

# Teaching how to Look at and View Bodies within Literature

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**Abstract** This paper focuses on how to initiate discussions of the regulatory gaze in primary school classrooms through the study of characters in literature. It specifically focuses on two renowned characters in Spanish literature: Xola (Bernardo Atxaga) and Iholdi (Mariasun Landa). These characters are composed of a chorus of looks which in turn also look. We shall carefully reflect upon these looks and discuss how we see others, how others see us, and how we would like others to see us.

**Keywords** Regulatory Gaze, Characters, Identity, Violence

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## 1. Conceptualisation and Introduction

This paper agrees with the theoretical basis of feminist anthropology's claims concerning inequality. The theory holds that the hierarchy between the sexes is the cornerstone of a social order initially dictated by nature, subsequently ratified by customs, and finally legislated in law. In this regard, the law takes on board the thesis that an attack on a woman is structural violence based on standards and values, on the grounds of unequal hierarchised relations between the sexes.

In connection with this structural violence, in recent decades the Basque Country (Spain) has been heavily mediated due to political violence, whereas sexist violence has been silenced even though it has been generated in the same proportion as in the rest of the Spanish State. These two types of violence in the Basque Country match what researcher Johan Galtung defined as instances of structural violence. When there is an intentional perpetrator of violence, Galtung defines this as direct violence; when there is no such perpetrator, he defines it as structural or indirect violence, a type of violence arising from the structure of society itself. Behind these types of violence lies the symbolic cultural violence present in religion, language, ideology, art, science, law, the media and also in education. The function is quite simple - legitimising direct and structural violence. Thus the patriarchy institutionalises male dominance in vertical structures, with extremely strong correlations between gender and position, legitimised

by culture and often emerging as direct violence, with men the subject and women the object. The patriarchy blends direct, structural and cultural violence into a vicious circle[1].

This paper is based on the concept of structural violence (Galtung, 2003), although it avails itself of one of the concepts most widely used in cultural analyses: gender violence[2]. Gender violence is the exercise of violence reflecting the asymmetric nature of power relations between men and women. This asymmetry is defined by the female and male sexes, constructed in the social habitat[3]. This concept in turn has a large number of definitions, but they all have one issue in common, which is that this type of violence is exercised against women simply because they are women, and it is also an erotic violence. We can establish various classifications for types of gender violence depending on how they arise in intimate situations or in public; we could mention sporadic or continuous abuse; we could create another classification for physical or psychological abuse. The type of violence which concerns us in this paper, however, is symbolic violence, since it transforms procedures the aim of which is to subjugate a certain social group into natural phenomena, using strategies deployed for those wielding power. In other words, it is a form of violence that turns an exercise of social inequality into something totally natural[4].

As the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu rightly points out, submissive acceptance of such symbolic violence arises from schemata of perception, appraisal and action that are dissociated from the control of willpower and the mechanisms of conscious awareness. This perception, for example, may be generated through the regulatory gaze. The design of this research is based on an examination of such a phenomenon. For feminist critics, this method of

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observation is the experience of women with their bodies, “gauged by the way in which women perceive how their own bodies are perceived by the subject of desire of which they form the object”[5].

This regulatory gaze is still a current phenomenon in the advertising industry, the fashion industry etc., to the extent of causing illnesses such as anorexia or bulimia that can claim the lives of young girls afflicted by them. In the sections below we will discuss firstly the power of images, secondly people's gazes and the construction of identities, and in the final section we will forsake mirror gazes to conduct an analysis of two literary characters: Xola and Iholdi. These characters transgress the regulatory gaze, the look of desire of others; from the gaze of male desire they move to the look of female vigilance, which steals away the gaze of the spectator in order to look themselves[6]. Finally we will end by drawing the most significant conclusions.

## 2. Theoretical-methodological Paradigm

### 2.1. Woman as an Object to be Looked at

The history of women's bodies subscribes an extremely conclusive paradox, which must be strictly borne in mind in teaching circles. On the one hand, the history of women as objects refers us to hypervisibility, i.e. the axis around which rotates the entire controversy of women as objects to be looked at, as adornments at the service of men, and on the other we have the underlying concept of their invisibility as subjects. Subjects that do not appear in history, since it was male discourse which told the woman what she was. In other words, the history of a woman's body as a subject equates to absence or negation.

