

# **The surfing experience and its main issues acquired from a comparative literature study on surfing literature**

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## **Abstract**

The following work is a comparative literature study on surfing literature. It's original because there aren't many papers written about this kind of literature and it's fairly new. The study will try to understand the view of surfing literature authors about surfing and which issues are for them the most relevant. The study will comprehend why surfing means much more for them than a simple hobby or sport.

**Key words: surfing literature, surf, culture, comparative literature, ocean, transcendentalism, movement.**

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# 1. Definition and objectives

The present work is a comparative literature study about three books containing surf-related experiences and issues, all the books belong to *surfing literature*. All of these works have many characteristics in common in spite of their different origins, one book belongs to an Australian author, another is Spanish and the last one is American. The objective of this work is to use a supranational comparative literature study on surfing literature to acquire a portrait of the surfing experience and its main issues. . That would establish the existence of standards related to the surfing experience approach in a supranational system. In the process of the study, the surfing culture will be introduced and explained as well as the current situation of the surfing literature and the method of comparative literature.

## 2. An introduction to the surfing culture

The most basic description of surfing is “a surface water sport in which a surfer or a *rider* rides on a wave using a surfboard” but this *sport* has many other features that would be difficult to cover in a single work. Surfing has a cultural dimension of respecting the environment and people and a very strong philosophical approach to the search for happiness that will be covered later on in this work. Surfing has become a popular sport, with about 23 million surfers around

the world (International Surfing Association) and a big follow on his main events, such as the WCT or the ASP tour and has been introduced by the media as a cultural fixture, as the surfing author Matt Warshaw explains:

“During the 1990s, the common media at last came to view surfing as a permanent cultural fixture. No formal announcement, or single event, marked this shift. But more or less all at once, newspapers and magazines, novelists and documentary filmmakers, Hollywood studios and New York publishing houses – everybody seemed to decide that surfing was no longer a novelty or curiosity” (Warshaw, 2010)

## **2.1 Historical origins**

Although this now considered sport may seem new, the first written witness that appears of it dates back to 1767 when Samuel Wallis and the *HMS Dolphin* arrived to Tahiti in a scientific travel of exploration. Few years later surfing will be mentioned in James Cook’s journals. The first testimony of surfing written by a notorious writer was in 1866 when Mark Twain arrived to Hawaii and later wrote:

“In one place we came upon a large company of naked natives, of both sexes and all ages, amusing themselves with the national pastime of surf-bathing. Each heathen would paddle three or four hundred yards out to sea (taking a short board with him), then face the shore and wait for a particularly prodigious billow to come along; at the right moment he would fling his board upon its foamy crest and himself upon the board, and here he would come whizzing by like a bombshell” (Twain, 1872)

Nowadays we know that surfing was a central part of Polynesian cultures and that it meant purification and renewal for them. They structured their society around the sport, the

ruling classes had access to better surf breaking beaches and were offered the best trees to build their surfboards.

The most important place for the development of surfing was the Polynesian island of Hawaii. The island was frequented by Europeans because its location favored the island as a trading center. Europeans settled there really soon. This was a drawback for surfing because the number of Native Hawaiians diminished (about 25.7% of the population) and when the Catholicism arrived they forbid the surfing activity (surfing was considered pagan). This created a big crisis in surfing and it was relegated from its place of important tradition in the Island to a forbidden hobby. Surfing came back to its origins and it was simple again, only an unskilled hobby practiced by a few inhabitants of the islands and lost its “traditional” point of view. (Veronica Britton, 2004)

## **2.2 Hawaii, birthplace of modern surf**

Surfing came back many years later, in the early 1900’s when a certain group of Hawaiian inhabitants led by Duke Kahanamoku, known as the father of modern surfing, proposed themselves to restore the importance of the sport. Duke was a Hawaiian native and was a personality in the Island, he was an Olympic swimmer and he started a surfing club on Waikiki beach. Duke being a personality helped to expand the sport to Southern California and making the sport known by the media. Surfing was yet seen as a restrictive sport, a “sport of kings” because surfing materials were rare and only wealthy or important islanders could acquire a surfboard, but Duke Kahanamoku improved the surfboards, made them cheaper and better and that got the attention of many people in South California. With Duke and the popularization of the sport, people started looking into the sport and many improvements on surfboards made them

cheaper and available. Later on, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century surf spreads to the United States and Australia where the surf culture will develop (Veronica Britton, 2004). Media makes an echo of the sport and we can even find educational films in United States about the sport, like *Travelettes' On the waves at Waikiki* and surfing in the news in 1938, in *Leader news' Bathing beauties surfing at Palos Verdes*. .

## 2.3 Surfing culture

To fully understand the importance surfing got in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century it would be important to know the elements surrounding the sport. Surfing created a culture. The most basic definition of culture is “The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively” or “The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society” (Oxford, 2012). We can use both definitions to realize the existence of a *surfing culture*. As surfing modified the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular collective from the early 30's and there are art manifestations that will be introduced at this point of the work that we can consider in order to establish the term of a *surfing culture*

The 50's and the 60's are considered the Golden Age of surfing, although the sport is not yet known worldwide. The sport has three main centers, California, Hawaii and Australia. The most relevant from the point of view of the birth of the surfing culture is California, the most media-related one. The number of surfers there grows exponentially because the media has embraced surf as a new pastime and the conditions for surfing are exceptional. Numerous artists see surfing as a new and fresh experience, a great activity for the summer. In these decades surf becomes a part of the collective memory. We can find many pieces of art motivated or related to surfing. Movies that share surfing as *Gidget (1959)* or the latter success *The endless summer*



(1966) that were in theatres across the world. We find surfing music like the Beach boys with *Surfing USA or Surf safari*, *The Bel Airs or the Dick Dale and his Del Tones with Misirlou*. This music tried to catch the experience of surfing in a combination of blues and electric guitar. There are also many visual artists that started around this time which combine ocean, flowers and a lot of color. Many of these artists started painting surfboards and then moved on to paintings or murals but few of them obtained recognition. There aren't many examples of surf related literature from this period although surfing arrived to the collective memory by its music, paintings and fashion. I comment later on the history of surfing literature.

