

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE'S *CASSANDRA*: A TRANSACTIONAL READING IN THE NEGOTIATION OF MEANING(S)

Karla Araya Araya*

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a literary analysis of the narrative *Cassandra*, by the British writer Florence Nightingale. The aim of this work is to analyze how the text structure engages the reader in a process of transactional reading to negotiate meaning(s). To do so, the theoretical framework used is the reader response criticism. This analysis includes the study of the frames developed in the text a way to confront the reader and the narrator's worldviews, textual graphical gaps as rhetorical devise to omit information and the role of the reader as co-author of the text.

Key Words: Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*, Transactional Reading, Negotiation of Meaning, Reader Response Approach, Frames, Textual Gaps, Co-authorship.

RESUMEN

Este artículo ofrece un análisis literario de la segunda parte de la obra *Cassandra* de la autora británica Florence Nightingale. El objetivo principal es analizar la forma en que la estructura estilística del texto involucra al lector(a) en la creación de significado(s) de la obra. Para tal propósito se toma en consideración el enfoque de crítica literaria de la respuesta del lector(a) al texto, donde la lectura es considerada un proceso transaccional que permite la negociación de significado(s) en la interpretación literaria. Los aspectos a considerar en el análisis de la obra son el desarrollo y la confrontación de valores relacionados al rol de géneros mediante las estructuras mentales del narrador y el lector, el uso de "vacíos" gráficos, la omisión de información y el (la) lector(a) como coautor(a) del texto.

Palabras claves: Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*, lectura transaccional, negociación de significado, respuesta del lector(a), coautoría, vacíos gráficos.

* Profesora en la Sede de Occidente y en la Sede del Pacífico de la Universidad de Costa Rica [arayaka@gmail.com]

Introduction: Theoretical Background

The field of literary criticism has been eclipsed by many different theories about the way in which meaning and interpretation of texts are conceived. For some theoretical perspectives such as mythic criticism, formalism and structuralism meaning is something “given” in the text. In other words, the text contains meaning per se; and, it is the reader’s task to find *that* meaning. On the contrary, post-structuralist critical theories assert that meaning is created through an active process of negotiation between the text and the reader. Louise Rosenblatt in *The Text, the Reader, the Poem* (1978) explains that during this active reading process,

A reader brings to the text his or her past experiences and the present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, the reader marshals his or her resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feelings a new order, a new experience, which he/she sees as the poem [referred to any literary creation]. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of the reader’s life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him or her as a human being. (cited by Bressler Charles E., 1999: 7)

So, interpretation varies according to the texts’ characteristics and the reader’s identity, background and knowledge. Each reading of a text demands a transactional experience in which negotiation of meaning “guarantees” the re-creation of the text and the re-definition of the reader.

One of the theories that conceives meaning as an active construction generated from a transactional reading is the reader response approach. According to its theoretical perspectives, a text cannot have the objectivity proclaimed by the structuralist notions because it is

the emotional response of readers what permits the text’s interpretation(s). In other words, a text cannot mean by itself because it is not a self-centered container of significance; it is meaningless without the reader. Readers activate the text through their experiences. At the same time, these experiences stimulate certain responses to the text permitting the negotiation of meaning when interpreting the literary work.

Regarding the proposals of the reader response criticism, James Tompkins ponders that to the reader response approach main proposal is:

[w]hat has happened is that the locus of meaning has simply been transferred from the text to the reader. This move seems radical at close range because it undermines the notion of textual objectivity. But the transfer of meaning from the text to reader appears startling only within the narrow assumptions of the modernist perspective. For although reader-oriented critics speak of the “poem as even” and of “literature as experience”, meaning is still for them object of critical act. That act, moreover, has the same shape in the reader-response criticism ... (1980: 206)

This transference of the locus of meaning re-addresses the role of both the reader and the text in the reading process proposing that every literary work can only acquire meaning in a process of interaction and negotiation with the reader. It is the reader who gives life to the text due to her/his active participation in the construction of the text sense. This does not mean that text loses its importance but that it provides particular conditions through its structure for the reader to negotiate meaning.

Then, the text still plays an important role in the process of interpretation because its structure and organization helps readers to active their schemata (previous knowledge) to create

meaning while reading. According to Wolfgang Iser

as the reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the 'schematised views' to one another, he sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself. Thus, reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character (1994: 51).