Thus we might say that our society still contains a symbolic order which reproduces male dominance. Today this dominance is maintained in basic institutions such as the family, schools etc., and is represented in cultural production which is placed within the structure of the personality of men and women through the process of socialisation[7]. Gender violence is thus related to the social construct of female and male attraction models tailored by the structure of male dominance. One of the key features currently maintaining gender inequality is increasing differentiation with respect to the corporal identity and image of men and women[8]. It cannot be forgotten, as Lourdes Méndez rightly points out[9], that the rules to be followed are dictated to women in order to present us in society through our bodies.

Nowadays the values proclaimed by society for a woman's body are slimness, beauty and youth. These attributes are no longer gifts from heaven as blessings bestowed upon a chosen few. They have become a universal cult, an obsessive daily obligation, or even unavoidable social requisites, without which women perceive a devalued identity and the threatening spectre of personal failure, very often with tragic consequences.

Naomi Wolf claims we are at the centre of a violent

reaction against feminism, using the myth of beauty as political clout to put the brakes on women's progress.

Beauty is a monetary system just like the price of gold is. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West, it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact[10].

The author goes on to claim that the myth of beauty prescribes a pattern of behaviour and not an appearance. The prevailing cultural values in terms of aesthetics make beauty an asset that is transformed into symbolic capital and finally reverts to social and economic capital[11]. Thus professional female urbanites allocate one third of their income to maintain their beauty, and they feel this is a necessary investment[12].

What can we as teachers do about this mediatised image that is accepted by the vast majority of women and by society in general? Turn our backs on images, look at each other, seek out inter-generational assistance and search for images of beauty in a female subculture, locate biographies of women, read their stories and discover the heroines that have been silenced, fill the terrible voids of beauty. Seek alternatives. Seek emerging models[13]. And, above all, learn to look and to not be seen as the objects of desire, but as the subjects of a story.

### 2.2. Gazes and the Construction of Identities

We learn to look and to see interesting masculine models from infancy. Firstly, as already mentioned, advertising communications make women hypervisible as objects. A sexual object or (reward) for men purchasing the desired object (car, cologne etc.). An object for women, apparently empty, bereft of identity, but nevertheless accompanying the object desired by women. We also have the image of the woman as a family model (the homely type). And finally we have superwomen who are emerging nowadays, but who lack credibility. These mediatic bodies reproduced by the media create an identity.

In terms of the models transmitted to the smallest children, we must make some mention of the production of Disney bodies. The idealisation of Disney bodies also extends to the construct of viewers. Thus we appraise the slenderness of the central female character and the strength of the male character ... not forgetting the ugliness of the evil female and the idiocy of those assisting the evil characters. A genuine mosaic of differentiations which intensify the desire to identify with the girl or the boy[14]. Television, video games and computers generate a host of stereotypes and images. The images we see portray only beauty, slenderness and youth.

What can schools do about this dilemma, particularly when it is the media that disproportion the problem so? Television produces images and destroys concepts, and thus atrophies our capacity for abstraction, and hence our capacity for comprehension[15]. This hegemony of image makes it difficult for small boys or girls to be reflexive with themselves, with others, and in general with the world around them[16]. This bombardment of images, apart from

continuing to recreate stereotypes, educates the look and encourages the regulatory gaze. Teachers will initially focus their discourse on the stereotypes which appear on screens and also in literature, and will mention subversion of roles in order to deconstruct inequality[17]. In addition to discussing the roles played by these roles, teachers will closely examine gazes concerning characters in advertising or in literature.

