

Psychoanalytic Interpretation of *Blueberries* by Susan Gibb

Interpretación psicoanalítica de *Blueberries* de Susan Gibb

Maya Zalbidea Paniagua (CES Don Bosco, Centro adscrito a la Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

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ABSTRACT: *Blueberries* (2009) by Susan Gibb, published in the ELO (Electronic Literature Organization), invites the reader to travel inside the protagonist's mind to discover real and imaginary experiences examining notions of gender, sex, body and identity of a traumatised woman. This article explores the verbal and visual modes in this digital short fiction following semiotic patterns as well as interpreting the psychological states that are expressed through poetical and technological components. A comparative study of the consequences of trauma in the protagonist will be developed including psychoanalytic theories by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and the feminist psychoanalysts: Melanie Klein and Bracha Ettinger. The reactions of the protagonist will be studied: loss of reality, hallucinations and Electra Complex, as well as the rise of defence mechanisms and her use of the artistic creativity as a healing therapy. The interactivity of the hypermedia, multiple paths and endings will be analyzed as a literary strategy that increases the reader's capacity of empathizing with the speaker.

RESUMEN: La obra de ficción digital titulada *Blueberries* (2009) de Susan Gibb, publicada en la ELO (Organización de literatura electrónica) invita al lector/a a viajar dentro de la mente de la protagonista para descubrir sus experiencias reales e imaginarias en las que se examinan las nociones de género, sexo, cuerpo e identidad de una mujer traumatizada. En este artículo se exploran los modos verbales y visuales en esta ficción digital breve siguiendo patrones semióticos así como se interpretan los estados psicológicos por medio de componentes poéticos y tecnológicos. Se llevará a cabo un estudio comparativo de las consecuencias del trauma en la protagonista de la historia con teorías psicoanalíticas de Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, así como las de las psicoanalistas feministas: Melanie Klein y Bracha Ettinger. Se estudiarán las reacciones de la protagonista ante la pérdida de la realidad, las alucinaciones y el complejo de Electra, así como el surgimiento de mecanismos de defensa y su uso de la creatividad artística como terapia curativa. La interactividad del hipermedia, sus múltiples recorridos y finales se analizarán considerándolos una estrategia literaria que aumenta la capacidad del lector de empatizar con la voz narrativa.

KEYWORDS: hypermedia, digital short fiction, gender, body, psychoanalysis

PALABRAS CLAVE: hipermedia, ficción digital breve, género, cuerpo, psicoanálisis

1. Introduction

Blueberries is an updated example of the kind of latest electronic literature available today. It is a hypertext fiction published in 2009 in the *New River Journal* and on the *Electronic Literature Organization Website*. The author, Susan Gibb, is a recent Pushcart nominee and winner of the *Eighth Glass Woman Prize* in December 2010. She keeps a blog on literary analysis and another on hypermedia writing and reading. Her poetry, fiction, and digital art have been published in

many fanzines as well as in the *Valentine Day Massacre* chapbook (Červená Barva Press). In her blog called *Hypercompendia* she published *100 hypertext stories* in the summer of 2009, and *100 flash fictions* in the summer of 2010 and 2011 respectively.



Figure 1. Cover of *Blueberries* by Susan Gibb.

Blueberries was created using Tinderbox 4.7.1 software, a more modern software than the one which was used to develop electronic literature so far: Storyspace. Storyspace was the first software program specifically developed to create, edit, and read hypertext fiction. It was developed in the 1980s by Jay David Bolter and Michael Joyce, who presented it at the first international meeting on Hypertext at Chapel Hill in October 1987 (Bolter, 2001: 41-50). Hypertext fictions written with Storyspace are, for instance: Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story* (1987), Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) or Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* (1992). The newest program, Tinderbox, allows complex hypertexts to be read easily by cybereaders who are not used to dealing with hypertext fiction and are learning to enjoy multilinear and interactive narratives. In this sense, Tinderbox is a personal content assistant that helps the writer to visualize, analyze, share notes, plans, and ideas. Its creator, Mark Bernstein states: "It was designed to be a powerful environment for creating complex hypertexts — especially for capturing and analyzing information over the course of a long project and in the face of shifting goals and growing understanding" (Bernstein qtd. in Zalbidea, 2011: 325).

