

Edges of the Swarm: The World in Flux in Pilar Adón's *Las efímeras*

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An important feature of the narrative work of Spanish writer Pilar Adón is her interest in utopian social forms, that is, in forms of organization based on alternative models of sociability that establish new relationships between humans and with nature. Instead of focusing on the enduring power of the utopian idea—of the human desire to enact forms of existence free from social constraints—Adón's 2015 novel *Las efímeras* explores the slow unraveling and collapse of a utopian community.¹ The community in question, La Ruche (the Beehive), has its origins in an educational project: a school for orphan children. Implicit in the community's name and the novel's title—"Las efímeras" is not just the feminine plural of the adjective "ephemeral" but also a Spanish term for a specific family of insects, mayflies, or Ephemeroptera—is the notion of swarming insects, of provisional and capillary forms of collective organization. Mayflies and bees have the potential to settle and congregate, to cluster together, and to operate as a plural mobile whole that morphs into new configurations.

Eugene Thacker has drawn attention to the ambiguity of the swarm as a type of collective organization that may acquire positive and negative, utopian as well as dystopian, connotations.² Thacker defines the swarm as a unit composed of a large number of individual members operating in coordinated fashion without

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the necessity of centralized control. The utopian dimension of the swarm resides in its capacity for self-organization, the creation of a collective macrounit that instead of forming a totalized whole is continuously reconstituted through a relay of decisions at the microlevel. The dystopian and terrifying aspect of the swarm occurs when its fluid metaorganization falls prey to entropic tendencies that lead either to the swarm's chaotic disintegration or its transformation into a blind and uncontrollable force. (Think of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* or plagues of locusts ravaging vast areas of Africa.)

Adón's novel explores a complex dynamic of personal and political relationships in the utopian community, the former based on affective—romantic or familial—bonds among characters (sisters or lovers) and the latter regulating connections *among* individual household units as well as *between* them and the figure of the leader, Anita, who oversees the functioning of the community as a whole. The seeds of disintegration of La Ruche, the roots of the conflicts that disturb the balance between individual autonomy and interests of the collective, are found in relationships of dependence that have far-reaching consequences that are both interpersonal as well as systemic.

At the interpersonal level, Adón's novel probes into the dynamic of interdependence between couples or pairs of characters—two sisters, two lovers, a mature woman and her young protégé—constituted as unions between a strong individual who offers protection and a weak one who is in need of being protected. This power dynamic is destabilized whenever—as indeed happens in most of the crucial episodes of the novel—the purportedly weak character breaks the bonds of dependence and attempts to escape the cocoon of physical and emotional protection. By focusing on the incapacity of the strong to protect the weak and the ensuing fear of losing control over one's own life—a life that is so deeply enmeshed with the imperative to protect the other—Adón's novel brings to the fore the dark core of interdependence. Do the weak depend entirely on the strong, or are the latter also ensnared in the web of dependence constructed around the purported weakness of the former? Conversely, can the attempted escape from protection reproduce the structure of domination by devolving into a search for another protective environment? In Adón's novel, the tangled web of inter- or codependency points to the flipside of the power dynamic that characterizes the relation between the strong and the weak.

A similar dynamic of dependence and interdependence operates at the systemic level, that of the community's body politic. The

founding idea of the novel's utopian commune speaks of a harmonious coexistence between the individual household units that form the "beehive" and the interests of the collectivity that is a living embodiment of common principles, values, and traditions. The basis of the delicate balance, the fragile equilibrium, that informs life in *La Ruche* rests on the idea that within the bounds of the community whose purpose is to protect all its members—particularly the weakest—from encroachment and domination, no one should curtail the other's autonomy or feel controlled by another.

The commune's catastrophic unraveling occurs precisely at the point where the rupture of integrity of an individual unit destabilizes the functioning of the community as a whole. The event that introduces disturbance within the community—the escape of a young woman who abandons her domineering sister and flees to her lover's house, situated just outside the perimeter of *La Ruche*—creates a conflict between two pillars of communal relationships: the autonomy of an individual household endangered by the presence of an outsider who lures a young woman away and the protective role of the community whose survival depends on suppressing tendencies to domination whether from the outside or within. The basic plot structure of Adón's novel, the root that supports an intricately woven tapestry of episodes, depicts a struggle between two principles that regulate the life of the community. The first of these principles is based on the defense of the integrity and autonomy of every cell or household within the beehive—notably, the family unit formed by two sisters—while the other, personified in the figure of Anita, the community's leader or administrator, seeks to secure the collective's internal equilibrium against the unpredictable actions of individual members, which have the potential for tipping the beehive's metabolism toward imbalance. The actions of individual characters in the novel, their desire to protect the weak or exercise control over them, generate tensions within the swarm's interior, where they begin to reverberate and expand outward toward its edges. The edges of a swarm, as Thacker has argued, are not just its physical borders but also a zone where the complex dynamism of swarming—a constellation of myriad individual actions organized without centralized control—meets the swarm's inherent impermanence: its potential for transformation, shifting into new configurations, or falling prey to dispersion and chaotic unraveling. Rather than writing a novel *about* the commune named after a beehive, Adón deploys the imaginary of swarms and beehives, with deep roots in the history of utopian thought, as a way of exploring the instability—the ephemerality—of a world in which the utopian desire for freedom and self-sufficiency clashes with the crude reality

of interdependence and in which each individual action holds the potential for generating unforeseen systemic consequences.³

The narrative of Adón's novel concentrates around five characters: three women from La Ruche—the leader Anita and the sisters Dora and Violeta Oliver—and two young men, Tom and Denis, who do not form part of the community. Tom is a newcomer, an exile from the city who abandoned his studies and came to La Ruche looking for his “true place in the world.” Denis is a great-grandson of a healer capable of reviving the bodies of recently deceased animals who attracted the wrath of the community's founders after failing to save the life of their adoptive daughter, Adeline. As the last member of an entire lineage of healers, Denis has inherited the supernatural power transmitted through successive generations of men in his family. Together with this gift, however, come responsibility and blame for his great-grandfather's crime of not preventing and thereby directly or indirectly causing the death of the little girl.

