

Studies in Gothic fiction

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Introduction: Exploring Gothic and/in Latin America

Enrique Ajuria Ibarra

Fernando de Fuentes's 1934 Mexican horror film *El fantasma del convento* (*The Phantom of the Convent*) displays extraordinary cinematic technique in the visual representation of a haunted place. The film's production design is loyal to the depiction of a solitary and ruined religious building: the consistent use of soft lighting is enhanced by the presence of candlelight on stage, and the set design highlights the colonial convent as old and forgotten. De Fuentes's film emphasizes darkness and mystery. Accompanied by effective sound effects of lamenting off-screen voices and howling winds, it is clear that this setting suggests terrors the protagonists may need to unveil. Nevertheless, rather than discovering gruesome secrets from the monks who inhabit the convent, Eduardo, his wife Cristina, and their friend Alfonso end up revealing their treacherous love triangle. Transformed from innocent woman to erotic seductress, Cristina threatens her husband's trust and almost turns Alfonso into a sinful man. What the haunting reveals are the true intentions from the main characters: their dark desires are exposed when spectral, yet mostly unseen, threats turn their overnight stay into an uncanny dream.

The Phantom of the Convent is evidently structured around Gothic motifs. Even the external conflict, focusing on three lost travelers who have to spend the night in the ruined convent, is determined by the appropriation of elements most commonly noticed in British Gothic fiction. De Fuentes's film questions the sanity of its protagonists, who are trapped in a colonial, labyrinthine space where supernatural apparitions and events are far from ever being confirmed. Suggesting a terror that unveils horrifying subject desires, *The Phantom of the Convent* is keen on adhering to an aesthetic that Fred Botting has determined to be "negative" (1). Botting additionally defines Gothic fiction to be predominantly dark, that is, where "an absence of the light associated with sense, security and knowledge" eventually reveals "delusion, apparition, deception" (2). De Fuentes's film explores this side of the human psyche, revealing Cristina as a treacherous and seductive woman, a threat to masculine integrity and the Catholic religious institution. Double and uncanny, she is deemed evil in the holy space.

This film is Gothic then, and it is also Mexican. It is a clear example that suggests that this fictional mode moves beyond geographical, cultural and artistic borders. This local transposition proves that Gothic already reveals a certain global fascination. Speaking of contemporary Gothic, Glennis Byron claims that "Gothic has energetically participated in the cultural flows and deterritorialisations that characterize globalisation" (3). *El fantasma del convento* anticipates the contemporary global flows that Byron speaks of: Gothic has been intrinsically characterized by its capacity to move and travel, and its ability to fascinate and terrify a wide transnational audience. This Gothic move allows de Fuentes's film to explore dark fantasies and uncanny subjectivities with the use of formal and aesthetic techniques that have usually been articulated with these themes. Aside from its setting, *El fantasma del convento* rejects the depiction of the traditional Gothic heroine, reminiscent of Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and favors a representation of femininity that is both seductive and treacherous, more similar to the female vampires described in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Cristina, who appears at first to be innocent and dependent of her male companions, reveals her true identity inside the convent: in the realm of the masculine a woman preys on men. This revelation hints to the cultural representation of woman in Mexico: she is simultaneously holy and condemned by her sexuality. The film's Gothic approach also reveals this cultural anxiety in the form of terrors and supernatural hauntings projected on screen.

The use of Gothic motifs in Latin American art, literature and film is far from impossible. On the contrary, as a receptacle of various cultural and social discourses, the region is able to accommodate elements from foreign and local beliefs and expressions. Mythicized as a land of wonders, its vast tropical and desert features may seem far removed from the dark and cold forests and cliffs that saw the birth of Gothic fiction in Northern Europe. Indeed, Latin America has been most commonly associated with magic realism, a term that encompasses a series

of works of fiction characterized by the irruption of the supernatural in the everyday. Lucy Armitt further argues that “magic realism is always, to some extent, ‘foreign’ to the real while being part of the real” (307), elucidating the double nature of this narrative mode as a thing of wonder that nevertheless belongs intrinsically to the world of realist fiction. Armitt has also compared both magic realism and Gothic to assert that “in magic realism ghosts are simply ‘there’, usually giving testimony to the voices of those whom society has silenced or rendered ‘disappeared’, but rarely the primary focus of the mystery of a text. In the Gothic the phantom *is* that central source, manifesting a secret that disturbs, even chills” (315). In this sense, both magic realism and the Gothic may evidence a use of specters, but their narrative strategy discloses different ontological and epistemological purposes: while magic realism utilizes ghosts as an aid to social criticism, Armitt argues that the haunting becomes the nuclear aspect in Gothic fiction to reveal traumatic histories and character obsessions that result in a different core of narrational inquiry.

If the distinction between magic realism and Gothic depends on the strategic use and relevance of motifs in a narrative, it is possible to examine Latin American texts that posit central preference to haunting, darkness and the uncanny to explore different aspects of our social and cultural psyche. *The Phantom of the Convent* is such a case. As I have argued above, the film recurs to haunting to unveil the characters’ deepest desires; it unleashes disturbing revelations that threaten the cultural privilege of marital over extra-marital relations. This way, the film attempts to “other” Mexico’s Roman Catholic upbringing with characters that are prompted to break the rules inside a holy (yet condemned) place. The haunting is not intended to support a social and political stance when situated within the confines of the real. The spectral mode in de Fuentes’s film rather brings central subject anxieties to the fore and crushes the reassurance of the codes of reality and reason. As such, it seems as if magic realism were structured around the notion of wonder, while Gothic determines its aesthetic by focusing on terror and eventual horror.

Instead of condemning Gothic as a foreign fictional mode and rejecting it in favor of more local forms of fiction – such as magic realism –, it is worth examining influences, adaptations and appropriations of the Gothic in Latin America. The exercise of this negative aesthetic allows us to understand how different Latin American cultures and nations respond to and become deeply involved with the Gothic move. Rather than seeing it as alien and unrelated, a Gothic fascination may enact its influence in order to understand how even the warmest and luxurious locations can also hide disturbing monstrosities. The wonder of the tropic can also be seen as a danger and may drive humans mad, as Joseph Conrad elaborates in *The Heart of Darkness*. What is more valuable for critical enquiry is to examine how this tropical darkness is perceived by the very people who inhabit this domain. This way, Latin American narrative forms may reveal a consistent Gothic use that evidences intertextual fictional motifs and plots. On the other hand, it may also reveal a more localized and consistent Gothic form that may be inherent to the area. In short, it is a matter of understanding how this other land has incorporated the Gothic, whether consciously or unconsciously, to be able to identify its particular manifestations.¹

A viable approach would explore the potential relations that arise from this possibility. Thus, it is not a matter of looking at Gothic in Latin America, but also of exploring Gothic *and* Latin America. Such inquiry allows for a more flexible structural relationship, where Gothic is absorbed into mainstream and obscure regional manifestations and Latin America can serve as a location that can be Gothicized. The imbrication that arises can work in both directions: feeding on the flow of the Gothic move and enriching fictions from both areas. As such, it is not just a matter of determining how Gothic is understood within the Latin American framework, but also of noticing how, as a geographical and cultural whole, Latin America may be darkly projected to different regions. Thus, Gothic works as a mobile catalyst: it moves narratively, transtextually and transculturally, as it constantly finds rich and fascinating localities that are subject to Othering, mis-recognition and monstrification. In this sense, Byron claims that this motivates “a growing awareness that the tropes and strategies Western critics have associated with the gothic, such as the ghost, the vampire and the zombie, have their counterparts in other cultures, however differently these may be inflected by specific histories and belief systems” (3). This global flow of Gothic can find a niche for exploration in Latin America: ghosts, vampires, zombies and other monstrous creatures can and have been absorbed into Latin American culture to speak of the horrors embedded in this particular

land that differs historically and discursively from other regions where Gothic is more commonly associated with. An interest for Gothic and/in Latin America can further enrich our understanding of this fictional mode.

The following articles are evidence of the fruitful, and useful, critical observations and explorations of Gothic manifestations in Latin American literature and film. These enquiries provide evidence of the early adoptions and adaptations of Gothic fiction, to then explore more contemporary appropriations and circulations: they point to reconstructions and global disseminations of local legends by means of the Gothic mode. Thus, Gothic and Latin America feed on each other to project those monstrous and horrifying phenomena that crack mythical elaborations of Latin American identity, magic realism and exoticism. The contributors to this special issue prove that Gothic has rooted itself and speaks of cultural anxieties, such as national trauma and identity. Additionally, it motivates experimentations and regional adaptations of the negative aesthetics of the Gothic. Such examinations also provide further anticipated evidence of what Byron suggests to be the current and evident global flow of the Gothic.

Early incorporations of Gothic motifs are noticeable in Latin American literature in the nineteenth century. Several Romantic and Modernist writers² recurred to elements of the Gothic mode to manifest in writing their fascination with the supernatural and the uncanny. Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez suggests that writers, such as Juan Montalvo, Juana Manuela Gorriti, Horacio Ladislao Holmberg, Rubén Darío and Rubén Campos, “(in) form the basis of a new corpus of writing, and although it failed to become a full-fledged literary movement, … it has haunted and continues to haunt Latin American literature to the present day, through the use of a twist that hybridizes and, above all, *tropicalizes* the Gothic movement”. Eljaiek-Rodríguez uses the term “tropical” to refer to Gothic appropriations, adaptations and transformations in the whole of Latin America. In this sense, Gothic is not invasive or authoritative; it is rather absorbed into the practice of fictional writing with the purpose of revealing anxieties and concerns that are best imagined through the Gothic. Additionally, Gothic’s presentation of dark, unknown and monstrous Otherness is given a twist in location: Eljaiek-Rodríguez convincingly claims that “the place of origin or development of the monsters (Others or specters) and the supernatural situation is no longer the periphery of Europe (Eastern Europe, the Orient, the Caribbean) but Europe itself”. Latin American nineteenth and early twentieth century Gothic reverses Otherness in a cultural reconfiguration of home and the terrifying beyond. Here, the old continent is indeed old: a place of superstition, haunting and witchcraft that lingers mythically and in contrast with the new Latin American continent.

While tropical Gothic can be traced to its early literary manifestations, the term was coined more recently, and more concretely, for cinematic purposes. Juana Suárez decides to explore Colombian filmmakers Carlos Mayolo’s and Luis Ospina’s notion of Tropical Gothic in relation to horror, historical trauma and national identity. Suárez determines that Mayolo’s and Ospina’s horror films disrupt the Latin American magic realist tradition in favor of an appropriation of “longstanding characteristics of gothic style … and giving them back together with elements associated with the tropics”. Suárez notices that the term also considers films that are not necessarily set in the tropics: its main characteristic then is the cinematic “presence of vampirism, supernatural, psychological and physical horror itself”. These elements thus provide a visual confirmation that the Colombian period of social and political unrest known as *La violencia*, is nationally perceived as “a generator of monsters … generated by monstrous circumstances”. Suárez proposes that Gothic and horror elements in Mayolo’s and Ospina’s films are more suitable to address issues of national trauma than magic realism. In this sense, what is of interest to both Colombian directors is the centrality of haunting as a structural necessity in the elaboration of a national and cultural discourse. Thus, as a term, tropical Gothic can serve as the springboard for further evaluations of local adoptions, re-configurations and implementations of Gothic in the Latin American region.

Jonathan Risner’s study of space in Latin American horror films examines these re-configuration processes that are noticeably taking place. More than just identifying a Gothic mode in terms of the construction of what Anthony Vidler terms “the architectural uncanny”, Risner determines that space in Latin American horror cinema is a key element to evaluate transnational movements and re-locations of the genre. Therefore, more than speaking of tropical Gothic, Risner prefers to see regional permutations of the Gothic as exercises of diffusion of this fictional mode in local and national terms. His focus on the Uruguayan film *La casa muda* (*The Silent House*,

2010) and its apparent deconstruction of space and time may hint to how Gothic may be transposed to expose local anxieties regarding political conflict and female abuse. Nevertheless, Risner argues that an examination of Latin American Gothic horror “should be seen as part of a transnational circuit of horror cinema in which transnational genre communities consume horror from other countries and, as evidenced in the four films examined above, filmmakers are keenly aware of the genre’s tenets such as the plasticity of space and suggested horror”. Even though it may be possible to speak of Latin American Gothic, Risner claims it is more relevant to explore the transnational flows these horror films are allowed to be part of by means of well-known Gothic and horror conventions.

This sense of transnational Gothic is further reflected in Jennifer Donahue’s assessment of *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz. Donahue examines the novel’s exposition of a national identity crisis that inevitably revisits the national traumatic wound Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo inflicted on this Caribbean country during his term in power. Although the novel may not be immediately associated with the Gothic, Donahue identifies brief Gothic suggestions that further enhance the protagonist’s identity crisis, not just in terms of his geographic dislocation, but also in terms of his sexual and intellectual identity. By recovering the local notion of the *fukú* curse, the novel explores the determinations of a national haunting. For Donahue, “Díaz invokes specters through the Gothic”. The persistence of the supernatural curse envelops the narrative in a sense that is far detached from magic realism. Indeed, even though Donahue claims that “in utilizing the supernatural as a means of exploring *fukú*, Díaz proffers a shift in the understanding of Dominican identity that moves beyond essentialist, physical markers of identity to ones rooted in the mystical and collective”. It is once again this centrality of haunted national trauma that allows for a more Gothic expression in Díaz’s novel. The Gothic in this transnational and Latin American narrative is incorporated as a means to understand personal, regional and national identities rooted in traditional beliefs that are eminently spectral.

Finally, the Gothic’s sense of the transnational or the global is further elucidated in Zoila Clark’s analysis of Andrés Muschietti’s film *Mama* (2012). Here, the Gothic mode explores monstrous maternity by appropriating a local Mexican legend and incorporating it in the configuration of spectral Mama in a multinational film production. Clark identifies useful associations between the film’s ghost and the legendary *La Llorona* as a means to redeem the cultural abjection of motherhood and nature. Clark proposes the relationship between Mama and Mother Nature by means of an Aristotelian syllogism to then examine the film’s narrative confrontations and connections with the mythical Mother. The explorations of a Jungian collective unconscious further reveal a rooted attraction and dread of the maternal, which is surmounted in the film by a subject ruled by social and cultural discourses. Thus, Clark argues that “this film shows that the tales we are told as children are in part memories of real historical events. Both stories and histories are memories constructed out of facts and fiction, and when they are put into narrative, whether linguistically or visually, they are at once individual, collective, and as much a part of the past as they are part of the present”. For Clark, the fictional presentation of a monstrous and spectral mother taps into legendary and mythical configurations of social and personal history. The collapsing of past and present cultural beliefs that is suggested in the transnational adaptation of a local horror legend proves once more that the Gothic is indeed fluid, as Byron suggests, in the incorporation and transmission of regional varieties of horror into the global mainstream. *Mama/La Llorona* is an amalgamation that is essentially more uncanny than abject, as it discloses the structure of the cultural myth of motherhood and nature.

Latin America should be considered a focal point for the evaluation of the Gothic move. Antonio Alcalá González claims that “Gothic conventions reappear in many contexts where human certainties about identity and reality are questioned” (534). His explorations of the Gothic narratives of Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes prove that this fictional mode is able to transcend location and be incorporated in works whose chief concern is to understand the vicissitudes of time, the self and the Other. It seems as if the relationship between Gothic and Latin America hints at a two way interchange of myths, concepts, narrative structures and perceptions of horror. While Latin America is enriched by more powerful manifestations of the uncanny, the abject, national trauma and haunting, the Gothic allows for specific regional narrations to be of interest to a wider, world audience. The presence of Gothic in Latin America is far from being new or simply fortuitous; on the contrary, perceptions, adaptations

and transformations are evident for more than 150 years. It is due time for an incursion into the dark side of Latin America to unveil further features of the mobility of this Gothic world.

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Notes

1 Katarzyna Ancuta has already proposed a similar approach to Gothic in Asia. Ancuta understands that this mode is “an outsider term” for Asia (428), and that the study of Gothic “has to be adjusted to suit local cultural contexts” (429). Thus, she suggests an identification of writers and narratives that “do” and “are Gothic” (430), that is, to point at Gothic fictions that are evidently worked upon consciously or unconsciously to be able to determine what social, cultural and subjective aspects manifest this localized Gothic form.

2 The Latin American Modernist movement differs from its Anglo-Saxon counterpart. José Emilio Pacheco claims that while Modernism in the English speaking world is a synonym for the literary avant-garde (xii), Latin America experienced a confluence of “romanticism, parnasm and symbolism” (xxi) and mediated these movements into a more particular Latin American language that “assumes its own features and is influenced by the Spanish Baroque tradition” (xix). The Modernists’ interest in nature, Orientalism and mysticism – mostly inherited from the European romantic movement – permits the exploration of the supernatural and the sublime too, common features of Gothic fiction that are evident in selected Modernist texts (I have translated all quotes from Spanish).

Semillas de maldad. Early Latin American Gothic

Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez

¡Maldición!... Un terror inconcebible se apoderó de mí,
quise gritar con todo mi ímpetu, quise con un esfuerzo prodigioso
romper los lazos invisibles que ataban mis miembros rígidos.¹

Julio Calcaño. “El dictado del muerto”.

In their book *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* Emma McEvoy and Catherine Spooner list what they consider to be the most important geographical areas for the development and diffusion of the Gothic genre: “from America, Scotland and Ireland to the postcolonial landscapes of Australia, Canada, the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean” (2). On their map, as well as in the work of a number of Gothic scholars such as David Punter, Robert Miles, Elizabeth MacAndrew and George Haggerty, the Americas are reduced to North America and the Caribbean while Latin America goes nearly unmentioned.

In addition to extending the Gothic genre only as far as the Caribbean, most scholarship presents these manifestations as postcolonial derivations rather than their own unique literary and cinematographic form. In this article I state that it is indeed possible to talk about a Latin American Gothic, and will attempt to demonstrate how this is constructed through a process that relocates and transforms topics and characters borrowed from the European Gothic, creating distinctly regional and hybrid variations of these recognizable narratives.

Specifically I will focus on five early manifestations of the genre in Latin America that embody distinct Gothic themes and characters, thus providing an overview of the development of the Gothic mode in this region: “Gaspar Blondín” (1858) by Juan Montalvo; “Coincidencias” (1867) by Juana Manuela Gorriti; “Horacio Kalibang o los autómatas” (1879) by Horacio Ladislao Holmberg; “El caso de la señorita Amelia” (1894) by Rubén Darío; and “El dictado del muerto” (1901) by Rubén Campos.

Prehistoria

Similar to—and often in parallel with—how the Gothic developed in Europe and the United States, South and Central American writers were aware of and interested in the genre since the first decades of the 19th century. Many Latin American writers and intellectuals were exposed to seminal narratives of the European Gothic and read them in their original languages (in English, German and French), in books acquired overseas or through installments published in literary magazines. The act of translating these works that were published in previous years or decades only served to further foment their popularity and dissemination.

Such is the case of novels and short stories written by Anne Radcliffe, Edgar Allan Poe and E.T.A. According to Helena Establier Pérez,

Of the six novels that Radcliffe wrote between 1789 and 1802, four were translated into Spanish, although they did not follow a strict chronological order. The first to be translated into Spanish, in 1819, was *Julia, o los subterráneos del castillo de Mazzini* (translation of *A Sicilian Romance*, 1790) [...] The last to be published was *Los misterios de Udolfo* (*The mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794) published in Paris, in 1832 (112).

From Hoffmann it is possible to find Spanish translations from as early as 1830 (as in the case of Cayetano Cortés's *Cuentos fantásticos* published in the *Semanario Pintoresco Español* in 1839) (9), according to the research of Enriqueta Morillas Ventura. The translation of Poe's work happened years later, and one of the first texts to be translated is the short story "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" which "appeared in *El Correo de Ultramar* in its first number (3-9 January) of 1853" (López Guix 4). Ultimately it is important to stress the fact that both the translations of Radcliffe's most notorious novel and the first of Poe's short story were published in Paris, a space far from the restriction of Spanish censorship and the preferred city of Latin American intellectuals and *flâneurs*, as well as other readers and disseminators of the genre.

From sporadic contributors such as Rubén Darío and Amado Nervo, to avowed cultivators of the genre, such as Leopoldo Lugones and Carlos Fuentes, several Latin American writers helped to create a particular form of the genre in the continent, whether through the publication of shorts stories or novels. Together they (in) form the basis of a new corpus of writing, and although it failed to become a full-fledged literary movement, I argue that it has haunted and continues to haunt Latin American literature to the present day, through the use of a twist that hybridizes and, above all, *tropicalizes* the Gothic movement.

This hybridization or *tropicalization* is a way of appropriating the images and values of a dominant culture (in this case, European) in order to generate autochthonous products, maintaining a bond with the "original" while discussing and questioning issues and images of the dominant culture. This definition of *tropicalization* is related to the discussion enunciated by Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman, who see *tropicalization* "as a tool that foregrounds the cultural transformative cultural agency of the subaltern subject" (2). In this case, Latin American writers adapt and transform a genre that emerged in Europe and was further developed in the United States, generating playful and subversive texts that are structured in terms of agency and resistance, and creating a (re) production of imaginaries.

