

Mapping the Self: Leonora Carrington's Journey through the Mad Mind in *Down Below*

LAURA DE LA PARRA FERNÁNDEZ

Universidad de Salamanca

lauradelaparra@usal.es

This article examines the Map of Down Below as a central element for understanding Leonora Carrington's *Down Below* (1944). Carrington's Surrealist memoir about madness, first dictated in French and then translated into and published in English, recounts her experience of being interned in a mental asylum during the early Francoist dictatorship in Spain while trying to flee from the Nazis in France. The text has often been read as a Surrealist autobiography contesting André Breton's *Nadja* (1928). However, and without disavowing this reading, I argue that the way in which Carrington narrates her experience of madness is a means to gather knowledge about the world and the Self beyond the literary and institutional conventions of the time, namely, autobiography and eugenic psychiatry as part of the authoritarian state. Thus, I explore how *Down Below*, as life writing, illuminates a form of truth that deviates from the autobiographical tradition of the unitarian Self. Carrington's found truth sheds light on other possibilities of experiencing—or creating—the Self, while she also challenges both the normative Francoist psychiatry and traditional life writing.

Keywords: Surrealism; Leonora Carrington; life writing; British modernism; medical humanities

...

Trazar un mapa del Yo:
el viaje de Leonora Carrington a través de la locura en *Down Below*

Este artículo examina el *Map of Down Below* como elemento central para comprender *Down Below* (1944), las memorias sobre la locura de la autora surrealista Leonora Carrington. El texto, primero dictado en francés y luego traducido al inglés y publicado en este idioma, relata la experiencia de cuando Carrington fue internada en un hospital psiquiátrico en los comienzos del franquismo mientras intentaba huir de los nazis en Francia. A menudo, el texto se ha leído como una autobiografía surrealista que pretende refutar la *Nadja* de André Breton (1928). Sin embargo, y sin desacreditar esta lectura, en este artículo argumento que Carrington narra su experiencia de la locura vista como medio para descubrir la realidad y el Yo más allá de las convenciones literarias e institucionales de la época, a saber, la autobiografía y la psiquiatría eugenésica como herramienta del estado autoritario. Por lo tanto, explico cómo *Down Below*, en tanto que autobiografía, muestra una forma de verdad que se desvía de la tradición autobiográfica del Yo unitario. La verdad que Carrington encuentra arroja luz sobre otras posibilidades de experimentar—o de crear—el Yo, a la vez que desafía la psiquiatría franquista normativa y la escritura autobiográfica tradicional.

Palabras clave: surrealismo; Leonora Carrington; escritura autobiográfica; modernismo británico; humanidades médicas

I. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE “FANTASY” OF THE SUBJECT

As Isabel Durán affirms, “autobiography has traditionally been a masculine institution: written by men about men, it has laid the foundations about notions such as what people are like, what lives are like, and how people and lives should be written about” (1992, 36; my translation).¹ This has led women authors of life writing, Durán claims, to search for different strategies to talk about themselves in various ways in order to find appropriate means “to express the truth about the ‘Self’” that clearly place that truth in relation to the community where their selves have emerged (1992, 36-37; my translation).² In canonical, androcentric autobiographies we can trace patterns of success in public life, as well as the transcendence of the private values needed to achieve this success: we may think, for instance, of pioneering texts such as Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* ([1771] 2012), Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* ([1782] 2008) or their ultimate predecessor, St. Augustine’s *Confessions* ([ca. 400 CE] 2009). However, Sidonie Smith notes that these textual strategies are often replicated in texts by women as a way of giving a recognisable account of the Self: “a pattern of progressive stages” is created that allows the autobiographer to trace “how she has become who she is: the childhood that moved her toward some vocation, her educational and intellectual experiences, her entrance into the public arena,” thus ultimately enhancing the “prevailing ideology of male selfhood” (1987, 52). In fact, canonical conceptions of autobiography figure the Self in a more or less romantic way: as a preexistent, unique, precultural entity that must be searched for, discovered and explored (Lang 1982, 4). In contrast, Durán points out that many women autobiographers dismiss the existence of an autonomous “Self” (1992, 37) and, instead, introduce a variation in the genre by highlighting how social relations are inextricably intertwined with the formation of the Self and how life writing does not actually rely on memory as its most eminent source (78).

As Candace Lang argues, from a poststructuralist standpoint autobiographers do not really recount their life through establishing a “factual” dialogue with or “reading of” their past Self; rather, this reading is entangled with present discourses wherein the writer responds to an Other—be it society, a specific addressee or the very Other manifested within discourse and language (1982, 16). Thus, the autobiographer is not just remembering the past, but rather engaging with the present reality through life writing, to the extent that they may even be said to *create* said reality. However, autobiography as a genre is so charged with fixed notions of identity that it encourages readers to read life writing in a certain light—as a “factual” account—thus hindering other readings. Leigh Gilmore argues that

¹ The Spanish source reads: “La autobiografía como género literario ha sido tradicionalmente una institución masculina: escrita por hombres y acerca de los hombres, ha sentado las bases de nociones tales como cómo son las personas, cómo son las vidas, y cómo debe escribirse sobre las personas y sobre sus vidas.”

² In the Spanish original, “para expresar la verdad del ‘Yo.’”

Autobiography provokes fantasies of the real. Its burden is not only to represent gender, genre, and identity in any particular lived and imagined configuration, but to posit a ground from which that configuration is thought to emerge. Gender, genre and identity and, therefore, autobiography, are similarly “grounded” in metaphysics, in the belief that representation is layered over substance. [...] this seeming *real* is, in no small part, fantasy. (1994, 16; italics in the original)

The notion of fantasy—fantasy as “truth” and fantasy as a plausible agent shaping reality—is an important element in life writing, and writing in general for that matter. In Leonora Carrington's *Down Below* (1944), a Surrealist memoir that recounts her internment in a mental asylum in Spain in 1940 as she tried to escape from the Nazis in France, the real and the imaginary—or, we might say, the surreal—play with each other in a way that can help to shed light on how to read autobiography as a genre whose literary value, or authority, does not depend on a preconfigured identity. Instead, Carrington's memoir challenges notions of the real, of genre, of gender and of “satisfactory” plot development in terms of presenting a cohesive, exemplary notion of how the Self came to be who he or she is, that is, fitting clearly into preconceived, metaphysical categories of identity. Indeed, Carrington's memoir discards a narrative of the unified Self and engenders a rhizomatic conception of subjectivity that also challenges hegemonic political forces, as I show below.

