



# JACLR

## *Journal of Artistic Creation & Literary Research*

***JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access Graduate Student Journal of the Universidad Complutense Madrid that publishes interdisciplinary research on literary studies, critical theory, applied linguistics and semiotics, and educational issues. The journal also publishes original contributions in artistic creation in order to promote these works.***

---

### **Volume 8 Issue 1 (June 2020)**

Claudia Vázquez Martín  
***The Hitchhiker***

---

Vázquez Martín, Claudia: *The Hitchhiker* . JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research 8.1 (2020) <<https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>> ©Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

## **The Hitchhiker**

The car was all ready to go. The whole family had been packing for the last six days, and now all those suitcases and brand-new surfboards and frocks and baskets and baskets of food were piled up inside the car, which looked ridiculously crooked and overstuffed. This had to be a special vacation for all of them. Jeanie and Bobby were seated in the backseat with their seatbelts on and surrounded by the littlest pieces of luggage when their parents finally got inside the car and started the engine. The car roared off and left the front of their garage.

'Daddy, is it gonna be a long ride?' asked Jeanie when they had just come outside the town in a sleepy voice, for they all had to wake up early to help with the preparations for their journey. But Daddy did not answer, as he was focused on his driving, so Momma did instead.

'Yes, sweetie. But you'll see how entertaining it'll be!' she turned to look at her husband in search of some backup, but he was still with his eyes fixed on the road and a slight smile resting on his face. It was as if he were in a dream, and he certainly felt like so. He had been waiting for this vacation for months, planning each detail with impatience but trying not to show it too much to not disturb his family. He knew exactly what awaited them at each turn of the road, the bars they were going to see as they rolled down the highway across the country, when they were going to stop, and he even felt proud to know the people they were going to meet – Bill, the owner of the gas station where they would do their first stop, and his wife, thirteen years younger than him; Chet and his four sons, who carried the little restaurant next to that one place on the left side of the road; and so on. So he was pleased with his daughter's response.

'Good. I love long car rides.'

Bobby was looking out the window, marveled with the passing trees. He was roughly a year younger than his sister, who had just turned nine. Her mother had dressed him in his blue Sunday clothes for the occasion. He, unlike his sister, detested long road trips, as he usually got dizzy. Bobby then started to look at the morning dew drops that had formed on his window. He stared at the cold glass, following the small drops in their route, and imagined he was witnessing a race. He was quite the dreamer, his mother used to tell him. Nevertheless, none of the drops he followed seemed to ever reach an end – they all melted in tiny streams or merged with other drops before the imaginary finish line. Bobby tried to touch them and concentrated deeply to see if that way he could make his drops win, but eventually, annoyed and frustrated, decided to look at her sister, who was licking a red lollipop and humming unaware of her brother's troubles.

Jeanie had been dressed in her Sunday clothes too. The white dress had been a birthday gift from her mother, who was in the front seat wearing herself a similar one, but more adult. Her mother had just picked up a lipstick from her purse and was starting to paint her lips looking in

the rearview mirror with her window down. Jeanie was a little jealous. She had seen some old pictures of her mother from when she was younger, and she used to be very pretty, and everybody said that, and people used to congratulate her father for the wife he had fished. But people did not make those remarks anymore, and even Jeanie could tell that she had lost that glow.

'Mommy,' she started, after some time hypnotized with the vision of her mother and the pink stain on her lips, 'can I paint my lips too?'

'When you grow up you'll have time to paint your lips all you want' she replied turning around and smiling sweetly at her daughter.

'Midge, seat straight. We're about to do our first stop.'

The boy was glad that they were going to stop at last, as he was feeling like throwing up. They had been on the car for over three hours now and the heavy luggage was swallowing them. Bobby saw with great relief how his father got out of the main road towards a gas station.

'Oh, Arthur, thank God.'

Arthur finally parked at Bill and Mrs. Bill's. His plan was working out perfectly, just as he had prepared it. Now they'd be there for twenty minutes, to go to the bathroom, snack something, and let the kids play for a while. And then they'd be off on the road again to pass Chet and Sons' in other two-and-a-half hours. If they continued this way, everything would work out perfectly.

Some jazzy song was playing from a radio that Mrs. Bill had beside her on a table, next to an ashtray. She was sitting on a plastic chair fixing her nails. Her husband was standing up chewing a toothpick waiting for the next customer. He went to the pump as soon as he saw the car approaching.

'Hi, there' Bill said loudly, leaning on the roof of the car. 'What can I do for ya?'

