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## Post-Global *Welt(er)schöpfung* in the Work of Karina Sainz Borgo, Fernanda Trías, and Guadalupe Nettel

“Hemos reinventado el mundo, creado una nueva normalidad”, the narrator declares in Guadalupe Nettel’s 2023 short story “El Sopor” (The Lethargy), while simultaneously lamenting the adjustment to this new world marked by exhaustion, created during a pandemic (Nettel 2023: 152). The ambivalence of the *Welt(er)schöpfung* (world creation/exhaustion) conveyed in this story has deeply influenced Latin American cultures as a conceptual motif and is closely tied to the exhaustion of the global project amid escalating global crises. Critical examinations of the asymmetries, fissures, and dark sides of globalization have gained momentum in recent years, leading to a new, post-global framework for reflection that also informs the literatures of our time, without rendering phenomena of global connectivity obsolete (Müller/Loy 2023). In these reflections from post-global perspectives, literatures occupy a central role, precisely because of their inherent creativity, which enables them to design new worlds under the conditions of post-globality. Against this backdrop, this essay will set out to show how Latin American literary productions from the most recent post-global phase have reflected the exhaustion of the global project. What notions of globality, and especially of exhaustion and new creation, are being developed here?

Three literary examples will be considered: the 2021 novel *El Tercer País* by Venezuelan author Karina Sainz Borgo (forthcoming in English as *No Place to Bury the Dead*), the 2020 novel *Mugre Rosa* (forthcoming in English as *Pink Slime*) by Uruguayan author Fernanda Trías, and the aforementioned story “El Sopor” from Mexican author Guadalupe Nettel’s collection *Los divagantes* (2023). All these works negotiate the theme of *Welt(er)schöpfung* by taking experiences of pandemics or epidemics as their narrative premise, interwoven with explorations of various crisis phenomena related to *Welt(er)schöpfung*. In Karina Sainz Borgo’s novel, this dynamic of creation and exhaustion is tied to themes of migration: the book takes its name from an illegal cemetery known as “El Tercer País”, a site in an unspecified border region, where the narrator buries her twins who have perished while fleeing a plague. Fernanda Trías’s novel *Mugre Rosa* highlights the fragility of the social fabric in the face of an ecological disaster. Here, too, the obvious choice is to run, but the narrator ultimately forgoes an escape plan and stays

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put in the contaminated environment. Finally, Guadalupe Nettel's story "El Sopor" tells of adapting to the never-ending crisis of a 15-year-long pandemic. Reality and fiction are blended in the characters' new lifeworlds, which are shaped by the mounting impacts of climate change and by processes of sweeping digitalization alike. All these texts negotiate the ambivalence of phenomena of losing the world, or *Welt(er)schöpfung*. They are all pervaded by questions of contamination and (social) isolation, escape and stasis, and the importance of imagination. They are characterized by a fundamental exhaustion, deeply reflected in the post-global literatures of Latin America, but also by creative aspects of potential (future) worlds.

## On the *Welt(er)schöpfung* Concept in the Post-Global Context

The ambivalent motif of *Welt(er)schöpfung* should be understood here as an aesthetic manifestation of grappling with current post-global developments. Since the turn of the millennium, the asymmetries of the Western-led project of globalization, in general, and the fourth accelerated phase of globalization, in particular, have grown more and more glaring. Cosmopolitan visions of global citizenship are losing their persuasive power amid an intensifying experience of crisis, as currently demonstrated by the exacerbation of climate change, migration flows on an unprecedented scale, and globally active terrorist networks, to name just a few phenomena. The worldwide spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has also catalyzed a post-global discourse in recent times, especially in regard to the theme discussed here.