How, then, can we read autobiography as something other than—or something beyond—an account of a Self? As Gilmore points out, “the autobiographical subject is a representation and its representation *is* its construction” (1994, 25; italics in the original). Gilmore's claim opens up the possibility of subverting the very genre of autobiography, as well as the construction of the subject within the autobiographical text. The discourse in the text can then be interpreted as a “becoming” of sorts, constantly in the making and ultimately undoing the hegemonic idea of the Self and the Other. In this regard, in *Giving an Account of Oneself* Judith Butler suggests the possibility of developing a different theory of life writing. If we consider an autobiography—or any life story in general—as a canonical story where the Self must fit a preestablished frame of representation, then

this work on the self, this act of delimiting, takes place within the context of a set of norms that precede and exceed the subject. These are invested with power and recalcitrance, setting the limits to what will be considered to be an intelligible formation of the subject within a given historical scheme of things. There is no making of oneself [...] outside a mode of subjectivation [...] no self-making outside the norms that orchestrate the possible forms a subject may take. (Butler 2005, 17)

Social norms include narrative norms: rules for narrating the Self. For instance, a traditional narrative norm, used in fiction as well as autobiography, is causation; another is teleology—the reason for telling that story, which in autobiography has traditionally

been to teach something through the author's life example (Bal 2017). Carrington's *Down Below* is not, however, structured around these narrative norms, and even if we were to find some kind of narrative progression, end or purpose in her memoir, they do not stand out as particularly productive reading strategies in this case. Before going on to recount her experience in the asylum, the narrator warns us: "I am afraid I am going to drift into fiction, truthful but incomplete, for lack of some details which I cannot conjure up today and which might have enlightened us" (Carrington [1988] 2017, 19). That is to say, Leonora is not going to tell her story based on memory alone, but also on experience—an experience that is "truthful" even if parts of it may be fiction.³

As Butler claims, "if we require someone to be able to tell in story form the reasons why his or her life has taken the path that it has, that is, to be a coherent autobiographer, we may be preferring the seamlessness of the story to something we might tentatively call the truth of the person" (2005, 64). According to Butler, this "truth of a person [...] might well become more clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, [and] open-endedness" (64). Thus, my aim in this article is to examine Carrington's stoppages or breaks in giving her account of her asylum experience. I intend to explore how *Down Below*, as life writing, illuminates a form of truth about the subject that deviates from the autobiographical tradition of the unitarian Self. Carrington's found truth sheds light on other possibilities of experiencing—or creating—a Self, while she also challenges both normative Francoist psychiatry and traditional life writing. In sum, in this article I analyse how Carrington reappropriates the Surrealist tradition to convey her experience of madness through a new mode of representation that challenges and subverts the normative idea of the Self.

2. LEONORA CARRINGTON AND THE SURREALIST MEMOIR

In her study of postmodern literature in the light of the main tenets of Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* ([1975] 2018), experimental writer Christine Brooke-Rose argues that "certainly what used to be called empirical reality, or the world, seems to have become more and more unreal, and what has long been regarded as unreal is more and more turned to or studied as the only 'true' or 'another and equally valid' reality" (1981, 4). Surrealism—the term coined by Guillaume Apollinaire in the 1917 preface to his play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, written in 1903—means not the unreal or the incredible but rather, following the translation from the French *sur-*, "on top of" or "above" the real. Thus, Surrealism means "super-realism, hyperrealism, heightened realism" (Stockwell 2017, 3). Indeed, the experiences related in *Down Below* do seem somewhat "above the real," both as regards their cruelty and because of the way Carrington renders them, as if going beyond the material reality of things was the only way to accurately convey

³ Hereafter I use *Carrington* to refer to the author of the text and *Leonora* to refer to Carrington's representation of herself in the text, following Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact (1989).

them. While Carrington was in exile in Mexico, three years after her internment in a mental hospital in Francoist Spain, the French psychoanalyst Pierre Mabilie and his wife Jeanne Megnen listened to her remembered version of a manuscript of *Down Below* that she had written in New York in 1942 but was then lost.⁴ Megnen transcribed Carrington's dictation in French, which was then translated into English by Victor Lloná and published in the New York-based Surrealist journal *VVV* in 1944. Thus, the "you" in Carrington's memoir is Mabilie and Megnen (Gambrell 1993, 87). Carrington revised the 1944 text in 1987; this version, published in 1988 and edited by Marina Warner, is the one I have worked with for this article.⁵

The narrator, Leonora, starts her account by addressing her audience—and by extension, the reader—as a sort of confidante:

Since I fortuitously met you, whom I consider the most clear-sighted of all, I began gathering a week ago the threads which might have led me across the initial border of Knowledge. I must live through that experience all over again, because, by doing so, I believe that I may be of use to you, just as I believe that you will be of help in my journey beyond that frontier by keeping me lucid and by enabling me to put on and to take off at will the mask which will be my shield against the hostility of Conformism. (Carrington [1988] 2017, 3)

From this first page of *Down Below*, we can gather several points that are important for interpreting the narrative. Firstly, as already noted, there is an addressee, a receiver of the account, Mabilie and Megnen. Kristoffer Noheden shows that Carrington had recently read Mabilie's Surrealist classic *Mirror of the Marvelous* ([1922] 1998) and it had a deep influence on her use of esoteric imagery, such as alchemy, to access "a 'key' with which to decipher the world" (2014, 38). This indicates that Carrington shared collective myths and preoccupations with other exiled Surrealists (Noheden 2014, 47-49), as Gloria Orenstein (1982) and Natalya Lusty (2017) also note. However, there may be further addressees: other Surrealists and readers in general. As Shoshana Felman affirms, "an address is not merely an intellectual and emotional appeal. It is *an act of empowerment*" (1993, 127; italics in the original). Leonora addressing the reader directly makes the act of telling her story charged with intention, force and power, indicating as it does that she will guide us through the journey that led her to knowledge. Not only

⁴ In 1941, Carrington escaped from Madrid to Lisbon, where she married the Mexican writer Renato Leduc in order to obtain a visa to travel to the US, where she joined other exiled European Surrealists. She then moved to Mexico City with her husband, where the government was granting citizenship to people fleeing the Nazis (Warner 2017, xxx).