The *tropicalization* of the Gothic works in a similar manner as the process of *transculturation* as enunciated by Fernando Ortiz and Angel Rama, that is, as an intercultural and bidirectional dynamic, a two-way flow of information, knowledge, and cultural products. The mechanism revives Gothic images and themes, while at the same time employing images and imaginaries that are related to the colonial and postcolonial relationship of Europe and the United States with Latin America (and vice versa), ideas that situate extreme otherness and monstrosity in the southern part of the continent. The ways in which writers and film directors appropriate these issues, enabling the emergence of politicized ghosts and monsters, relate to the formulations of Tabish Khair on Postcolonial Gothic: "Gothic fiction and fiction influenced by the Gothic tradition not only bring the colonial/racial Other back to the (imperial) center; they also depend on and examine the anxieties and complexities of such hauntings" (10). *Tropical*, in this sense, is synonymous with Latin America as a whole - not only the humid Caribbean - taking into account that Latin American writers and directors deliberately tropicalize European and South American themes and characters, be it as a critique or as a way of auto-exotization.

Since the mid-nineteenth century it becomes possible to find in Latin America literature tales that emulate, nourish and complement their European and US counterparts. A large production of short stories published in various Latin American countries (re) construct the Gothic in its different forms and begins to delineate idiosyncratic features of the genre. Writers like Juana Manuela Gorriti, Horacio Ladislao Holmberg, Macedonio Fernández, Leopoldo Lugones in Argentina, Rubén Darío in Nicaragua, Julio Calcaño, Luis Lopez Mendez, Nicanor Bolet Peraza, Eduardo Blanco in Venezuela, José Asunción Silva and José Joaquín Vargas Valdés in Colombia and Francisco Zárate Ruiz and Teófilo Pedroza in Mexico (among others) begin to build the corpus of the nineteenth century Latin American Gothic. In this article, I will briefly discuss five significant examples that emerged from this period of inspiration and transformations, prime examples of the transculturation and hybridization of the Gothic in Latin America.

“Blondín...It is him!”

The short story “Gaspar Blondín”, by Ecuadorian writer Juan Montalvo, is one of the first Latin American Gothic narratives. Written in 1858 during one of the author’s frequent stays in Paris, *Gaspar Blondín* illustrates the recycling and fusion of Gothic forms, elements that appear in the narration from the very beginning of the text, as in the instance of the initial disclaimer that the narrator offers, a device that links his story to its European Gothic predecessors: “I have translated this story into Spanish, from the first of a series I wrote in French, in Paris, under the influence of a long fever. Things written in bed by a delusional man should be taken mostly as dreams” (32). This note introduces the narrative voice, and goes on to explain how the aforementioned story was pieced together from one overheard at an Alpine inn—on a stormy night, naturally—, adding new intertextual layers to a story that has not yet properly begun.

These introductions provided by both writer and narrative voice permeate the story, crafting a narrative ambiguity that leaves both the listeners of the stories— usually people assembled by chance or by some banal reason in a strange space, raptly attentive to a story narrated by a character who warns them that they will not believe what they hear— and the reader with a confused sense of reality and fiction, between what can be explained logically and what appears to be supernatural. According to David Punter, this space of uncertainty, of paranoia over what is real or false, is a fundamental tool in Gothic narratives:

The reader is placed in a situation of ambiguity with regards to fears within the text, and which the attribution of persecution remains uncertain and the reader is invited to share in the doubts and uncertainties that pervade the apparent story. It is this element of paranoid structure which marks the better Gothic works off from mere tame supernaturalism: they continually throw the supernatural into doubt, and in doing so they also serve the important function of removing the illusory halo of certainty from the so called “natural” world”. (404)

Briefly, the narration tells the story of Gaspar Blondín, a vampire-like character who is accused of killing his wife and kidnapping a girl in conjunction with his lover, and is eventually executed in Italy for his crimes. I refer to him as a “vampire-like” character because, in accordance with the Gothic ambiguity that permeates the story, Blondín is never referred to directly as a blood-sucking monster, despite sharing some undeniable characteristics with these beings (the narrator affirms that he remained “hidden by day, [and] he haunted the night” [34]). In this sense, neither the reader nor the multiplicity of voices telling the story ever has enough information to properly characterize Blondín as a vampire. At times, due in part to the ambiguous tone of the writing, it seems that he is not a supernatural being but a mental patient whose only known crime was the murder of his wife, an occurrence that ultimately leads to his descent into madness and vaguely necrophilic acts. These narrative tricks and twists perhaps bring the storytelling closer to Poe’s tales than to a traditional vampire story as narrated by Le Fanu or Stoker. The female character – Blondín’s lover – is also imbued with the same pervasive ambiguity that characterizes both the titular protagonist and the story: she is alternately described as both the vampire’s victim and his instigator; as a witch fond of “trading with evil spirits”; as an insane criminal or a mere hallucination of Blondín.

The conclusion of the short story reveals another twist that abruptly ends the narrative while at the same time opening it to a new series of chilling possibilities: Blondín himself appears as a guest at the hotel in which his story is being told and interjects to question the authority of the narrator. The last words of the inn owner demonstrate his surprise when he discovers that the mysterious man that arrived late to his storytelling session is none other than its own murderous protagonist: “Blondín! ... It is him!” (36). The appearance of Blondín at the end of the story not only serves as a surprising and unexpected continuation of the story, but also as a break with the “fourth wall” of the text. The questioning of the narrative authority by one of characters contained within it continues the path forged by Montalvo at the beginning of the story – when he questions himself and his authority

due to his feverish state – carrying to the extreme and paying homage to the use of Gothic ambiguity and its practitioners while at the same time (perversely) mocking its very use.

With a great knowledge and respect for the genre, Montalvo situates his short story both temporally and thematically between the environment of an eighteenth-century Gothic story (using recurrent elements such as the inn where the action takes place and the ruins which bring together the vampire and the witch figures) and a nineteenth-century one (with the question of whether Blondín is a madman or a vampire and the emergence and interjection of the central character at the narration's end). Above all, he also demonstrates a desire to bring these types of narratives (Gothic fiction) to Spanish speaking audiences, translating and publishing *Gaspar Blondín* in the newspaper *El Cosmopolita* of Quito in 1866. In this sense, Montalvo's short story illustrates perfectly the transportation of the Gothic to Latin America and the interest in creating both a Latin American Gothic genre as well as an audience for this type of 'worldly' literature: written in Paris, translated from the original French, and published finally in a newspaper in Ecuador.

Not So Coincidental Coincidences

Another seminal text in the corpus of the Latin American Gothic is the series of stories *Coincidencias* (*Coincidences*, 1867) by the Argentinean writer Juana Manuela Gorriti. *Coincidencias* consist of four texts: "El emparedado" ("The Enwalled"), "El fantasma de un rancor" ("The Ghost of Rage"), "Una visita infernal" ("A Visit from Hell") and "Hierbas y alfileres" ("Herbs and Pins"). In an exercise of transposition and transformation four different narrators (a vicar, a canon, a woman and a doctor), together construct a true showcase of Gothic themes and characters: in the first, a priest finds the body of a cleric sandwiched in a wall thanks to an oniric apparition – in a clear reference to Poe's recurring claustrophobic fears; in the second, a family drama is solved by a ghostly visitor; in the third, the Gothic takes the form of a demonic presence that only the mad can perceive; and in the fourth, magnetism and witchcraft meld together in an atmospheric blend. The four tales occur in cities in Peru and Bolivia, in spaces such as isolated monasteries or creaky old mansions that, while undoubtedly in the Americas are nonetheless closely related to Gothic tradition.

Despite the four distinct narrators and the variety of topics that the stories cover, what ultimately unites them is the fact that all four stories describe some kind of apparent coincidence, a situation that for one reason or another is revealed at the end as not so coincidental and in many cases even supernatural. These coincidences have, as in many Gothic stories, roots in wrongdoings and situations that require further clarifications or solutions (albeit in the afterlife), or, as Trinidad Barrera explains, "in each case the tales reveal a transgression" (109) that has to be revisited. As in other examples of Latin American Gothic, humor and mockery comfortably intermingle, fulfilling an important role within the dynamic of the ghostly/horror story. In the case of the "El emparedado" the ghost of a Jesuit (an order often associated with academia and intellectuals) manifests himself to achieve a double function: to both correct an erroneous citation of the protagonist as well as a way to reveal the location of his enwalled tomb. As the Jesuit ghost explains: "-Do not look for your quote in Tertullian, it is in the eighth chapter of the Confessions of St. Augustine. When I heard that apostrophe, I looked up, surprised, and saw in front of me the ghost of a clergyman" (53).

Thanks to the conciseness of the stories that form *Coincidencias* it is possible to observe the author's ample knowledge and use of Gothic texts and themes as well as note her interest in creating a Latin American Gothic variant using elements of Latin American traditions. This interest is perhaps clearest in the final story – "Hierbas y alfileres" - in which the trope of the wise doctor who confronts the supernatural (embodied by well-known characters such as Stoker's Van Helsing) is tropicalized by the author, who contrasts the doctor's magnetic and pharmacological knowledge with practices of witchcraft from the Peruvian and Bolivian traditions. The ending is ambiguous and reveals the "coincidence", not letting the reader know if what heals the sick character is the removal of the pins from the anthropomorphic dummy or the botanical remedies prepared by Dr. Boso. In this case, the reader is left to decide which option seems the most likely, without any further intervention from

the author or narrator. Nevertheless, what remains as a (tropicalized) certainty is that the healing element was a Bolivian product, either in the form of a “herb discovered in the Apolobamba Mountains” (4) or a “strange figure, a rag doll wrapped in a piece of embodied taffeta” and covered in pins (5).

This series of stories is just a sampling of the many Gothic and fantastic tales Gorriti wrote, all of which show her extensive knowledge of the genre’s topics and authors. In particular, Gorriti demonstrates a particular interest in topics such as

Dreams, neurotic losses, madness, hallucination, telepathy, macabre communication with the beyond, spiritualism, hypnotism, etc., are a good manual of the most common motifs of the genre used by Gorriti that she handles nimbly, with certain doses of humor and an insistence on the use of first person narrative (Barrera 111).

As in the early days of the European Gothic women writers like Gorriti were the ones in charge of expanding the genre and introducing new twists, taking into account that many of the writers that (in)form the Gothic genre were women: Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, and later the sisters Charlotte and Emily Brontë. In contrast with these writers, Gorriti uses elements of Latin American folklore and popular legends to anchor her stories in a new environment, creating works that represent and use the Gothic genre and its conventions while at the same time appealing to horrors shared by a Latin American audience.

A Literary Automaton

The short story “Horacio Kalibang o los autómatas” (1879) by Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg is another text of great importance in the early years of Gothic in Latin America. As Carlos Pérez Rasetti summarizes, the story is a “narration in which the human beings are replaced secretly and systematically by automatons”, in a dark plot that is gradually discovered by the town magistrate Hipnock and his cousin Fritz, the inquisitive lead characters. The story takes place in Europe, in an unspecified German city replete with Teutonic characters and stereotypes. This Germanic environment, which might initially suggest a mere copy, finds its *raison d'être* when we read the story dually as both a tribute to and a parody of German romantic literature, particularly “The Sandman” and certain works of Goethe like *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. From the very first lines in the prologue’s dedication, Holmberg describes his story as an artifact, as a “delightful toy” dedicated to Argentinian scientist José María Ramos Mejía, who had just published a book that Holmberg calls a “delight for the materialist” (17). The fact that this fantastic tale is openly dedicated to a man of science is yet another contradiction that charges the narration with an ambiguity that connects it to the Gothic, as an Argentinean idealization of, and homage to, the European literary tradition (just as Gothic romances idealized the past, such as the medieval epoch in Southern Europe).

Although Hoffmann is not the only 19th century writer who demonstrated an interest in automatons, “The Sandman” is one of the most important short stories to explore this topic, and echoes of it appear throughout Holmberg’s text. A unique mixture of gravity and mockery towards the subject of the double and the German tale permeates Holmberg’s narration, replete with characters whose names and descriptions oscillate between homage and parody. The colorful set of characters (cerebral heroes, a doll-like heroine, a mad scientist) closely relates the story with the German Sandman yet at the same time permits the possibility of a purposeful distancing. In “Horacio Kalibang” there is a carnival-like quality that permeates the characters and the narration, removing some of the seriousness of the German tale and tropicalizing it. In a way, the Argentinian story invades the setting of “The Sandman”, (that is, the serious and stoic Germanic countryside where Nathaniel’s trauma originates), trivializing it in a playful way. Similarly, the revelation of the existence of automatons among humans, a late development in Hoffmann’s story, happens at the very beginning of “Horacio Kalibang”, highlighting the performativity of the automaton at the forefront of the tale.

The tribute reaches a frenzied, bizarre, and comical peak when out of control automata fill the pages

of the narration, playing out all kind of scenes portending the dawning of the automaton era. Shockingly the discovery and the presence of hundreds of automatons in Baum's house does not seem to faze the narrator or Hipnock, a significant fact considering that Nathaniel suffered a psychotic break in *The Sandman* upon learning of Olympia's true automaton nature. Ultimately, the materialistic character of the magistrate and Fritz saves them from losing their minds and directs them to a rather "wonderful chain of unveilings". Ultimately they discover that the mechanical paraphernalia conceals a conspiracy of global proportions, as Baum himself informs the confused magistrate:

- They are all here?
- No, there are some thousands of them that are already rolling around the world. When what you call their winding-up and our master called his ability has run out, they will receive new power and then, Mr. Magistrate, then ... good night (36).

Upon the discovery of a world already populated by automatons the two protagonists cannot help but feel slightly paranoid about the people that surround them and propose to keep their eyes wide open. Such a drastic option as jumping off a tower like Nathaniel does in "*The Sandman*" certainly never occurs to them- they approach the problem of the proliferation of the automatons with relative calm and composure, reinforcing the hybrid nature of Holmberg's story, once again highlighting the mixture of mockery and homage.

At the end of the story the characters find themselves in the middle of a world increasingly populated by automatons, a dystopia that predates science fiction narratives such as *Blade Runner*. As Rachel Haywood Ferreira asserts, "we are given a glimpse of the dystopia that would result where technological, materialist tendencies are taken to extremes" (175). Humor and the sense of artificiality that has been developing throughout the narrative unfolds completely at the end of the story, when the reader discovers that Fritz and Oscar Baum are the same person and everything has been orchestrated to show the magistrate new scientific forms of reproduction. The letter in which Fritz/Baum reveals his secret also leads to a clearer understanding of how the narrative itself works. As he is sending an automaton as a present he explains: "When Luisa has children, this human machine will teach them, with special methods, all they have to learn. I'm sending him as a wedding gift. Although shaped like a man, he is a book" (38).

The automaton that will in theory help Luisa's children, then, is described as a type of book, an ambulatory encyclopedic volume providing them with the wealth of knowledge stored in his mechanical brain. Seen in conjunction with this statement, Holmberg's narrative works as a machine (or an automaton) in which the gears (characters and situations) have moved in a coordinated and organized way in order to produce a sensation that is both ominous and playful. This vision of narrative as machine is reaffirmed in the wonderfully ambiguous warning that the magistrate gives to his daughter:

You will have children, if you obey, like everyone else, the organic automatism [...] and when I have a grandson who will be my glory and my charm, I'll tell him, and if I die you tell him:" My son, before spreading the aromas that erupt from your heart, carefully examine whether the cup that receives them is not an automaton". The reader will pull the remaining strings. (38)

This last sentence posits the story as a type of mechanical toy, the same delightful toy that Holmberg names in the dedication and one that the reader themselves has to activate and mobilize in order to choose to either be frightened or humored by it. This function of the narration demonstrates both Holmberg's textual and metatextual knowledge of Hoffmann's story and of other Romantic and Gothic writers (such as Goethe and Poe) as well as a concerted attempt to distance himself from these figures. Ultimately this produces a text that both emulates and continues the Gothic and Fantastic traditions while at the same time criticizes the very genres that inspired the Argentinian author: a dual role that serves to further hybridize the story and makes it part of its own unique literary space.

Peter Pan gone bad

“El caso de la señorita Amelia” (“The case of Miss Amelia” 1894) is one of the few incursions of the Nicaraguan writer Ruben Dario into the Gothic genre. Known as a poet and specifically as the father of literary Modernism, his is a strange and wonderful entrance into the genre, colored by the author’s keen interest in spirits and spiritualism. Along with Dario, several other Latin American writers such as Juana Manuela Gorriti, Leopoldo Lugones and José María Vargas Vila in the nineteenth-century and Horacio Quiroga and Macedonio Fernández in the early twentieth-century were interested in or involved with spiritualism, whether in the form of knowledge of or membership to spiritualists groups. As Morillas Ventura asserts, much of the development of Fantastic and Gothic narrative in Spain and Latin America had to do with the spread of spiritualism in the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas (12).

The central character in Dario’s short story is “Dr. Z”, a wise Argentine, who has acquired his knowledge of the world by delving into the occult teachings of the sages and the erudite scholars “of East and West”. As he explains to his audience, “I searched with determination what my eyes were eager to contemplate, the Keherpas of Zoroaster, the Persian Kalep, the Kovei-Khan of Indian philosophy, the archoeno of Paracelsus, the Swedenborg limbus; I heard the word of Buddhist monks amid the forests of Tibet; I studied the ten sephiroth of the Kabbalah”(86). This wise man fits perfectly within the Gothic tradition, especially in the orientalist aspect of the movement, in novels and stories where the European periphery (the Far East, North Africa, and the Middle East) appears either as the origin of extreme Otherness and monstrosity or as the source of exotic and obscure knowledges. Novels such as *Rasselas* (1759) by Samuel Johnson, *Vathek* (1786) by William Beckford or *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) by Robert Southey, among others, help compose a literary aesthetic and sensibility where the East and the Orient are constructed and adapted according to the parameters of a Gothic imaginary, one that stresses the opposition of the natural and supernatural worlds, and emphasizes both sentimental and dramatic elements.

As in Montalvo short story and Gorriti’s *Coincidencias*, both narrator and protagonist swear to the veracity of the tale, a very important Gothic narrative trend. In this case the main character Dr. Z decides to tell his story as a lengthy digression stemming from a query about the possibility of stopping time. As he bitterly explains in the story, both Western and Eastern wisdom falls short in explaining why, upon his return to Argentina, he finds his childhood friend Amelia still a young girl, exactly as he knew her twenty-three years ago, asking him for chocolates as if no time had passed. While time did not pass for her, he has grown in both years and knowledge. This violent and literal return of the familiar that Dr. Z is confronted with is the basis of the ominous and horrifying effect of the story, while also serving as a commentary on the futility of knowledge that fails to comfort the doctor, who at the end of the story is only able to provide descriptions: “[she was] Amelia, the same as when I left twenty-three years ago, but fixed in childhood, stunting her vital growth. The watch of time has stopped for her at a designated hour, who knows under what plan of an unknown God!” (87).

Dario’s story uses elements borrowed from the aforementioned orientalist Gothic novels and stories, many of this elements serving as a way to criticize both the genre and the context where the narration takes place (in this case the ultra-intellectual world of the Argentinian elite). The supposedly enlightened Argentine cannot explain a supernatural event that occurred in his own country, even with the complex tools and “superior” knowledge that he has acquired in distant lands. Through this hybridization Dario criticizes the orientalist Gothic as well as the Gothic in general, as a genre that has constructed itself based on an idealization of a lost medieval past, in contrast to dominant Eighteenth century rationality. As Srinivas Aravamudan asserts, referring to orientalist Gothic texts, “by creating Oriental Gothic, these texts explore abstract allegories of subject formation even as they parody the universalistic claims of novelistic realism and Enlightenment rationality” (191).

While this story was one of the Nicaraguan writer’s few forays into the Gothic genre, it was influential enough to attract the attention of other Latin American writers that were looking for models for their own Gothic narratives. For instance, the tale “La muñeca reina” (“The Doll Queen” 1964) by Carlos Fuentes is a tribute to

and a recreation of Dario's story. Set in contemporary Mexico City, the story follows a very similar pattern to that of "El caso de la señorita Amelia", having as a protagonist a sinister girl who never grows up and whose name, Amilamia, is directly related to the Amelia of the Nicaraguan poet.

The voice of the Dead

Common themes in the Gothic, such as incest and "premature burial" as the result of catalepsy (recurring in Poe), also appear in Latin American Gothic tales at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The topic of incest is present in stories like "¿Una mariposa?" ("A Butterfly?" 1897) by Leopoldo Lugones, and premature burial occurs in texts such as "El día de difuntos en mi cuarto" ("The Day of the Dead in my Room" 1887) by José Joaquín Vargas Valdés, "Catalepsia" ("Catalepsy" 1901) by Carlos Diaz Duff, and "El dictado del muerto" ("Dictation of the Dead" 1901) by Rubén Campos. All three deal with the horror of being buried alive, a subject of interest not only to the authors of Gothic fictions but to the press of the time as well. As Vargas Valdés says in an addendum to his chronicle: "the European press informs us about the frequency with which people are being buried alive and the precautions that the authorities are taking to avoid it. I hope these lines could contribute here to this charity" (67).

Rubén Campos's short story, "El dictado del muerto", is of particular interest because it links, in a hybrid and transformative way, the issue of catalepsy with spiritualism, both topics of fashion in literary circles and in Gothic short stories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Campos introduces the reader to a couple of positivist friends – who are the narrators of the story—, disbelievers of spirits and the spiritual world (the scientific character who scoffs at the supernatural being is a stock character in Gothic tales as "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving" and "The Story of the Late Mr. Elvesham" by H. G. Wells, among others) to the point of attending *séances* to try to debunk them and unmask the falsity of the people who run them.

