparo de las mujeres, los niños y los pobres' and 'los ensayistas señalan, descarnadamente, la distancia cada vez mayor entre el discurso oficial y la realidad social cotidiana' (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.63).

### **Women in Costa Rican society**

Prior to discussing Lyra's life, it is important to emphasise the social inequalities faced by women in Costa Rica. Jurado Fernández comments that 'since the beginning of the last century, Costa Rican society has made great strides to further refine the definition of who we are as a people, in the context of being a true political democracy' (Jurado Fernández, 2013, no pagination). Democracy has not always been celebrated and 'women have by no means had an equal part in establishing what is contemporary Costa Rican society' (Paul-Ureña, 1999, p.7). Women were often regarded as second-rate citizens, or rather, they were not even classed as citizens at all. In 1848, a Costa Rican citizen was defined as 'a male, age twenty-one or over', thereby excluding women from voting (Sharratt, 1997, p.63). The 1917 Constitution again classified women as non-citizens (Sharratt, 1997, p.64). In 1920, 'el presidente Julio Acosta, motivado por la importante participación de las mujeres en el derrocamiento de Tinoco en 1919, planteó la necesidad de aprobar la reforma del voto femenino'; his proposals were rejected (Rodríguez, 2011, p.3). Although he valued the democratic rights of women, 'he limited his enfranchisement proposal to municipal elections and to women who paid taxes' (Sharratt, 1997, p.73). However, this was at least the beginning of over two decades of national, political debate which finally culminated in women gaining the right to vote.

Instrumental in this was Angela Acuña, founder of the Costa Rican Liga Feminista. During the same period, Carmen Lyra was also taking the political stage, as 'a founding member of the Communist party, the first Costa Rican party to put women's political rights on their platform' in 1931. However, although Lyra supported votes for women, she was more concerned for workers' welfare and rights in general (Sharratt, 1997, p.72).

On 2nd August 1947, women teachers organised a demonstration with several thousand women campaigning for voting rights in the next elections. The protest was a 'deciding factor in achieving the concession of the political rights to women in the 1948 Constitution' (Calvo Fajardo, 1997, p.10). Costa Rican women only gained the right to vote in 1949, first exercising this right in a referendum in 1950 and a presidential election in 1953 (Sharratt, 1997, p.80). Educational establishments and the Catholic Church also withheld political rights from women, although some were encouraged to become teachers when 'not being impelled to develop their domestic skills' (Sharratt, 1997, pp.66-68).

### **Carmen Lyra – early life and political activism**

It is difficult to separate Lyra's political and literary lives. Lyra is almost universally hailed as 'una de las figuras costarricenses más destacadas de la primera mitad del siglo XX, no solo en el campo literario para niños – por lo que se le recuerda más en la actualidad – sino como activista política, pensadora profunda e innovadora pedagógica' (Ovares and Rojas, 2001, p.179). Lyra challenged and shaped Costa Rican political and social attitudes, at a time when women were discriminated against by the country's national constitution, as

previously discussed. The contributions that she made to Costa Rican society, politics, education and culture are still evident today and her legacy lives on in everyday Costa Rican life. She is undeniably worthy of study.

Carmen Lyra was born in San José in 1888. From an early age, she was an avid reader, 'lo que dio como resultado que lograra un bagaje cultural e intelectual extraordinario' (Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.15). She was familiar with the works of authors around the world, including writers from Russia, Portugal, Germany, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia and the Americas. Not only a competent reader of French and English literature in the original language, she loved oriental poetry. Her interests were not limited to literature, but extended also to art, philosophy, sociology and science (Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.15).

Between 1901 and 1903, Lyra attended the Colegio Superior de Señoritas. In 1904, she qualified as a schoolteacher and took a job outside of the provincial capital of Heredia (Horan, 2000, xi). In 1906, Lyra worked at the Hospital San Juan de Dios but returned to teaching when she was prevented from joining the Hermanas de la Caridad because she was a 'hija ilegítima, hija de "padre desconocido" ' (Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.16). Horan writes how 'literature gained from religion's loss: her earliest publications date from 1906, the year she left the novitiate'. Her pen name of Carmen Lyra was assigned to her by her friend, the writer and editor Joaquín García Monge. It served to reduce aspersions being cast on her 'run-of-the-mill civil name, with the glaring absence of a paternal surname and family connections' (Horan, 2000, p.5). In the words of Molina Jiménez, Lyra was then able to '[desplegar] sus talentos literarios, sin que pesara su ilegitimidad' (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.27).

From 1906 onwards, Lyra began writing articles for several publications, including *Páginas Ilustradas*, *Pandemonium*, *Ariel* and *Athenea*. Argüello Scriba describes how 'sus escritos expresan un profundo interés y compromiso por los más necesitados y sin voz, en un mundo lleno de cambios, de reformas y de conciencia social'. Along with other prominent intellectuals, Lyra also wrote for the newspaper *La Hoja Obrera*, first published by García Monge in 1909 (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.45).

In 1910, Centro Germinal, an anarchist educational group, was formed by Lyra and other intellectuals. Costa Rica provided no tertiary education and only the wealthy could pursue their studies abroad. However, 'anarchism brought local intellectuals into contact with an extensive international network' (Horan, 2000, p.8). Horan quotes Molina Jiménez who counted anarchist publications from thirty-nine different sources in Latin America, Europe, and the United States in the magazine *Renovación*, later to be edited by Lyra.

During this period, Lyra also helped edit affordable editions of Spanish classics with García Monge, before later providing translations of English and French stories in *San Selerín* (Horan, 2000, p.8). *San Selerín* was Costa Rica's first children's magazine, running from 1912-1913 and 1923-1924. It was created by Lyra and Lilia González with the support of many national writers (Rojas, 2010, no pagination). González and Sáenz describe how 'pronto llegó a ser famosa en el mundo escolar del país. En su orientación y en su realización palpita, vivo, el espíritu de la escritora que en las pequeñas páginas evangélicas supo contar a los niños costarricenses muchas cosas de verdad o de maravilla, de utilidad o de entretenimiento' (González and Sáenz, 1998, p.12). In 1914, Lyra took over as

editor of *Renovación* (SINABI, 2012, no pagination).

In 1917, a women's grassroots movement began fighting for democracy and battling against the power of Federico Tinoco's dictatorship (1917-19), a government that 'seriously curtailed civil liberties and the freedom of press and assembly' (Sharratt, 1997, p.73). Costa Rica was spiralling into severe financial hardship and the poorly paid female teachers suffered enormously. As a result, they engaged fervently on a political level, particularly those at the chalkface of the education system, and in spite of the challenges and obstacles in their way. They protested against the deteriorating conditions and were 'frequently beaten and hosed down' (Sharratt, 1997, p.73). Lyra was among the women who began to challenge the Tinoco regime, which had 'threatened them with layoffs, firings, and the revamping of pension plans' (Sharratt, 1997, p.73). She was in a good position to lead these protests because, as Horan remarks, her 'gender and ongoing alliances with the labor unions, plus her lack of a public position or family to protect, made her a highly effective organizer of this group' (Horan, 2000, p.12). In June 1919, the Tinoco brothers cut the pay of women schoolteachers by a third, under the pretext of 'government insolvency' (Horan, 2000, p.12). On 13th June 1919, the offices of Tinoco's newspaper, *La Información*, were burned down by a mob of women schoolteachers and students led by Andrea Mora and Carmen Lyra (Sharratt, 1997, p.73), angry at police violence directed at them during their demonstration the previous day (Bisher, 2016, p.269). Palmer and Rojas Chaves describe how 'students and teachers from the Colegio Superior de Señoritas marched, denounced the country's tyrants, and confronted police and fire hoses in four days of urban

protest that dealt a fatal blow to the regime' (Palmer and Rojas Chaves, 1998, p.46). Bisher writes that 'the oppression became so odious to the population that all of the dictatorship's intelligence, police and military resources could not restore order, much less public trust'. The actions of Lyra and her female comrades ultimately led to the downfall of the Tinoco dictatorship, as they fuelled the 'groundswell of public outrage' (Bisher, 2016, p.270).

Following the downfall of the dictatorship, Molina Jiménez notes that Lyra became accepted into mainstream culture through her connections with García Monge, the Minister of Education, among others. In June 1920, Lyra was awarded a European pedagogy scholarship (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.21). Departing in September 1920, she spent a year studying at the Sorbonne and in Belgium, travelling to England, and learning new teaching methods at María Montessori's newly founded school in Rome (Horan, 2000, p.13; Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.18).

On her return from Europe in September 1921, Lyra began teaching children's literature in the Escuela Normal de Costa Rica, where she helped train other teachers (Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.18). In the same year she started writing for *Repertorio Americano* (Horan, 2000, xii). In 1925 she co-founded the Escuela Maternal Montessoriana with Luisa González and Margarita Castro. The school was 'el primer centro educativo costarricense – científicamente concebido – de enseñanza preescolar, y que funcionaría hasta finales del siglo XX' (Ovares and Rojas, 2001, p.180). This preschool catered for children with limited economic means in San José, where she divided her time between teaching and working for the *Repertorio Americano* (Horan, 2000, p.13). However, the reality



of the extreme poverty witnessed by Lyra and her colleagues shattered her idealistic hopes for the school (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.29) and in 1931 Lyra helped found the Costa Rican Communist Party, promoting anti-imperialist ideas and supporting the struggle of the United Fruit Company (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.46). On a political level, Lyra was a powerful leader, galvanising marginalised groups of Costa Rican society to stand up for their rights. Her public teaching, wide readership and anti-government protests afforded her a status that concerned the American Embassy in San José. As a result, her political activity was followed with interest, particularly between 1931 and 1933 (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.12).<sup>2</sup> The American Embassy in San José were particularly worried that her professional and intellectual status allowed her to spread communism among women teachers and workers, noting as early as March 1933 that Lyra and her colleagues had begun to 'impartir a los trabajadores clases nocturnas de marxismo y economía anti-imperialista' (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.14).

Following violent clashes between unemployed workers and the police on 22nd May 1933, Lyra wrote various anti-government articles in the local press<sup>3</sup> and ignored a final warning by the Minister of Public Education (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.15). As a result of 'actividades beligerantes', she was dismissed from the Escuela Maternal Montessoriana (Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.18).

More protests and strikes ensued and Tío Conejo, the main character in *Cuentos*

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<sup>2</sup> Pacheco Acuña comments on how the U.S. Embassy in San José considered Lyra 'como persona de peligro y de poder subversivo' (2005, p.258) and even sent a letter to the director of the FBI in November 1944. This included a brief biography, details of her communist party involvement and highlighted her intelligence and influential leadership qualities (Molina Jiménez, 2000, pp.9-10).

<sup>3</sup> Lyra wrote for the newspapers *Trabajo*, *Diario de Costa Rica*, *La Hora* and *La Tribuna* (Editorial Costa Rica, 2016, no pagination).

*de mi tía Panchita*, even joined the party, appearing in the communist newspaper *Trabajo* and in puppet shows to help win votes from the agricultural workers (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.62). In 1937, Lyra became the director of the Escuela Popular, created by the Communist Party. She continued to engage in national politics and 'su obra en general es de compromiso y de búsqueda de justicia social' (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.46).

Over the next decade, support for the Communist Party gained momentum and Costa Rica went on to 'pass some of the most comprehensive labor and social legislation in the Americas, limiting layoffs of long-term workers without notice, guaranteeing a social security program, and instituting health care' (Horan, 2000, p.17). Lyra was clearly an influential force in trying to establish greater levels of national equality and social mobility. Writing in *Nación*, Molina Jiménez adds that **'la sospecha de que la "espiritual escritora de nuestra Tiquicia" fue la verdadera fundadora del Partido es, sin duda, exagerada; pero también es un indicador del grado en el que, en la mejor tradición de Tío Conejo, Tía Panchita logró inquietar al imperio'** (Molina Jiménez, 2016, no pagination).

Her political influence, resistance to authority and egalitarian convictions continued to grow. At the end of the 1948 civil war, on 23rd April, Lyra was exiled to Mexico. Banned from returning to her beloved Costa Rica, she died from cancer on 14th May 1949 (Editorial Costa Rica, 2016, no pagination).

## **Carmen Lyra – author**

In addition to her early contributions to various magazines and newspapers, Lyra published *La Cucarachita Mandinga* in 1916, *En una silla de ruedas* in 1917 and *Las fantasías de Juan Silvestre* in 1918 (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.46). Much of her literature was aimed at children, because 'siempre estuvo presente en Carmen Lyra su intención de servicio a los más necesitados, principalmente los niños y niñas de extracción humilde' (Ovares and Rojas, 2001, p.180). Before travelling to Europe for a year, she published her first edition of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* in 1920 (Jiménez, 2009, p.29). Horan comments:

The texts that Carmen Lyra published between 1916 and 1920 suggest a kind of double life. For all her engagement with urban anarchists, she was, at the same time, collecting folklore and writing *Tales from My Aunt Panchita*, a text motivated, in equal parts, by nostalgia for a happier past, celebration of fantasy, and aesthetic pleasure in wonder tales. (Horan, 2000, p.8)

In fact, Lyra began to overtly use literature as an instrument of social protest, publishing the stories of *El barrio Cothnejo-Fishy* in 1923, *Siluetas de la maternal* in 1929, *Bananos y hombres* in 1931 and *Los diez viejitos de Pastor* in 1936. (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.77). 'A la vez, en estos relatos se confiere un papel protagónico al pueblo ya grupos o seres marginados, como los niños, las mujeres o los trabajadores bananeros' (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, p.77). However, her fictional writing decreased in the 1930s (Horan, 2000, p.17) as she developed a more influential political voice. Argüello Scriba remarks that 'numerosos artículos

periodísticos y uno de sus últimos escritos *El peón y el grano de oro* [sic.] a finales de la década de los 30, completan su obra' (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.46).

In effect, Carmen Lyra lived a life-less-ordinary and revolutionised both Costa Rican politics and literature.

## PART TWO

### THE *CUENTOS* AND CARMEN LYRA'S SOCIAL VISION

#### Introduction to *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*

The complete oeuvre of Lyra spans various genres and audiences, but *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* is her best known and most popular book (Carazo, 1999, p.2) and 'one of the most widely read books ever printed in Central America' (Horan, 2000, p.1). Lyra collected and modified her stories to produce 'una recopilación del folclore mundial, en la que se recrean arquetipos universales en un contexto cultural, geográfico y lingüístico costarricense' (Rojas and Ovares, 1995, pp.81-82). By framing them in a national setting, with nationally recognised expressions and vocabulary, she satisfied the state agenda of endowing Costa Rica with a distinct national identity and made her stories accessible to all. Regarded as a work of national importance, the Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica includes the book in the fourteen obligatory reading books for the *primer ciclo* of all primary schools, suitable for children aged seven years old and above (Mátiz Vargas, 2016, no pagination).

*Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* can also be regarded as being Lyra's most important work because it has been deliberately promoted as such, in what some regard as a way of erasing much of her political influence and radical views, promoting her as a 'maestra extraordinaria, mujer talentosa y culta, promotora cultural protectora de la niñez, fundadora de escuelas, creadora de *los Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*' (Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.18). Jiménez shares this opinion, commenting that Lyra's popular folktales overshadow her overtly political works

written during her time as a member of the communist party (Jiménez, 2009, p.39). Her seemingly harmless collection of stories, made up of fairy tales and the roguish adventures of Tío Conejo, are accepted and promoted as a national treasure. Her literary prowess is therefore acknowledged, while glossing over her divisive political views and activism in later life.

### **Taxonomy of folk, fairy and trickster tales**

The first section of the book is comprised of fairy tales and the second section contains a collection of trickster tales featuring Tío Conejo. In this thesis I use the overarching term folktale to refer to stories from both of these sections as it covers both genres. For example, Stein states that, for literary scholars, a fairy tale can refer to 'both a category of oral folk tale and a genre of prose literature'. She adds that 'it is often used by folk narrative scholars when referring specifically to 'magic tales', or tales listed under tale-type numbers 300-749 in the \*Aarne-Thompson tale-type index'. Stein considers a folktale as 'any tale deriving from or existing in oral tradition' and a term 'generally preferred by folklorists and anthropologists' (Stein, 2000, p.167). As Zipes writes, 'It is nearly impossible to define the fairy tale as a literary genre because it has become more of a cultural institution than anything else' (Zipes, 1988, p.7). He remarks that 'during its inception, the fairy tale distinguished itself as genre both by appropriating the oral folk tale and expanding it [...] The fairy tale is only one type of appropriation of a particular oral storytelling tradition: the wonder folk tale' (Zipes, 1988, p.7). Bettelheim refers to 'folk fairy tales' in his introduction to *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Bettelheim, 1976, p.5), and in German academic and popular usage Märchen is

used to describe both the literary fairy tale and the traditional folktale (Stein, 2000, p.167). Thompson notes that attempts to define Märchen or fairy tale are not useful as 'the two forms continually flow into each other, and it is likely that the distinction between Märchen and other types of folk narrative is largely confined to Western culture'. He stresses that the differentiation is of little importance and 'the primitive tale-teller cares little for such distinctions'. He adds that European literary scholars are 'merely using these terms as points of reference and we must understand that they have only vague analogues in various countries of the world' (Thompson, 1955, p.485). This echoes the sentiment in his earlier book that:

Although the term "folktale" is often used in English to refer to the "household tale" or "fairy tale" (the German Märchen), such as "Cinderella" or Snow White," it is also legitimately employed in a much broader sense to include all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which have come to be handed down through the years. (Thompson, 1946, p.4)

Trickster stories, like fairy tales, were diffused orally and have spread across generations, borders and cultures. Their exact origins are often disputed and similar motifs are noted in stories from very different places. Tricksters appear in fairy tales (Tatar, 1999, p.183) because the trickster is ubiquitous in global folktales that have inspired the genre. Tatar implies that the trickster and the simpleton of fairy tale tradition are not so very far apart. She writes that 'both the simpleton and the trickster ultimately make good by outwitting or outdoing their seemingly superior adversaries', although recognising that national literary

traditions have embraced and promoted these aspects to different degrees in almost identical tales (Tatar, 1987, p.103). She discusses how dim-witted heroes in fairy tales can succeed against their adversaries and remarks that 'the naive hero without fear and intelligence becomes virtually indistinguishable from the trickster' (Tatar, 1987, p.97). So if outwitting a greater power has a deserved, documented place in fairy tales, whilst also being the defining characteristic of the trickster story, it becomes clear that these boundaries are fluid and permeable.

The categories of fairy tales and trickster tales therefore overlap considerably, although some distinctions can be made between the two types of tales. Ferreira Pinto describes the animal trickster tale as the 'the best known type of African folktale' (Ferreira Pinto, 2009, p.100). She points out that trickster tales feature a devious animal that 'employs its cunning to protect itself against much larger and more powerful animals and whose pranks usually cause trouble for another character' and is typically left 'gloating and unpunished'. Stressing that they are most often male, Ferreira Pinto notes that they delight 'in breaking rules, boasting, and playing tricks on both humans and gods' and operate 'outside the framework of right and wrong' (Ferreira Pinto, 2009, p.101). Tatar explains that 'in fairy tales all over the world, the one least likely to succeed paradoxically becomes the one most likely to succeed. Merit rarely counts; luck seems to be everything' and 'classical fairy tales reward virtue and punish evil' (Tatar, 1987, p.87). In trickster tales, this is not the case as the trickster is often the wrong-doer, who triumphs by using his wit. Tatar also notes that it is 'not rare for fairy-tale heroes to suffer silently and to endure hardships in a hopelessly passive



fashion' (Tatar, 1987, p.88). However, the trickster hero, or anti-hero as often is the case, clearly demonstrates the opposite. Thompson remarks that the trickster is inconsistent in his victories: 'part are the result of his stupidity, and about an equal number show him overcoming his enemies through cleverness' (Thompson, 1946, p.319). Tatar shares this view that 'the roguish trickster does not always live up to his reputation for shrewd reasoning' (Tatar, 1987, p.86) and writes that 'in the world of fairy tales, a simpleton can easily slip into the role of a cunning trickster'. She adds that 'character traits display an astonishing lack of stability, shifting almost imperceptibly into their opposites as the tale unfolds' (Tatar, 1987, p.87). Still referring to fairy tales, Tatar explains that:

The humble hero weds a woman of royal blood; the brazen fool proves his mettle; the naive simpleton outwits just about anyone. [...] Inversion of character traits is a common occurrence in folkloric narratives. A reversal of the conditions prevailing at the start is, after all, manifestly the goal of every tale. (Tatar, 1987, pp.99-100)

In the trickster stories however, there is no inversion of character traits; the trickster remains a shrewd, devious individual who will reliably behave as such in future tales.

### **The genesis of Costa Rican children's literature and the story collection**

*Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* can be considered as the book that founded Costa Rican children's literature (Rubio Torres, 2012, p.28) and García Monge was instrumental in its creation. An influential mentor for Lyra, García Monge was also the creator and first professor of the children's literature department at the

Escuela Normal in 1917. It was the second of its kind in the whole of Latin America, following the first in Uruguay (Ruedas de la Serna, 1995, p.32) and it heralded the beginnings of the study and written diffusion of the genre in Costa Rica. The concept of Costa Rican children's literature only originated in the early twentieth century, largely because this academic institution legitimised its value (Vásquez Vargas, 2012, pp.19-20). As Ruedas de la Serna confirms, 'desde entonces la literatura infantil forma parte importante no sólo de los programas de formación de profesores de enseñanza básica sino de la tradición literaria costarricense' (Ruedas de la Serna, 1995, p.32). Rubio Torres states that 'es notorio que el rescate del folclore fue la razón de ser de dicha cátedra'. He adds that 'Carmen Lyra tomó el puesto de profesora de literatura infantil y siguió, según lo consignara su discípula y continuadora de su obra, Luisa González, reforzando la estrecha relación entre las obras literarias dirigidas a la niñez y el folclore' (Rubio Torres, no date, no pagination).

García Monge can therefore be regarded as the catalyst for the birth of Costa Rican children's literature; he taught Carmen Lyra and María Leal de Noguera<sup>4</sup> and enlisted them both to collect and rewrite nostalgic children's stories, so eternising folktales in a Costa Rican context and vernacular (Horan, 1997, p.35). Rojas González also adds that 'el propósito de García Monge era que la gente de Costa Rica conociera la literatura de todo el mundo' (Personal communication with Rojas González, 2015). His vision was realised and *Cuentos de mi tía*

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<sup>4</sup> María Leal de Noguera wrote *Cuentos viejos*, a similar book to *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*. First published in 1923, it also contains fairy tales and trickster stories of global origins, modified for a Costa Rican readership. García Monge was responsible for publishing and funding both books. There are strong similarities between the stories of both folkloric compilations. This text will not be explored in this study, although it is an important point of reference.

*Panchita* 'sparked a boom in Latin American children's literature and folklore' (Horan, 2000, p.11).