These artistic currents made people across the States, even in places without ocean, have an interest in surfing and created a surf fashion. The image of a typical surfer arrived to many places and created a trend. Many people wanted to imitate the surfing fashion and as Elvis in *Blue Hawaii* they started wearing a Hawaiian flower shirt, or Aloha shirts (created by Ryan Spooner) which would be the surfing trend in the 60's (combined with board shorts). The artistic follow-up of surfing also affected the way people approached the sport and the ones that imitated this trend got a motivation to travel to coastal areas, or where the most notorious surfers went to surf. Then there was a trend in the surf passive behavior and their understanding of an easy life, live to surf and surf to live.

## **2.4 Surfing nowadays**

After this media boom in the United States in the 60's surf goes viral, surfing materials are much cheaper to obtain and much easier to find, so surfing becomes affordable to all. This causes a great growth on the amount of surfers. Also, surfing expands to Europe in the late 70's. Some authors say that the surfing expansion to Europe was originated because Hollywood stars

moved to France in order to go to cinema festivals or to film bringing their surfboards with them and that created an interest in European people over the sport. As France has a lot of great breakpoints surfing was a success and soon became popular.

Surfing in the 70's and 80's improved radically in the means of surfboards and wetsuits, that allowed people to surf in colder places. Nowadays people can surf in winter in Scotland which was unthinkable if we consider the water temperature and the outside wind and temperature. These improvements and the growth of the surf related industry (which was present since the first surf arrival to California with brands like *O'neal* or *Quicksilver*) promoted surf and made it easy to access surfing materials worldwide.

Nowadays around 23 million people surf across the world and this number is in constant growth. The format that surfing has evolved is by using a surf school formula. Surf schools have arisen in coastal areas throughout the world renting material for a low price. This fact made surf available mostly to everybody because people don't have to save up for a surfboard, they just can rent it and be taught on surf basics easily. The surfing school formula is very popular in areas with great conditions and with inhabitants that doesn't know about surfing. Galicia is one of these areas and in the latest ten years only in the region of Coruña about 25 different schools started their activities.

There are common events and facts that interest these 23 million surfers worldwide. They are worried about the environment, because sea pollution and artificial reefs for harbors affect their surfing space and also about individual completion, surfing is an obsession for some of them and a way of evading reality for other but for most it's much more than a hobby it's a way of life which bonds you to the ocean, as we'll see later on the work, surfers feel bonded to it and

this leads to different issues and situations, which make them think about individual completion and happiness, giving surfing a philosophical approach about the search for happiness.

World events like the ASP World Tour which is the World Championship of surfing gives surfers a lot of reach into the common media and the image of a nowadays surfer is in the collective memory and trendy, which causes the Surf community to keep on growing and expanding. (Matt Warshaw, 2010)

### **3. Methodological approach**

This work consists in a supranational comparative literature study over three works of surfing literature in order to analyze their common issues and their perception of the surfing experience. With the information provided by the study the work will define a “global” understanding on the surfing experience and culture. In order to achieve this. The work will first develop the topic of comparative literature (its status and main methods) and comment briefly on the genre’s theory to explain the fact that there are two “essays” and a narrative work featured in the study. After this, each author and novel featured in the study will be introduced, situating them in their context and explaining their work plots and their main issues. After this introduction the work will treat the main issues in surfing literature (the ones found in each individual work) in order to see if this conception is similar in all of the works and the concept of surfing is shared worldwide or which differences it has in each place

#### **3.1 Comparative literature**

The comparative literature studies have a broad lense and a difficult definition, because many authors have an individual vision about it throughout history. I will follow the method and

definition of Armando Gnisci and Franca Sinopoli in their “Introducción a la literatura comparada” (2002). The comparative literature started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a general historic positivist science. It was Eurocentric in its beginning and covered the comparison between national works and for example their “international relationships” or their “exterior commerce”. Until the 70’s even the comparative literature scholars argued about the origin of this science and its own consistence and limits. They were for example either having a conception of analyzing national literatures and their relationship with international literatures or a supranational conception. Later on scholars were studying the relationships between literature and arts and other fields of knowledge or studying the typology of texts and its circulation worldwide. One of the most interesting approaches related to this work is the intercultural studies which compares works between different literary civilizations in the world.

Gnisci says that one of the features of comparative literature it is that it grows from itself. It co-educates itself and has a reciprocal way of enrichment from its own work. To understand this vision, he states that we have to understand the current globalized society. We live in a “world of worlds” where everything is contained in a limited space. The literature means for him a world phenomenon that creates a common patrimony to all the civilizations of the world. He compares the literature to a huge library of knowledge where the only barriers between the books are the translation. “Translation is the only barrier between one literature and all the literatures. Comparative literature offers itself as the study and discourse that tries to correspond to this globalism of literature as a partner an equal, as the science that translates the literature into an open and plural speech. Armando states that the literary system is an infinite net of reciprocity and difference and that it exist a dialogue between the literatures. Then the comparative literature

provides the common speech of all languages that literature maintains with his public and lead us to comprehend this “world of worlds”. (Gnisci/Sinopoli, 2002)

Nowadays the comparative literature field is such an open field, because scholars have absorbed this description of the field and are widening it by not just considering the literary fact a part of this “world of worlds” but also other arts like music or cinema and they are studying their relationships. Also this field of study is extensive because it provides space to a lot of interconnections with other fields of knowledge. For example, it is possible to analyze the difference between cultures in a supranational system so this is useful to sociologists or other scholars. In short, the comparative literature is providing tools to understand the current globalized literature and other arts, helping us to understand the current globalized society.