Arthur got out of the car and the rest of the family followed. Bobby was very pale and as soon as he stepped outside run towards the little bathroom cabin with a faded sign that said "BOYS". Midge took her hand to her forehead to cover her eyes from the June sun and Jeanie started dancing around to the song. Arthur had a big pleased smile on his face. He felt dazzling and said pointing to the car 'fuel it up, Billy, my friend'.

Leaving his wife behind, he went towards the bathroom just as his son was coming out. 'How are you feeling now?' he asked paternally, patting him on the left shoulder a bit too strong. 'Better' answered Bobby while rubbing his mouth with his jacket to clean himself from the rests of vomit, which his father observed disapprovingly, and then touching his left arm, 'but I just felt another shiver'.

Both father and son returned to the car, where the girls were eating some grapes that Arthur had brought specifically for that stop. Bobby didn't like grapes. Arthur moved the ring on his

finger while looking at his hands and realized that the radio had changed tunes, and now a catchy melody filled the place. Around the gas station, there was nothing – they had long ago left behind the part of their journey where there were trees all around the road, and now all they could look at were yellow colors and cornfields and red barns. The solitude mixed with the sound of that happy tune made the scene eerie. But Arthur still felt encouraged and so he kissed his wife on the temple and gave her another grape.

‘Would you look at that’ exclaimed from his chair Mrs. Bill, ‘what a nice family and loving husband.’

Arthur looked at the woman, who despite her young age looked older than her husband, and just then he noticed another figure close to the bathroom cabins. It was a twenty-something man dressed neatly, but he had dirt on his shoes as if he had been walking a long distance. He looked vacant as he approached their car, and had a dark aura which Arthur could not explain. But he flinched as he already sensed what that stranger was going to ask, and that was not in the plan.

‘Good morning, sir’ started the stranger addressing Arthur, ‘I’m sorry for disturbing your family, but my car broke down some three miles back. I walked all the way here but they don’t have a phone. Would it be a problem for you to drive me to the next gas station or the nearest town?’

There was something in the smile of the stranger that Arthur didn’t like. The next stop from there was Chet’s restaurant on the left side of the road, and the nearest town was almost four hours away. He wasn’t willing to accept him in his car, it would be a drawback and interfere with his trip. And he didn’t like his smile at all. Midge thought he looked like a movie star.

‘Oh, Daddy, please, say yes. I love hitchhikers!’ pleaded Jeanie energetically.

‘I don’t think we can, sweetheart.’

‘But why! It would be so much fun. This trip is so boring!’

‘I thought you liked long car rides, Jeanie’ replied her father in a rather serious tone. ‘Besides, there’s no space for all of us in the car.’

‘I don’t want to cause any trouble, sir’ intervened the stranger still smiling.

‘He could seat between Bobby and me, Daddy! This is so unfair!’

‘Jeanie!’ Arthur was starting to get angry and anxious. They had been in Bill’s gas station for half an hour now. His plan was crumbling down.

‘Arthur. Art, please, honey. Listen to your daughter’ said Midge, looking up and down at the stranger recovering some of her lost glow. ‘We can make some room for someone in need.’

'Thank you very much, ma'am.'

And so the stranger squeezed in between an excited Jeanie and a still dizzy Bobby, and the luggage seemed to swallow them all inside a little bit more than before. Arthur was uneasy. They were already twenty minutes late in his perfectly arranged schedule, and that was too much. But he had to give in, as he wanted this trip to be enjoyable for all of them, even if he had to suffer the consequences of that delay – after all, the result would be the same.

'So what's your name?' asked Midge smiling after a silence inside the car, looking at the stranger through the mirror. They were rolling again on the highway, this time surrounded by all those fields. Bobby wanted to look at his precious drops again, but they had dried out and there was no trace of their existence anymore. Jeanie looked thrilled with that stranger by her side. She had a tendency of being too friendly with strangers, no matter what her father said to her. And her father was still nervous on the steering wheel. He kept looking at his ring, at his family, and at that stranger just in the middle of the car, in the middle of the luggage, in the middle of his trip.

'My name is Leland Barnes, ma'am. I'm a salesman.'

'Well, that explains the briefcase' Midge turned around cheerfully.

'Oh, Mommy, do you remember how much Addie loved briefcases? She would always play with Daddy's brown one.' Jeanie's words affected heavily the passengers of the car. Bobby looked altered at her sister, and her mother, seating back straight, replied almost crying.

'Yes, Jeanie. We remember.'

Arthur shrank in his seat. The only thought of it... of his little girl...