In this context, *Welt(er)schöpfung* can be read as an attempt to reflect on and reformulate the often-homogenizing conceptions of a globalization-shaped world that has been continuously subordinated to Eurocentric and hegemonic interests since 1492. Ignacio Sánchez Prado recently asked how the understanding of "the world" within the academic discussion around world literature, as shaped by the material circulation of books, can be accompanied by a more suitable understanding of diverse cultural imaginations of the geopolitical world (Sánchez Prado 2023: 163), a crucial question for the contexts discussed here. Literatures from the Global South serve as a fruitful starting point for negotiating the flip side of global connectivity under the banner of neoliberal culturalism. Through their critical lenses, post-global literatures shift the focus to the asymmetries of globalization processes from a new, non-Eurocentric vantage point, while also harnessing the constructive potential to design new forms of global coexistence, a

potential that is particularly inherent in post-colonial literatures according to Pheng Cheah's theory. Theoretical discussions beyond Cheah's must draw distinctions between diverse conceptions of aesthetic worldliness. Sánchez Prado highlights aesthetics of fragmentation that no longer convey a self-contained experience of the Other, or of other worlds, but instead invoke and assemble fragments, shards, and traces within self-reflective writing so as to create fleeting visions of the future. This is a vision of world literature as one of the "archives of the exceptions to come" (Sánchez Prado 2023: 171).

If we now examine post-global literature against this background, the following four main thematic pillars can be identified: (1) Ecological issues around Anthropocene narratives, (2) the digital revolution, (3) epidemic fictions, and (4) migration. For the context of this article, each of the narrative texts discussed here – as paradigmatic examples and models of the so-called Global South's realm of experience – relates to theme 3 (epidemic fictions). Aspects of the other themes are also represented in the selection: theme 4 (migration) in Sainz Borgo and Trías, theme 1 (ecological contexts) in the texts of Trías and Nettel, and theme 2 (digital revolution or artificial intelligence) in the work of Guadalupe Nettel. This sampling attests to the frequent interwovenness of various themes of *Welt(er)schöpfung* in literary writings.

The concept of *Welt(er)schöpfung* holds multiple dimensions of meaning. On the first level, it refers to the *exhaustion of material practices of globalization*. Although the current phenomena of exhaustion and disillusionment trace further back, the 2008 financial and economic crisis can be seen as the turning point of an "exhausted globalization" (Hüther et al 2019). The "drying up" of growth and/or integration processes, despite an almost unchanged outward pace, not only provides an entry point into questions whose answers could shape prospects for a genuinely inclusive globalization of the future. It also increasingly leaves a vacuum in which new cultural (world) creations are emerging during a period notably devoid of overarching narratives. Ultimately, the impression that the trends are changing course partly results from a sense that the various narratives about the increasingly overt global problems and asymmetries can no longer be strung together into a consistent story or systemic narrative, as Tally (2019) and others have pointed out.

In a second, meta-linguistic sense, the concept of world creation/exhaustion also encompasses the *exhaustion of theory about global processes*, as reflected in the ongoing debate over world literature. The interplay between global development and theoretical production has developed to a point at which the notion of "world" is increasingly exhausted, although processes of "worlding", the world-building power of literature, are still being assigned meaning.

The third dimension of the exhaustion concept pertains to the *exhaustion of the earth's resources*, which conversely exposes the problems with the notion of “world”, as regions are unevenly responsible for and affected by this. The Latin American region is a prototypical of this starkly apparent asymmetry. That is especially true of the concept of exhaustion, which could scarcely be deployed in any non-negative sense given modernity's logics of acceleration and growth. And this is precisely an area where current trends in Latin American literary production come into play, as they envision alternative imaginaries of the global beyond an acceleration dogma that is no longer economically, ecologically, or socially sustainable. Meanwhile, recent reactionary anti-globalist currents have raised the question of how such alternative perceptions of the world and visions for the future can be characterized using a dialectic of exhaustion and new creation that might also be politically progressive.

With all this in mind, the concept of *Welt(er)schöpfung* is deliberately framed as ambivalent. Invariably, the dynamic of exhaustion is also countered by a trend of *creatively harnessing world creation processes*. Likewise, Anna Katharina Schaffner points to the inherent link between creation and exhaustion in her genealogical study *Exhaustion: A History* (2016), which focuses on individual and collective states of human exhaustion. She stresses the important function of fictionalized scenarios of exhaustion for helping us grasp the phenomenon, while also highlighting literature's power to create anew: “Fictions [dealing with exhaustion] also form culture – they do not just mirror certain historical dynamics, values, and medical paradigms but also help to create, to complicate, and to question them” (Schaffner 2016: 14). If we treat literary writings, then, as an archive of aesthetic worldliness – an archive that, for all its limitations, has the task of rendering the present moment tangible and even envisioning (slivers of) yet unknown futures – we must especially attend to the forms of ambivalence that the concept of *Welt(er)schöpfung* exposes for literary studies.