### **3.2 Genre’s theory applied to this work: The question of lit. gender**

I’m comparing three works; Fiona Capp’s *That oceanic feeling* which is an Australian work. *Saltwater Buddha* from the American Jaimal Yogis and *Los que hemos amado* a novel by Willy Uribe. The first two works are autobiographical narrative (non-fiction) and the latter is a narrative novel (fiction). The first two works have a strong philosophical content and the Spanish work lacks its depth because it’s centered on its plot. But this doesn’t mean that these works can’t be subject of a comparison. Those genres respond to the aesthetic of the work whether its content respond to one semiotic code of including surfing, and experiences related to this sport. Then, we can compare the reciprocities on them and establish a dialogue between the fiction in *Los que hemos amado* and the other works. Following the genre’s theory on genres as an absolute classification is an old conception, that was done in the beginnings of literature and this conception comes back from the Ancient Greek. If we

follow the evolution of the genre's theory we find for example a critic on the conception of genres. One example is John Hartley, an Australian scholar that studies an actual conception of the genre's theory, for him it is even argued that "genres are agents of ideological closure - they limit the meaning-potential of a given text" (O'Sullivan et al. 1994, 128) . For other author classifying literary texts into aesthetical categories such as poetry or narrative, or even terms of reality (fiction- nonfiction) is only creating "a set of expectations" (Neale 1980: 51). Scholars like John Hartley suggest that "we need to understand genre as a property of the relations between texts" (O'Sullivan et al. 1994, 128). Understanding genres this way allow us to classify the content of the three books on surfing experiences as a common code that allow us to extract information and start a dialogue between this works that otherwise we couldn't.

We cannot then limit the potential of Uribe's work as a philosophical work because it's contained in a narrative book. There are parts of the book that expose philosophical concerns and the issues related to the surfing experience. As this is the main theme of this work we can't restrain this potential. We consider that genres are not simply features of texts, but are mediating frameworks between texts, makers and interpreters. As Fowler says "Genre makes possible the communication of content" (Fowler 1989: 215). Considering this theory of genres, all of the works chosen for the analysis, they belong descriptively to a genre we could name as surfing literature. Also they share a common code in the conception of the surfing experience which will be analyzed further on. The common code allows communication between these texts in the exposition of surfing experiences and on their perception of their surfing culture. Using a supranational comparative study will allow us then to see the dialogue sustained between this works and establish a set of standards that define surfing literature and also the philosophical

conception of surfing by the authors. What's more, as this works have expositive code we can consider them essays. It is easy to catalogue the two narrative autobiographical essays because they are expositive. They are exposing experiences of their lives. In the case of Willy Uribe's narrative novel, we can say that certain semiotic code is shared with the other works in the study.

The essay genre it's very flexible and has many adaptation possibilities. Also it's one of most usual ways in which argumentation and exposition are shown,

“The essays content it's more intellectual than scientific and these peculiarities favor the genre becoming a hotchpotch where we can include any reflexive discourse even with an esthetic quality”. (Olivia Rodriguez/M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Madrenas).

Considering this both the autobiographical works are expositive because they expose experiences lived by the authors and they use a reflexive discourse. Willy Uribe's novel is far from being autobiographical and lacks the philosophical depths of the other works but at some points its reflections can be considered essay text.

Also there is another depth conferred to considering these works essays. On this work I'm analyzing the surf related experiences and issues that affect the surfers and even in Willy Uribe's novel a fictional character is affected by this issues and has all the philosophical content of the other novels, but is only presented in a fictional work and not focused on.

## **4. Analysis of the corpus**

Before analyzing the main works in this study, it is needed a brief consideration about surfing literature and its status. This definition hasn't been done before because it was needed the *genre's theory* chapter in order to explain the conception of this *genre*. After this brief

consideration the three works of the study will be introduced. The works will be presented by its plot and its author, situating the work and the author in their context and covering the main issues of each novel. After this study of each individual piece of work the information will be structured around the main issues of surfing and that will lead to a final conclusion.

#### **4.1 A brief commentary about surfing literature and its status**

Surfing literature is considered to have started with an early example, James Houston's *A Native Son of the Golden West* in 1966. The novel tells us about a surf/road trip and the failed spiritual quest of America in that time. The book has features from the beat generation and the hippie movement and describes surfing as a wild experience, describes the big-wave riders, a risky kind of surfing. This novel is an early example of surfing literature and until 1992 surf lit it's not considered to start (Matt Warshaw). There are of course many technical works about surfing speaking about materials, techniques, places to travel or magazines but there isn't an inclusion of surfing stories until 1992, when William Finnegan writes *Playing Doc's games* a two part *New Yorker* feature. As I said in the beginning of the work surfing was accepted by the mainstream media in 1990 and it's when they consider everybody surfing audience so works start to appear. Following this feature by Finnegan, in 1996 appears a very important work. A surfing a memoir by Dan Duane called *Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the California Coast*. These successes in the United States motivate many writers to publish or keep writing surf related or centered work as Kem Nunn with *Dogs of Winter* (1997). He had written *Tapping the source* in 1984 and although considered a dark novel has surf literature features.

The good reception of these surfing works in United States also motivates Australian authors as Tom Winton to write. United States and Australia are the main centers of surfing



literature and almost any author from another country has transcended (although there are many other countries with a really high surfing population, like Brazil, that may start producing new works). In Australia Tom Winton is a fairly known writer and his novel *Breath* a coming of age story set in a small town of West Australia called Sawyer had really good critics. This work is considered the most important book in surf literature history. (Warshaw, 2010 article in the Inertia)

The *genre* includes many issues about surfing and it's not just about the sport as a technical report or as a recurring theme. It deals with risk, for example in the Pacific Ocean there are sharks, poisonous snakes and the like. Also there is a branch of surfing that surf really big waves that implies in a way dominating or putting the rider under the designs of nature which implies a revised concept of fate. Surfing literature also deals with the obsession of surfing and its drawbacks, most surfers have to live close to the surf breaks (it's not always the sea) and that sometimes stop them from moving on in their life. This fact is really important for surfers and I will deal with it later on in the work. They are bond to their surfing spot in a way and that bonds the surfers to the ocean

## ***4.2 Saltwater Buddha by Jaimal Yogis***

The first book I'm commenting is '*Saltwater Buddha: A surfer Quest to Find Zen in the Sea*' by the American writer Jaimal Yogis. *Saltwater Buddha* is an autobiographical work in which Jaimal uses short-stories or short pieces of text and dialogues to tell his life experiences until today. It has a unique vision of life and surfing and a strong philosophical content..