It is best to choose authors who have opted to create identities far removed from mirror gazes. In other words, authors who are breaking with stereotypes through their literary characters and to this end, among other devices, they deploy the creation of a gaggle of gazes deconstructing the role of the object to be looked at<sup>1</sup>. The intention is to break the idea of pleasant contemplation. In this regard, besides choosing authors conveying their message through alternative models, it is a good idea to opt for an autobiography<sup>2</sup>. In these literary autobiographies, the female authors often refer to the corporeity of the characters in order to explain the events and their moods. Through the words we glimpse the actual presence of a living body. "The aim of looking at oneself, and looking towards oneself again is to recover oneself, to exist again, or more precisely to exist for the first time simply as oneself, far removed from the gaze of others"[18]. Far from the penalising gaze, the female writer does not believe, does not give credit to what she is told, and she verifies and explores her true nature for herself. Taking the floor through language or through one's body is essential if one is to rise up as the subject. The genuine revolution is a woman's capacity and decisiveness to speak for herself[19]. Characters are narrated, they are seen, and they also talk. Having reached this point, it would be interesting to make the pupils talk. Talk about the aesthetic code of regulations. Whether or not the character complies with the virtues demanded by the regulatory gaze: beauty, slimness, youth. Suggest exercises to show how many women demonstrate these characteristics on TV, in books, at home, or in the park. Talking. Talking is essential. The symbolic construction of the body and its image, moulded and appointed by an ideology, must be questioned. Talking about other references, other universes where being a woman is valued: aunts, grandmothers, female teachers, women, in short, who can offer other models where they can see themselves as the female subject[20]. And we mention talking because a school permits the exercise of authority which knowledge gives since it is not an area of domination, but rather of relations among peers where the construction of identities

rising forth through bodies and the looks of the bodies must be innovative and seductive.

In this brainstorming concerning identities, there is a type of discourse which schools must accept in relation to stereotypes. Maria Luz Esteban talks of the women's agency, not women portrayed as victims, but as enterprising women. Dolores Juliano analyses some very different issues, from the positive transmission of female models through children's stories to the role of women in religion. The experience of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina is extremely revealing in that taking on the role of mothers can question an entire political system[21]. Thus, before embarking on an examination of the characters of Mariasun Landa and Bernardo Atxaga, we wish to choose some suitable authors and characters as emerging models which enable us to question the stereotypes created and to portray a woman as a subject, and not as a sexual object.

### 3. Characters who Transgress the Regulatory Gaze

For examination of this regulatory gaze, the intention is to study the characters of Xola by Bernardo Atxaga<sup>3</sup> and Iholdi by Mariasun Landa<sup>4</sup>. The research intends to discuss this gaze as a practical and educational perspective in order to conceptualise it and implement it in the classroom with computerised formats and material (PowerPoint slides, Wikispaces, 'blogs or simply through illustrations). After finalisation of the theoretical basis, it should be mentioned that the aim of this project is for small boys and girls to learn to look. It will commence with reading the stories and familiarising them with the main characters. The stories will be read as many times as necessary until the children are completely familiar with the main characters: Xola and Iholdi. Although the characters form part of a series, the final choice can be Xola y los leones ([Xola and the lions] (1995) and Los secretos de Iholdi[Iholdi's secrets] (2007).

Reading these stories can serve to work directly on construction of identities and discuss the issue of unequal and hierarchised relationships between the sexes. The first question we will share with the children concerning Xola and Iholdi will attempt to elucidate how Iholdi and Xola are seen by the other characters and by the narrators of the stories. When the relations between the characters have been discussed, we can move on to how Xola and Iholdi see themselves. Does Xola see herself as just a mutt of a dog or a lion? Thirdly, we will ask the children how the characters deal with their observation of themselves and with observations from the exterior. Which is more important? Finally, the project will attempt to reflect on how Xola and Iholdi see others.

These concepts will be worked on in the classroom by means of a number of different methodologies, and their objective will be to discuss how others view us and how we

<sup>1</sup> Laura Mulvey considers this look to be a characteristic of films directed by men.

<sup>2</sup> Isolina Ballesteros, 1994, *Escritura femenina y discurso autobiográfico en la nueva novela española* [Female writing and autobiographic discourse in the new Spanish novel] and Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, 1994, *La novela femenina contemporánea (1975-1985). Hacia una tipología de la narración en primera persona* [The contemporary female novel (1975-1985). Towards a typology of narration in the first person] are compulsory reading for knowledge of this issue.

<sup>3</sup> For all information on the writer: [www.atxaga.org](http://www.atxaga.org).