The text becomes important because it provides readers with a set of codes, signs or signals necessary to activate the process of interpretation and meaning construction. The way in which the elements of the text (plot, characters, narration, point of view, etc) are structured and organized guides and limits the reading process. At the same time, this text's "arrangements" permits several probable interpretations that vary from one reader to another.

As a result, both the reader and the text need each other to co-exist. On one side, there is no reader without the text because it is through reading that the reader is identified as such due to

reading implies something resembling the apperception I have of myself, the action by which I grasp straightway what I think as being thought by a subject (who in this case is not I). Whatever sort of alienation I may endure, reading does not interrupt my activity as a subject. Reading, then, is the act in which the subjective principle which I call *I*, is modified in such a way that no longer I have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my *I*. I am loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers, and acts within me. (Georges Poulet, 1994: 45)

Every reading is a personal act that reveals some aspects of the reader's personality. Hence, the act of reading becomes a very subjective process in which

readers transform themselves and their expectations based on their particular identities as individuals. That is why, the way every reader experiences the text reflects his or her values and beliefs; and this experience is never the same for each human being keeps growing and changing throughout his or her whole life.

In this process of self formation and identification, the reader needs the text to recreate him or herself as the reading proceeds. In doing so, the reader uses his or her background knowledge as a source of previous memories or insights that help him or her to deal with the world presented in the text. Wolfgang Iser states that during the reading process, there is an interactive relation between the text and the reader which provokes that

whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened. It may later be evoked again and set against different background with the result that the reader is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections. The memory evoked, however, can never reassume its original shape, for this would mean that memory and perception were identical, which is manifestly not so. (1994: 54)

In other words, the text evokes a memory in the reader offering a reality that the reader may accept or refuse according to his or her worldview and perceptions. In this sense, every reader needs the text to shape his/her identity, to exist as a reader.

The text's existence depends on the active interaction and transaction generated with the reader through the awakening of esthetic experiences. The esthetic experience is referred to the realization of the text accomplished by the reader through the artistic creation –that also can be considered an experience-. In this respect Iser states that

the text as such offers different “schematised views” through which the subject matter of the work can come to light, but the actual bringing to light is an act of *Konkretisation* [this term is used to refer to realization]. If this is so, then the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. (1994: 50)

In other words, the text transcends the textual composition to become an artistic and an esthetic experience “for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader –through this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text” (Iser, 1994: 50). Then, neither the text nor the reader is autonomous: they need each other to exist.

Taking into consideration the relationship between the artistic and the esthetic creation, it can be deduced that the authorship of the text does not only depend on the participation of who traditionally has been considered the author (the person who writes the text), but also on the reader. The text as a literary work exists because both the writer and the reader bring it into existence. On one side, the writer creates certain conditions for the text to become part of the physical world. On the other, the reader acts as an author giving life to the text. Without the reader, the text is a seed in an arid land waiting for the necessary conditions to grow. The contact with the text is exercised through the reading process in which the reader is in charge of “feeding” the text to become an artistic and esthetic creation. Consequently, the reader becomes a co-author of the text. In the process of co-existence, co-authoring and inter-dependency between the text and the reader, interpretation is a particular

aesthetic experience provoked by the creative essence of the literary work.

Hence, “[b]elieving that a literary work’s interpretation is created when a reader and a text interact or transact,” (Guerrin, 1996: 68) it seems somewhat realistic to think that there are going to be some indetermined textual aspects that each reader has to fill up when decoding a text into meaning (s). Because of these indeterminate textual elements, there is no absolute and unique interpretation; rather, there can be many interpretations that depend upon what the reader brings to text and what the text provides to the reader. In *Literature as Exploration*, Louise M. Rosenblatt asserts that the reading process involves the reader and the text in a transactional experience where

[f]undamentally, the process of understanding of a work implies a reaction of it, an attempt to grasp completely the structured sensations and concepts through which the author seeks to convey the quality of his sense of life. Each must make a new synthesis of these elements with his own nature, but it is essential that he evokes those components of experience to which the text actually refers (1938: 113)

The text acts as a source of possible stimulus that may provoke certain responses on the reader. The indeterminate textual aspects that each reader has to face in order to mean the literary work can generate many different reactions on him or her. These responses vary according to each reader; even though, they are shaped by the text.