The book is divided into ten parts each one consisting from 6 to 20 short chapters. The

chapters are really short and they go from one line to two pages or three (the longest ones). This structure allows Yogis to tell the interesting stories of his life in each moment without having to make an introduction of his situation. For example the first chapter *Leaving home* we know that the stories are related to his ran away from home. This structure is dynamic and lets the author focus on what he considered important, as Yogis said in one interview (in references) he started writing because he had the stories he wanted to tell about his life. He considers his writing something positive that the world needs in these times where there are a lot negative influences

#### **4.2.1 *Saltwater Buddha's* situation in context**

*Saltwater Buddha* is the first book written by Jaimal Yogis. The book can be considered an autobiographic work, from the point of view of its content the book deals with an enormous number of topics and has many references. The work has a strong philosophical content, as it proposes an special way of life ruled by surfing, religion and rejects drugs and alcohol. In a way this is also an auto-helping book because it promotes personal growth and may have a didactic function. The book contains a lot of intertextuality as he quotes Zen principles (he lived as a Buddhist monk in Tibet for some time looking for what he calls *something true*), *Siddhartha* of Herman Hesse. And this quotations and the sense that the author applies to them made the book a journey of self-discovery and a spiritual book. The author applies the knowledge he learnt while being a monk and from Buddhism to what he calls *the real life* back in California. He also uses Zen as a different lense through which he sees reality in another way and acquires sensibility to other matters. For this we can consider the novel having strong East culture influences, as he also quotes many important Chinese works and authors to start some chapters. The prologue of the book and its title are important matters to consider too, in them he explains that he made a

journey to acquire wholeness and this is the process they follow in Buddhism, to become a Buddha.

#### **4.2.2 Topics covered in *Saltwater Buddha* obtained from its plot**

As it was commented before the author uses short chapters to comment on stories that happened throughout his life. Having a brief description of his life helps to understand the topics and get a better hold of the book meaning. Yogis was born in the United States and as his father was working in the military he moved when he was 4 years old to the Azores Islands. He remembers this time as being on the beach, learning to body-surf and a great childhood. After some years they moved back to Sacramento, California and his fathers divorced. Jaimal then rebels and starts doing drugs and drinking. These troubled teenage years lead to his ran away. He decides to steal some pocket money from his mother and takes the first plane to Hawaii without having anyone there. He leaves a note which is like a manifest for this work “I’m somewhere in the world and I will call you when I get there. I had some dreams that led me to believe that I need a change and I could not make it here. I’m sorry” (First page of chapter 2 in *Leaving home*). He sets up in Maui, a Hawaiian Island and starts his search for wholeness. In this search surf is crucial: “MY MAIN GOAL WAS TO LEARN SURF. There were, of course, subtexts to this: a struggle for independence; a rebellion against the deadness of the suburbia; the first sparks of a spiritual path and a need to shock my parents” (First page of chapter 5 in *Leaving home*). Later on we discover that this *first sparks of a spiritual path* come from what he was reading at the time he ran away, Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha* that augmented his interest about Eastern culture.

When he is set in Maui starts traveling around in order of looking to find where he belongs, he tries many places and he even makes a reclusion in a Buddhist monastery in the

Himalayas where he will be in contact with the Buddhist way of life and will learn its principles. Later on he will be back in the States to study in the University. He then says that along the way he didn't find truth but he become a writer and had the stories to write. And he defines his work as a gift to surfers and young spiritual seekers.

When Jaimal runs away to Hawaii he has *Siddhartha* with him and he compares with its main character. He summarizes the plot of Siddhartha explaining that he was born a prince and a prophet told his parents that he either will be a mendicant spiritual guide or a great leader that will conquer a great land. Siddhartha's parents are overprotective with him and want him protected of any kind of suffering so he chooses to stay. Siddhartha is then surrounded but youth and beauty but soon he realizes that the life that he is living is a lie and when he witnesses the suffering of people he decides to leave his own kingdom in order to end the suffering within. He says then that it couldn't be a coincidence that he also was named after an Indian saint and raised in an Eastern culture (in a hippie education provided by his parents) if he wasn't destined neither to spiritual greatness, to acquire a wholeness that he will look for throughout his travels and life.

### **4.2.3 Surfing experience in *Saltwater Buddha***

Jaimal Yogis uses surfing as the frame of his life. Almost all of his stories since he ran away from his home in the suburb to Hawaii are ocean-related. He gives an enormous importance to the ocean, evidence from the text: first chapter *But the sea never left me* (after leaving Azores as a child).. Remembering spending time on the beach in his childhood affected him in great manner and his parents divorcing broke his childhood apart, so when he decides to move to Hawaii he decides in a way to return to his lost childhood. At that time he does poor

decisions, later on the work Jaimal said that he felt sorry for running away and leaving his mother, even after the personal enrichment he acquires in the process.

Yogis says that surfing helped him to evade from his life even more than running away and surfing made him quit drinking and doing drugs. Like in the Ancient Polynesian cultures surfing meant a renewal to him, a purification of the soul that prepared him on his trip looking for happiness, or the way he puts it *becoming a Buddha*. Jaimal relates everything to Buddhism and bases his actions and judgments always on a Buddhist base. Everything but surfing. Surfing has a dimension in his spiritual being that is even more important than a religion or a way of life. This importance is based in surfing as an evasion, surfing as a challenge to himself and surfing as challenging nature (and most important, the ocean). He has many references to the ocean in his work, always feeling in it like home but respecting it greatly. One of the quotes I find more illustrating of his principles is one we can find in the chapter 12 of the V part.

“I usually liked to think of the ocean as a nurturing mother, a giver of life. But as we rounded the lava rocks that separated the Second Bay from the Third Bay, as the swell transformed from manageable turquoise into blue open-water surges that exploded against the rock I began to resonate how Hawaiian legends described Kanaloa the sea’s ruler: a sea monster-god of death and darkness, the king of the underworld.”

In this quote we can observe the two different perceptions of the sea, firstly surfing in a relatively calm and safe place the sea is a nurturing mother, but when they move to another spot where the sea bottom is made of lava-stones (which are really dangerous because with the strength of the waves and a bad slip you can break your bones against it) then he respects the sea as a force of nature and quotes the Hawaiian culture that he has been part of to feature an image

of what he felt in that moment. This conception of the sea as a force of nature that can bring us life and death is not new in literature and falls back for example to novels like Hemingway's *The old man and the sea*.