### **The corpus of tales**

The book is comprised of twenty three traditional tales, taken from different literary traditions with debatable global origins. Of these, eleven are animal stories, with the tale of 'La Cucurachita Mandinga' and ten specifically about the adventures of Tío Conejo. The Tío Conejo stories have been accepted, by the majority of critics, as being adaptations of the Brer Rabbit stories originating in the African oral trickster tradition and published by Joel Chandler Harris. The remaining twelve stories have recognisable motifs of traditional fairy tales and share common plot elements with European, oriental and Russian literary parallels. 'La Cucurachita Mandinga' also fits into this category of deriving from the traditional fairy tale tradition, as obviously stories featuring animal protagonists and fairy tale motifs are not mutually exclusive. Pacheco Acuña also loosely defines the first group of stories as 'cuentos de hadas' and the second set as 'cuentos de animales' in which personified animals have the same qualities – negative and positive – as human beings (Pacheco Acuña, 2004, p.37, p.39). According to González and Sáenz, the first thirteen stories 'proceden de muy diversas fuentes y no presentan, como es lógico, ninguna relación en sus argumentos' and the final ten 'se refieren a los sucesos fabulosos, cómicos, picarescos, de un personaje que es todo un tipo humano, compatriota nuestro, aun cuando se cree que vino de África: Tío Conejo' (González and Sáenz, 1998, p.6). Ovarés and Rojas regard the series of Tío Conejo stories as being different from the first section as 'se unifican alrededor de un único protagonista y de los

amigos y los adversarios que lo acompañan en sus aventuras' (Ovares and Rojas, 2001, xv). Pacheco Acuña also concludes that Lyra's trickster tales contain more fantasy and far-fetched plots than the magic wand of the fairy tales can provide. She writes that:

No es sólo que una ballena y un elefante puedan hablar o flirtar sino que estén juntos en el mismo lugar. El hecho que Tío Coyote se beba toda el agua de un lago o que Tío Conejo pueda matar a un león, a un tigre y a un lagarto demanda mucha imaginación y credibilidad del lector y exhibe un alto grado de fantasía en el cuento. (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.265)

Whilst accepting this statement with reservations, it can be argued that there are also extraordinarily fantastical elements in the fairy tales. They may have different elements of fantasy, but both literary traditions revel in the unbelievable. Examples include the Virgin Mary feeding her chickens – who lay golden eggs – in heaven ('Uvieta'), a talking horse with a screw that once turned gives it the power of flight ('El pájaro dulce encanto'), a witch painlessly slicing off a goitre without spilling even one drop of blood ('Salir con un domingo siete') and a murdered prince whose hand grows into a cane used to make a singing flute ('La flor del olivar').

*Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* was aimed at children, as advertised in the cultural magazine *Repertorio Americano*: 'el librito resulta de lo más apropiado para los niños, por la sustancia de los cuentos en sí, como por la riqueza de expresiones del lenguaje popular en que están contados' (*Repertorio Americano*, 1920,

p.245). Arbuthnot observes that children 'need books that minister to their merriment or deepen their appreciation of beauty. They need heroism, fantasy, and down-to-earth realism. And they need books that, in the course of a good story, help to develop clear standards of right and wrong' (Arbuthnot, 1964, p.17). This study does not propose that the primary goal of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* was to indoctrinate its readers with morality, rather the opposite. The tales were compiled to entertain and enchant children through 'nationalised' folklore, to 'hacer reír y soñar a los niños', although this does not preclude the subtle transmission of moral values.

### **Publishing history<sup>5</sup>**

As stated above, *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* was first published in 1920. Prior to the first edition of the *Cuentos*, Tío Conejo had already gained popularity from his earlier antics in *San Selerín*, first appearing in May 1913 and featuring six more times in the same year. The 1920 edition contained a prologue and fifteen stories, all of which had already been published in the children's magazine *Lecturas* (1918-1919) except 'Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas' (Rojas González, 2005, p.106). This edition contained two other Tío Conejo adventures ('Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote', and 'Tío Conejo Comerciante') and twelve traditional fairy tales. The book was subsequently published with the addition of four Tío Conejo tales in 1922 and three more in 1926 (Rojas González, 2005, p.106). There was a reprint of the third edition in 1936, but no changes were made. The 1956 edition, seven years after Lyra's death, saw the addition of one more fairy tale, 'Escomponte perinola', and the reorganisation of the book to

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<sup>5</sup> See the table in Appendix 1 for full details of the contents of the different editions.

separate the traditional fairy tales, 'Cuentos de mi tía Panchita', from the Tío Conejo trickster stories, 'Cuentos de tío Conejo'. This resulted in greater thematic coherence and no further alterations occurred after 1956; the contents remained stable. Since 1956, the book has never been out of print, with numerous editions over the past sixty years.

### **Tía Panchita and the purpose of including an absent storyteller**

The book opens with a carefully structured yet whimsical prologue that introduces the character of Tía Panchita, the storyteller who only appears once in the collection. As is often the case with the oral tradition, it is mostly women who tell the stories (Lurie, 1990, p.35). Costa Rica is no exception, as demonstrated by the role of tía Panchita, 'que cuenta adorables cuentos, llenos de gracia y picardía, con hondas alusiones filosóficas a la vez' (Dobles Rodríguez, 2007, p.213). García Monge declared that 'abuelas, madres, niñeras, maestras son las llamadas a contadoras de cuentos infantiles' (García Monge, 2013, p.12). However with this responsibility comes great power, one which women who adopted this role could use to their advantage to influence their young listeners and share their social ideologies. Paul-Ureña also states that 'one of the most interesting features of Costa Rican literature is a certain degree of gender equity: since its beginning, a significant number of major contributors have been women' (Paul-Ureña, 1999, p.7). It was indeed the women who developed children's literature as a subject of respectable, academic value at the Escuela Normal in the 1920s: 'en Costa Rica, además, la literatura infantil debió a la mujer su gran trascendencia porque en ese país se dio a la educación normal una importancia capital, y la instrucción básica estuvo bajo la responsabilidad casi absoluta de la

mujer (Ruedas de la Serna, 1995, p.31).

In *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, Tía Panchita does not actually have a key role in telling the stories, and her presence is not as evident as Uncle Remus in the Brer Rabbit tales, an observation that Cantillano points out as a significant difference between the two collections (Cantillano, 1972, p.160). There is no dialogue such as that between Uncle Remus and the little boy who is listening to him tell the story, and Tía Panchita only appears once at the very end of 'Tío Conejo Comerciante'. Ovares and Rojas refer to her as 'no como la autora de los cuentos sino más bien como la depositaria de una tradición proveniente de lugares y épocas lejanos' (Ovares and Rojas, 2001, vii). The prologue offers a framing device in which Lyra creates a world in which the central figure is a storyteller, stressing the orality of the tales. By locating them in a time and place – her aunt's kitchen in her early childhood – she renders them accessible and relevant to all.

Tía Panchita is confined to a domesticated, stereotypical female role of a sweet and cake maker, creating delicious treats that attract buyers from other neighbourhoods. Sharing a house with her sister, Panchita is 'diligente y afanosa como una hormiga' (CTP, p.7);<sup>6</sup> a woman of the people, she leads a simple life. Mocked by her more educated brothers, she still exerts a significant influence over the fictionalised Lyra. She is therefore powerful, much more so than the uncles, as suggested by the exclamation '¡Qué sugerencias tan intensas e inefables despertaban en nuestras imaginaciones infantiles, las palabras de sus

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<sup>6</sup> Carmen Lyra, *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, San José: Editorial Legado, 2012 (second edition). All quotations are taken from this edition.

cuentos, muchas de las cuales fueron fabricadas de un modo incomprensible para la Gramática, y que nada decían a las mentes de personas entradas en años y en estudios!’ (*CTP*, p.9).

The construction of the storyteller allows Lyra to embark on an autobiographical fantasy, whilst presenting maternal creativity against the contrast of her serious, scientific uncles. Lyra draws a clear line between magical tales and cold hard facts, recalling that:

Las otras personas de mi familia, gentes muy prudentes y de buen sentido, reprochaban a la vieja señora su manía de contar a sus sobrinos aquellos cuentos de hadas, brujas, espantos, etcétera, lo cual, según ellas, les echaba a perder su pensamiento. Yo no comprendía estas sensatas reflexiones. (*CTP*, p.8)

The prologue is not presented in an entirely logical manner; Lyra skips between evocative descriptions of her aunts, their house, their domestic nature, the highly educated but unimaginative uncles (*CTP*, p.10), 'La Cucurachita Mandinga', a trip to the outside well, dreams of crystal palaces, tobacco smells and foreign literary influences. She goes off on poetic tangents and invites the reader or listener to join her on a journey of imagination and a mutual rejection of logic and ethics (*CTP*, p.11). Building anticipation for the tales that follow, she announces that '¡Qué largos se hacían para mi impaciencia los segundos en que ella dejaba de **narrar para “subir su cigarro” o ir a encenderlo en una brasa del hogar!**' and proclaims that 'Los cuentos de la tía Panchita eran humildes llaves de hierro que abrían arcas cuyo contenido era un tesoro de ensueño' (*CTP*, p.9.) It is clear that



Lyra loves the narrator as even though she had no knowledge of logic and ethics, she knew how to make children laugh and dream. By writing her prologue, Lyra has effectively captivated her audience before her tales of enchantment and trickster ingenuity have even begun.

In real life, Carmen Lyra had three aunts: Isabel, Tila (Domitila) and Trina. Lyra called the latter tía Panchita, but none of the three match Lyra's description in the prologue to her book. However, they did tell stories and Cantillano's research suggests that the tía Panchita to whom she refers in her book is 'una creación literaria, nacida sin embargo, aunque parcialmente, de las tías de carne y hueso' (Cantillano, 1972, p.180). She is a character to whom everyone could relate, regardless of class, gender or age, representing the storyteller in the lives of Costa Ricans throughout the whole country. 'Magón' (Manuel González Zeledón), the celebrated *costumbrista*, wrote to Lyra congratulating her on the publication of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* and commenting that the storyteller was a familiar and reassuring figure (Magón, 1920, p.299). Lyra conjures a feeling of nostalgia, recalling memories of the innocence of childhood. Lyra's style of a fictionalised autobiography and her inclusion of aspects of San José (los josefinos, el Morazán, del Paso de La Vaca y de la Soledad) and other descriptions of Costa Rican life, in terms of the general setting and food items, add local favour and substantial cultural value to her work.

Lyra uses traditional storytelling motifs and structures to frame the stories while underlining their fictionality by referring to 'las mentiras de mi tía Panchita' as lies that delighted her. Lyra's honest, open declaration that her stories have multiple origins further stresses the fictional constructs. Her characters have travelled

across frontiers and ages; she mentions Aesop, 'La Hormiguita' by Fernán Caballero, 'La Cenicienta', 'Pulgarcito', 'Blancanieves', 'Caperucita' and 'El Pájaro Azul' – stories that she later found in books. Lyra explains that others 'me han vuelto a salir al paso, no en libros sino en labios' and asks '¿Qué muerte imaginación nacida en América los entretejió, cogiendo briznas de aquí y de allá, robando pajillas de añejos cuentos creados en el Viejo Mundo?' (*CTP*, p.11). At no point does she claim the stories to be her own, and by drawing the reader's attention to this, she primes them to accept her collection of tales. The stories are intended to be read to children and the listener no longer needs to question where they are from; it is likely that this question cannot yield a definitive answer anyway. Margarita Dobles Rodríguez comments that:

La autora rescata personajes de cuentos que ruedan por el mundo y pasan por Costa Rica y los cuenta ella, no solo a la manera costarricense, sino a la manera de la tía Panchita que es, por fin, la autora misma con toda su fuerza creadora y su estilo inimitable (Dobles Rodríguez, 2007, p.214).

Rojas González proposes that 'la construcción de estos autores-recopiladores probablemente obedece, por un lado, a las reglas del género del cuento de hadas – popular, anónimo, de la tradición universal – y, por otro, a la necesidad de reconocimiento colectivo, que se logra si el creador **es el "pueblo" y no un individuo**' (Rojas González, 2005, p.108). The fact that tía Panchita shares her compilation of locally-modified, globally-sourced stories highlights their collective belonging to the people.

## Existing research on the text

Much has been written about different aspects of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* but there may be new or different interpretations to be made. It is worth reviewing some of the key observations although it is possible that literary critics may have appropriated her writings in order to advance their own agendas. The most recurrent themes that critics focus on are cultural authenticity, through the inclusion of everyday Costa Rican foods, objects and practices, and the distinct Costa Rican expressions and vernacular (Arce, 1946, p.213; Cantillano, 1972; Vásquez Solórzano, 1989 cited in Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.259; González and Sáenz, 1998, p.7; Paul-Urena, 1999, p.47; Carvajal Vincenti *et al.*, 2000, p.17; González, 2008; Ovares and Rojas, 2001; Vásquez Vargas, 2006, p.182; Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.21). This will be discussed later in this part of the thesis. Intertextuality studies and research into folkloric elements and the origins of the tales have also proved popular, and include Cantillano (1972), Pacheco Acuña (2004), Echeverría de Sauter (2009) and Rubio Torres (2007, 2016). In 2006, Cantillano published an extensive philological study, including classification of the tales using the Aarne-Thompson, Boggs and Hansen indices (based on texts published in 1961, 1930 and 1957 respectively). This study will use a broader categorisation of stories as those in the first section being from the fairy tale genre and those in the second from the trickster tradition. Cantillano's work also contains details of publications by, and about Lyra, as well as a brief biography.

Argüello Scriba (2010) considers the relation of Lyra's stories with animal fables. Cantillano (1972) **discusses the relationships between Lyra's Tío Conejo and Joel Chandler Harris's** Brer Rabbit. Lyra herself writes that the Tío Conejo stories

'nacieron en la imaginación de los negros y Joel Chandler Harris los recogió e hizo un libro. Al pasar a nosotros, se aplicaron a animales de este clima y se les rodeó de otro ambiente' (Lira, 1918, p.70). Yet Cantillano states that:

Tanto el estudio de Espinosa como lo expuesto sobre el análisis folklórico, la forma, las semejanzas con otras versiones hispanoamericanas y divergencias de las angloafricanas, así como la caracterización, parecen indicar que en realidad no hubo influencia directa del Uncle Remus en el total de los cuentos que componen la serie Cuentos de tío Conejo. (Cantillano, 1972, p.177)

Cascante (1999) looks at the origins and didactic potential of the Tío Conejo stories by Carmen Lyra, María Leal de Noguera and Adela Ferreto. Vásquez Vargas (1993) also compares different rabbits in a study including the work of Ferreto and the development of Costa Rican literature for children. Her work **compares Ferreto's later representation of Tío Conejo** with that of Lyra. Rojas González (2005) focusses on the publication of the Tío Conejo stories from *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* in literary magazines, as well as those of Leal de Noguera. **Rubio Torres (no date) compares the two versions of 'Salir con un domingo siete' by Carmen Lyra and** María Elena Walsh.

Pacheco Acuña (2005, 2006) explores feminist readings of the tales. Jiménez (2009) and Ugarte Barquero (2011) also consider gender representations in the collection. Several critics have broached the aspect of race (Vásquez Vargas, 2006; González, 2009; Quesada Villalobos, 2011; Ramírez Caro, 2014). Pacheco Acuña (2005) considers Reader-Response theory in the short stories, based on

**Wolfgang Iser's theoretical views.** Manuel Villalobos (2013) explores an unusual set of culinary metaphors in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, and their association with the human body and emotions.

González (2009) discusses the lack of happy endings in the stories. However, nine of the thirteen fairy tales in the first section do have a happy ending. The trickster tales usually end well for Tío Conejo, excluding 'Tío Conejo y el yurro' in which he is very angry with the other animals and 'Tío Conejo ennoviado' in which he does not get the girl, or rather he turns her down at the last moment. It is only 'La Cucarachita Mandinga' that closes with a funeral<sup>7</sup> and 'La flor del olivar' that finishes with the sentence 'El pobre rey mandó a meter a sus hijos en un calabozo, y él y la reina se quedaron inconsolables por toda la vida' (CTP, p.86) that end unhappily. The remainder are fairly neutral conclusions.

Horan (2000), González (2009) and Beam (2016) offer postcolonial or postmodern readings; these will be discussed later in this study. Present interpretations may not pertain to earlier reception of tales, and we are now dealing with new readings for a new readership.

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<sup>7</sup> Cantillano, who has researched into thirty-three variants of this story across the Hispanic world, reveals that only Lyra's version concludes with an old man who slits his own throat. She also states that it is the only version that features a funeral (Cantillano, 2006, p.74). However, there are other non-Spanish stories that also show great similarity, such as the Punjabi chain tale, 'The death and burial of poor Hen-Sparrow', that concludes: 'they danced and sang till they were tired, and that was how everyone mourned poor cock-sparrow's pretty bride' (Steel, 1894, pp.148-158). In addition, the gruesome ending is by no means exclusive to Lyra. The oldest dated example I could find, in keeping with the version of Lyra is 'The Louse and the Flea', penned by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, but originally told by Dorothea Catharina Wild in 1808. This precedes the first publication of 'La Hormiguita' by Fernán Caballero, a story known to Lyra (CTP, p.9). In Wild's story we hear the maid-let ask ' "should I not break my water-pitcher-let? Louse-let itself burned, flea-let cries, door-let creaks, broom-let sweeps, wagon-let runs, muck-let burns, tree-let shakes itself." Ei! said the well-let, so I will begin to flow, and so it began to flow terribly, that all is drowned, the maiden-let, the tree-let, the wagon-let, the broom-let, the door-let, the flea-let and the louse-let, all together' (Loo, 2014, p.149). The point here is that, contrary to González's suggestion that the unhappy ending is an 'enunciation of border thinking', one can perceive the unhappy ending to 'La Cucarachita Mandinga' as Lyra honouring the traditions of this particular folk tale.

## **Carmen Lyra – *costumbrista***

As stated previously, Carmen Lyra belonged to *la generación del Repertorio* and produced texts in keeping with the modern, social realist expectations of this later movement. Nevertheless, the role played by the earlier *generación del Olimpo* should not be underestimated, namely the contributions of their literature to the formation of a national identity, their quest to promote Costa Rican language and customs, and the subsequent development of *Costumbrismo*. Gold discusses the birth of this movement, and its dominance in twentieth-century Costa Rican narrative, explaining that it 'is diverse in tone, technique and degree of criticism of the national reality, but what all *costumbrista* texts have in common is that they focus on the customs, language and social patterns of Costa Rica. They are descriptive and colloquial' (Gold, 1997, p.230). *Costumbrismo* can be defined as 'atención que se presta al retrato de las costumbres típicas de un país o región' in literary and pictorial works.<sup>8</sup>

This study proposes that Lyra also kept the nostalgia of the earlier *generación del Olimpo* alive, through the promotion of popular speech and everyday elements in her corpus of children's folktales. *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* features folktales with both foreign influences and adaptations for a local readership. Like Costa Ricans before her, she was attracted to the cultural delights that Europe offered and captivated by the works of key European children's writers. It is feasible that the earlier national obsession with European art and literature was instrumental to Lyra's own cultural development, and it is not impossible that exposure to European fairy tales as a child shaped her writing choices and story preferences

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<sup>8</sup> As defined in the *DRAE*, <http://dle.rae.es/?id=B7siWbD>

as an adult.

Lyra's work has been classified as examples of modernism, naturalism and realism by Bonilla, Castro Rawson, Luisa González and Carlos Luis Fallas. Chase defines her work as social realism, a view shared by Quesada Soto about her later fiction in which Lyra 'hacia una estética cada vez más cercana al realismo social, una literatura concebida como instrumento de denuncia y concienciación' (Rivera Rivera, 2010, p.8). Of course, Lyra's *Bananos y hombres* was one of the greatest national exemplars of social realism, while *En una silla de ruedas* typifies *costumbrismo*. González stresses that there are two reasons for uncertainty over how to describe her work: 'one, all of these European literary currents were influential in Latin America concurrently, not sequentially, and second, her novels for adults reflect a very different tone from her stories for children' (González, 2008, p.80). Also referring to *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, González states that 'the fundamental reason she is so often included in *costumbrista* lists 'is due to the orality of Lyra's language' (González, 2008, p.73). After reading *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, Magón praised Lyra's work and wrote that 'como yo reclamo y mantengo ser el iniciador en Costa Rica de la literatura de Costumbres, tengo y asumo el derecho de lamentarme o felicitar me con la aparición de nuevos libros del género' (Magón, 1920, p.299). Portuguese notes that in Lyra's work, for the first time 'el costumbrismo se identifica con los cuentos infantiles, para integrarse en el alma del pueblo costarricense' (Portuguez, 1964, p.139 quoted in Ovares and Rojas, 2001, p.190). As Rivera Rivera writes, 'la cultura ha privilegiado una determinada lectura de la obra *Los Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* precisamente para promover por medio de ella esa nostalgia por un pasado idealizado que tiene que

ver directamente con su concepción de las relaciones sociales' (Rivera Rivera, 2010, p.8). González concludes that 'Lyra is no *costumbrista* in a strict sense of the term; in fact, just the opposite. Despite her use of popular Costa Rican speech, her tales for **children are in no way little slices of life or "cuadros de costumbres"** (too many kings and queens and palaces and talking animals)' (González, 2008, p.73).

I argue that whilst Lyra shifts between writing styles in her complete oeuvre, in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, she is a *costumbrista* who also revels in fantasy, and the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. I believe that Lyra should most certainly be included as a *costumbrista*, as regardless of how *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* is categorised, the tales feature the people's language with specific Costa Rican elements. This fulfilled one of the main objectives of the founders of the national identity, while still flirting with the influence of European fairy tales and other globally derived sources. Lyra's magic and folkloric charm helps Costa Rican children to construct their own national identity and social ideologies. I will later outline examples of observations which have led me to this belief. It is my interpretation that Lyra actively endorses gender equality and rejects class divisions, often with a subtle satirical humour, whilst simultaneously producing a corpus of tales that fitted with the earlier state-driven construction of a new national identity. This is a view shared by Rivera Rivera who also associates the folkloric aspects of the stories, the idealistic rural setting and the language of the *campesino* with 'el proyecto ideológico y de tono nostálgico de la oligarquía cafetalera' (Rivera Rivera, 2010, p.5). He suggests that although the text appears not to question the status quo, instead helping to promote an idealised image of



a rural Costa Rica, this may not be an accurate interpretation. He raises concern for social issues in the text as many of the lower class characters use ingenuity or divine intervention to climb the social ladder, so promoting to children 'la idea de cambio de las condiciones socioeconómicas de los personajes humildes, contrario a lo que podría verse desde la lectura que la cultura oficial hace de ellos' (Rivera Rivera, 2010, p.5).

### **The role of literature in constructing a national identity**

Social values and accepted moral standards will be dictated by the society in which a child lives and the cultural distinctions and codes to which he or she is exposed. Children's literature, that mirrors the everyday lives and values experienced by the children who read it, will undoubtedly aid in the construction of national identity and desirable social behaviour. This view is supported by Marriott, who states that children 'learn about who they are and what their relationship is to the society of which they are a part, how they should think and act within a community; in other words, they develop an identity within a social context' (Marriott, 1998, p.10). Fox and Short propose that stories 'influence the ways in which children think about themselves and their place in the world as well as the ways in which they think about other cultural perspectives and peoples' (Fox and Short, 2003, v). Hazard comments that 'children's books keep alive a sense of nationality' (Hazard, 1960, p.146) and that 'we can disregard the literature for childhood only if we consider unimportant the way in which a national soul is formed and sustained' (Hazard, 1960, p.111). Children's literature offers a significant platform to instil national identity and social values from an early age, serving as a vehicle for the formation of identity and sociocultural

attitudes in childhood.