⁵ In her discussion of the 1944 manuscript, Andrea Gremels underlines that, in the preface to the Spanish version published in the Peruvian journal *Las Moradas* in 1948, "Mabilie emphasizes that Jeanne Megnen only helped Carrington to specify certain aspects of her text and to arrange some chaotic passages, but did not make any fundamental changes in the text's composition" (2020, 89n6). See also Alice Gambrell (1993) for an exploration of the differences between the *VVV* text and the revised 1988 edition. Gambrell concludes that Carrington altered the 1944 text to complicate the idea of "factual accuracy" (1993, 98).

that, but she warns the reader that she will not tell the story based on her memory, but rather, she will relive the experience. In this regard, Carrington's son, Gabriel Weisz Carrington, has claimed in an interview that his mother dictated the 1942 manuscript by heart, but that "rewriting meant visiting what she had lived in the mental hospital" while, at the same time, it was "a healing process" (2020, 210). Indeed, authors such as Ann Hoff (2009), Lusty (2017), Andrea Gremels (2020) and Alessia Zinnari (2020) have read *Down Below* through the lens of trauma theory, wherein the memoir is considered a means for Carrington to work through traumatic memories. Further, Leonora's account bestows a performative quality upon the text: unlike other madness narratives where the narrator "remembers" madness, in *Down Below* the narrator and the mad character are fused into one single voice (Fox 2008, 162). As Gremels claims, "far more than writing *about* madness, Carrington writes *with* madness," a practice that destabilises the factual expectations of a memoir (2020, 85; italics in the original). Furthermore, I argue that Carrington's memoir shows how the "truth" of the person arises precisely in what Butler calls the "stoppages" (2005, 64) or breaks that emerged in the reworking not only of her memories, but also of the text, insofar as the story needed to be retold to Mabelle and Megren for Carrington to gain the knowledge mentioned previously about a nonunitarian conception of the Self. On the other hand, the narrator does not deauthorise the—now healed—"mad" voice as mainstream madness narratives tend to do but, rather, what is real and what is delusional intertwine and the experienced madness actually enriches the account.⁶ At the beginning, Leonora claims: "The time had not come for me yet to understand. What I am going to endeavour to express here with the utmost fidelity was but an embryo of knowledge" (Carrington [1988] 2017, 4). This implies that it is the telling of the experience itself that enacts this knowledge, while also providing the reader with access to it. The text provides an account of the Self in its becoming, acknowledging that there is no fixed account of the Self and, therefore, following Gilmore (1994), no fixed Self. Further, the text's eventful history of production reveals that there is no telling of this Self that occurs in a void, as both the Self and its telling are affected by internal and external change.

In this sense, *Down Below* can also be read as a response to the representation of women, particularly the madwoman, by fellow male Surrealists. Critics such as Mary Ann Caws (1991), Gwen Raaberg (1991) and Katharine Conley (1996) point out that the Surrealists were concerned with the role of woman in the (male) subject's search for transformation into an undiscovered Self. Despite being a movement that included women's work in publications and exhibitions from its inception (Rosemont 1998a, xxx), Surrealism often represented women as sexualised objects undergoing patriarchal violence (Caws 1991, 11). Surrealism depicted woman as "*femme-enfant*, muse, source and object of man's desire, embodiment of *amour fou*, and emblem of revolution"

⁶ On "textbook" madness narratives, see Brendan Stone (2004), who argues that narratives that aim to represent the unsayability of madness disavow the authority of the coherent subject and engender the speaker's vulnerability by reenacting its supposedly unspeakable traumas.

(Raaberg 1991, 2; italics in the original). This objectification of woman presented a problem for women Surrealists for it hindered their individual, autonomous subjectivity when creating art, and it also poses a problem for scholars who study the work of women Surrealists who borrowed from these tropes (Suleiman 1988, 162-66). A good example of the Surrealist madwoman can be found in André Breton's *Nadja* (1928), which *Down Below* can be read as a foil to (Orenstein 1982; Conley 1996; Lusty 2003). Breton's roman à clef describes the poet's encounter with Nadja, a woman suffering from psychic distress. Breton obsesses over Nadja's ability to transcend the realm of consciousness and yearns for access into the world of madness himself. However, when Nadja's condition worsens and she turns to Breton for help, she becomes unbearable to him. That is, when Nadja tries to reach a connection with an Other, Breton cannot acknowledge that the reality of her suffering does not match his idea of madness and abandons her. The real Nadja, Léona Camille Ghislaine, died imprisoned in a mental asylum in northern France in 1940 (Rosemont 1998b, 28-29). *Down Below*, therefore, reclaims the experience of the madwoman and "restores the silenced and abjected figure of Nadja in Breton's text" (Lusty 2003, 337). However, the articulation of Leonora's descent into madness is a challenge in itself, for how can Carrington escape from portraying herself as the stereotypical Surrealist *femme-enfant* or *femme-sorcière*?⁷

In her influential essay "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy" (1975), Felman traces the historical link between woman and madness and concludes that

The woman is "madness" to the extent that she is Other, *different* from man. But "madness" is the absence of "womanhood" to the extent that "womanhood" is precisely what *resembles* the Masculine universal equivalent, in the polar division of sexual roles. If so, the woman is "madness" since the woman is *difference*; but "madness" is "non-woman" since madness is the lack of resemblance. [...] "madness" [...] is nothing other than *feminine difference*. (1975, 8; italics in the original)