The transactional experience generates a new conception of the literary work called poem. The poem is conceived as an eventful artistic creation; an event that permits readers experiences the text. As an event, the transactional experience opens the possibility that

[i]n whatever way, and under whatever circumstances the reader may link the different phases of the text together, it will always be the process of anticipation and retrospection that leads to the formation of the virtual dimension, which in turn transforms the text into an experience for the reader. The way in which this experience comes about through a process of continual modification is closely akin to the way in which we gather experience in life. (Wolfgang Iser, 1994: 56)

Then, during the reading progresses, the reader is continually presented with a text that allows many possibilities for interpretation since the omission of information through the presence of gaps and frames force the reader to complete the “unwritten” parts of the text. So, the structure and organization of the text as well as the reader’s background cause a process of modifications when interpreting the literary work. It is in this active, transactional and very particular process where the text births as an event: an artistic and aesthetic experience.

Therefore, the dynamic nature between the text and the reader initiates the reading process as an act of negotiation to reconstruct the “incompleteness” of the text. The reader needs to make connections within the text to establish relationships among space, time, characters, events and emotions. “Thus, the reader, in establishing these inter-relations ... actually causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections. These connections are the product of the reader’s mind working on the raw of the text, through they are not in the text –for this consists just of sentences, statements, information, etc. (Iser, 1994: 54). In doing so, negotiation of meaning is inevitable. Meaning is not absolutely posited in the text because there is no linear meaning production. Instead, the text and the reader have to “conciliate” meaning.

In the literary work *Women’s Time* from *Cassandra* by the British writer Florence Nightingale, the reader is presented with a variety of textual devices that opens many possibilities to mean the text. Gaps and frames activate the reading process forcing the reader to complete and modify the text according to his or her worldview. In doing so, the reader needs to use his or her background knowledge to decode those “unwritten” parts of the text into meaningful constructs-interpretations.

Frames in the Text

In *Women’s Time* from *Cassandra*, the artistic and esthetic experience of the literary work is developed through different frames that generate indeterminacy, that is, lack of concrete information to create the significance of the text. This lack of concreteness leads the text in a condition of openness that the reader has to face when reading. As a result of the textual indeterminacy, the reading process is opened to many interpretations permitting multiple responses from readers. One of the ways in which indeterminacy is present in the text is through frames. The text’s organization triggers a varied set of mental frames in the reader, that is, the reader starts the transactional experience of co-creating the text’s significance. Georges Poulet explains that

The universe of fiction is infinitely more elastic than the world of objective reality. It leads itself to any use: it yields with little resistance to the importunities of the mind. Moreover, -...- this interior universe constituted by language does not seem radically opposed to the *me* who thinks it. Doubtless what I glimpse through the words are mental forms not divested of an appearance of objectivity. But they do not seem to be of another nature than my mind which thinks them. They are objects, but subjectified objects. In short, since

everything has become part of my mind thanks to the intervention of language, the opposition between the subject and its objects has been considerably attenuated. And thus the greatest advantage of literature is that I am persuaded by it that I am free from my usual sense of incompatibility between my consciousness and its objects. (1994: 43)

Poulet proposes that the esthetic experience is a very subjective response developed while reading. The indeterminacy of the artistic creation of the text frees reader from literal determinisms. As frames are developed in the text, the reader has to work with contending those frames prompted by activating his or her schemata.

In *Cassandra*, one of the main frames that cause indeterminacy is the social role assigned to the male and female gender. While reading, the reader may perceive that the text -through the narrator- presents women as victims of a chauvinist society. The narrator tries to frame the reader's perception about gender discrimination by stating that "passion, intellect, moral activity -these have never been satisfied in a woman" (Nightingale: 804) because the society in which women live is a ... cold and oppressive conventional atmosphere" (Nightingale: 804). Then passion, intellect and moral activity "cannot be satisfied" (Nightingale: 804) in a woman. The narrator reinforces this frame when pointing out that "to say more on this subject would be to enter into the whole history of society, of the present state of civilization" (Nightingale: 804). At this point, the reader is confronted with the idea that female oppression has been a historical fact exercised through discriminatory conventions about gender roles. The reader has to struggle between his or her activated frames about gender as the reading process proceeds, and the frames developed by the narrator in the

text. He or she has to deal with the latter (a manipulative narrative strategy used to persuade the reader) accepting or rejecting the idea in which females are framed as oppressed and unsatisfied beings.