Mo and Shen stress that 'folktales introduced from another culture often need to be modified in order to fit with the social conventions and values of the recipient culture' (Mo and Shen, 2003, p.208). Reception of children's stories depends on the moral code, traditions and society of a population. Despite the sharing of common values, distinct identities exist in different countries; no modifications would be necessary if cultures were uniform. Meek writes that 'in all children's stories there are cultural features which locate them in a tradition' (Meek, 1988, p.13). Poesio highlights Calvino's view that folk literature only 'becomes 'national' when a nation claims it' (Poesio, 2001, p.71). In order to 'claim it', a folktale may well need tweaking, be it by the inclusion of a different setting, alternative culinary representation or choice of character names. Children's literature can therefore help to construct or preserve a sense of national identity.

I am not proposing that events or ideas in a text will be relevant to all readers, but there should be at least common ideas and themes to which he or she can relate. It goes without saying that a compilation of fantasy tales is far from a reality. Nevertheless, there are local elements embedded within the magic and imagination of Lyra's writing that do indeed make these stories very authentic, in spite of the implausible plots and supernatural events. The obvious familiar elements would include recognisable settings, customs, plants, animals, food, traditions, social values and language patterns and expressions. The inclusion of identifiable, common themes and use of appropriate vernacular will undoubtedly contribute to cultural authenticity and reinforce national identity. This is an area in which Lyra excels, and her focus on regional and national expressions is

similar to that seen in the texts of other national authors at the start of the twentieth century. It is also one of the main reasons why this book was so positively received.

### **National identity and language**

As Meek points out, 'national identity is undoubtedly linked with language; children learn their culture as they learn to speak' (Meek, 2001, x). González refers to Changmarín's opinion that 'the more honestly the text reflected local culture and speech, the more universally valid was the artistic work'. Although the use of local vernacular may restrict readership, it serves to differentiate between Spanish speakers of other countries, not only in a racial or cultural context but also in terms of language (González, 2014, p.69).

New republics formed in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century were tasked with constructing new national identities that reflected how they differed from the countries around them. Race was an important consideration in the creation of these Latin American identities, with 'a new idealistic mixture of the two races, cultures, histories, and ethnicities embodied in the concept of *mestizaje*' (González, 2014, p.68). Non-Spanish speaking labourers arrived from the Caribbean to work in agriculture and railroad construction, as did large numbers of Chinese, Italian and Americans (Harpelle, 2002, pp.12-14), but these groups were largely neglected in the construction of new identities. Instead these were 'based on the imagined idea of racially homogeneous countries composed of *mestizos*, who, if anything, were conceived of as being more white than Indian' (González, 2014, p.68). Whilst the overall

continental identity was obvious, the distinction between similar, individual countries was not. Therefore, to produce geographically defined national identities, 'national discourses tended, among other things, to emphasize linguistic differences' (González, 2014, p.68).

National identity construction is a process, not a final product, and Botelho and Rudman note that 'language is not seen as possessing a fixed, stable meaning, but as possessing significance that is bound by its historical and sociopolitical context' (Botelho and Rudman, 2009, p.101). Following the formation of representative national discourses, each new Latin American republic 'needed to create a body of loyal patriots that would continue to reproduce themselves into the next generations. To this end they focused particularly on education and on encouraging local authors to write for children hoping to promote an emphasis on the values and desires of the dominant class' (González, 2014, p.69). This Latin American trend mirrors national literature creation in Costa Rica at the turn of the twentieth century.

The emphasis on regional and national expressions is similar to that seen in the texts of Lyra and other authors at the start of the twentieth century, as previously described in part one of this study. The usage of local expressions, immortalised in national literature of the time allowed the lower class's vernacular, namely that of the *campesino*, to be promoted. Mosby describes how 'the construction of its national identity adheres to the image of Costa Rica as a state formed by white, Catholic, Spanish-speaking peasants' (Mosby, 2012, p.9). National identity is promoted as egalitarian and Lyra subscribes to what Mosby refers to as the *leyenda blanca* by implication, but the messages within her

stories are not confined to one ethnic or social group. Although meeting the agenda of nation building and creating a culturally distinctive compilation of national folk tales, Lyra draws on folklore from outside the national boundaries. Her ideology extends beyond the narrow margins of an imagined, homogenous society simply due to the nature of producing a compilation originating from multiple sources and featuring many different social situations and characters. It is ironic that Lyra incorporates elements from African oral stories and fairy tales spanning various cultures, following the construction by the oligarchy of what Mosby describes as a 'dominant national ideology of "whiteness" that renders invisible other ethnic groups in the country' (Mosby, 2003, p.4).

González discusses the varying ways of recording popular speech, such as imitating 'the vernacular to indicate how uneducated the campesinos sounded' or conversely idealising its 'simplicity, honesty, and connection to the uniqueness of the region and culture' and 'raising the campesino to the level of mythic national hero and martyr' (González, 2014, p.69). Rubio Torres explains that 'en esta época [...] representan el campesino como el indio, el ingenuo, el pobre, el tonto. Porque este modelo de la civilización era el europeo' (Personal communication with Rubio Torres, 2015). Through literature, the *campesino* slowly became a cultural icon, and his place in society was valued rather than mocked. After all, the agricultural exports that brought wealth to the country depended on his work. In this way, although class divisions obviously remain, as in any society, the intellectual elite aimed to promote the implausible myth that everyone in the country was equal – from the agricultural workers right up to the nation's leaders.

Critics have argued that in order to relate to a story, children must be able to understand the language choices made by the author and gauge a genuineness that allows ready identification with the material. If a text is culturally authentic, it will accurately reflect the 'the speech patterns, values, cultural practices, and perspectives' of the people that it represents and also 'communicate certain values, knowledge, and social practices' (Brooks and McNair, 2009, p.130, p.136). Sims Bishop states that the accuracy of details such as the 'grammatical and lexical accuracy of the characters' dialect, and taken-for-granted information possessed by members of a cultural group, help to determine authenticity' (Sims Bishop, 2003, p.28).

Fox and Short agree with Sims Bishop's argument that 'cultural authenticity cannot be defined, although "you know it when you see it" as an insider reading a book about your own culture' (Fox and Short, 2003, p.4). When reading *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, it quickly becomes apparent that the book is written for a Costa Rican readership; accurate translation of some words and expressions is near-impossible without the help of either a Costa Rican national or the *Diccionario de costarrriqueñismos*<sup>9</sup> by Gagini. Whatever the theme of a story, if culturally authentic elements and themes can be identified and if the lexical choices of the author promote the local population, the text can certainly serve to establish, maintain and promote a national identity. *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* is a prime example of this.

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<sup>9</sup> The *Diccionario de costarrriqueñismos*, by Carlos Gagini was first published only one year before *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* and is described by La Academia Costarricense de la Lengua as 'uno de los trabajos lexicográficos más importantes y un punto de referencia ineludible para los estudios sobre el español de Costa Rica' (<http://www.acl.ac.cr/x.php>).

## **Cultural authenticity**

Lyra ensures that her stories are relevant and accessible to Costa Rican children. For example, in 'Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote', Lyra describes 'una huerta que era una maravilla. Allí encontraba uno todo: rabanitos, culantro, tomates, zapayitos y chayoticos tiernos, lechugas' (*CTP*, p.109) and 'un palo de zapote cargadito de zapotes' (*CTP*, p.112). In 'Tío Conejo Comerciante', she depicts typical household chores that may remind children of people within their own families. We learn of 'Tía Cucaracha, que estaba tostando café' (*CTP*, p.129), 'Tía Gallina, que estaba enredada con el almuerzo', 'Tía Zorra que estaba pelando unos pollos' (*CTP*, p.130) and 'Tío Coyote, que estaba quitando del fuego una gran olla de conserva de chiverre' (*CTP*, p.131). Lyra specifies that Tía Palomita Yuré is sitting in a Guanacaste tree when Tío Conejo encounters her at the start of 'Tío Conejo y los caites de su abuela'. In this tale, Lyra also lists some of Tío Conejo's grandmother's clothing: el camisón, los fustanes, las enaguas, la petaca and los caites (*CTP*, p.141). In 'Tío Conejo y los quesos', she mentions that 'un carretero bajaba todos los viernes de una hacienda – por un camino de la vecindad – , con madera y quesos' (*CTP*, p.135). Pacheco Ureña writes that 'la carreta es en nuestro país uno de los legados materiales más importantes heredados de nuestros ancestros y el símbolo nacional sin temor a equivocarse, de su espíritu de trabajo; su humildad la ha dejado inscrita en el alma de los costarricenses' (Pacheco Ureña, 2010, p.49). It was declared as a national symbol in 1988, twenty nine years after the Guanacaste tree was assigned the same status. Pacheco Ureña states that it is considered 'histórico, generoso y centenario' (Pacheco Ureña, 2010, p.41). Obviously, even though these stories were written

before the cart and Guanacaste tree were officially recognised as national symbols, they are culturally iconic to Costa Rica. Likewise, the idea that Tío Conejo 'le habló a un zopilote para que lo llevara a las nubes adonde Tatica Dios' (CTP, p.115) would not need explaining to an imaginative Costa Rican child who is likely to be familiar with both vultures and the usage of this local term for God.

The nationalisation of children's folklore by Lyra was undertaken under the watchful eye of García Monge. By adding in elements that promote cultural authenticity, she also actively promotes national identity. I have provided some examples of this although, as previously mentioned, other critics have also considered this theme. There is unanimous agreement that Lyra's work is culturally identifiable as being from Costa Rica, principally for her lexical choices, but also for her inclusion of recognisable cultural artefacts. While the distinct Costa Rican identity is incontrovertible, I posit that Lyra is reconfiguring certain aspects of national identity as part of her socio-political educational mission to convey what she considers to be appropriate moral messages. Whilst endorsing national identity, she also seeks to change certain attitudes promoted within it.

Whilst *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* can be read through the prism of identity, the main focus of this study will remain firmly on the moral messages and social values within her tales and, although briefly introduced earlier in this work, these will be further explored in the next part of this study.



## **PART THREE**

### **THEMES**

#### **Introduction**

'Children's literature has long been considered a vehicle for transmitting moral and cultural values as well as entertaining' (Sims Bishop, 2003, p.25). This study will argue that these values cannot be separated in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* as they are based on a variety of subjective, interconnected principles. Stories have always been important within communities, serving multiple functions, including 'wish fulfillment, improvement of social status, compensation for misery, preservation and celebration of rituals within a community, and the celebration of power. Some were stories of warning, while others were didactic and moral' (Zipes, 2009, p.27).

It is difficult to delineate a sole theme in a story, as numerous interpretations can be made and subject matter inevitably overlaps. However, there seems to be an overwhelming consensus that children's stories are capable of forming, strengthening, or challenging moral values. Over the ages and across various lands, folktales have reinforced moral expectations and cemented a common behavioural code by putting a 'stamp of approval upon certain values held by the group' (Arbuthnot, 1964, p.255). The stories children read can influence their views and attitudes, either maintaining or altering the development of society and culture. The extent to which they help form belief systems and ideology is not important, they at least contribute in part and therefore they matter.

**Hunt believes that** 'what may at first sight seem like trivial or ephemeral texts are

in fact immensely powerful'. In addition, they are read by those who are starting to form their own ideas and belief systems so 'it is inconceivable that these texts have not shaped society in fundamental and lasting ways' (Hunt, 2009, p.15).

Cascante echoes this view on the importance of literature in moral development, adding that 'es en esta etapa del desarrollo evolutivo, en el que se forjan muchos de los preceptos y valores que el individuo poseerá durante el resto de su vida' (Cascante, 1999, p.36). Reynolds proposes that 'if we are interested in understanding how our society works – where young people get their attitudes about issues such as sex, gender, violence, government, and war – it behoves us to look at what is being read' (Reynolds, 1994, ix). However, it is important to remember that books affect individual children differently, that children's literature is only one vehicle to transmit values and ideas, and that children are influenced by an unquantifiable number of external influences.

It appears García Monge believed that children could learn from modified folktales but, above all else, they should enjoy them (García Monge, 2013, p.13). Perhaps, in tribute to her story-telling aunt, Lyra simply wanted to make children laugh and dream, whilst also producing the folkloric compilation under the guidance and request of García Monge. However, as with any author, some of her personal social values also became integrated into the stories, either in the modifications she made or simply by her conscious selection of tales.

## **Political ideologies**

Jiménez writes that 'all of the folktales in this book can be considered political' and that although Lyra compiled the stories to entertain children 'they promote the values of economic, social and gender equality' (Jiménez, 2009, p.29). Horan also regards the stories that feature Tío Conejo as 'highly entertaining, deeply political stories' (Horan, 2000, p.3). Sutherland states that the promulgation of **one's values through writing and publishing a** potentially influential book is a **political act as 'the author's views are the author's politics; and the books** expressing these views, when made accessible to the public, become purveyors of these politics, and potentially persuasive' (Sutherland, 1985, p.1). In order to **avoid confusion, I will be using Sutherland's definition of a person's politics as** 'any informing ideology (whether explicit or implicit) which has the potential of **persuasion, of influencing another person's belief and value systems'** (Sutherland, 1985, p.1). Within this political ideology, I will consider gender equality, social equality and moral values. It is important to emphasise this, as I wish to separate Carmen Lyra's life as a political activist and leader from her other persona as a children's author. Argüello Scriba writes that Lyra 'fue valiente y audaz en su lucha de romper esquemas para la formulación de una sociedad más justa y de derechos. Búsqueda que se encuentra en los cuentos de Tío Conejo, y al estudiarlos como fábulas de animales es posible encontrar esos intertextos y el trasfondo social y político' (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.47). It is precisely these political undertones that this thesis aims to demonstrate.

I do not believe that Carmen Lyra used her children's stories as a vehicle to promote her communist convictions or to inform children of Costa Rica's

economic relationships with other countries. However, some critics do make this claim. Beam interprets political messages in the context of those relating to socio-political events at the time, considering 'Como Tío Conejo les jugó sucio a Tía Ballena y a Tío Elefante' to be a 'metaphorical reflection of the alliances forming in the North Atlantic' (Beam, 2016, p.59). She views Tío Conejo as 'the meddling hero' that undermines their plot for domination and compares it with 'the declining British empire and the rising U.S. hegemony struggling for control in Central America, particularly in the agro-export sectors' (Beam, 2016, p.60). González, referring to the same story, proposes that:

It is as if Lyra foresees the Cold War, or before that, World War II. What can a tiny country like Costa Rica do when the major powers decide to take over? Clearly, it follows Tío Conejo's lead and takes advantage of the fact that as long as the superpowers are busy quarreling, no one will pay much attention to what Costa Rica does. (González, 2009, p.39)

In her book, *The Subversive Voice of Carmen Lyra*,<sup>10</sup> Horan also relates this tale to political principles that 'may well have operated in the British empire, as well as in Central American politics' (Horan, 2000, p.181). Horan further suggests that 'Tío Conejo y el yurro' has political connotations: 'a political crisis typical of small countries with large neighbors: the large predatory Uncle Tiger has invaded their territory and taken over their most important resource' (Horan, 2000, p.198). Describing the same tale, González makes another socio-political comparison

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<sup>10</sup> This book offers an English version of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*. Some of Horan's translation choices are open to question.

which is also open to considerable interpretation. She describes the lack of gratitude showed by the other animals to Tío Conejo as 'reminiscent of attempts by Costa Rica to help her neighboring Central American countries only to be rebuffed or unacknowledged' (González, 2009, p.39). Linking the lack of a happy ending with 'border thinking' and 'a kind of post-traumatic stress syndrome on a continental scale', González remarks that 'the narrative of Latin American history teaches a healthy mistrust of happy endings' (González, 2009, p.41). Another example that she uses is that of 'La Cucurachita Mandinga', in relation to which she claims that Costa Rican readers are unaffected by the death by scalding and subsequent self-mutilation because they are 'an audience on the receiving end of colonial violence' (González, 2009, p.44).

González offers an economic interpretation of 'Tío Conejo Comerciante', stating that 'since Costa Rica feels victimized economically by a rampant capitalism beyond its control, the solution once again is to turn to Tío Conejo for a few well placed economic tips. What to do to make up for years of under-priced crops?' (González, 2009, p.39). It appears that many interpretations could be assigned to these stories, although I believe some of these interpretations to be as imaginative as the tales themselves. González goes one step further and suggests that Tío Conejo represents an astute Costa Rican (González, 2009, p.38). Drawing comparisons with the trickster, she states that Costa Ricans play on the unsophisticated *campesino* image, whilst secretly acknowledging that they are 'smarter, more astute, experienced, able to manipulate and fool colonial power, intelligent in a covert way' (González, 2008, p.75). She describes this attitude, of concealing intelligence to exploit an adversary, as 'typical of

oppressed cultures' although adding that it 'allows the oppressed to have their way, to get what they want, or to have the last laugh, without being caught, without angering the agents of established power or awakening the beast of violent colonial, imperial, or racist domination and suppression' (González, 2008, p.75). Her idea that Tío Conejo is a metaphor of the national psyche is an interesting one but I question its application to the Costa Rican people; no nation can be defined by a sweeping and essentialist statement. Horan states that 'such tales appeal to children and any people living with the constant reminder of their own political and economic powerlessness' (Horan, 2000, p.170). Given the nature of the target readership, I am not convinced that in 1920 Lyra was necessarily employing the character of Tío Conejo to tackle any lingering colonial, imperial or racist grievances, although there are those who subscribe to this view, as mentioned above.

Although some critics assign political or historical meaning to Lyra's folktales, this is certainly not a view that I share. Nor is it supported by Rubio Torres who notes that 'Carmen Lyra logró mantener un prudente distanciamiento entre su labor como escritora de literatura infantil y su vehemente, meditada y acuciosa participación política' (Rubio, no date, no pagination). The same notion is rejected by Rojas González when she explains that 'la literatura no es un reflejo de lo que pasa en la sociedad' and advises that the stories were not written to illustrate Costa Rican socio-political events as the stories that Lyra modified are taken from all over the world (Personal communication with Rojas González, 2015). It is clear that there are deep socio-political references in her later works, and that her status as a popular author afforded her credibility and familiarity

that may have helped to promote her subsequent communist or anti-government ideals in later years. However, it would be wrong to make assumptions that these messages are hidden in her stories for children.

I believe that Carmen Lyra, whether intentionally or not, conveys many of her own moral values through *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*. It is also possible to discern an underlying vision of gender and social equality, something that Lyra fervently campaigned for throughout her life, as a key theme in her work. Although wishing to avoid the risk of biographical fallacy, this statement is even more credible with some understanding of the context of Lyra's own life experiences; her illegitimacy, lower social class and differing political ideologies prevented her joining feminist movements and charitable female-led social programmes of the time (Molina Jiménez, 2000, p.28; Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.258). Lyra campaigned for all members of society and treated both sexes equally, even though her gender and the circumstances of her birth led her to be heavily discriminated against at the start of the twentieth century in Costa Rica.

Singer proposes that 'subversive stories make claims about power within social arrangements, and contain information about the possibilities of evading that power' (Singer, 2011, p.318). Lurie argues that:

Most of the great works of juvenile literature are subversive in one way or another: they express ideas and emotions not generally approved of or even recognized at the time; they make fun of honored figures and piously held beliefs; and they view social pretenses with clear-eyed directness. (Lurie, 1990, p.20)

González concludes that *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* can be interpreted as subversive due to 'her penchant for trickster characters, her inversion of the structural expectations set up by conventional fairy tales, and her clear violation of what is considered to be appropriate children's literature from a Eurocentric, psycho-pedagogical perspective' (González, 2009, p.45). I believe that Lyra's stories can be regarded as subversive texts as they feature immoral (and amoral) conduct that is not always punished. They also suggest that weaker individuals have considerable power that they can exercise against authority or more powerful adversaries. Tío Conejo is a prime example of a character who subverts. He resists authority in tactical ways, using his intelligence to defeat stronger opponents that are preventing him from getting what he wants. In my view, this represents a life strategy, not an overt political or race-related statement. The fairy tales also challenge social norms and the morals are not always as expected, nor in line with traditional motifs commonly seen in similar stories from other cultures. Pacheco Acuña also shares the view that *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* is a subversive text, especially considering that Lyra is an 'escritora de un pequeño país latinoamericano en donde su sociedad a fines del siglo XIX y principios del siglo XX es todavía más opresora y patriarcal que otras sociedades que le eran contemporáneas, en lo que a mujer y su rol social se refiere' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.267). She declares that 'si se ha manifestado que su lenguaje es una trasgresión lingüística y si se ha cuestionado la moralidad de sus relatos por la inversión de valores, esta obra de Carmen Lyra resulta transgresora tanto en forma como en contenido' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.259). Lyra's work is quite subversive as her folktales, featuring princesses, peasants and talking



animals, promoted popular speech at a time when children's literature did not really exist. Certainly, the use of anthropomorphism and fairy tale fantasy cleverly cloak her social ideals and representations of equality in her stories. These tales were not considered to be of concern, except for the use of popular speech and *costarrriqueñismos*. Ironically, some criticised Lyra's vernacular approach, believing it to be detrimental to children's acquisition and appropriate use of spoken language (Echeverría de Sauter, 2009, no pagination).

In recent decades, critics have examined the subversive use of fairy tale themes and motifs by women writers (Wanning Harries, 2001; Haase, 2004; Zipes, 2006). Lyra uses traditional fairy tale elements but there is an indication of subversiveness in her work. However, given the period in which Lyra was compiling her stories, it would be unrealistic to expect her to completely subvert the fairy tale tradition. She is not as subversive as other writers, but could certainly be considered a precursor to female authors who also wrote for children (Haase, 2004; Zipes, 2006; Dunbar, 2014).

González states that her stories seem innocuous, because of the inclusion of familiar 'Costa Rican speech, settings, religious imagery' in her imported stories (González, 2008, p.74). I argue that the stories are innocuous and it is her use of these recognisable elements that allows the child to identify with the characters and engage with the story more easily, as a result of fewer barriers to understanding and enjoyment. I believe that her 'subversive' content positively promotes gender and social equality in a patriarchal society, largely driven by the domineering coffee elite of the time. However, Lyra also celebrates the anti-heroic nature, and generally ignores the questionable morals, of the protagonists

when they manage to triumph over a more dominant adversary. Furthermore, the stories also promote a range of positive moral behaviours, even if these do conflict with the less socially acceptable values also presented in her tales. Within these short stories, aimed specifically at a younger audience that lacks adult cynicism, I do not view Lyra's subversive content as being damaging to children. Rather the opposite: she calls into question conventionally held notions of equality, respect for others and social mobility, whilst cleverly nationalising selected folktales and reinforcing identity in an entertaining way. In addition, by respecting the global traditions, retaining the amorality of the trickster rabbit and honouring the more sinister elements of fairy tales, Lyra rejected 'logic and ethics' in her own special way. These are the themes that will be explored in this study.

