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DOSSIER: Words and Rhythm, Sound and Text

Resonantly Reading Borderlands Narratives in Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive*

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ABSTRACT: Whereas written texts are often perceived as silent, stable, and solitary, attuning to the sonic dimensions of literatures means recognizing how sound crosses borders and opens ears to multiplicity and simultaneity. In this essay, I propose resonant reading as a way of listening to the voices underlying a literary narrative and amplifying its themes, then I advocate for why this attunement towards aural literacies is especially important for borderlands narratives. I demonstrate resonant reading through a comparative analysis of Valeria Luiselli's 2019 novel *Lost Children Archive* and two other novelists she references: Cormac McCarthy and Roberto Bolaño. While McCarthy was credited with writing the "Great American Novel" and Bolaño was celebrated as the greatest Latin American literary voice of his generation, both of these writers shared borderlands narratives where characters move between Latin America and the United States. By citing these writers as intertexts in her own exploration of migrant journeys towards and across the U.S.-Mexico border, Luiselli demonstrates how multiple texts create thematic resonances together, beyond what each text achieves individually. I argue that an attunement towards resonance in literature offers a new way of understanding intertextuality as sharing more complete and inclusive stories of peoples and places. In conclusion, this essay, by synthesizing Transnational American Studies and Literary Sound Studies, sheds new light on how sonic methodologies change how the reception and reputation of literatures are understood across the Americas.

KEYWORDS: borderlands, sound studies, American studies, intertextuality, transnationality

RESUMEN: Mientras que los textos escritos a menudo se perciben como silenciosos, estables y solitarios, sintonizarse con las dimensiones sonoras de las literaturas significa reconocer cómo el sonido cruza fronteras y abre los oídos a la multiplicidad y la simultaneidad. En este ensayo, propongo resonancia como una forma de leer y escuchar las voces subyacentes a una narrativa literaria y amplificar sus temas, luego defiendo por qué esta sintonía con las alfabetizaciones auditivas es especialmente importante para las narrativas de las zonas fronterizas. Demuestro resonancia a través de un análisis comparativo de la novela *Lost Children Archive* de Valeria Luiselli de 2019 y otros dos novelistas a los que hace referencia: Cormac McCarthy y Roberto Bolaño. Si bien a McCarthy se le atribuyó el mérito de escribir la "Great American Novel" y Bolaño fue celebrado como la mayor voz literaria latinoamericana de su generación, ambos escritores compartieron narrativas fronterizas donde los personajes se mueven entre América Latina y los Estados Unidos. Al citar a estos escritores como intertextos en su propia exploración de los viajes de los migrantes hacia y a través de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, Luiselli demuestra cómo múltiples textos crean resonancias temáticas juntas, más allá de lo que cada texto logra individualmente. Sostengo que una sintonía con la resonancia en la literatura ofrece una nueva forma de entender la intertextualidad para historias más completas e inclusivas de pueblos y lugares. En conclusión, este ensayo, al sintetizar los estudios transnacionales americanos y los estudios sonoros literarios, arroja nueva luz sobre cómo las metodologías sonoras cambian la forma en que se entiende la recepción y la reputación de la literatura en las Américas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: tierras fronterizas, estudios sonoros, estudios americanos, intertextualidad, transnacionalidad

When the son in the fictional family at the center of Valeria Luiselli's 2019 novel *Lost Children Archive* asks his mother what it means to document something, she tells him, "You just have to find your own way of understanding space, so that the rest of us can feel less lost in time" (103). As an archivist and journalist herself, the mother encourages her son's impulse to record their journey from their home in New York City to the borderlands of the U.S. Southwest. She and her husband are both pursuing separate documentary projects, hers focused on the future of Latin American child migrants and his on the past of the Chiricahua Apache Native American leaders. Their children, the son and a younger daughter, are trying to make sense of their present experience as they view the changing landscape and listen to their parents' stories from the backseat. The son has been gifted a Polaroid camera and wants to use photography to document their journey because he is afraid that his little sister will not remember it all. However, he feels overwhelmed by the amount of potential material and uncertain about when to click the shutter button, knowing that there will inevitably be parts of the landscape cut out from the frame of his shot. He has to find his own unique approach to documenting space and time in order to tell a more complete story of their journey beyond those afforded by visual literacies alone.