In contrast, men are presented as privileged individuals because "the atmosphere which enervates you [women] is life to me [men]" (Nightingale: 804). In this sense, the narrator ponders that "the state of society which some complain of makes others happy. Why should these complain to those? *They* do not suffer. They would not understand it, any more than that lizard would comprehend the suffering of a Shetland sheep" (Nightingale: 804). Based on the narrator, gender equality cannot be possible in a male society that obtains special benefits because of its male organization. Those who have certain privileges over others exercise their power by subordinating others; otherwise, they would not be considered powerful. But this frame may suffer some modifications according to each reader's experiences and values regarding gender relationships. After all, frames in text are developed through sentences that acquire meaning in a reading process of individual interpretation where, as Stanley E. Fish states,

[t]here is no direct relationship between the meaning of a sentence (paragraph, novel, poem) and what its words mean. Or, to put the matter less provocatively, the information an utterance gives, its message, is a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with its meaning. It is the experience of an utterance -*all* of it and not anything that could be said about it, including anything I could say- that *is* its meaning. (1994: 78)

The information provided through the sentences shapes the frames in the text works as insights for the reader to substitute the sentences' literal message into an

interpretative experience to reconstruct the frames about gender roles.

Little by little, the narrator develops another frame that undergoes the transformation of gender roles. This frame is prompted by the phrase “look at the poor lives we lead” (Nightingale: 805). The narrator criticizes the way in which female discrimination has been institutionalized:

It is a wonder that we are so good as we are, not that we are so bad. In looking around we struck with the power of organizations we see, not with their want [lack] of power. Now and then, it is true, we are conscious that *there* is an inferior organization, but, in general, just the contrary. (Nightingale: 805)

This inferior organization is in charged of creating a socio-political bias between men and women. That is why, “Mrs. A. has the imagination, the poetry of a Murrillo [a famous Spanish painter of religious and peasant subjects] and has sufficient power of execution to show that she might have had a great deal more” (Nightingale: 805) but Mrs. A cannot have the same social recognition of a Murillo. Women are not acknowledged in the same way as men because there is “a material difficulty, not a mental one” (Nightingale: 805). By subverting discriminatory attitudes towards women and by demanding more equal opportunities for them, the text imposes the frame of gender transformation through the re-organization of those social, political and religious institutions that discriminate women;

Those institutions we call monasteries, and which, embracing much that is contrary to the laws of nature, are yet better adapted to the union of the life of action and that of thought than any other mode of life with which we are acquainted, in many such, four and a half hours, at least, are daily set aside for thought, rules are given for thought,

training and opportunity afforded. Among us there is *no* time appointed for this purpose, the difficulty is that, in our social life, we must be always doubtful whether we ought not be with somebody else or be doing something else. (Nightingale: 806)

On the other hand, the narrator tries to present women as individuals who are strained to see house chores not only as their exclusive duty but also as their unique field of action. When the narrator states that “dinner is the great sacred ceremony of this day, the great sacrament,” (Nightingale: 805), she makes the reader confronts his/her experiences regarding gender with those framed in the text.

On one side, the narrator points out that the social acceptance of labor distribution is an oppressing force that diminishes women. That is why, “to be absent from dinner is equivalent to being ill” (Nightingale: 805). However, it is the reader who decides whether or not labor distribution conditions women to behave according to certain social predeterminations. On the other, this frame reinforces the need of a female transformation by offering readers with a male image whose power is questioned:

men are afraid that their houses will not be so comfortable, that their wives will make themselves ‘remarkable’ women that they will make themselves distasteful to men; they write books (a very wisely) to teach themselves to dramatise ‘little things,’ to persuade themselves that ‘domestic life is their sphere’ and to idealise the ‘sacred hearth,’ (Nightingale: 810)

Nevertheless, it is the reader who decides whether following this frame, or transforming it.