Violeta Oliver's decision to live in Denis's house after escaping the shed in which her sister kept her locked up marks the moment where two narrative lines—the past and present of La Ruche—merge and intersect. Although Violeta's presence in his home gives Denis an opportunity to shelter and protect a young delicate woman from her unstable sister, their union rekindles the memory of the conflicts that continue to haunt the community. Dora Oliver, her world shattered by the disappearance of her sister, solicits Anita's help to bring Violeta back and, in a sense, thereby restore the communal order against the noxious influence of the man whose predecessor had evaded the founders' vigilance once before. Anita refuses to help Dora and lays the blame for Violeta's disappearance squarely and quite literally at Dora's feet. (As we shall see, in the scene in which Anita chastises Dora for imprisoning Violeta, Dora loses the ground under her feet and is rendered prostrate, stretched out on the floor of the shed where her sister was locked up.) As Dora rejects Anita's authority and heads to Denis's house to plead for her sister's return, the waves of unrest spread outward and reach the young couple who are attempting to break the bonds of dependence and the generational curse that tie them to La Ruche. The union of Denis and Violeta shatters after she mentions the rumors circulating in the community about his great-grandfather's responsibility for the little girl's death. This seemingly casual repetition of the ancestral story, which Violeta insists she heard from Dora, enrages Denis, who loses control of his actions and violently shakes and shoves Violeta before throwing her out of his house.

In the final part of the novel, in which all the protagonists perish with the exception of Denis and Violeta, the scenario shifts from the spaces of the characters' homes to the wooded area surrounding La Ruche. In the same way in which the action of the novel breaks free from the domestic interiors, which invariably turn into places of voluntary or involuntary confinement, the affects that tie the characters to each other and to the community—domination, dependence, desire for protection, and thirst for revenge—become at the end of the novel impossible to contain, whether spatially or within the strictures of the dynamic that organizes relationships between couples of characters. Throughout Adón's impeccably executed novel, the accumulated tensions that lead to the final violence are painstakingly built on proliferating instances of micro-level conflicts that involve just two characters: Violeta and Dora, Dora and Anita, Denis and Violeta, Anita and Tom, Dora and Tom, Dora and Denis, and so forth.

Surrounded by the mysterious presence of the woods, the four remaining characters, brought together in the novel's final scene after Dora has already met her lonely and cruel end, form two couples, one already torn asunder (Denis and Violeta) and the other (Tom and Anita) preparing to part ways as Tom, who received full membership in La Ruche, is looking for his own home in the community. Their hazardous and ultimately fatal encounter comprises the culmination of a novel that instead of being driven by causal narrative logic constitutes a web of multiple trajectories of movements that orbit around La Ruche, movements driven by the push and pull of contrary impulses that place each and every character in a double bind, on the cusp of a decision regarding a forced or imagined next step. Every action of Adón's characters, everything they do or think, is a function of their movements, their comings and goings, their intentions to settle and remain in La Ruche or break free from it, and their frustrated attempts to leave home or find a new one, always looking for an impossible equilibrium between individual freedom and the need to protect and be protected.

In the novel's final scene the trajectories of the four remaining characters, each driven by the desire to escape one set of circumstances while searching for a different but not necessarily better one, converge and come to a halt before the moment that will bring about the final dissolution of La Ruche. In what seems like fateful symmetry, that dissolution results from Denis's decision to exact revenge on the community that punished his family with the curse of ostracism and shame whose lasting effects derailed the prospect of his future with Violeta. In its final lines,

the novel pauses on the edge of destruction as Denis aims his rifle at Anita, ready to shoot. Just like his great-grandfather, whose actions unleashed a slew of unforeseen micro- and macrolevel consequences, Denis's decision to kill Anita is not simply an individual murder but rather the destruction of an entire community that, in keeping with its own name, replicates the dynamic of a swarm balanced precariously between a search for stability and the potential for chaotic unraveling.

Fugitive Beings: Family Genealogies, Flocks, and Swarms

What is a girl, what is a group of girls? . . .

"Fugitive beings."

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari,
*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism
and Schizophrenia*

The seeds of the conflicts that will lead to the self-unraveling of the community are planted at the initial stage in La Ruche's development when it still functioned as a home and school for orphan children, founded by a pair of exiles from the city, Madame Caterina and Monsieur Claude. The future of La Ruche changes indelibly following the unexpected appearance of Adeline, a sickly little girl of unknown provenance who becomes Caterina and Claude's adopted daughter and appointed heiress. Not only are the circumstances of Adeline's arrival unusual—she arrives in La Ruche alone, seemingly out of nowhere, seeking refuge—but her presence introduces a new and extraneous element into the community: the attempt at creating a family genealogy. Following Adeline's arrival and adoption, the founders' function as the benefactors and parental figures of a cohesive collective, a flock of orphan children gathered around them, becomes altered by the creation of a new, unique, and irreplaceable bond tying Caterina and Claude to their only "true" daughter.

As much as her privileged status, it is the precarious state of Adeline's infirm body that separates her from the rest of the community. Her physical weakness, which shows no signs of improvement despite the constant care and attention, consumes the adoptive parents' energies, diverting the affection they owe to other children in a collective body whose members all depend on the vital energy emanating from parental and, more particularly, motherly love. The metaphors of luminous energy abound in Adón's description of the scene in which Caterina, in a brightly

colored dress, lovingly stretches her arms around the girls, reassuring them of Adeline's recovery, which will allow them all to remain together in their "exquisite and radiant" home.⁴

As it brings to the fore the fragility of an individual life, Adeline's illness and uncertain recovery prospects become a vital issue that affects all the members of *La Ruche*—the adoptive parents as well as the orphan children—generating far-reaching consequences for the future of the community as a whole. The eventuality of Adeline's death not only stirs up conflictive emotional responses—although devastating for the parents, that death is secretly desired by the girls who aspire to take her place—but also threatens to disrupt the collective equilibrium and cohesiveness of the flock/beehive in which each member holds a stable place. Following Adeline's arrival, the balance of the closely knit universe of *La Ruche* hangs on the feeble body of the girl who is wavering between two possible outcomes: her recovery from illness or her demise. Recovery entails assuming her assigned role as the founders' daughter and heiress. Death amounts to abandoning her assigned genealogical function, leaving empty a place that will be filled by the grief of the couple deprived of their dreams of parenthood as well as by the stirrings of desire among the other girls who will cease to be part of a unified flock and become pretenders to Adeline's role, wannabe daughters who covet her place.