In *Blueberries* the protagonist's memories are fragmented like in a mosaic and the reader needs to find interconnections among memories, dreams and fantasies. After having read any of the possible existing paths in the hypertext story there are three possible endings. The reader can choose between two links: *The end* or *The beginning*? This author's strategy is very effective to show that choosing other lexias permits the reader to find more possible readings. As Susan Gibb remarks "alternative paths in a story can lead the reader into a new world that may not be vital to the story but surely offers more depth of the background or a character" (Gibb, 2010: web). Underneath the plot of *Blueberries* there are also subtexts that only curious or expert hypertext readers can find. According to María Goicoechea, these subtexts have made the hypertext reader develop paranoid and schizophrenic readings as strategies in his/her confrontation with the electronic text, and in general, with the complexity of the technological world around him/her (Goicoechea, 2004: 504).

Blueberries presents the working of a female mind who suffers from a post-traumatic mental disorder. She has an affective problem she tries to solve and she makes up stories to hide the terrible truth. The fact that the narrative takes the form of a hypertext influences the perception of the reader, who, like a psychoanalyst, has to find clues to understand the origin of the protagonist's psychological problems which are reflected in her loss of the sense of reality and temporality. The omniscient narrator and use of the present tense in the narrator's interior monologues contribute to the feeling of closeness to the reader. The reader may feel seduced by the beautiful imagery of Laura's (the protagonist) fantasies though confused by her contradictions and intrigued to know what really happened in her past life.

Blueberries is the story of a young painter who sets up an exhibition of her drawings. Through them, she reflects all the pain she has suffered during her life: her grandfather raped her when she was a child, her mother never believed her when she told her about it, and her father committed suicide. Laura, as a painter,, tries to overcome her trauma by painting and trying to find poetical beauty in her memories.

2. The multilinear structure of *Blueberries*

The sections in *Blueberries* are multilinear, the aim of the author at this stage is to create an emotional attachment with the reader. Each page provides several new points of information

simultaneously as new, and increasingly troubling questions are raised, childhood memories appear as flashbacks, recent experiences of the speaker are told as interior monologues, etc. The cyclical effect of the speaker, Laura, -remembering her father's stories, her attempts to leave home during childhood, grandfather's presents, mixed with scenes in which she is at her painting gallery the day of the exhibition,- increase the reader's interest to discover what are the connections between her childhood memories and her paintings.

The reader's paths are determined by his/her choice of words, which lead in a particular direction to the different endings of the story. If the reader chooses the word "dreamt" he or she will be confronted by the speaker's confession of her dreams, inspiration, art and hallucinations. If, from the start, the reader prefers the word 'sex', he or she will learn about Laura's emotional and sexual experiences, especially her long relationship with her ex-boyfriend. By choosing the word "hands" in the first lexia the reader will get immersed in Laura's childhood experiences when her grandfather used to rape her.