## Morality

Lyra appears to prioritise magic and fantasy over didactic tales. In the prologue to *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, she explains how her aunt told 'cuentos que poblaron de maravillas mi cabeza' while the sensible members of her family bored her with 'sus conversaciones sesudas y sus cuentecitos científicos, que casi siempre arrastraban torpemente una moraleja' (CTP, p.8). Despite Lyra's disdain for dull, moralistic tales, this study argues that her work does in fact transmit moral values and social observations. It also proposes that these moral messages are contradictory, varying both within and between individual stories. Reflections on gender and social equality, however, demonstrate a certain degree of consistency. Pacheco Acuña writes that Lyra:

...no está en busca de una redefinición de identidad individual sino persigue una redefinición o reestructuración de una mejor sociedad. Su interés no es el de ser solo creadora de textos, sino el de crear una familia unida que escuche, disfrute y aprenda de los *Cuentos de la Tía Panchita*. (Pacheco Acuña, 2006, p.18)

Horan remarks that 'the narrator dismisses morality altogether, stressing instead the power of fantasy as escape' (Horan, 2011, p.11). Vásquez Vargas describes tía Panchita as a woman who 'apartada del mundo formal y conservador de los adultos lograba fascinar a los niños e introducirlos en un mundo mágico, sin moralejas explícitas' (Vásquez Vargas, 2006, p.182). Lyra speaks with contempt about her 'tío Pablo, profesor de Lógica y Ética', sarcastically adding that she keeps 'las mentiras de mi tía Panchita' alongside the scientific explanations given

to her by 'profesores muy graves que se creen muy sabios' (CTP, p.9). Pacheco Acuña suggests that the introduction of a narrator without a critical conscience 'tiene como función salvar el código moral' because it promotes reflection and questioning of the tales (Pacheco Acuña, 2006, p.19).

Peter Hunt declares that children's books are 'inevitably didactic in some way: even the most child-friendly is adopting some implicit attitudes' (Hunt, 2009, p.14). However, the prologue suggests that the principal purpose of these stories is not to offer moral **guidance or didactic substance, in spite of Lyra's role as an** educator at the time of writing the book. Echeverría de Sauter, referring to both *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* by Lyra and *Cuentos viejos* by Leal de Noguera, states that both authors 'tenían claro que no intentaron hacer libros didácticos sino darles placer y gusto por la lectura a los niños' (Echeverría de Sauter, 2009, no pagination). I recognise that Lyra rejects clumsy heavy-handed moralising and that conveying a moral message is not her primary objective. Nevertheless, Lyra selected stories from the moralising fairy tale genre and included trickster stories that I argue are laden with morals, however implicitly these may be presented. The tales may be sugar-coated with fantasy and show examples of questionable behaviour, but some kind of moral sense is still implied.

Moral values are certainly more clearly defined in the first section of the book, as is often the case in fairy tales. For example, in God's explicit advice to Juan in 'Escomposte perinola': 'hay que tener su poquito de malicia en la vida, si no querés salir siempre por dentro. Vos sos muy confiado con todo el mundo; creés que todos son tan buenos como vos, ¡y qué va!' after he has been tricked by a dishonest man. God then tells him 'Yo no te digo que no seas bueno con tu

prójimo, pero tampoco te dejés, porque eso es dejar lugar a que el egoísmo se extienda como una mata de ayote' (*CTP*, p.41). Rubio Torres, discussing the generalised adaptation of European folklore by Lyra and other authors between 1920 and 1975, refers to the oral tales as 'cuentos con intención moralizante y educativa, que, por medio del entretenimiento y de la palabra, facilitaban la **transmisión de valores y la añoranza por un mundo "ilustrado" y cosmopolita**' (Rubio Torres, 2012, p.27). Quesada Villalobos suggests that the values Lyra intended to convey in her folktales were 'la idea de educar para la paz, la justicia y la transformación social' (Quesada Villalobos, 2011, no pagination).

González states that Lyra's stories are 'seemingly grounded in a fairly conventional Christian morality of virtues rewarded and sins punished' (González, 2009, p.32). However, Tío Conejo, following the time-honoured trickster tradition, commits all manner of heinous deeds and it is these stories that lead some critics to question the presence of moralising elements in Lyra's work. For this reason, much of this section will focus on the morals that are conveyed by this character, both directly and indirectly. Tío Conejo literally gets away with murder, on more than one occasion. Pacheco Acuña also notes that 'el engaño es presentado como salvación o instrumento para hacer justicia, la cual resulta relativa, pues el embaucador sale impune' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.259). It is therefore difficult to agree with González's statement and Villalobos's claim that the tales promote justice, as although this conclusion is fairly representative of the fairy tales, the same cannot be said for most of the tales in the second section.

Lyra overlooks certain immoral (and amoral) actions by Tío Conejo. Indeed, she

delights in his bad behaviour. This does not present an ethical problem; the stories would be less appealing for children if there were always penalties for poor conduct. The fact that Tío Conejo has undesirable morals makes the stories all the more entertaining. García Monge shares this view when he describes Tío Conejo's popularity: 'los muchachos, cuando ya pasan por las escuelas, se inclinan más a lo picaresco. Por eso tío Conejo les resulta un gran tipo; siempre se sale con la suya. Cierta destreza al servicio de cierta picardía; eso como que les gusta a los muchachos' (García Monge, 2013, p.13). Lyra added seven more Tío Conejo stories in subsequent editions (and only one more fairy tale) presumably because these stories with a naughty protagonist proved so popular. Obviously, approval of Tío Conejo's more serious crimes of grievous bodily harm and murder cannot be justified within a real society, there is a limit to what is deemed as acceptable bending of the rules. **Of course, much of Tío Conejo's** behaviour can be attributed to the genre to which he belongs, and Lyra is clearly not minded to modify or revise the trickster tradition. She conserves the archetypal storylines and familiar motifs of the tales in the interests of readability. According to many literary critics, trickster tales are typically associated with (a)morality. For example, in her essay, 'The Trickster in African American Literature', Harris observes that tricksters 'in executing their actions, [...] give no thought to right or wrong; indeed, they are amoral' (Harris, no date, no pagination). Ferreira Pinto agrees that tricksters are amoral characters, adding that the trickster 'possesses no values, moral or social, and is at the mercy of his passions and appetites' (Ferreira Pinto, 2009, p.101). For Pacheco Acuña, there is no doubt that Tío Conejo has no scruples (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.267). The

trickster is transgressive and ruthless, escaping punishment and any negative consequence of his behaviour. The message conveyed is therefore not straightforward as the lack of retribution and his flouting of the rules is what enables him to achieve his goals. This can be viewed as the intention to better his life chances or increase material wealth, successfully implemented through clever deception against a less intelligent opponent. His behaviour does not reflect the social norms and he has lost his moral compass. Tío Conejo is never a victim, except possibly in 'Tío Conejo y el caballo de mano Juan Piedra' when he falls victim to a little too much eggnog. Other than that, and excluding 'Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas' where God only increases the size of his ears, Tío Conejo gets the upper hand over all of the other characters using deception and wit. Graham Seal, referring to the Anansi stories, states that 'like many trickster figures, Anansi is amoral, duplicitous and greedy'. However, he concludes that 'trickster tales often point to a moral' (Seal, 2011, p.71). I agree with these distinctions: even if the trickster lacks morals, the stories are not necessarily devoid of morality. On a superficial level, they entertain and amuse but beneath this, they convey different messages to different readers. The absence of an explicit moral ending, as often seen in fairy tale type stories, allows the reader to formulate their own judgements on Tío Conejo's morality.

In a personal communication (2015), Rubio Torres states that:

Tío Conejo es, si se quiere, el antihéroe de lo que nosotros en cuanto a valores, porque Tío Conejo es un ladrón. Tío Conejo es un hurtador, es un engaña, incluso Tío Conejo es un asesino, verdad. Como el mata el tigre, mata el otro, mata este, el encierra a la

cucarachita en la cocina, la mete la gallina, la gallina se come la cucurachita, luego mete el zorro, el zorro se come la gallina. ¡Claro nos hace muchas gracias pero yo no quisiera encontrarme a Tío Conejo en la vida real!

Tío Conejo is, as Rubio Torres explains, a classic anti-hero. He exposes the flaws, wrongdoing and the material desires of the people. Marriott notes how anthropomorphised animals 'exhibit all or most of the attributes of people, and whilst they **often personify adults, they equally often represent children's** behaviour and characteristics' (Marriott, 2002, p.178). Children may identify with the characters, or be distanced from their actions and behaviour if they consider the animal protagonists as being different to humans. Morality can be distorted when animals act 'in ways that children might like to behave but are never able to without penalty' (Marriott, 2002, p.178) and if animals are perceived to be lacking moral qualities (Berger, 1977, p.505).

Different sides are seen to Tío Conejo's behaviour. For example, at times he is a psychopathic murderer ('Tío Conejo Comerciante', 'Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas') and at others he is a thief ('Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote', 'Tío Conejo y los quesos', 'Tío Conejo y el caballo de mano Juan Piedra'). Well-known for undesirable behavioural traits, he presents a contradiction of socially acceptable values in the corpus of stories. However, his poor conduct will be recognised as such, which means his immoral actions remain morally significant. Ironically, the trickster provides an example of how not to behave, often compromising personal morality to take back power from the stronger adversary. His behaviour is often so extreme that nobody could possibly think it is a model



to be followed, but rather one to be avoided. Adela Ferreto, who authored her own Tío Conejo stories (*Aventuras del Tío Conejo y Juan Valiente*, 1982) rejects the morality, or lack of it, demonstrated by Lyra's rabbit and transforms him into a more morally appropriate character. Her Tío Conejo uses his wit for good and she is quoted as saying that 'el Tío Conejo de Carmen es un conejo popular, lleno de mañas y artimañas, muy poco honorable, muy simpático sí, pero también muy sinvergüenza. Ahora bien, el Tío Conejo de mi obra personifica a un campesino honrado. Trabajador y amigo de ayudar' (Vásquez Vargas, 1993, pp.21-22).

Horan notes the unconvincing morals in the stories, asserting that 'es cierto que se pueden criticar algunos relatos de los *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* utilizando toda la gama de críticas que se han empleado para censurar y empobrecer la llamada literatura infantil: el racismo, lo monstruoso, finales de moraleja dudosa, su poca originalidad' (Horan, 1997, p.30). However, Lyra is not rejecting the presence of moral messages, rather she appears to convey them in a lively way that neither overwhelms nor bores the reader. Argüello Scriba concludes that not all stories featuring Tío Conejo promote an explicit moral, but the stories do offer a point of departure for discussing morality and lessons learned (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.56). Furthermore, children can learn positive moral lessons from the dyadic morality and the responses or misfortunes of the other characters affected by the trickster's behaviour, rather than from his negative actions directly. Clements explores the Native American trickster stories, describing how the moral lessons may be more important than the entertainment value as the trickster can 'remind a storyteller's audience of what they should avoid to remain accepted members of the community' (Clements, 2011, p.60).

Lyra dedicated almost half of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* to the adventures of Tío Conejo, accepted by most literary critics as unequivocally representing an element of subversiveness from a literary tradition emerging from oppressed cultures. His inclusion alone suggests that Lyra delighted in the subversive nature of certain strands of children's literature. For this reason, subversion must be considered as it may represent a common thread in the text.

Twagilimana discusses the protean morality of animal tricksters, stating that they add to the 'fictionalized world of anthropology by providing multiple ways of dealing with social challenges' (Twagilimana, 1997, p.140). Jurado Fernández states that the political and social democracy of Costa Rican society defines its success as a nation. Writing about the colonial government in 1821, he describes how the national identity-making process 'overcame incredible obstacles, any of which could have stopped it in its tracks. We have every reason to believe that we are still the same people, still able to confront and resolve any obstacle placed in front of us' (Jurado Fernández, 2013, no pagination). As will be shown in part four, Lyra's fairy tale protagonists and Tío Conejo epitomise this spirit of circumnavigating and overcoming challenges, and whilst this is not unique to nationals of one particular country, it is certainly a character trait with which Costa Ricans can identify. Lyra's tales promote the idea that greater adversaries can be defeated through cunningness and sheer audacity. Cortés notes that 'Tío Conejo, por muy inocente que parezca, plantea una subversión del orden **establecido y de las "buenas costumbres" patriarcales, valiéndose de los recursos y maquinaciones del ingenio, que son los únicos que poseen los sectores populares**' (Cortés, 2016, no pagination). Dégh explains how a tale 'symbolizes

elementary reality with its dangers and struggles, and it demonstrates that cleverness, skill, courage, and perseverance lead to victory' (Dégh, 1979, p.99). This is a valuable message for any child, regardless of whether the main character has to use deceit and corruption to succeed in life. It is not only a theme that presents itself in the trickster tales. For example, in 'Uvieta', the protagonist tricks Death and the Devil, although God unfairly goes back on his word and so Uvieta still ends up dying earlier than he had hoped. In 'La casita de las torrijas', the children manage to use courage and God's advice to defeat the old lady who wants to kill them. Victory over a stronger adversary is a theme that runs throughout Lyra's stories. Mosby notes that stories 'like Brer Rabbit in North American black folklore, not only were entertainment but also had a didactic purpose' and 'were used to transmit lessons of survival and resistance' (Mosby, 2003, p.34, p.35). The Anansi stories – thought to be the origin of Brer Rabbit – are visible in both the work of Chandler Harris and Lyra.<sup>11</sup> They were used to impart moral values as well as for providing entertainment, comfort and a cultural connection with homes and cultures left behind (Mosby, 2003, p.37). Rightly or wrongly, Mosby laments that because of greater integration of races in Costa Rica, the trickster stories 'are fading from oral culture' (Mosby, 2003, p.38). I argue that Carmen Lyra has preserved oral African tradition indefinitely in Costa Rican children's literature. The trickster is ever present in the form of Tío Conejo, but the stories go beyond race and have a wider social application. Fairy tales

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<sup>11</sup> Compare 'Nansi and the Gum Man' (Ishmael, 2010, pp.45-47) with 'Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote'; 'Nansi rides Tiger' (Ishmael, 2010, pp.32-34) with 'Tío Conejo ennoviado'; 'The Strongest Animal' (Ishmael, 2010, pp.61-63) with 'Como Tío Conejo les jugó sucio a Tía Ballena y a Tío Elefante'; 'Mongoose tries to steal from Nansi' (Ishmael, 2010, pp.104-105) with 'Tío Conejo y los quesos' and 'Why Anansi owns every story' (Sherman, 1996, pp.15-18) with 'Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas'.

and the oral trickster tales are centuries old, and it is with good reason that they have remained popular.

In children's stories, more often than not, the underdog or weaker character gains the sympathy of the reader. The trickster challenges the status quo, fighting back against the inequality and obstacles he faces. In this way, he is subversive and, in spite of the difficulties he faces, his trickster ways give him the same chance of achieving his objectives as any other character, regardless of their power or status. His strategic deceptiveness allows him to compete on an equal level; by the end of the story, he is no longer the weakest or least fortunate character. However, the way that he succeeds is by taking advantage of others, thereby reversing any perceived inequalities and redistributing the wealth or power in his favour.

Cascante proposes that Lyra's folktales 'propician enseñanzas para la vida, no solo de moral, sino de cortesía, de amor, amistad, etc y también, de cómo enfrentarse a esos Tío Coyotes, Tíos Tigres y demás tíos que aparecen, igual que a Tío Conejo, en la vida de cada individuo' (Cascante, 1999, p.165). Insaído stresses that African trickster stories allowed the elders to 'teach the youngsters not to be naive, gullible, foolish, or too trusting or believing of the things they heard from friends or strangers' (Insaído, 2011, xxxviii). In some cases the other animals know exactly what Tío Conejo is like and somehow he still manages to trick them. For example, in 'Tío Conejo y los caites de su abuela', Tío Tigre chastises the gullible Tía Palomita Yuré, saying '¡Ah, Tía Palomita Yuré! ¡Tan vieja y en cartilla! ¿Usted es capaz de comprarle las mentiras a este gran zamarro? ¿No ve que es Tío Conejo, más conocido que la ruda?' (CTP, p.139). He

also tells Tío Conejo, 'No, no, no. Ya te dije que a mí no me vengás con solfas. Quien no te conoce que te compre' (*CTP*, p.140). Obviously, he fails to keep his guard up for long enough and the story ends with Tío Conejo fooling him into thinking he is a pair of old sandals. In addition to his conduct throughout the tales, Tío Conejo is clearly not perceived as a victor at the end of the stories either. Even when he does get his way, it has been through the abuse and exploitation of other characters; there are obviously pertinent moral lessons to be learned. In 'Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas', Tío Conejo ties up Tío Tigre and stones him to death. He later tricks Mano León into falling into a pitfall trap he has made and 'a los ocho días el pobre mano León murió de hambre' (*CTP*, p.117). He gives Mano Lagarto 'un garrotazo por la nariz que lo dejó tieso allí no más' (*CTP*, p.119), thereby killing three overly trusting friends in his superficial quest to be taller. In fact, his first attempt at murdering Mano Lagarto was unsuccessful and the latter falls for Tío Conejo's lies twice. This story does not provoke any sympathy for Mano Lagarto, as demonstrated by Tío Conejo's justification of 'Lo que el sapo quería' (*CTP*, p.119). One possible interpretation is that the real underlying message is whether the victims should have ever really trusted Tío Conejo at all. Therefore, the terrible actions of Tío Conejo are in fact entirely defensible as the listener is able to use these as a way to make sense of human nature and understand key social interactions. The idea that friends may not be trustworthy could shock a child more than a murderous rabbit, as the latter is obvious fantasy whereas the former represents a viable threat. Indeed, Tío Conejo only wants to be bigger because 'era una gran vaina ser tan chiquillo porque todos se lo quería comer' (*CTP*, p.115). Many children would be able to

sympathise with his predicament, because they themselves may be conscious of being at the mercy of bigger and more powerful individuals. They can identify with the main character and skim over the explicit violence, simply enjoying the story as Lyra intended. In this way, the anti-hero essentially becomes the children's hero.

Similarly, in 'Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote', Tío Coyote, on encountering Tío Conejo again after his lies had resulted in him being scalded with boiling water, says 'Sí, callate solfas. Por dicha que ya yo sé con la tusa con que me rasco. Encomendate a Dios, porque aquí me las vas a pagar todas juntas' (*CTP*, p.111). By the final meeting, after Tío Conejo 'le apió cuanto diente tenía y el pobre Tío Coyote dijo a correr pegando el grito al cielo' (*CTP*, p.112), Tío Coyote should know what to expect. He ignores Tío Conejo's initial charm and pleas of innocence, telling him 'Callate, vende miel y bebe sin dulce. Quien no te conoce que te compre' (*CTP*, p.113), before falling for his lies a third time and drinking so much water that his stomach bursts. Tío Coyote's cleverness and ability to defeat his adversary appeals to our darker nature. The unwary Tío Coyote really should have trusted his initial instincts. Manuel Villalobos remarks that 'La gula entonces es su desgracia y de este modo queda claro el castigo' (Manuel Villalobos, 2013, p.91). Perhaps he is a victim, not of Tío Conejo, but of his own desires, the irresistible prizes being marriage to the princess, a juicy plum and a big cheese. Likewise, in 'La Cucarachita Mandinga', there is a strong suggestion that it serves Ratón Pérez right that he died, as his death was the result of his greed and disobedience. Thus, in some of the stories, a moral message is transmitted through a denouement which is best described as poetic justice.

Lyra also plays with the assumed morality of some of the other characters. Pacheco Acuña, writing about '¿Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas?', describes God as 'la fuente de moral suprema' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.267), yet He challenges Tío Conejo to kill three animals and then fails to keep his side of the bargain. The obvious violence pales into insignificance within the context of the story as Tío Conejo had to commit such atrocities to meet the demands of Tatica Dios, an important fact in a country where religion holds so much importance. It was Tatica Dios who set the challenge to bring him the skins (*CTP*, p.115) but when Tío Conejo accomplishes his mission, God is furious with him. The listener may be left asking why Tatica Dios insisted on such a brutal task when his success was inevitable. Pacheco Acuña adds that 'por lo tanto, no es de extrañar todas las veces que Tío Conejo se burla de los otros animales, les miente, les roba e incluso ocasiona su muertes como en "Tío Conejo Comerciante", ya que no hay moralidad estable en su mundo' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.267). In this upside-down world, the devil is afraid of his mother-in-law in 'La suegra del diablo' and Jesús, María and José are rude to the eponymous Uvieta, insisting that he should be greedier and demonstrating frustration and self-importance when hearing that he is already satisfied with what he has. Taking Jesus's name in vain, the Virgin Mary tells him '¡Jesús, Uvieta, no seas malagradecido! No me despreciés a mí' (*CTP*, p.20), while Uvieta himself refers to Jesus as an interfering busybody (*CTP*, p.21). This is in response to Jesus's superior comment of '¡No seas sapance, hombre! Pedí, que en la Gloria andan con vos ten que ten. No te andés con que te da pena y pedí lo que se te antoje, que bien lo merecés' (*CTP*, p.21). However, the most interesting observation is

that God also colludes with the devil to defeat Uvieta. When Uvieta beats the devil senseless with a stick, we learn that 'Nuestro Señor se vio a palitos para volver a hacer al Diablo de aquel montón de polvo' (*CTP*, p.24). Clearly Pacheco Acuña's reference to the lack of stable morality is absolutely justified. However, this does not mean that morality is not also present. The book is contradiction after contradiction, and stereotypes are both reinforced and destroyed by Lyra.

While Lyra did not invent her plots or characters, she did choose which stories to adapt and include in the collection. As previously discussed, Lyra was an educated woman with a broad knowledge spanning different literary traditions of various times and places. There were thousands of stories that she could have used instead. This study suggests that Lyra selected the specific tales in the corpus because they suited her purpose and conveyed her own social ideologies and personal morality, up to a point. The stories chosen encompass a range of behaviours, values, attitudes and flaws. Binary oppositions are prevalent but Lyra also deconstructs them. For example, good and evil coexist but in some tales good wins out and in others evil prevails. Lines are blurred and social rules are not clear cut; grey areas exist in the morality of the tales. For example, Tío Conejo often triumphs due to deceit and disrespect to others, but in several of the fairy tale type stories, it is kindness to others that is rewarded. In some stories, God is good, in others He is dishonest. The moral messages can also change from one story to the next as, like many anthologies or compilations, the tales are independent of each other and not sequential. The creation of a compilation of stories provided Lyra with a multitude of very different protagonists, whom she could use as mouthpieces to convey a variety of ideas,



moral values, social situations and cultural perspectives. A population is not socially homogeneous and multiple character types allowed her to comment on a range of behaviours visible in society. The acceptance of implicit and explicit morals within this work does not mean that those values need to be restricted to one set of messages. In addition, it is difficult to reach a conclusive decision regarding consistency of the messages, as the various literary traditions and societies from which the tales originate differ enormously.

In conclusion, morality is present in Lyra's stories, even if not in the idealised form that we may expect of a children's writer of the time. This will be explored further in the next part of this thesis.

## Gender representations

As mentioned in part one, women were not afforded with the same rights as men in Lyra's lifetime, largely due to the dominant ideology of patriarchy. González writes that Lyra's:

...gender and her ethnicity prohibit her from talking back to, much less talking with hegemony; her gender further mutes her voice within her own locality. By liberating herself from the dominant discourse, however, and claiming the *gnoseology* [sic.] **of her aunt's** stories, Lyra becomes nothing less than a cultural subversive.  
(González, 2008, p.78, italics in text)

Referring to *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, Pacheco Acuña writes 'usando una voz femenina para trasmitirlos, pero una voz que casi no censura, el discurso está lleno de brechas, de subversión y de ambigüedades que generan tensión' (Pacheco Acuña, 2006, p.18). She also notes that Lyra creates 'una gama de cuentos de hadas o animales que conlleven a lo mismo: estar todos juntos, hombres y mujeres, sin opresión ni subordinación, escuchando y disfrutando, riendo y analizando, comprendiendo y juntos mejorando la sociedad costarricense, es decir, la familia de la Tía Panchita' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.268). Clearly, equality was very important to Lyra, and therefore it is not unrealistic to expect to see this reflected in her writing for children.