As the text develops the frame of gender roles, the narrator deduces that all these social predispositions about gender roles are the result of a social and cultural system reinforced through education:

Women are never supposed to have any occupation of sufficient importance not to be interrupted, except “suckling their fools”; and women themselves have accepted this, have written books to support it, and have trained themselves so as to consider whatever they do as not of such value to the world or to others, but that they can throw it up at the first “claim of social life.” They have accustomed themselves to consider intellectual occupation as a merely selfish amusement, which it is their “duty” to give up for every trifler more selfish than themselves. (Nightingale: 808)

Some readers may accept the idea that women’s education makes them follow the supposedly “command” of their nature: to serve others. Yet, other readers could use the following questions pondered by the narrator in order to activate their background and give different answers to refuse the previous stated idea:

why is it more ridiculous for a man than for a woman to do worsted work and drive out every day in the carriage?... Why should we (women) laugh if we were to see parcel of men sitting round a drawing-room table in the morning, and think it all right if they were women? Is man’s time more valuable than woman’s? ... is the difference between man and woman this, that woman has confessedly nothing to do? (Nightingale: 806)

The answers to these questions demands a transactional participation to agree or disagree with the conformation of the text’s frame developed about the purposes of education in men and women, to whether discard or accept what the text imposes when the narrator states that through education, there is a society that “fritters away the intellect of those committed to her charge! It is said that society is necessary to sharpen the intellect. ... it does sharpen the intellect, because it is a kind of *tour-de-force* to say something at pinch ...” (Nightingale: 807).

Responses, then, may be as many as there are readers. Through the narrator,

the text frames the information provided but this does not mean that readers are going to follow those frames to interpret what they read. Instead, readers negotiate with the text in their own way. By this negotiation, each reader re-constructs the text from the particular response generated during the reading process, and not exclusively from the imposed organization of the information provided.

Gaps in the Text

One of the main aspects that readers need to negotiate when experiencing the construction of meaning is the presence of gaps in the text. Initially, these gaps appear at the textual level as a way to construct the literary work. Later on, gaps transcend the textual aspect to become part of the interpretative level where each reader has to reconstruct the text based on his/her assumptions generated in the reading process. According to Iser, “it is through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections –for filling in the gaps left by the text itself” (1998: 55). Far from the idea of conceiving gaps as obstacles, they permit the construction of meaning(s).

In *Women’s Time* from *Cassandra*, textual gaps enable readers to interpret this literary work in different ways. A graphical gap that triggers different reactions about this text is the use of capital letters. There is a special allusion to the “A” letter when referring to the female gender. When the narrator introduces the reader to the female character, he states that “Mrs. A. has the imagination of a Murillo, the poetry of a Murillo, and has sufficient

power of execution to show that she might have had a great deal" (Nightingale: 805). At this point, the reader has to "negotiate" the textual gap –developed by the A reference- in order to reconstruct the text at the interpretive level. This gap leaves unresolved the mysterious identity of the woman posing some questions in the reader: why the narrator refuses to reveal Mrs. A's full name?, why is she named as A?, and/or "why is she not a Murillo?" (Nightingale: 805).

To face the absence of information created by the "A" reference, the reader needs to fill the gap by creating his own assumptions based on the rest of his reading. She or he may think that the narrator only provides the initial letter of the lady's name in order to protect the woman's identity, or that the "A" name sarcastically remains to a lack of recognition, or that Mrs. A keeps anonymous in a society that only acknowledges the "Murillos" (men) because they live in a patriarchic culture where women have been minimized and oppressed. Still for some other readers, this gap may be filled up with the idea that the "A" woman is an attempt to lift the female image. Taking into account that "A" is the first letter of western alphabets, Mrs. A could be considered by some readers as a subtle remembrance of gender orders. Hence, the reference to the "A" person creates a mental construction in the reader about the possibility of a bias in the writer's minds, and then, in the information provided. In this sense, interpretations are numerous as readers, but the possibility of having many different ideas about the text's meaning is possible because of the negotiation undertaken in the reading process.