From the moment of their arrival at the *séance*, the two characters criticize and mock the people they encounter, referring to them as "fanatics" who are "meek and empty" (127), all of whom are spellbound by the "hysterical" medium. With no *in situ* material to mock, as the *séance* is abruptly canceled after the medium enters into a trance, the friends steal the piece of paper where the dictations of the spirit have been written and escape to a café to read it (both the story within a story and the stolen [spectral] manuscript are characteristic Gothic elements). Their curiosity turns to horror when they discover that the spirit of the woman's husband – the one who "spoke" in the *séance* - tells how he was buried alive after suffering an attack of catalepsy, that left him paralyzed but did not deprive him of his awareness of everything that happened around him.

The story is replete with details about the sensations, feelings and thoughts of the buried man who knows he is lost, but nevertheless tries to move and communicate with someone about his situation. Paradoxically, what constitutes the climax of horror in the story is offset with a dose of black humor: the man (the spirit who narrates) begins to regain feeling and control of his body only when it is introduced into the hole of his gravesite, when he starts to hear the earth hitting the lid.

Then I felt a dull hum, as the flood that comes down, in my head, my temples, my arteries ... It was the blood, the lifeblood that rushed back into my body... In that supreme moment, I heard a noise with inconceivable terror, a sinister sound on my coffin. The first shovelful of earth, then a furious beating that sounded increasingly deep... "(133).

The very moment when the narrator feels alive again only affords a new agony, as he is now alone in his coffin: "Live! ... Live at last ... And the choking ..." (133). The influence of Poe's tale "The Premature Burial" from 1844 is very clear in this Latin American short story. In this case the theme is enriched and enlarged by the characters' and readers' ability to hear the perspective of the spirit of the buried thanks to the developments of spiritualism (in Poe's tale it is possible to hear the voice of the buried as well, but with the essential difference that he is alive when telling his story). While in "The Black Cat" (1843) the horror comes from the image of a

woman sandwiched between two walls with a cat on her head and in the “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846) we contemplate with fear how Montresor buries his enemy alive, in the “El dictado del muerto” the sensation of horror is derived mostly from the testimony of the person that suffered and died, the spirit of the man who knew he was being buried alive yet is incapable of escaping his gruesome fate.

Narrating the catalepsy and the fear of being buried alive, or waiting for death between two walls with no possibility of escape is a way of appropriating the horror that these scenarios generate; in both cases Poe is undoubtedly a master, while Campos is an innovative and critical disciple who introduces the possibility of a macabre levity in moments of extreme horror, expanding the parameters of Poe’s tales. Following this idea, Campos’s use of spectral testimony could be read as an expansion of Poe’s technique, as an extreme version where the protagonist, unlike the more fortunate main character of “The Premature Burial”, is doomed and can only recount his story as a ghost, and where the reader can even have a grim laugh at his expense.

Coda

I have paid particular attention to five examples of the early Latin American Gothic, five seminal texts (*semillas*) that demonstrate early interest in the Gothic genre, and the extensive knowledge of writers who, although perhaps not consciously constructing a corpus, nevertheless laid the groundwork for future generations of writers and filmmakers.

The transformation of topics and characters and the critique of the conventions of the genres in these five stories - through both textual fidelity and deviation from traditional models - paved the way for new narratives in Latin America (framed within the terms of the Fantastic, the Gothic, and Science Fiction genres), narratives which reach levels of expertise and specialization in writers such as Leopoldo Lugones, Julio Cortázar, and Carlos Fuentes, among many others in the twentieth century. Montalvo, Gorriti, Holmberg, Dario and Campos, like others before and after them, employ hybridization, tropicalization of characters and topics, and humorous excess as transformative tools to manipulate diverse elements of the Gothic genre and its European and North American variants. This transformation, in turn, allows a measure of control over foreign narratives (such as “The Sandman”, “The Premature Burial”, *Dracula* or *Vathek*) and also permits a criticism of their own distinct texts and contexts, all the while contributing to the formation of a uniquely Latin American Gothic canon.

In essence, the act of transformation and tropicalization also implies an act of “putting out of place”: the place of origin or development of the monsters (Others or specters) and the supernatural situation is no longer the periphery of Europe (Eastern Europe, the Orient, the Caribbean) but Europe itself. In these narratives the monstrous Other is inextricably linked to the old continent, through the places where many of the stories develop or where many of the characters are from. Whether the entire narrative space of these stories or merely specific scenes takes place in European or North American cities, the overall effect is the same. The commonality that most share, then is the act of placing narrators and narratives within the typical transmission circuit of the genre, while at the same time flipping the place of Otherness and monstrosity (the antipodes). In other cases (as in many of Gorriti’s stories) where the story in its entirety takes place in Latin America, European science falls decidedly short, failing to adequately explain or deal with the supernatural and its resultant consequences. Ultimately these authors sought to carve out their own unique space within the Gothic corpus, and the examples cited in this article serve to demonstrate just how the Latin American Gothic genre formed and evolved, and how it attempted to both pay tribute to and distance itself from European Gothic works in the process.

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Notes

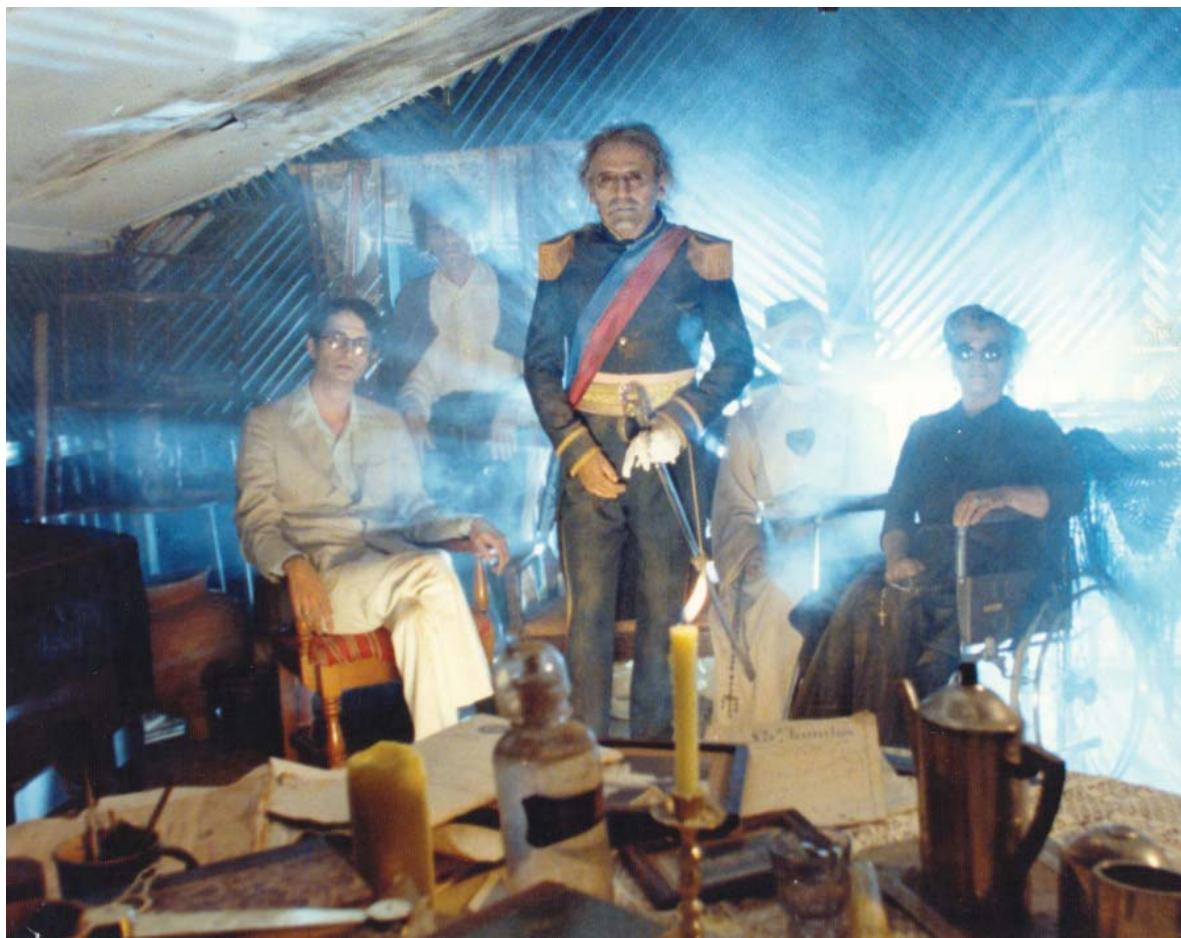
1 Damn!... An inconceivable terror seized me and I wanted to scream with all my forces, I wanted a prodigious effort break the invisible ties that bound my rigid members

Tropical Gothic: Cinematic Dislocations of the Caribbean Imaginary in South West Colombia

Juana Suárez

“Tropical gothic” identifies a particular segment of Colombian filmmaking, namely the productions of Luis Ospina and Mayolo himself in the 1980s. Ospina’s *Pura sangre/Pure Blood* (1982) and Mayolo’s *Carne de tu carne/Flesh of your Flesh* (1983) and *La mansión de Araucaima/The Araucaima Mansion* (1986) combine the directors’ own film training, their cinephilia, and their predilection for horror films in an attempt to retell stories of South West Colombia. Together with writer Andrés Caicedo, who committed suicide at 25, the two directors were members of the Cali Group and so-called Caliwood, two assemblages of artists with similar leanings who worked together in that city in the 1970s,¹ and left a mark in the diversification of audiences with their film club, their *Ojo al cine* film journal, and their film experiments.

“Tropical gothic” is a negotiation with the horror genre that generates a new hybridity: it is not a matter of complying literally with longstanding characteristics of gothic style, but of appropriating them and giving them back together with elements associated with the Tropics—an essentialist and colonial construct for Latin America, and more specifically for the Caribbean.² However, Mayolo and Ospina’s films do not take place in that geographical zone but in the landlocked Valle del Cauca. This essay is invested in exploring the implications of such geographical dislocation.



Voyeur specters in Mayolo’s *Carnet de tu carne*, 1983

Compared to literature coming from social sciences where a vast number of studies on the culture and exploitation of sugar in the Caribbean Basin, Brazil and Colombia exist, less is written about sugar as a motif in Colombian visual, literary, and film production. In the case of the Caribbean countries, sugar is a dominant economy; in the case of Brazil, one that occupies an important segment of income and it is determining in the development of the large North East state of Pernambuco. This is not very different from the case of Colombia, a country that ranks as the thirteen producer of sugar in the world.³ More importantly, upon the US embargo on Cuba, Colombia became one of the largest purveyors of sugar to the United States, keeping that outstanding place, and lately rivaling with Brazil in the race to become a sugar-cane ethanol powerhouse.⁴

Sugar, as a harvest of the empire, and its narratives are at the core of debates of colonization, industrialization, and globalization. The economics of sugar and the life in the hacienda will provide the setting for the gothic narratives in the three films to be examined here. The sugar industry is central to these films by Mayolo and Ospina. Hence, I propose that they share with the Caribbean Basin and Brazil a history of what Gilberto Freyre summarizes as one of “monoculture, slavery, and latifundia” (18). For this Brazilian sociologist, that culture opened the deepest wounds in the life, landscape and character of his native Pernambuco. Representations of that heritage extend to the corpus of cultural production related to sugar elsewhere: slavery, rape, and oppression. Mayolo and Ospina’s films not only locate such heritage in the Colombian context, but also invite us to revise how “tropical gothic” combines the region’s history, myths, and popular imaginary to make these elements extensive to Caribbean studies paradigms through their connection to places where sugar mills and the hacienda economy prospered.

Although there are major precedents to the representations of sugar cane plantations in horror films—*White Zombie* (Dir. Víctor & Edward Halperin, 1932), and *I Walked with a zombie* (Dir. Jacques Tourneur, 1943) being quintessential in that regard—the small corpus of “tropical gothic” appears as a disruptive novelty in the context of Colombia, and even Latin American cinema. On the one hand, Mayolo and Ospina’s films interrupt a fixation in magical realist representations of *La Violencia*⁵ that were favored by their contemporary directors during the FOCINE years.⁶ As a war machine, *La Violencia* was characterized by a symbolic imaginary consisting of threats, and scorning where the human body became the main canvas to draw war symbols and signs (cuts on cadavers labeled as “monkey cut”, “flower base cut”, “tie cut”, for example; disposal of bodies in rivers of neighboring towns, opposed by political views; dismembering; assassination of family members as a warning, and general massacres to exterminate the enemy). In discussing this bloody period of Colombian history, María Victoria Uribe describes it in terms of “the application of techniques of terror and the use of semantic procedures that convert people into disposable and destructible bodies.” (95) In the symbolic imaginary of Colombian violence, representing the body is accompanied by elements such as configuring a verbal or iconic language, ratifying the hegemonic place of the two traditional political parties, and highlighting the absence of a unifying national narrative. The fear of the spreading of communism during the Cold War years runs parallel to all these events. This adds to a visual legacy that builds towards later manifestations of violence: State terror, guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and drug lords, making *slasher* films at times too close to the Colombian reality. Mayolo and Ospina seem very aware of the fine line that divides this segment of Colombian history and narratives of the horror genre; such deformity is at stake in their film production.

In films by Mayolo and Ospina the oppressive legacy of the hacienda economy and anxieties about lineage and the purity of bloodlines emerge as colonial metaphors that combine with *La Violencia* (or its traces in the case of Mayolo), and other manifestations of urban/rural violence in the South West, along with popular myths and legends, but always with the conventions of gothic style as their film agenda. This approach is also different from the way the hacienda economy is presented in other Latin American historical reenactments such as *La última cena/The Last Supper* (Dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Cuba, 1976),⁷ and *Rue Cases-Nègres/Black Shack Alley* (Dir. Euzhan Palcy, Martinique, 1983), or the operatic style that extols musical traditions and religious syncretism in productions like *Quilombo* (Dir. Carlos Diegues, Brazil, 1984).

To be precise, rather than “gothic” the films exhibit a gamut of elements from the horror genre and sub-genres, raging from the over gore aesthetics of *Pura sangre*, the very gothic nature of *Carne de tu carne* and *La*

mansión de Araucaima, and the presence of vampirism, supernatural, psychological and physical horror itself. Regarding these latter elements, the films make problematic the doubting of the supernatural and the real horrific presence of evil since the history of *La Violencia* does attest to an imaginary of torture, dismembering and physical violence inflicted in the body of the political *other*.

As a term, *La Violencia* has made it into Colombian history as a name that seems to disembody the responsibility of the State; the singular, feminine term in Spanish language constructs violence as an abstract force, traversing spaces and times with a recurrent, as well as imprecise nature. Given the nebulosity of specific actors, victims, places, and times, in narratives about *La Violencia* the period itself is usually the nominal subject of many tales, such as “*La Violencia mató a mi familia/La Violencia killed my family*” or “*La Violencia me dejó sin tierra/La Violencia took my land.*” This lack of corporeality proves partially useful to its haunting aura in the films at stake here. The economics of sugar and the life in the hacienda combine with the historical setting of *La Violencia* will provide the ground for the gothic narratives in the three films to be examined here. Let’s start with Ospina’s *Pura Sangre*.

Pura sangre (1983) is a horror tale that deals with urban vampires. Florencia, Perfecto, and Ever are tasked with supplying blood for Roberto Hurtado, a dying tycoon from the sugar refining industry in the Valle del Cauca. It is Adolfo, the sugar magnate’s son, who hires them as nurses and blood suppliers. The nurses manage to camouflage their killings as crimes by the Mangones Monster, a character from the popular imaginary of Cali residents that allegedly steals children, rapes them, and abandons them in wastelands.

Vampirism functions on different levels in *Pura sangre*. It engenders a circuit that interpolates economic elements with visual aspects as a power regime; vampirism encloses the victims in a panoptical order. On the one hand, Hurtado represents a certain type of feudal vampire who loses his primary domain with the irruption of a capitalist order. This movement literally consists of decentralizing the hacienda-based order with the “industrializing” process that transfers the epicenter of control of sugar mills to the city. On the other hand, his company faces the eventual decline of its product in the marketplace. *Pura sangre* makes it clear that Hurtado’s illness coincides with his sugar mill’s economic crisis. By medical prescription, the patient can only receive blood from young males, and they ought to be white. Thus, “impure blood” is set up as an element that defies the desire for immortality (the vampire’s *raison d’être*) as well as the racial and class supremacy of the refinery’s patriarch. Metaphorically, more than a fear of death, we see the colonial fear of mixing white and Indian or African blood, where miscegenation is understood as degeneration of the species and depletion of the possibility for white surveillance and control.

Hurtado’s prognosis and the report of his cure render numerous analyses having to do with commercial relationships and economic redistributions around the sugar refining industry. For example, the explanations of the American doctor that oversees Hurtado’s case serve as a reference for Alliance for Progress as a palliative against the influence of the Cuban Revolution. *Alianza para el progreso*—as it is known in Spanish—was the political program instituted by President John F Kennedy in 1961 in order to establish economic cooperation, and political reform between the US and Latin America, with the long-term goal of countering communism in the region.⁸ It is during the time of Alliance for Progress that the region of Valle del Cauca (the state where Cali is located) becomes one of the largest purveyors of sugar to the U.S. once it breaks off relations with Cuba. As in the political context, in the film, “there is a virus that is spreading” and must be stopped. To be exact, the doctor states that the sickness has to do with a “phobia of microbes,” a reference that can be politicized and racialized. Obviously there is a fear of racial mixing; however, the phobia is also of mobs, multitudes, and the danger of losing one’s privileged and hegemonic place in the capitalist order.

Despite his imminent death, Hurtado’s control must be confirmed. For these purposes, he communicates with the outside world by means of a closed-circuit security system and, in his position of *voyeur*, he spends his convalescence watching movies. The perspective of his gaze is projected from that superior position, and high angle shots offer an all-encompassing view of his surroundings. In the film, lighting techniques magnifying Hurtado’s shadow on the wall contribute to portray an image of his all-powerful nature in spite of his convalescence. Vision machines and cameras increase his control of the panoptic where he inhabits. The television set

in the film has ubiquitous functions such as controlling the house, enjoying the nurse's change of uniform, and watching films. Hurtado ritually demands that the nurse provides daily information about the economic indicators, coffee and sugar. His obsession with the business section of the paper—an intertextual reference to *Citizen Kane* not only because of the connections the spectator might find between both magnates' (Hurtado and Kane) pursuit of power, but also because we often see Hurtado watching that film in the TV set), speaks not only to two competing economies but also metaphorically to the racial anxieties present in the entire film narrative, and the vampirism that characterizes the economic system that sustains his sugar empire.

Vampirism is also portrayed at the intra-familial level. Hurtado's son Adolfo also fulfills his vampire-like role: he guarantees his father's survival, gradually *sucking him dry* of his capital while he ensures that others *suck* blood to keep him alive. Like the tycoon vampire, the nurses are also *voyeurs*; for that reason they take photos of their victims and when these photos fall into Adolfo's hands, they become the target of blackmail to command their services in caring for his father. His surveillance and control derive from those photos with which Adolfo bribes the gang of nurses. These photos capture images of links between crime and pleasure that allow Hurtado's nurses to locate blood from young white men. The goal of Adolfo's surveillance and blackmail is to guarantee that his father's blood "bank" stays full without his discovery of how the product for his transfusions is obtained.

Race is a dominant discourse in the film, and it is always presented as a threat to an apparent order of the Hurtado family and the source of its economy. Black people are the menace, the prospective disestablishing force. A travelling shot of Adolfo in the sugar mill comes to a halt in a fixed shot to remind us that the workers, in their majority, are black. Rumor has it that in the working world of the hacienda, the workers commonly make mythic pacts with the devil, seeking their wellbeing and increases in salary by enhancing their productivity.⁹ In his own way, and as part of the sugar-producing empire, Adolfo signs his own Faustian pact at the cost of his loyalty to his father's business, reaching an agreement with earthly pirates. His plan is to argue that the sugar mill has declined as a consequence of problems with the cane cutters. With his plot, he engineers his own destruction.

In this economic system, blacks are thus represented as destabilizing the whites' acquisition of capital. Facing a strike in the sugar mill, Hurtado orders the black cane cutters to be suppressed with a firm hand. The owners of the hacienda vampirize the black force for the sake of the survival of the sugar mill economy, but the black individuals are represented as characters that remain outside the order of carnal vampirism due precisely to the horror of racial mixing, the same fear of contamination detectable in the previous reference to microbes. However, the denouement of the film is the arrest of a black guy named Pedro Luis Mosquera, who is also nicknamed "Babalú", as the Orisha associated with disease and sickness.¹⁰ Mosquera is accused of being the Mangones Monster, allegedly the one who has been stealing children, raping them, and throwing them in wastelands. At the expense of his arrest, the vampire nurses (Ever, Perfecto and Florencia) remain free. Here, it is the black character—not the owner and the heir of the hacienda—the one that momentarily acquires vampire characteristics: an extreme close-up emphasizes his erratic gaze as well as his missing front teeth and accentuate his fangs, typically associated with representations of vampires.

Lastly, Florencia, Perfecto, and Ever, the nurses, are vampires of poverty and sexual vampires who seduce their young victims with cocaine, a white substance similar to sugar, representing *another* economy that would also prosper in the Valle del Cauca (the Cali cartel and the Norte del Valle cartel). As in Ospina and Mayolo's signature mockumentary *Agarrando pueblo* (*The Vampires of Poverty*), some of the victims come from marginal sectors, young men from poor neighborhoods or who live on the streets. Perfecto and Ever are not only vampires but also sexual predators. The visual allusion to the practice of sodomy is clear in Perfecto's case but ambiguous in Ever's. It can only be deduced from Florencia's ambiguous comment, "I don't know what pleasure you guys get out of that." It's unclear whether the line refers to a taste for blood or for sodomy and, even more obscurely, whether sodomy occurs between living bodies or is yet another necrophilic act in the story.