Somewhat paradoxically, finding a cure for Adeline's illness becomes the only way to reintroduce stability into the beehive, which was altered not only by her presence but also by the intimations of future disturbances that the prospect of her absence might bring. The hopes for Adeline's recovery, fervently embraced by her adoptive parents and half-heartedly seconded by the rest of the children, are a facade that hides a mix of contrary feelings, fears, and fantasies about the commune's future in the event of her disappearance. Both her recovery and her death announce a potential change in the functioning of the collective organism and the status of the individual members, who link their chances of maintaining, improving, or losing their place in the community to the presence—or absence—of the legitimate daughter. As they secretly await Adeline's death as an opportunity, the children also fear that Caterina and Claude might abandon them, leaving *La Ruche* to search elsewhere for the cure. For the parents, torn between concern for their sick daughter and the increasingly vocal cries for attention coming from other members of the flock, finding a cure for Adeline is the only solution, the only way to satisfy their parental yearnings—having a daughter who will remain by their side even if others leave—while reassuring the other children

that once Adeline recovers, they will continue to care for all of them equally rather than “insisting on being here always with the same daughter,” as one of the girls complains.⁵

Adeline’s healing is necessary to avert the threat of systemic disturbance that her illness has set into motion. In the name of reaffirming the bond that connects them to all their children and not just to one daughter, Caterina and Claude decide against leaving La Ruche in search of a cure, announcing instead that a man with supernatural healing powers from the neighboring village will treat Adeline in their home. The jubilation with which the children receive Caterina’s announcement—“Adeline will be cured in this very house. And we will all witness the miracle of her recovery”⁶—is hardly an expression of collective hope for Adeline’s healing. Quite the contrary, it is a manifestation of diverse individual interests joined by the desire to continue living in (swarming around) La Ruche. This desire is not an expression of a collective spirit but rather a shared investment in securing everyone’s place in the community against the prospect of more unexpected comings and goings that was set into motion by Adeline’s arrival. In Thacker’s terms, the common interest in Adeline’s healing represents the triumph of connectivity (temporary coordination of individual actions and intentions) over collectivity (coalescence of individual units gathered around a common goal).⁷ The only member of La Ruche who doesn’t participate in the jubilation is Adeline herself. Her response is a barely audible sentence, her only utterance in the entire novel: “And what if I don’t get better?” she asks. “But no one seemed to hear her.”⁸

Although justified from the standpoint of the interests of its members, the decision to invite an outsider to cure Adeline and protect the integrity of La Ruche is laden with irony by literally and figuratively opening the doors of the community to the anomalous and uncontrollable outside. The healer they bring in is an outsider not just because he does not belong to the community but also because of his exceptionality. The unique power he possesses—curing the sick and dying and bringing small dead animals back to life—comes from his family lineage of men who are singled out and set apart from everyone else (from any community). For these men, their own exceptionality is normal: “Something they simply do. Something habitual in them. What they have always done.”⁹

From the moment of the healer’s arrival in La Ruche, the narrative draws attention to the contrast between him and his hosts. The awkward scene that unfolds at the doorstep of La Ruche, as the nervous couple welcomes their daughter’s appointed savior, establishes a stark distinction between the air of refinement

emanating from Claude and Caterina in their comfortable bourgeois surroundings and the coarse, unpolished exterior of the man who appears utterly uninterested in becoming acquainted with the hosts who are determined to make him feel at home. (The library, chosen by the parents as the site for the “miracle” of healing, is the only place in the home that elicits the healer’s interest, but he examines the books with voracious, almost desperate curiosity rather than casually perusing the titles in the manner of a civilized visitor.) Subtly and indirectly, the narrative suggests that the healer’s rejection of the sense of intimacy and familiarity being imposed on him by the couple reveals something more than the lack of manners of a rustic man unaccustomed to refinement. Behind his facade of indifference, the healer is attentively observing the spectacle of the bourgeois family filiation unfolding before his eyes: the angelical aura (“like two angels of goodness”) of a couple determined to save the life of a sickly girl they chose as their daughter, the woman’s insistence on addressing her husband as “papá,” and even their domesticated guard dogs (“inoffensive” despite their loud barks, Claude assures him)¹⁰ that fit Deleuze and Guattari’s characterization of “Oedipal animals, each with its own petty history, ‘my’ cat, ‘my’ dog.”¹¹ The scene of the healer’s arrival therefore stages an encounter between two different kinds of genealogies: the fictive and all too wobbly genealogy of the nuclear family that Caterina and Claude have attempted to form by adopting Adeline and the male lineage of healers whose power over life and death is transmitted through bloodline and exercised like a habit (i.e., a practice beyond individual control that transpires via contact with another—human or animal—body).

The healing session, one of the most unsettling scenes in a novel replete with them, puts into contact two bodies, two characters who could not be more unlike each other: the well-dressed and well-behaved little girl who enters the library, in the company of her adoptive parents, and the man who refers to her in a cold and impersonal fashion, not by her name but as “la enferma,” and appears less drawn to the ailing girl than to the nonhuman company of the books he eagerly examines like a man possessed. Once the session gets under way, the healer’s unusual methods to decipher the root of the girl’s illness alarm the parents as well Adeline herself who, initially smiling and docile, becomes distressed and stops complying with his requests.¹² The healer’s initial skepticism—“I don’t think I can do much for her . . . but let’s see”—shifts when he separates the girl from the parents and, after planting gentle kisses on her hair, eyes, and hands, asks her to lie down next to him. Once the two are stretched out on the floor, the

man, his lips touching Adeline's, initiates what to the incredulous parents at first looks like a game of sorts. With his eyes wide open and focused entirely on the girl's face, he begins to observe and reenact Adeline's tiniest movements, as if attempting to transform himself into her. His physical proximity to Adeline and his insistent pleas for her to allow him to see inside her in order to locate the "mystery of her ailment" alarm both the parents and the girl held in place by the man's piercing gaze and commanding voice: "Come on . . . let me see you. . . . Don't you close your eyes! You haven't died yet, so don't be that way. What is going on with you, girl? Let me in."¹³ When the enraged father finally steps in to separate the healer from the quivering and quietly sobbing Adeline, he does so to assert his parental power over the girl he repeatedly calls "my daughter"—"My daughter is crying" and "She is my daughter!"—against the actions of the visitor who has trespassed the borders and integrity of Adeline's body as well as Caterina and Claude's home.