Discourses of female madness, Felman argues, have been left unspoken and are often "spoken for" (1975, 4), as is the case of *Nadja*. From a feminist standpoint, then, the problem is how to translate this double experience of difference—being female and mad—with all its violence and unspeakability in order for it to be recognised, without reifying patriarchal tropes and representations of suffering. If Surrealism was concerned with "the ability to transform the personal myths of artists into collective myths, and [...] the emancipation of man" (Noheden 2014, 49), the problem for women Surrealists was how to express their subjectivity while sharing the ideals of male Surrealists. As Jonathan P. Eburne claims, Carrington's *Down Below* is part of this dialogue between

⁷ In his *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, which aimed to assert the Surrealist canon, Breton only included Carrington's "The Debutante" and Gisèle Prasinno's poetry in the final (1966) version. There he nicknames Carrington "*la Sorcière*," discusses her beauty and age and reinforces the stereotype that women are closer to madness than men (Breton 1966, 557-59).

the political, the artistic and the individual, as it “strove to articulate new forms of commitment, collectivity, and knowledge” (2008, 219). In this way, *Down Below* interrogates how the female Self may be constructed, narrated and performed after the unspeakable experience of madness, while leaving behind fixed, essentialist notions of the subject and male Surrealists’ representations of women’s madness.

Leonora’s madness can be read as mimetic of the world’s ongoing madness and suffering at the time due to the rise of fascism, the outbreak of the Second World War and the terrible persecution and torture many were about to suffer. We know that Leonora begins to feel the first symptoms of her illness or suffering when she learns of her partner, the Surrealist artist Max Ernst, being imprisoned after the German occupation of France. She says that she “indulged in voluntary vomitings,” “ate very sparingly” and “took sunbaths” (Carrington [1988] 2017, 4-5). As Lusty has noted, Leonora identifies the world’s pain with her own pain and “strives to redeem the world” through her body (2003, 346; see also Hoff 2009, 87-90). Leonora claims that she “had realised the injustice of society,” and adds: “I wanted first of all to cleanse myself, then go beyond its brutal ineptitude. My stomach was the seat of that society, but also the place in which I was united with all the elements of the earth. It was the mirror of the earth, the reflection of which is just as real as the person reflected” (Carrington [1988] 2017, 4). As Susan Bordo suggests, women’s bodies “[are] not only a *text* of culture. [They are] [...] also [...] a *practical*, direct locus of social control” ([1993] 2003, 165; italics in the original). Wanting to exercise control over the world, Leonora turns inward and attempts to control her body, foreshadowing the violence that fascist authorities and Spanish psychiatrists will exert on it when she gets to Madrid: “This was,” she claims, “the first stage of my identification with the external world” (Carrington [1988] 2017, 7). As Leonora reaches Barcelona, she “chokes on the dead” and sees “the red earth [as] the dried Blood of the Civil War” (11); on her arrival in Madrid she is raped by *requeté* soldiers, drugged and sent to an asylum in Santander.⁸ These events are narrated in passing, while her “visions” about the citizens of Madrid are given prominence. Leonora explains that those days in Madrid between July and August 1940 can be used as “a crystal” that encloses “my own experiences as well as the past and future history of the Universe” (19). Aware that she is breaking linear time and progression, both standard requirements of fiction and autobiography, the narrator wants us to reconsider the way that her experience may encapsulate various times all at once, as well as different rhizomatic selves. These are selves whose bodily boundaries are broken through her identification with her surroundings:

I worshipped myself in such moments. I worshipped myself because I saw myself complete—I was all, all was in me; I rejoiced at seeing my eyes become miraculously solar systems,

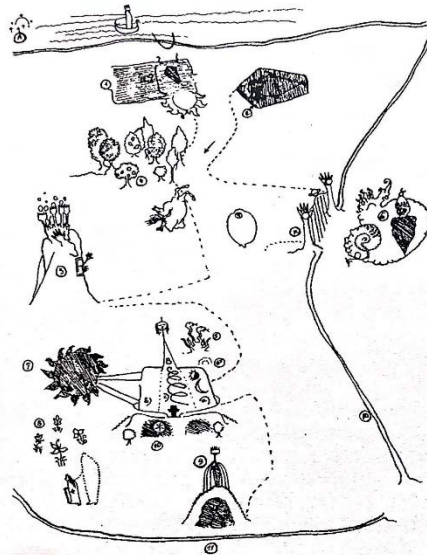
⁸ The *requeté* was a paramilitary far-right association that defended the values of tradition, Catholicism and the Carlist monarchy and was radically opposed to Marxism.

kindled by their own light; my movements, a vast and free dance, in which everything was ideally mirrored by every gesture, a limpid and faithful dance; my intestines, which vibrated in accord with Madrid's painful digesting, satisfied me just as much. (20)

In the next section, I explore how, through Surrealist strategies, Leonora captures her rhizomatic selves throughout her stay at the asylum as a way to contest the violent treatment and the restrictive notion of Self that others—particularly the institutions of the family, psychiatry and the nation—want to impose on her.

3. MAPPING THE MAD MIND

When Leonora regains consciousness from the strong dose of barbiturate she has been administered, not knowing how long she has been asleep or where she is anymore, and finds herself tied up, slapped and force-fed, she is told that she has “acted like various animals” on the few occasions that she has woken up (Carrington [1988] 2017, 22-23). As she feels herself to be “drifting” in “some unknown and hostile country,” which she at first mistakes for a concentration camp (23), her strategy is to find knowledge about herself, or her selves, and her surroundings, since everything around her, including her own state, is alien to her. This exploration is reflected in the Map of Down Below that is included in the text (36) but is mentioned for the first time about ten pages earlier when she discusses going outside with her “keeper,” Frau Asegurado, and discovers that she is still in Spain: “By looking at the map, you will see the respective positions of Villa Pilar, Radiografía [*sic*], Covadonga, Amachu and Abajo (Down Below); that will enable you to get your bearings” (25). Upon reading this, the reader is likely to imagine a realistic map that complies with the rules of cartography. Cartography, as Kathleen M. Kirby notes, developed in the Enlightenment as “an expression of the new form of subjectivity and a technology” (1996, 45), particularly performing the European subjectivity of ownership and placing boundaries between territories (1996, 46). As Kirby points out, “one could transfer this insight [on cartography] into the realm of the subject by pointing out the emphasis upon ‘propriety’ and ‘own-ness’ in the ‘oneness’ of the Enlightenment individual” (1996, 46), which involves homogenising and standardising the subject to conform to a set of rules dictated by scientific discourse. However, when the reader of *Down Below* finally encounters the map, it looks nothing like a traditional map: it is handwritten, full of scribblings, figures and drawings (figure 1). As Stacey Fox argues, “Carrington’s ‘mad’ mapping [...] resists the scientific and classificatory imperatives of psychiatry, [and] it might also be said to imagine a relationship between the subject and space alternative to a fascist insistence upon firmly maintained boundaries” (2008, 228). The map disrupts preconceived conceptions of external time and space, as well as the boundaries of representation of a unified Self, and engages with the Self’s becoming during its journey through time and space.