We can also find from Yogis' experiences some encounters with another surfers that he sees different from him. There is a part of the book called *Surf-nazis have Buddha nature too*. He describes the two sides of the surfing experience from the point of view of the people surfing. He gives surfing transcendence to his life but there are some people that have another conception of surf, these ones are the considered *Surf-nazis* and don't have anything to do with Nazism, at least most of them. Yogis considered the existence of two different kinds of surfers, ones like him and the ones he calls Surf Nazis. There is a nice quote Yogis takes from Steven Kotler, an American author at the beginning of this part to describe Surf-Nazis that is very illustrative to the term "the irony of it was that most of the people there considered surfing a religious experience and that their religious experience was being ruined by all the others surfing for the same reason" Surfing breaks are often crowded, and as the ocean and surfing is for every surfer a *special* experience, some of them don't want to get their experience diminished by having to share spaces. This phenomenon is called *localism* and it's one of the biggest issues in surfing and creates fights and a bad atmosphere at some surf breaks. It's extreme in some points and for example you can't surf in (for example) Santa Monica if you don't live there or know someone related to the surfing crowds there. This creates gangs and most of the bad stereotypes about the surfing community, often characterized by fights and people breaking other people surfboards. This people called by Yogis *Surf-Nazis* represent the duality of surfers, there are good surfers and then it's them. The term Nazi is a metaphor that Jaimal uses to represent the duality of Good and Evil applied to a

community. This duality in the surfing community is also a relevant topic to this study and will be further commented on.

*Saltwater Buddha* has many other issues related to the other works in the study, but its vision of the ocean needs a mention because it's quite unique and with references to the Hawaiian tradition.

## ***4.3 That oceanic feeling by Fiona Capp.***

*That oceanic feeling: A surfer's view of the world* is an autobiographic book by the Australian author Fiona Capp. Fiona Capp has written many other books but this book was chosen because it's a coming of age story related to a surf trip. Fiona Capp is a well-known writer in Australia some of her other books, like *Night surfing* and *Gotland* have acquired really good critics. She decided to write this work because surfing has always been more to her than something physical and she wanted to have another book where she could put what the surfing experience meant for her. Also, she has some insights about what it means to be a woman and surf (surf community doesn't discriminate gender) and will mention this topic in this book.

### ***4.3.1 That oceanic feeling: A forty year old woman surftrip book***

*That oceanic feeling* main thread is the travel that Fiona undergoes when she finds herself stuck with her third novel and starts feeling stuck with his forty years old and a child. She feels that she is losing something, she feels that she won't for example be able to go back to surfing as she did when she was a teenager. She says to herself that it is in that exact moment that she has to go surfing or she won't be able to do it again. The travel that she starts is not only a way of

leaving the postmodern city of Victoria she lives in to be in contact with nature, it is also a soul travel where she will acquire the stories and experiences she needs. As the author says in a beautiful surfing metaphor “As I travelled in time and place, this ever-swelling story—like a wave which gathers energy as it travels across the ocean—gathered insight and inspiration from the stories of people I encountered along the way and of those who accompanied me for periods of the journey” (p.57) Fiona undergoes a journey that in a way is a coming of age, because she doesn’t feel stuck anymore after the travel and the ‘*rebellious child*’ she still felt inside her is calmed. As the Australian poet Dominique Hecq says in his review of the book called *Rousing waves*:

“Returning to the water (undergoing the surfing trip) is a momentous event, and the stakes are high. For the mother, this means confronting the rebellious child in herself. For the woman, moving from memory and recognition to liberation in a rearrangement of identity. For the writer, surfing the wave of language”

Dominique’s words are chosen to explain this matter because they describe three important topics of the novel, the motherhood of Fiona and what means to her, the ‘*rebellious child*’ and surfing as a rearrangement of identity. Dominique summarizes very well how surfing affects three qualities of Fiona’s life and also appoints the important of this experience to her writing. *Surfing the wave of language* is a beautiful metaphor to explain that she inspired his writing by surfing and also implies that in a way, in this work (and this is what it makes it so special for this study) she could write the surfing experience, translate what surfing meant to her to paper and create literature.

*That oceanic feeling* is full of references, the first one we can find it in its title. *Oceanic feeling* is a metaphorical psychological term coined by Romain Rolland and used by Sigmund



Freud that criticized the psychological feeling of religion, the "oceanic" feeling of limitlessness. In Romain Rolland words in his correspondence with Freud "It is a sensation of an indissoluble bond, as of being connected with the external world in its integral form". The reference in the title is great because Fiona will relate this *oceanic feeling* to the ocean and surfing, two things she felt bonded to. As she says in the prologue "Few images better capture this primal *at oneness* than that of the surfer crouched inside the crystal, womb-like tube of a breaking wave; an image made all the more exquisite by our knowledge of the wave's imminent destruction" (page 11, prologue) . This quote is also interesting because the term oceanic feeling applied to the ocean implies that she feels connected *at one-ness* to the ocean and nature which also deals with a conception of *Transcendentalism*. Transcendentalists like the American Waldo Emerson said that we are a part of a whole, the human being is a part of nature and we belong to nature, also they said all our questions about the order of the universe – about the relation between God, man and nature – may be answered by our experience of life and the world around us. This conception of the world is similar to the author's. Through the experience of surfing she could answer herself questions about her life and the universe. As Emerson says in *Nature* "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail" and "What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales in comparison to what lies inside of you". Fiona Capp has a similar conception and by undergoing his surfing trip she is following these transcendental principles, she is not going where the path may lead and she is making their own and she isn't worried about what is behind, she is worried about what is ahead and what's *inside of her*. (The final quote of Ithaka is related to this too).