The conflict between the father and the healer presents a confrontation between two forms of power, one based on parental prerogative and the other on affect (i.e., the power to affect and be affected) as well as between two concepts of lineage: one based on the fictive family genealogy and the other on a masculine bloodline (the exceptional and anomalous inheritance of men singled out for their capacity to interfere with other bodies' power to live). These conflicts are acknowledged by the healer himself, in his final comment before being expelled from La Ruche by the father, who calls him "a pervert . . . filthy . . . insane." The healer replies: "Do not mock me, sir. I beg you not to mock me. . . . My father had the same power and my father's father too. I can resuscitate cats and birds. I can prevent the death of those who don't want to die. But I must tell you right now that this girl you call daughter does not wish to go on living. She won't let me see her. She is tired."¹⁴

The phrase "this girl you call daughter" draws a line between two powers with contesting claims concerning Adeline's capacity or will to live: the father's power to oust the outsider to protect the corporeal integrity of the girl, who occupies the role of daughter that was arbitrarily assigned to her, and the healer's power—or lack thereof—to situate himself on the edges of Adeline's body to gain access to the inner borders, the points of passage where life is circulating through or, rather, slipping away from her.¹⁵ The father's actions of welcoming and then expelling the healer seek to safeguard Adeline's place in the family. The healer, on the other hand, tries to gain access to the girl based on the power to influence the functioning of a body that is forfeiting its capacity

to self-regulate and self-affect. The cause of the healer's expulsion from La Ruche—and later on from his home and the village—is his act of violating the borders of the body whose survival is tied to the constitution of the nuclear family on which the parents have placed their hopes for ensuring the stability of the collective gathered around them.

In the "Becoming Animal" chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Felix study animal groupings, such as packs and swarms, as forms of organization that stand at odds with formations based on notions of lineage or group filiation, such as the family or the state. For Deleuze and Guattari, institutions such as the latter are rooted in a "sentimental or domestic relation" in which a special place belongs to an exceptional individual, one distinguished as the favorite or as "a model or unique specimen," "the perfection of the type incarnate."¹⁶ In contrast to the family or the state, a distinguishing feature of assemblages of multiple units such as packs of animals and swarming insects is the "phenomenon of bordering," which Deleuze and Guattari describe as follows: "Thus there is a borderline for each multiplicity; it is in no way a center but rather the enveloping line or farthest dimension [i.e., the edge], as a function of which it is possible to count the others, all those lines or dimensions constitute the pack at a given moment."¹⁷

The borderline of the pack or the swarm is not fixed but is instead continually drawn and redrawn by the multiple lines of affect connecting the members of the unit and the element that Deleuze and Guattari call the "anomalous": "every animal swept up in its pack or multiplicity has its anomalous."¹⁸ The anomalous is not simply an exceptional individual within a group, such as a preferred animal or person embodying the properties that define a type, be it family or species. Instead, the anomalous is the element or a position toward which the borders of the pack, band, or swarm are drawn. The anomalous, which Deleuze and Guattari, following Lovecraft, also call the Outsider, is nothing but "the Thing, which arrives and passes at the edge," a position or entity that has the potential for affecting the configuration of the pack or swarm at each moment.¹⁹ The relationship between the anomalous and the other members of the unit is based not on personalized feelings but on impersonal, "preindividual" affects,²⁰ not on filiation but on pact or alliance; not on the distribution of a set of roles that guarantees unit cohesion but on the lines of connection among the unit's members, their position in relation to the edge, the furthestmost point of extension of the pack or swarm that vibrates and fluctuates, bordering on catastrophe:

Sometimes each and every animal reaches this line or occupies this dynamic position [that of the anomalous], as in a swarm of mosquitoes, where “each individual moves randomly unless it sees the rest [of the swarm] in the same half-space; then it hurries to re-enter the group. Thus stability is assured in catastrophe by a *barrier*.”²¹

Rather than acting as a barrier to catastrophe, the presence in La Ruche of the outsider charged with integrating into the commune the girl who herself occupies an anomalous position—neither inside nor outside, neither the same as the rest nor separable—exacerbates the potential for disturbance inherent to the collective. The healer’s reference to Adeline’s lack of desire to live—“she does not wish to go on living. . . . She is tired”—connects the undetectable cause of her illness to another motive behind her unspoken decision to give up, namely her reluctance to occupy the position assigned to her, that of favorite daughter and pillar of the family genealogy built around her. Adeline’s desire, or lack thereof, stands in the way of the parental will to ensure the life of the one they chose as their daughter, the girl whose role in La Ruche is to bound and keep in place the lines of attachment connecting the parents and the children. Adeline’s presence is synonymous with the cohesion of the community held together precariously yet fatefully by the waves of affection that go back and forth, radiating from the parents to the other girls via the figure of the favorite (who is and is not like the others), only to rebound from other girls back to the parents also via the figure of the favorite (whom they all aspire to replace). Adeline’s death, which occurs a few months after the healing session, becomes a watershed moment in La Ruche not because it brings about the loss of a singular person but because the disappearance of the favorite opens a fissure in the barrier that protects the community from the turbulence.

Following Adeline’s death, the parents’ rage—and especially that of the mother—is directed at the healer for reasons that remain somewhat obscure. Are they repudiating the outsider who violated the edges of the girl’s frail body, demanding to be allowed to enter and see inside her, or are they blaming him for the daughter’s disappearance (or escape) from the place intended for her? The healer’s failed entry and Adeline’s demise open a hole in the fabric of La Ruche through which the favorite daughter—and later in the novel another fragile, ephemeral girl—slips out. To restate Deleuze and Guattari’s quote from Proust in the epigraph for this section, girls in Adón’s novel are fugitive beings indeed. The punishment for the healer’s trespass, plotted by the grieving mother, culminates in an attack against not just the man she holds

responsible for Adeline's death but also his family and the entire lineage that will henceforth bear the blemish of his crime. Following the act of revenge, in which his family home is set on fire and burned to the ground, the healer abandons the village and builds a new home, a stone hut growing out of the fence on the outermost edge of La Ruche. The house becomes the new home for the healer and his descendants, the anomalous lineage that has been punished for disturbing the unstable borders of the body whose demise frustrated the founders' zeal for consolidating the swarm by instituting a family genealogy at its center. One must invoke here Deleuze and Guattari's words about healers and sorcerers as a liminal, disruptive force and agents of anomalous becomings: "Sorcerers have always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods. They haunt the fringes. They are at the borderline of the village, or *between* villages. The important thing is their affinity with alliance, with the pact, which gives them a status opposed to that of filiation."²²

Both the physical positioning and structure of the sorcerer's hut in Adón's novel underscore the liminal status of his proscribed lineage. The fence out of which it has been built, as Adón puts it, seems to have softened and caved in, in order to accommodate the house.²³ The makeshift construction, the uneven surface of its walls built out of differently shaped stones, is a physical embodiment of the anomaly, a term that "designates the unequal, the course, the rough."²⁴ Rather than separating the sorcerer's lineage from La Ruche, the house built on the edge, with its walls full of edges—irregularities, protuberances, crevices—marks a porous line between the inside and the outside, thereby both separating and keeping together two lineages marked by the crimes they committed and those committed against them.