Young dead victim of the urban vampires in Luis Ospina's *Pura sangre*, 1983

The photos of the victims that the nurses keep offer an extreme affiliation of Ospina's film to gore aesthetics, and to what Philip Brophy coined as "horrorality," precisely in 1983. For the author, this was the peak of the "small golden age of the contemporary horror film", characterized and distinguished from other periods of horror film by "[T]he act of showing over the act of telling; the photographic image versus the realistic scene, the destruction of the family, the body, etc." (2) Unlike the films of Mayolo that, as we shall see, locate violence either at the heart of *La Violencia* (*Carne de tu carne*) or in a very undefined time (*La mansión*), the spectacle of graphic violence in *Pura sangre*, and its portrayal of the open, dismembered and butchered body reinforce and endemic characteristic of representations of violence following the imaginary of *La Violencia* in Colombia.

In the neocolonial order that *Pura sangre* proposes, processes of racialization must be ratified; therefore, excluding the blood of blacks renews a eugenics project that becomes a mechanism of selection for maintaining a social order where a notion of nobility and ancestry still prevails. *Carne de tu carne* will insist on the topic. Both films work around the idea of "purging blood", arguing an anxiety to protect hegemonic discourses on race, class and gender from deteriorating influences. As Angela Smith's elaborates on *Hideous Progeny*, this is a discourse that lies as the foundation of American classic horror cinema, in films such as *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), *Freaks* (1932), and *Mad Love* (1935), in a reading illuminated by a revision of legal and medical documents from the turn of nineteenth century to the 1930s. This is a corpus of films well known by Mayolo and Ospina as their supplementary work in the Cali Group, the Cali cine club, and the film journal *Ojo al cine* attest. Rather than imitating it by means of new versions of old films, their challenge is to contextualize it within the local history of hacienda, sugar, and violence.

As mentioned, *La Violencia* and its symbolic imaginary of body dismembering is the historical axis of *Carne de tu carne*. In his two autobiographical books, Mayolo confirms his deliberate search for the language of "tropical gothic" in his two feature films by combining the history of his family, his cinephilia framed by the horror genre and the fantastic, and the country's history. In both texts, there are many references to his early years marked by *La Violencia* in contrast with "the Americanization of the world through North American cinema that was deeply felt in Cali" (2008, 42).

Carne de tu carne is a film about incest; according to Mayolo, it unfolded from Andrés Caicedo's reading

of *The Turn of the Screw*, by Henry James, and his drafting of a preliminary screenplay (2002, 139). Set on August 6, 1956 and the days following, the spark that sets off the chain of events is the explosion of a military convoy, an episode associated with the bloody bipartisan *Violencia*. In his memoirs, Mayolo recapitulates on the gothic aura that the city acquired during that day with tombs breaking open at the cemetery, piles of bodies waiting to be taken to the morgue, and erratic citizens running like zombies. The chaos of that day serves as genesis to the film project.

In the film, airplanes arrive from the U.S. transporting several members of the Velasco family who are coming for the reading of the matriarchal grandmother's wealthy will. Among them is Margaret, half-sister to Andrés Alfonso. The explosion serves as an excuse for sending the half-siblings to the family's summer estate, separating them from the urban space and placing them into a surrealist rural one. Their visit to the summer hacienda brings them close to Enrique, who lives there as the free-thinking uncle, and suspected communist. The trip becomes an adventure for the adolescents' sexual discovery and transformation into zombies.

In addition, Margaret and Andrés Alfonso experience a revelation about the family's secrets and the origins of their ancestors' wealth. Uncle Enrique shares stories of the family's capitalist vampirism as the hacienda becomes the ideal space for the young people to continue the incestuous order of the Velascos, a tradition already existing in the relationship between Uncle Enrique and his deceased sister.¹¹ That preceding family incest is suggested (or rather screened) in the opening sequences when the family gets together around a projector to see homemade movies, right before the explosion. It is confirmed by the finding of love letters in the trunks of Uncle Enrique. As suggested by Felipe Gómez, the repetition of endogamy here becomes a strategy to perpetuate the socioeconomic status of the Cali elite, struggling to keep power in spite of the bipartisan division (289). Incest here aligns the plot of the film within the gothic tradition, reminding us of Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto* who pursues a divorce from his wife Hippolita in order to marry his late son's bride Isabella so that he can keep his old estate. Once anew, incest here is a strategy to maintain power.



Margaret and David Alfonso listening to Uncle Enrique's unveiling of family secrets

Margaret and Andrés Alfonso exhibit characteristics of vampires and zombies; to be clear, as vampires they take pleasure in blood, they show the agility and ability to become invisible and then suddenly appear in front of those they intend to bite. Fangs become recurrent in the props, particularly once Margaret disguises herself in her grandmother's wedding gown. However, Mayolo deliberately chooses a very ambiguous ending for the film where the young couple keeps alive after dying, and they fuse themselves with the luscious nature of the zone. Hence, rather than dying Margaret and Andrés Alfonso mutate to a wandering state and their presence dissolves into nature in front of the camera.

Mayolo associates his preference for zombies with his favorite trilogy by director George Romero: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and *Day of the Dead* (1985). Nonetheless, if we pay attention to Richard Dyer's discussion on the meaning of death vis-à-vis the representation of the white race in Romero's production, it will be evident that Mayolo creates another language. Rather than imitating Romero (or Roger Corman, or any other filmmaker from his favorite repertoire), Mayolo contextualizes the history of the Valle del Cauca into the notion of the gothic. Although it may be similar to the history of exploitation and consumption in other regions of the globe, this language is enriched in content by its unique approximation to local myths, the oppressive history of sugarcane plantations, and *La Violencia*.

These treats of the gothic will also be present in Mayolo's *La mansión de Araucaima*, an adaptation of Álvaro Mutis' novel whose complete title adds "Relato gótico de tierra caliente/Gothic Tale from Torrid Land." Among many other reasons, the novel was written as a response from Mutis to Luis Buñuel on the impossibility to set a gothic story in the tropics. The setting of the film is visually constructed in a hallucinatory space and a time that appears to be suspended in the exuberance of tropical vegetation. The reference to *The Castle of Otranto* is renewed here as most of the action takes place in an abandoned house located in a remote geography. All the people in the house have arrived to the place by chance and they don't seem willing neither able to leave it. The mansion is a micro-reproduction of a social hierarchy in decline. It gathers a renegade Jesuit priest; Camilo, a pilot trapped in the place, characterized by his sexual impotence, and Machiche, a stage actress in decline. She is a mature woman who keeps pleasure under control and disseminates it to the men in the mansion. The arrival of Angela, a young model, disrupts the apparent peace in the house. Machiche's antagonism eventually causes Angela's disappearance, but the spectator realizes that her death is part of a cycle, a spiral of events controlled by the whims of the mansion's inhabitants. The arrival of Angela's boyfriend at the now desolate Araucaima closes the film with an ellipsis that heralds a possible continuation of the cycle.

The house is owned by Don Graciliano, an elderly landowner, who is always assisted by his black slave, Cristóbal. These two characters map out the history of sugar production in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco and connect it to the history of the Colombian South West in a film gesture that ceases to be referential. The roles are interpreted respectively by Brazilian actors Josué Lewgoy and Antonio Pitanga, each with an extensive trajectory in that country's television soap opera and film industry. Lewgoy worked for Werner Herzog as Don Aquilino in *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and as Don Octavio Coutinho in *Cobra Verde* (1987), a film where Mayolo interpreted the role of Governor. Pitanga has worked in various classics of Brazilian cinema such as *O pagador de promessas/The Given Word* (Dir. Anselmo Duarte, 1962), *Barravento/The Turning Wind* (Dir. Glauber Rocha, 1962), and *Quilombo* (Dir. Carlos Diegues, 1984). In these films he always plays the role of the mulatto from Salvador de Bahia, a character that he reprises in *La mansión de Araucaima* in a very intentional move from Mayolo to create intertextuality between the Brazilian and the Colombian history of sugar.

Vision machines appear yet again in *La mansión de Araucaima*, ranging from the cinematographic equipment in the opening sequence, to the guard's binoculars, the countless photos decorating Machiche's *boudoir*, and an endless number of mirrors that add considerably to the film's gothic *mise-en-scène*. In this film, the supremacy of the gaze is combined with melancholic night soundscapes, a gramophone playing music by Wagner, and Machiche constantly humming songs, creating a dark atmosphere that surrounds the narrative. Angela's Walkman and her rock music are the disruptive element. She appears as an intruder to a setting that is purposely alienated from civilization in the best of the gothic tradition to locate narratives in displaced and isolated geographies. Nonetheless, like Margaret's role in *Carne de tu carne* (both roles are interpreted by ac-

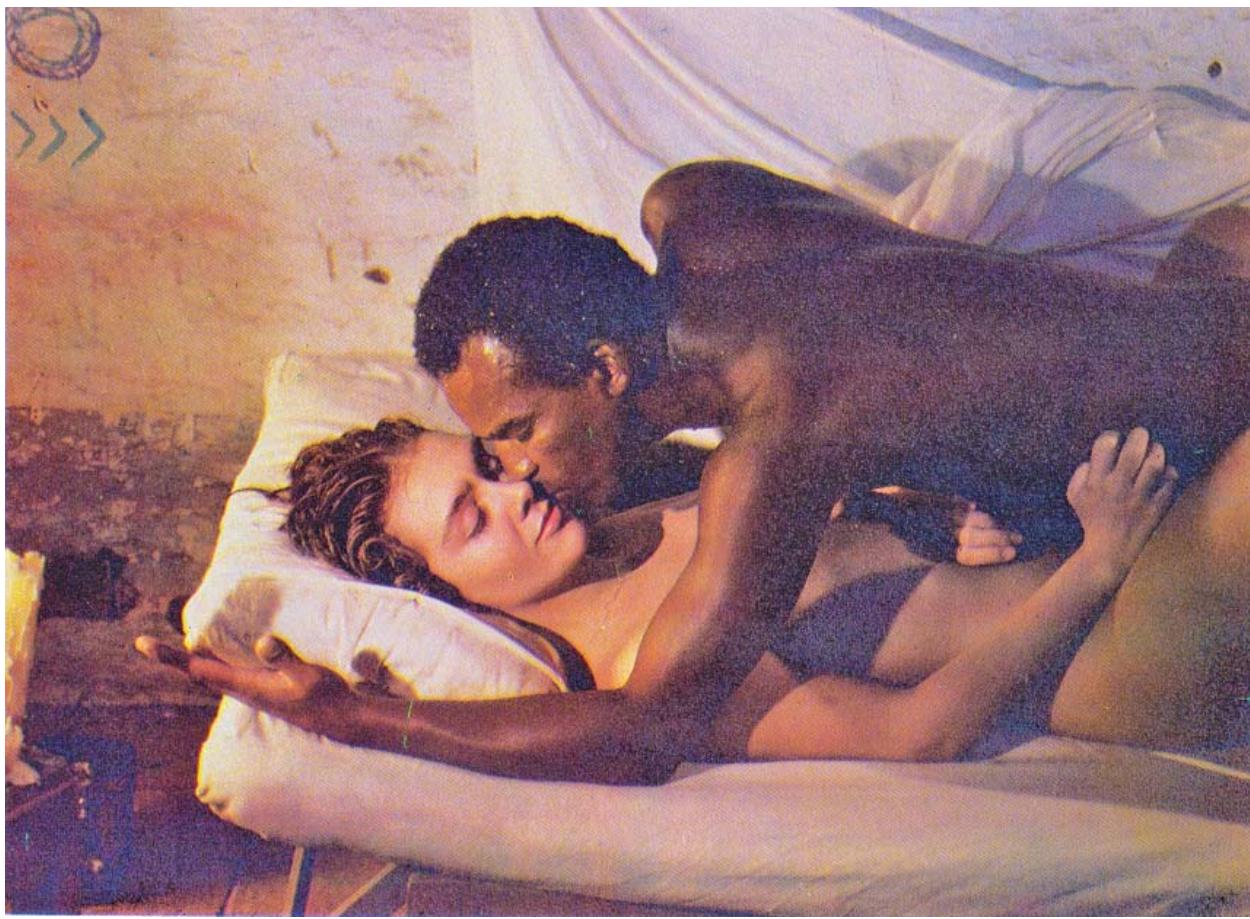
tor Adriana Herrán), the protagonist appears predisposed to surrender herself to the pleasure games that govern the mansion's baroque universe.

Unlike the visual violence that characterizes the other two films in this trilogy, there are no blood and no fangs in *La mansión*. However, it is still a vampire movie. As Angela gradually undermines Machiche's sexual power, her fresh blood becomes a precious possession for Araucaima's other inhabitants. She soon becomes an object of interest and desire for the pilot, the priest, and the black slave. The latter is spurred on by Don Graciliano who warns: "In this house no one commits venial sins," the landowner claims, and reminds the salve that "even the whitest flower has to sink its roots into black earth." In this case, all the sexual acts in which Angela participates function as rites of passage for her to lose her innocence. As she disseminates pleasure, Machiche decides that Angela should not leave, but in order to reestablish her sexual power in the mansion and reclaim her territory, she engages in a lesbian relationship with the young woman, a relationship that literally turns into "the bite of the vampire," as Machiche attempts to perpetuate her life by stealing Angela's sexual power. Once the purpose of her seduction has been achieved, Machiche humiliates and desexualizes Angela, reminding her of her nature as an outsider and her inability to find a place for herself in the mansion. As the two characters that can no longer bestow sexual pleasure (they no longer have any blood to be sucked), both Angela and Camilo must disappear, along with Machiche, bringing the mansion to an illusory end. For Mayolo, "*La mansión de Araucaima* is an allegory about power, about the house that represents the State, [where] an innocent arrives and is exterminated" (Madrid Benítez n.p.).

I'd like to further examine Don Graciliano's words when he exhorts Cristóbal to couple with Angela. What he advocates about blackness so that whiteness can be achieved encapsulates the racial project on which the narration of these three feature films is constructed. Here it is impossible to escape the mixture of white, Indian, and black blood, which makes the project of "racial purity" unsustainable, challenges patriarchal surveillance, and destabilizes the economic order. The origin of the blood that keeps him alive is the sole element that eludes the panoptic order of the patriarchal sugar baron in *Pura sangre*. His death is brought about by Adolfo's confrontation with authority, which sets off his racial phobia and makes him expel the blood in a massive hemorrhage.

Mayolo's well-known television soap opera, *Azúcar/Sugar* (a 1989 historical restitution of the history of sugar haciendas in the South West), reiterated the impossibility of avoiding miscegenation. Here the white master who separates his bastard son from his mulatta mother is cursed with the pronouncement, "Sugar in order to be white has to have black blood, from black seeds and black earth." In Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena*, Don Gaspar makes a similar statement in his scientific explanation of sugar production where he tries to persuade the French Count to increase the number of slaves. However, as a refugee from the Dominican Republic where he has been unable to rule the blacks, he notes the danger of Cuba filling up with slaves; he is also motivated by the revolts breaking out in Haiti that eventually are consolidated in the revolutionary feats of 1791. The reference in *Pura sangre* to the connection between blood and production revisits that historical racial metaphor to renew its weight in the regime of power dominant in the hacienda, a regime that sustained oppression, slavery and a bastardized family order.

In *Carne de tu carne*, Enrique is a purported communist who has helped displaced peasants occupy neighborhoods in Cali and has aligned himself with them; his death opens up space for the "monstrous-feminine", embodied by Margaret in a reversal of the traditional male monster that defines power in terms of sexual domination. The urge to continue the family line is intensified; dressed in white like a bride, Margaret gradually victimizes the children of the peasants who live in the hacienda, marking the space with little black dolls from voodoo practices. Simultaneously, she becomes *la Madre Monte*, a figure taken from the region's mythic imaginary that also fills the role of maintaining surveillance over the peasants. In the final shot Margaret and Andrés Alfonso survive as the promise of endogamy, potentially continuing the protection against miscegenation that can only persist in an unreal space.



Still from Mayolo's *La mansión de Araucaima*, 1986

In *La mansión de Araucaima*, sexuality is an affirmation of power. If indeed Don Graciliano does urge Cristóbal to couple with Angela, in *La mansión de Araucaima* miscegenation is as destructive as it is liberating. Before Angela's dead body, Don Graciliano reclaims his patriarchal authority, which has been destabilized by the chain of jealousy generated by the sexual contact between the mulatto and the young white woman. The final abandonment of the mansion is marked by the destruction of any trace of the tragic deaths of Angela, Machiche, and the pilot. As he is leaving, Don Graciliano hands a key to a jubilant Cristóbal, who proclaims the end of his slavery and is unaware of a final appeal from the landowner. In both of Mayolo's full-length films, the gothic images that—according to Carlos Jáuregui—are used to tame fears of insurrection on the plantations, are subverted and used against the white master. Jáuregui speaks of “decapitation, stealing and diabolically sacrificing children, sexual mutilation, raping the women, burning the means of production and the merchandise, slaughtering the plantation administrators, zombie domination, and cannibalism” (277). This subversion does not restore any particular order; on the contrary, it complicates and dismantles many other imaginaries from *La Violencia* and other forms of violence.

Carne de tu carne and *La mansión de Araucaima* were Mayolo's only two feature films; *Pura sangre* is Luis Ospina's only feature film on vampires. The “tropical gothic” universe in Mayolo and Ospina's films derives not only from collaboration among the directors but also from intertextuality in the films where characters, settings, reference and *mise-en-scène* are repeated. Likewise, the three films insist on sugar mills, hacienda ownership, violence, *La Violencia*, and gangs of *pájaros*.¹² Nostalgia for the colonial order is always emphasized by those in power in the films. Mayolo described his films as oriented toward stirring up the Cali that still saw itself as pureblooded and refused to accept racial mixing (“Ojo a Mayolo” n.p.). Inherited from the colony, upheld by the *criollos*, and not yet overcome in the present-day societal order, the idea of lineage is also emphasized over

and over by Julia Borrero in *Carne de tu carne*. She boasts of her family's closeness to conservative leader Laureano Gómez, claims that her lineage is related to one of "las Meninas," the maids of honor at the Spanish court, and yearns for the lifestyle of Franco's Spain.¹³ Ana, her antagonist evokes the idea of order and progress in the U.S. However, her admiration for the U.S., along with the goods imported by Margaret, are part of the aforementioned Americanization as well as the escapism that Mayolo seeks to disrupt. It is no coincidence that two apparently different economic orders are together in the narrative, as Felipe Gómez remarks. On one hand, we have Margaret's blood father who keeps the sugar hacienda and protects his paramilitary squad (*pájaros*), and Margaret's stepfather, the successful and entrepreneurial businessman that works in the commercialization of sugar in the United States (289). The film narratives are well informed by the role the economy of sugar plays in the Alliance for Progress project, and in keeping of an old colonial power.

While the two women in *Carne de tu carne* function as representatives of a race that sees itself as pure and unmixed, the services of Asunción (a mulatta) and Ever (a mestizo) create an extension of the family that is not forged by blood connections but by the acquisition of a work force and the servants' order and loyalty. The will of the matriarch includes a modest pension for Asunción for devoting her life to servicing the family. Asunción has been a loyal servant to the family and she is not depicted as associated to any political fraction. In contrast, Ever dies after being attacked by Margaret, who has become a zombie, and she also kills other peasants in the hacienda. From the beginning of the film, Ever is identified as a *pájaro*, a paramilitary leaned to illegal actions from the Conservatives. His killing can be interpreted as neutralizing the information about the family's dark past, achieved by eliminating the main witness to their incest, criminal activities, and paramilitary connections. María Inés Martínez's clever reading of political symbols in *Carne de tu carne* proposes that Ever's death can be understood as the disappearance of a character that "did not tolerate the possible coexistence of both [political] parties" (75), a likely reference to the Frente Nacional (National Front), the political agreement signed by the Liberal and Conservative signed in 1956 where each party took a turn in power every four years, as a prospective way to mitigate *La Violencia*.

Uncle Enrique has been ostracized for his communist inclinations but also from his infatuation with his late sister Josefa Borrero de Velasco. Margaret and Andrés Alfonso's visit to the hacienda coincides with Enrique's death, gradually locking them up into a phantasmagorical world where reality disintegrates. Images from a bestiary are superimposed to replace the family members with ghostly apparitions. The adolescents' copulation takes place amid surrealist and *umheimlich* or uncanny elements; their ancestors return as voyeuristic specters who take pleasure in watching the sexual act between the half-siblings, approving a renewal in the familial order that is only possible in that unreal space. The family's new organization is announced by a literal interpretation of the meaning of belonging to a clan, "*sangre de mi sangre, carne de mi carne*" ("blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh"). Incestuous sexuality is, hence, not separated from power. Martínez points out that "General Borrero, [one of the dead relatives that returns as a specter] instead of wearing a sash with the colors of the Colombian flag (yellow, blue, and red), wears a blue and red sash, symbolic of the [conservative and liberal] political parties" (75).

The three films have unresolved open endings, avoiding normalcy to be restored. Families here are not reunited and monsters cannot be destroyed. The open structure of each film renews the idea that *La Violencia* was a generator of monsters, was generated by monstrous circumstances, and it that regard, it is inscribed in the Colombian political imaginary as a haunting episode that will always resuscitate ghosts, and unresolved political division.

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Notes

1 For an overview of the relationship between art and cinephilia in 1970's Cali, see *Cali, ciudad abierta. Arte y cinefilia en los años setenta* by Katia González Martínez, a complete study not only on the importance of Caicedo, Mayolo and Ospina in the cultural scenario of the city but also a revision of different artistic manifestations, important artists, and the role of the film club, and film itself in the shaping of that moment.