Fiona Capp also introduces a new view on the surfing experience never seen before, the importance on the surfing experience in her writing. There are many quotations of this issue

relevant in the text but there is an interesting quote from an article she wrote to a *Allen & Unwin* reading group about the book:

“When I started writing *That Oceanic Feeling* I imagined I would end up telling a simple story about a woman approaching forty with a young child and a skeleton in the closet in the form of a surfboard stashed away in the garage of her family’s beach house. A woman who gave up surfing in her early twenties, not long after she got a job as a journalist in the big city, but who swore that she would one day return to the water. I knew it would also be a literary journey about a love of the sea which is inseparable from a love of books, and also an intellectual one about why the ‘idea of surfing’ has such a powerful hold over her imagination.” (Allen & Unwin)

This quote is very illustrative because at the beginning, before she started writing anything she sees surfing as a *skeleton in the closet* a thing he *swore upon* coming back. This initial view of surfing responds to a hidden burden, some personal quality that she had abandoned and she wasn’t sure why it was coming back. But even with this she knew that the journey she will make will affect his literature and imagination.

In *That oceanic feeling* there are also found references to the *Odyssey* the precedent of the book travels. Fiona calls his travel through Victoria, Europe and Hawaii her particular odyssey but not in a bad way. The last part of the book is called *Returning to Ithaka*. As a conclusion

Fiona

says.

“Keep Ithaka always in your mind. Arriving there is what you're destined for. But don't hurry the journey at all. Better if it lasts for years, so you're old by the time you reach the island, wealthy with all you've gained on the way, not expecting Ithaka to make you rich” (p.257)

The author makes a metaphor of Ithaca being the last destiny of things, and we say that we should not hurry to find this end. “We should benefit from the experiences that we live in order to get there even if they are good or bad, because maybe the end it’s not what we are looking for and won’t benefit us” (p.257). If we abstract the meaning of this quote, she is telling the reader to live the moment, to gain something from each experience and not hurry things. This vision of time can be considered a revised *Carpe diem*, which is interesting and again really related to the surfing life, where you don’t expect and end in the long run of your surfing experiences, you just want to enjoy the most from each time you surf, because it may be the last, as Fiona was feeling this surftrip would be.

## 4.4 Los que hemos amado by Willy Uribe

*Los que hemos amado* is a fictional novel written by the Basque Willy Uribe. Willy Uribe is relatively not really well known in Spain although he is one of the pioneers of surfing literature with *Cronicas del salitre*, an essay where he gathers all the knowledge he acquired of surfing and from surfing in his life. He was born in Bilbao in 1965 and has worked in many surfing magazines as he is a professional photographer and surfer. He is a quite new author, he published his first novel *Nanga* in 2006 but he has a wealthy literary career from then, with more than 10 books published like *Cuadrante las planas* or *Revancha*. He is an activist for human rights and was in a hunger-strike not long ago in order to get and indult in the case of one man, David Reboredo, who was wrongly convicted.

Willy Uribe's publications greatly differ from each other, he has a book with self-pretensions of being the Spanish Joyce's *Ulysses*, *El ultimo viaje del Omphalos*. Noir-genre publications like *Cuadrante las planas* and a novel about a Basque fugitive in Indonesia *Nanga*. *Los que hemos amado* was published in 2011 and is a novel set in the Basque country where surfing is the initial contact between the first and main characters.

#### **4.4.1 *Los que hemos amado*: relevant parts of the plot to this study**

*Los que hemos amado* is a complex novel. It has many characters and themes and subthemes that appear. The work is a narrative novel set in the Basque Country in 1981 that narrates the happenings to Sergio Santos. Sergio Santos is a person from outside the Basque country, who has moved into Algorta. Algorta is a municipality of Getxo, a small city in the vicinity of Bilbao. There is a kind of negative prejudices on some traditional Basques about Spanish people moving into the Basque country and a pejorative term in Basque to describe them, maketo. This set up isn't friendly to Sergio and Sergio is kind of an outcast.

Sergio is a surfer and through surfing starts having social relationships. He gets to know Eder. Eder is an important member of the bourgeoisie in the city. He has another status and he is popular and well related in Getxo. Sergio gets to know him because he surfs really well. Eder has plans and money and when the atmosphere in the Basque country of that time gets darker and oppressive (murders, repression, terrorism) they decided to go on a surfing trip to Morocco. The main goal of the trip is to surf and to smoke hashish. The goal is fulfilled but the situation in Morocco isn't any better and they see a girl suicide by jumping off a cliff. This event starts a series of intricate events that darken the atmosphere in Morocco. Sergio and Eder went to

Morocco in order to evade these situations and now they found themselves into something much worse than in the Basque country.

#### **4.4.2 Los que hemos amado : main topics related to surf**

This work is a narrative novel, so the work is fictional and all the characters and situations come from Willy Uribe imagination. This means that the situation in where we can find evidence on issues related to surfing is prepared by the author. The way in which we can look into the issues is greater because maybe the actions of the characters meant something to Uribe and this gives this book's analysis another dimension. Also it is important to know the complexity of the author when considering his works. On a self-critic of *El ultimo viaje del Omphalos* the author compares his work with Joyce's *Ulysses* and some characters and situations with their *Ulysses* counterparts.

The first relevant fact that can be gathered from this novel is that Sergio gets to know Eder in the beach. Sergio is an outcast so he gets integrated into the community by surfing. This simple fact can have many reads, more given the complexity of the novel and the complexity of another Willy Uribe works. For example, one read would be that Sergio is an alter ego of the author and he feels sometimes like a *strange at home*. He feels like he doesn't belong and it's surfing that allows him to be a part of a whole, to integrate himself into the community. This read is connected to the transcendentalism we have seen in the other works which gives it credibility. Analyzing this narrative novel after the essays is important because the study before provides a broad perspective and in this case another perception of the literary motives used by Willy Uribe.

Another read of this would be that Willy Uribe wanted to create a duality between the novel main characters, Sergio as a naive person, that is not really aware of what is happening and undergoes a coming of age trip and Eder, who is already 'mature' and is a (bad) influence on Sergio. This duality is interesting because it's related to the duality in the surfer community mentioned earlier on in the work. This read is important to consider because considering a *good* surfing community part and an *evil* part of the surfing community that does drugs and starts fights, gets in trouble matches the description of Jaimal Yogis and the existence of *Surf-Nazis*. Also, the read of Sergio being naïve and going on this journey matches the pattern of a self-discovery trip, like in the other works commented.