<sup>4</sup> For all information on the author: [mariasunlanda.net](http://mariasunlanda.net).

view others. In other words, a start will be made on teaching children to learn to look. The outcome of the project should convey the idea that all gazes are divergent, and help configure our identity. We will see that it is very important to Xola how others see her and how she sees others, but most particularly it is extremely important how she sees herself, very much a far cry from the regulatory gaze prescribed by a society that is based on inequality. In the case of girls this view forms part of the myth of beauty, but far removed from the identity configuration of Iholdi, which offers new ways of looking and seeing oneself.

### 3.1. Iholdi

One of the best known characters created by this Basque storywriter is Iholdi. Iholdi appeared in 1988 in the narration of the same name; she appeared again in the year 2000 in *Amona, zure Iholdi* [Grandmother, your Iholdi], in 2003 she was the main character in another story, *Marina*, and emerged again in 2005 in *Haginak eta hilobiak* [Teeth and tombs]. The publication of Iholdi was a genuine milestone in Landa's literary trajectory. The book contains 16 micro-stories demonstrating apparent simplicity, precision and power of suggestion. The critic Mari José Olaziregi (1999) holds that Iholdi adds a more postmodern form of aesthetics to Basque literature, with some of the characteristics of minimalism. In her remarks on this phase of Landa's writing career, this critic and university professor points out similarities to the work of Katherine Mansfield or the American author Raymond Carver. The brevity, suggestiveness and photographic narration constitute common denominators between the female writer and the Basque author.

Iholdi is a character representing a break with female stereotypes, as Landa insists in her narrative dynamics, creating to this end peripheral personages: grandfathers, grandmothers, little girls and boys, women, characters with physical defects. Beings who are not normally the recipients of society's greatest privileges, but who acquire force and relevance in Landa's work. She creates identities and voices beyond that usually considered as normal, and even occasionally produces marginal characters living in heterotopic spaces, to use Foucault's term, as in the case of *Karmele* (Chan el fantasma [Karmenxu and the Little Ghost], 1984), who lives in a psychiatric hospital.

These characters speak in the first person, and feel the need to communicate their innermost feelings. Landa, like many contemporary female writers, resorts to memory as a narrative thread to recall and reconstruct a past denied to women. Thus intimacy and memory are recurring techniques used by the author to create identities to resignify daily realities.

Following this brief introduction to the personages portrayed by Mariasun Landa and a focus on one of her characteristic features, the creation of alternative identities, we now intend to produce a sequential work unit with the Iholdi character. It is recommended that this unit be deployed in primary education from the age of nine.

First we will introduce the author. We can use her web page to this end - we can trawl the site and discuss the author, what she suggests to us, the titles of her works, and anything each title may conjure up to us. We will invite the class to go to [mariasunlanda.net](http://mariasunlanda.net) and say what they liked most about Mariasun. The red hair, the page format, the literary aesthetics ...

When we have met the author, we will read *Los secretos de Iholdi* (2007) [Iholdi's secrets], a compilation of three narrations the common feature of which is that they are letters or stories written by Iholdi. Thus, in the first story she writes a letter to her dead grandmother to tell her a secret. In the second she writes a composition at the request of her teacher relating the most important thing that has happened to her recently, and in the third she enters the 2004 First Interschool Children's Stories Competition. In other words, it is Iholdi herself who is writing the story. Apart from a careful examination of looks, the aim of reading these three stories can be to write various texts: the grandmother's reply to Iholdi, writing or preparing a story. The aim of reading these stories must be to familiarise the children with Iholdi, as if she were just another classmate. We can dramatise the concept, and in literature classes we can suggest that the pupils act out Iholdi's role.

To familiarise ourselves with Iholdi, first of all we will appraise the illustrations. In the stories published in Basque, Iholdi is portrayed by the artist and writer Asun Balzola, whereas Elena Odriozola was responsible for the illustrations in the Spanish version. We will scan the different versions as PowerPoints, and hold a full group discussion on how Asun Balzola and Elena Odriozola see Iholdi. In issue Nº 2 of the magazine *Behinola*, Maria José Olaziregi claims that Balzola's innovative techniques, experimentalism, attention to detail and poetry are the artistic explicitation of Landa the poet. What most interests women about these representations is that Iholdi appears to be far removed from the mirror gaze. Iholdi is the protagonist and the subject of the action, and bears no resemblance to the conventions that society requires of female attractiveness. After a reading by each pupil, therefore, they will be asked to draw Iholdi the way they imagine her to be. When the illustrations are carried out in the classroom, it will be interesting to see if they pay any heed to conventionalised aesthetics. What they understand by beauty. Whether they have drawn her as slim or fat. Why?