Exits and Precarious Openings

In this tapestry there are no insides or outsides . . . only openings and ways through.

—Tim Ingold, *Being Alive*

The narrative of *Las efímeras* traces the shifts in the organization of La Ruche through time, from Adeline's death to the community's unraveling at the novel's end. These shifts manifest themselves through tension between structure (that of relationships in the community and the physical structure of dwellings) and space (encompassing the features and texture of the natural environment

surrounding the members' homes as well as the distance characters travel while moving between different points within and around La Ruche). The spatial lines traced by the characters as they move to and fro, seeking protection or attempting to break the bonds of attachment, generate openings and gaps. These openings constitute Deleuzian lines of flight, at times real and at others imagined trajectories of escape that interfere with the aim of ensuring the stability of the community's political structure that is precariously built upon and finally destroyed by the bonds of family filiation. Ultimately, the community cannot offer protection against the human and the nonhuman—natural—forces that interfere with its structures (political or physical), nor can it contain the movements through space of the characters who are always on their way somewhere, to a location they cannot reach or where they cannot stay.

The political and spatial organization of La Ruche reflects the positioning of—and the lines of movement between—two structures: the hexagonal building that previously housed the school and orphanage and the family home of Dora and Violeta Oliver, which is situated at a distance from the rest of the community on inhospitable terrain that “was not a place intended for humans.”²⁵ While still functioning as a reminder of the history of La Ruche—that of its original project to create an egalitarian educational environment for orphan children—the main building and its surroundings have undergone changes over time. Most notable among these changes are the new dwellings that have sprung up around the hexagonal structure to house the families of the teachers at the onetime school. Simultaneously, La Ruche went from being a collective and unified body-like organism to a looser cluster of dispersed households held together by certain common principles and the figure of the leader symbolizing tradition. (The leader, Anita, is the founders' granddaughter, a daughter of the girl who replaced Adeline.) Following several transformations, the most recent organizational pattern of La Ruche seeks to balance collectivity and independence. In addition to satisfying each member's elemental needs and offering mutual protection from pernicious external influences, natural or human, the purpose of the community is to guarantee the independence of each family unit. In that sense, life in La Ruche, where “there are no well-meaning neighbors who think that they should meddle in the affairs of others,” reflects Adón's own interest in the history of alternative communities formed by individuals who gather in order to engage in their solitary pursuits.²⁶

The character of Anita, La Ruche's leader, not only ensures respect for the community's principles but also embodies those

principles. Anita, who until the arrival of Tom, the newcomer, was the sole occupant of the hexagonal building, spends most of her time secluded in her study, making elaborate drawings of flora and fauna and fabricating models of insects. Her solitary existence, interrupted temporarily by the presence of a young man looking for a home in La Ruche, reflects not just her personal ethos—her dedication to her work—but also her conception of her role in the community. Convinced that her excessive visibility as a figure of authority would make the members of the commune “feel governed, branded like cattle,” Anita stays inside, out of public gaze.²⁷ The building’s compartmentalized space, modeled after the structure of a beehive where every room repeats and refracts the hexagonal shape of the overall construction, functions as an anti-panopticon of sorts, a space that allows Anita to remain unseen while fully directing her own gaze at the barely perceptible movements of the plants that fill her study and the minute details of the species she draws. The building and the walled fence erected around it at some unspecified point in the community’s history play the dual role of keeping Anita out of sight and protecting her from any kind of external interference that would interrupt her study.²⁸

Anita, hiding from sight in the hexagonal building, and Dora Oliver, the eldest of two sisters who inhabit a house situated at a distance from the rest of the community, are two characters whose roles are to preserve the physical structures of dwellings and the structure of communal relationships from internal and external threats. Interfering with Anita’s and Dora’s roles are two men: Tom, who lives in the main building while awaiting Anita’s decision to admit him into the community, and Denis, the healer’s great-grandson and the last vestige of the lineage of men expelled to the periphery of La Ruche. While Tom, fleeing his former life in the city, seeks entry into La Ruche, Denis, a hunter who inherited the healer’s special powers, haunts its borders. Denis prowls the area around La Ruche, where he meets the younger Oliver sister, Violeta, on one of her walks through the woods in search of an escape from the monotony of her life with Dora and from her sister’s constant vigilance.

Dora, a surly young woman who shuns human contact, fears the prospect of her life being altered and the autonomy of her household ruined by Violeta’s closeness to—or possible escape with—Denis. Early on in the novel while musing about the animals and trees that keep her company—a pack of ferocious dogs that follow her around and the holm oak trees next to her home—Dora concludes that she does “not wish to be responsible for anything that comes in threes (*nada que sumara tres*).”²⁹ The ominous number

three—foreboding presage of the nuclear family that could result from her sister's romantic involvement with Denis—stands at odds with Dora's affinity with entities that come in other kinds of configurations and numberings: the pack of five dogs, the cluster of four trees with their unique physiognomy, and, finally, the binary unit and unbreakable bond she comprises with Violeta. In fact, such is Dora's fear of losing Violeta that she locks her sister up in the shed in a fruitless attempt to prevent her escape.

Violeta's escape introduces a literal opening in the physical structure of the shed that imprisoned her. But as becomes evident in the scene that unfolds in the shed following her escape, the opening is also metaphoric or symbolic. It is a breach in the structures of containment designed to secure the existing relationships in the community. In this scene, as in other crucial scenes in the novel organized around the characters' attempted flight from physical or emotional entrapment, an animal or a group of animals—a flock of birds, a swarm of insects—makes its appearance.³⁰ The animal appears not only *at* the site of an opening (be it the shed or the woods) but also *as* that very opening: an unruly, living presence that unsettles the relationships among the characters and disturbs, even if temporarily, their entrapment in their roles.

Giorgio Agamben, in his reading of Heidegger's seminars devoted to Jakob von Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt*, addresses the animal's relationship with its environment by focusing on the notion of "the open." Heidegger spoke of the animal as being "open in captivity," that is, capable of responding only to certain stimuli from the environment—so-called disinhibitors—and remaining closed off to any features of the outside world that do not belong to its circle of disinhibitors.³¹ Open in captivity, the animal is open only to what captivates it. Heidegger speaks of the animal's "poverty in world," by which he means that the animal's openness to a limited range of stimuli keeps the world as such concealed, withheld from the animal.³² By contrast, the animal presence in Adón's novel reveals the limitations of the human world, which are brought into view most clearly at the points of contact where the closed and the open, the animal and the human, touch.