FIGURE 1. Map of Down Below (1944), ink on paper⁹*Key to the map*

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. A desert scene, Covagonda cemetery | 7. "Down Below" |
| B. High wall surrounding the garden | 8. Kitchen garden |
| X. Gate of the garden | 9. Bower and cave |
| 1. Villa Covagonda | 10. Don Mariano's "place" |
| 2. Radiography | 11. "Outside World" Street |
| 3. Villa Pilar | a. My room at "Down Below," the
eclipse and the limbos |
| 4. Apple trees and the view of Casa
Blanca and the valley | b. The lair |
| 5. "Africa" | c. The library |
| 6. Villa Amachu | Wide "Down Below" alley |
| 6b. Arbour | |

Thus, the Map of Down Below presents the subject's journey towards derecognition and deterritorialisation as a way to come to terms with the authoritarian, violent ideas of the nation that were spreading across Europe, for it "calls into question scientific models of knowledge and the authoritative possession of space. [...] [The map] inscribes multiple perspectives and calls for imaginative engagement" (Fox 2008, 192). Even though Leonora cannot move freely by herself—she has been abducted, raped, drugged and administered dangerous psychiatric treatment—she charts her own understanding of her journey by means of the map, gaining agency in the telling of the knowledge that she has gathered and sharing it with the community. The Map of Down Below, inserted as though it were a real document, object or material from everyday life—a piece of *realia*—in order to comply with readers' expectations for an autobiographical text, plays with the genre as well as with the hegemonic idea of authenticity since, even if the map does not represent a real place, it represents Leonora's journey through

⁹ The map was first published in the VVV version of *Down Below*.

madness in an accurate, authoritative way. Interestingly, Joanna Moorhead's biography of Carrington, which relies on *Down Below* to provide a factual account of her stay in the asylum in Santander (2017, ch. 6), claims that the asylum's location, now a public park, is "almost exactly as Leonora drew it" (2017, ch. 6). As Kirby indicates, "cartography institutes a particular kind of boundary between the subject and space, but is also itself a site of interface, mediating the relationship between space and the subject and constructing each in its own particularly ossified way" (1996, 47). The map can, then, can be read as a Surrealist strategy to break with life writing conventions as well as with authoritarian narratives of knowledge and the Self.

Despite its centrality in the narrative, Carrington's map has not been discussed thoroughly by critics. In addition to Fox (2008), whose contribution is referenced subsequently, three exceptions are Eburne (2008), Ella Mudie (2014) and Gremels (2020). In his discussion of *Down Below* as war writing, Eburne writes that "Carrington's more intricate drawing of the Santander hospital [...] presents both a map of suffering and an imposition of certainty" (2008, 225-26). Eburne interprets the map as a "solution" to Leonora's madness as well as that of the world, along with it being a way to transform her madness into an epistemic quest for "alternative practices of social organization and knowledge production that had been lost, destroyed or discredited" (2008, 243). Mudie, on the other hand, considers Carrington's engagement with mapping "feminine" in contrast with a Cartesian, rational approach, and claims that "Carrington's central dilemma in *Down Below* ultimately runs counter to the disorienting impulses of surrealist [*sic*] cartographies in so far as Carrington must learn to appropriate mapping strategies in order to navigate her way back to psychic self-mastery" (2014, 145-46). For Mudie, this deterritorialisation and defamiliarisation places Carrington "off the map," for Carrington needs to "draw her own boundaries in order to construct a terrain of self-knowledge and self-understanding" (2014, 151-52). Finally, Gremels understands the map as an attempt to project Leonora's experience of madness onto reality, defying the reader's idea of the real (2020, 94). The map, then, breaks the reader's expectations of a memoir and prioritises the experience of the madness mapped onto the Self and the reality that surrounds that Self.

Although the map may have initially been drawn at the time of her internment, given that she managed to obtain paper and pencil (Carrington [1988] 2017, 31, 45, 54, 57), it is nevertheless placed in the narrative for the reader to follow Leonora through her "epistemological crisis"—borrowing Mudie's term (2014, 145)—during her mental breakdown, abduction to be placed in an asylum and eventual escape.¹⁰ The map portrays Leonora's journey to the asylum mapped onto what she perceived to be the asylum's grounds. The route, however, does not correspond with the numbers and, as Fox notes, there is in fact no "logical" numbering sequence (2008, 195): the dotted

¹⁰ Mudie, like other critics who advocate the factual authenticity of Carrington's text, claims that the Map of *Down Below* plays a "documentary role in the text as it both authenticates the asylum as a real geographical location whilst providing a document of Carrington's insanity" (2014, 151).

line does not follow the numbers in ordinal sequence; there is A, B, X, 1 through 11 (including 6b), and finally a, b and c; and “Wide ‘Down Below’ alley” is not numbered. Multiple human figures can be also seen on the map—multiple selves or reflections of Leonora during her journey. To a certain extent, it is impossible to read the map as a whole or in a linear way: “the map disclaims the possibility of obtaining complete or objective knowledge of the space of the asylum” (Fox 2008, 196). Thus, only in breaks or fragments can we enter the guide that Carrington provides for *Down Below*.