The mother is grappling with similar concerns in her professional archival work. Motivated by her previous role as an interpreter in immigration court, she seeks to document "undocumented" child migrants. Dismayed by the way these children's stories are often simplified by news media, she wants to find a new way to share their complex life stories, inclusive of individual identities, familial heritages, community traditions, and national cultures while also still recognizing the larger contexts of geopolitics and the forces that pushed or pulled them towards the United States. Through these ambitions, the mother grapples with her own positionality as a documentarist in relation to the subjects of her work:

Ethical concern: And why would I even think that I can or should make art with someone else's suffering? Pragmatic concern: Shouldn't I simply document, like the serious journalist I was when I first started working in radio and sound production? Realistic concern: Maybe it is better to keep the children's stories as far away from the media as possible, anyway, because the more attention a potentially controversial issue receives in the media, the more susceptible it is to becoming politicized...Constant concerns: Cultural appropriation, pissing all over someone else's toilet seat, who am I to tell this story. (79)

Understanding the inherent power differential and aware of the dangerous pitfalls of her project, the mother seeks an inclusive methodology for documenting and sharing stories. Within the novel, then, the mother and son seek socially just approaches to

nonfiction storytelling, but the novel itself, by fictionalizing and emulating the archival practices these characters enact, models a socially just way for readers to engage with narratives, which I call resonant reading.

Previous scholars studying *Lost Children Archive* have likewise found inspiration in Luiselli's innovative writing techniques for proposing implications beyond the novel. Valentina Montero Román's article "Telling Stories That Never End" characterizes it as a "big, ambitious archival novel" that does not shy away from the complexities and contradictions of immigration and other human rights issues it tackles, while Richard M. Cho's "Becoming an Imagined Record" classifies the novel as autofiction for the way it uses archival interventions to situate the characters' fictional lives within real social and political contexts. Through this interplay between fiction and reality, Sebastián Saldarriaga Gutiérrez suggests that the novel represents "a rural turn" in Latin American literature, Luis F. Avilés uses the novel to advance translation theory, and Aparna Mishra Tarc celebrates how Luiselli represents the important and often overlooked perspectives of children. What David James calls sympathy, Pieter Vermeulen calls empathy, but both scholars indicate the affective power of Luiselli's writing to incite real change. Armando Octavio Velázquez Soto, Silvia Schultermandl, and Rubén Peinado-Abarrio each focus specifically on the role of archival practices in achieving this advocacy and activism. Most closely aligned with my approach to the novel through sound studies is Emily Celeste Vázquez Enriquez's "The Sounds of the Desert," which analyzes the characters' sound projects within the novel, but the methodology of resonance I propose considers the work of sonic concepts for readers' experiences with the text. In synthesizing and building from the important scholarship preceding my methodology, I aim to articulate another possibility for what we as readers can learn from the characters as storytellers.

Although the son wants to tell a story that honors the complexity of places and the mother wants to tell a story that honors the complexity of people, no one text can tell an entirely complete and inclusive story. Instead, there need to be new ways of engaging with and understanding intertextuality, letting multiple stories resonate together towards greater meaning than a single text could alone. Understanding intertextuality as resonance means applying sonic concepts to the study of literature. Luiselli demonstrates the power of sound in relation to the production and reception of stories through her characters' actions and her style of composition.

Guided by his mother's advice, the son finds his own way of recording space and time by pairing photography with audio recording. The final chapter of the novel serves as a transcription of his recordings to his younger sister, followed by a series of 4x4 photographs printed in color. He tells her that by looking through the pictures and listening to the recordings, she will, "understand many things, and eventually maybe [she will] understand everything" (349). By insisting that his sister receive "at least two versions of everything and know things in different ways, which is always better

than just one way," the son articulates a powerful theory of multimodal literacy (349). Whereas photography can only capture one framed moment, sound recording works temporally and omnidirectionally; sound develops and makes sense in forward-moving time, and the reach of a microphone extends in all directions beyond the framing lens of a camera. The son's newfound method of documentation is not a rejection of visual literacies but rather a celebration of what can happen when sight is combined with the power and potential of sound.