The function of the shed as a space of enclosure is broken twice: first through Violeta's escape and second when a large majestic lizard crawls out from under a basket and becomes a focus of attention of the trio of characters gathered in the shed. The mystery of Violeta's disappearance is compounded by the mystery of the lizard's appearance in the shed. How did it enter the structure? How long had it been hiding there in a dormant state before being interrupted by the noise and commotion? The lizard's pres-

ence, in such close proximity to Dora, elicits an immediate reaction from Tom and Anita, who insist that she remain as far away as possible from the menacing-looking reptile. Dismissive of their attempts to protect her from the animal she considers harmless, Dora pulls herself closer to the lizard, inspecting its eyes and body with a sense of almost enraptured attention. The actions that interrupt this silent interspecies dialogue—Tom forcefully pulls Dora away as Anita picks up a hoe and severs the lizard in half—explode tensions that spill over from the shed into the community and its surroundings.

The lizard's unexpected appearance, with its sluggish movements and menacing exterior, creates a breach in the cavernous structure designed to enclose and imprison. In Adón's depiction of the conflict that ensues following the lizard's appearance, the horizontality of Dora's body stretched out in a halting advance toward the animal contrasts with the rigid verticality of Anita and Tom, intent on denying her the right to give shelter and hospitality to the lizard in the same space in which she sheltered her sister from Denis. The barrage of criticism that Anita and Tom direct at Dora for imprisoning her sister and their refusal to help her search for Violeta in Denis's house fuel Dora's brewing anger against Anita. The woman she regarded as the beacon of authority, "the one who sets norms and imparts justice" in the community, has become an interloper who entered the space of Dora's home in the company of an outsider and trampled on her right to protect her household from another meddler, who preyed on Violeta.³³

Ultimately, however, it is Anita's killing of the lizard that shatters Dora's trust in her as a figure that ensures the stability of the community. The lizard's unexpected appearance in the shed undermines Anita's poise, unsettling the majestic stillness of the woman who was unperturbed by Dora's distress at the disappearance of her sister. For the horrified Dora, the act of killing, condensed into the few seconds that transpired from the moment Anita reached for the hoe to the final agony of the animal severed in half, represents an overreach of Anita's authority and an infringement of communal norms. The unsanctioned slaughter of a defenseless animal is not meant to take place in a community whose members, Dora thinks to herself, "were not expected to be always ready or vigilant, lurking like a beast encircling its prey."³⁴ Overcome by fear and rage, Dora has witnessed Anita's unhinged behavior in using a sharp instrument of power against an animal that emerged into the open and approached her in the enclosure of the shed breached by Violeta's escape. The actions of Anita and Tom break the circle of captivation around Dora and the lizard—Dora's enthralled

contemplation of the animal and the lizard's emergence from the dormant time-space in which it was closed off from the world.

Anita's severing of the lizard's body foreshadows Dora's decision to sever her ties with the community whose leader twice violated the autonomy of her home, first by her violence against the inoffensive animal and second by her failure to intervene and stop an event that threatens to bring about the collapse of Dora's world. Following the events in the shed, Dora ventures alone to rescue her sister from Denis while Anita sets out on a search for a new home for Tom, whom she has offered membership in the community. Neither of the two women fulfill their pursuit aimed at restoring balance to their households and community. Heading through the woods on her way to Denis's house, Dora falls into a deep hole, an inverted opening without a way out that becomes the site of her death. Similarly, Anita and Tom's search is interrupted by the appearance of Violeta, who is wandering through the woods after Denis expelled her from his home.

Tim Ingold, cited in the epigraph for this section, proposes that instead of thinking about the environment as something that surrounds an organism, we should conceive it as "an immense tangle of lines," a bundle of trajectories created by different constituents of the environment—humans, plants, animals—"as they move through time and encounter one another."³⁵ These trajectories create the "tapestry of the world" (a term used by geographer Torsten Hägerstrand) in which "there are no insides or outsides, no enclosures or disclosures, only openings and ways through."³⁶ In the final section of Adón's novel, the narrative abandons the architectural structures of the buildings for the "archi-textural" space of the woods.³⁷ The characters' movements through a tangled morass of branches filled with uncertain murmurs and distant echoes speak to the failure of their attempts to leave behind or return to the world that affords them protection. Interwoven lines of Adón's narrative come together in a space with no inside or outside, only openings and ways through.

Unraveling

Two types of movement unfold and converge in the final section of the novel: Anita and Tom's tour of empty homes in La Ruche, one of which is to become Tom's new residence, and a hazardous search for two women who have gone missing from the settlement, first Violeta and then Dora. While Dora's attempt to find her sister leads to Denis's house, Violeta's search for Dora follows an

inverted trajectory. After Violeta is expelled by Denis, infuriated by her mention of his great-grandfather's murder of the little girl, she returns to the Oliver residence and finds her sister missing. Distressed, Violeta heads back to the woods in an attempt to locate Dora, whose hatred of Denis indirectly led to the abrupt ending of their relationship. The couple's separation sets yet another character into motion. This time it is Denis who searches for Violeta, only to become the sole witness to the death of the other Oliver sister. Unable to lift herself up from the cavity she has fallen into, Dora bleeds out onto the ground as Denis impassively watches the scene from the edge of the hole.

The two separate trajectories intersect when the bedraggled figure of Violeta emerges from the woods, interrupting Anita and Tom's search for his new home. The unsettling appearance of a disoriented woman who is asking after her sister—Violeta's first words, barely audible, are "Are you looking for Dora?"—not only interrupts Anita and Tom's plans but also diverts the narrative from their ongoing search and back to the scene that unfolded in *La Ruche* in the aftermath of Violeta's disappearance. As Tom and Anita offer to lead Violeta back home, the younger sister repeats almost verbatim the words spoken earlier by Dora when she came to ask for their help: "But she is not in the house. . . . I don't know why you don't listen to me."³⁸

The behavior of the two sisters who are orbiting in an endless loop—Dora looking for Violeta, Violeta looking for Dora—without the possibility of either escaping from or returning to the world where they were to remain always together clashes with Anita's vision of the community that affords a proper place to each member, including the newest one, Tom. Finding a residence where Tom could lead an autonomous existence is of vital significance for Anita. Afraid of becoming too accustomed to his presence in the hexagonal building, she views Tom's independence as a way for her to recapture solitude and equanimity as well as restore the dignity of her leadership, tarnished by her impulsive behavior in the shed. The search for Tom's new home is both a metaphor and a test of Anita's leadership. Their movement from one house to the next—which is meant to conclude when they find a suitable dwelling for Tom—is a physical inscription of her commitment to reestablish order in her own home and the community, which has been brought to the brink of disarray by the conflicts in and around the Oliver household. But it is the appearance of Violeta Oliver that, once again, puts to the test Anita's resolve to distance herself from Tom and protect the community from the disorder caused by the Oliver sisters.