If we connect the map’s key to the actual images on the map, number 1, “Villa Covadonga,” “a pavilion for the dangerously and incurably insane named after Don Mariano’s daughter who died” (Carrington [1988] 2017, 24), shows a coffin being brought through a gate lit by the sun. This may refer to Leonora’s fears of becoming like said daughter, or to her arrival—we should remember that she was “handed over like a cadaver” because of the effects of the barbiturate administered in Madrid (18). Number 2, “Radiography,” shows a body with two heads inside a coffin. This perhaps represents Leonora’s dissociation into madness or her epistemological crisis upon trying to find a solution for the state of the world; Fox’s plausible reading identifies it with the place where she was injected with pentylenetetrazol, a stimulating drug used in convulsive therapy that causes seizures (2008, 194), while Susan L. Aberth associates this image with alchemical death and resurrection (2004, 50). Number 3 represents “Villa Pilar,” an anthropomorphically shaped sandcastle-like construction where Leonora finds Alberto—the figure waving his hands through the window—the physician from Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) who had brought her to Santander and whom she first believes to be “a prisoner” like her (Carrington [1988] 2017, 26).¹¹ In number 4, “Apple trees and the view of Casa Blanca and the valley,” we find a human heart among the trees—possibly Leonora’s heart, her love for Ernst, which has been discarded along the way, or her attempt to solve the utter chaos the world had become immersed in.

Numbers 8, 9 and 10—“Kitchen garden,” “Bower and cave” and “Don Mariano’s ‘place’” —also portray anthropomorphic figures, the first a woman with a walking stick accompanied by a shadow or ghost, the second a woman in a cage, and the third a woman with a body that represents a cosmology. This woman sits right next to number 7, “Down Below,” a huge, blazing sun: “it was called Abajo (Down Below), and people lived there very happily. To reach that paradise, it was necessary to resort to mysterious means which I believed were the divination of the Whole Truth” (35). As Fox suggests, all the figures “can easily be read as self-representations, as inscriptions of the subjective” (2008, 195). The Map of Down Below allows multiple representations of the Self to coexist simultaneously or, in Leonora’s words, “I had found what was essential to solving the problem of Myself in relation to the Sun” (Carrington [1988] 2017, 44). Unlike a

¹¹ Carrington’s father was a shareholder in ICI. Although Carrington’s narrative mentions this only in passing, Julia Salmerón provides archival evidence of Carrington’s father’s involvement in her incarceration in the asylum (1997, 91).

unitarian, Cartesian Self, Carrington represents the Self as a community of selves and subjectivities, each needing to coexist with the others in order to reach Down Below.¹²

Her will to “solve the problem” may be interpreted as the “Absolute Knowledge” (45) that Leonora needs in order to construct herself as a subject in this new terrain. The sun is “a traditional representation of masculinity” (Zinnari 2020, 32) and, therefore, patriarchal authority. Leonora must thus learn to relate to it without submitting to it and to incorporate it into her common knowledge. Hence her representation in number 10 of a woman’s head whose body contains the moon—the feminine—and what appears to be the universe, as an attempt to capture the totality of the experience both inside and outside the Self. The problem of how to construct oneself before the totalising forces of institutional violence is, therefore, also a narrative one: that of narrating the Self that has been fractured and shattered, has gained knowledge along the way, and is impossible to narrate without breaking narrative conventions—in other words, the problem of how to understand a Self that has become an Other. This project is completed, as Eburne argues, in the telling of the narrative to others, such that Leonora’s suffering is no longer personal but collective (2008, 228). Leonora explains her “solution”—a full identification with the Other—thus:

I believe that I was being put through purifying tortures so that I might attain Absolute Knowledge, at which point I could live Down Below. The pavilion with this name was for me the Earth, the Real World, Paradise, Eden, Jerusalem. Don Luis and Don Mariano were God and His Son. I thought they were Jewish; I thought that I, a Celtic and Saxon Aryan, was undergoing my sufferings to avenge the [*sic*] José for the persecutions they were being subjected to. Later, with full lucidity, I would go Down Below, as the third person of the Trinity. I felt that, through the agency of the Sun, I was an androgyne, the Moon, the Holy Ghost, a gypsy, an acrobat, Leonora Carrington, and a woman. I was also destined to be, later, Elizabeth of England. I was she who revealed religions and bore on her shoulders the freedom and the sins of the earth changed into Knowledge, the union of Man and Woman with God and the Cosmos, all equal between them. (Carrington [1988] 2017, 44-45)

In this fragment, according to Zinnari, “Down Below becomes a sacred utopia within the heterotopia of the asylum, but it is also converted into the liminal setting par excellence, represented by the sacred/liminal territory of Jerusalem” (2020, 31). This spatial subversion is related to the alchemical idea of the death and rebirth of the Self, as can also be traced in the alchemical symbols of the sun and the moon present in the map (Noheden 2014; Zinnari 2020). From a poststructuralist perspective on the subject, the passage shows a Deleuzian rhizomatic Self: a Self that is related to multiple selves, who in turn affect her shifting subjectivity. As with a rhizome, there is no single subject or

¹² In English, *down below* is also a euphemism used to refer to a woman’s genitals. The metaphor of sexual liberation, together with bodily and mental freedom, is worth exploring further.

unity, but a multiplicity of connections that inform one another; the Self is thus in a state of constant change: “Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 8). The rhizomatic Self is, like a map, “detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (1987, 12). Carrington’s map thus enacts these connections, changes and becomings of the subject in a nonlinear way. Through experiencing the world on the inside and the outside, the blame of the victimiser and the pain of the victimised, escaping from identity limits such as time, gender, space and materiality, Leonora copes with suffering and projects a new vision of equality, freedom and the liberty to experience the Self in a variety of different ways—in connection with her surroundings, not separate from them. Even though, after she is freed, Leonora realises that “Cardiazol was a simple injection and not an effect of hypnotism; that Don Luis was not a sorcerer but a scoundrel; that Covadonga and Amachu and Down Below were not Egypt, China, and Jerusalem, but pavilions for the insane and that I should get out as quickly as possible” (Carrington [1988] 2017, 62), she does not disregard or correct her previous experience of madness, but rather avows it as a valid way to cope with suffering and see beyond human misery and destruction by exploring different facets of the Self and, most importantly, sharing this knowledge with others. In fact, through Leonora’s identification of the pavilions where she suffers the mistreatment of the institution of psychiatry with the Exodus in the Old Testament and the parallel with events happening in the Second World War, her musings become a reflection on violence exerted on the Other and the solitude of not being able to share this pain, which is also the pain of oppressed people.