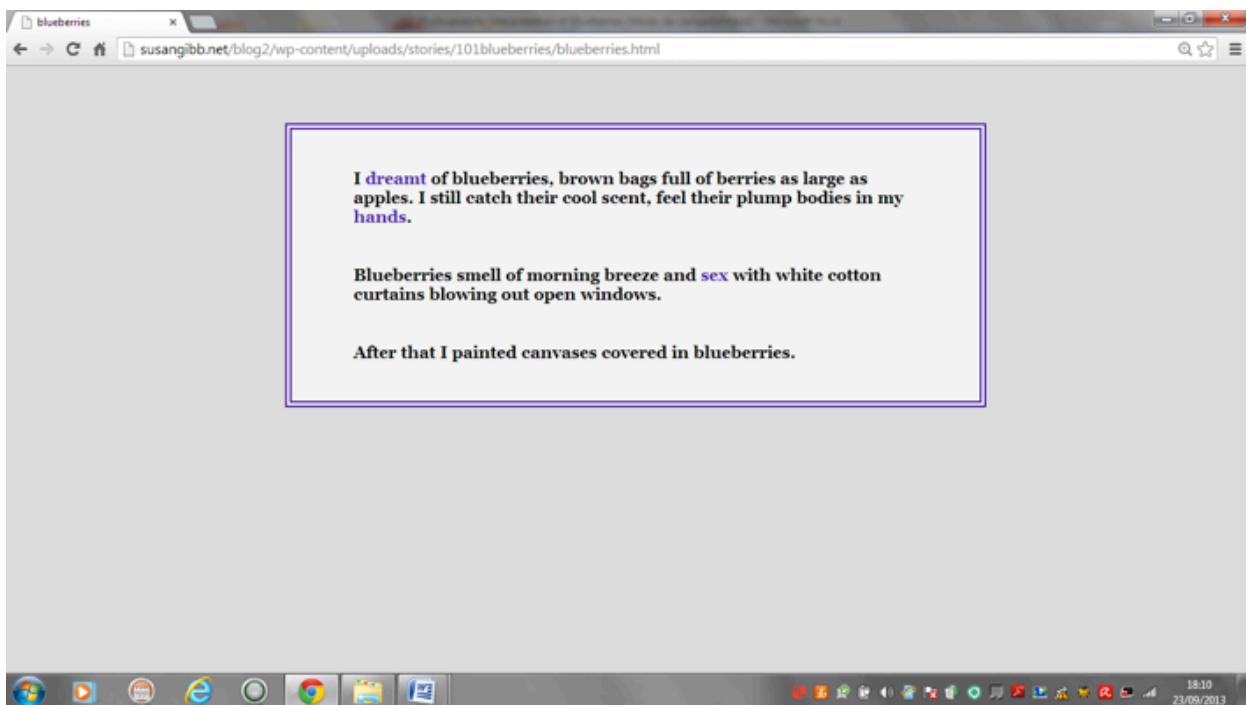


Figure 2. First Webpage of *Blueberries*. The highlighted words in purple: "dreamt", "hands" and "sex" take the reader to different parts of the same story.

The title makes reference to the "blueberries" Laura paints "Deeper and deeper I swirl black and a touch of red to shadow the berries with purple" (Gibb, 2009: web) which before the show she ends up covering with white color: "yesterday morning all my work has been repainted

stark and strokeless white" (2009: web). Due to the links which connect the color red with her paintings it could be taken for granted that the blueberries of the story symbolize sex: "Instinct is what makes my paintings what they are. Streaks are flight. Blood red is survival. Blood red is also sex" (2009: web). Besides, cherries and berries can be associated with sex not only because of their purple color which is similar to menstruation-in the hypertext some links are related to red, blood and menstruation-but they are also fruit that is semiotically related to genitals, a reference to this idea could be the quotation: "Jon never asked about the stories my father would tell me, or the boys I dated in high school, or who popped my cherry" (2009: web). In the possible ending called "family" the speaker tells the audience that blueberries represent her family: "These are the blank faces you see in the blueberries" (2009: web). Susan Gibb, the author herself, gives a more complete explanation of the symbolism of the blueberries: "the blueberries are symbols of various parts of life, including memories that she wants to hold onto and yet finds that her own version of the past has been tainted by adults whom she trusted" (Gibb qtd. in Zalbidea, 2011: 324).

3. Psychoanalytic Interpretation of *Blueberries*

At the beginning of the hypertext the reader does not know if the speaker is a woman or a man, the name is unknown. Some sentences give clues about the gender of the speaker: "There is something about a man's finger in my vagina that fills a bigger space" and "I painted the men who had danced through my life" (Gibb, 2009: web). If the speaker is not a woman, he/she could be an intersexual or transgendered. Not until the speaker's mother, who is a figure of authority, consciousness and reality, mentions her name does the reader know who the speaker of the story is: "Laura, what is wrong with you? What were you doing?" (Gibb, 2009: web). The only character who pronounces the speaker's name is her mother and this sentence specifies that Laura has done something forbidden, her mother is worried about her committing a sin. The author of *Blueberries* always tries not to mention names in her narratives so the readers can feel identified with the story or better empathize with the characters (Gibb 2011: web).

The only other names which are pronounced by the speaker are Jon, Jack and Jesus. Like in modernist narratives such as those written by Virginia Woolf or James Joyce the reader needs to find symbols and repetitions of images or sounds to understand the meaning of the text. The