'Excuse me, but, who is Addie?' that stranger had to interrupt even his thoughts. Addie was his and he didn't have the right to ask about her. Neither to be on his trip. His concern was growing with each bump of the road.

'She's our little sister. But she's dead.'

There was a silence in the car that fell onto them as heavily as the luggage. Jeanie could not notice the tension accumulating in his father, or if she did, she did not care. Arthur could only picture the little hands of her Addie, playing in the garden and laughing with him, her hair shaking long and blonde and pure - his, his little girl...

'She'd be four today, right Daddy?' spitted Jeanie, mindlessly and boldly, unaware of anything that was going on in the thoughts of the passengers of the car.

Midge burst out crying and Bobby couldn't believe what his sister had just said. The hitchhiker mumbled a clumsy 'I'm so sorry, I didn't know', but Arthur was furious and turned to look at the back seat angrily - to his daughter, to his son, to the hitchhiker.

'Of course, you didn't know! Jeanie, look what you've done to your mother!'

The next hour and a half slipped away in awkward silence. Bobby wanted to throw up again. As the minutes passed by, all except for the two men felt terribly sleepy. The road was monotonous and the silence heartbreaking. Arthur kept anxiously checking on his wife and his kids and the hitchhiker. Their trip had been ruined by him. If he hadn't been there... All he wanted was to enjoy the ride with his family, to stick to the plan. But it was all ruined. Jeanie did not want to fall asleep, so she tried to play with her brother, but Bobby was lost in the clouds. Then she tried with the stranger, but her father did not let her. Midge was in a haze, with the breeze in her hair and the memory of her dead little girl. Arthur was dead in life.

Another twenty minutes passed, now filled with some small talk between the members of the family. The father had a serious face, nothing like the smile he showed at the beginning of their journey. Jeanie asked for water, as her throat was dry, and Bobby said he wanted some too because he wasn't feeling well. Arthur looked at them. Midge looked absent.

'I have some inside my briefcase' smiled the hitchhiker. The father was suspicious of him as he saw the young man open the briefcase, taking out a bottle of water.

Bobby was the first. He put the bottle on his lips and drank and drank and drank. Jeanie took the bottle from him before he could empty it all. He cleaned his mouth again with his sleeve under the watchful eye of his father. Then Jeanie drank.

They were twenty-five minutes away from Chet's restaurant. Bobby felt as if his head were spinning around. He touched his face and then saw drops of blood on his little hand. He exhaled, scared, and shouted 'Mommy!' His sister turned to him with great difficulty, as she was like dreaming, and pointed to his nose, just to see the same red drops on her immaculate white dress.

Mommy did not answer this time. She was asleep next to her husband, who kept on driving with an ardor and a tingle down his spine. The hitchhiker turned around and saw the two kids bleeding from their noses with their eyes closed.

'Sir' he started. 'Sir, your kids...'

Arthur wouldn't let a stranger tell him anything about his kids.

'They're fine. It's because of the heat of this area. They'll be fine. They just need some rest.' He kept on driving. His wife was still, and so were his children. The hitchhiker was shocked, his eyes opened wide. The seconds rolled by. They were only ten minutes away from their second stop.

'I don't think they're fine' said the hitchhiker at last, 'I don't think...'

'Shut up! You have already ruined our trip. You have-' Arthur hushed abruptly. He was making spasmodic moves with his hands. He kept on touching his ring, touching his wife's thigh, his eyes on the road ahead. He started searching for something somewhere beneath his seat. The hitchhiker began to move slowly and grabbed the steering wheel.

'Stop! Y-you are to blame. You interrupted us! Stop it! Stop!' the hitchhiker and Arthur engaged in a fight. Both of them were afraid of the other, of the car, of the swallowing weighty luggage, of the sensing of the other three people in the car. The vehicle moved dangerously from one lane to the other, to the other, to the other. Arthur did not let go of his hold of the steering wheel, where he had one firm hand, the other under his seat. The hitchhiker was now sitting above Midge's body, who had her face turned to the rolled-down window, creasing her dress in the struggle. The father then took out his hand and showed a gun. He had a strange grinning expression. The hitchhiker looked at him in terror as the other man placed the gun under his chin.

'This was not in the plan.'

From inside the restaurant, as they were serving mashed potatoes to the regulars, Chet and his four sons could hear a gunshot coming from the other side of the road.

**Bioprofile of the author:**

Claudia Vázquez Martín is an undergraduate student of English Studies at UCM devoted to literature and creative writing.

**Contact:** <clavaz01@ucm.es>