## Karina Sainz Borgo: *El Tercer País*

In the novel *El Tercer País* (2021), the first of this essay's three examples of writings that portray *Welt(er)schöpfung*, Karina Sainz Borgo explores various global emergencies, including the outbreak of a life-threatening epidemic and the inhumane conditions of a family's escape. The thematic backdrop of the novel is the mass exodus from Venezuela, one of the largest movements of refugees in contemporary times. The border area where the characters struggle to survive offers only subtle allusions to the Venezuelan-Colombian border. Instead, this

borderland becomes a paradigmatic microcosm of global capitalist structures of violence, in which the dangers and precarious conditions confronting particularly vulnerable groups, unaffiliated to a nation-state, come to light in distilled form. In the process, this literature navigates phenomena of “being lost in the world”, which Mariano Siskind describes as “the transition away from a post-dictatorial understanding of global displacements, from the figure of the exiled to that of the wandering orphan without a world” (Siskind 2019: 221).

The protagonist Angustias first experiences this sense of being “lost in the world”, or perhaps losing the world, after the outbreak of a plague whose symptoms can include memory loss and fatal fevers. Angustias and her family flee. Her infant twins, who both have a heart condition, do not survive the ordeal of the escape. She carries their bodies in a cardboard box until she can give them a dignified burial. When she finally reaches the borderlands, her world literally comes to an end:

Sand had muted the light, and wind needled in our ears, a moan that seemed to rise through fissures in the ground. That breeze was a warning, a thick, strange dust storm, like madness or pain. The end of the world was a mountain of dust, formed from the bones we had left behind on our journey here. (Sainz Borgo 2021: 11; forthcoming translation by Elizabeth Bryer)

In this profoundly exhausted world, the border crosser Angustias develops survival strategies closely associated with the aforementioned illegal cemetery. This place not only signifies the end of life, but also the only space of creation, where humanity counteracts pervasive violence and exploitation: it is the only place where refugees who have not survived their escape can find a grave. As a modern Antigone, Visitación Salazar, who runs the cemetery, defies prevailing power structures with these illegal burials, driven by the conviction that refugees also deserve a dignified resting place. Like Polyneices, whom Sophocles considered an enemy of the state of Thebes, these individuals have been excluded from basic human rights, which, although theoretically global, remain tied to nationality in practice. The illegal cemetery thus becomes a third space of pan-human solidarity, through which Visitación Salazar engages in open conflict with local drug cartels and armed gangs in the border region. In collaboration with state representatives, like Mayor Aurelio Ortiz, they constantly seek to maximize profit from the flows of migration. Regarding Alcides Abundio, one of the most powerful and wealthiest men in the border region, it is said that he prefers exploiting refugees as cheap labor over human trafficking:

Selling people was more lucrative. He built his empire on the bones of these people, supplying them to the irregulars at a price, or in exchange for arms. That was how, thanks to Abundio, new recruits swelled the ranks of the bloodiest patrols in the region. The guerrilla

commanders thanked him for his efforts by eliminating his enemies and granting him safe passage to their poppy plantations, where they produced heroin to finance their war against the State. (Sainz Borgo 2021: 47–48; forthcoming translation by Elizabeth Bryer)

Visitación acts as a counterpoint to Abundio and the corrupt border regime, offering her services to the dead out of charity, solidarity, and love of humanity, without demanding compensation. She buries people who died on the run, placing a gravestone with their names on each grave. Portrayals of intertwined creation and exhaustion extend into the details of the novel's portrayal, such as the exclusive use of plastic flowers on the graves after the real ones have withered due to under- or over-watering: "Such was the paradox of that land: water, giver of life, could just as easily take it away" (Sainz Borgo 2021: 54; tr. Elizabeth Bryer).