The mother likewise finds solutions to her storytelling concerns by engaging aural literacies. First, she realizes that her true objective is not to collect the stories of survivors because, as she witnessed in immigration court, there are already spaces created for this testimony. Instead, she wants to record the stories of "the children who are missing, those whose voices can no longer be heard because they are, possibly forever, lost" (146). Recognizing the impossibility of actually hearing those voices and recording their stories, the mother listens for resonances in the material available at hand. She seeks out a variety of artifacts—from photography and maps to novels and news reports—related to historical and contemporary migrations. She compiles these artifacts together into an archive of research, which she defines as "a kind of valley in which your thoughts can bounce back to you, transformed," explaining:

You whisper intuitions and thoughts into the emptiness, hoping to hear something back. And sometimes, just sometimes, an echo does indeed return, a real reverberation of something, bouncing back with clarity when you've finally hit the right pitch and found the right surface. (42)

Her engagement with these print, audio, and visual sources together in an archive is, therefore, guided by aural literacies. By listening for and learning from vibrations of "the right pitch" against "the right surface," the mother demonstrates a practice of resonant reading.

Luiselli likewise emulates the potential of resonant reading through the structure and style of the novel itself. In her "Works Cited (Notes on Sources)" at the end of the book, Luiselli explains:

Like my previous work, *Lost Children Archive* is in part the result of a dialogue with many different texts, as well as nontextual sources. The archive that sustains this novel is both an inherent and a visible part of the central narrative. In other words, references to sources—textual, musical, visual, or audio-visual—are not meant as side notes, or ornaments that decorate the story, but function as intralinear markers that point to the many voices in the conversation that the book sustains with the past. (379)

Furthermore, Luiselli makes the presence of this archive known

through multiple modes of intertextuality. Some texts are referenced by characters within the narrative as they engage with various forms of literature, music, and film. Other texts are included within interstitial bibliographies. Like the mother's archive of research materials described above, the father also curates collections of books and other texts to help inform his perspective; he stores these materials in bankers boxes packed into the trunk, then Luiselli lists out the contents of these boxes between chapters. Within the narrative, these bibliographies demonstrate the parents' research processes, but they also serve as the bibliography showing readers Luiselli's writing process. Similarly, there are also references that appear as paratexts in the Works Cited alongside Luiselli's commentary on how she uses intertextuality "not as an outward, performative gesture but as a method or procedure of composition" (380). What makes Luiselli's approach to intertextuality unique are the ways in which the novel encourages readers to engage with these references through aural literacies.

Resonance is not a term used explicitly by Luiselli in *Lost Children Archive* but rather a theory that the novel emulates. Acoustically, resonance happens when two or more wavelengths of similar frequency occur in a shared space simultaneously and amplify the oscillation; resonance makes a listener more aware of a pitch they could not have heard to the same extent with either wavelength in isolation. Colloquially, the word resonant might be used to characterize the quality of a voice as rich, deep, or full, or it could be used to describe how a story connects meaningfully with a personal memory or emotion. In other words, the way something is said can be resonant, or the content of what is said can resonate. In *Keywords in Sound*, David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny speak to this idea that sound is both the material and a metaphor that "construct perceptual conditions of hearing and shape the territories and boundaries of sound in social life" (1). Through the material and metaphorical as well as the acoustic and colloquial definitions, resonance recognizes an encounter: a voice comes into contact with and affects a listener's body, and a story interacts with a reader's psyche. Theoretically, then, resonance recognizes underlying ideas that are continually vibrating but not always audible or otherwise made meaningful until they are brought into a shared space and time with something else that amplifies their similarities. Furthermore, resonances must be listened for before they can be listened to.

An attunement towards resonance is a sonic methodology that opens new and inclusive ways of engaging in humanities inquiry. Stephanie Daza and Walter Gershon advocate for resonance as a methodology in their 2014 article "Beyond Ocular Inquiry: Sound, Silence, and Sonification." Whereas ocular methodologies create an "Othering gaze," they argue, "sounds provide a means for spaces, people, and objects to resound and articulate the that the impossibility of closing an earlid is a possibility for more socially just, ecological methodologies" (639). Furthermore, they suggest the possibility of resonance specifically as a sonic methodology for qualitative inquiry; by inverting traditional reliance on relevance,

which seeks data to fit a predetermined narrative, resonance listens openly to let the data tell its own story:

Methodologically, it provides a means to examine echoes across time and contexts, opens relationships within and between ecologies, breaks down barriers between siloed fields and methodologies, provides a means for the marginalized to literally voice their perspectives, and to consider complex interrelations and orientations inside and beyond people. (641)

Bringing this sonic methodology into the study of literature, then, means approaching texts as collections of voices and perspectives coming together through the primary narrative.