The image of a flock of cranes on their seasonal migration appears during the scene of Anita and Tom's search, before their encounter with Violeta. Anita observes the geometry of the flock, the shape of the moving unit bordered by a single line extending from its base to its tip and pivoting back in a sharp angle. The dynamic geometry of the flock set against the smooth surface of the sky renders perceptible the composition of an event, that of the flock's migration, the evanescent architecture of bodies in transit.³⁹ Anita associates the form of the flock with the living energy that propels it and sets into motion "that grouping of bodies that adhered to each other by a strange force of attraction until they formed a single mass in which the silhouette of each individual was still perfectly identifiable."⁴⁰ "Cranes above, cranes below," a somewhat cryptic thought conjured up by Anita as she forges through the woods with Tom, points to the common logic guiding the movement of the birds and the characters' search for home.⁴¹ Recalling her own study of nature, Anita admires the intelligence of the collective body, the precise method that steers the flock on the safest route to its destination, a place where the birds—and by extension Tom—will engage in a routine existence, "procur[ing] food and keep[ing] away predators."⁴²

Several lines of continuity connect the flock above to the humans below. The regularity of seasons, punctuated by the flock's migration, invokes Anita's attachment to her daily routines of study and observation of nature. The migratory path of the flock, whose trajectory Anita knows so well that she can draw it on a map, recalls the composition of another map, that of La Ruche, on which she marks the topography of the terrain and the precise locations of all dwellings, occupied and abandoned. Anita's commitment to finding a location and a building whose unique combination of topographic, natural, and architectural features would reflect the needs of the new autonomous member of La Ruche brings to mind the interplay between the individual unit and the collective, the combination of micro- and macrolevel decisions that determine the behavior of the flock at each moment. Finally, Anita's desire to ensure the continuity of the community by creating a secure environment in which members feel protected and free to engage in their solitary pursuits points to another feature of collective organisms such as flocks and swarms: the uncanny, almost mysterious capacity for self-regulation that forms a protective barrier against the always present possibility of disorder. The fleeting appearance of the flock up above—soon the birds will disappear from sight, and the sky will become empty and utterly removed from the events on the ground—vividly illuminates a form of life both

enduring and ephemeral, one whose spatiotemporal coordinates defy and exceed human measure.⁴³

The ideal geometry of the flock contrasts with the orbiting movement of the characters who circle around La Ruche in the novel's last scene, attempting to contain or interrupt the whirling force of dependency that keeps the Oliver sisters in an unending loop incapable of breaking apart or reconnecting with each other. The fear of dependency is the main reason Anita resists Tom's proposal for them to return to La Ruche with Violeta and organize a search party for Dora. "Anita knew what it meant to depend excessively on someone," remarks the narrator, withholding further explanation.⁴⁴ The unhinged behavior of the two sisters—one of them lost, the other one aimlessly trailing through the woods—undermines the value that the community as a whole and Anita in particular place on the autonomy of its members. The thoughts racing through Anita's mind as she witnesses Tom's solicitous behavior toward the woman she qualifies as "an unstable element without solidity" return to the idea that she should not be called upon to care for others or meddle in their affairs.⁴⁵ Anita's reluctant decision to abandon her and Tom's plans in order to accompany Violeta back to La Ruche seeks to interrupt the endlessly spinning circle of dependency that threatens to pull everyone in. All the while, Anita suspects that the return to La Ruche will prove futile, that it will not interrupt but instead reinscribe the trajectory of a failed escape.

The appearance of Denis as a hunter who patrols the woods with a rifle on his shoulder derails Anita, Tom, and Violeta's voyage back to the familiar territory of La Ruche. Denis's revenge against the community that thwarted his plans for a new life with Violeta aims to settle accounts for the indelible crime of his great-grandfather's interference with—and disruption of—the community's protective borders. Just like the healer, who could not remedy the inner disturbance of a body that refused to go on living, Denis's attempt to rescue Violeta, a frail woman he could not protect, puts an end to the entire life cycle of a political body that could not ensure its continuity or manage its tendency toward entropy. Denis's final attempt to save Violeta by inflicting death on the two members of La Ruche who inadvertently crossed his path has a dual purpose. It is not only a sign of his renunciation of the family *munus* that fell onto him, the gift and burden of bringing the dying back to life. It is also a gesture of severing the tangled web of relationships that tie him and Violeta to the human grouping he never belonged to and that she ceased to belong to from then on.

The last image of the novel—as Anita, oblivious to the actions of the man who is preparing to shoot, gazes at the empty sky in search of a flock—suspends the action on the edge of the violence that will bring about the disappearance of La Ruche, an edge where the events on the ground reach a point of no return, causing Anita’s attention to shift away toward the sky. The sky and ground touch on the horizon, recalling Edward Casey’s characterization of the horizon as “an untraceable edge of the land itself . . . a part of a place-world that insistently refuses to be a determinate object.”⁴⁶ Adón’s novel closes with the image of the horizon formed by the untraceable edge of the woods against the stretch of sky where Anita is unable—and will never again be able—to spot a migrating flock, a recurring spectacle of multiple bodies in movement together.

Epilogue

In *Creation of the World or Globalization*, Jean Luc Nancy argues that in modern thought “whoever speaks of ‘the world’ renounces any appeal to ‘another world’ or a ‘beyond the world’ [*outré-monde*].”⁴⁷ Together with the disappearance of another world as an external or transcendental point of reference, there also disappears the possibility of forming a totalizing representation of the world from the vantage point of some kind of *cosmotheoros*, an observer of a world: “Time has passed since one was able to represent the figure of a *cosmotheoros*. . . . And if this time has passed, it is because the world is no longer conceived of as a representation. A representation of the world, a worldview, means the assigning of a principle and an end to the world.”⁴⁸ In opposition to the world captured and ordered in its totality within a vision (*Weltanschauung*) that belongs to a transcendental subject, be it religious (God) or secular, Nancy understands the world as a locus of meaning or sense that is created through the experience of inhabiting, situating, and orienting ourselves in a world: “The stance of a world is the experience it makes of itself. Experience (the *experiri*) consists in traversing to the end: a world is traversed from one edge to the other, and nothing else. It never crosses over these edges to occupy a place overlooking itself.”⁴⁹ To create a sense of a world by traversing it from one edge to the other means, for Nancy, that a world is never enclosed within its limits, whether they are established from the outside, by an external observer who assigns it a meaning or direction, or from the inside of a world conceived as a self-reproducing totality.