The vast black market at Cucaña, whose name evokes and simultaneously perverts the notion of a mythical land of plenty, is also representative of the border region. As a microcosm, the area magnifies and casts into sharp focus the devastations of globalized neoliberalism, making physically palpable in literature the degree to which market-oriented globalization has been exhausted. Similarly, the failure of universalist cosmopolitan ideals and human rights becomes evident in the borderlands outside the systems of territorial states, where sheer strength prevails. In this space, there is no destination or hope of refuge for the walkers (*caminantes*), as the people fleeing in the novel are called. A more exhausted world is hard to imagine. Yet the entire novel is interspersed with motifs of ambiguity that fuse opposites, in which good and bad, beautiful and ugly, creation and exhaustion converge. The ambivalence of *Welt(er)schöpfung* is particularly evident in the fate of Consuelo, a girl who is impregnated by her rapist and then dies in childbirth. Her daughter's birth costs Consuelo her life, as though this were one of the common barter deals at Cucaña. Birth and creation cannot be separated from world exhaustion; in the figure of the newborn Milagros, Siskind's image of a "wandering orphan without a world" resounds once more, posing a question about the power of new life, in a sense one more sliver of a possible future. While Siskind describes mourning for the loss of the world as never-ending, emphasizing the aspects of melancholy, Sainz Borgo also shows how world exhaustion is intertwined with world creation, mourning with hope, and death with life.

## Fernanda Trías: *Mugre rosa*

Like Karina Sainz Borgo's narrative, Fernanda Trías's novel features a plague – this time set against the backdrop of an ecological collapse – that so profoundly alters the protagonist's surroundings that escape appears to be the only viable

option.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in *Mugre Rosa* (2020), the first-person narrator only fantasizes about fleeing the increasingly inhospitable environment, but never actually attempts it. The novel describes how an ecological disaster leads to the collapse of the local ecosystem of a coastal city (which bears similarities to Montevideo but is again unnamed). A bloom of dominant dark-red algae spreads in the water, polluting it and causing a die-off of the local fish population and the contamination and closure of the beaches. The changes in the marine and aquatic environment trigger the collapse of the entire region's climatic processes. In the absence of rain, the dominant weather is a persistent thick, wet fog, usually accompanied by a forceful, all-penetrating red wind. The climatic and ecological changes, along with a wind-borne, usually fatal disease, lead in turn to social collapse and force people to adapt their daily rhythms to the new circumstances. Henceforth, lulls and gusts of the pathogenic wind dictate people's day-to-day lives and by extension their movements through public space. In this situation, the narrator suffers from the unhealthy dependency defining her social relationships, yet she experiences increasing isolation. This is particularly evident in her strained relationships: with her mother, with whom she maintains contact during the crisis, and with her ex-husband who is in the hospital. She does not feel a real interpersonal connection with him yet cannot detach either. In her daily life, the narrator earns money sporadically by caring for a boy suffering from Prader-Willi syndrome and thus from an insatiable appetite. She tries to "provide" for all these people to some extent, without being able to establish supportive relationships.

The lack of food security during the crisis, as well as a general fear of contracting the unidentified disease, cause many residents in the protagonist's vicinity to panic and flee the coastal region. Gradually, the city empties out. This exodus leads to the collapse of public infrastructure; nothing functions anymore – except the hospital, which has been upgraded as part of the protective measures directed by the Ministry of Health. There are hardly any stores left; in their place, the black market flourishes and peddlers become common. The city disintegrates as the residents hastily flee and what remains is looted, but also because of the climatic conditions. The moisture is pervasive, and only specially insulated windows can keep the wind from slipping through even the smallest cracks. While the streets in the city gradually become calm, those living inland, although safe for the time being, worry about preserving calm in their own cities and about the chaos spreading there.

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1 For more on Fernanda Triás's *Mugre rosa* in the context of migration and *Welt(er)schöpfung*, see also Müller (2024).