Following analysis and class discussion of the visual portrayal of Iholdi by Asun Balzola, Elena Odriozola and by the pupils in the class, we can move on to analyse how the author saw Iholdi. Which characteristics she gave her. Landa opted for the autobiographical method and portrayed Iholdi writing or drawing, i.e. in construction of the self. Landa has directed an internal look, with a voice speaking in the first person which wants to know more about itself and introduce itself to others. The look is for herself. It is a look of self-construction and self-conscience, and this is where Iholdi presents herself to the observers as a subject

and not as an object. This is a look of self-discovery, but it is also a look of correction or destruction of the image of the self perceived from the exterior. Nobody desires Iholdi because she is slim, good and kind. Iholdi is a combination of male attributes, which are always attractive to small girls and boys, and female qualities that Landa positivises with great mastery. Iholdi is intelligent, brave and sensitive. This is how Landa depicts the situation in Iholdi's secrets.

There is an interesting cross-glance in *Grandmother*, your Iholdi (the first story in *Iholdi's secrets*). First, however, it should be mentioned that the second main character in this story is Iholdi's dead grandmother. A grandmother who watches her carefully from heaven and helps her out. This grandmother reminds us of Christine Nöstlinger's grandmother in *Dear grandmother ... your Susi* or Peter Härtling's *The grandmother*. Strong-willed grandmothers who face up to the invisibility of age or old-age. It is most important to study and analyse aged characters, because they have now disappeared from television. Just as we are discussing Iholdi, therefore, it is a good idea to discuss the grandmother. What the grandmother means to Iholdi, what our grandmothers mean to us. This is the only way to produce different female models to emulate. Iholdi's grandmother is responsible for directing the traffic in heaven. An important job. Iholdi tells us her grandmother has the power to see everything from heaven - this is therefore a look which is powerful and protective, a look which is an accomplice and a friend.

Iholdi looks up to heaven and at the letter, and tells her secret. The secret is the crux of the narration. The secret is that she is being blackmailed by her cousin Martín. And Martín also looks at Iholdi - he looks at her with a strange know-all smile, and she knows this is the look of blackmail and hegemony. Martín has found a gun, which he shows to Iholdi. Iholdi is frightened, and says she will tell the teacher. Martín reminds her that he knows one of her secrets: Iholdi occasionally wets her bed. Martín suggests they play cops and robbers with the gun he has found and Iholdi does everything Martín wants, for fear he will reveal her secret to the whole class. In this instance of blackmail, Landa is talking to us about stereotypes. Martín tells Iholdi to play with the gun, not to be a coward, not to be chicken, like all girls usually are. It is at this point that Landa intervenes to subvert roles and looks. Iholdi writes to her grandmother, who advises her to get rid of the gun. Once the gun has gone, Martín's hegemonic gaze changes direction and now it is Iholdi who is threatening to reveal Martín's secret. Iholdi is proud of standing up to Martín, and proud of the grandmother who always helps her.

The representations of masculinity (the cops and robbers game, Martín who is always planning adventures, always thinking up some mischief) and female dominance ("you're probably wondering why Martín would be threatening me, and why he made me keep quiet and had control over me") form part of practices at school. As we see in the story, masculinity is shored up by the subjugation of "feminine" attributes through bodily strength (girls wetting their beds),

hypersexualisation (scaredy-cat, chicken), interiorisation of the body and its expressions. Femininity is configured in this way, from observance of rules and acceptance of bodily inferiority - the school is of great relevance in the story, since Iholdi's fear is based on the possibility that her classmates will find out about her incontinence. Iholdi, however, says no, and stands up to Martín.