In this way, resonant reading offers a sonic understanding of intertextuality. In his "Introduction" to *Intertextuality*, Graham Allen overviews how the theory, like resonance, is about the "relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence" between two or more ideas (5). Saussure traced these connections through language, Bakhtin situated them within specific social contexts, then Kristeva first used the term to show how the ways these interconnected ideas are understood are always changing as they move across time and place between different contexts. Bakhtin and Volosinov referred to this potential for change as the dialogic function of language, leading to the possibility of a polyphonic novel, an instance where literary theory has already borrowed from sonic concepts. However, resonant reading is not as much about the way a writer crafts a novel as it is the way a reader approaches it. *Lost Children Archive* serves as an exemplary text for tracing this approach because of the way characters' experiences within it represent readers' experiences with it.

Furthermore, the novel's focus on borderlands and migrant narratives demonstrates the importance of sound for fostering more complete and inclusive understandings of these places and people. Whereas the lines on a map, like the one between Mexico and the United States, create visual boundaries in space that reify notions of belonging and otherness, sound is the ultimate border crosser. Sound does not stop at the metaphor of geopolitical lines nor the material of border walls but rather permeates and continues through. Sound serves as a reminder of continual movement in borderlands. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa describes borders as "set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them," whereas borderlands are "vague and undetermined place[s] created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (3). Resonance, as a sonic methodology, helps to conceptualize the fluidity of borderlands spaces. Resonant reading, then, brings a sonic awareness of intertextuality to the study of transnational literature, and in relation to the mother and son's broader concerns for socially just storytelling, shares responsibility with their audiences to read with open ears.

Making this argument synthesizes the emerging fields of

Transnational American Studies and Literary Sound Studies. In her "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, Yogita Goyal acknowledges that while the idea of transnationalism is still relatively new to literary study, which has historically defined texts within geographic and linguistic categories, it is borrowing from other fields that have already been understanding the impact of globalization upon how stories are shared (2). She explains that approaching literature through a transnational perspective "can unsettle nationalist myths of cultural purity, reveal through comparison the interconnectedness of various parts of the world and peoples, and offer an analysis of past and present imperialism" (6). Revisiting texts that have previously been canonized as classic American literature as well as seeking out texts from across the Americas that have not received the same recognition can unsettle the stories the United States unquestioningly tells about itself.

While this approach offers powerful potential for finding new insights on older works, David James also advocates in his chapter "Transnational Postmodern and Contemporary Literature" for the necessity of studying texts created and received within this era through a global perspective. His description of what this perspective can offer resonates with much of Luiselli's approaches to composition:

Writers engaged with transnational concerns today inherit much that is dynamic and enabling from postmodern fiction: collagist arrangements of voices, genres, and settings; self-reflexive, metafictional references to the composition and reception of the written word across national frontiers; stylized alternations in perspective and idiom that foreground the process of fiction-making, often to interrogate the veracity of historiography itself; and interactive or collusive forms of narrative address that allow novelists, in Toni Morrison's words, "to have the reader work *with* the author in the construction of the book." (124-125)

Lost Children Archive makes this work visible and audible through its multiple modes of intertextuality. Luiselli trusts her readers with the intertextual references and citational practices, making her audience active participants in the work and honoring the resonances they can create with it, regardless of geographic and cultural contexts.

As Luiselli emphasizes, the bibliographic boxes are not just lists to look at but rather voices to listen to in conversation with each other, engaging readers in the new theories of Literary Sound Studies through this transnational perspective. Speaking to the field of Sound Studies broadly, Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes's book *Remapping Sound Studies* calls for "a remapping—and, indeed, a partial decolonization—of thinking and listening" (265). They recognize the unique challenges of twenty-first-century geopolitics, as Goyal

and James likewise articulate, and advocate for sonic methodologies that offer new ways of listening to the world and its interconnections. Anna Snaith responds to this call by proposing the literary text as a space in which sound is recorded and can be heard. Specifically in *Sound and Literature*, she suggests that "literary texts can serve as sonic archives" (5). In this way, then, Luiselli's intertextual bibliographies can be perceived as contributing to the novel as an archive, holding together both the sounds of the present narrative at the surface as the family travels across the United States towards Mexico but also the sounds of the intertexts supporting the narration of this journey.