The novel explicitly links the crisis-ridden present moment to a creative element. This becomes particularly clear when the narrator stops writing articles for the new government ministry that attempts to propagate a beautified reality to the people through a publication called *Bien-Estar*. Upon her resignation, her boss notes: “Vos no creés que el mundo merezca ser contado”, to which she replies, “Tal vez, dije, o tal vez no haya a quién contárselo” (Trías 2021: 115). This underscores the unique role of literature and the act of literary world creation, which gains its value precisely from the unembellished recounting of catastrophe, in contrast with the portrayals in *Bien-Estar*. But also unlike that publication, such literature has not been funded or demanded by anyone. The narrator saves up money for a flight to Brazil and repeatedly tells her mother that she will take her there, a plan she never carries through even though she has long had the money. The novel’s title refers to a world where it is impossible to detach from unsanitary living conditions. The “pink slime” in question is initially the meat paste produced in a new factory (see Trías 2021: 87, 113), intended to feed the population during the crisis: “Todos odiábamos la nueva fábrica, pero dependíamos de ella, y por eso le debíamos agradecimiento. Una buena madre, proveedora. Y ahí estábamos nosotros, atragantados de rabia, como un puñado de adolescentes que odia a los padres pero les debe la vida” (Trías 2021: 113). Building on this description, the dependence of humans on a potentially destructive environment is illustrated with the image of the “ball of pink slime”: “Así nacemos: un coágulo de carne, boqueando por un poco de oxígeno; una bola de mugre rosa que, una vez expulsada, ya no tiene más remedio que aglutinarse a este otro cuerpo, el de la madre, morder con fuerza la teta de la vida” (Trías 2021: 113).

Coexistence, beginning with images of birth and the creation of new life, is depicted as a dead-end dependency in which people are nothing more than “balls of pink slime”, existing in perpetual dependency. The hopelessness of the ecological collapse parallels societal developments in the novel, highlighting the interplay of dependency and the lack of relationships or even the destructive power of coexistence. Thus, the novel stages a pattern Jan-Henrik Witthaus has demonstrated in a series of Latin American novels themed around plagues (including novels by Mario Bellatín, Yuri Herrera, and Edmundo Paz Soldán): “Más que de novelas sobre epidemias, se trata de estudios sociales ficticios, incluso distópicos que, a través de la profeta de las pandemias, elevan la visibilidad de procesos sociales, de estructuras, relaciones de poder y distribución de los recursos” (Witthaus 2021: 92). Fernanda Trías also seeks to lend visibility to societal conditions and processes, focusing on social dynamics that are accelerated and intensified by the outbreak of the plague in the novel. She portrays a social system under high pressure, leading to interpersonal dynamics that culminate in images of catastrophe and isolation.



## Guadalupe Nettel: “El Sopor”

The short story “El Sopor” was published in 2023 as part of the collection *Los divagantes* by Mexican author Guadalupe Nettel. All characters in the eight stories gathered here are, in a way, *divagantes* (wanderers): for various reasons, their familiar environments have become fragile or inaccessible, forcing them to move through unfamiliar, foreign territories. As in many of Guadalupe Nettel’s works, including the titular story “Los divagantes”, migration emerges as a recurring theme, alongside the pandemic experience, which is portrayed as a journey through alienation and *Welt(er)schöpfung*. “El Sopor” narrates the life of a family of four in Paris fifteen years after the outbreak of a life-threatening and still ongoing pandemic. The descriptions by the first-person narrator, a mother in her thirties, make clear how the exhaustion accompanying the pandemic is inextricably linked to the creation of new realities and a new routine, as in the narrator’s lines quoted above: “Hemos reinventado el mundo, creado una nueva normalidad, como se decía al principio, y nos hemos adaptado a ella. Eso es el peor de todo” (Nettel 2023: 152). In this “new world”, creation and exhaustion have become intertwined, a tangle from which the protagonist attempts to distinguish herself through the art of storytelling.