Moreover, it is only Iholdi's body which appears throughout the story to point out her defect. It is for this reason that Martín calls her a bed-wetter, and manipulates her because Iholdi does not want the entire class to see her as a bed-wetter. It is a sick body that is portrayed in this case. And flawed bodies suffer regulatory gazes. The derogatory term bed-wetter allows us to talk about illnesses, how we see illnesses, the deficiencies of our bodies and the bodies of others. The language of violence judges, derogates, insults and denies the existence of others, disdaining their emotions and their different points of view, disdaining diversity and difference among human beings. Far from accentuating a deficiency as devalued and shameful, teachers will try to soften it by homing in on the more important virtues each pupil has, as Iholdi does.

At this point, we can discuss in class the gaze that terrifies us most. What we like least about our bodies, and why. Or rather, what we believe society does not like about our bodies. We will talk about Iholdi's illness and about all the illnesses and deficiencies of all bodies, since Disney bodies only exist in virtual media.

We will not conduct much analysis of the second story in *Iholdi's secrets*, *Marina*. This story also contains many interesting looks. The way her parents look at her, who see her as very small, unlike Marina, who sees her as rather older, like a friend, and this is why she asks her to keep a secret. "Marina told me Iker was a child, but not me, that I was old enough to be an assistant. That I had lovely hair"<sup>5</sup>.

Marina is Iholdi and her brother's new nanny. They go to play in the park every day. Marina is visited in the park every day by a boy who gives her something and runs off. Until one day some men arrive, policemen according to Iholdi, and she hears something about drugs. This encounter becomes the great secret between Marina and Iholdi. Following this encounter, however, Marina ceases to be her nanny and her friend.

The look of desire does appear in this story. Marina, who wants to be a hairdresser, promises Iholdi she will put colours in her hair "like those lovely girls on TV"<sup>6</sup>. We will discuss those lovely girls in class, and how we like our hair. What colours we like. We know that blonde hair until recently was the most sought after, but now the aesthetic preference is for long dark hair. But not red hair, which is still the transgressor, and Iholdi likes Marina's red hair. "I thought she looked very nice: long red curly hair". Also, and here we have the crux of the matter, Marina is visited by a boy in the park, and Iholdi sees her taking a little

<sup>5</sup> *Iholdi's secrets*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> *Iholdi's secrets*, 35.

mirror out of her bag, putting on lipstick and letting down her hair. When the boy has gone, she takes out a paper handkerchief to clean her lips, and ties up her hair with an elastic band. Iholdi tells us that when the boy arrived in the park with a wary look he would come over to Marina: "And I don't think he looked at Marina too much, I don't think he realised how pretty she was with her red lips and her long curly hair".

Formal or school education has ensured, and ensures, that a sense of bodily issues is transmitted, a sense no different to the dominant ideologies that are present in all aspects of life. Thus our body learns and is constructed by suffering, loving, thinking, working, studying, and in a word observing social realities and situations. This reality can serve as a basis for us to talk about how we get ready to go out, why we have a shower, why we get dressed, why we put on make-up, why we go to the hairdresser's ... we can draw up an entire project around the encounter between Marina and the boy in the park. What do we dress up for? Here we are deconstructing the idea that a woman only dresses up to attract looks of desire. Talking to our mothers, bringing in family photos etc. are possible activities that could enhance the project.

Finally we will analyse the image of Iholdi, whose pigtails and cleverness remind us of Pippi Longstocking. Sandra Bartky (1988) discusses the modernisation of patriarchal power through three categories of practices that are central to the construction of female subjectivity. The shaping and configuration of their figures through dieting, physical exercise and facial expression. Secondly, she mentions body language, where men are clearly less inhibited than women. Unrestrained women are therefore in breach of these rules. Her third category discusses their ornamented surfaces and cosmetics. We could say that the shaping and configuration of the Iholdi character's figure, her body language and ornamentation do not meet these aesthetic requirements, and this is precisely why we have chosen her for our examination of the regulatory gaze.

Finally, in her third story, *Teeth and tombs*, Landa presents Iholdi writing a story, a new subjective experience she is sharing with her friend Deo Gratias. Thus Landa again avails herself of autobiographical writing in the first person to demonstrate her interiority, reaffirm her position vis-à-vis the outside world and put some order into her life through writing.