2 The essentialism embedded in the construction of Latin America as the “Tropics” would deserve a longer discussion. For my purposes here, it is true that a large portion of the Western hemisphere fits the geographical definition of the tropics as being located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. This includes parts of Mexico, all of Central America, all of the Caribbean islands, the top half of South America as well as the northern portions of Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. The coining of “tropics” in social sciences and the humanities owes a lot to Claude Lévi-Strauss’ influential *Tristes Tropiques*, although his travelogue refers specifically to his experience in Brazil. The terms “tropics/tropical” are overused to refer to Latin America as a whole, encompassing discourses related to banana republics, abundance, leisure, and unruly worlds (both in the governance of the political and health orders), erasing the geopolitical diversity of the zone and differences in the histories of colonization, industrialization and the ebbs and flows of each country’s particular participation in transnational and global transactions.

3 See “Socio-Economic Impact of the Sugar Sector in Colombian Economy” by Centro de Investigación Económica y Social Fedesarrollo.

4 See “Colombia Pursues Sweet Dream of Becoming a Sugar-Cane Ethanol Powerhouse”, *NY Times*, May 9, 2011.

5 In the context of Colombian history, *La Violencia* (capital V) stands for the bipartisan violence of the 1950s to differentiate from other violence manifestations. Works on Colombian history usually refer to El Bogotazo, the massive riots that followed the assassination of Liberal leader and presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948 in Bogotá, as having sparked the period of two-party (Liberals and Conservatives) conflict. According to these accounts, throughout the country and until the 1960s, *La Violencia* manifested itself as a series of sectarian events, embedding its dire economic consequences in the national imaginary along with a whole list of bandits, guerrillas, and *caciques*, or local political bosses, all seeking to defend their territory. First, spatial and temporal discrepancies show that in some regions of Colombia, *La Violencia* had begun to emerge before April 9, 1948. Such is the case in the departments of Boyacá and Santander, where the most significant antecedents date from the 1930s. *La Violencia* primarily battered coffee-producing areas, along with the departments of Cundinamarca, Valle del Cauca, and Tolima. Although its bipartisan nature is frequently emphasized, it’s important to highlight the splintering that resulted with the emergence of guerrilla troops under the FARC and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). They claimed to have arisen precisely in response to betrayals by both Liberals and Conservatives. This rupture allowed areas like the eastern *llanos* of the Orinoco River basin and the departmental borders around central Magdalena to take on a leading geographic role from then on. The political “resolution” to *La Violencia* came about with an interval in the military coup led by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. He was overthrown in 1957 with the establishment of the Frente Nacional, an alliance between Colombia’s two traditional political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, wherein each party took a turn in power every four years. There is extensive literature on *La Violencia*. See, for example, Guzmán Campos, Germán, Orlando Fals Borda and Eduardo Umaña. *La Violencia en Colombia*. Bogotá: Punto de Encuentro, 1972; Palacios, Marco. *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia. Colombia 1875-1994*. (Bogotá: Norma, 2003); Sánchez, Gonzalo. *Pasado y presente de La Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: CEREC, 1986), Sánchez, González

and Donny Meertens, *Bandoleros, gamonales, y campesinos: el caso de La Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: El Áncora, 1983);

6 FOCINE stands for the Compañía de Fomento Cinematográfico, an attempt of the State to industrialize Colombian film production that ran from 1978 to 1993. The FOCINE years were characterized by a continuous yet meager production, whose quality and legacy for Colombian filmmaking are still debated today. As an institution, FOCINE went down in history as a bureaucratic entity, mired in intrigues over budgets and a final crisis that led to its inevitable dissolution. Various full-length films were made under FOCINE broached the topic of *La Violencia*, often too close to magical realism narratives in vogue at the time. Mayolo and Ospina received financing from FOCINE but ventured into experimenting with other visual languages and approaches.

7 Gutiérrez Alea's film is based on Manuel Moreno Fraginals' *The Sugarmill*, together with Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* the most important discussions of Cuban identity that use tobacco and sugarcane as a synecdoche for the island's racial composition.

8 For a thorough critique of Alliance for Progress, see Taffet, Jeffrey F. *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy. The Alliance for Progress in Latin America*. NY: Routledge, 2007.

9 A more detailed study of the role filled by the Colombian sugar refining industry during the U.S. embargo of Cuba appears in the chapter on "Owners and Fences" in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* by Michael Taussig. In this context, the author dismantles the complicated system of symbolic referents related to the devil in South West Colombia. Taussig offers an extensive discussion on the meaning of the devil in the folklore of Colombian sugarcane plantations and Bolivian mines, tracing it ethnographically and historically in order to establish the relationship between the imaginary related to this evil entity and capitalist development.

10 In the Lucumi tradition in Santería, Babalú-Ayé/Saint Lazarus is the *orisha* or deity associated with illness—particularly smallpox and the plague—and poverty. El Guaval is the same poor neighborhood where sequences of *Agarrando pueblo* (*The Vampires of Poverty*) take place. In that 1978 mockumentary, Mayolo and Ospina establish a poignant criticism to what the label as "pornomisery", i.e. the opportunism of directors who profit from filming poverty and scarcity.

11 Incest here is a gothic element in itself, present in classic stories of the genre such Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*; Matthew G. Lewis' *The Monk*; Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*, and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, for example.

12 *Pájaros* were squads of conservative paramilitary peasants organized in those years. Extremely Catholic, most of these men had an average family and business life during the day, with very secretive and private meetings at night to plan their bloody actions.

13 See Diego Velázquez' 1656 painting, *Las Meninas*, of the Infanta Margarita and her entourage. The allusion to Laureano Gómez directly connects the Borrero family to actions by this conservative leader, who was president of Colombia in 1951. Together with Alberto Lleras, Gómez, he was directly responsible for the Pact of Benidorm that established the Frente Nacional (in her nostalgia for Spain, Julia recalls having coincided with Gómez at Benidorm). As a political figure, Gómez has been the object of innumerable studies for his responsibility in Colombia's political collapse and the bloody period of *La Violencia*, but also for his participation in the country's industrial development, which experienced an economic boom after World War II according to James D. Henderson in his study on the topic (xiv).

Filmic Spaces in Contemporary Latin American Gothic Horror Cinema

Jonathan Risner

Horror cinema, often defined for its socially transversal qualities, is also among the most transnational of genres.¹ *Mama* (Andrés Muschietti, 2013) illustrates such a dynamic: The gothic film is a Spanish-Canadian co-production set in the United States, filmed in Canada with actors from the U.S., Denmark, and Spain who speak in English. Muschietti is Argentinian and has lived in Barcelona for ten years, and the film's technical crew is from Canada and Spain with Mexican director Guillermo del Toro serving as the film's executive producer.² *Mama* also enjoyed a theatrical release on a near global scale with subsequent global DVD distribution, and garnered attention originally as a short film entitled "Mamá," which was screened at film festivals in Spain, Holland, Scotland, and the United States and is accessible through video-sharing websites such as Youtube ("Mama").³

If transnationalism frequently characterizes a horror film's production and consumption, then some facet or expression of the national nevertheless remains significant and, at times, is defined concisely through a film's iconic character or by a director's notoriety and nationality. For instance, the lanky teenage girl whose long hair obscures her face in *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998) provides a globally-recognized calling card for Japanese horror cinema.⁴ Likewise, Peter Jackson's early gore films constitute the popular conception of so-called "Kiwi horror" from New Zealand eclipsing other national horror productions, or co-productions that have a New Zealander component.⁵

The dynamic of concise and instant recognition of a national horror cinema inevitably broaches the topic of the global branding of local, national, and/or regional horror. Regarding horror cinema from Latin American countries, Juan Felipe Orozco, director of the Colombian apartment horror film *Al final del espectro/At the End of the Spectre* (2006),⁶ described in an interview how the apartment's mise-en-scène in his film constitutes an onscreen aspect of Latin America that recalls "'esos apartamentos de nuestros abuelos y tíos, esos sitios miedosos llenos de retratos donde nos llevaban nuestros papás, [para] poner ese imaginario latinoamericano en una película de suspense con un lenguaje universal'" ("those apartments of our grandparents and aunts, those frightening places full of portraits to which our parents used to take us [in order to] put that Latin American imaginary in the suspense film with a universal language") ("Broche"). A claim that the apartment horror subgenre could be the Latin American horror subgenre is disputable;⁷ however, Orozco's conjecture serves as a point of departure to consider two questions central to this essay. First, how the centrality and aesthetics of filmic and architectural spaces in recent Latin American horror films may define a regional horror cinema. Second, while fused with "a universal [cinematic] language," how the presentation of filmic spaces possibly distinguishes a Latin American cinematic gothic from gothic horror cinema from elsewhere.

My use of the term gothic in a cinematic context, on one hand, rests on a film's engagement with themes common to gothic literature: the uncanny and fantastic, specters, unexplained pathologies, the multiplicity and duality of characters, and the revelation of past crimes. The progressing revelation of a crime over the course of a narrative often is inextricably linked with a specific space (e.g., a secluded and lurid mansion or castle) as the site of a crime. In their observations of the various symbolic meanings that the castle holds in gothic literature, David Punter and Glennis Bryon describe such a space as "a labyrinth, a maze, a site of secrets" (261) from which a previously unknown or repressed tragedy is brought to light.

My discussion of the cinematic gothic in select Latin American films is also linked with what Misha Kavka describes as the "visual codes" (211) of the gothic, which include long shots of a castle on a hill (215), "the close-ups of mad, staring eyes" (210) and, the "plasticity of space" in which an onscreen space expands and con-

tracts through camera placement, editing, and lighting (214, 215).⁸ Contemporary haunted house and apartment horror films from Latin America and elsewhere commonly update the dilapidated mansions and castles of gothic literature and classic horror films made by Universal Studios during the 1930s and 1940s. In short, suburban houses and urban apartments often are the “site of secrets.” Contemporary horror films traffic not only in the visual codes described by Kavka, but also introduce other ways of spatial manipulation. As filmic spaces, apartments and houses become malleable and achieve a gothic plasticity according to how they are presented through formal elements such as lens choice, editing, cinematography, framing, lighting, and sound. Albeit a simplification, a haunted house or apartment horror film may follow a kind of spatial template: the initial presentation of a house or apartment comes in the form of a long shot of a structure’s façade with the camera subsequently fragmenting the structure’s interior by capturing particular rooms, furniture, staircases, hallways, basements, doors, and/or closets in close-ups and canted angles. The film’s gradual explication of space is almost invariably accompanied by the revelations of a past crime or injustice through the peeling away of memories pregnant in the space and often with the peeling back of the house’s physical structure.⁹

As mentioned above, I am keenly interested in whether the filmic spaces in Latin American gothic films can be differentiated from such films from other countries. I will start by sketching a theoretical lens for examining the onscreen spaces in haunted house and apartment horror films and will utilize three recent Latin American horror films to illustrate specific claims regarding genre patterns. Those films are *Visitante del invierno/Winter’s Visitor* (Argentina-Spain, Sergio Esquenazi, 2008), *La casa del fin de los tiempos/The House at the End of Time* (Venezuela, Alejandro Hidalgo, 2013), and the aforementioned *Al final del espectro*.¹⁰ I consider the Latin American gothic horror films alongside other more well-known non-Latin American horror films to delineate the shared spatial elements and transnational gothic codes. In addition, the comparisons among the films will mark how the three Latin American films are possibly unique for their presentation of space. Subsequently, I will focus on the ambiguous focalization in *La casa muda/Silent House* (Gustavo Hernández, 2010).

“A change of algebraic signs”: Topoanalysis and Uncanny Spaces

Brief summaries of the three Latin American films reveal their gothic credentials: the centrality of a particular space, the illumination of a tragedy that occurred in that space, and the presence or evidence of a specter. In *La casa*, Dulce (Ruddy Rodríguez) returns to a vast and labyrinthine home after completing a 30-year prison sentence for supposedly murdering her husband and two young sons. Set in Caracas, Venezuela, the house to which Dulce returns was, according to the film’s story, originally owned by an English immigrant who subscribed to masonic beliefs and thought the house to be the site for attaining ““la verdad absoluta de nuestra creación”” (““the absolute truth about creation””). Within the house’s interior, Dulce passes in and out of different stages in time to save one of her two sons from being murdered by her estranged husband after he learns he is not the son’s biological father. In *Al final*, Vega (Nöelle Schonwald) moves into an apartment in Bogotá, Colombia after she witnesses the death of her boyfriend, Jairo (Manuel José Chávez), while the two were making a documentary about bullfighting in Bogotá. Vega becomes increasingly agoraphobic and obsessed with the space after moving into the apartment. She positions and repositions different closed-circuit video cameras and screens to film the apartment’s different rooms. Neighbors intrude into her home and apparitions appear. Vega is visited in her dreams by a woman in a red velvet dress who Vega believes to be Victoria, the wife of the apartment’s owner who died some months ago. Along with some photos, Vega finds the dress in the apartment in a trunk and puts it on. In the film’s climactic confrontation, a neighbor, Tulipán (Julieth Restrepo), threatens to stab Vega in a bathtub with a pair of scissors. Instead, an unseen force stabs Tulipán with the scissors. The film’s final sequence shows Vega in the red dress staggering down the stairs in front of the apartment building and getting into a taxi. In *Visitante*, Ariel Lambert (Santiago Pedrero) moves to Villa Mar with his sister and mother following a psychological breakdown. One afternoon Ariel notices an adult man dragging a young boy into a nearby house. Ariel repeatedly enters the house to investigate and finds dismembered corpses and torture chambers. Given Ariel’s history of hallucinations, friends, family, and police at first doubt the veracity of his findings until an undead-like killer materializes and

pursues Ariel.

Gaston Bachelard's idea of topoanalysis offers a fitting starting point to analyze space in select Latin American gothic horror films. At first glance, Bachelard's topoanalysis as described in *Poetics of Space* may seem a curious, if not incongruent, critical approach. Defining topoanalysis as "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (8), Bachelard explicitly states in the book's introduction, "[...] the images I want to examine are the quite simple images of felicitous space" (xxxv). Bachelard's lyrical analysis of houses and its intimate spaces (nooks, corners, closets, etc.) is almost invariably positive: "All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction. Their being is well-being" (12). Yet, Bachelard himself reserves that the house and its varied spaces may evoke unease and anxiety: "And with regard to images, to attract and to repulse do not give contrary experiences ... All that is needed is a change of algebraic signs" (xxxvi).

Haunted house and apartment horror films essentially change the algebraic signs of the spatial images as conceived by Bachelard. The onscreen spaces in the three Latin American films do not constitute the outright antithesis of a "space for cheer and intimacy" (Bachelard 48) that would be a space dominated by terror and panic. Instead, the diegetic spaces of a house and apartment take on an uncanny aspect characterized by both attraction and repulsion. In his comments on the topic, Freud describes the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). To illustrate this definition, Freud considers the etymological correspondences between *heimlich* ("homely," "canny") and *unheimlich* ("unhomely," "uncanny"), with the former related to the home and its familiar, comfortable connotations, among other meanings (222). Freud alludes to *unheimlich* as the return of repressed memories "that ought to have remained secret and hidden" (225), and which renders the familiar disturbing and menacing. As suggested by the English translation of *unheimlich* as "unhomely," home possesses a special significance in Freud's formulation of the uncanny. As Anthony Vidler observes in *The Architectural Uncanny* "[...] the uncanny has, not unnaturally, found its metaphorical home in architecture: [...] in the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror" (11).

The houses and apartments in the three Latin American films are uncanny spaces. First, they are homes and, in the case of *La casa* and *Al final*, afford their occupants a degree of comfort and protection. Prior to the accidental death of her younger son at the hands of her older son while the two play baseball, *La casa* depicts the mansion generally as a pleasant familial space through acting, soundtrack, and high-key lighting. Similarly, Vega's apartment in *Al final* provides her with a space to recover from the trauma of witnessing her boyfriend's death. In *Visitante*, the house where the children are murdered is a furnished and seemingly occupied home.

The home spaces (*heimlich*), nevertheless, are rendered strange (*unheimlich*) by what unfolds or appears there, or intrudes into the space: murders (*Visitante*), apparitions (*La casa* and *Al final*), time travel (*La casa*), and bizarre noises (*La casa* and *Al final*). These phenomena initiate or accompany the return of repressed memories, or events that should remain repressed, and thus sow mental and narrative conflict. Bachelard's focus on the relationship between space and memories relates to Freud's notion of the uncanny, and haunted house and apartment horror films spatialize the return of repressed memories.¹¹ For Bachelard, the house provides a kind of receptacle for memories: "[...] thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it is a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated" (8). This enclosed nature of a memory plays out in the Latin American films with the memories of a crime repressed or occluded within a house or apartment. The arrival or presence of a character or family in a space animates those memories and brings those memories to the attention of others, sometimes with horrific consequences. The dismemberment of children in *Visitante* happens in the basement of a large house, and Ariel documents what he sees with a video camera with the hope of exposing the crimes to others. In *La casa*, the murder of one of Dulce's sons at the hands of her husband happens in the mansion's kitchen in front of a door that leads to a cellar. In *Al final*, Vega does not remember a crime that transpired in the apartment. Instead, her memory of Jairo follows her, and Vega seems to assume the memory of Victoria after she locates the trunk with Victoria's belongings and puts on the dead woman's dress.

Despite witnessing strange happenings, the characters in the three Latin American films remain in their

uncanny homes. Even though her neighbors harass her and she observes occurrences that unnerve her, Vega is not compelled to abandon her apartment. In *La casa*, Dulce returns to and remains in the mansion where her husband and child died and where Dulce suspects a ghostly presence resides. In *Visitante*, while Ariel does not live in the space in which the murders take place, he repeatedly puts himself in harm's way by returning to the house where children are mutilated. The three films' characters' propensity to remain in or return to a space that harbors a threat conforms to the haunted house film genre in which characters or entire families remain in a house and only abandon the space after a spectacular confrontation with some paranormal entity. *The Amityville Horror* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979), *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013), *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), *Darkness* (Jaume Balagueró, 2002), and *The Changeling* (Peter Medak, 1980), among other films, illustrate a general dynamic in which characters remain or return to a space unswayed by strange happenings.

The Latin American films' characters' tendency to remain in a space corresponds with another tenet of Freud's conception of the uncanny, specifically, the dynamic of repetition and fate.¹² After describing his own experience of repeatedly taking the wrong detour while walking in an Italian town, Freud considers the turns as suggesting "the idea of something fateful and inescapable" instead of a question of chance (237). As in the five non-Latin American films mentioned above, the characters in haunted house and apartment horror films often only abandon the space at the film's end following a spectacular confrontation with a supernatural force. Yet, staying in the space essentially permits the film's narrative to unfold. Characters have multiple encounters with some malevolent entity until a character, or group of characters, eventually relinquishes their home. *Al final* and the aforementioned non-Latin American films conform to this narrative sequence in which a character's confrontations with a diabolical force increase in intensity until the film's end. Albeit a slight variation, Ariel in *Visitante* abandons the cycle of returning to the house to investigate after the murderer discovers him inside. *La casa*, however, proves to be an exception. Dulce stays in the mansion after the climax in which she prevents her son's murder, and the film's final images show her sitting at one of the mansion's window as the camera tracks backwards.

If an individual's presence animates a space by evoking a memory, then a structure's height also personifies a house or building. For Bachelard, "1) [a] house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward. It differentiates itself in terms of verticality. 2) It is one of the appeals to our consciousness of verticality. A house is imagined as a concentrated being" (17). A house or apartment in a horror film achieves a "concentrated being" since the space delimits the presence of a memory or a supernatural entity with the space marked as *the site of a crime*. In other words, the memory does not pervade all a film's onscreen spaces, rather the memory or crime is enclosed in a house or apartment. In *La casa*, Dulce's son is killed within the mansion, the memory of his murder is contained there, and Dulce traverses time solely inside the mansion. While a killer pursues Ariel in *Visitante*, the basement's house takes on a specific importance as the place where children are dismembered. In *Al final*, the claustrophobic apartment in which Vega lives is the space in which her agoraphobia worsens and memories intrude.

The three Latin American films accentuate a house's verticality through particular shots of its exterior. With the exception of *Visitante*, a house's or apartment building's initial presentation comes in the form of a long shot of its façade from a low height and low angle. Such framing is common to haunted house films such as *The Amityville Horror*, and, in keeping with formal tenets of the genre, the mansion in *La casa* and the apartment building in *Al final* loom and dominate the frame when appearing on screen for the first time. In the case of *Visitante*, at first, we see only partial views of the façade of the house in which children are dismembered, and the camera is masked to simulate Ariel's use of a telescope to peer at the house.¹³ The house is fragmented initially and a low-angled long shot of its entire façade comes later in the film. Thus, *Visitante* inverts the order of the house's presentation.