From her account, it emerges that the crisis – now the norm – has passed through various phases. At first, the government took measures to contain infections, leading to significant human isolation. This was followed, after a few years, by a phase that historians now call “el recreo” (Nettel 2023: 150), during which government pandemic measures were temporarily relaxed, and physical interpersonal contact possible again. Demonstrations against government policy were also held. The *recreo* gave way to a new stage, in which more people died from the rampant, deadly virus than ever before, leading to the “segundo periodo de confinamiento” (Nettel 2023: 150) – a stage that continues into the present moment of the story. During this stage, not only has the freedom of the press been suspended in the country, but on many levels, people can no longer tell what is real from what is fictional or imaginary. These blurred lines between reality and fiction, within lives that have significantly changed since the advent of the pandemic, are a central theme of the story, interwoven with manifest ambivalence, marked by creation and exhaustion.

Initially, this is most evident in the coping strategy the narrator’s husband and children adopt as they adjust to the situation. Since they are no longer permitted to leave the house and all contacts outside the nuclear family, including school and professional activities, take place on screen, they escape into longer and longer stretches of sleep and dreaming. Meanwhile, the narrator, who writes that she is a literature professor teaching virtually, is the only person awake on

the night the story takes place, when she sits at the kitchen table writing down her memories and thoughts about the past fifteen years and her current life, at which point no one expects the state of emergency to end. The narrator reports on day-to-day life in her home, with the outside world only apparent via ambulance sirens and the sounds of food delivery vans. She is disturbed by how accustomed her family has become to these circumstances. At one point the mother ponders: if she ever tried to realize her own dream and flee deep into the forest, where she probably would not survive long but would finally experience nature and animals again, her family would probably also adapt to her absence without complaining. Ultimately, her children might not even be certain whether their mother's existence had been merely a dream, she muses.

The subject of birth also plays a central role in this story, as the birth of the narrator's first child marks the ejection or departure from an alternative life. The narrator and her husband had temporarily fled to a commune (near the city of Fontainebleau, south of Paris) to avoid life confined in an urban apartment. The narrator had adapted to life at the illegal commune in a remote and inaccessible part of the forest, despite the extremely arduous manual labor and the utter lack of privacy. When she became pregnant, however, her husband believed that unless she had an abortion, they had to leave the commune and return to the city before the birth. Thus, in the story, birth is not only the beginning of new life but also a verdict of being trapped in a hostile environment with no permissible interpersonal contact outside the home. It goes without saying that the new life would be shaped by the numerous crises described in the story. The government continues to do nothing about environmental destruction and climate change – apart from banning the media from reporting on it. During the protests in the *recreo* period, where the narrator met her husband, the two had demonstrated for a climate policy that was never implemented. Now, it is unbearably hot even in November, and the heat and devastating floods in northern Europe are only discussed in hushed tones. The story comments on official news reports:

No mencionan el calor ni las inundaciones en Escandinavia que, se dice, han ocasionado muchísimas muertes. Hace tiempo que los noticieros dejaron de abordar el cambio climático como un tema político y lo convirtieron en una leyenda urbana, una superstición de gente desinformada. (Nettel 2023: 151)

Exhaustion in the face of multiple crises, but also in the face of this silencing of debate, is omnipresent in the story.

The narrator reports that the family has been living in a very restricted mode (“esa existencia intramuros que llevamos desde que apareció el virus”; Nettel 2023: 146), after the world completely changed with the outbreak of the virus. At the same time, this life is also characterized by a certain comfort. As a literature

professor at a university, the narrator is one of the few who has not lost her job (it is easy to read while confined to one's apartment). Teaching has been virtual for years, but many countries have introduced a universal basic income ("la renta universal", Nettel 2023: 146) due to the never-ending state of emergency, causing many young people to lose any motivation to study whatsoever. Compared to fields such as medicine or computer science, literary studies, divided into "las letras pre y postpandémicas" (Nettel 2023: 147), is not held in very high esteem. The students who choose to focus on the "pre-pandemic" writings are often the standouts, the narrator reports, but also risk their mental health through awareness of all that was lost to the pandemic. Like sleep with its phases of dreaming, literature offers both creative and exhausting potential. That is, the activities of reading and writing carry the dangers of exhaustion but also offer moments of escape from the limitations of pandemic life. Imagination thus becomes a central theme of *Welt(er)schöpfung* in this story. Sleep, in particular, is presented as ambivalent, both a state of exhaustion and a space of imagination, even escape: "Dormir, creo que ésa acabó siendo su forma más personal de disidencia", the narrator comments of her husband (Nettel 2023: 160).