repetition of the letter *J* in these names indicate that some are associated with others, Jon is the ex-boyfriend who left her, Jack is a fictional character from the tales that Laura's father used to tell her when she was a child and Jesus is the son of God in Christian religion. From a religious point of view these three men might represent the Trinity in Laura's abstract thoughts. She does not mention the names of her grandfather and father probably because it hurts too much to remember their names. When she paints she imagines they are watching her. "I painted with three people watching. They sat quietly behind me. My grandfather, my father, and the strange little man who I know is Jesus" (Gibb, 2009: web). If we follow Freud's theories (1961) in *The Ego and the Id* it could be said that the grandfather and father represent the "super ego" which plays the critical and moralising role and the fictional character of her father's tales, Jack, may represent the "id", which is the set of uncoordinated instinctual trends. Jesus, grandfather and father accomplish the task of the super-ego, punishing the ego with feelings of guilt, anxiety, and inferiority. Laura's traumas do not permit her to enjoy pleasure nor *jouissance* (Lacan, 1998: 3), she has lost her sense of reality and feels depressed because the *Superego*, which should be the father/grandfather representing morality, means immorality to her, due to the rape and suicide episodes. Laura's mother contributed to increase Laura's guilt with her comments on the death of her father. According to the psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman (2001) the traumatic memory is omnipresent in the mind of the traumatized. The memory repeatedly occurs as a flashback, which can happen at any time, and the victim is unable to distinguish the memory from actually experiencing the event again. This is exactly what happens to Laura, as Herman points out "the traumatic subject has to move through three stages in the healing process: safety, remembrance or mourning and the reconnection with ordinary life" (Herman, 1992: 15).

In the safety period Laura knows that there is something absent in her life that needs to be sought, she is feeling alone and has depressive symptoms, however, she is not able to admit the cause of them. She has a terrible feeling of loneliness: "I sank into bed with the weariness of a thousand days in my heart. It hit me, a few days before the showing, that I was all alone" (Gibb, 2009: web). She projects her feeling of sadness onto the abandonment: "Mostly though, since Jon left me, I'm alone, as if the bubble I live in were unbreakable" (web). And she feels so empty that she tries to find some sexual intercourse to fill her spirit: "Sometimes when the moon is strong enough to make me weep, I take a stranger into my bed" (2009: web). According to Freud and Breuer in "On the Physical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena" the original traumatic events take place without the traumatised subject noticing it (1893: 53; 60).

Laura remembers that as a child she was not aware of the negativity of her grandfather's sexual abuse, naturally she felt love and affection for him: "I never hated him. Even when I understood what he'd done" (Gibb, 2009: web), and she decides to forgive him to relieve her feeling of guilt and anguish. Incest as an immoral act is a cultural notion which, as Sigmund Freud explained in *Totem and Taboo* (1950), has been developed because in endogamic groups sexual harassment and jealousy led into violence and homicide. "Primitive peoples noticed the dangers with which their race was threatened by inbreeding and for that reason deliberately adopted the prohibition" (Freud, 1950: 124).

In some cases, Oedipic or Electra jealousy could end up in murder of the father or mother, seen as main rivals. In one of the hypothetical endings of *Blueberries* Laura makes up her own personal story and tells those people, who have come to her painting gallery, that her mother died in childbirth. She imagines that her life would have been less traumatic without the presence of a mother who did not admit that her grandfather raped her, who blamed her for her husband's suicide and who could not see in Laura's painting her daughter's search for positive negotiation with the traumas of her childhood: "It made sense. I wanted to be a painter and my mother bought me ballet slippers and a tuba. Maybe she never forgave me for running away from home for a day. Or causing my father to hang himself" (Gibb, 2009: web). Laura's mother act of blaming her daughter is what Freud called a *psychological projection*. Projection involves imagining or projecting the belief that others originate feelings of self-failure. It also reduces the person's anxiety by allowing the expression of the unwanted unconscious impulses or desires without letting the conscious mind recognize them. Freud stated that a projection is a mechanism of defense in his letters to Wilhelm Fliess, *Draft H*, where he explained the case of a man who blamed his wife for his alcoholism and impotence (Freud, 1985: 166).

Laura has a negative relationship with her mother because she shows reluctance to admit her grandfather's abuses: "She called me perverted. Screamed and denied her father would ever have touched me" (*Blueberries*: web). Bracha L. Ettinger in "The Matrixial Borderspace" (2006) explains three stages in the feminine experience. According to Ettinger primary feminine difference is the difference opened between woman (girl) and woman (mother), and introduces the idea that three kinds of fantasy (that she names Mother-fantasies) should be recognized, when they appear in a state of regression aroused by therapy itself, as primal: Mother-fantasies of Not-enoughness, Devouring and Abandonment. Their misrecognition in psychoanalysis (and

analytical therapy) leads to catastrophic blows to the matrixial daughter-mother tissue and hurts the maternal potentiality of the daughter herself, in the sense that attacking the "non-I" is always also attacking the "I" that dwells inside an "I"-and-"non-I" trans-subjective feminine tissue. Laura needs to solve her hate against her mother, because as Ettinger explains the projected hate (towards such figures) will turn into a self-hate in the woman/daughter web.

