

The intertextual
relation between tell
me how it ends: an
essay in forty
question...



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Migration is not a contemporary phenomena; it has defined human nature since (or even before) crossing The Bering Strait. Humans migrate for two reasons: they are looking for better lives or they simply cannot stay—the latter being the most important and less comprehended. The idea of someone being unable to stay is easy to understand, but when migrants arrive to their destination, the fact that they could not stay home (and are not simply looking for improvement in their lives) is often inconceivable, and they are treated with mistrust. Migrants in both the poem “ Home,” by Warsan Shire, and the essay *Los niños perdidos*, by Valeria Luiselli emigrate because they cannot stay, and are received with abuse. There is a intertextual relationship (as understood by Barthes) between these two texts; the intertextual relation makes visible the difficulty of migration, and recognizing and understanding this intertextual relationship helps to understand their situation.

Intertextuality, as explained by Barthes, is the relation between texts created by language (instead of by the author). The meaning of the words used by the author does not belong to him because he/she rearranges existing words, and this words already have meanings that are defined by their context. Barthes states that meaning are not property of an individual writer. He affirms that:

“ a text is made from multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the

quotations that make up the writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination... the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1977: 148).

The reader is the one that receives the meaning of every word and connects it to its context: creating intertextuality.

The text by Warsan Shire presents the home of a migrant not as a place for living, but as a place where living imposes danger. The poetic voice in "Home" uses a metaphor to state that the place of belonging of these migrants is dangerous, uninhabitable: "home is the mouth of a shark" (Shire 2). It explains that even if migrating demands a risk, a greater risk would be to stay in their homes: "no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land" (Shire 24-25). It shows how the destination is also dangerous and aggressive, but not deathly: "the insults are easier to swallow than rubble than bone than your child body in pieces" (Shire 67). The migrants in Warsan Shire's text have extremely threatening homes, "home[s] [that] chase [them 12]" (Shire) to their destinations and keep assaulting them; nevertheless, these destinations are safer than their place of belonging.

For migrants, home is dangerous regardless of if it is the place of belonging or of destination. For them, home will never be a secure place. Migrants cannot have a home as is commonly understood in other contexts. The title of Luiselli's essay shows that; she is speaking for children that have already arrived to to the United States, but she still calls them *los niños perdidos*.

Migrants will, in a way, always be lost because they will not find a home as it <https://assignbuster.com/the-intertextual-relation-between-tell-me-how-it-ends-an-essay-in-forty-questions-by-valeria-luiselli-and-home-by-warsan-shire/>

is normally understood: safe. Their migratory context condemns it to not belong, to be lost.

Los niños perdidos, by Valeria Luiselli, presents immigrants in the United States, their proses of arriving, the criteria to allow them to stay, the forty questions asked to the children to know if they have a case. Valeria Luiselli translates the answers to the forty questions from Spanish to English, and by doing this, she learns about their personal stories. Migrants in Los niños perdidos, as in " Home," have also experienced the impossibility of living in their places of belonging, and the rejection from their place of arriving. The danger of these zones does not come from the physical place itself, but from the society and its context. Departers in both texts migrate for survival.

Home in both texts represents danger because the migrational context involves it. The word home by itself does not normally have a negative connotation, but for migrants (that travel looking for survival), it does. The migrational context in the text is what makes the concept of home in the texts be dangerous. The third section of Los niños perdidos is called " Home," and it explains why home is inhabitable for migrants: " Todos los adolescentes [...] responden que sí, que han sido directamente afectados por la violencia de las bandas criminales y pandillas" (Luiselli 69); their places of destination as new homes also have a dangerous connotation but in less degree: " Nos cuenta que Hempstead High está llena de pandilleros [...] Le tumbaron los dientes" (Luiselli 74). In the poem, " home is like the mouth of a shark" (Shire 2), but " home [also] chases you" (Shire 12); home is also

dangerous as a place of belonging and of destination. The migration context of both texts is what makes home dangerous, creating intertextuality.

The two texts reach the same function: they explain the migrant's situations in their place of belonging, and how migration is necessary even if part of this violence will accompany them during their journey and to their place of destination. A similar message is expressed throughout two different genres. Poetry and essay are genres characterized for requiring thought from the reader. By expressing a similar message through these genres, it is implicit that the reader should think and re-think in order to understand the migrant's situation in the same way that the reader thinks and re-thinks in order to understand poems or essays. The texts state by their genres that this topic needs to be thought about in order to be understood.

Both of these texts appear as particularly simple for their genre; they express the message clearly instead of having the reader looking for a hidden meaning. It is not that the texts are simple, but they are stating that this common and apparently simple topic as is migration needs to be thought about. Common and clear situations of life should be questioned, connected to others, read about even if they are not unknown. By making apparently simple texts, Luiselli and Shire are showing that common and known situations should also be thought about.

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