This story deals with death and friendship. Iholdi introduces us to her friend, Deo Gratias. This character summarises everything that has been said up to now. Deo Gratias is the sum of the looks. These looks, however, are divergent. Iholdi tells us that Deo is her neighbour, a woman who on the outside appears to be perfectly normal, but is a little girl inside. Iholdi tells us that local people say she has a screw loose, the other neighbours think she is a special case, "born simple", and Iholdi also says her grandmother used to remark that Deo was a couple of sandwiches short of a picnic. "And I couldn't understand what difference it made how many sandwiches there were

at a picnic that made Deo so special, but I liked the comparison, because it reminded me of the lovely things grandmother used to cook at home".<sup>7</sup>

When Deo Gratias's father dies, she tells Iholdi a secret. Deo has a hundred or so teeth - her father was a dentist, and she is burying them in different little graves in the park. When the Town Hall carers arrive to pick up Deo, she is away working on her graves. Only Iholdi can find her friend.

Summing up, we have seen how Asun Balzola and Elena Odriozola have portrayed Iholdi with all these looks, how Landa has created Iholdi, and how Iholdi has observed the other characters. The various gazes configure the identity of each character one by one. Each gaze is, to use a metaphor, like a ring on a tree providing information as to its age and corporeity - in a word, its identity. But how does Iholdi see herself? From the very first story we know that Iholdi is a character who always questions gazes, thinks them through, reflects upon them and finally accepts her own gaze to confirm her position vis-à-vis the outside world. She questions the gazes of Martín, the gaze of her parents who feel she is very small, and she likes Marina because she sees her as a friend.

Finally, we noted above that construction of identities entails the body and the gaze emanating from the body. If that body and those gazes form part of the relationship with a mother or other women who are of some standing in the little girl's world, they will constitute emerging models for her. Not to be copied, but for her to look at herself as a female subject, unlike female models in the advertising industry and stereotypes. If we offer no female role models, there is a risk that little girls in school will take up the male paradigm as their ideal self, and it is for this reason that Iholdi is interesting, because she provides a response to all the concerns and experiences of her peers, but with a male slant.

### 3.2. Xola

The setup for work on the sequential unit will be the same. First of all, a brief introduction to the author at [www.atxaga.org](http://www.atxaga.org), and secondly a reading of the stories until Xola becomes just another classmate. *Xolak badu lehoien berri* (1995)[Xola hears about the lions]; *Xola eta basurdeak* (1996)[Xola and the wild boars]; *Xola eta Angelito* (2004)[Xola and Angelito] and *Xola eta Ameriketako izeba* (2011)[Xola and the aunt from America]. *Xola y los leones* (1995)[Xola and the lions] and *Xola y los jabalies* (1996)[Xola and the wild boars] are the only stories translated into Spanish, and so we will focus more on these.

When the stories have been read, we will conduct an analysis as above - how the illustrators portrayed Xola, and how Bernardo Atxaga himself produced Xola. Here we will merely raise a couple of questions concerning gazes, in due consideration of the length of the paper, and because the analysis setup has already been furnished above.

<sup>7</sup> *Iholdi's secrets*, 58.

The first question is why we have chosen Xola to discuss the rules of aesthetics, the rules of gender or of the regulatory gaze. We have chosen Xola because this avoids the universal gender, i.e. males, and no female exists. We might say that Xola has a hybrid condition that enables the exaltation of feminine traits, and questions traditionally masculine traits. What is interesting about this character is that, in its animal guise, we do not know whether it is female or male. Only references by the dog's master or by Angelito, another Basque sheep dog, who address the animal as a girl, show us that it is female. Basque verb formats for the familiar "you" differentiate between men and women. No other clues are provided. Atxaga deletes any characteristics that could lead to the construction of identities, and the tale includes a rich helping of role-questioning.

This rupture of the frontiers between sexes, eminently theorised by postmodernist feminists such as Monique Wittig and Judith Butler, among others, ushers in a new thought, a new body, a new being that is different to those that went before it, a genderless being, a new ontological entity. In the case of Xola, it is a blend of frontiers, animal and person, that is ushered in. Xola is a dog that talks, thinks and barks.