Laura could be said to be suffering an *Electra Complex*, she hates her mother because she did not believe her when she confessed her grandfather raped her, while she is in love with her father. Carl Gustav Jung (1967) used the Greek myth of Electra in response to Freud's *Oedipus Complex* to explain girl's sexual competition with her mother for sexual possession of her father. Laura's idea of her father is canalized through an erotic desire: "My father's voice telling stories goes through my head when I paint. I masturbate onto the canvas with colors that follow the narrative arc" (Gibb, 2009: web).

Laura's first exhibition is going to take place and she realizes that in her paintings she has expressed her hidden and repressed feelings. She has been painting for a long time and the pictures remind her of past experiences which activate the mental process that makes the narrator conscious of her unsolved traumas. Remembering the men of her life and her mother corresponds to her need to understand the past and start a period of analysis, what Leigh Gilmore calls "the transference of traumatic experiences" (Gilmore, 2001: 73). Laura becomes aware of her loss of identity and her mind works to find those traumatic episodes which have originated her hysteria; the ghosts of the past, haunt her: "I'd wanted this gallery showing to be my transcendence to freedom. To be a metaphorical doorway to an identity stripped of its influence by men. Or should I say, by men and my mother. The ghosts all came with me. They're hiding in the brushstrokes" (Gibb, 2009: web).

In the remembrance and mourning stage Laura has flashbacks and the hypertext reader needs to impose a logical order on the fragmentary memories of her tragic past. Following the path called "dreamt" the reader will read the childhood memories of Laura when her father used to tell her bedtime stories. The innocent tone of the speaker reflects how Laura conceived reality from a child's perspective: "If I close my eyes and listen to the dark I hear my father telling stories he made up for us himself" (Gibb, 2009: web). The speaker expresses her childhood feelings as she experienced them like in children's tales: "Jake baked a chocolate chip cookie as big as a lake" (2009: web). The childish language brings an echo of Stephen Daedalus in James

Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917). At the start of the novel, Joyce seeks to present the mind of the child-artist who listens to his father's bedtime stories and notices the importance of words: "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down the road" (Joyce, 1917: 1). This fragmented and imaginary language corresponds to the children's language which contrasts with the complex language Stephen will acquire in his youth during the process of becoming a writer. From a Lacanian perspective both the Stephen-boy and Laura-girl are in the imaginary order, they think of images instead of words, Laura imagines Jake's chocolate chip and Stephen perceives his father wearing glasses and having a beard: he "looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face" (Joyce, 1917: 1). According to Lacan, whereas the imaginary is all about identifications, the symbolic is about language and narrative. Once a child enters into language and accepts the rules and dictates of society he or she starts to be able to deal with others. The acceptance of language's rules is aligned with the Oedipus complex. The symbolic is made possible because of the acceptance of the *Name of the Father*, those laws and restrictions that control both desire and rules of communication: "It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Lacan, 1977: 67). Laura's breakdown is due to a series of traumas: her grandfather's abusive touching, her father's suicide when she was only eight, and that is why at that age she decided to become an explorer, like Jack, the character of his father's tales, to look for her father, because though he had committed suicide, her mother did not believe he was dead, so Laura's aim was to find her missing father.

Following the path of *Blueberries* which starts with the origin node "dreamt" moves the reader throughout Laura's nightmares and unconscious thoughts. In the section called "space" Laura remembers when she used to go hiking with her boyfriend to pick blueberries. She looks at the big gallery where she is exhibiting her paintings, looks at the wall and imagines blood stains on the white walls. The blood stains symbolize her grandfather's sexual abuse which is present in Laura's mind, she tries to have clean thoughts but her mind has been hurt. Clicking on the origin node "death" drives us to another lexia about the suicide of Laura's father: "I came home from school one day and my mother told me that my father was dead. Just like that" (Gibb: 2009, web).