Bachelard further stresses the house's verticality and internal fragmentation by emphasizing its interior levels: a basement, main floor, or attic. Bachelard considers a cellar to be the site of "buried madness" (20) and juxtaposes it with the attic "where it is a pleasure to see the bare rafters of the strong framework" (18). Though critics who write about houses in horror cinema often point out the correspondence between Bachelard's observation of basements and the location of some harmful entity,¹⁴ a basement invariably is not the space in which evil lurks.¹⁵ Instead, in the event that a diabolical force can be located, a house's extremities – either its attic or

basement – are the particular spaces in which a crime has been committed or a secret resides. Other spaces within the house also are marked by an event that forms part of the plot and contains some clue that eventually leads the characters to a basement or attic where a revelation occurs.¹⁶ In *Visitante*, Ariel observes clues about the children's murders when he enters the house and finds knives and a severed limb in a kitchen. Only when he descends a staircase into a basement and finds torture rooms and videotapes presumably of killings does Ariel understand the extent of the ordeal. In *La casa*, Dulce encounters an apparition of her son as an elderly man in the house's upper floor. Only after she descends a long staircase to arrive at a cellar, passes through a tunnel, and listen to her son's words about the possibility of time travel does Dulce (and a viewer) understand what is happening. With clues appearing in different parts and levels of the house, staircases in *Visitante* and *La casa*, as well as scores of other horror films,¹⁷ become figurative and literal passages in a plot in which a protagonist arrives at a climatic discovery or possible confrontation.

Though Bachelard writes almost disparagingly of apartments as “superimposed boxes” which make home “mere horizontality” (26-27), it is precisely owing to an apartment’s horizontality in apartment horror films that possibly makes the space more concentrated and unsettling than that of a house. In the case of Vega’s apartment in *Al final*, each room in the apartment connects one to another in a single level. Vega cannot seek refuge in an upstairs room and her agoraphobia tethers her to her apartment. With the exception of the beginning, the end, and brief moments in a hallway, the entire film unfolds in the apartment. The apartment affords no exit for Vega in the apartment’s onscreen space.

Bachelard essentially fragments a house’s space by associating memories with particular spaces and differentiating a house’s levels. The three Latin American films possess their own aesthetics of fragmentation with variations in framing and lenses that generally conform to the aforementioned haunted house and apartment horror films from elsewhere. First, the three films lack a sequential presentation of the house’s entire floor plan and, thus, maintain the space’s labyrinthine quality. A viewer is likely to have trouble ascertaining a house’s or apartment’s organization of space by piecing together separate shots of different parts of the dwelling.¹⁸ The films’ characters and rooms are shown with normal lenses in long and medium long shots allowing viewers to understand characters’ positions in space within rooms. For instance, in *La casa*, the camera uses a normal lens and long shots to show Dulce, her family, and/or the priest in the house’s living room, kitchen, and hallways. Alternatively, at instances of extreme tension in the three films, the camera captures the characters with a telephoto lens in close-ups, medium close-ups, or medium shots. Such framing reduces depth of field and further contracts an already finite space (i.e., the interior of a house or apartment). *Al final*’s fragmentation merits additional attention for being distinct. As noted above, Vega sets up and repositions different closed-circuit video cameras throughout her apartment. The sheer number of cameras in *Al final* fragments an already claustrophobic interior space creating a multiplicity of screens and, at some moments, fragmenting the same space that we see onscreen. In one instance, Vega films herself with one surveillance camera and watches herself on the monitor in the same room. In another moment, Vega moves the camera into the bathroom and places another in front of the apartment’s entrance.

Al final’s visual fragmentation approximates Vega’s psychological fragmentation that worsens throughout the film as she meditates on her boyfriend’s death, imagines an apparition occupying the apartment, and neighbors intrude into the space.¹⁹ In short, the apartment projects Vega’s mental state. Kavka articulates such an idea when she refers to Roger Corman’s filmic adaptations of Poe’s short stories and, more specifically, to the relationship between Vincent Price’s characters and the houses in Corman’s films. For Kavka, the films’ houses serve as “the spatialization of the frustrated, repressed psyche” (224) of Price’s characters. In a similar vein, Anthony Vidler’s notion of spatial warping is useful here for conceiving onscreen fragmentation and plasticity in *Al final*, along with the other two Latin American horror films, as an indication of a character’s psychology. Vidler views modernism as an unfinished project that stretches into the present, and is chiefly concerned with spaces of modernism and how “the nature of space [operates] as a projection of the subject,” namely “all the neuroses and phobias of the subject” (*Warped Space* viii).²⁰ The view of space as a psychological projection of the subject constitutes one form of spatial warping for Vidler.²¹ While Vidler is concerned with avant-garde aesthetics within modernism and how artists offer unprecedented ways of conceiving space, haunted house and apartment horror films also partake

in spatial warping. In addition to *Al final*'s use of multiple screens, the presentations of the houses' interiors in three Latin American films through the aforementioned use of lenses and framing likewise show the distressed and anxious psychological state of the films' characters.

Spatial warping in the three Latin American films occurs in other ways, namely the manipulation of light and sound. Dulce in *La casa* carries a lantern as she walks down the staircase and through a tunnel beneath the house. Ariel in *Visitante* uses a flashlight to explore the house where kids are supposedly slaughtered. While underscoring the influence of select Japanese horror films such as *Ju-on* (Takashi Shimizu, 2002) and *Dark Water* (Hideo Nakata, 2002), the dark interior in *Al final* can be characterized by low-key lighting that often accentuates abrupt changes or surges of light. For example, Vega's neighbor Tulipán drills numerous holes in a wall from the exterior of Vega's apartment, and the holes permit intense and focused rays of light to enter the apartment. In another varied use of lighting in *Al final*, when Vega and Tulipán struggle in a bath tub near the film's end, the screen repeatedly goes black for brief periods of time with the soundtrack remaining audible.

With the exception of the moments of complete darkness in *Al final*, the films' lighting arrangements are common in haunted house and apartment horror films from non-Latin American countries. The changes in lighting contract and expand the onscreen space at different times and engage in spatial warping to communicate the tension that a character feels at a specific moment. For example, when the light source is merely a lantern, as in the case of Dulce descending some stairs, the predominance of darkness onscreen essentially shrinks the frame and increases the off screen space. In other words, the character is surrounded by darkness, and the darkness temporarily fuses with the offscreen space and creates a realm in which an unknown threat potentially lurks unseen and can suddenly emerge. The space of a house or apartment, in turn, becomes more claustrophobic and threatening. A character (as well as a viewer) can no longer *visually* discern what lies around him or her and, in turn, must rely on a sense of touch. The reliance on touch places the proximity of a potential threat much closer; a diabolical force cannot be seen from afar with one's eyes, instead the entity must be touched to be discovered by a character.

Sound also contributes to spatial warping and projects a character's mental state. Sound and light are intrinsically linked in the three films. While variations in lighting expand and contract the onscreen space, sound also expands a space albeit within the finite interior of a house or an apartment. The three films feature a range of noises that disturb the films' protagonists: banging, knocking, footsteps, doors slamming, a clothes hanger squeaking slightly as it swings from a closet bar. The noises often emanate from off-screen within the house or apartment building. Given that the sources of these noises are unknown yet still within the space unnerve the characters. The characters and camera react accordingly with anxious expressions framed in close-ups. The films' spatial warping is not necessarily a question of isolating a single formal element. Instead, spatial warping occurs with formal elements – lighting, framing, and sound – working in concert.

Although such techniques do not make for a single aesthetic, they conform to what Julian Hanich calls suggested horror and cinematic dread. In *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers*, Hanich articulates notions of suggested horror and cinematic dread linking them to the presentation of filmic spaces. Hanich describes suggested horror according to a spectator's capacity to "perceive and imagine at the same time" (110) with "delayed, blocked or partial" images of graphic violence (114) and a reliance on sound to formally characterize it (114). For example, in lieu of seeing a knife entering a body, one may only hear a sound that suggests such an act as when Tulipán is stabbed with a pair of scissors at the end of *Al final*. One does not see the scissors pierce skin. Hanich describes cinematic dread as "an intense but quiet anticipatory type of cinematic fear in which we both feel for the endangered character and fearfully expect a threatening outcome that promises to be shocking and/or horrifying to us" (156). Signaled formally by claustrophobic spaces (e.g., a hall, woods), tight framing, and an eerie soundtrack, a viewer anticipates a character's confrontation with something unpleasant.

With the exception of some brief moments of graphic screen violence in *Visitante de invierno*, the three Latin American films adhere to Hanich's tenets of suggested horror and cinematic dread. Although the three films do not differ vastly from non-Latin American gothic horror films in their aesthetics of cinematic dread and spatial presentation, the degree of suggested horror makes them distinct from their transnational counterparts. In the three Latin American films, there is an absence of elaborate special effects that might feature a monster climbing the

walls à la *Darkness* or *The Conjuring* or a character expelling a computer-generated phantom as in *The Haunting in Connecticut*. While the absence of such special effects reflects the films' low budgets, the three films' degree of suggested horror hardly makes them inferior. Instead, the aesthetics of suggested horror can be conceived as significant when viewed against hyperviolent depictions of Latin America in horror films coming from elsewhere, namely the U.S. One might recall the film *Snuff* (Michael Findlay, Horacio Fredriksson, and Simon Nuchtern, 1976) and the sensationalistic slogan that appears on the DVD cover: "The film that could only be made in South America, where Life is CHEAP!" *Snuff*'s notoriety and the violent reiterations of Latin America in contemporary U.S. horror productions such as *Turistas* (John Stockwell, 2006), *The Ruins* (Carter Smith, 2008) and *Green Inferno* (Eli Roth, 2013) may shape a viewer's horizon of expectation that a horror film set in a Latin American country will feature graphic and excessive screen violence.²² The three Latin American horror films undermine such an expectation and, instead, the films testify to the plurality of horror film styles, which include variations of the gothic, currently emerging from Latin America.

Filmed, financed, and set in Uruguay, *La casa muda* attracted attention for its incredibly low-budget of \$6,000 and for supposedly being filmed in a single cut, a claim that has been disputed (Ruétalo). *La casa muda* relates how Laura (Florencia Colucci) and her father Wilson (Gustavo Alonso) are hired by a family friend, Néstor (Abel Tripaldi), to fix up an isolated and dilapidated house as Néstor prepares to sell the property. Néstor asks Laura and Wilson not to ascend to the second floor since some of the tiles are loose and unstable. Soon after arriving and despite it still being daytime, Laura and Wilson decide to sleep. A series of noises emanates from upstairs and sets off an unceasingly tense sequence in which Wilson and Néstor are mysteriously killed, and a young female specter appears inside and outside the house. During her attempts to find her father and Néstor and to understand what is happening inside the house, Laura discovers a wall of polaroid photos of different women including herself. Laura comes to learn (or imagine, since one cannot be certain) that Néstor and her father have had sexual relationships with different young women. After finding Néstor inexplicably bound, Laura accuses him of impregnating her and killing their daughter. Laura then kills Néstor with a scythe. By the film's end, Laura is outside the house and converses lovingly with the specter as if the ghost is her daughter. At one moment, the two hold hands as they walk towards a setting sun and, in the film's final images, the ghost has disappeared, and Laura seems to be talking to herself.

La casa muda conforms to and shares many of the formal elements that appear in the other three Latin American films and haunted house films produced by other countries: the centrality of a single house with multiple floors and a staircase; the return of repressed memories; the propensity to stay in a house despite a threat; an aesthetic of suggested horror that relies on sound and lighting to alternately shrink and expand the onscreen space and engage in spatial warping that reflects a character's psychology; and the use of close-ups to accentuate tension. Among these shared elements, *La casa muda*'s lighting merits special attention for its similarities and differences with the other three Latin American films discussed above. *La casa muda*'s lighting can be characterized generally as low-key with momentary lighting schemes that recall *La casa* and *Al final*. In an arrangement similar to Dulce's use of a lantern in *La casa*, Laura's more frequent use of a lantern shrinks the onscreen space and forces her to depend almost exclusively on a sense of touch to navigate a temporarily dark space. In addition, akin to moments in which the screen flickers between complete darkness and light in *Al final*, *La casa muda* features a sequence in which the screen is entirely dark and Laura uses a polaroid camera to illuminate briefly that space with the camera's flash. As in *Al final*, the soundtrack remains audible and Laura appears to be pursued by a male figure who becomes visible with the flashes of the polaroid camera's light. The figure seems to be her father who was viciously attacked offscreen earlier in the film. Though the sequence's lighting resembles the climactic scene in *Rear Window* and, more precisely, sequences in *Los ojos de Julia/Julia's Eyes* (Guillermo Morales, 2010) and *Mama*, two films presented by Guillermo del Toro, *La casa muda*'s lighting in this instance is distinct.²³

Cinematography and ambiguous focalization set apart *La casa muda* from the three other Latin American films and non-Latin American haunted house films. Laura is the film's exclusive focalizer; the house and the events are presented through Laura's perspective. From the film's outset, the camera is focalized through Laura and follows her closely behind her back and with over-the-shoulder shots as she and her father walk through a

field and approach the house. As Laura steps through a fence, the camera assumes a point-of-view shot from Laura's perspective and, after which, the camera returns to being slightly behind Laura. Almost throughout the entire film, both inside and outside the house, the camera maintains this alternating focalization: the camera moves between point-of-view shots and a kind of framing in which Laura inevitably appears close to the camera (over-the-shoulder shots, shots of Laura from the side, behind bottles, or in which the camera is slightly above her). The camera's fluctuating positions, along with the aforementioned lighting arrangements, creates an incredibly claustrophobic and paranoid aesthetic. Slavoj Žižek describes the lack of objective shots in the film *Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947) as producing "a paranoiac effect" (43). With the exception of two brief moments at the film's beginning and end, the *Lady in the Lake* is solely focalized on a detective with a framing that captures his point-of-view. For Žižek, "the field of what is seen is continually menaced by the unseen, and the very proximity of objects to the camera becomes menacing; all objects assume a potentially threatening character, there is danger everywhere" (42). While *La casa muda* presents a more varied range of shots than *Lady in the Lake* and which focalize events through Laura, Žižek's comments connecting paranoia and film position are instructive: the potential of danger from beyond the frame is ever present. Inside the house where the majority of *La casa muda* unfolds, an unseen threat is introduced into the narrative through sound near the film's beginning. Shortly after Laura and her father decide to sleep in the living room, Laura soon hears a noise emanating from upstairs and, from that moment forward, Laura appears under constant threat by the possible materialization of the person who caused an offscreen noise.

The alternating shots that focalize the narrative through Laura in *La casa muda* create a form of ambiguous focalization and depict Laura's extremely unstable psychological state. In *Film Narratology*, Peter Verstraten alludes to instances of ambiguous focalization in films such as *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003), and *Il deserto rosso/The Red Desert* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964). Verstraten describes Sasha Vojkovic's description of subjective and over-the-shoulder shots in *E.T.* and what they connote about Elliot's character (Henry Thomas). Vojkovic argues that the lack of subjective shots of E.T. from Elliot's point-of-view suggest both the possibility that E.T. is a figment of Elliot's imagination and of Elliot's lack of self-confidence (Verstraten 102-103). In lieu of subjective shots of E.T. from Elliot's point-of-view, E.T. is consistently shown from the boy's perspective with over-the-shoulder shots. With the arrival of the character Keys (Peter Coyote), a government agent, subjective shots of E.T. from Elliot's point-of-view imply Elliot has acquired self-confidence and a high-degree of subjectivity (Verstraten 103).

Given how the dynamic of subjective and over-the-shoulder shots signify Elliot's mental interior in *E.T.*, the constant fluctuation of framing and focalization in *La casa muda* likewise projects Laura's mental condition. In the case of subjective shots from Laura's point-of-view, there is internal focalization: viewers see what Laura sees. When the camera shifts to other positions vis-à-vis Laura (over-the-shoulder shots, full body shots from the side, from behind objects), the events onscreen shift from an internal focalization (i.e., from Laura's perspective) and, instead, Laura's focalization becomes embedded in an external focalizer. That is, viewers do not see the house through Laura's eyes but rather along with her; thus, Laura's subjectivity is in flux, as if she cannot maintain a durable perspective that is even temporarily anchored. The camera hardly follows a specific pattern. The viewer momentarily sees the house's exterior or interior in a point-of-view shot from Laura's perspective. The camera is then at a slight remove from Laura either behind her shoulder, directly behind her head, or lurking behind a shelf of picture frames and heirlooms. The camera then moves back to being a subjective shot only temporarily before moving somewhere else. Owing to the shifts in the camera's position and focalization, Laura consistently goes from seeing the house in point-of-view shots to being seen by viewers in a subjectivity in flux.

La casa muda's ambiguous focalization through Laura extends to moments of hallucination that cast doubt on the film's entire veracity. The camera and Laura rarely separate, and one particular moment of separation is instructive. Around the film's midpoint, Laura escapes from the house, runs through woods and a creek, and eventually climbs onto a dirt road. The film's sound has become muffled, and Laura breathes and wheezes heavily. As she stands on the road, the soundtrack suggests footsteps on the grass beside the road. The camera

pans left as if following Laura's gaze into the grass. The camera leaves Laura offscreen and presumably outside the right side of the frame. Given the camera's movements up to this point in the film, a viewer may presume that the camera assumes Laura's point-of-view. However, Laura soon appears on the frame's left side opposite the side on which the camera left her. The soundtrack again suggests footsteps on the grass. Laura looks in the direction of the noise. The camera then performs a similar movement to before by panning right following Laura's gaze and leaving Laura offscreen on the left side of the frame. Again, a viewer may suppose the camera has assumed Laura's point-of-view. However, Laura emerges on the right side of the frame and opposite the side on which the camera left her. The camera then frames Laura from the front in a medium close-up, and the aforementioned female ghost sits in the background under an overhead light source. Néstor drives up honking his horn incessantly. The soundtrack loses its muffled quality, and the camera returns to alternating among the shots focalizing the events through Laura (again, point-of-view shots, over-the-shoulder shots, etc.).

Such disorienting sequences suggest that the effects of the house on Laura extend beyond its interior with the camera momentarily projecting Laura's psychological change. Verstraten describes a moment in the film *Ja Zuster, Nee Zuster/Yes Nurse, No Nurse* (Pieter Kramer, 2002) in which a figure in a painting winks at one of the film's characters, Boordevol. The moment is focalized through Boordevol and presents his perception: a pill-induced hallucination that animates a painting. According to Verstraten, "[...] the visual narrator has completely subordinated itself to the perception of Boordevol" (110). Likewise, given that the narrative is focalized through Laura, the events depicted in *La casa muda* are subordinated to Laura's unstable mental condition. Laura frequently hears noises and sees a ghost that other characters do not, and the film's final images that show Laura walking through a field as if holding a hand of a child who is not there in a rare moment of external focalization in which events are no longer presented through Laura. In turn, almost the entire film appears to be Laura's hallucination; an extreme and ceaseless exercise in spatial warping that inevitably challenges the film's claim to be based on real events.

While unique and perhaps too premature, *La casa muda* has yet to define Uruguayan or Latin American gothic horror cinema, and its focalization is likely not to mark a new paradigm in horror. Likewise, *La casa, Visitante*, and *Al final* traffic in gothic codes without necessarily creating a distinct Latin American gothic aesthetic. Instead of presuming that a single film will 'make' and establish Latin American gothic horror cinema, Latin American horror cinema or the horror cinema of a particular Latin American nation should be seen as part of a transnational circuit of horror cinema in which transnational genre communities consume horror from other countries and, as evidenced in the four films examined above, filmmakers are keenly aware of the genre's tenets such as the plasticity of space and suggested horror. Latin American or a national horror cinema's place in the transnational circuit is likely to come not from a single film or films from a single director. Instead, with the groundswell of horror films currently coming from countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Chile, Latin American countries can gain and are gaining notoriety for producing horror films at a sustained pace and being viewed on a transnational scale in contexts in which audiences recognize the films' gothic credentials with slight variations in style and touches of national elements through language and cultural references. The films adhere to transnational gothic codes by projecting houses and apartments as uncanny spaces with the national seeping in through other ways. The filmic presentation of spaces do not necessarily project a national identity, as if the apartment in *Al final* somehow was both a spatial warping of Vega but also of the entire country. Instead, the Latin American films' use of gothic codes with national elements demonstrate the national intertwined with the transnational.

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Notes

1 See, for example, Schneider and Williams, Schneider, and Díaz-Zambrana and Tomé.

2 Guillermo del Toro's role in *Mama*'s production extended beyond that of executive producer. In addition, del Toro's name appears prominently on the film's promotional material as presenter ("Presented by Guillermo del Toro, Creator of *Pan's Labyrinth*"), as is the case for other horror films such as *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* (Troy Nixey, 2010) and *Los ojos de Julia / Julia's Eyes* (Guillem Morales, 2010). Del Toro's global notoriety owing to his own transnational success as a director with films such as *Pacific Rim* (2013), *El laberinto del fauno / Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and *Hell Boy* (2004) add to the transnational dimensions of *Mama*.

3 Films are assigned a nationality, or nationalities, according to the national origins of their financing. However, films can acquire other nationalities and, thus a more expansive transnationality, in any number of ways as in the case of Muschietti's *Mama*. For a more thorough discussion of different forms of cinematic transnationalism, see Hjort.

4 See, for example, McRoy, 2-3.

5 See Conrich.

6 In an apartment horror film, an apartment serves as the primary setting for a character's psychological demise and often projects that demise. Roman Polanski's apartment trilogy – *Repulsion* (1965), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), and *The Tenant* (1976) – is largely responsible for establishing the subgenre and rendering the apartment as an architectural space ideal for helping to forge an aesthetics of fear and anxiety.

7 Though earmarking a single horror genre as the Latin American horror genre seems a questionable venture, one could argue that the cannibal subgenre could perhaps be another candidate for a horror genre associated with Latin America. Recent cannibal horror films set in Latin America include *Somos lo que hay / We Are What We Are* (Jorge Michel Grau, 2010), *En las afueras de la ciudad / Hidden in the Woods* (Patricio Valladares, 2012), and Eli Roth's *Green Inferno* (2013). The history of Italian cannibal films set in Latin America, and the historical and metaphorical resonance of cannibalism in the region also could support the argument that cannibal horror is salient within Latin American horror. For an overview of Italian cannibal films set in Latin America, see Syder. For a comprehensive overview of cannibalism in Latin American cultural production, see Jáuregui.