Therefore, by analyzing Luiselli's postmodern novel for its transnational and sonic qualities, this essay contributes specifically to the subfield of Latin American Literary Sound Studies. In her 2023 review "Listening in/to Literature," Tamara Mitchell affirms how six new monographs published in the last six years exemplify increased and ongoing interest in the topic. These studies by Jason Borge, Marilla Limbrandi, Francine R. Masiello, Luz María Sánchez Cardona, Sarah Finley, and Ren Ellis Neyra together emphasize how the representation of sound in literature "has served as a means to undermine colonial logic and affect structures of power in a region organized around the lettered city" (215). Anke Birkenmaier's chapter on "Sound Studies and Literature in Latin America" in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Latin American Literary and Cultural Forms* also augments literary critic Ángel Rama's idea of the "lettered city." Whereas Rama's 1984 *Ciudad Letrada* discusses the imperial power of written word in forming Latin American societies, Birkenmaier considers how "the oral and popular culture of indigenous and Afro-descendant minorities with less access to education and writing" also played an important role in cultivating Latin American identity (350). By destabilizing what constitutes literature, who can compose and read literature, and how literature can be engaged with, sound serves to amplify marginalized voices and attune readers to new ways of listening to literature from across the Americas. Analyzing *Lost Children Archive*, then, requires both close reading of and close listening to the many voices held together in the novel as a sonic archive, and approaching Luiselli's novel through Latin American Literary Sound Studies also contributes towards a gap in research concerning migrant narratives and borderlands stories specifically.

The analysis that follows, therefore, demonstrates a resonant reading of the many voices held together in the novel as a sonic archive and exemplifies the efficacy of this methodology for better understanding borderlands narratives. It will first perform a close analysis of how Luiselli composes through intertextuality then transition into a comparative analysis between *Lost Children Archive* and two other borderlands writers cited in the novel's bibliographic boxes: Cormac McCarthy and Roberto Bolaño. Doing so will demonstrate how this approach changes readers' perception and reception of literature across cultural spaces through sonic methodologies.

The fictional family's visit to a bookstore first shows how Luiselli creates this sonic archive through multiple modes of intertextuality. As the family enters the shop in Asheville, North Carolina, they notice that a book club meeting is underway and "assume the silent, respectful role of spectators who have walked into a theater in the play's second act" (83). The parents and their children quietly peruse the shelves, but the mother finds herself nearing closer to the club and eavesdropping on their conversation as they discuss "the impossibility of fiction in the age of nonfiction" and "truth-telling as a commodity" (84). Although the mother does not know the author and title of the book they are discussing, she still hears resonances between their conversation and her own concerns for socially just storytelling. Perhaps in the spirit of Barthes's "The Death of an Author," this moment suggests that audienceship is more important than authorship in hearing intertextual resonances. Accordingly, Luiselli's citational conventions are varied. For example, when listing the books that the family purchases from the bookstore, only some authors and some titles are given: the mother selects an Emmet Gowin photography book, the son gets an illustrated companion to Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the daughter chooses *The Book with No Pictures*, and the father "buys a book on the history of horses," both untitled and unattributed (86). Each character's selection demonstrates how they have found connections with books that resonate with their individual interests and ideas.

The phenomenon of individual resonances with a text is also represented through the family's shared listening experiences in the car. For example, they play the song "The Highwayman" on repeat several times and discuss its meaning, "unraveling the lyrics as if we were dealing with Baroque poetry" (101). Each family member's theory demonstrates how they are uniquely connecting the song's lyrics with their own present concerns: the mother thinks it's about the power of fiction, the father suggests that it deals with American history and guilt, and the son reflects on how it portrays the progress of transportation technology. The daughter does not yet have a solid theory, but she asks questions about each line, which demonstrate how interpretations develop:

What is a blade?
It's the part of the knife that cuts things.
So the highwayman used his knife?
Yes.
To cut people apart?
Well, perhaps, yes.
So he was an Indian or a cowboy?
He was neither.
Then he was a policeman.
No.
Then he was a white-eye.
Maybe. (101-102)

Furthermore, this exchange underscores how the daughter is also

learning about the past and present of the land they are traveling across, trying to make sense of the simultaneous stories being collected within the car as a kind of family archive.