Jiménez states that 'since women's history is ignored in Costa Rica, it was uncommon for folktales and fictional stories to give women agency', and describes Lyra's work as 'unique for its time' (Jiménez, 2009, p.31). Singer writes

that the Costa Rican national identity was 'patrocinada por una ideología patriarcal, de origen oligárquico, de parte de la élite en el poder' (Singer, 2006, p.87). Ovares and Rojas note Portuguese's observation that *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* 'incorpora a la mujer costarricense en la literatura nacional en su fase de desenvolvimiento. [Lyra] fue una de las pocas mujeres dedicadas a la literatura, con verdadera capacidad para realizar obra de valor, por las dotes intelectuales que poseyó' (Portuguez, 1964, p.139, quoted in Ovares and Rojas, 2001, p.190). Pacheco Acuña states that *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* 'podría analizarse como un texto que muestre la problemática de identidad femenina dentro de una sociedad patriarcal y de cómo esa voz de mujer escritora-narradora, lucha por expresarse' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.259). She proposes that 'el texto señala injusticia en el rol, esfera y trato de la mujer en la sociedad. Además desmitifica la pasividad femenina [...] y confiere a la mujer atributos **"considerados" como masculinos, (la astucia, agresividad y fuerza)**' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.267). This study will show both male and female characters in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* who can be perceived as strong or weak, naive or cunning, and aggressive or passive. In terms of gender, Lyra represented female and male characters with equal respect and a balance of positive and negative behavioural traits. In keeping with oral tradition, Lyra employs Tía Panchita as the storyteller instead of a male character as in the case of Uncle Remus. Argüello Scriba describes her as 'anciana y entendida de lo más importante: la vida y la sabiduría popular; representa a la mujer que ha visto y comprendido el mundo y la vida' (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.47). Lyra refers to tía Panchita and tía Jesús as 'Las Niñas' in the prologue of the book, highlighting a sense of female value from

the outset. This complements the dominance of the male protagonist, Tío Conejo, so his role as the main character in the second section of stories does not lessen the importance of subsequent female animals.

The acceptance, or rejection, of rigid gender stereotypes in Lyra's characters is very important. Lyra's portrayal of gender equality shuns the patriarchal society of the time. By presenting her male and female characters as equals, she rejects male dominance in society. The stories could therefore be interpreted as highlighting inequalities, by presenting a fictional equality that does not exist on a cultural level. Cortés states that 'Tío Conejo, por muy inocente que parezca, **plantea una subversión del orden establecido y de las "buenas costumbres" patriarcales**' (Cortés, 2016, no pagination).

In places, Lyra also ridicules gender stereotypes and mocks the women who are overly concerned about attracting a husband, most obviously in 'La suegra del diablo', 'La Cucarachita Mandinga' and 'Tío Conejo ennoviado'. These relationships are doomed from the start, and the female characters are victims of their own over-trusting nature, inappropriate suitor choice and fickleness. However, in the interest of fairness, so too are the males. In 'Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote', it is Tío Coyote's desperation and gullibility to marry the princess that leads to him being tricked and belittled by Tío Conejo. In addition, in 'Escomposte perinola', Lyra reveals how the male protagonist 'Creyendo hacer una gracia, se casó, pero la paloma le salió un sapo, porque la mujer tenía un humor que solo el santo Job la podía aguantar. Parecía que el pobre Juan Cacho se hubiera puesto expresamente a buscar con candela la mujer más mal geniosa del mundo' (CTP, p.33). In this story, it is the husband who is the victim of

domestic abuse.

Pacheco Acuña states that 'el menosprecio a la moral masculina también está presente' in the Tío Conejo stories. She refers to the tale of '¿Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas?' in which 'el Padre celestial, la fuente de moral suprema, no solamente le pone como prueba a Tío Conejo el matar a tres animales, pues le exige las pieles de éstos como requisito para concederle lo pedido' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.267). She also describes the portrayal of female characters as victims as a result of their existing knowledge of the trickster's behaviour. In spite of their awareness, they underestimate his capabilities:

A la Tía Venada el conocer los hechos y los embustes de Tío Conejo, la hace víctima y queda "pifiada" y a Tía Zorra saber cómo hizo Tío Conejo para robarse los quesos no le sirve de nada y termina "apaleada." Por eso es mejor ser como Tía Ardilla que nada cuestiona o como la inocente Palomita Yuré que lo cree todo, características femeninas propias dentro de una sociedad patriarcal.  
(Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.267)

I aim to demonstrate that Lyra does not simply portray female characters as victims but that, equally, male protagonists are duped and discriminated against by Tío Conejo. I will now consider various stories in which I feel elements of gender equality are demonstrated by la Cucurachita Mandinga, Tío Conejo and his acquaintances.

In 'Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote', the old lady uses her intelligence to stop a destructive male adversary, Tío Conejo, who has been eating her vegetables.

Lyra could have used a male, such as the more commonly used Brer Fox, Buh Wolf or the Frenchman (Ashliman, 2014, no pagination) but she chose to use a female character. Even upon realising he has exchanged places with Tío Coyote, she remains undeterred to punish somebody for the offence. Lyra therefore does not use this character as a way to represent women as weak or submissive, rather this is a lady who is determined to protect her garden and does so effectively. As Pacheco Acuña notes, 'Esta mujer actúa, se defiende y castiga' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.264). Another aspect of this story is how Tío Coyote so readily exchanges places with Tío Conejo, who tricks him by feigning that he is trapped in the bag 'porque me quieren casar con la hija del rey, y yo no quiero' (*CTP*, p.110). Tío Coyote is shocked at Tío Conejo's rejection of such an idea, exclaiming that '¡Cuándo yo! ¡Más bien estaría bailando de la contentera! Yo sí que no me haría el rosita como vos' and switching places immediately thereafter. Gagini references the term *rosita* as 'Melindroso, delicado, afeminado. Se usa mucho en la frase «hacerse el rosita»' (Gagini, 1918, p.217). Tío Conejo's pickiness with his potential marriage partner could be interpreted as a feminine trait, and a fact that he should accept willingly. The princess, while of the highest social class, does not have a say in whom she marries. This is the decision of the King because 'En la ceremonia el novio va a estar metido entre el saco, para que la princesa no se dé cuenta, porque el rey es el de la gana de que yo me case con su hija' (*CTP*, p.110). It goes without saying that the king, the embodiment of patriarchy, has the last word. There is also the willingness of Tío Coyote to marry the princess instead. Tío Conejo, on the other hand, says 'Pues ni aun así. Ya ves que es la hija del rey, y todavía si me la dieran encasquillada en oro, diría

que no. ¡Qué vaina! ¡Qué vaina! El buey solo bien se lame. Yo que pensaba morir soltero...' (*CTP*, p.110). The Costa Rican phrase 'el buey solo bien se lame', meaning 'cuando se está solo, hay más libertad para hacer lo que se quiere' (Soto Méndez, 2007, p.61) suggests that Tío Conejo prefers the bachelor life, or rather, this is part of his trickery to get out of the bag. Tío Coyote would happily marry the princess – 'estaría bailando de la contentera' (*CTP*, p.110). In the end, their motives are irrelevant; the point is that there are two male characters, one wanting to get married and the other not. Lyra is providing a balanced view where two male protagonists seek opposite goals and have opposing personality traits. Finally, in this story it is Tío Coyote who is the real victim, and who continues to suffer as the rest of the tale unfolds at the expense of his gullibility. Again, this male character is not presented in a positive light and his role appears to be to provide amusement or to highlight the downfalls of greediness.

In 'La Cucarachita Mandinga', the main character finds a coin that allows her to buy ribbon to transform her from her domestic reality into an attractive female. She turns down the marriage proposals of the bull, dog, and rooster, before Ratón Pérez arrives. His clothes catch her attention, just as her appearance had his: 'A la Cucarachita se le fueron los ojos al verlo: parecía un figurín, porque andaba de leva, tirolé y bastón' (*CTP*, p.66). Her newly purchased accessory had allowed her to attract a well-dressed, desirable gentleman. Although speaking generally and not referring to this story, Horan claims that 'Carmen Lyra's work mocked the illusions of fashion and romance' (Horan, 2000, p.9) and this provides a perfect example. He charmingly asks her, 'con mil monedas', to marry him, and as with the previous suitors she seductively asks '¿Y cómo hacés de

noche?' (*CTP*, p.66). In this instance, although he chooses to propose, she responds with an overt sexual suggestion, deciding her own destiny from a position of power. However, from the moment she marries Ratón Pérez she fails to maintain this control and supremacy. La Cucarachita:

...que era muy mujer de su casa, estaba arriba desde que comenzaron las claras del día poniéndolo todo en su lugar. Después de almuerzo puso al fuego una gran olla de arroz con leche, cogió dos tinajas que colocó una sobre la cabeza y otra en el cuadril, y se fue por agua. (*CTP*, p.66)

Jiménez describes how 'once she marries Ratón Pérez, her autonomy is lost; she becomes a cook and a maid for her husband. No longer an active member of society, she is confined to pleasing him' (Jiménez, 2009, p.32). González and Sáenz remark that the story 'se exhibe muy buena mujer de su casa, buena esposa y recomendable viuda, desde que a Ratón Pérez se le llevo la trampa' (González and Sáenz, 1998, p.9). Clearly, her domestic reality has returned and she warns her new husband, who appears to have no household responsibilities, not to interfere with the rice pudding. However, curiosity gets the better of him and leaning over to smell the food 'el pobre se resbaló... y cayó dentro de la olla' (*CTP*, p.67). Again, Manuel Villalobos also refers to the greediness that punished Ratón Pérez, 'quien por glotón cayó en la olla con arroz con leche y se murió. La comida es placer, pero la desmesura implica castigo y esta la moraleja tácita de estas narraciones' (Manuel Villalobos, 2013, p.91). The male is indeed the victim once again, emphasised by the use of 'el pobre', and due to his own inability to control his desires. Once again, Lyra subversively reframes the usually strong



male in a patriarchal society as a weak character.

When la Cucarachita returns, 'se encontró con la puerta atrancada. Tuvo que ir a hablarle a un carpintero para que viniera a abrirla' (*CTP*, p.67). This female character can make herself look beautiful, can cook and can clean. However, she needs a man to open the door; the gender roles are very rigid in this tale, but in a very tongue-in-cheek manner as the plot and expressions are so comical. On finding her dead husband in the rice pudding, sadness consumes her and so begins the chain link motif, with the final sequence revealed as:

Ratón Pérez se cayó entre la olla, y la Cucarachita Mandinga lo gime  
y lo llora... Y la palomita se cortó una alita, el palomar se quitó su  
alar, la reina se cortó una pierna, el rey se quitó la corona, el río se  
tiró a secar y nosotras por ser negras, quebramos los cántaros. El  
viejito dijo: —Pues yo por ser viejito, me degollaré. Y se degolló.  
(*CTP*, p.71)

The responses from various characters are not differentiated by gender; the fact that the queen cuts off her leg and the black women smash their pots show that they are not acting in a passive manner. The old man slitting his own throat also demonstrates a strong action, although the king merely takes off his crown. Symbolically though, this is of huge significance and no male dominance is apparent. Jiménez discusses Lyra's desire for 'children to develop social consciousness' and concludes that this tale 'conveys the moral that one person's choices affect all of the community, so it is important to think carefully about what you are doing' (Jiménez, 2009, p.33). Pacheco Acuña takes a different view

entirely, describing La Cucarachita Mandinga as an 'ángel de muerte' and a 'femme fatale'. Ratón Pérez becomes her victim because he is both physically attractive and so completely unintimidating that she can control him. She suggests that 'en realidad, la cucarachita en cierta forma le ocasiona su muerte' (Pacheco Acuña, 2006, p.15). It is certainly an interesting interpretation. Pacheco Acuña also states that 'la ambivalencia es que aunque cumple con el rol social femenino de domesticidad, pues la cucarachita es muy hogareña, ya que cocina y limpia su casa, ella también tiene un rol subversivo, pues ella es quien elige a su hombre y lo controla' (Pacheco Acuña, 2006, p.15).

Taking another example of 'Como Tío Conejo les jugó sucio a Tía Ballena y a Tío Elefante', both characters are full of mutual respect and admiration for the other's strength. Lyra writes, 'Que, tía Ballena, a usted sí que no hay quién le gane en fuerzas y eso de que ya se tomara usted tener las mías, es hablar por hueso de la nuca. —Que, adiós tío Elefante, no me salga con eso. Usted sí que es ñeque. Sí, sí, donde se llora está el muerto...' (*CTP*, p.121). Pacheco Acuña stresses how physical strength and the desire for power are not merely regarded as male character traits; both animals are 'poderosos, pelean, se enfrentan y miden sus fuerzas' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.264). She describes the story as a 'batalla de los sexos' and states that 'este cuento puede verse como una advertencia muy acertada: si los dos sexos no se unen y se siguen confrontando, nunca gobernarán la Tierra'. This could be interpreted as an acknowledgement of how men and women need to work together, or perhaps that individuals, regardless of sex, can accomplish more by combining their efforts.

While pulling on the rope from Tío Conejo, and on realising that Tío Elefante was

on the other end, Tía Ballena exclaims '¡Yo te contaré, trompudo, labioso, poca pena! ¿No te da vergüenza ver que te cogí la maturranga? ¡Creyó que yo me iba a dejar, como soy una triste mujer, para quedar se gobernando solo!' (*CTP*, p.124). Here Lyra mockingly refers to women being stereotypically weaker and self-deprecating, but does not indulge or endorse this stereotype as Tía Ballena continues to pull on the rope. There are also analogies that can be drawn from this story about the struggle between men and women in society. However, both in reality and in this tale, men and women are equally powerful. Ugarte Barquero stresses that Carmen Lyra writes with a clear social conscience and, rather than particularly portraying this in her female characters, she directs it 'a lo colectivo, a una sociedad que debería reaccionar, transformar, **aprender** [...] se dan cambios en el rol femenino tradicional de ese contexto particular' (Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.37). Tío Elefante did not demonstrate superiority over Tía Ballena, rather it was the smaller Tío Conejo who got the upper hand. In this way, Lyra questions the patriarchal society and overturns society's gender stereotypes.

Tía Venada is not presented in a positive light in 'Tío Conejo ennoviado'. Her love for Tío Tigre is called into question with the remark: 'yo no sé si de miedo o porque de veras le gustaba' (*CTP*, p.151) and she is described as 'muy languona y que no podía quedarse con nada adentro' (*CTP*, p.153). Tía Ardilla 'que era comadre de Tío Conejo' is viewed more favourably as it is she who warns Tío Conejo about Tío Tigre's plans to make him pay for his actions (*CTP*, p.153). Tía Ardilla finds Tío Tigre and she is described as having 'la cola derecha que la hacía parecerse a una muñequita que tuviera mucho pelo y lo llevara suelto, y con una

risita muy fregadita' (CTP, p.154). However, with the references to a little doll with long loose hair Lyra is not presenting this character as a loyal friend; rather she is emphasising her ability to charm and manipulate Tío Tigre with her feminine guiles. Not so much an annoying laugh, as translated by Horan (Horan, 2000, p.206) but a sly, evil one instead.<sup>12</sup> Tía Ardilla appears to be a submissive female but it is her assistance that allows the murderous Tío Conejo to squash Tío Tigre flat.

On seeing what has happened Tía Venada turns her attention to Tío Conejo again. He is no longer interested and has lost all respect for Tía Venada even if he initially fell in love with her. Horan writes how Lyra's work 'is full of sympathetic portraits of women who'd been, like her mother, seduced and abandoned' (Horan, 2000, p.9). Tía Venada's gossiping, her weak character, and needy desperation had led to the loss of both her suitors. For Pacheco Acuña, Tía Venada, 'la mujer deseada', commits the sin of expressing her feelings and for this she is punished (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.265). She notes that 'no solamente la muerte física o el engaño se presenta en la víctima femenina sino la burla y el desprecio' and declares that 'la denuncia social está presente en *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.265). However, the real victim in this story is Tío Tigre, after all he has not even survived the tale! Again, Lyra presents Tía Venada as the victim on a superficial level, whilst a closer look shows that a male character has come off much worse overall.

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<sup>12</sup> According to Gagini in his *Diccionario de costarrriqueñismos*, 'fregadera' means 'molestia, impertinencia' and 'fregado' is 'pícaro, falso, hipócrita, socarrón, maligno' (Gagini, 1918, p.142).

Lyra does not exclude gender stereotypes, but she does deconstruct them. For example, in 'El Cotonudo', she writes that 'había una vez una viejita que tenía un hijo galanote e inteligente y además bueno y sumiso con ella, que parecía una hija mujer' (*CTP*, p.57). Referring to the princess, she describes how 'el rey la obligaba a casarse con un príncipe muy viejo y más feo que un golpe en la espinilla' (*CTP*, p.61). Again she highlights the lack of freedom of the female character, but also almost immediately returns her to a position of power and control when she rejects her father's choice of husband for that of her own.

In conclusion, Lyra's female characters do not fit neatly into rigid gender stereotypes. Her male and female characters share similar characteristics and there is an overwhelming sense of equality in the way that she represents both sexes. Further examples to demonstrate this will be demonstrated in the integrated thematic analyses of selected tales in part four.

## **Social equality**

Biesanz *et al.* comment that 'Ticos of all classes, political parties, and regions share a sense of national identity. They believe they have a unique way of life and a distinctive national identity', adding that Costa Ricans 'profess the essential equality and dignity of all human beings' (Biesanz *et al.*, 1999, p.5). José María Castro Madriz, twice president of Costa Rica, made a speech at the inauguration of the University of Santo Tomás which reflected the 'essential independence and egalitarianism at the heart of Costa Rican national identity' (Gold, 1997, p.230). McCreery refers to 'Costa Rica's national myth of classless equality' (McCreery, 2016, p.122) established by the early twentieth century. Biesanz *et al.* suggest that this claim may derive from 'indistinct boundaries between the urban middle and upper classes as individual fortunes rose and ebbed' (Biesanz *et al.*, 1999, p.101).

This homogeneous aspect of the national identity is also promoted heavily by Lyra. González notes that 'what Lyra does is level the playing field for her protagonists. Monarchs, Catholic icons, and animal characters are all transformed into various versions of the Costa Rican peasant where what counts is neither wealth nor status nor education, but ingenuity' (González, 2008, p.80). Where González states that she 'levels the playing field', this study will endeavour to demonstrate how she does so at the level of class representations, as well as gender. Lyra shows her readers how her characters deal with and circumvent social differences: through ingenuity, luck, magic and divine intervention.

Rubio Torres writes that Lyra's use of popular language 'da valor a la palabra de

hombres y mujeres que, en su tiempo, eran considerados iletrados o ignorantes' (Rubio, 2016, no pagination). If anything the vernacular in Lyra's stories potentially breaks down barriers of verbal communication related to status rather than strengthening them further. Even in the fairy tales with kings and queens, there are significant positive interactions between the classes.

Horan discusses how Lyra does not hide the darker side of life in her tales: 'Los Cuentos de mi tía Panchita, al igual que los cuentos de Grimm, no niegan la existencia del hambre, del dinero, de la lucha de clases, de matrimonios infelices' (Horan, 1997, p.30). Lyra does not shy away from the themes of poverty and wealth, and includes both the upper class (kings and princesses) and proletariat. She presents characters with distinct social divisions, particularly in the fairy tale section, but also deconstructs these to allow interaction and movement between social groups.

In addition, in a number of stories, the characters' economic situation improves, through various mechanisms, and they move to a higher social class. This features explicitly in 'El tonto de las adivinanzas', 'Juan, el de la carguita de leña', 'Escomposte perinola', 'La Mica', 'El Cotonudo', 'La suegra del diablo', 'La casita de las torrijas', 'La negra y la rubia' and 'Salir con un domingo siete'. In 'Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote' and 'Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas', the possibility of transcending social classes is implied through the suggestion that a simple animal character, Tío Conejo, could marry a princess. Vásquez Vargas notes that 'los personajes principales superan un mundo de miseria a través de la magia y la suerte, y pasan a ser ricos, situación que no anula la división de clases sino la mantiene porque superan su situación económica familiar o individual,

pero no la del pueblo' (Vásquez Vargas, 1993, p.21).

In 'El Cotonudo', the princess sees a 'joven tan galán vestido pobremente, pero tan limpio que parecía un ajito, con los pies descalzos' (CTP, p.57) as she leans over the palace balcony. Eventually she sends a servant to call him and when she hears him speak, she falls hopelessly in love with him. The boy feels the same about her, especially as 'además era buena y noble, que no tenía compañera, y ella tan lo mismo trataba al pobre que al rico' (CTP, p.58). However, he does not tell her because '¿en qué cabeza podría caber que una princesa se casara con un chonete como él, que no se calzaba porque no tenía con qué comprar zapatos?' The princess declares her love for him but he turns her down saying 'Yo soy lo que se llama un arrancado. Es de las cosas que no hay que pensar dos veces, y lo mejor que yo puedo hacer es decirle adiós' (CTP, p.58). However, the princess does not give up easily and, to eliminate his perceived obstacle of poverty, she gives him a bag of gold to help him seek his fortune. Bad luck befalls him, and she twice provides him with a further bag, only for it to be lost again. Following a shipwreck, he is consumed with sadness and plans to hang himself until he sees a handsome young man bewitched by an evil spell. The man, who turns out to be a prince, asks for his help and 'el cotonudo reflexionó que era mejor morir tratando de sacar de apuros a un prójimo, que ahorcado' (CTP, p.59). Fearlessly facing the swelling tide, carrying enormous rocks and tree trunks, and apparitions of a tiger and a bull, he breaks the curse and frees the prince. He is rewarded with great riches and returns to eventually marry the princess and provide his poor mother with a life of luxury. *El cotonudo* becomes rich through bravely helping a stranger in need and with the assistance of a little magic. At the same



time, the princess did not look down on him for being less privileged than her. Looking past his poor background and lower social standing, she fell in love with him and never lost sight of that even when his fortune deteriorated further.

Similarly, in 'La negra y la rubia', the prince also marries a member of a different social class. In this Cinderella-inspired tale, the prince is mesmerised by the beautiful fair-haired girl in the dress 'como las espumas de una catarata cuando hace luna, todo sembrado de maripositas de oro' (*CTP*, p.90). The mysterious girl escapes him twice, but on the third occasion he hides in the coach which takes him directly to her house. Seeing the prince regularly pass by looking for the girl, her delusional ugly stepsister 'juraba que ya el príncipe le iba a declarar su amor' (*CTP*, p.93) and so hides her sister out of the way under a cooking pot. However, the talkative parrot reveals her location and the prince 'levantó la olla y se va encontrando con la pobre niña, todita tiznada y haciendo cucharas'. In spite of seeing her in such a state, he proposes to her immediately. Never lifting her eyes, she goes with the prince to the palace where he 'contó a sus padres lo que pasaba, y que si no lo dejaban casarse, se dejaría morir de hambre' (*CTP*, p.93). His mother respects his decision but 'no le acomodaba mucho aquella nuera tan tiznada y remendada' (*CTP*, p.93). However, an angel appears with 'un vestido mejor que los otros, y por supuesto los reyes al verla quedaron encantados' (*CTP*, p.94). Whereas the prince is determined to marry the girl even when he finds her sobbing in her real clothes, and despite the obvious socio-economic differences, the queen only fully accepts her after her magical transformation. By the end of the story the girl has acquired a higher social status; Lyra is following the fairy tale tradition of a happy ending and good fortune – the classic

rags to riches motif. Tatar discusses the domestic heroines of the fairy tale world 'who are ultimately liberated from their lowly condition' by dressing to impress and gain male admiration'. She adds that 'through a combination of labor and good looks, the heroine gets her man' and notes that social promotion depends on her domestic skills and striking beauty (Tatar, 1987, p.118). These are themes clearly seen in 'La Mica', 'La Cucarachita Mandinga', 'La suegra del diablo' and 'La negra y la rubia'. Zipes comments that 'rarely do wonder tales end unhappily in the oral tradition. They are wish-fulfilments' (Zipes, 2000, xvii). Noting that 'there is generally a change in the social status of the protagonist' (Zipes, 2000, xvii), he claims that they are not subversive, 'though there are strong hints that the narrators favoured the oppressed protagonists' (Zipes, 2000, xix). Indeed, Lyra's tales generally appear to lean towards the underdogs and the disadvantaged, although this is not the case in 'La flor del olivar'. In this story, the king's kind, youngest son 'que era casi un niño' (CTP, p.84) is murdered by his brothers, leaving his parents 'inconsolables por toda la vida' (CTP, p.86).