Rather than depicting a world safely set within its boundaries—whether physical boundaries or boundaries of meaning or sense—

Adón's novel dwells on the experience of inhabiting a world whose search for stability is consistently undermined by tensions that sprout from within and expand outward, toward the edges of the utopian community named and modeled after the beehive. Adón's narrative situates the reader within the dynamic system of a world in flux, one whose state is determined at every moment by multiple forces and lines of movements, "movement 'from the inside going out,' and 'from the outside going in.'"⁵⁰ Without reaching a completion or achieving its intended goal, each action in Adón's novel generates systemic resonances and adds another strand to the complex web of human interdependence that forms the texture of her fictional world. That world of connectivity does not have clear limits, a beginning or an end, just configurations of states that rest uneasily on the edge of events that are about to happen.

Notes

1. Pilar Adón, *Las efímeras* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2015). In addition to *Las efímeras*, Adón (b. 1971) is the author of one novel, *Las hijas de Sara* (2007), and three short story collections—*Viajes inocentes* (2005), *El mes más cruel* (2010), and *La vida sumergida* (2017)—as well as four books of poetry, *La hija del cazador* (2011), *Mente animal* (2014), *Las órdenes* (2018), and *Da dolor* (2020). Among the authors whose works she has translated into Spanish are Henry James, Penelope Fitzgerald, and Edith Wharton. One of Adón's recent publications is her prologue to the Spanish translation of Louisa May Alcott's *Fruitlands*, a novel that chronicles a failed utopian experiment spearheaded by Alcott's father. All citations from the novel in this essay are my translation.

2. Eugene Thacker, "Networks, Swarms, Multitudes (Part 1)," *Ctheory*, May 18, 2004, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14542>.

3. For an overview of the image of the beehive in political thought, see Giovanna Damele, "Adventures of a Metaphor: Apian Imagery in the History of Political Thought," in *Metaphor and Communication: Metaphor in Language, Cognition, and Communication*, ed. Elisabetta Gola and Francesca Ervas, 173–88 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2016). Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bee* (1901) remains a classic on the subject of bee behavior and the "spirit of the hive."

4. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 60.

5. *Ibid.*, 52.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Thacker defines collectivity as "an aggregation of individuated units in relation to each other" and connectivity as "a way or relating individuated units within a wide array of possible topological configurations." He also notes that "while connectivity may be a prerequisite for collectivity, the reverse does not apply. Connectivity may happen . . . without any aggregation or group phenomenon manifesting itself." Thacker, "Networks, Swarms, Multitudes (Part 1)."

8. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 52.

9. Ibid., 51.

10. Ibid., 53.

11. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 240.

12. Readers familiar with Adón's work will associate the uncomfortable ambiguity of what transpires between Adeline and the healer with the content of the autobiographical text "Carte Blanche," an open letter she published in the newspaper *El País* and directed to a stranger, an elderly man who accosted her at a train station. The real-life aggressor's clothes and speech identify his rural provenance. The fact that he accosted Adón while she was absorbed in reading evokes the title phrase of the novelist Marta Sanz's prologue to Adón's short story collection, *El mes más cruel*: "Leer nos hace débiles" [Reading Makes Us Weak]. The weakness of Adeline's body is, in Adón's case, the weakness of a body held in the grip of literature.

13. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 56.

14. Ibid., 57.

15. The healer's attempt to locate the places where life escapes Adeline's body can be related to Edward S. Casey's discussion of edges: "Edges mark an abrupt turn from one surface to another, or from one part of something to another part, or from one phase of an event to another. . . . Every edge and every perception of an edge is on the way to elsewhere, on the verge of going somewhere else." Edward S. Casey, *The World on Edge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), xvii (my emphasis).

16. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 244.

17. Ibid., 245.

18. Ibid., 243.

19. Ibid., 245.

20. Jussi Parikka, "Politics of Swarms: Translations between Entomology and Biopolitics." *Parallax* 14, no. 3 (2008): 118.

21. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 245.

22. Ibid., 246.

23. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 141.

24. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 244.

25. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 15.

26. Pilar Adón, interview with the author, March 2019.

27. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 73.

28. This interconnectedness between the building and its occupant recalls a point made by Jean Luc Nancy regarding the semantic proximity of the Greek terms *êthos* and *ethos*, dwelling and behavior or disposition, which "contaminate each other in terms of certain comportment, an attitude or behavior which is the ground of all ethics." Jean Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 31.

29. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 10.

30. Other important instances in the novel when a swarm of insects or a flock of birds appears at the site of an opening include a mass of caterpillars that cover Violeta's body in the scene in which she meets Denis and a flock of sparrows that lace the edge of the hole in which Dora finds her death.

31. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 55.

32. Ibid.

33. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 197.

34. Ibid., 113.

35. Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9. See also Tim Ingold, "Point, Line and Counterpoint: From Environment to Fluid Space," in *Neurobiology of the "Umwelt": How Living Beings Perceive the World*, ed. Alain Berthoz and Yves Christen, 141–55 (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2009).

36. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 84.

37. Ibid.

38. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 229. Dora's words to Tom are "To my house? Why to my house? She is not there. Don't you hear me?" (103). Similarly, Violeta's statement that she is to blame for Dora's disappearance echoes the scene in which Anita and Tom inculcate Dora for her sister's escape and possible death.

39. On the temporal architecture of the swarm, see Parikka, "Politics of Swarms": "Between one and many, structure and agency, the swarms and their insect architectures are temporally embodied organisms that are hence open to future becomings as well" (121).

40. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 220.

41. Ibid., 221.

42. Ibid., 220.

43. The issue of the swarm as a life form that is both enduring and ephemeral returns to the double meaning of the word in the title of Adón's novel. Adón stated that what intrigued her about mayflies ("las efímeras") is "their aquatic nature, the fact that they exist in every part of the globe except the Antarctica . . . and carry out the same vital functions since time immemorial, given that they belong to the most ancient species of winged insects currently existing" (interview with author, March 2019). The ephemerality of mayflies, their extremely brief lifespan—five minutes for females and up to two days for males—stands in contrast with a long trajectory of the life form that stretches across time and space.

44. Adón, *Las efímeras*, 228.

45. Ibid., 233.

46. Ibid., 174.