The previous excerpt also lends itself to an ironic reading: that of Leonora performing madness in order to disrupt the expectations of the psychiatrists. Fox points out that “it is also possible to read her ‘delusions’ as rebellious self-assertion and as a refusal to comply with a psychiatric narrative in which clinical treatment produces compliant and feminine behaviour” (2008, 187). In a conversation with Don Luis (Dr. Morales) after he has administered the convulsive drug to her for the first time, Leonora claims that she “can do anything, thanks to knowledge,” to which Dr. Morales replies by asking her to make him “the greatest physician in the world” (Carrington [1988] 2017, 30). Leonora promises to grant his wish if he frees her and describes a Druidic temple outside—possibly number 3 or 10 on the map—where she “shall teach [him] [her] knowledge” (31). She later hands him a piece of paper with a triangle drawn on it that “to [her] way of thinking, explained everything” (31). She also tells him, authoritatively: “*I have no delusions*, I am playing. When will you stop playing with me?” (55; italics in the original). By turning madness into a performative game, Leonora inverts the balance of power in the doctor/patient relationship: she is “playing” because Dr. Morales “plays” with her through psychiatry. In her diary, Anaïs Nin points out that the Surrealists “played” with the unconscious, but asserts that “Eleanora [*sic*]

had gone too far, almost too far to return from those regions" (1969, 238).¹³ Leonora later learns through Frau Asegurado that "Don Luis had gone mad" in order "to take a vacation from himself" (Carrington [1988] 2017, 37), which subverts the doctor/patient hierarchy even further by portraying the doctor as the one who is actually mad. In fact, Dr. Morales himself later recognised in an interview with Julia Salmerón that meeting Carrington challenged his own views on psychiatry (Salmerón 1997, 234).

If we look at the map, "Wide 'Down Below' alley" is nowhere to be seen graphically, but rather it is indicated as the way to reach Down Below. We can therefore assume that that "Wide 'Down Below' alley" is the text itself where the map is placed, the memoir *Down Below*, and its potential to lead to an understanding of the experience of madness in all its multifaceted complexity. Moreover, the fact that neither the map nor the narrative allows for a single, linear reading makes space for a multiplicity of narratives to coexist at once—a kind of empathetic, inclusive knowledge that leads Leonora to understand "the pain of the world" that she projects onto herself.

4. CONCLUSION

Following Allyson Booth's reflections on the role of cartography in the First World War, Fox argues that if wartime mapping involves an erasure of "the violence and bodily destruction of the war" as well as "the investment in the ability of maps to order and organise space and bodies in ways that lead to the damage or destruction of those bodies," Carrington, on the other hand, refuses to omit "the subjective from her map [...] as a determination to keep in view the suffering caused by the war (or psychiatry)" (2008, 229). Full of anthropomorphic figures, alchemical symbols and various spaces connected by a dotted line, Carrington's map aims to contain at one and the same time her experience and her surroundings as well as the world's pain and hope in a way that creates a new understanding of reality and of the Self.

As has been argued throughout this article, Carrington bestows authority upon the voice of the madwoman narrator and "refuse[s] a pathological narrative of self" (Fox 2008, 176). The narrative voice merges with the present-time narrator recounting her experience not by remembering it, but by *reliving* it. In a 1993 article in *El País*, Dr. Morales claimed that "Leonora, in 1941, healed when she adapted to the society of that time. Her mission had ended" (1993; my translation).¹⁴ But I disagree: Carrington did not adapt. The proof that refutes his statement is the text itself: the account of what her journey through madness meant and the epilogue added in the 1988 edition both confirm the knowledge she gained, how she integrated it into her life and how she used it

¹³ In her discussion of Carrington's influence on Nin's work, Fox argues that Nin fictionalised Carrington's persona in her diary, mistaking, among other details, Carrington and Ernst's marital status—they were never married, but Nin assumes they were—and Carrington's name (2008, 12).

¹⁴ The original Spanish reads: "Leonora, en 1941, sanó al adaptarse a la sociedad de entonces. Su misión había terminado."

to combat the authoritarian ideologies that caused her internment in the first place. In a 1994 interview, Carrington claimed: “I am armed with madness for a long voyage” (quoted in Abelleira 2000, 33). Carrington used madness as a weapon, not only metaphorically in her memoir through the representation of Leonora’s madness as a way to understand the world around her, but also in the writing of *Down Below* itself. Her representation of the experience of madness allowed Carrington to disrupt hegemonic knowledge and gain access to a different representation of the Self, therefore questioning the status quo and confronting the terrible consequences of not adapting to society.

Carrington told Moorhead that “at least being mad gets rid of all your fixed ideas about yourself” (quoted in Moorhead 2017, ch. 6). Butler explains that “suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same” (2005, 42). In *Down Below*, Leonora suspends a fixed identity of the Self not only as a way to protect herself from the harmful events that surround her, but also to counter the forces that demand a monolithic identity which, as Butler claims, “is occasioned by a normative discourse whose temporality is not the same as a first-person perspective” (2005, 42). Thus, in this decentring of identity—at least in the temporal experience of the narration, and by way of its breaking with the autobiographical genre—Carrington allows a different knowledge—of the Self, the world and the Other—to illuminate her words.¹⁵

WORKS CITED

- ABELLEYRA, Angélica. 2000. “Leonora Carrington: Discovering Diverging Worlds.” *Voices of Mexico* 53: 33–40.
- ABERTH, Susan L. 2004. *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*. Aldershot: Lund Humphries.
- APOLLINAIRE, Guillaume. (1917) 2019. *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. Paris: Arvensa.
- AUGUSTINE. (ca. 400 CE) 2009. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick and edited by Patrick Coleman. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- BAL, Mieke. 2017. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: U of Toronto P.
- BORDO, Susan. (1993) 2003. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: U of California P.
- BRETON, André. 1966. *Anthologie de l'humour noir*. Paris: Pauvert.
- . (1928) 1972. *Nadja*. Paris: Gallimard.