The daughter's assumptions about Native Americans, cowboys, police, and white-eyes, meaning white Europeans and white Americans, come from the stories she is hearing from her parents and on the radio. As they approach the site of his research, the father shares more stories about the Chiricahua Apaches and their leaders, Cochise and Geronimo, who he calls, "the last free peoples on the American continent, the last to surrender" (20). Similarly, as they approach the U.S.-Mexico border, the family hears more reports on the radio about child refugees that align with the mother's research interests. She translates an interview with a young boy, whose voice starts "breaking, hesitating, trembling" as he describes losing his brother just before reaching the border (73). Even without their mother's translation of his words, the son and daughter can hear the emotion in the boy's voice and empathize deeply, continually asking, "What happened next?" (73). Later, the son and the daughter imagine possible endings as they play pretend in the backseat:

If we are forced to stop hunting wild game, we shall raid their ranches and steal their cows!
Yeah, let's seal the white cows, the white, the white-eyes' cows!
Be careful with the bluecoats and the Border Patrol!
We realize then that they have been listening, more attentively than we thought to the stories of Chief Nana, Chief Loco, Chihuahua, Geronimo...as well as to the story we are all following on the news, about the child refugees at the border. (75)

Combining "bluecoats and Border Patrol" brings together two different histories, two different threats, upon two different communities (Native Americans as first peoples and Latin Americans as migrants), which, in the children's minds, connect together as one amplified story of displacement and dispossession.

Troubled by the resonances their children are hearing through the harsh realities of transnational American history, the parents decide to focus on fiction in the form of audiobooks; their decision-making process demonstrates another way in which Luiselli integrates intertextuality to orchestrate resonances through her characters and, ultimately, for her readers. With her smartphone in hand, the mother begins clicking through a selection of pre-downloaded audiobooks, letting the first sentence or so sound through the car's speakers until they decide what to listen to. For example, a man's voice first speaks: "When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night...he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him" (75). The mother and father identify this story of a parent and child journeying into the unknown as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, which they decide is too violent for their children. Next is

Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, another novel about a journey in search of family history, but the mother does not like the English translation and clicks the skip button. She celebrates the next first line they hear, "I am an invisible man," as "a barren, perfect first sentence," but she decides that Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is not the story she wants to "glove itself upon the landscape" they are driving through (76). Similarly, the parents disagree about the next two potential audiobooks: Carson McCuller's *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* feels too close to their current marital struggles, and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* feels too close to their present road trip. Regarding the latter, the father suggests that "even if the children won't get the meaning...we can all enjoy the rhythm of it as we drive," but the mother insists that they need fiction (76). The resonances of each text about a journey, whether post-apocalyptic, familial, personal, marital, or national, are too strong to serve as the distraction they seek to help pass the time.

Like the parents, readers make choices about the texts they engage with, and their prior knowledge and present concerns affect how intertextual resonances are heard and help make sense of reality. Accordingly, the parents settle on Golding's *Lord of the Flies* as striking the perfect resonances to accompany their journey: "Not a fiction that will separate us and the children from reality, but one that might help us, eventually, explain some of it to them" (77). In other words, in the car as a family archive, they have found "the right pitch" and "the right surface" through which to hear "a real reverberation of something, bouncing back with clarity." Of course, these resonances are not just heard by the characters in Luiselli's fiction, but they are also orchestrated for readers of the novel. Just as the car creates the context of a family archive where different texts are held and interpreted together to shape individual and collective understandings of their journey, the novel can also be understood as a sonic archive containing the potential for intertextual resonances to emerge for the reader to better understand the narrative. The bibliography boxes play an especially important role in showing readers the intertexts resonating through Luiselli's narrative.

The comparative analysis that follows will focus on two writers cited together in a bibliographic box who are also interested in borderlands, Roberto Bolaño and Cormac McCarthy, and listen for the amplified themes that emerge. In doing so, I intentionally create space for a conversation between contemporaries across national boundaries. In describing Transnational American Studies, James recognizes how "within the broader rubric of transnational writing today...the specificity of contemporary writing can often be blurred when subsumed under theoretically large-scale generic or cultural-historical categories" (125). In other words, literary critics have a tendency to limit the study of postmodern writers by their genre and geography; while Bolaño and McCarthy are both late twentieth-first-century prose novelists, they are conventionally categorized separately as a Latin American writer and a U.S. writer, respectively. Bolaño, who passed away in 2003, was characterized by the *New York Times* as "the most significant Latin American liter-

ary voice of his generation" (Rohter). Similarly, McCarthy, who also recently passed in 2023, was credited with writing the "Great American Novel" in *Blood Meridian*, a designation meaning that a book embodies the character and spirit of the United States. Not only is this label problematic to place upon a novel that shares an exclusively male perspective and only includes women through their gaze, but it also limits the geopolitical reach of McCarthy's writing. Both McCarthy and Bolaño composed stories with characters who move back and forth between Latin America and the United States where, as Anzaldúa describes, "the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (3). The Chicana scholar further extends the metaphor to explain how "before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (3). As the family in *Lost Children Archive* approaches the "border culture" of the U.S. Southwest, resonances with Bolaño's and McCarthy's novels help readers better understand the intersections and exchanges that happen at the Mexico-U.S. border.