In 'Salir con un domingo siete', the pursuit of greater wealth results in with the greedy rich man arriving home with 'dos güechos, todo dolorido y sin sus cinco mulas' (CTP, p.107). It is clear that the pursuit of wealth does not necessarily lead to happiness. In 'La suegra del diablo', marrying the filthy rich devil did not bring contentment to the widow and her daughter either. However, in 'Escomposte perinola', the opposite is true. The browbeaten husband uses his magic stick to reassert his authority over his overbearing wife and children. His use of magic ultimately results in him securing a happy life and financial security for his family and village.

In 'La Cucarachita Mandinga', there is no ascending order of social hierarchy in the sequence of events that follow the death of Ratón Pérez. In addition, the king and the queen are not afforded status or special treatment: the dove and the queen both cut off a part of their body, and the dovehouse and the king both physically remove an important feature. In the Tío Conejo tales, Lyra ensures that all of her animal characters are equivalent in worth and free of a presumed social pecking order. Instead, they occupy the impartial middle ground of appearing equal. 'Tío Conejo y los caites de su abuela' starts with Tío Conejo telling Tía Palomita Yuré:

...que él era hijo del rey y que vivía en un palacio de oro y plata;  
que su padre y su madre usaban una corona más alta que el palo  
en que estaba parada Tía Palomita, con ser que era un palo de  
guanacaste; que tenía mil ochocientos criados y que cuando le  
hablaban se ponían de rodillas y le besaban los pies. (*CTP*, p.139)

Tía Palomita Yuré does not quash or doubt his ludicrous claims; naively, she has no problem imagining the braggart living in a servant-filled palace. Nothing is out of the question for Tío Conejo; be that stealing cheese from a local farmer ('Tío Conejo y los quesos'), talking to God in Heaven ('Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas') or even suggesting that he has been chosen to marry the King's daughter ('Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote').

Zipes writes that wonder folk tales, from which fairy tales derive, allow us to appreciate how life can be 'changed to compensate for the lack of power, wealth, and pleasure that most people experience' (Zipes, 2000, xviii). Many of the Costa

Rican children exposed to her stories would not have enjoyed any status in society, prevented by the barriers of social class from ever reaching positions of power and authority. Lyra was proactive in seeking to empower marginalized groups. There may be the hint that some individuals have the potential to better their life chances. Certainly through the antics of Tío Conejo and her fairy tale protagonists, young children will be able to imagine that their lack of power and stature is no obstacle to them. Zipes refers to the fairy tale tradition and the typical simpleton-hero. He explains that 'his goodness and naivete eventually enable him to avoid disasters. By the end of the tale he generally rises in social status and proves himself to be more gifted and astute than he seems' (Zipes, 2000, xvii- xviii). Lyra's humble beginnings allowed her to identify with the less fortunate members of society and broach in her first stories 'la problemática emocional que se abate sobre las personas, producto de la miseria, la injusticia social, el abandono, la soledad' (Ovares and Rojas, 2001, p.179). Therefore, with her characters able to transcend social classes and her fluid social hierarchies, the stories become relevant to all readers, regardless of background.

Pacheco Acuña (2006, p.18) notes that:

En Lyra se ve el deseo de comunicarse, de escribir para enseñar, aconsejar, denunciar. Para ella la escritora es responsable del mejoramiento social, en lugar de aislarse, al escribir la autora se debe involucrar con gusto en su sociedad y si la crítica es por el deseo de transformarla para mejorarla.

With the popularity and timelessness of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, it is

impossible to overestimate the influence these stories have had on Costa Rican children as they develop their own social vision of an egalitarian society.

## **PART FOUR**

### **INTEGRATED THEMATIC ANALYSES OF SELECTED TALES**

In this section I will examine three pairs of stories; this comparative analysis will demonstrate why I believe Lyra's work has a strong moral sense and, in the case of the animal stories, could even be perceived as fables. Moral integrity is not excluded from these tales, although in places it is reframed and more subtly portrayed than often traditionally seen in other folktales. I believe the theme of equality to be present throughout and will comment on examples of this where applicable.

#### **Moral: Changing to please others**

'El tonto de las adivinanzas' and 'Juan, el de la carguita de leña' are both tales in which a poor boy hopes to marry a princess. In the first tale, *el tonto* rejects the notion of modifying his appearance to please the princess and decides instead to return to a simple life with his mother. He is given gold by the king but, whilst his economic situation changes, his social class does not. In the second, Juan uses his magic wand to change his physical form and increase his material possessions, thereby impressing the princess whom he is due to marry. As a result riches are bestowed on his family; Juan climbs to a higher social status, so do his mother and brothers.

'El tonto de las adivinanzas' is a folk tale with a mixture of traditional fairy tale discourse, colloquial language, proverbs and word play. It starts with two sons,

one 'amigo de guardar su plata y de plantarse bien los domingos', while the other 'gastaba en tonteras cuanto cinco le caía en las manos, y no le importaba un pito andar hecho un candil de sucio' (*CTP*, p.13). By describing contrasting characteristics in the two sons – the typical binary opposition between wise man and fool – not only does the author endow them with separate identities as characters but she also pre-empts any generalisation based on gender or class as they are both poor men. In addition, the implication by Lyra that the older son is perceived to be clever because he is hard-working suggests that it is important to work hard in order to be judged as successful or capable. However, despite his flaws, it is the younger son who wants to attempt the riddle challenge set by the king. If he can win the competition, he will win his daughter's hand in marriage and help his own mother out of debt. His mother is not portrayed positively; she has been unable to raise him to be an intelligent man like his brother and, referring to him as 'tonto de mis culpas' (*CTP*, p.13), appears to regret having had him in the first place. Even Tía Panchita will not repeat the insults he receives from her. *El tonto* sets off for the palace, taking with him the snack prepared by his mother. Out of kindness to his mare, and even though he wants the food, he takes pity on and selflessly feeds it to her instead. His mare dies of poisoning as the son's mother inadvertently poisoned the food, and he respectfully buries her while the feasting scavengers also die before his eyes. Lyra presents the son in a good light: 'el tonto que no era tan dejado como creían, secó sus lágrimas y se dijo: — No hay mal que por bien no venga' (*CTP*, p.14). This distances the reader from discrimination against him on the grounds of his lack of intelligence and also demonstrates more of his positive attributes:

sensitivity, hopefulness and the ability to see the good in a difficult situation. In the middle of the story, Tía Panchita even affectionately refers to him as 'mi tonto' (CTP, p.15). In fact *el tonto* is not so stupid at all; he manages to survive and procure food and drink in times of adversity, relying on himself and without needing others to help him. When he arrives at the palace he is mocked again for his lack of intelligence: '¡Lo que no han podido personas inteligentes lo va a poder este no-nos-dejes!' (CTP, p.15). He calmly continues to pursue his goal, in spite of a death threat if he fails, and even agreeing to wear shoes and nicer clothes if he succeeds. It is the princess who demands the latter, although at this point it seems unlikely that he will defeat the king and so this could be interpreted as further ridicule from her as well.

The king fails to solve any of the young man's riddles but *el tonto* accidentally solves all of the king's with unintentional replies: 'Aquí fue donde la puerca torció el rabo', '¡Y en qué apuros tienen a este pobre grillo!' and 'Bien me lo dijo mi mamá que buen adivinador de m... sería yo' (CTP, p.16, p.17). Referring to the first section of fairy tales, Cantillano discusses the use of magic objects in helping characters in the stories succeed. She claims that 'sólo en «El tonto de las adivinanzas» el héroe gana la mano de la princesa gracias a su sagacidad' (Cantillano, 1972, p.38). I remain convinced that he did not demonstrate sagacity; it was luck that won him the princess's hand in marriage as seen in Lyra's clever linguistic games mentioned above.

The king decides the marriage will go ahead despite protests by his daughter. In this, Lyra emphasises the patriarchal nature of society as the princess has no choice in her own future husband: 'La pobre no tenía nadita de ganas de casarse



con aquel gandumbas' (CTP, p.17). In an attempt to gain some control of the situation, she arranges for tight patent shoes and ridiculous, uncomfortable clothes to be prepared for her husband-to-be. *El tonto* decides that the outfit is a step too far and that it is going to be too much trouble to marry the princess, who cannot stop laughing as her plan to prevent the marriage has succeeded. This shows how the daughter creatively challenges patriarchal oppression and uses intelligence to free herself from the domination of both her father and her unknown husband-to-be. Pacheco Acuña concludes that 'La princesa no sólo se ríe de Juan [sic.] sino del sistema que quiere controlar su vida' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.262). What began as a tale with a submissive, powerless female ends with her taking control of her destiny. This motif of powerless, or weaker, members of society demonstrating resistance to authority features regularly throughout the corpus of tales. This theme is widespread in the Tío Conejo stories, but also in other tales of the first section (most notably 'Uvieta', 'El Cotonudo' and 'El pájaro dulce encanto').

*El tonto* throws his fancy clothes out the window and his shoes on the roof, in what Quesada Villalobos says 'denota el empoderamiento por parte del campesino y su consecuente negación a pertenecer a un grupo social que lo obliga a cumplir con parámetros que él no está dispuesto a seguir' (Quesada Villalobos, 2011, no pagination). He stands firm on his convictions, telling the king 'Mucho me gusta su hija, pero más me gusta andar a gusto'. Scoffing at the vanity of the uncomfortable, upper-class fashion, he decides to return home to his mother as 'allí ando yo como me da mi gana; y si me quedo aquí tendré que pasar mi vida como un Niño Dios en retoque' (CTP, p.18). He rejects a life of

royalty and riches, one that he was being handed on a plate, instead choosing to return to his disparaging mother and superior brother. Although he returns to the same social situation as before, his economic situation has improved and it is assumed that he will now be respected by his family ('lo recibieron muy contentos') due to the king's gifts of two mules and gold. Ovares and Rojas point out that the ending 'se aparta de la solución tradicional en favor de un desenlace cómico: aunque el protagonista acepta el oro de la recompensa, se niega a casarse con la princesa' (Ovares and Rojas, 2001, xiii).

This story is therefore not as simple as it first appears and conveys many important moral messages: the importance of compassion, the ability to approach adversity with optimism, and the need to be proactive and take action if an undesirable situation is to be improved. In the case of the princess, it promotes the use of intelligence to succeed and the danger of underestimating those who are deemed to be less intelligent. However, the most powerful message is perhaps that drastic changes should not be needed in order to be accepted by others, and if they are expected then maybe it is better to not pursue those relationships. *El tonto* is a man of principles and simple tastes. He succeeds through luck, managing to get one up on the upper classes when he inadvertently succeeds in the riddle challenge. As Pacheco Acuña notes, *el tonto* prefers to 'dejar así una vida de opulencia a tener que sacrificar su libertad al vivir con las normas sociales de restricción y ética que su nueva condición social le impediría como miembro de la realeza' (Pacheco Acuña, 2004, p.43). This story also suggests that the aristocracy may have money, but they are not always happy or comfortable as a result of this. The suffocating clothes and shoes may

well be a metaphor for the restrictive life that the upper classes have to endure due to their own social pressures.

In spite of his name, *el tonto* cannot be defined only by his lack of intelligence. He possesses other desirable characteristic traits that others disregard or fail to notice, even his own mother views him as a punishment that she has brought on herself. Children may comprehend that even those who are ridiculed by society, or even by their own family, have positive attributes and personal worth.

In this story, the women are miserably unkind, mirroring their tragic social situations. In this way, Lyra highlights the plight of unfortunate women in the patriarchal society. She also alludes to the relationship struggles and regrets of the single mother (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.262). Her disappointment in her son could be a reflection of her universal disillusionment in men and she has no confidence in her son's proposals to free them from debt. When he leaves for the palace, she tells him 'Vas a ver que con lo que vas a salir es con una pata de banco' (*CTP*, p.14); there is no maternal encouragement, perhaps because his quest is so unrealistic. In contrast, the princess is living a privileged life. However her gender affords her little autonomy. She is initially presented as a passive female, waiting for an unknown suitor to win her father's competition and claim her hand in marriage. The resulting animosity shown to *el tonto* is therefore understandable. These are views shared by Ugarte Barquero, although she notes that the princess 'no es pasivo, actúa, planea, inventa' (Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.24). The princess is a very positive role model for children: 'gracias a su ingenio y acertadas acciones, la conclusión a la que llega el lector es que la princesa se casará cuando ella quiera y con quien quiera' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005,

p.262).

Although Lyra also refers to 'pobre Panda' and the main character refers to himself as 'pobre grillo', Pacheco Acuña emphasises the use of the adjective 'pobre' for both the old lady and the princess as 'el sentimiento de injusticia que se siente hacia el trato social de la mujer' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.262). In fact, the same adjective has different meanings: *el tonto's* mother is economically poor, and, whilst the princess is free of financial worry, there are social pressures that impoverish her by restricting her freedom instead.

Jiménez states that Lyra's 'radical portrayal of gender propelled this story from a simple folktale to a "call for action" to change women's roles in Costa Rica'. She claims that Lyra's 'choice to present this strong female figure was a drastic deviation from the male protagonists who dominated Costa Rican literature and social life in the early 1920s' (Jiménez, 2009, p.31). However, while agreeing in part with the point that Lyra rejects gender norms, it is important to note that the main protagonist in the story is indeed male. In addition, the male and female characters possess a full, balanced range of character traits and are not stereotyped by gender. In conclusion, it is possible to observe multiple moral messages in this story. Subversion is also evident in Lyra's work; the helpless princess is not so helpless, the stupid son overcomes challenges and the upper classes are not necessarily happier than the everyday folk.

'Juan, el de la carguita de leña' begins in a similar style to 'El tonto de las adivinanzas', in that there is an old lady with a foolish son. However, in respecting true fairy tale tradition, this time she has three sons (Schulze-Boysen,

2013, p.77; Rubio Torres, no date, no pagination).<sup>13</sup> We learn that 'Los dos vivos eran muy ruines con la madre y nunca le hacían caso, pero el tonto era muy bueno con ella y era el palito de sus enredos' (*CTP*, p.27). Also, as in 'El tonto de las adivinanzas', Lyra immediately dispels negative stereotypes and defends the less educated son, affirming that 'lo cierto es que el tonto no era nada tonto, pero como era tan bueno lo creían tonto, porque así es la vida' (*CTP*, p.27). Again, Lyra reinforces the importance of treating one's mother well when an old lady appears and gives Juan a magic wand as 'un premio por lo sumiso que sos con tu mama' (*CTP*, p.27). When asked about its powers, the old lady adds that he can use it to conjure up money or to carry him and his firewood home. Juan uses it for the latter, but he does not ask for money. In fact, unlike the first story, money is not mentioned as a social concern. What does interest Juan, however, is the king's promise that whoever finds the youngest princess's missing ring 'sería el marido de su hija' (*CTP*, p.28). Once more, the princess has no say in this decision and the patriarchal control is again apparent.

Juan uses the wand to retrieve the ring and travels to the palace on his firewood. On arriving, the soldiers tease him and refuse him entry, presumably again for his lower social standing and bundle of firewood. Juan does not give up and his protests catch the attention of the king who allows him to come into the palace. Not feeling demoralised by the mocking of his humble origins, Juan confidently

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<sup>13</sup> From our readings of fairy tales – our horizon of expectations – the first two sons are likely to be unprepossessing, while the third and youngest, underestimated and ridiculed, turns out to be the most capable and successful. This view is supported by Bettelheim: 'In fairy tales it is typically the youngest child, who although at first thought little of or scorned, turns out to be victorious in the end' (Bettelheim, 1976, p.44). Rubio Torres notes that 'El tema de que el más pobre, el más débil o el de menor edad sale victorioso con respecto a sus contendientes se suele presentar con regularidad en la literatura para la niñez' (Rubio Torres, no date, no pagination). Likewise, Schulze-Boysen describes the repeating theme of 'cuentos con tres hijos, donde el más joven es el más ingenuo pero pasa la prueba mejor que sus hermanos' (Schulze-Boysen, 2013, p.77).

declares 'Señor rey, aquí traigo la sortija de la niña, y a ver en qué quedamos de casamiento' (CTP, p.29). His blunt statement suggests that he is neither afraid of royalty, nor intimidated by the upper class. The nerve of him asking to marry the princess suggests that, for Juan, it is not an audacious request at all. This indicates that if Juan can disregard the social barriers, then perhaps the reader can too. His proposal is viewed as a joke – 'la miel no se había hecho para los zopilotes' (CTP, p.29), another allusion to the difference in social status between Juan and the princess.

In this story, Lyra again refers to the 'pobre princesa' who weeps at the news that her father will honour his promise. Still in keeping with the traditional three person motif, the other two princesses protest as well, begging their domineering father to change his mind. Lyra dismisses another class stereotype when she says that the king 'no era nada engreído' and so he offers the young princess some valuable advice. He tells her:

Vea, hijita a nadie hay que hacerle ¡ché! en esta vida. No hay que dejarse ir de bruces por las apariencias. ¡Quién quita que le salga un marido nonis! Y en esta vida, uno se hace ilusiones de que porque a veces se sienta en un trono más que los que se sientan en un banco. Pues nada de eso, criatura, que solo Cristo es español y Mariquita señora... (CTP, p.29)

In this statement, full of Christian morality, the king explains to his daughter that everyone is equal. This is perhaps the most incontrovertible evidence in *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* that Lyra was keen to dispel class barriers and promote social

equality. The princess fails to accept his decision, but is helpless to do anything to prevent the marriage; she is a very different princess to the one in the previous tale. She is left sobbing, remembering the laughter of the court, and with her face boiling with shame (*CTP*, p.29).

Unknown to his family, Juan sets off for the wedding, but on the way he uses the magic wand to transform himself. He asks 'que la carga de leña se vuelva un coche de plata, con unos caballos blancos que nunca se hayan visto, y yo un gran señor muy hermoso y muy inteligente' (*CTP*, p.30). Whilst he has become a handsome prince, the princess was looking ugly from all her crying, 'con los ojos como chiles y la nariz como un tomate' (*CTP*, p.30). The physical description of the traumatised princess further emphasises her powerlessness and fragile state, so she is stunned when Juan 'la coge de una mano, se la lleva y la mete en una carroza de plata. Sale la carroza que se quiebra para la catedral y allí los casa el señor Obispo' (*CTP*, p.30). The princess had made it clear that she did not want to marry him so Juan's actions could be viewed as paramount to kidnap and forced marriage; an explicit representation of arrogance, male domination and masculine supremacy. Or another interpretation could be that the princess was incredibly shallow and more than happy to marry a stranger who is handsome and has obvious economic power. Either way, neither of the two characters are presented in a particularly honourable manner.

Juan who had previously been rejected by the royal court, was now admired by all and the subject of everyone's attention. This is the opposite moral to the previous tale, in which *el tonto* refused to change to gain social acceptance. In this story, it was the only way that Juan could earn the approval of the

unfortunate princess and the scathing upper classes. The story concludes with Juan, like any good obedient son, using magic to wish that 'la casilla de nosotros se vuelva un palacio de cristal y mi madre una gran señora' (*CTP*, p.30). However, in order to do this he goes into a corner, presumably where no one can see him use his wand, so hiding his real self. He has gained approval of the people, but only for what they see of him; the physical transformation due to magic. However, the special powers are allegedly provided by God, perhaps suggesting no immorality or deception in his actions as it is God who endorses the changes.

As a result of the final spell, Juan's mother enjoys a life of luxury with 'sirvientes que se querían deshacer por sonarle la nariz, por abanicarle y hasta por llevarla en silla de manos allá fuera' (*CTP*, p.107). Suddenly, Juan, his new wife and 'el rey, la reina, las princesas y cuanto marqués y conde había en el país' arrive in her palace (*CTP*, p.107). When Juan's drunk brothers return home he tells them that 'si se formalizaban, los casaba con las otras princesas' (*CTP*, p.107), again exercising the 'right' as a regal male to decide who marries whom. The ending of 'Juan, el de la carguita de leña' is the classic fairy tale ending: 'Juan y su esposa fueron los reyes y todos vivieron muy felices' (*CTP*, p.31). It seems to promote aspirations to a higher social class, as the outcome was so overwhelmingly successful for Juan. Social mobility is actively encouraged, rather than happy acceptance of the present living situation as in 'El tonto de las adivinanzas'. However, these points contradict the suggestion made by the king that all individuals, excluding Jesus and Mary, are of equal worth regardless of their class.



In the second tale, the princess is passive and resigned to her fate imposed upon her by her father. This resignation is not out of paternal respect, it is because 'no hubo remedio' and she has no choice (*CTP*, p.29). This reinforces the notion that men are superior to women, and that women are governed by their caprices and desires. However, Lyra also promotes great respect for women in the way that Juan cares for his mother. As a result of his devotion to her, he is rewarded with the magic wand and the chance to alter his world for what he considers the better. Pacheco Acuña highlights the importance of the feminine image in magical transformations. She qualifies this by saying that 'Juan adquiere esta varita debido a su lealtad con su madre. Hay que tomar en cuenta que es una mujer quien le da la varita mágica' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.265) which of course he then uses it to transform not only his own life, but that of his mother and the poor princess in the process. Quesada Villalobos (2011, no pagination) notes that Juan effortlessly becomes rich through magic alone. She states that:

...la Tía Panchita no le confiere ningún tipo de posibilidad intelectual o física para que pueda transformar la realidad, es decir, el modelo económico imperante no es cuestionado ni superado, la dualidad rico-pobre se reproduce cuando los segundos logran alcanzar, con ayudas mágicas, los niveles de vida de la clase adinerada, representada por la monarquía europea.

The point I am making however, is not that class equality is represented by the lack of a social hierarchy. I argue that whilst barriers remain in many of Lyra's tales, her characters may surmount them, albeit sometimes through luck, magic or divine intervention. In 'El tonto de las adivinanzas', the protagonist is not

intimidated by the most powerful member of society, rather, he attempts the challenge even though the penalty for failure is death.