8 Kavka articulates and defines the visual codes of gothic cinema by analyzing "three select film clusters:" films made in the 1930s and 1940s by Universal Studios (*Frankenstein* [James Whale, 1931]), *Dracula* [Tod Browning, 1931], *The Wolf Man* [George Wagner, 1944]); a cycle of films from the 1940s and early 1960s, such as *The Uninvited* (Lewis Allen, 1944) and *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963) that evidence a "female Gothic"; and Roger Corman's filmic adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories which were produced in the 1960s and featured Vincent Price.

9 For a thorough and fascinating overview of haunted houses that focuses mostly on English-language and Japanese cinema, see Curtis.

10 I will subsequently refer to the three films in an abbreviated fashion as *Al final*, *Visitante* and *La casa*. This aside, my selection of recent Latin American gothic films prominently featuring a house or apartment is hardly

an exhaustive list and could include, among other titles, *Jennifer's Shadow* (Daniel de la Vega, 2004), *La memoria del muerto/Memory of the Dead* (Valentín Javier Diment, 2011) Adrián García Bogliano's *Penumbra* (2011) and *Habitaciones para turistas/Rooms for Tourists, El hoyo del diablo/The Devil's Pit* (Francis Disla, 2012), or films in which a space momentarily becomes gothic as in the military base in *El páramo/The Squad* (Jaime Oзорio Márquez, 2011).

11 The dynamic of encountering a tragic memory in space plays out in numerous haunted house and apartment horror films, including *The Amityville Horror*, *The Conjuring*, *Poltergeist*, *Insidious* (James Wan, 2010), *Darkness*, *The Changeling*, *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), *Repulsion*, *The Tenant*, and *Dark Water* (Hideo Nakata, 2002).

12 Speaking in general terms about the haunted house genre, characters' tendency to remain in a house can also allegorize the 'American dream' of homeownership with the reluctance to relinquish that home even in the face of paranormal activity.

13 Such a technique recalls Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and Brian De Palma's *Body Double* (1984) in which a protagonist uses either a camera or telescope to peer at a neighbor and the camera is masked to suggest a protagonist's point-of-view.

14 See, for example, Phillips and Curtis.

15 See, for example, *The Amityville Horror*, *Poltergeist*, *The Shining*, *Darkness*, and *Fragile* (Jaume Balagueró, 2005).

16 See, for example, *The Conjuring*, *The Haunting in Connecticut* (Peter Cornwell, 2009), and *The Attic* (Mary Lambert, 2008).

17 In addition to the other non-Latin American films that I have cited thus far, see *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) and *[Rec]* (Jaumé Balaguero, 2007)

18 The lack of a house's spatial layouts is common to haunted house films and can be seen in nearly all of the aforementioned non-Latin American haunted house films. Albeit not a haunted house film, the opening sequence of David Fincher's *Panic Room* (2002) illustrates how a film could provide a coherent layout of a house.

19 The notion that architecture or a space projects a character's mental condition appears frequently in criticism of gothic literature, such as Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher." For an elaboration of the relationship between space and a character's psychology in Poe's short story, see chapter 2 of McEntyre.

20 Vidler's idea of spatial warping is not vastly distinct from his observations of the uncanny in *The Architectural Uncanny*. Vidler charts the genealogy of the term uncanny and notes "for an early generation of sociologists, 'spatial estrangement' was more than a figment of the imagination, but represented precisely that mingling of mental projection and spatial characteristics associated with the uncanny" (11). In other words, the idea of the uncanny posits space as a mental projection. I use Vidler's idea of spatial warping to succinctly represent how haunted house and apartment horror films can project a character's mental condition.

21 Vidler refers to another form of warping as artistic warping, or "the forced intersection of different media [...] in a way that breaks the boundaries of genre and the separate arts in response to the need to depict space in new and unparalleled ways" (viii). Artists – architects, photographers, filmmakers, painters – draw on different

media to scrutinize architecture and “the traditional terms of art” (Vidler viii).

22 The aforementioned films can be conceived as part of a crop of travel horror films that have proliferated over the past decade in which tourists travel to foreign lands (as opposed to a national hinterland) and suffer horrific consequences. Other such films include *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005) and *The Human Centipede* (Tom Six, 2009) and, among other topics, allegorize U.S. liberal/leftist anxiety over the United States’ international image following George W. Bush’s election and the War on Terror.

23 In Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, Raymond Burr (Lars Thorwald) is a murderer who enters the apartment of Jeff (James Stewart) to confront him. When Raymond begins to approach Jeff, the latter uses a camera’s flash to blind the killer and stall him. In *Los ojos de Julia*, Julia is pursued by an ‘invisible’ killer who drove her twin sister to commit suicide by hanging herself. Julia searches for the killer and loses her sight during the course of the film. At the film’s end, Julia is nearly blind and the killer is inside her house. In order to bide time for the police to arrive, Julia shuts off the lights in the house and uses a polaroid camera to blind the killer and hit him with a lamp. In *Mama*, Dr. Gerald Dreyfuss goes to an isolated cabin at night to locate the ghostly mother who seeks to possess two young girls. When Dr. Dreyfuss’s flashlight fails him, he uses a camera to attempt to light the space and locate the specter. The ghost eventually kills him.

Moving Beyond the Fukú: Exploring Intersections between the Folkloric and the Feminine in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Jennifer Donahue

"In the world of Oscar Wao, the simultaneity of modernization and dependency has become the new norm, indeed, the paradigm of the new norm in the Americas. The great achievement of Oscar Wao is, then, Díaz's ability to balance a coming-of-age story- humorous and hauntingly poignant episodes of the fierce and traumatized intensity of Oscar's longing for love- with mediations on the real history horrors in the Americas"

-Ramón Saldívar

Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) explores issues of cultural identity and the legacy of the Trujillo¹ dictatorship on an individual level. Following the lives of the Cabral family across decades and between nations, Díaz's work offers a side of history that has been largely suppressed and writes back against the notion that "all form of dictatorship, large and small, are a threat to narrated, individual identity" (Patteson 14). In this polyvocal novel, narrated by the protagonist (Oscar), his sister, Lola, and his best friend, Yunior, Díaz reinterprets Caribbean history by interweaving the tale of the Cabral family and the history of the Dominican Republic as he moves readers back and forth between the United States and the Dominican Republic. With this novel, Díaz presents a "marvelous history of the Dominican Republic through the point of view of a fantasy nerd" (Lanzendörfer 129). Though Díaz's text has been critiqued for "essentializ[ing] the Caribbean as a site of loss and a site of struggle against that loss," I champion the quest for self-acceptance that Díaz presents (Khan 201). Developing on Aisha Khan's investigation of the "sympathetic and ironic critique of power gone mad," I argue that folkloric references in Díaz's novel prove central to rewriting the legacy of Trujillo (208).

While indeed Díaz brings readers to consider the legitimacy of authority and the way that power is maintained, historical references ground an understanding of the *fukú* that pervades the text. This essay explores the construction of Dominican identity in Díaz's text, one I will assert, is largely aligned with *fukú*, a Dominican curse that has been transformed into folklore, and now, fiction.² By employing this spectral curse, Díaz celebrates the "irrational, the outlawed and the socially and culturally dispossessed" (Smith and Hughes 1). In using the Gothic³ or supernatural in his writing, Díaz examines "how images of otherness have been made to correspond to particular notions of terror;" more specifically, he connects Oscar's otherness with anxieties about a personal and political terror (Smith and Hughes 4). In exploring the boundaries between the natural and supernatural, Díaz contributes to Latin America's tradition of fantastic literature. Expanding upon Gisele Anatol's understanding of folk legends as a form of establishing "cultural behavioral rules and standards of acceptability," I argue that in employing the *fukú* as a unifying device, Díaz complicates more traditional, sexualized associations of what it means to be "Dominican" (45). As this discussion of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* suggests, folktales can also be used to reinforce social and gender norms as well as class distinctions. In offering his own version of history, Díaz resists long-standing norms as he devises an alternative Dominican identity that offers inclusion to nerdy, sci-fi fanboys as awkward as Oscar de Léon. In detailing the violent history of the Dominican Republic, Junot Díaz writes "as truthfully as possible about a period of tyranny, a period of dictatorship, about people who have survived great repression" (Moreno 534).

My analysis here centers upon the concept of folklore as the "traditional beliefs and behaviors that circulate within a group of people in different versions based on a perceived model" (Hill 8-9). While Hill notes that folklore is "learned and transmitted verbally or by example within a 'face-to-face' setting," works such as Díaz's

transform and transmit folklore for a wider audience (9). Rather, folklore functions as “part of what anthropologists call ‘culture,’ the shared beliefs, activities, customs, behaviors, and traditions of a people that are handed down from one generation to the next” (Hill 12-13). In reading Díaz’s novel, I maintain that the *fukú* does not operate as superstition, or false knowledge, but as a cultural referent. More than simply passing down the stories themselves, Díaz intertwines folklore and literary production. As such, he keeps folklore alive while contributing to the “dynamic culture that continually adds new and revises old folk traditions” (Hill 11). In this way, then, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, features a folkloric voice that has been “intrinsically bonded into Caribbean art and literature;” this fusion of folklore and literature positions the *fukú americanus* as a curse that can be traced back to Columbus’s arrival (Roldan-Santiago 7). For Díaz, retelling stories serves as a means of keeping cultural ties intact, a means of maintaining history. In this novel, the author “introduces the generational curse of the *fukú* as a metaphor for the perpetuation of colonial power structures” (Mahler 119). For this transnational author, folklore is but one of the ways of retaining connections to his homeland. For Oscar, as well as Díaz, folklore surpasses geographic barriers and proves central to the transnational experience. In raising questions about cultural norms, the *fukú*, a form of spectral curse, balances moments of levity with seriousness to provide a counter-narrative that is an alternate vision to historical record. As a recorder of madness, fear and failure, the Díaz’s Gothic functions as a vehicle for “groups forced to the margins of power by a patriarchal culture” (Crow Preface).

With the belief that “to circumscribe the folkloric act within ‘face to face’ exchange would be to ignore the other levels of orality that are possible,” (Akoma 3) I work against the tendency to see folkloric references as embellishment to a vision of the texts as “written-oral phenomena” (Roldan-Santiago 3). Thus, much like Serafin Roldan-Santiago, I view the inclusion of folklore in print culture as an equal partner with oral lore. Rather than holding one method up over another, I view all forms of folklore as part of the fabric of Caribbean literature, the “vulcanizing agent [that results in] a literature which includes the ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ of a region and its people” (Roldan-Santiago 7). This is not to say that oral culture and print culture do not serve different purposes and audiences, but that perhaps those differences are beginning to diminish as more and more legends are transcribed. While some scholars may debunk the legitimacy of folklore in its written form, as Roldan-Santiago suggests, written retellings offer understanding and appreciation to those from other cultures; this diasporic dispersal of folklore should not be dismissed.

Applying Patricia Nichols’s assertion that “we must attend to both the continuities between oral and literate texts and the contrasts between cultural traditions they transmit,” I interrogate the ways in which written and oral, fact and fiction, intertwine in Díaz’s novel (123). With this essay I call for a reading of *fukú* that surpasses a view of oral materials as “exotic” elements sprinkled throughout the text to an understanding that realizes the “dynamic overlapping and interaction of materials from both literature and folklore in the Caribbean” (Roldan-Santiago 2). By interpreting Díaz’s text in this way, I work against the tendency Chiji Akoma identifies to only see oral materials “to the degree they embellish or ‘add color’ to the written work” (82) to a vision of the complete text as a “written-oral phenomena” (Roldan-Santiago 3). As a close analysis of folkloric references reveals, the dissemination of and attachment to folklore is frequently gendered in this novel. While on the one hand women often serve as “guardians of folk knowledge” as Barbara Bush observes, Díaz refutes the gendering of folklore by presenting a cultural homecoming for Oscar (764). Though folklore is largely associated with and transmitted through women in this work, the author illustrates the “simultaneity of modernization and dependency,” the old and the new, by presenting a form of folklore men can identify with as well as propagate (Saldívar 590). As my discussion of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* suggests, the transference of oral lore into print culture not only historicizes folklore but also makes elements of oral culture available for a wider, very interested audience.

I.

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* Díaz writes, “in Santo Domingo a story is not a story unless it casts a supernatural shadow” (245-46). Díaz’s text examines the legacy of Trujillo as it joins in the construction of the supernatural; with this novel, Díaz exposes the “truth” of Trujillo’s legacy and furthers a history of the

dictatorship as one shrouded in mystery and mysticism. At the same time, Díaz's novel is also a "multigenerational story about a Dominican family that provides a window into the past and present of the Dominican nation and its diaspora" (Moreno 532). By connecting trauma and a family haunted by the past, Díaz invokes specters⁴ through the Gothic. Supporting this, David Punter maintains that the Gothic "speaks, incessantly, of bodily harm and the wound: the wound signifies trauma, and recent years have seen a veritable explosion in terms of trauma at individual, communal and global levels." In this way, Díaz highlights internal exile and physical trauma against a political backdrop and reifies the way in which the Gothic resonates with "anxieties and fears concerning the crises and changes in the present [as well as] the terrors of the past" (Botting).

In Díaz's novel Trujillo's name becomes synonymous with *fukú*, both individual and national, as no one can escape his legacy; rather, like the *fukú*, the history of colonialism and imperialism haunts Díaz's text as the past keeps coming back to affect the present. As Avery Gordon writes in *Ghostly Matters*, "haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely." But one of the many specters in the text, Trujillo's legacy leaves no borders—it is a *fukú* itself. On an individual level, the Cabral family has their own personal legacy of *fukú*. Although this particular *fukú* is localized, on a larger scale the curse is inherited and pervades the Caribbean basin. This curse is not unique to the Dominican Republic but to the Caribbean region, as Díaz mentions at the start of the text. Ergo, the localized *fukú* the Cabrals experience connects them on a larger level to the history of loss and oppression in the Caribbean. With *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Díaz evidences the impossibility of escape from the island's "hyper-trophied voodoo imagination" (246).

Though the protagonist, Oscar, strives for a more inclusive identity akin to Du Bois' double-consciousness,⁵ Díaz does not present a fusion of disparate identities. Rather, his text illustrates the consequences of the Trujillo legacy and restrictive Dominican identity. Instead of featuring the merging of "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" into a "better and truer self" at the conclusion of the text, Díaz presents Dominican identity rooted in folklore as an alternative to a problematic situation (Du Bois 3). As such, Díaz constructs an identity for Oscar that starkly contrasts that of the "ideal" Dominican male. Oscar is quite opposite the image of macho Dominican man; instead, he is a "clash and a symphony of multiple identities forged in a particular neighborhood, within the United States, and across borders" (Villenas 133). While his peers largely ostracize him, folklore offers validation and acceptance as his quest to fulfill the stereotype of the Dominican man falls short. In fact, Oscar, like Díaz, has a "rather complicated and problematic relationship with his ancestral 'homeland' due to his upbringing in the US" (Bautista 43). Much like the characters he constructs, Díaz emigrated to the United States at a young age, six years old to be specific; like Oscar, Junot "had difficulty speaking English when he first emigrated. He retreated to books as a way to master the language" (Gross 5). This struggle, interestingly, is reflected in his text. As the author notes in an interview with Terry Gross, he "wanted everybody at one moment to feel like an immigrant in this book, that there'd be one language chain that you might not get;" as intended, this sense of otherness and exclusion allows readers, in part, to identify with Oscar's struggle for acceptance (5).

While scholars such as Chiji Akoma recognize the "tendency to privilege the written over the oral," in Díaz's novel, the oral, or folkloric, exists alongside the written, which serves to create a sense of mystery about *fukú* and the legacy of the Trujillo regime (82). As a result, this examination of *Oscar Wao* views the adaptation of folklore into print as part of the "dynamic culture that continually adds new and revises old folk traditions" (Hill 11). In *Oscar Wao*, folklore does not merely pepper the text, adding an element of exoticism, but serves as a system of "shared beliefs, activities, customs, behaviors, and traditions of a people that are handed down from one generation to the next" (Hill 12). More specifically, in Díaz's novel, *fukú* and bruja ways, or the "generic name for witchcraft in Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America," are transmitted genealogically, in addition to orally (Hill 21). This results in an identity partially rooted in an inheritance of the mystical. Through an understanding of folklore as a source of community, as Angrosino suggests, we can explore the function of folklore in Díaz's text as a means of establishing an identity for both men and women that reclaims the folkloric (127). As such, the masculine identity that Díaz offers, largely through Oscar, runs counter to more traditional understandings of

Dominican identity. Through folklore, and the *fukú* in particular, the author bridges the oral and written with a fictional work that is largely shaped by folklore.

Turning now to an examination of the role of the *fukú* in Díaz's novel, Angrosino notes that "the Caribbean has developed an extensive literature (both prose and poetry) devoted to the exploration of national identity" (113). This is especially true of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, as in Díaz's text national identity is largely tied to the legacy of the Trujillo dictatorship. Illustrating the transnational power of *fukú*, Díaz writes that this "curse of doom of some kind" is said to have come "first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved" (1). Thus, from the first page on, Díaz casts folklore in light of transnationalism as he links it to a legacy of abuse.⁶ As Díaz soon reveals, though, the *fukú* he references serves as a family curse as well as a national one. This legacy connects the "nightmares of small and private lives" with a legacy of trauma that can then be interpreted as a haunting (Crow). In this way, then, the personal and the political intertwine. As the text develops, Díaz illustrates the dictatorship's manipulation of the legacy of *fukú* to extend oppressive power, presenting a man not unlike the oppressive male figure often seen in classic Gothic romances. For instance, Díaz writes that Trujillo, the man who "ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961 with an implacable ruthless brutality" became aligned with *fukú* to the extent that "to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours" (1-2). Ultimately, though, the author illustrates the downfall of the abuse of power by highlighting the connection between masculinity and power. Although Trujillo and his *fukú* haunt the nation, and, more locally, the Cabrals, his demise suggests that the link between gender and influence is tenuous and even dangerous. While Díaz's novel recognizes the effective silencing of oral folklore, his text serves as a supplement and transforms the oral into the written. With this prize-winning novel, Díaz furthers his own story of the legacy of Trujillo and its connection to the supernatural. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Díaz perpetuates the mystification and cultural monstrosification of a historical figure by rendering a folktale personal. In this novel, the written text is haunted by the oral in the same way that the Cabrals cannot escape the *fukú*; by incorporating folklore into this exposé, Díaz upholds the oral tale as a legitimate form of communication.

More specifically, Díaz's text takes *fukú* from the national to the local level; in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* Oscar inherits a cursed love life from his mother, Beli, a woman who grew up in the Dominican Republic and migrated to the United States as a young adult. Though Díaz first describes *fukú* in terms of Trujillo's dictatorship, it morphs in his novel to become a particular curse impacting the Cabral family. Thus, an association between the national and the familiar that takes a Gothic turn develops a site of terror enclosed in the family structure. This terror is constitutive of the Cabrals' identity both in personal and national terms and refuses to leave or liberate the family. Illustrating a connection with transnationalism or the "transformation of two or more cultures into one" as an attempt to escape this shared legacy, the Cabrals' migration suggests the larger inability or impossibility of escape for Dominicans (Paravisini-Gebert 2). Despite attempts to leave the island fully behind them, the *fukú* migrates with them. While on the one hand this evidences the enduring power of folklore, it also suggests that the *fukú*, as folklore, serves as a means of retaining a connection to one's culture and homeland. More specifically, folklore operates as a tool of instruction and offers characters a bit of comfort during escape and exile; while adjusting to a foreign land, folklore serves as a cultural referent, a touchstone for those of Dominican ancestry who are living outside the nation. Thus, folklore, though framed by notions of terror and horror, is an essential part of Dominican culture and a central part of the transnational experience.

Further evidencing the link between *fukú* and transnationalism, Díaz writes that "there are still many, on and off the Island, who offer Beli's near-fatal beating as irrefutable proof that the House Cabral was indeed victim of a high-level *fukú*, the local version of the House Atreus" (152). Here, *fukú* unites beyond borders, occupies imagination and illustrates that even those who have left the island cannot escape it. As Díaz writes, the *fukú*, "was in the air, you could say, though, like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about" (Díaz 2). In this way, then, the *fukú* functions as the metaphorical elephant in the room. While Díaz's text references a cultural silence around *fukú*, his novel, interestingly, offers a wider audience a glimpse of the history surrounding the term and its legacy. In reaction to this silencing surrounding the Trujillo regime and the related *fukú*, Díaz's text asks us to "think about the ways authority and legitimacy are established and maintained" (Khan

204). Taking this further, in Díaz's novel, Dominican national identity is not based on individuals themselves but how legacy shapes itself. Rather, Trujillo's legacy developed through an infiltration of every aspect of Dominican culture, making every Dominican an actor in his regime. Through a mix of stories and research, Díaz attempts to position his intended reader, one likely outside the Dominican Republic, as an immigrant, while himself eschewing implication in the legacy of Trujillo through this re-writing. Through an incorporation of a variety of cultural references, as well as Spanish terms, our author creates moments of dissonance as well as identification for readers.

II.