When Sergio and Eder flee to Morocco they are going on a trip, but it's not a philosophic motivated one, they are trying to evade reality (the harsh conditions in Basque Country with terrorism), not only with this trip but also with drugs. Evading reality is a consistent topic in literature and it's in a way unique. People sometimes try to evade reality with literature or occupying their minds with activities. Surfing is for a very high portion of surfers a way to evade reality too. Most of us would have heard one surfing motto which is *Surf to live, live to surf*. This topic deals with the obsession on surfing and its capacity of evading reality and this is being pictured here by Willy Uribe.

The last important fact from the novel that can have an interesting read for the study is the suicide of this girl jumping off a cliff. The way the suicide is set it makes it look like the girl wanted to come back to the ocean. Both Eder and Sergio characters are bonded to the ocean, because they have structured his life around the surfing sport going to Morocco to surf. This is another conception of the ocean as a giver and taker of lives, which we have seen in many sea related literature like I commented before.

## 5. Common issues of surfing literature

Having analyzed these three works of surfing literature we found the same common issues and three different visions about them. Now the work will enlist these topics and summarize the opinion of each author about each topic commenting when they agree or when they do differ about surfing issues.

### 5.1 The ocean

The ocean is an element present in most literatures and has different conceptions. Jose de Espronceda's *La canción del pirata* is an Spanish example of the sea understood as freedom. Hemingway's *The old man and the sea* perceives the sea as a life giver and taker, and a force of nature. Many transcendental novels have the ocean as an important element, for example Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Melville's *Moby Dick* or Homer's *Odyssey*. All these works have different conceptions about the sea. For the surfing literature authors the sea is the main element where action happens and a recurrent element to which they will relate doing metaphors to explain another important issues. Also they reckon something in the ocean, something the three authors miss and something they want to come back to. This view is related to the feeling that life comes from the ocean and someday our lives will return there.

In the three works analyzed the ocean is seen as a giver of life and life taker. As I quoted on Yogis he said the ocean was a *nurturing mother* and sometimes a Hawaiian sea monster. That goes more or less the same for Fiona Capp, and both include poems in their autobiographies praising ocean's beauty. On *Los que hemos amado* we can see the sea giving live to both Sergio and Eder characters and taking the life of the girl that suicides.

## 5.2 Transcendentalism

The view of the ocean is related to the transcendentalism present in all these authors. Transcendentalism is a movement that started in America in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was a philosophical movement that criticized the empiric knowledge and state of the art in universities across the United States. Also it proposed new reflections about the relationship between the individual and society. Waldo Emerson, one of the most relevant transcendentalists was quoted when debating the main issues in *That oceanic feeling*. His work *Nature* is considered the base of principles of transcendentalism and has many things in common with *That oceanic feeling* and the other works dealt. As it was exposed exposed before surfing is a meaningful activity for every character and person in the works. Through surfing they acquired insights on themselves and nature and better themselves. Transcendentalists defended the importance on learning through our own experience just like all the autobiographic authors, Fiona and Yogis did in their works. There are much more similarities between the original transcendentalists and the surfing literature authors. Surfing is considered as putting yourself alone in front of the nature force in order to learn about ourselves (the Kanaloa god on Yogis, or the one-ness Fiona felt). And it's similar as what Waldo Emerson says in *Nature*: "go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars." The difference between transcendentalists and surfing literature authors is their view on society, transcendentalists see society as a corruption of the individual and surfing literature authors consider the individual already corrupt by its surrounding areas. The ocean means a clean and free area for surfing literature area and it's where they will go into solitude, but not escaping from society, escaping



for the configuration of society into cities (as Fiona from Victoria, or the characters from *Los que hemos amado* when they leave Getxo) or suburban areas (as Yogis when he runs away).

The conception of learning it's also similar between transcendentalists and surfing literature authors, through the own experience , in this case *surfing trips* as in *That oceanic feeling* or *runaways* as in the other works mentioned, the characters will acquire insight not only on themselves but also about life and way of life. It is important to remark the similarities between these *discovery trips* that the main characters of the novels undergo with Thoreau's *Walden*. *Walden* is the result of a retirement of the author into the woods to experiment what it is to live in accordance with nature and not influenced by society. In a way all these surfing literature books propose something similar, as in *Walden* Thoreau learnt from his retirement and contact with nature, Fiona and Jaimal also learn from their trips into nature and the surfing experience, not escaping from society but escaping from their comfort zone. There are many more issues in these works that relate to Transcendentalism and it is possible to say that in a way surfing literature applies a revised and current concept of Transcendentalism. The transcendentalist movement was born to make people aware of the corruption of society and the corruption of its intellectual models (specially education in America) proposing the individual experience in order to acquire knowledge, and a knowledge earned by a contact with nature. These surfing literature works analyzed in the study propose the same natural individual experiences (in this case surfing) which will allow this knowledge that doesn't have to do with the knowledge we can acquire in schools or universities (in *That oceanic feeling* the knowledge would be knowing ourselves and in *Saltwater Buddha* to find our inherent being, our *Buddha*).

The discussion of the transcendentalism in this work can be concluded by saying that surfing literature gives to the surfing experience the characteristics that Transcendentalist authors

gave to nature. The similarities between the propositions the authors make of personal betterment through surfing experience are related to the Transcendentalist way of learning. Also, the conception of Transcendentalist of the human being as a part of a whole is shared by surfing authors, as I quoted from Fiona she felt *at oneness* with the ocean.

### **5.3 Duality in the surfing community**

The issue dealt before, gave the surfing experience a philosophical edge. But this edge is not perceived by all the participants in this surfing experience. There is a duality in the understanding of the surfing experience, some will be attracted to surfing for various reasons and respect others creating a good atmosphere but others will be attracted to surfing because they want to evade reality (as in *Los que hemos amado*). The concept of *Surf-nazi* was introduced before while introducing Yogis' book and it meant the contraposition of good and evil in surfing. For him there were some good surfers (the philosophical ones, the respectful ones) and other that were *surf Nazis*. It is clear that in any given society there would be many kinds of people, but in surfing, the existing surfer community is driven by not that many motivations. As I exposed in this work, some were attracted to surf by its conception of renewal and purification and transcendent. Others instead are driven to surf because they see it as a way of evading reality by risking themselves in front of nature and other surfers. Of course there are many kinds of surfer but the first one symbolizes for Yogis the good ones and the latest the *surf- Nazis*. This conception on surfers it's shared by a deep read of *Los que hemos amado*. In this narrative novel the main characters know each other surfing. Sergio is a surfer belonging to the first category I mentioned, he surfs for the art of it and it's really good at it and Eder surfs to evade his situation of responsibility at his home. *Los que hemos amado* is all about this duality characterized in two

different person that will clash during its plot and give different opinions and reactions about the same problems and issues.