There are many morals embedded within 'Juan, el de la carguita de leña', but they are sometimes contradictory. Juan had the power to change himself into a rich prince prior to going to the palace with the ring, but he chose not to do so. Later the king makes it clear that everyone is equal and he accepts Juan as his future son-in-law. However, Juan still feels that he needs to use the magic wand to better himself and gain acceptance, and this is a conflict of ideas. It is surprising that Lyra would make such an important and bold statement about social equality, only to negate it later in the story. It is also the opposite principle to that presented in 'El tonto de las adivinanzas', so sending conflicting messages to children, or at least making them think about the merits of both options. The two stories therefore have common elements but the main moral messages are paradoxical. As proven, it is also possible to interpret multiple moral values in both stories. It cannot be said that morality or class and gender equality are not clearly visible in Lyra's work.

### **Moral: Judging others on appearances**

'La Mica' and 'La suegra del diablo' both feature marriages to supernatural beings who are not what they seem, and are eventually freed from their respective 'prisons' by characters whose fortunes also improve as a result. In the first tale, the youngest son marries an unattractive monkey in order to rescue it from an evil witch. His actions are motivated by sympathy and selflessness. It later transpires that his animal bride is a beautiful princess and the daughter of the richest king in the world. He has inadvertently married up, advancing his social status. In the second tale, the mother marries her daughter off to a wealthy, dashing handsome stranger. Unbeknown to her, the mysterious man is the devil. On learning this news, she locks him in a chest and buries him out of harm's way. A poor woodcutter frees the devil in return for riches obtained by the pair tricking the wealthy, until the woodcutter pretends that the devil's mother-in-law has returned and he flees. The woodcutter is now rich, having seized the opportunity to improve his situation, although through trickery and deception.

'La Mica' starts with the king being hopelessly unhappy with his sons 'porque los encontraba algo mamitas y él deseaba que fueran atrevidos y valientes' (*CTP*, p.47). Seeing them as unable to fend for themselves, he starts to think what he can do to 'sacarlos de entre las enaguas de la reina, quien los tenía consentidos como a criaturas recién nacidas' (*CTP*, p.47). He announces that 'Le ofrezco el trono a aquel que venga casado con la princesa más hábil y bonita', but they cannot tell their mother (*CTP*, p.47). This opening reinforces the power of patriarchal control and the disappointment of the father that his sons are not as

masculine as either society or he expects. Lyra has already introduced the three sons as weak men, going against the usual characteristics for a prince.

The sons set out on their quest on different days, each encountering an old woman who is 'más fea que un susto en ayunas: tuerta, con un solo diente abajo, que se le movía al hablar, hecha la cara un arrugero y con un lunar de pelos en la barba' (CTP, p.48). The woman's personality is as ugly as her exterior and she systematically abuses *la mica*, an imprisoned she-monkey whom she has cast a spell upon because her father, the king of France, would not marry her. For Beatriz Domínguez García (1999):

La bruja es **aquella figura que "globaliza la dualidad mítica femenina" que se contrapone a la de la "buena madre"**. Es presentada, por lo general, como una mujer que se encuentra fuera de la sociedad, liberada, que con su manera de vivir desafía constantemente a la sociedad patriarcal. (Domínguez García, 1999, quoted in Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.28)

Beauty matters in the male-dominated society. As Pearson and Pope note, 'in fairy tales a woman's worth comes from her youth and beauty; old women are usually witches' (Pearson and Pope, 1981, p.23 quoted in Wright, 2013, p.44). Zipes refers to the portrayal of fairy tale witches, adding that their beauty was 'downplayed in most European countries so that the witch was likened to an ugly hag' (Zipes, 2012, p.62). In this tale, Lyra has presented the old women as the familiar grotesque witch figure often associated with fairy tales and folklore. In keeping with the fairy tale tradition, **Lyra's** witch in 'La casita de las torrejás' is

described as 'una bruja más mala que el mismo Patas' (CTP, p.80) and in 'Salir con un domingo siete', she includes 'brujas mechudas y feas que bailaban pegando brincos como los micos' (CTP, p.104). Witch figures do not abound in the *Cuentos*, but they are present.

*La mica* proposes to each of the princes, as marriage is the only way she can escape her evil captor. The first prince offers to take her only for fun, the second does not want to help her at all. It is only the third prince who 'tenía el corazón derretido y no podía con la crueldad' who shows her any compassion (CTP, p.49). With these examples, it cannot be said that Lyra does not include a wide range of characteristics for each gender, or that she fails to challenge the expected stereotypes of a patriarchal society.

The youngest prince defends *la mica* and threatens the lady with her own stick. In this moment *la mica* is elevated to a being of equal worth. The youngest prince then says that he would spend the night sleeping on her bench 'aunque se enojara el Padre Eterno' (CTP, p.49). He is not scared of the old lady or of God's wrath. He has already protected the powerless monkey and he is capable of standing up for his principles as well; this shows that his father has underestimated his strength. For him, everyone has equivalent importance in life. In the morning, he suddenly agrees to marry her. However, he immediately regrets his decision, calling it a 'gran tontería' and worrying about the reaction of his parents. His concerns about his mother who 'no encontraba buena para sus hijos ni a la Virgen María' (CTP, p.49) suggest that she is an equally overbearing force in his life; it is not just his father who exercises power.

Pacheco Acuña (2006, p.15) states that:

...no es al rey a quien se le castiga sino a la pobre princesa, otra víctima femenina. Luego se basa en el razonamiento de que por su aspecto físico, nadie querrá casarse con una mica. Así, la belleza física o apariencia de la mujer resulta factor esencial para poder ser elegida, siguiendo la mentalidad patriarcal.

The youngest prince overlooks appearances and does not adhere to this patriarchal idea that he must marry a beautiful wife, choosing instead to rescue his monkey wife.

After a year of simple living with his monkey wife in the mountains, he returns to the palace where the king sets a challenge to see which son's wife can make the best shirts for him and the queen. A month later, *la mica* gives him two seeds; the king 'las cogió con cólera, las destripó y entonces de cada una salió una camisa de tela tan fina que una hoja de rosa se veía ordinaria a la par, y de una blancura tal, que parecía tejida con hebras hiladas del copo de la luna' (CTP, p.51). The angry outburst by the king is a demonstration of masculine power, but the shirts please him and he says: 'Estoy muy satisfecho del trabajo de vuestras esposas' (CTP, p.51), stressing the importance of his approval of their domestic prowess. Setting another household task, he gives the wives fifteen days to cook a dish for him. Returning to the palace again, the king and queen are ready to taste the food. The fact that Lyra includes both the husband and wife, and does not rely solely on the judgement of the king, suggests that the queen has some status. Again *la mica's* submission angers the king, but it contains hidden baskets

'llenas de manjares tan deliciosos como los que se deben de comer en el cielo en la mesa de Nuestro Señor; otras con flores que dejaban caer sobre todos los presentes' (*CTP*, p.52). The king sets a final challenge and again the sons grumble about their father's whims; he exercises total control over them and their new wives, making his power known and responding aggressively when he is displeased. The youngest son returns to *la mica* who spent all week carrying out her household duties, and constantly encourages her to make a dress (*CTP*, p.53). This reinforces both the conventional role of the wife, and the expectations of a stereotypical husband that she should make herself look beautiful for him. This is ironic though, as she is a hairy little monkey, a fact of which the youngest prince is very ashamed. In addition, Lyra portrays expertise in various domestic tasks as criteria for judging the best wife. However, the winning entries by *la mica* were completed through magical powers, not through her own handiwork, so again Lyra subverts the notion that women should be accomplished housewives. Although this magic is not explicitly mentioned, it is inconceivable that it could be the result of anything else. It is obviously further implied in the final task in which *la mica* provides a tiny cow inside a cane of bamboo for the king to milk on the dinner table.

Finally the wives must go to the palace, and *la mica* insists on travelling in a wooden cart. She is stubborn, and although physically weaker and less socially esteemed than her husband, it is she who calmly controls the relationship. She tells him 'Mire, hijo, para el santo que es con un repique basta' (*CTP*, p.54), a phrase used in Costa Rica that 'se dice de alguien que no merece mayor atención' (Soto Méndez, 2007, p.172). This statement could not be further from

the truth. The other sons arrive, with their beautiful wives decorated with lace and feathers. However, these judgemental women are not beautiful on the inside and, on seeing *la mica*'s humble cart appear 'se taparon la boca con el pañuelo para que su cuñado no las viera reír' (*CTP*, p.54). Lyra ridicules their fashion when Tía Panchita remarks that 'El rey y la reina salieron a recibir a sus hijos. Las dos nueras al inclinarse les metieron los plumajes por la nariz' (*CTP*, p.55). *La mica* emerges from the cart as a beautiful princess. Lyra further mocks the other wives when they imitate the princess by spooning food down their dresses. The princess starts to dance and 'salieron rodando perlas, rubíes y flores de oro'. The two wives copy her but 'lo que salió fueron los granos de arroz, el picadillo, los pedazos de carne y las empanadas' (*CTP*, p.56), embarrassing themselves and the family. The princess may have been a humble monkey, but she now possesses elegance that cannot be matched.

Lyra has represented different characteristics in the women; not all her female characters are presented as beautiful or graceful. In fact, the old lady at the start of the tale was anything but! This is important because it allows Lyra to deconstruct gender stereotypes and represent multiple character qualities and flaws.

The king then proposes that the youngest son and the princess will be successors to the throne, but she graciously declines, saying, 'Le damos las gracias, pero yo soy la única hija del rey de Francia, que está muy viejito y quiere que mi esposo se haga cargo de la corona' (*CTP*, p.56). The prince has inadvertently married the daughter of the richest king in the world, who whispers to her husband to tell the king to share his kingdom between the other brothers. She is not greedy, as



she is already a rich queen, and she wants the other brothers to have equal rewards. The story ends with everyone happy with this very fair decision, and the prince and princess leaving for France immediately.

There are many moral lessons in this story. The prince seemingly marries down, in a compassionate bid to prevent further suffering to *la mica*. However, in reality the reward for his selflessness is that he has married up and climbed the social ladder. This is another subversive example of equality; people are not always as they seem and no assumptions should be made that one individual is more worthy or desirable than another. Although she is a woman, *la mica* is still represented in the form of an animal; the story also promotes equal respect for all beings. The prince does not walk away from his commitment either. Although married life is not as he hoped, he honours his promise to *la mica*, in spite of the problems he anticipates this causing within his family. This suggests that suffering may be short-lived and that caring for others is of greater importance than self-fulfilment. In addition, sharing is promoted as a fair solution to having more resources than needed and when others are less well-off.

It appears that the prince has rescued the female, but in reality her power far exceeds his and their marriage significantly improves the male's life and status. This subversiveness and rejection of male power is also seen in how *la mica* controls the prince, a view shared by Pacheco Acuña who notes that 'aunque transformada en mica, esta princesa actúa, se casa con el príncipe, decide donde viven y sobretodo hace lo que quiere porque es muy "cabezona" ' (Pacheco Acuña, 2006, p.15).

In an earlier paper, she also states that:

La mica es un ser pensante que no le teme a la competencia y que además está dotado de poderes supernaturales. Además es ella quien le propone matrimonio al príncipe, quien dispone donde van a vivir y quien decide que el reino de su suegro sea compartido por sus cuñados. (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.263)

Her apparent lack of power is misleading as she is actually the most powerful character in the story, much more so than any of the male characters. In spite of this, Pacheco Acuña still regards *la mica* as a victim (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.266). However, she is only a victim whilst imprisoned in the witch's house. In this story, as in many fairy tales, the female needs to be rescued. Ugarte Barquero comments that 'lo que sigue latente es el hecho de que la mica/princesa necesita de un hombre/príncipe para ser liberada de su maldición y lograr la felicidad' (Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.29). This is not untrue, but I still believe that the patriarchal model has been subverted through the dominant nature of *la mica*, which ultimately results in her release from the witch's curse.

In the second tale 'La suegra del diablo', an affluent widow wants her beautiful daughter to marry a wealthy man (CTP, p.73). Several honest, hard working suitors come forward but the widow dismisses them all because they are simply not rich enough. The daughter is described as leaning out of the window, 'bien compuesta y de pelo suelto. (Por cierto que el pelo le llegaba a las corvas y lo tenía muy arrepentido)' (CTP, p.73). As in the case of the fair-haired girl in 'La negra y la rubia', Lyra emphasises her femininity and allure from the very start of

the story; she is immediately presented as an object of desire, unlike the hairy monkey in the first tale. A handsome, well dressed man passes by, riding a beautiful horse with 'los cascos de plata y los arneses de oro y plata' (*CTP*, p.73). He greets the girl, who notices that his teeth are all gold. His horse does a pirouette and he rides off, leaving the girl to run to tell her mother what happened. This story is different to the previous tale because in this one it is the mother who is actively encouraging the daughter to get married, there is no dominating father figure.

The stranger returns the next day to find the mother and daughter 'bien alicoreadas' in the window. He appears again on a different horse, this time with 'los cascos de oro, frenos de oro, riendas de seda y oro y la montura sembrada de clavitos de oro' (*CTP*, p.74). It seems that the man is also eager to make a good impression; his wealth is literally glistening and the ladies 'se volvieron una miel para contestar el saludo del caballero' (*CTP*, p.74). This shows the women adhering to the social expectation to look beautiful and attract an economically powerful man. The next day, he returns with a horse bedecked with gold, rubies, diamonds and emeralds. With each appearance, his riches have amplified and the ladies are equally keen to impress. The mother is fawning and obsequious but the stranger maintains a distance, referring to himself only as 'don Fulano de Tal'. He shows them recommendation letters from important people, stressing the social divide between them. He talks more of his riches and when he asks for the daughter's hand in marriage the mother jumps at the chance and calls him

her son. After that day 'las dos mujeres se volvieron turumba'<sup>14</sup> visiting farms, going to dances and dinners, and generally living the high life. Although the mother and daughter are comfortably placed, they have nowhere near his degree of wealth. The class divide exists but Lyra minimises its relevance by showing that the man is content to marry down.

The groom refuses to marry in church, instead marrying in the women's house (*CTP*, p.74), an early indication to the listener of his true identity. Moving to a new city, the man tells his new wife that he knows how to do acrobatics<sup>15</sup> that will entertain her. The daughter describes the tricks to her mother, who asks her son-in-law to show her as well. Following his display, 'la vieja se quedó con el credo en la boca y desde aquel momento no las tuvo todas consigo' (*CTP*, p.75). Ugarte Barquero notes that this mother-in-law goes against the stereotype of an evil mother figure, since she has her daughter's best interests at heart (Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.33). It is the astute mother who questions the true nature of her son-in-law, even though his strange antics do not arouse suspicion in the younger woman (Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.32). One interpretation is that Lyra is promoting the life experience and wisdom of an older woman, rather than presenting any lack of autonomy or passivity on the part of her daughter. The daughter is not choosing to ignore the issue, rather she does not seem to notice that the problem exists.

A few days later, her mother returns with 'una botijuela de hierro, con una tapadera que pesaba una barbaridad' (*CTP*, p.75) and bets the man that he

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<sup>14</sup> Gagini explains that '«volverse uno turumba» es en buen castellano «volverse tarumba»' (Gagini, 1919, p.238).

<sup>15</sup> Gagini defines 'pruebas' as follows: 'suertes, ejercicios acrobáticos' (Gagini, 1919, p.208).

cannot fit inside. When he enters, his mother-in-law signals to the waiting men she has recruited to put the lid on. Lyra exploits two stereotypically male attributes here. Firstly, the need for the man to show that he is capable of doing any physical feat that the woman asks. Secondly, that men are stronger and are therefore needed to close the very heavy lid. However, his mother-in-law has outsmarted him, demonstrating that intelligence can defeat a stronger adversary. His new wife tries to intervene, but the mother exercises her maternal authority and prevents her doing so. She says '¿Pues no ves que es el mismo Pisuicas?' The mother has protected her daughter from 'el Malo' in a proactive demonstration of her strength, in spite of being the weaker sex in a patriarchal context. In addition, she does not leave the men to bury the box on her behalf. Whilst they carry the box to the mountain for her, it is she who leads the way and digs the deep hole. Meanwhile, the devil 'se quedó bramando de rabia y diciendo pestes contra su suegra' (*CTP*, p.75); the female has definitely got the upper hand against the wealthier male.

Tía Panchita continues that because the devil was buried 'nadie volvió a cometer un pecado mortal, solo pecados veniales, aconsejados por los diablillos chiquillos. Y toda la gente parecía muy buena' (*CTP*, p.76). Drawing on Gilbert's and Gubar's critical-theoretical framework (1979), Pacheco Acuña states that 'la suegra es el monstruo quien hace un bien a la humanidad al encerrar al Malo'. She adds that this can be interpreted as 'los monstruos femeninos no sólo tienen poder sino que pueden hacer importantes cambios sociales' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.16).

Lyra refers sympathetically to 'el pobre Pisuicas' who remains trapped in the box for many years until a poor woodcutter passes by. The devil begs for his help and the man digs for hours, although not initially for financial reward. However, he only has one pair of shorts and many mouths to feed (*CTP*, p.76) and he is spurred on when the devil says 'Soy alguien que puede hacerte inmensamente rico' (*CTP*, p.76). The poor woodcutter, hearing the promise of riches, 'hizo un esfuerzo tan grande que levantó solo la tapadera'. Lyra adds that 'Cierto es que por dentro el Diablo empujaba a su vez con todas sus fuerzas' (*CTP*, p.76), but nevertheless the fact that one man could move a lid that previously needed several men to lift it and resist the devil's strength, emphasises how much he needs the money. Lyra writes temptation with a capital letter, possibly due to its magnitude in the woodcutter's actions and thereby again stressing the degree of poverty he faces.

The devil, freed by the woodcutter, tells him that they are both going to go to the city: 'Yo me voy a ir metiendo en diferentes personas, de las más ricas y sonadas, para que se pongan locas. Vos aparecerás en la ciudad como médico y ofrecerás curarlas' (*CTP*, p.76). The plan is implemented and the woodcutter cures the devil's first victim, a grand count who 'se puso más loco que la misma locura'. The most famous doctors in the land have failed before him, but when the woodcutter whispers 'Soy el que te sacó de la botijuela', the devil leaves. The cured count's family are eternally grateful and the woodcutter is paid well for his work. More important people are inflicted by the devil occupying their heads, 'el duque don Fulano de Tal [...] la duquesa doña Mengana [...] el marqués don Perencejo' (*CTP*, p.77). Certainly the devil seeks to mock the rich and con them

out of their money. One by one they are cured and the woodcutter 'no tenía dónde guardar el oro que ganaba' (*CTP*, p.77). Thus, the poor woodcutter is exploiting the riches and gullibility of the upper classes. It could be argued that he himself is also a victim, of both his own economic situation and the devil's clutches. The nobility have the privilege of money and their affliction is short-lived and serves only to help the woodcutter. His behaviour could almost be excused by the reader as it is only a result of circumstance that he is coercing with the devil, and no-one is really harmed by their actions. One could question what the devil gains from the relationship and why he does not seek retribution for being locked in the box. However, the fact that he does not go after his mother-in-law suggests that revenge is not necessary. He may be enjoying the physical and mental freedom following his release, or simply avoiding this strong female character out of fear.

Eventually the devil inflicts himself on the queen and she too goes mad. When the woodcutter arrives, the king offers him a position as head physician and riches if he cures his wife. The woodcutter, 'por rajón',<sup>16</sup> le contestó que ya podía hacerse de cuentas de que la reina estaba curada y que si no sucedía así, le cortara la cabeza' (*CTP*, p.77). However, this time the devil refuses to leave and ignores the pleas of the woodcutter who begs '¡Salí por lo que más querrás! ¡Mirá que si no acaban conmigo!' (*CTP*, p.77). The devil is 'muy a gusto entre los sesos de la reina' and after three days of failing to convince him, the woodcutter comes up with a crafty plan to trick him into leaving. He asks the king to help prepare the stunt and on his signal 'la banda rompiera con una tocata bien parrandera,

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<sup>16</sup> Gagini explains 'rajón' as follows: 'es castizo el verbo rajar en la acepción aquí tan frecuente de jactarse, decir fanfarronadas' (Gagini, 1919, p.212).

todos gritaran y golpearan en sus latas y se diera fuego a la pólvora' (*CTP*, p.78). The devil, hearing the commotion, wants to know what is happening and the woodcutter tells him that his mother-in-law has found out that he is in the palace and wants to lock him up again in the box. He leaves the queen's head immediately and does not stop running until he reaches hell. Lyra ends the story by saying that 'el leñador, que ya era don Fulano y muy rico, mandó por su mujer y su chapulinada<sup>17</sup> y todos fueron a vivir a un palacio, regalo del rey. Desde entonces la pasaron muy a gusto' (*CTP*, p.78). There are certainly contradictions in this ending. Firstly, fulano is a pejorative term, or at least one that suggests a lack of significance. One interpretation is that Lyra is subversively expressing displeasure in his actions, as although the woodcutter has gained great riches, he has done so in an immoral manner. He took advantage of the sick, and perhaps their social status is of no consequence. Although he has become one of them, he is now just another so-and-so, albeit one with a happier life. Secondly, the cowardly devil, with all his great supernatural power, has been outsmarted again by another ordinary person without the substantial power that he possesses.

In terms of moral principles, Lyra has once again shown that wit can defeat an oppressor. She also contrasts the power of the old widow, a strong female protagonist in the tale, against the weaknesses of the male devil character. Pacheco Acuña writes that 'es ella, la suegra, quien es temida por el mismo diablo. La pasividad y las otras características de feminidad que establece la sociedad patriarcal como sumisión, debilidad e ingenuidad no se vislumbran en

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<sup>17</sup> Gagini defines 'chapulinada' as follows: 'Metafóricamente, chiquillería, turba de muchachos' (Gagini, 1919, p.109).



este personaje femenino' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.263). This statement supports my earlier observations. Ugarte Barquero concludes that, despite his riches, when the mother-in-law learns the identity of her son-in-law, she decides to get rid of him, 'lo que también señala un elemento religioso cristiano que pesa más en el comportamiento de la suegra, propio también de la época y de las costumbres del pueblo campesino costarricense' (Ugarte Barquero, 2011, p.33). There are huge moral implications in the defeat of the devil and the power of overcoming evil, and Ugarte Barquero makes a valid point. At the end of the tale, the threat of meeting the old widow again terrifies the devil. In this tale, the only feminine weaknesses that Lyra portrays are those related to the submissive nature of beautification to attract the powerful male. She balances the male characters by having a rich male who is defeated, and a poor one who achieves social mobility and personal victory. Again, she has deconstructed stereotypes and shown how class divisions can be crossed.

In 'La suegra del diablo', the marriage ended abruptly when the true identity of the husband is revealed. This was a marriage based on looks and material wealth alone, the opposite to the basis of the successful marriage in 'La Mica'. In 'La Mica', compassion and kindness are of greater value than riches and public opinion. This could be a rejection by Lyra of marriages purely founded on a materialistic basis. Social mobility does occur in both cases, although we never hear any more about the daughter and can only assume that her well-off mother would have continued to care for her. The daughter in the second tale had presumed that she had married up, whereas in fact, she had made a bad decision. The prince in 'La Mica' assumes he has committed a terrible mistake,

but he has married the richest girl in the world. This presents the moral that people cannot be judged by their appearance. However, assumptions are made on this basis and dressing to impress features as important elements in both stories; Lyra's moral messages are contradictory. The motives in the second story are all about greed. The mother had sufficient money and rejected suitors in the same economic situation because of her desire for excessive wealth. Again, patriarchal control, and associated attitudes in 'La Mica' are challenged in 'La suegra del diablo'.