Another gap that the reader has to deal with is the use of questions as a

rhetorical device. In this sense, the typographical question mark per se sets up specific mental frames in the reader's mind. For instance, the question "is discontent a privilege?" (Nightingale: 804) instigates the reader's participation. The reader's answer, an even more, his/her interpretation is going to reflect his/her own experiences and beliefs regarding the issue of discrimination and social injustices. No matter the narrator's answer is: "Yes, it is a privilege for you to suffer for your race – a privilege not reserved to the Redeemer [Christ], and the martyrs alone, but one enjoyed by numbers in every age" (Nightingale: 804), it is the reader who interprets accepting or refusing the frame established by the narrator when answering. On one side, for some readers, this statement may sound masochistic.

The fact that someone could get pleasure from pain triggers the assumption that the narrator may be somehow mentally ill. But some other readers may agree with the narrator because they could believe that suffering is necessary. As stated by the narrator, some readers may consider that "suffering rather than indifference; for out of nothing comes nothing" (Nightingale: 804) is a strong reference to activism. Other readers could interpret suffering as a chance to react towards social problems; opportunity human beings have to look for the solution to their pain.

However, some other readers could consider that suffering does not necessarily mean or imply redemption and recognition. They may think that, even though, it could be true that "[o]ne discovers the new world" (Nightingale: 804) if "rather, ten times rather, die in the surf, heralding the way to that new world, than stand

idly on the shore!" (Ibid), there should be other ways to herald a new world; that no human being should suffer for dreaming a better place and society.

Another important question that incites the involvement of the reader to be solved is "are men better off than women in this (adapting to the social norms of behaving)?" (Nightingale: 806). It depends on each reader's beliefs and experiences to give an affirmative or a negative answer. The apparent response pointed out by the narrator still has certain ambiguity. One can think that following the social roles assigned to each gender is a difficult task for both men and women because to fit the norm is not feasible:

For men, who are seen much in those hunts, there is no end of the epithets we -women- have: "knights of the carpet," "drawing-room heroes," "ladies" men. But suppose we were to see a number of men in the morning sitting round a table in the drawing-room, looking at prints, doing worsted work [knitting], and reading little books, how we -women- should laugh! (Nightingale: 806)

Then, neither men nor women can deny that fulfilling the gender role they have been socially assigned is a difficult and painful task. If any of them does not succeed in fitting the rule, s/he will be criticized and discriminated. Some other readers could assume another different position toward this problem. They could presume that the narrator wants to depict the hard time men and women have to face in order to "properly" behave according to their gender. For those readers men as well as women are going to be discriminated if they want to do things that do not correspond to their socially imposed gender image. On the other hand, some other readers could think that the narrator is condemning the social role given to the female. While men "who

are seen much in those hunts, there is no end of the epithets (Nightingale: 806), women have to be condemned to their house space as "knights of the carpet" (Nightingale: 806).

As a textual gap, the act of questioning transcends the educational aspect to a more spiritual dimension, it is the religious field. When the narrator states "is there anything in this life which can be called an Incarnation of the ideal life within?" (Nightingale: 812), s/he claims for an answer from a religious perspective. This could mean that the female subverts the authority of a crucial institution such as the church. Likewise, the narrator seems to censure the socio-educational discourse because s/he demands an explanation from those who have interpreted God's commands. Some readers may perceive this as an act of rebellion to God's law, as an act of heresy. But others may see these lines as a challenging call for the accomplishment of God's real purposes, for the real application of the premises referred to love, equality and justice that God expects real Christians to achieve. Surely, there is a confrontation of mental frames concerning religious principles.

But how come is it possible to challenge chauvinist notions about gender roles by means of a Christian doctrine? For some readers this is definitely not possible. For some others, what the persona does is an intelligent use of the religious discourse that has oppressed women to evidence the way faith can be manipulated.

Regarding religious matters, contradictory positions can be triggered in the readers' mind by the narrator:

Jesus Christ raised women above the condition of mere slaves, mere ministers to the passions of

men, raised them by His sympathy, to be Ministers of God. He gave them moral activity. But the age, the World, Humanity, must give them the means to exercise this moral activity, must give them intellectual cultivation, spheres of action. (Nightingale: 809)

Even for modern readers, it could be very difficult to determine if the narrator's discourse still is too religious to call for the "awake, ye women, all ye that sleep, awake!" (Nightingale: 811) or if it is an early attempt to state that "time is come when women must do something more than the 'domestic hearth'" (Nightingale: 811).