This ambiguity, however, goes further, and at one point Xola realises she is not just a mutt, like her mother used to say, but that her attributes, as she sees them, are those of a lion, those of the King of the Jungle. This is the idea implemented by Bernardo Atxaga in the Xola and the lions story. In this tale, Atxaga applies the idea of gender performativity as developed by Judith Butler. The well-known feminist uses the performance concept to claim that gender is learned, and arises from the roles we learn and interpret in the course of our lives. Hence genders have no reason to exist, and can be learned or unlearned. While Butler was writing *Gender Trouble*, she experienced daily injections of testosterone in her own flesh, and a change of gender or the configuration of a gender that goes much farther: transgender.

The thing is that Xola hears about lions, a strong, powerful and noble species which can dominate any other animal. Xola then realises she is really like a lion, and cannot understand why people treat her like a stupid mutt. She decides to read *The Jungle Book* to find out more about lions, find out more about herself. Eventually she is totally convinced she is a lion, and at this point she applies the performance concept. The park becomes Xola's jungle, where she attacks the doves and ducks. She decides to change her habits and goes out hunting on the streets, and even changes her bark for a roar. At one point she even begins to transform her body, because her white skin does not match the yellow colour of felines. She dyes her hair after the cyborg concept of Donna Haraway, to mould our body to our own liking. Even when she looks in the mirror she does not see just a mangy dog, but a courageous lion.

Xola transforms from a mere dog to a lion in the jungle, successfully merging the genres. The problem is that her

owner, the cats, the ducks and the little old ladies in the park do not see her as a lion, but just as a mutt of a dog. Thus she finally decides to go back to her old life as a dog. This story could end in many different ways since it discusses queer theory, cultural construction of sexuality and gender. It also, however, discusses how society is not used to these postmodernist feminist postulates, not used to looking in any way other than a dichotomy.

## 4. Conclusions

Firstly, in order to work on the regulatory gaze, especially looks which avoid the regulatory gaze, it is important to select authors who advocate alternative models. Specifically, the biographical option is extremely interesting. Autobiographical works frequently discuss an internal gaze which, to quote Mónica González Bastos, means looking at oneself and looking again in order to recover oneself, to be again, or rather to be for the first time something that belongs inside oneself, a loof to the gaze of others.

Secondly, it would be interesting to have the pupils talk, and talk about the regulatory code of aesthetics. Whether or not the characters we are analysing or seeing fulfil the characteristics demanded by the regulatory gaze: beauty, slimness, youth. Suggest exercises to demonstrate how many women show these characteristics on TV, in books, at home, or in the park. Talking. Talking is essential. The symbolic construction of the body and its image, moulded and appointed by an ideology, must be questioned. Talking about other references, other universes where being a woman is valued: aunts, grandmothers, female teachers, women, in short, who can offer them other models for them to see themselves as a female subject.

Thirdly, we will take account of three categories of practices that are central to the construction of female subjectivity. The shaping and configuration of figures through dieting, physical exercise and facial expression; body language, where men are clearly less inhibited than women, and thus unrestrained women are in breach of these rules. And, lastly, women's ornamented surfaces and cosmetics. We could say that the shaping and configuration of the figure of the character we have investigated, Iholdi, her body language and ornamentation do not meet these aesthetic requirements, and this is why we have chosen her for our examination of the regulatory gaze.

Fourthly and lastly, we have seen that just as Iholdi proposes the construction of alternative identities and a break with the mirror gaze or aesthetic rules, Xola ventures farther and suggests a merger between genres or the dissolution of the artificial frontiers between the male and female genders as claimed by Judith Butler in her performance concept. The dog avails itself of performativity to turn itself into a lion in the jungle, and she even sees herself as a lion in the mirror. The problem is that society in general still sees her as a worthless dog. Society has been educated in the regulatory gaze, and so it is essential for

women to work on their internal gaze, as Landa proposes through Iholdi in a construction of alternative identities. It is also essential that society learns to look and see in a different way. It is obvious that educational tasks can make a contribution to the teaching of that look, by analysing the mirror gaze and the rules of aesthetics, and also by teaching how to look.

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