## **Moral: Using intelligence to achieve a goal**

Whilst all the Tío Conejo stories share common themes with the oral trickster tale tradition, I have selected two examples with endings that are loaded with moral implications. In both stories, the trickster uses wit and duplicity to achieve a goal. In 'Tío Conejo y el yurro',<sup>18</sup> Tío Conejo uses his wiles to help the other animals. He is neither rewarded nor thanked for his actions and he occupies the moral high ground when he expresses disappointment in their passive approach and their attitude towards him. In contrast, in 'Tío Conejo Comerciante', his amoral behaviour results in a series of carefully premeditated murders. Tío Conejo is the only character who benefits from his trickery, when he kills his friends for material gain. The story ends with Tía Panchita expressing her sadness at Tío Conejo's actions, in the only story where we hear her voice and the only one in which his behaviour is questioned. All of the named characters in the first story are male, but as this is the only story where Tío Conejo actively tries to help others, it was deemed important for comparison.

There appears to be no apparent social hierarchy in the Tío Conejo stories; generally speaking, all animals are born equal. However, 'Tío Conejo y el yurro' begins with a clever feline word play to the effect that Tío Tigre exercised control over the other animals when 'se hizo gato bravo con el yurro'<sup>19</sup> (*CTP*, p.143). The other animals are powerless as all the rivers have run dry and the spring is their only source of water. Tío Tigre sees this as an opportunity to not only gain the water he needs, but also to eat any animal who tries to do the same. The victims

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<sup>18</sup> Gagini defines 'yurro' as follows: 'manantial, vertiente, ojo de agua' (Gagini, 1919, p.246).

<sup>19</sup> Gagini explains the term 'hacerse gato bravo con una cosa' as 'adueñársela sin permitir que otros la usen' (Gagini, 1919, p.155).

here are 'los pobres animales' and they hold a meeting to decide what to do about Tío Tigre. Again, there appears to be no social structure and nobody is in charge of chairing the discussion. Some say this, some say that, but eventually the talks descend into chaos. When Tío Conejo offers to remove Tío Tigre, the other animals are bad-mannered and hostile, responding with 'No seás rajón' and '¿Qué vas a poder vos? Mejor callate' (*CTP*, p.143). He may not seem like a likely adversary to defeat the powerful tiger, unless the listener is familiar with his track record of foolproof schemes, but he goes to the house of an old lady to ask if he can borrow a large bowl.

Tío Conejo then looks for a honeycomb, rummages around in it and allows the honey to run out and make a large pool on the ground. First he rolls around in the fallen leaves, then the honey and finally the leaf litter again, 'hasta ponerse de este tamaño' (*CTP*, p.144), in a reminder from Lyra that these are stories from the oral tradition. Then he starts to jump around and the alarmed, furious bees fly out from the honeycomb, in all different directions and at great speed. Making a hole in the bowl, he howls and rustles his way to the spring. He is an horrendous sight, so much so that the other animals 'quedaron sin habla, con la lengua arrollada y a los más poquiticos les dio una descomposición y ganas de ir allá afuera' (*CTP*, p.144). Lyra's poetic descriptions are full of humour, and emphasise just how ugly Tío Conejo looks in his disguise. Tío Tigre is woken by the terrible noise, his hair standing on end out of fear. Tío Conejo announces his arrival: '¡Soy el Hojarascal del Monte! Se me quisieron oponer cinco leones y me los comí. Se me quiso oponer un elefante y me lo comí. ¡Pobre de quien se me oponga!' (*CTP*, p.144). Tío Tigre kneels before him and responds 'Soy Tío Tigre,

y si su Sacra Real Majestad quiere, puedo ir a barrerle su solarcito' (*CTP*, p.145). Suddenly the power dynamic is reversed. He has lost control over all other beings and has gone from being a self-appointed dictator to a subservient cowering wreck. He begs Tío Conejo not to hurt him and, taking orders from the trickster that he is to leave immediately, he flees the spring. In an instant, social harmony is restored and the oppressor is banished from the community of otherwise peaceful, egalitarian animals.

Tío Conejo enjoys a well-earned drink of water and rolls around in the spring to wash off the honey and leaves. Returning to the other animals he tells them 'Bueno, ahora sí, manada de inútiles, vayan a beber agua, ya está todo arreglado. ¡Y síganme comiendo por detrás!' (*CTP*, p.145). Not believing him, they send Tío Yigüirro to check out the situation. He returns with confirmation of the news and they run to quench their thirst with no words of gratitude. Lyra writes that 'Cuando Tío Conejo los vio bebiendo agua muy a gusto, le dio colerita y les gritó: — ¡Eso es, así es como les gusta a ustedes todo, sinvergüenzones, a mama sentada! ¡Otra vez cojan cacho! Y se fue muy enojado' (*CTP*, p.146). The use of 'a mama sentada' conjures up the image of a baby feeding from its mother, sitting and receiving everything it needs while not having to exert any effort to obtain what it wants. Tío Conejo is angry with the ungrateful animals, lambasting them for being lazy and work-shy.

The humour provided by the usual anti-heroic antics is missing at the end, and the story is all the more mundane for this. In the May 1913 edition of *San Selerín*, edited by Lyra and González, a similar type of story appears with tío Conejo covered in honey and leaves. On encountering tía Zorra and tío Coyote,

tío Conejo says 'Uuuu! ... Yo soy el viejo de la montaña que engulle zorras y coyotes, y ya me los voy a engullir a ustedes!' When they run off in terror, tío Conejo 'se rió tanto, que ya no tenía fuerzas y las lágrimas le corrían' (Lira and González, 1913, p.16). I believe that a conclusion similar to this would have been a better way to end the story, and more in keeping with the actions of Tío Conejo who rarely helps others unless there is something in it for him. I remain unsure as to why Lyra chose to finish her tale in this way; although she disliked stories that 'arrastraban torpemente una moraleja' (*CTP*, p.8), what she does not say provides an opening for a discussion of acceptable conduct. By including that Tío Conejo was angered by their actions, Lyra had already implied that the animals did not behave or respond appropriately and so she did not need to labour this point further. Therefore, although Lyra misses the opportunity to discuss morals and gratitude, it may not have been missed unintentionally or maybe it has not been missed at all. Even if she wished to exclude overt moralising in her stories, the ending emphasises that the rudeness of the other animals was not socially appropriate behaviour.

In this story, it is only by proactive measures that the situation was remedied. Lyra does not promote passivity or dependence on others. In addition, the classic trickster motif moots the idea that self-confidence is important for emerging victorious, even if others doubt that the goal is realistically possible. An alternative interpretation is that the rudeness demonstrated by the animals was simply a means of providing a contrast to Tío Conejo's uncharacteristic altruism. It affords Lyra the opportunity to demonstrate his double standards, as he ironically adopts the moral high ground against the unappreciative animals.

Certainly, Tío Conejo seems to have acquired a completely new set of values in these stories, possibly more in line with what was deemed as socially desirable behaviour.

The second story, and the one which demonstrates the more unpleasant side of his character, is 'Tío Conejo Comerciante'. In this tale, the trickster plots and executes an elaborate chain of events that culminate in his closest friends being murdered for a small financial gain. The story begins with Tío Conejo only managing to harvest a meagre bushel of corn and another of beans. One by one, he visits the other animals to sell them his wares. They welcome him with open arms and local foods, suggesting that there is genuine friendship between them. The final sales pitch is to Tío Tirador, who agrees to the transaction and Tío Conejo returns home. He has lied to everyone, abused the hospitality of his friends, and planned their murders with impeccable timing.

When Tía Cucaracha arrives at his house, he takes her money, turns on the charm and invites her to rock on the hammock and enjoy a cigar. Tía Gallina arrives and Tía Cucaracha begs Tío Conejo to hide her, saying 'Ya me parece que estoy en el buche de Tía Gallina' (*CTP*, p.132). After taking Tía Gallina's money, he signals to her to peek in the oven, where she finds Tía Cucaracha, 'que pasó a su buche cuello de gallina en un decir amén'. He then leads her to the lounge and offers her the hammock and a cigar. Although, hens do indeed eat cockroaches, this is the only story where the food chain is seen in action. When Tío Conejo visited their houses, they were eating tamales and tortillas in true anthropomorphic fashion, but suddenly Lyra exploits their animalistic stereotypes and expected carnivorous eating habits. The reality that it is 'nature's way' makes

the premeditated murders seem almost acceptable as Tía Gallina had no qualms about eating Tía Cucaracha prior to smoking her Cuban cigar. If the characters are merely considered as animals, they really have not done anything immoral. In fact, it is the sub characters that kill each other, not Tío Conejo; he merely provides the means and opportunity. Tío Conejo again enters with his hands on his head exclaiming, '¿Tía Gallina de Dios? ¿Adivíneme quién viene allí nomasito?' (*CTP*, p.132). Tío Conejo clearly feels no remorse for what is to happen to his next victim. His language is almost pantomime-like, allowing for a storyteller to delight their audience with suspense and the familiar repetition that often features in children's stories. Hiding Tía Gallina in the oven, he welcomes Tía Zorra, takes her money and points at the oven 'con mil malicias'. Tía Zorra finishes Tía Gallina off before continuing in the expected routine of smoking a cigar in the hammock. Again, Tío Conejo appears to say '¡Tía Zorra de Dios! ¿Adivine quién viene para acá?' (*CTP*, p.132). This repetition indicates that Tío Conejo is toying with his victim, adding to his villainous character as the listener is aware of the pattern of his responses. Tío Conejo hides Tía Zorra in the oven and after taking Tío Coyote's money, he once again invites his guest to relax in the hammock and smoke a cigar. He tells Tío Coyote that he doesn't need to worry about anything, '¡Adiós! De repente, cuando uno menos lo piensa llega la Pelona y adiós mis flores, se acabó quien te quería'. This is a little ironic as death will indeed arrive when Tío Coyote least expects it, and there will be nothing he can do about it so he may as well enjoy his last few moments. At least Tío Conejo provides his victims with a brief last moment of happiness prior to their premature deaths. Tío Coyote smokes the cigar and Tío Conejo whispers to him



to go take a peep in the oven. Tío Coyote finds 'Tía Zorra haciendo zorro' (*CTP*, p.133). The use of 'hacer zorro' is interesting, because whilst Tía Zorra is indeed being a fox, the meaning of this in Costa Rican Spanish is 'Agazaparse, quedarse uno callado o inmóvil para no ser descubierto, hacerse el disimulado' (Gagini, 1919, p.156). It is a clever play on words. In an instant, he kills and eats her, and is still licking his lips when Tío Conejo enters with '¡Tío Coyote de Dios! ¿Adivíneme quién viene allí no más?'. Tío Coyote is 'asustado al ver la cara que hacía Tío Conejo' (*CTP*, p.133), another indication that Tío Conejo is revelling in his little charade. Tío Conejo helps Tío Coyote into the oven and closes the door. We are again reminded that the victims are obviously afraid as Tío Coyote gets into the oven 'con el corazón que se le salía'. Tío Conejo goes to the gate to greet Tío Tirador and insincerely says that he didn't expect him to turn up. The use of 'dijo el muy sepulcro blanqueado' is a biblical reference (Matthew 23: 27-29) and is synonymous with concealing corruption, so this selective use of language by Lyra could not be more fitting to this tale. He invites Tío Tirador to relax in the hammock, as he must be very tired, and offers him a cigar before they look at the corn and beans. When Tío Tirador had rested, Tío Conejo whispers to him to get his shotgun ready and go take a little look in the oven. He does so and finds Tío Coyote, his little legs shaking with fear. Tío Tirador takes aim and '¡pun! ..., ¡adiós Tío Coyote!' (*CTP*, p.133). This rather flippant sentence emphasises the lack of importance of Tío Coyote, who to be fair has just killed Tía Zorra with no repentance himself either.

Afterwards they load the mules with the corn and beans, Tío Tirador being the only buyer to get Tío Conejo's harvest, which earned him seven and a half gold

coins, four carts and four pairs of oxen. It left Tío Conejo 'muy satisfecho de su mala fe' (*CTP*, p.134) and leaves the listener with a clear message that organising a series of premeditated murders can be financially rewarding! The other underlying theme is that of greed. Argüello Scriba proposes that 'Tío Conejo Comerciante' is about the way people are swindled by traders and how they buy at a price that is not real. She explains 'cómo engaña a cada uno de los personajes para que sean comidos por el siguiente más poderoso y conservar la cadena alimenticia natural para su beneficio, y acumular una cantidad considerable de dinero' (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.55).

Considering female characters as victims, Pacheco Acuña notes that three of Tío Conejo's victims are females and that 'todas le ofrecieron bocadillos a Tío Conejo. Todas hicieron el trato con él de comprarle fanegas de frijoles y todas mueren por su culpa' (Pacheco Acuña, 2005, p.265). However, I feel that this is a little unfair as she has conveniently ignored the fourth victim, Tío Coyote. Admittedly, the three female victims are shown as domesticated individuals, happy to serve their home-cooked delights to Tío Conejo. However, this is the same as seen in the representation of the final victim, Tío Coyote, in spite of him being a male character. When Tío Conejo arrives at his home, Tío Coyote 'estaba quitando del fuego una gran olla de conserva de chiverre', and welcoming him just as warmly as the female characters invites him to '**Entre pa' dentro y pruebe esta conservita** que está muy rica' (*CTP*, p.131). Lyra makes no differentiation between the sexes when Tío Conejo arrives at their homes, in terms of both their domestic activities and their generous hosting. Furthermore, Tío Conejo appears to be equally hospitable when each animal arrives at his own home, and there is no obvious

gender inequality.

Whenever she told this story, Tía Panchita always added sadly:

¡Achará que Tío Conejo fuera a salir con acción tan fea! Yo más bien creo que fue tía Zorra y que quien me lo contó se equivocara... porque Tío Conejo era amigo de dar qué hacer, pero amigo de la plata y sin temor de Dios, eso sí que no. (*CTP*, p.134)

In a very religious country, the fear of God is a very powerful incentive not to do something and suggests that Tía Panchita has pronounced moral judgement on Tío Conejo. Not only does she treat all victims equally in the plot, regardless of their sex, but she also suggests that the murderous actions of Tío Conejo were more akin to those of Tía Zorra, a female character who is clearly living up to her name. The narrator has no difficulty imagining that a female character could act in such a cold, calculated manner, doubting that her beloved Tío Conejo could commit such atrocities. The addition of the explicit moral at the end of the tale was something Lyra disliked in children's stories. Tío Conejo has obviously valued money as being more important than friendship; perhaps Lyra included this message as he had committed such overtly terrible actions. She does not excuse his behaviour in his other stories, including those where he kills other animals or, at least, instigates their death. For example, his actions causing the exploding stomach of Tío Coyote in 'Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote' and the murders of Mano León, Tío Tigre and Mano Lagarto in 'Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas' are not criticised in the same way. Argüello Scriba states that 'la autora disculpa a Tío Conejo, incapaz de matar por dinero, dando a entender que su

personaje no era capaz de acciones tan bajas, sino más bien un modelo no de buena conducta sino **de un ser "tortero"** a lo tico' (Argüello Scriba, 2010, p.55). However, there is no way to defend his behaviour, as in this tale Tío Conejo is more than just a troublemaker.

Tío Conejo toys with his victims, playing on their fears and planning the murders in such a way that a stronger, bigger adversary arrives to finish them off. However, there are implications that it is important not to be over-trusting or too easily tempted by a seemingly attractive proposal. The rejection of these values in the other characters provides moral lessons. Obviously there are no attributes to celebrate in the case of Tío Conejo's scheming behaviour. His only interest is the financial reward and he has no conscience about his actions as long as he gets his money. Both stories close with a moral and neither show any obvious social or gender inequality. The only dominant presences are those of Tío Tigre who exerts power over the other animals by taking control of the spring, and Tío Conejo who is in control of his macabre plan throughout. The moral messages in this story directly oppose those in 'Tío Conejo y el yurro'. One story promotes using intelligence to help others, even if there is no reward or incentive other than doing good for other people. The second reveals the depths of Tío Conejo's amorality, in a tale that focuses on tricking others purely out of greed and self interest.

This final part of the thesis emphasises the importance of equality in Lyra's idealised vision of the world; she does not endorse gender in a manner conducive to the patriarchal model. Comparison of various stories exposes a range of moral conduct, covering the whole spectrum of behaviours. As

observed, Lyra's messages are not consistent and similar types of stories show marked differences in the values conveyed.

## CONCLUSION

After a close reading of the story collection *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*, certain themes clearly emerge; in particular, gender equality, class barriers and social mobility, resistance to authority and triumphing over a more powerful adversary. Taken together, these themes constitute what I perceive to be Carmen Lyra's social vision, conveyed through her inclusion of certain moral values. I believe that notwithstanding Lyra's disparaging comments about tales that 'arrastraban torpemente una moraleja', morality is firmly embedded in her stories. Selecting certain *cuentos* has allowed me to explore this statement with a narrower focus and in greater depth. Matters such as inclusion, religion, social justice, death and luck were discarded as major themes as, on reflection, they were deemed trivial or too generalised within the tales, and therefore unable to yield additional evidence to support my arguments.

Carmen Lyra's early life, political career and communist convictions were briefly outlined, before providing an overview of the Costa Rican national identity deliberately constructed by *la generación del Olimpo* as well as the development of Costa Rican children's literature at the start of the twentieth century. Political ideology was defined in the context of this study, and economic or communist inferences made by other critics were dismissed as verging on imaginative biographical fallacy. *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* promotes the oligarchy's ideology that the country should be promoted on its own merits, but paradoxically Lyra also embraces other cultures and global traditions by using their stories as inspiration for her work. Fusing *costumbrismo* with foreign influences, her

particular focus on everyday language and constant references to specific Costa Rican objects, produce and customs contribute to the rich cultural authenticity of the text. It is beyond doubt that the vernacular used by Lyra imbues the text with a distinctive national identity; this book is unequivocally Costa Rican.

Stories from *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* were used to illustrate the way that Lyra weaves a rich moral tapestry of both desirable and unpleasant characteristics. Moral contradictions were exposed, leading to an affirmation that a strong moral code is present. At times the text serves to embody positive behaviour and at others, to denounce poor conduct, allowing the child-reader to reflect and reach their own conclusions. Whilst recognising that morality is frequently compromised, concealed or contradicted both within and between individual tales, its presence cannot simply be ignored. After all, moral paradoxes are to be expected in a compilation of stories gathered from very different cultures, times and literary traditions.

The subversion of patriarchal values was also explored, a rejection of the dominant ideology that did not even view women as worthy of being termed citizens. Gender roles were considered to be equally distributed, in terms of character traits and domestic situations: for all the female victims within Lyra's tales, there are a considerable number of male casualties too.

Furthermore, Lyra does not eliminate class differences but she does not use them to portray oppression or divided communities either. Evidence was found of a social vision encompassing the possibility of change within an unequal society. She includes a wide range of characters that transcend different social classes

and presents various strategies to the listener as to how they can overcome a greater adversary, achieve social mobility or deal with life's challenges. In the case of resistance to authority, these actions can also be viewed as subversive, although as expressed earlier, I do not consider her messages to be damaging to listeners of a young, impressionable age due to the moral development that they promote. Indeed, Cascante argues that Lyra's folktales 'logran desarrollar, de una manera muy indirecta, la conciencia social y moral del niño' (Cascante, 1999, p.168).

The thematic analysis of pairs of the stories centred on the themes of morality, equality and resistance to authority, confirming that Lyra used her nationalised children's folktales to transmit moral messages, promote her socio-educational vision and shape a distinctive national identity. This is not surprising given that *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* is a compilation of stories drawn from the moralising fairy tale genre and the didactic trickster tradition, respectively. **Lyra's use of** animal characters and other literary strategies constructs an alternative worldview which ultimately challenges the official discourse and ideology in Costa Rica at the start of the twentieth century. The thesis has clearly demonstrated why children's literature, past and present, constitutes a worthy object of study.

Finally, these stories deserve to be celebrated as they promote equality for all and have a strong moral undercurrent that can only serve to help children form their own values and belief systems. These values and identity markers are still just as important to Costa Rican children today, as proven by the continued popularity of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita*.



## **APPENDIX 1: Publishing history of *Cuentos de mi tía Panchita* from 1920 – 1956**

This table shows story order, page numbers and first inclusion of each story. Up to 1956, there are various combinations and changes of story.  
This information was obtained through consulting early editions. I was unable to locate the 1922 edition.

Story	Year published				
	1920	1922	1926	1936	1956
	First edition: García Monge y Cía. Editores, San José	Second edition: Imprenta Alsina, San José	Third edition: Imprenta María v. de Lines, San José	Reprint of third edition: Imprenta Española Soley & Valverde, San José	Fourth edition: Editora Las Américas, San José
Los Cuentos de mi tía Panchita (prologue)	(5-14)		(3-9)	(3-8)	(11-16)
<b>Cuentos de mi Tía Panchita</b>					
El tonto de las adivinanzas	6 (63-71)		6 (53-60)	6 (49-55)	1 (17-24)
Uvieta	11 (113-123)		11 (98-107)	11 (90-98)	2 (25-35)
Juan, el de la carguita de leña	13 (133-139)		13 (115-120)	13 (106-111)	3 (36-42)
Escomposte Perinola					4 (43-61)
La Mica	5 (46-62)		5 (39-52)	5 (36-48)	5 (62-76)
El Cotonudo	9 (87-99)		9 (75-86)	9 (69-79)	6 (77-88)
La Cucarachita Mandinga	2 (24-32)		2 (18-26)	2 (17-24)	7 (89-97)
La suegra del diablo	7 (72-81)		7 (61-69)	7 (56-63)	8 (98-106)
La casita de las torrejitas	8 (82-86)		8 (70-74)	8 (64-68)	9 (107-111)
La Flor del Olivar	4 (40-45)		4 (33-38)	4 (31-35)	10 (112-117)
La negra y la rubia	10 (100-112)		10 (87-97)	10 (80-89)	11 (118-128)
El Pájaro Dulce Encanto	14 (140-151)		14 (121-130)	14 (112-120)	12 (129-140)
Salir con un domingo siete	3 (33-39)		3 (27-32)	3 (25-30)	13 (141-148)
<b>Cuentos de Tío Conejo</b>					
Tío Conejo y Tío Coyote	15 (152-159)		15 (131-138)	15 (121-127)	14 (149-156)
Por qué Tío Conejo tiene las orejas tan largas	12 (124-132)		12 (108-114)	12 (99-105)	15 (157-164)
Como Tío Conejo les jugó sucio a Tía Ballena y Tío Elefante			20 (157-162)	20 (145-150)	16 (165-170)
De cómo Tío Conejo salió de un apuro		ADDED*	17 (143-145)	17 (132-134)	17 (171-174)
Tío Conejo Comerciante	1 (15-23)		1 (10-17)	1 (9-16)	18 (175-183)
Tío Conejo y los quesos			21 (163-167)	21 (151-155)	19 (184-188)
Tío Conejo y los caites de su abuela		ADDED*	16 (139-142)	16 (128-131)	20 (189-193)
Tío Conejo y el yurro		ADDED*	18 (146-150)	18 (135-138)	21 (194-198)
Tío Conejo y el caballo de mano Juan Piedra			22 (168-172)	22 (156-160)	22 (199-203)
Tío Conejo ennoviado		ADDED*	19 (151-156)	19 (139-144)	23 (204-210)

\* (Rojas González, 2005, p.106)

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