Another aspect that readers have to face in order to fill the gaps at the interpretative level is the constant use of quotation marks. They are used to call the attention of readers in different ways: to indicate the intervention of characters and to emphasize an idea. This last use may cause various responses from readers since the quoted phrases remain provocative in the process of interpretation; especially, when talking about the female role in society. Some of these phrases are "knights of carpets", "drawing-room heroes", "ladies' men", "suckling their fools", "society", "duty", "infection", "remarkable" women among others. In the first three phrases, there may be readers rejecting the way women are portrayed. It could be possible that feminist readers may perceive that these quotations reflect a sarcastically view of the way women have been valued as social beings, that is, the "ladies' men". For some other readers, these quotations could recognize the good way house chores have been traditionally assumed by women. Men and women's intellectual capacity of is also referred in terms of quotations mark. The narrator maintains that

women often try one branch of intellect after another in their youth, eg. mathematics. But that, of all is compatible with the life of "society". It is impossible to follow up anything systematically. Women often try to enter some man's profession where they would find direction, competition (or rather opportunity of measuring their intellect with other) and above all, time. (Nightingale: 805)

Readers may react to these marks since they promote an event: meaning. As Stanley E. Fish claims

Reading (and comprehension in general) is an event, no part of which is to be discarded. In that event, which is the actualization of meaning, the deep structure [implicit frame] plays an important role, but it is not everything; for we comprehend not in terms of the deep structure alone, but in terms of a relationship between the unfolding, in time, of the surface structure [explicit information provided through a frame] and a continual checking of it against our projection of what the deep structure will reveal itself to be. (1994: 86)

Therefore, processing the gaps demands from readers an active participation. But this participation is never the same for each reader fills the gaps according to his/her schemata.

Conclusions

The gaps presented at the textual level provoke different reactions towards the process of interpretation for they may be filled according to each reader's worldview at the interpretative level. For this reason, *Women's Time* from *Cassandra* can be rewritten from different ways or as Wolfgang Iser states, this text "is potentially capable of several different interpretations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled" (1994: 55).

In doing so, the reader reveals the dynamic nature of the reading process of this text. *Women's Time* is "realized" along with the reader which permits the *Konkretization* of the text as artistic creation and of the reader as esthetic experience. Both reader and text co-exist through the reading process re-creating each other. But the way they co-exist also depends on the world that surrounds them. As A. Egórov explains,

the artistic practice –regarding the artistic creation and the ideo-esthetic development in every person-, even though it is specific because of its task, particularity and form, it is strictly tied to other forms of human practice and all aspects of social life. That is why politics, philosophy and morality cannot be considered as extra-esthetic aspect in the realization of art ... On the contrary, these aspects become part of any esthetic experience because they are –through the artistic drama- "melted" in the esthetic consciousness of the human being. (1978: 197-198) (*The translation is mine*)

The text is developed with the reader and by the reader, the person who re-writes the unwritten parts through the use of his/her moral code, political position towards aspects related to gender and his/her experiences regarding the matter of what he/she reads. By this, the esthetic experience is the *konkretization* or realization of the text.

As a result of the interaction and transaction accomplished when decoding *Women's Time* into meaning(s), the reader becomes a co-author of the text. While the text tries –through the narrator- to frame certain ideas about gender roles in the reader's mind, the reader recreates the text according to his own schemata. Therefore, the text is re-written by the reader. The fact that none of the questions stated by the narrator comes to a definite concluding answer serves the purpose of co-authorship in the sense

that the reader is then required to render –at least internally- an opinion about the theme developed, and about each of the points of view used as illustrations of social values referred to gender roles. This means that the reader's background is necessary to construct and decode the text. According to Meyer and Pacheco, in their reading of Louise Rosenblatt, "the text and the reader should work together in a 'transactional process' in order to generate meaning ... the text is recreated every time a reader experiences it" (60) and this transactional process cannot be accomplished if the reader does not bring his own memories to the text. In this sense, the reader's background is very important because it provides readers with a variety of experiences that serve as a basis for opinions, understandings, evaluations, interpretations, and impressions of any given text; otherwise, *Women's Time* from *Cassandra* could be absolutely meaningless.

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