Her husband finds other, equally dangerous creative impulses in the face of exhaustion during the pandemic. He records hours of video calls between his children and his wife's parents so as have enough material to generate new, ad-hoc sequences if the grandparents die – after all, his children only know the grandparents from the screen and would not notice the difference, or so he reckons (Nettel 2023: 158–159). Regarding the boundary between reality and fiction, addressed here once again, artificial intelligence also plays a central role, as many people believe certain images (such as pictures from inside hospitals or long lines outside of medical facilities) are AI-generated and not "real".

What remains, then, of "reality" beyond the confines of the four walls from which the story's characters cannot escape? The narrator suggests that the memories of pre-pandemic life are not truly present anymore, at least not entirely, since there is a prevailing sense that these memories might not be entirely real, but rather be byproducts of the dreams to which people increasingly succumb. Rather, it is often the vivid sensory impressions that strike the narrator as "real" experiences – imagining her children paragliding or skiing with the brisk wind against their faces, activities familiar to her but unknown to her children. The "real" sanctuary the narrator finds at moments when the encroaching situation feels nearly intolerable is a balcony off the kitchen, offering a glimpse of the sky: "estos cinco metros cuadrados es lo único que distingue a esta casa de una sepultura" (Nettel 2023: 160). The sliver of survival space in a life hemmed in by the comforts yet threats of pandemic reality is, beyond these

few square meters, a realm of imagination, underscoring the indivisibility of creation and exhaustion in this pandemic world.

## Conclusion: World Exhaustion and the Potential for Creating New Worlds

In different ways, all three texts grapple with experiences of *Welt(er)schöpfung* within the context of post-globality, each triggered by the outbreak of an epidemic or pandemic that complicates human coexistence amidst inherently crisis-laden conditions from the outset. In her novel *El Tercer País*, Karina Sainz Borgo interweaves two of the most prominent themes of post-global literature: epidemic and migration. The border, which must be crossed to flee the epidemic, is not portrayed by the author as a strict dividing line but as an extremely ambivalent space. Sainz Borgo thus imagines a multifaceted place where, like fragments of an unknown future, the horrors of our exhausted world condense, and spaces for new creation emerge. Creative rebellion is always inseparably linked with exhaustion, always with death. The example of the border region shows us how cosmopolitan ideals fail precisely in the interstices of territorial state orders and how the promises of globalization get lost in an inhumane neoliberalism. In Fernanda Triás's work, the theme of the rampant, highly contagious disease (and the associated ecological catastrophe) is intertwined with suffering from the existential hopelessness of symbiotic interpersonal relationships. The narrator becomes increasingly isolated and self-reliant but cannot detach from relationships, particularly with her ex-husband and mother. Creation, especially regarding the negative mother relationship, is always already negatively charged from the outset, from birth, as expressed by the novel's titular image of "pink slime".

Regarding the ambivalence of creation and exhaustion, the theme of birth is central to all three texts. In Guadalupe Nettel's work, birth embodies the ambivalence of the beginning of new life and being trapped in a hostile environment under the conditions of a never-ending pandemic. Sleep, as a space of both exhaustion and creation in the sense of a dream's imaginative power, is also profoundly ambivalent. So are, ultimately, literature and storytelling. Here too, the protagonist – one of Nettel's *divagantes*, a "wandering orphan without a world" (Siskind) – faces a loss of the world while presenting fragments of new worlds with her storytelling. All three texts demonstrate that outlining the latest phase of post-global Latin American literatures in relation to *Welt(er)schöpfung* experiences requires a perspective that goes beyond a mere rejection of "world", beyond positing an "end of the world". Aspects of new world creation – especially in a

fragmentary sense of possibility, which envisions traces and slivers of unknown futures – must be considered in order to grasp post-global *Welt(er)schöpfung* in literature, especially in regard to the highly topical themes of pandemic lifeworlds.

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