¹⁵ The research underpinning this article was carried out thanks to a Visiting Fellowship for Doctoral Research Fellows granted by the Spanish Ministry of Education (EST2017/0008) for a short research period at Harvard University. The author also wishes to acknowledge the support of the research project “Gender and Pathography from a Transnational Perspective,” funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (PID2020-113330-GB-I00).

- BROOKE-ROSE, Christine. 1981. *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative Structure, Especially of the Fantastic*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- BUTLER, Judith. 2005. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham UP.
- CARRINGTON, Leonora. (1988) 2017. *Down Below*. Edited by Marina Warner. New York: NYRB Classics.
- CAWS, Mary Ann. 1991. "Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a Problem." In Caws, Kuenzli and Raaberg 1991, 11-16.
- CAWS, Mary Ann, Rudolph E. Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg, eds. 1991. *Surrealism and Women*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- CONLEY, Katharine. 1996. *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P.
- COX, Ailsa et al., eds. 2020. *Leonora Carrington: Living Legacies*. Wilmington, DE: Vernon.
- DELEUZE, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- DUNCAN, Nancy, ed. 1996. *BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- DURÁN, Isabel. 1992. "La estrategia del 'otro' en la autobiografía norteamericana femenina del siglo XX." *REDEN: Revista Española de Estudios Norteamericanos* 5: 36-47.
- EBURNE, Jonathan P. 2008. *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.
- EBURNE, Jonathan P. and Catriona McAra, eds. 2017. *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*. Manchester: Manchester UP.
- FELMAN, Shoshana. 1975. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics* 5 (4): 2-10.
- . 1993. *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP.
- FOX, Stacey. 2008. "The Idea of Madness in Dorothy Richardson, Leonora Carrington and Anaïs Nin." PhD diss., University of Western Australia.
- FRANKLIN, Benjamin. (1771) 2012. *Autobiography*. Edited by Joyce E. Chaplin. New York: Norton.
- GAMBRELL, Alice. 1993. *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference: Transatlantic Culture 1919-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- GILMORE, Leigh. 1994. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.
- GREMELS, Andrea. 2020. "Lucid Madness as Method? Surrealist Style in Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*." In Cox et al. 2020, 83-100.
- HOFF, Ann. 2009. "'I Was Convulsed, Pitiably Hideous': Convulsive Shock Treatment in Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32 (3): 83-98.

- KIRBY, Kathleen M. 1996. "Re: Mapping Subjectivity: Cartographic Vision and the Limits of Politics." In Duncan 1996, 45-56.
- LANG, Candace. 1982. "Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism." *Diacritics* 12 (4): 2-16.
- LEJEUNE, Philippe. 1989. *On Autobiography*. Translated by Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- LUSTY, Natalya. 2003. "Surrealism's Banging Door." *Textual Practice* 17 (2): 335-56.
- . 2017. "Experience and Knowledge in *Down Below*." In Eburne and McAra 2017, 57-71.
- MABILLE, Pierre. (1922) 1998. *Mirror of the Marvelous: The Surrealist Reimagining of Myth*. Translated by Joddy Gladding. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- MOORHEAD, Joanna. 2017. *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*. London: Virago. Kindle edition.
- MORALES, Luis. 1993. "La enfermedad de Leonora." *El País*, April 18. [Accessed October 15, 2018].
- MUDIE, Ella. 2014. "The Map of Down Below: Leonora Carrington's Liminal Cartography." *English Language Notes* 52 (1): 145-54.
- NIN, Anaïs. 1969. *Diary (1939-1944)*. New York: Harvest/HBJ.
- NOHEDEN, Kristoffer. 2014. "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation: Symbolic Death and Rebirth in *Little Francis* and *Down Below*." *Correspondences* 2 (1): 35-65.
- ORENSTEIN, Gloria. 1982. "Reclaiming the Great Mother: A Feminist Journey to Madness and Back in Search of a Goddess Heritage." *Symposium* 36 (1): 45-70.
- RAABERG, Gwen. 1991. "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism." In Caws, Kuenzli and Raaberg 1991, 1-10.
- ROSEMONT, Penelope. 1998a. "All My Names Know Your Leap: Surrealist Women and their Challenge." In Rosemont 1998c, xxix-lvii.
- , 1998b. "The First Women Surrealists, 1924-1929." In Rosemont 1998c, 1-40.
- , ed. 1998c. *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. Austin: U of Texas P.
- ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques. (1782) 2008. *Confessions*. Translated by Angela Scholar. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- SALMERÓN, Julia. 1997. "'Errant in Time and Space': A Reading of Leonora Carrington's Major Literary Works." PhD diss., University of Hull.
- SMITH, Sidonie. 1987. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- STOCKWELL, Peter. 2017. *The Language of Surrealism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- STONE, Brendan. 2004. "Towards a Writing without Power: Notes on the Narration of Madness." *Auto/Biography* 12 (1): 16-33.
- SULEIMAN, Susan Rubin. 1988. "A Double Margin: Reflections on Women Writers and the Avant-Garde in France." *Yale French Studies* 75: 148-72.
- TODOROV, Tzvetan. (1975) 2018. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Translated by Richard Howard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.

- WARNER, Marina. 2017. Introduction to *Down Below*, by Leonora Carrington, vii-xxxvii. Edited by Marina Warner. New York: NYRB Classics.
- WEISZ Carrington, Gabriel. 2020. "In Conversation with Gabriel Weisz Carrington." Interview by Roger Shannon. In Cox et al. 2020, 209-18.
- ZINNARI, Alessia. 2020. "I was in another place': The Liminal Journey in Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*." In Cox et al. 2020, 19-39.

Received 28 February 2020

Revised version accepted 15 February 2021

Laura de la Parra Fernández is a full-time lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Salamanca. She holds a PhD in Literary Studies from the Complutense University of Madrid, where she completed a four-year research and teaching fellowship funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education (FPU-MECD). She has been a visiting scholar at Birkbeck College, University of London, and at Harvard University.