Each of these writers represent border culture linguistically through their use of Spanish alongside English. Although I will cite from Natasha Wimmer's 2008 translation of Bolaño's *2666*, there are certain phrases left in the original Spanish, and McCarthy's Border Trilogy series and *Blood Meridian*, written in English, similarly have words and phrases spoken by characters in Spanish. Luiselli herself has published in both Spanish and English; *Lost Children Archive* was originally composed in English, then she collaborated with Daniel Saldaña to translate the novel into Spanish, published as *Desierto sonoro*. This title for the Spanish edition holds dual meanings. On one level it refers to the Sonoran Desert that spans between Mexico and the United States, but whereas a map would refer to this area as *El desierto de sonora*, Luiselli maintains the term *sonoro* to underscore the sonorous qualities of this space and to emphasize the importance of listening. Listening to the resonances with Bolaño and McCarthy, therefore, amplifies the themes they share.

Bolaño's *2666*, like *Lost Children Archive*, features characters engaging with literature and questioning the efficacy of storytelling. This expansive novel develops interconnected characters and plotlines centered on two key mysteries: the life story of an elusive, fictional German author, Benno von Archimboldi, and the cause of an onslaught of femicide in the fictional town Santa Teresa. The latter is based on Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city near the U.S. border where between 1993 and 2005 over four-hundred women were mutilated, tortured, and raped (Monárrez Fragoso 78). Whereas a Chilean professor and an African-American journalist are two characters trying to solve the murder mystery, it is a band of European literary critics whose search for Archimboldi leads them to Santa Teresa and guides the reader closer to answers. The ways in which the various characters are brought together through and in relation to the city demonstrates how multiple modes of storytelling can tell a more complete story than one can on its own, much like the son's realization about multimodal literacy in *Lost Children Archive*.

The work of the critics especially amplifies the theme of Luisel-

li's novel that multiple interpretations can be made upon the same text. Like the family in *Lost Children Archive* analyzing "The Highwayman," the critics connect and collaborate through the work of Archimboldi. The novel opens with Jean-Claude Pelletier reading Archimboldi and noticing "the wonder and admiration that the novel stirred in him" (3). This experience with the book makes a discernible change in his worldview and life direction, leading him to seek out others who share this experience, including Piero Morini, an academic and translator of Archimboldi's work. The introduction of the third critic, Manuel Espinoza, features another form of intertextual signaling: aside from Archimboldi, "the only German authors he was (barely) familiar with were three greats: Hölderlin...; Goethe...; and Schiller" (6). By introducing a character by who, and not what, he has read, Bolaño emphasizes the importance of authorship and reputation to these readers. In contrast, the final critic, Liz Norton, has an entirely different perspective on reading as "directly linked to pleasure, not to knowledge or enigmas or constructions or verbal labyrinths as Morini, Espinoza, and Pelletier believed it to be" (9). Nonetheless, it is their shared interests in the author's oeuvre and mysterious biography that brings them together in search of more knowledge than they could reach individually.

The professor's and the journalist's work, however, also demonstrate the power and importance of socially just storytelling. Their interest begins by only hearing rumors circulating second-hand that incite fear and curiosity respectively, but they gradually become closer to the crimes, which Bolaño represents in a documentary-style prose that shares the women's stories directly. For example, a witness to the violence tries to make sense of what is happening and reflects:

These ideas or feelings or ramblings...turned the pain of others into the memories of one's own. They turned pain, which is natural, enduring, and eternally triumphant, into personal memory, which is human, brief, and eternally elusive. They turned a brutal story of injustice and abuse, an incoherent howl with no beginning or end, into a neatly structured story. (189)

Not only does this reflection articulate another way of understanding resonance conceptually as the embodiment of another's story into one's own memory, but it also resonates intertextually with the mother's concerns as a storyteller. She wants to find ways to convey the children's stories that do not default to neat simplicity but instead are authentic, socially just, and impactful, affecting public perception and cultural memory towards change.