In the lexia "nothing" Laura suffers a hallucination in the gallery. The white of the walls makes her feel dizzy because she associates color white with purity, virginity and "nothingness". It

makes her feel guilty and impure because she was raped and the color of rape is blood red. She feels lost in the "endless white" and she describes her nightmare: "The floor swirled upward in ribbons like tree trunks and brush to cover the walls in a thicket" (*Blueberries*). She feels as if she were lost in a forest and she imagines that the three men of her life: her grandfather, her father and the strange little man help her to pick the blueberries on her skirt. Here, like in a dream, Laura's images use extracts of lived experiences, in the dream she repeats an action that she lived when she picked up blueberries with her boyfriend: "We picked wild blueberries once and carried them back in his hat. I made a pie" (*Blueberries*). Laura's hallucination is like a dream because as Sigmund Freud stated in *The Interpretation of Dreams* "in every dream we may find some reference to the experiences of the preceding day" (Freud, 1900: 136), experiences which have similar symbols: ribbons and the blueberries can be found in previous lexia in this hypertext. The reader can perceive that in Laura's nightmare symbols which were present in her memory, reappear.

The words the speaker uses at the beginning of her hallucinations are mentioned in her past experiences. For instance the word "ribbon" is connected to the "blue ribbon" that Jack -the character of her father's stories- won in a Fair. This node is connected to the lexia called "Sundays" in which her mother told her off for having streaks of green on the back of her skirt. There are two possible reasons why young Laura had these grass stains: one possibility is that she played to be an explorer like Jack and tried to run away from home looking for her dead father. The second possibility is that she was raped by her grandfather on the grass because in another lexia she comments that on Sunday nights her grandfather went to her bed. The verb "to cover" is semantically connected to the grandfather's hands which Laura describes in the lexia called "hands" "were large enough to cover my whole face" (Gibb, 2009: web). Laura knows how her grandfather's hands smelled when she raped her: "He smelled on Sundays of cigars that Gramma let him smoke that one day of the week. [...] His breath would come in rhythmic gusts of sweet-sickly whiskey. Warm and soft on my cheek, like an artist's camel-hair paintbrush" (Gibb, 2009: web).

Laura is scared of the emptiness of the gallery, she probably thinks that nobody will come to see her paintings and she expresses her loss of the sense of reality like a turmoil of painful memories. As a defense mechanism she imagines that the three men of her life helped her gather blueberries and shared important experiences with her. She needs to confess to the reader her traumas to find a cure. In *Blueberries* the reader becomes Laura's psychologist

because he/she is a witness of her depressive feelings and mourning experiences. Although she has been hurt by her grandfather, he is the only person for whom she expresses forgiveness: "Oddly enough the man who probably loved me the most was my grandfather [...] I never hated him even when I understood what he'd done" (Gibb, 2009: web). Melanie Klein observed that overcoming the grudges against parents by forgiving them is the only way to be at peace with oneself and love others (Klein, 1921-1945: 390). In *Blueberries*, the reader cannot know if the speaker solves her psychological problems or not because the unreal and fantastic tone of the three possible endings do not clarify if what happens in the end is real or not.

The last possible reading of *Blueberries* begins by clicking on the word "sex" which leads the reader to the protagonist's more recent experiences with her boyfriend, who abandoned her after seven years of relationship. This third testimony has connections with the previous ones and the reader needs to move forwards and backwards throughout all the hypermedia, reading every missing lexia to close the circle of the plot. Interestingly, the reader feels more relief every time a new reading of *Blueberries* is done because the pieces of the puzzle seem to fit.

In the middle section of the whole hypermedia there is a lexia called "time". This part is where the story gets to its climax. According to Deleuze and Guattari, in the middle (*milieu*) of a rhizome we find what originates the whole content (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972-1980: 23). In hypertexts like *Blueberries* in the middle of the narrative the user can find the interconnections of all the pieces of the stories. The user finds three times: the present, which is when Laura is waiting for people to come to the exhibition, the past, which are her memories and dreams, and the future, which corresponds to the moment in which somebody comes to the gallery. When the reader gets to one of the three possible endings the speaker is finally in the third stage of the healing process that Herman suggested: the reconnection with ordinary life. The reader will notice that the blueberries have been covered by a white layer as the speaker explained that she was going to do in her painting. According to the author, the color white means Laura's effort to leave the feelings of harm of the past behind: "Laura, is slowly letting go of the past trusts and memories, painting over them so to speak, as if she is trying to start with a clean canvas" (Gibb qtd. in Zalbidea, 2011: 324).