In surfing literature the authors create or try to manifest this duality in the surfer community. The authors by writing are trying also to deny the known part of surfing as something that involves violence, people breaking surfboards and drugs. They are defining in a way the ideal surfer and defining the anti-conception of this surfer, the *surf-Nazi* in Yogis book, the *Eder* in *Los que hemos amado*, this duality is important because usually, the most known part for an *outsider* of the surfing culture is the *bad* part. The things that people pay attention to is the way surfers dress or over which things they fight and sometimes they won't pay attention or just don't know the philosophy behind the surfing experience and all the manifestation of art that are related to this experience. The authors then remark this duality in order of giving the reader the thought of two different conceptions of the surfing experience by the surfing community.

## **5.4 The surfing experience**

It is difficult to summarize in one chapter of this work the interpretation of each author and what they have in common about surfing. It is clear that surfing is the motivation they used in order to write surfing literature. Surf motivated Yogis to change his lifestyle and that made him ready to write his life experiences, surfing *completed* Fiona in order to move on and keep on with his life after the surf trip, so in a way surfing was for her a coming of age. In *Los que hemos amado* surf is the main element of relating the two main characters in the duality I commented before and a tool to expose different behaviours.

As surfing is perceived differently by each author there are some similarities that we find in its conception. Surfing is perceived by Uribe and Yogis (initially) as an evasion of reality,

something similar to a daily runaway to the beach to escape from quotidian problems or unhappy situations. Yogis parents divorced and he was having an addiction to alcohol and drugs so he decided to run away to Hawaii, later surfing acquired another conception for him but initially he wanted that. This conception relates to the *surfing Nazis* commented on the *surfing duality*. It is important to consider Yogis' book as an example of betterment through the surfing experience. After this initial evasion of reality to Hawaii he realized that he has to look for *something* to be whole, so through surfing and Buddhism he will try to find his inner Buddha. This later conception of surfing is as an enthralling and almost religious activity. Surfing represents his purity in order to prepare himself as a better person and writing his story as he says is a gift to young surfers and spiritual seekers (Interview on *Saltwater Buddha*).

Fiona Capp sees surfing as a way to confront her *rebellious child* with her being a mother an move on. Surfing meant a coming of age for her and a way to express herself, to rebel from being stuck in a life she maybe didn't consider and accept it.

As it is clearly seen in this study, there isn't only one way to describe the surfing experience, each author has even different opinions about it through time (as Yogis) and the only thing that can be concluded about the surfing experience is that is individual and affects each surfer in a different way.

## **5.5 Movement**

Surfing is a sport that is based in movement. The most important moment in surfing is when the surfer is riding the wave, moving on the crest and into the wave. This movement allows surfing literature to have beautiful metaphors and explain the reality in base to this movement. As it was quoted before "Few images better capture this primal *at oneness* than that

of the surfer crouched inside the crystal, womb-like tube of a breaking wave; an image made all the more exquisite by our knowledge of the wave's imminent destruction". Fiona is referring to the oneness with human being and nature, but she is also making a metaphor of life and the movement in a wave. When the surfer is in a wave he knows that the wave is going to break the same way that when we live we know that someday we are going to die. There are many quotes related to this one but this one have to be considered because it contains Fiona's conception of life through the movement in a way. She compares life to surfing. Life starts when the surfer paddles the wave and gets in motion, life goes on as the surfer is riding the wave (and this is also relevant to her novel, because she moved on by surfing) and life disappears when the wave breaks and the motion stops. This conception is deeper than it seems because implies many things. The most important moment in surfing is when the surfer rides the wave and that's the most important for her in life. As I quoted again from her book:

“Keep Ithaka always in your mind. Arriving there is what you're destined for. But don't hurry the journey at all. Better if it lasts for years, so you're old by the time you reach the island, wealthy with all you've gained on the way, not expecting Ithaka to make you rich”

This is another metaphor on the same conception of life for her. She clearly is making the reader consider about living the moment because we don't know what comes after and the destination may not be the thing we are destined to. The baggage we acquire during the trip is the most important, more than the arrival

## 6. Conclusion

A supranational comparative literature study on surfing literature allowed this work to find out the similarities in the surfing experience and its conception around the world and has provided also examples of which issues are relevant to the surfing literature. Although the authors don't have any relationship they share similar ideas about the world and specially the issues related to the surfing experience. Surfing literature is such a new topic and is almost not known but as this work has proven it has more than meets the eye. There are many original topics and conceptions about life (as for example the revised concept of *carpe diem*, as living the life as if we were part of a wave). Being a newly bred literature doesn't mean that surfing literature hadn't antecedents or references, as it was seen in this study there are many references in each book in the study and ideas that have appeared in literature as the concept of the sea as a life giver and taker.

The comparative study allowed the comparison of the surfing philosophy with the transcendentalist movement philosophy and also the comparison of motives with other works before the appearance of surfing literature, then it allowed a dialogue between two different fields of knowledge, literature and philosophy. The comparative literature has proven itself a valid tool in order to describe and contextualize the surfing literature and its issues. The study found numerous similarities and reciprocities in topics such as the conception of the ocean, a duality in surfing (and society) and the importance of movement.

The main topic of the work, the surfing experience, hasn't been described by this method because every author and individual has a different interpretation of it and relates it to different ideas. Generally it can be concluded that the surfing experience understanding is something

individual. Every author has views and opinions about it. Their opinions and views can be shared or not, but we can acquire a certain knowledge from “their surfing experiences” and what surfing has contributed to their lives.

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