As previously discussed, she finds a solution alongside her son, through the power of sound. This realization resonates with McCarthy's literature. Whereas Bolaño emphasizes characters listening to and learning from border culture stories, McCarthy narrates characters listening to and learning from borderlands soundscapes. Specifically in the Border Trilogy series, listening is sense-making

and a way to navigate the fluidity of these changing environments. *All the Pretty Horses*, the first book in the series, opens with the protagonist, John Grady Cole, coming in and out of his mother's house, noticing the distant sounds of the outdoors and how "inside no sound save the ticking of the mantel clock in the front room" (3). This contrast between the dull quiet inside, aside from the rhythmic reassurance of passing time, and the exciting sounds outside epitomize sixteen-year-old John Grady's desire for a cowboy's way of life. After his grandfather's death and the sale of his Texas ranch, John Grady wants nothing more than to run away and explore the world on horseback, so he takes off with his friend Rawlins, heading south from Texas, across the Rio Grande, and into Mexico. Along their journey, the boys are continually listening to and learning from the environment: "In the distance they heard a door slam. A voice called. A coyote that had been yammering somewhere in the hills to the south stopped. Then it began again" (26). Listening becomes the way they learn to navigate the unfamiliar space, hearing repetition and noticing patterns that help them to anticipate what is surrounding them and what is coming ahead.

Sound, therefore, helps these characters find connection, but McCarthy also represents how silence signals distance and uncertainty. For example, when John Grady and Rawlins hear "what they'd none heard before, three long howls to the southwest and all afterwards a silence," they are afraid (59-60). It is not so much the howls themselves but the silence that follows that leave the boys feeling weary. Without any precedent or repetition, they are unable to locate the threat spatially or temporally. McCarthy also plays upon the contrast of sounds and silences in *Blood Meridian*, a novel also cited by Luiselli alongside the Border Trilogy series, which follows another fictional teenager, "the kid," on a journey with scalp hunters massacring Indigenous peoples in the borderlands. There are often "strange silence[s]" among the men when they do not know what to say after enacting such brutal violence (11). Silence is also represented in descriptions of the natural setting:

The moon rose full over the canyon and there was stark silence in the little valley. It may be it was their own shadows kept the coyotes from abroad for there was no sound of them or wind or bird in that place but only the light rill of water running over the sand in the dark below their fires. (139-140)

Just as John Grady and Rawlins could not place the threatening howl without a sonic context, silence here emphasizes the uncertainty of traversing unknown spaces. Furthermore, when the kid has broken from the band and finds himself lost and alone in the wilderness, he bivouacs for the night and notices how "the wind was all but silent for there was nothing of resonance among those rocks" (314). Just as Luiselli and Bolaño demonstrate the importance of literary and social contexts for understanding stories through intertextuality, McCarthy shows how contexts are also necessary for making sense

of sounds within a soundscape. McCarthy's use of the term "resonance" underscores that there needs to be material present to offer the potential for resonances to emerge and be heard.

Hearing these resonances, though, requires the careful attunement towards sonic methodologies that let the connections be recognized and remembered. McCarthy demonstrates the ephemeral nature of resonance in another use of the term towards the end of *All the Pretty Horses* to describe the movement of a man among horses in a dream: "They moved all of them in a resonance that was like a music among them and they were none afraid neither horse nor colt nor mare and they ran in that resonance which is the world itself and which cannot be spoken of but only praised" (162). In this sense, if resonance is "the world itself," then our understanding of the world is cultivated through connections, just as the theory of intertextuality asserts; although it may be impossible for these connections themselves to "be spoken of," we can still articulate our unique interpretations made through these connections. Luiselli narrates this phenomenon through her characters' experiences with other texts within the car as a family archive, and her references to other intertexts emulates this effect for readers as well.

McCarthy's literature, therefore, seems to underscore the sonic principles at work in *Lost Children Archive*, while Bolaño's novel reverberates with the sense of multiple perspectives coming together to tell a more complete and inclusive story. These are just two of the many writers Luiselli cites or alludes to, but they are two who are especially important for understanding the complexities of borderlands narratives. Through her fiction, Luiselli shows characters grappling with the ethics and effects of meaningful storytelling, but the novel further serves as a model for the ways readers can engage with intertextuality transnationally through sound. Literary Sound Studies scholar Angela Leighton suggests that "learning to listen is what literature might teach, by a kind of shared activity between author and reader, pages and ear, sound and soundings, in a mutual or interactive work of apprehension" (28). By attuning reading practices towards resonance, therefore, readers can find new ways "of understanding space" so we can "feel less lost in time" and understand interconnections across cultural and national boundaries.

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