All three endings have the possibility for the reader to start reading the hypermedia from a different starting point as we read the sentences "The end or The Beginning" (Gibb, 2009: web). The hypertext reader does not know which of the endings is the real one; all of them can be

true, lies, dreams or the result of an insane mind. The endings are called: "the man", "family" and "love". In "the man" a short middle-aged man is studying Laura's paintings at the gallery and he may be the man that Laura's started to imagine, some kind of "invisible friend" that according to her appeared at the moment in which her father died and her mother did not admit it: "He turns and comes closer. A chill sheath of familiarity slips over me" (Gibb: 2009, web). He asks her a rhetorical question: "You have painted the pain and loss of your life into each work, yes?" and then she goes with him to his place "where he swallows me whole" (2009: web). Being swallowed means sexually possessed and it depends on the reader's perception of the story to read positive or negative connotations in this ending: some can think that she enjoys the sexual experience and others may interpret that she disappears in his possession.

In the ending called "family" the speaker tells lies to the people who are attending the exhibition: "I am telling strangers about a grandfather who was an admiral, a father who raped me, a mother who died in childbirth. These people believe me, believe they'll see a rainbow of color on my paintings" (Gibb, 2009: web). In this ending the speaker is trying to lie to herself about her past. These stories are used as a defense mechanism to overcome her traumas. The other possible ending is the most "happy-ending" kind, in which Jon (her ex-boyfriend) comes to visit her gallery and makes friendly jokes about her painting. The last sentence: "I laugh because I can't cry" indicates that she is pretending to be happy though she is still depressed but is not able to express her suffering any more.

Susan Gibb portrays the power of art as therapeutical, as the protagonist of the hyperfiction experiences. Laura feels as if the paintings and herself were merging, as if there was a symbiosis phenomenon between her and her art. She imagines that she paints with her own blood: "When I paint I feel as if the paint comes from the brush from my fingers from the veins flowing blood that changes color as it hits the canvas" (*Blueberries*, web). Laura is bewildered by the beauty and power of art, she is in an altered state of consciousness associated with her artistic creativity and the psychotic states that she suffers: hallucinations, thought disorder and a loss of contact with reality. Overwhelmed by her artistic imagination Laura becomes a synesthete. The stimulation of one of her sensory or cognitive pathways leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway. Laura is actually able to "feel and hear colors". Synaesthesia is used as a literary resource and also as a sign to transmit the imaginative state of Laura. Examples of synaesthesia in *Blueberries* are: "If I close my eyes and

listen to the dark" or "The smile melts" (Gibb, 2009: web). Laura takes antidepressants to be able to relax but she feels that she has too much creativity and the colors she imagines cover her thoughts like in a painting: "the Prozac doesn't work on the days of intense creativity. It hides in the colors that flow from my veins through my fingers. Jon used to tell me it was my subconscious colors; red, black, eggplant purple, all fighting to color the green leaves their own" (Gibb, 2009: web)

Psychologists have worked on the healing process of verbalising the experience or making art to cure a trauma. We need only think about Freud and Breuer's talking cure (1893: 57; 68) and Carl Jung's (1981: 117) conviction that the healing process begins when the person is able to tell traumatic events in a chronological order and the first step is to verbalise the problem. *Scriptotherapy* is a term defined by Suzette A. Henke as "the process of writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" (Henke 1998: xii-xiii). In the case of the protagonist of the digital story *Blueberries*, the protagonist tries to overcome her trauma by expressing her suffering through painting and also inventing different endings to her day.

During the reading process of this hypertext story the reader acquires an active role which is to try to understand the psychological circumstances of the protagonist. The actions of choosing links and finding the speaker's memories merged with her dreams create a feeling of schizophrenia and empathy in the hypertext reader. The reader feels more intrigue and uncertainty about the possible endings of the story in this kind of interactive digital story than in a printed one owing to the absence of pages, because the certainty about having read the whole story or not is not as obvious in a hypertext as in a printed book in which the reader can see the number of pages. When the subconscious mind of the speaker is revealed the hypertext creates a cathartic effect on the reader. Like in Freudian psychoanalysis catharsis appears when the subject expresses the deep subconscious emotions caused by past experiences which had originally been repressed. In Susan Gibb's *Blueberries* both writer and reader can feel certain pleasure and relief in the experience of imagining possible realities or fictions within the same story.

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