Taking into consideration Michael Angrosino's assertion that "Caribbean literature has been a literature of symbolic escape as well as of literal departure," perhaps Díaz utilizes the act of writing in an attempt to escape the enduring legacy of Trujillo (116). Through the character of Oscar and his own literary pursuits, Díaz picks up where Abelard, Oscar's grandfather, left off,⁷ as he exposes "the supernatural roots of the Trujillo regime" (245). While religion and folklore serve as "powerful repositories of inner strength and cultural affirmation" in Díaz's text, this strength is frequently associated with the feminine (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2). Although Díaz gives voice to the supernatural legacy of Trujillo, mystical, unexplained supernatural references are largely relegated to the margins, buried within sections written from female perspectives. Thus, while Díaz can write the folkloric, he cannot fully claim it. Instead, the supernatural keeps coming back, not in response to the author's attempt to dismiss it, but because it cannot be avoided; it reflects our "predilection for terrifying or horrific experiences" (Cole 96). As a result, the novel seems to suggest that gender precludes male possession of the folkloric knowledge often attributed to women in this text.

Interestingly, in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, women are aligned with the folkloric, yet men are often out of touch with their identity. While in this work magical realism⁸ functions as a means of coming to terms with history, it affords Yunior, Oscar's best friend from college and the "author" of the text, "the means to connect his story to a Latin American, and specifically Caribbean, discourse regarding literary historical representation" (Hanna 509). Evidencing this disconnection as well as an enhanced feminine perception, Yunior notes that "of all the chicks I'd run up on ever, Lola was the one I'd never gotten a handle on. So why did it feel like she was the one who knew me best?" (Díaz 198). Here we see a young man out of touch with himself and, ironically, understood by another, a female, better than he understands himself. Humorously, the "chick" Yunior is referencing, Lola, is none other than Oscar's older sister. Thus, so much as Díaz's text aligns women with folklore, Dominican identity for men is largely constructed in terms of sexuality. Illustrating this, Díaz writes: "it's against the laws of nature for a dominicano to die without fucking at least once" (174). In this way, then, Díaz at once recognizes popular ideas of Dominican masculine identity through Yunior and offers an alternative, the more sentimental and cerebral Oscar. As a result, questions arise as to normative identity and who is "Dominican enough", or furthermore, who is "macho" enough. In response to this narrow definition of what the successful exhibition of masculinity looks like, Díaz rejects the norm and instead constructs an identity for Oscar based on *fukú*. Hence, Díaz transforms the very *fukú* associated with Trujillo's abuse of power into a productive form of identification for his protagonist. Because Oscar lacks the machismo that would allow him to command respect on the basis of looks alone, he comes to locate himself within the family curse. Instead of bemoaning his luck, Oscar's acceptance of this spectral inheritance undercuts proscriptive gender norms as he rejects the singular notion of Dominican masculinity in favor of a self that accepts, and even celebrates, a life surrounded by superstition. By partially liberating Oscar from the form of typical Dominican masculinity, Díaz's construction points towards cultural fluidity as opposed to an understanding of identity rooted in hyper-masculine sexuality.

By associating Oscar's Dominican identity with *fukú* rather than sexual prowess, Díaz capitalizes on a relevant cultural signifier. Taking note of this, Angrosino reminds us that "once the experience of independence has settled in, a people can begin to think of, and take heart in, a national identity drawn from local tradition" (114). Considering this assertion, it becomes apparent that Díaz's text moves towards a collective identity drawn from

the country's legacy rather than one rooted in reductive notions of masculinity and sexuality. In this way, Díaz proffers an understanding of the lingering legacy of Trujillo and the function of *fukú* as a process of national healing. On a local level, Díaz's text affords Oscar a means of identification with his country of birth through folklore and storytelling. Though men such as Oscar do not fit into the Dominican conception of male sexuality, folklore, or rather, *fukú*, offers a substitute form of inclusion. Rather, by having Oscar accept and appropriate folklore, Díaz sets the stage for a *bildungsroman*⁹ of sorts. While indeed, as Díaz himself notes, "Dominicans are Caribbean and therefore have an extraordinary tolerance for extreme phenomena," Oscar makes the perfect bearer of folk knowledge (149). With *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and through the character of Oscar Cabral in particular, the author expands issues of identity from the local to the regional.

Moving now to a discussion of the local identity of our protagonist, in Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, Oscar doesn't "look" Dominican; whether at school or the barbershop, his racial and cultural heritage is constantly questioned. As Díaz writes, "the white kids looked at [Oscar's] black skin and his afro and treated him with inhuman cheeriness. The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads" (49). Perhaps because of this lack of identification and acceptance, Oscar is constantly forced to assert his Dominican identity, even at home in New Jersey. When his peers cry "You're not Dominican" he says over and over again "But I am" and when that does not satisfy, Oscar turns to Spanish, responding "Soy dominicano. Dominicano soy" (Díaz 49). With this passage, Díaz includes the Spanish language to show the extent to which individuals must go to to "prove" their identity. As this exchange suggests, Oscar lives the "emotions, attachments, and understandings" of a second-generation immigrant, even if he has never visited the Dominican Republic (Villenas 131). As someone who identifies with neither his cultural home, the Dominican Republic, nor his physical one, the United States, Oscar's identification with the *fukú* over nationalistic or cultural association complicates the formation of an acutalized sense of self. Rather, in this novel, Oscar's identity is formed through historicity and folklore rather than location or ethnicity.

At the same time, Oscar's inclusion of another language in these affirming statements is quite troubling. Although the use of Spanish could indicate a deep linguistic and cultural affiliation or attachment on Oscar's part, the fact that he speaks partially in English and partially in Spanish illustrates his hybrid status as well as an attempt to convince his classmates of his nationalistic association. Sadly, the use of Spanish to assert his identity speaks to the unfortunate connection between language and national affiliation. When his initial explanation does not suffice, Oscar turns to Spanish in the attempt to convince his peers that he is indeed Dominican; this, again, proves unsuccessful. In this way, as Sofia Villenas argues, Díaz "plays with Western dominant notions of knowing Oscar within a continuum of Americanness and Domicanness" (132). Extending Villenas's assertion, I maintain that Díaz utilizes both language and looks to place Oscar outside of "traditional" constructions of Dominican maleness. Just as the women in *Oscar Wao* rail against societal norms, Díaz presents Oscar as an individual who fails to comply with societal expectations, instead struggling to come into his own identity despite a lack of acceptance by his peers.

More specifically, in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* Oscar exhibits an intense identification with the supernatural as opposed to fitting the Dominican masculine ideal. For him, this folkloric association and interest serves as a haven of sorts from the larger sense of ostracism he experiences. In this way, the feminine-fukú offers an acceptance that the masculine-ostracizing does not. While at first Oscar attempts to "polish up what remained of his Dominicanness" in reaction to questions of identity, by the end of the text writing becomes a means through which to claim ownership and assert agency (Díaz 30). For Oscar, Yunior, and perhaps even Díaz, words serve as a form of *zafa*,¹⁰ or counter-spell, that connect the written and the oral rather than perpetuating hierarchy. Therefore, writing, for Díaz as well as Oscar and Yunior, serves to liberate rather than simply record, working supernaturally to counteract a folkloric phenomena. By penning texts that embrace the mystical, Díaz, and even his characters, reject the polarizing sense of masculinity perpetuated in Dominican culture in favor of an association with the more accepting world of the supernatural. Through the use of folklore, Díaz unites Dominicans and provides a basis for identification for those at home or abroad. Writing against the stereotype of the hyper-masculine, hyper-sexual Dominican male, the author constructs a young man who "feel[s] at odds with the

other youth around [him]" (Roldan-Santiago 26).

However, as much as Oscar identifies with the supernatural and mystical, his transnational experience works on the level of personal amnesia, not unlike the national amnesia surrounding the legacy of Trujillo's dictatorship. In this case of localized amnesia, Oscar forgets his Dominican name but not the *fukú*. This suggests an understanding of identity that moves beyond superficiality and naming to a larger, collective identification. For example, Díaz writes that "he'd gotten somewhat used to the scorching weather and the surprise of waking up to the roosters and being called Huáscar by everybody (that was his Dominican name, something else he'd forgotten)" (276). This brief passage, referencing Oscar's summer vacation at his grandmother's home in the Dominican Republic illustrates rapid cultural assimilation as well as acceptance; Oscar's identity is not questioned in the Dominican Republic. Rather, he is simply accepted as one of the clan. Thus, in this way, memory is partially obliterated by assimilation. While later in the text Oscar queries the possibility of having two homes and two names, this situation is not yet achievable. Interestingly, it is only with physical remove and return that Oscar emerges from his personal "amnesia." In his novel, Díaz depicts Oscar as a "clash and symphony of multiple identities," which ultimately suggests that a complex, integrated identity is preferable to a one-dimensional one (Villenas 133).

In fact, it is largely because of this feeling of difference at home that Oscar is drawn to the Dominican Republic. Because Oscar cannot fully assimilate or develop an inclusive identity in America, he returns to the motherland, or, rather, his mother's homeland. However, instead of claiming agency in this decision, Oscar defers to the supernatural, stating that "it's the Ancient Powers...They won't leave me alone" (Díaz 315). Hence, the ancient powers, associated with the feminine, effectively emasculate Oscar, seemingly reducing him to a man lacking conviction, or one that fails to live up to the "standard." Perhaps because he feels that he doesn't measure up, Oscar relinquishes power to the mystical and inherited *fukú*; as such, the *fukú* serves as a cover or excuse for temporary migration. While Oscar follows the "calling," so to speak, by the end of the text "something had changed about him. He had gotten some power of his own" (Díaz 319). Through an understanding of mystical power as largely female, as I previously suggested, it is likely that the act of sexual intercourse with Ybón, the middle-age woman who is Oscar's love interest and the "start of his *real* life," heralds transformation (279). Ergo, intimacy brings the partial transmission of power and allows Oscar to gain agency from intimacy with a woman, and, in particular, a Dominican woman. In this way, the power women hold emerges as a form of alternative epistemology associated with the supernatural, which further supports the link between gender and the realm of the supernatural.

III.

As I have suggested, the supernatural and folkloric is often associated with women in Díaz's text. Reflecting on the women in his life, Díaz remarks: "when I think about the community of women that I was born into, they're pretty ferocious" (Moreno 539). In particular, in *Oscar Wao* the *bruja*, or witch-like ways, are depicted as an alternative way of knowing. Specifically, this knowledge, often applied to Oscar's sister Lola, is one acquired at birth. For instance, Díaz writes, "for as long as you've been alive you've had bruja ways" (53). Ergo, while Oscar inherits his mother's *fukú* in the form of a cursed love life, the *bruja* ways are passed down to female progeny. Yet, as with Lola, the prevalence of "*bruja* ways" often brings a difficulty with assimilation. Thus, much like her brother, Oscar, who is characteristically un-Dominican in his perceived lack of masculinity, Lola's *bruja* ways mark her as a goth or a rebel. As a result, like Oscar, she finds herself cast out of popular social circles. This association, as in Gothic fiction, paints Lola in terms of the strange, other and outcast; much like the way in which Gothic fiction functions as a sub-culture, Lola is marginalized as a result of this affiliation. Interestingly, descriptions of *bruja* ways appear only in sections written from the female perspective that suggests a knowledge that men cannot appropriate, or reveal, but only record. Hence, the relegation and gendering of this knowledge points to a distancing and difference rather than an understanding or incorporation.

Though Lola and Beli are aligned with terms such as "*bruja* ways" and "*oyá* soul," this source of knowledge is also connected with transnationalism.¹¹ More specifically, this enhanced perception is described as the

type of nebulous feeling that informs when “something in your life is about to change” (Díaz 53). This premonition is one rooted in the bones, one that “takes hold” (Díaz 72). Hence, perhaps in reaction to a stifling culture, *bruja* ways are connected to transnationalism in the intense desire to escape from “a society that had been designed to be virtually escape-proof” (Díaz 80). In this manner, *bruja* ways afford a means of “figurative travel” when migration is impossible. Illustrating this, Díaz writes that “La Inca [Oscar and Lola’s grandmother] talked soberly about the trip north, but Beli felt like a good part of her had already disembarked” (161). Thus, as Beli faces her impending literal migration, she utilizes dissociation,¹² or figurative travel, to emotionally escape her present situation.

Along with its connection to migration and escape, in Díaz’s text folklore also has a practical function. For example, Beli notes that “La Inca made her put hojas de mamon [papaya leaves] in her shoes so he wouldn’t ask too many questions” (Díaz 162). Here we have La Inca, an older matriarchal figure, situated as a “guardian of folk knowledge,” employing traditional knowledge ensure her granddaughter’s migration (Bush 764). As Sofia Villenas notes, La Inca is the “active agent in creating the possibilities for transnational solidarities in Díaz’s novel. She tells the stories that connect generations through memories of family and place” (134). La Inca, her name itself immediately associating her with the belief system of the Mayans, and also evidencing the influence of transnationalism in the Caribbean basin, is portrayed as a folk healer as well as a transmitter of knowledge as “she tells the stories that connect generations through memories of family and place” (Villenas 134). Through the voice of Beli, Díaz attributes an “encyclopedic knowledge of folk cures and traditional remedies” to La Inca, knowledge that runs counter to traditional, Western medicine (219).

As I have suggested, in Díaz’s novel *fukú* is inherited, both by women and by men, with birth affording a transmission of power. For instance, early in the text Beli states: “this was it. The magic she’d been waiting for” when her doctor informed her that her suspicions regarding her pregnancy were correct (Díaz 136). With the confirmation of Beli’s pregnancy came dreams of “wedding bells loud and clear” (Díaz 136). Yet, as seen throughout the text, Beli’s children, Lola and Oscar, are haunted by the family curse. This inheritance is then passed on to Lola’s daughter. As the text closes, Díaz writes that Lola’s daughter “will have a dream of the No Face Man. Not now, but soon. If she’s her family’s daughter-as I suspect she is- one day she will stop being afraid and she will come looking for answers” (330). In this particular instance, premonitional dreams are hereditary and serve as a means of verifying genetic and cultural connections. Supporting this, Anne Mahler suggests that “the colonialist curse of the *fukú* is physically embodied in the novel by a faceless man who haunts the members of Oscar’s family;” thus, the faceless man reflects the violent history of colonialism and the oppression that is the post-colonial state (122). The reference to “answers” suggests an oral transmission of truth rather than one that is recorded or “formal.” However, like the legacy of Trujillo, dreams are not something to be spoken of. For instance, Yunior states that he “never ask[s] if her daughter has started to dream. I never mention our past” (Díaz 327). Thus, despite use of the three *azabaches* to protect against the evil eye, the realization of healing powers and beginning of dreams of the No Face Man points to a rite of passage connected with ancestral and island legacy. Together, these passages suggest a gendered predilection or awareness. In Díaz’s novel, perhaps this alternative knowledge is associated with women’s reproductive abilities. Whereas women inherently have this connection, men search eternally for it; despite the power men are able to acquire, the transmission is never a complete infusion.

As I have discussed throughout, Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* constructs an understanding of home as inclusive rather than exclusive. In this text, Díaz utilizes the voice of Oscar to call for a more compassionate understanding of personal identity. While one can leave the island, one cannot escape *fukú*. As a transnational citizen himself, it is Díaz’s position as an exilic writer that allows him to write the book the fictional character Abelard (Oscar’s grandfather) was killed for; his exiled imagination allows him to explore issues of Dominican identity and the legacy of Trujillo’s dictatorship through the lens of the supernatural. In this way, Díaz utilizes transnationalism alongside folklore and mysticism to rewrite what it means to be Dominican. In his attempt to recast, or offer an alternative history of the Dominican Republic, Díaz emerges as an inheritor of the *fukú* and a molder of his own as well as his homeland’s destiny (Villenas 131). As a whole, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is a “transnational text that blurs the opposition between diaspora and nation by making clear

that for U.S.-born Oscar to be a diasporic subject, he must be domesticated according to the code of nationalist belonging, as enforced by the Dominican Republic-born Yunior” (Saez 526).

In Díaz’s novel *fukú* is aligned with writing. Reflecting on writing, Yunior/Díaz relates: “even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain’t a *zafa* of sorts. My very own counterspell” (7). Through a connection with the supernatural, the author seeks to expose an alternate version of the legacy of Trujillo, a version that contrasts the vast silence that he sees as problematic; in particular, Díaz states that “all societies are organized by the silences that they need to maintain” (Moreno 539). In the process of writing his *zafa*, Díaz complicates traditional Dominican identity and combats the single story of the Dominican Republic’s history as he offers up the character of Oscar as a means of exploring the effect of a cultural myth on individual lives. As he notes in an interview with Marisel Moreno, Díaz thinks that his work “falls into the tradition of writing that is concerned with issues of repression, of social justice, of tyranny, of immigration, of New Jersey” (533). In this account of hemispheric history, written for an implied reader not subject to Trujillo, Díaz conducts an “excavation of the Trujillo regime, and an examination of the nature of dictatorship itself” (Patteson 7). By incorporating multiple discourses, Díaz places the reader in the position of outsider while offering moments of identification. In using the transnational as a means of talking about that which is both smaller and larger than the nation, Díaz explores the contradictions Dominicans struggle to resolve. Through snapshots from the lives of the Cabral family, we see the journey of Oscar following “a classic theme of this literature, the Quest,” that is suggestive of the genre of the bildungsroman (Raboteau 921). Whereas Oscar accepts the *fukú* as his inheritance as a result of this process of psychological growth, Yunior rejects it. Yunior states: “I don’t believe in that shit, Oscar. That’s our parents’ shit. [To which Oscar replies]- It’s our too” (Díaz 194). Sadly, Oscar de Leon dies, not necessarily because as a result of the *fukú*, but because he, as an outsider to the notion of Dominican masculinity, becomes a scapegoat by trying to attain someone, the middle-aged prostitute, Ybón, who is undeniably “Dominican.” As Lyn Di Iorio Sandín writes, “beaten almost to death by the Capitan, and dragged back to the States by his mother, he returns to the island a second time pursuing both being, and death. It seems that one is not possible without the other. The scapegoat achieves being only through the self-destructive pursuit of mimetic knowledge that ends in death” (32).

In Díaz’s text, “a seductive novel that probably didn’t need the 2008 Pulitzer Prize to endear it to the academy,” *fukú* serves as a form of continuity, a tie that holds the nation together (Saez 522). Yet, despite this continuity, the characters’ desire to seek escape and locate connection outside the country is ultimately unsuccessful. Besides facing issues of assimilation, the Cabral transmigrants reveal an identification with *fukú* that survives migration. In utilizing the supernatural as a means of exploring *fukú*, Díaz proffers a shift in the understanding of Dominican identity that moves beyond essentialist, physical markers of identity to ones rooted in the mystical and collective. In Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the peripheral becomes the central as the author incorporates folkloric elements “into the hallways of centered-traditional literature” (Roldan-Santiago 3).

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Notes

1 As Anne Mahler remarks, “the most archetypical figure of tyranny in the novel is the historical figure, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, the military dictator who ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his assassination in 1961” (120).

2 As Díaz writes, the “*fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World” (1).

3 Andrew Smith and William Hughes define the Gothic as a “fantstical literary form that had its heyday in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries [and is a genre that] is calculated to challenge the dominant humanist discourse, and thus becomes, as this volume shows, a literary form to which postcolonial writers are drawn, as well as constituting a literary form which can be read through postcolonial ideas” (1-2).

4 In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida defines specters as a “paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some ‘thing’ that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, both one and the other.”

5 Du Bois defines double consciousness as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (3).

6 Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert defines transnationalism as indicating a “creative, ongoing process of appropriation, revision, and survival that leads to the mutual transformation of two or more pre-existing cultures into a new one” (2). Similarly, Steven Vertovec defines transnationalism as the “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Preface).

7 As Díaz reveals, Abelard was imprisoned and subsequently died in an “accident” for writing an *exposé* detailing Trujillo’s supernatural powers. With his writing, Oscar continues his grandfather’s legacy of anticolonial writing.

8 As Kathleen Renk details, magical realism “combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary” (103).

9 The Oxford English dictionary defines the bildungsroman as “a novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity.”

10 The zafa represents the “power of writing to show the presence of hegemonic power, and thus the presence of the *fukú*, within writing itself” (Mahler 134).

11 Throughout, I understand transnationalism as the result of “globalization whereby a group of people, with their own special culture and folklore, are spread out over several countries or continents and continue to act as a unit” (Hill 8).

12 Donnette Francis defines dissociation as a coping mechanism that allows “women to detach themselves from incidents that inflict bodily pain” (87). Similarly, in *Man and His Symbols*, Carl Jung defines dissociation as “a splitting in the psyche, causing a neurosis.” He notes R.L. Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a literary text that offers a physical reminder of this state.

The Myth of *La Llorona* in the Film *Mama*

Zoila Clark

The old notion of the power of nature as sacred, which commonly appears in third world and native American films,¹ is now entering mainstream films in the US, such as *Star Wars* (1977-2015), *Lord of the Rings* (2001-3) *Avatar* (2009), *Shrek* (2001-2010), *Gravity* (2013), *Mama* (2013), and *Maleficent* (2014). One felicitous dimension to our globalized culture is that myths once limited to a single national reality can now enrich the understanding of our broader multicultural society. The film *Mama* (2013) provides one shining example. This Spanish-Canadian production was directed by Argentinian director, Andrés Muschietti, and produced by Mexican producer, Guillermo del Toro, and is structured around the Mexican myth of *La Llorona*, The Crying Woman of the River.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that even though the *La Llorona* myth² is never mentioned in the film, the memory of this myth is symbolized in Mama's story by making use of a syllogism: "If Mama is *La Llorona*, and *La Llorona* is Mother Nature, then Mama is Mother Nature." This myth will be analyzed using Joseph Campbell's ideas, which are based on analytical psychology together with an eco-feminist perspective.³ This perspective is informed by the principle that "what makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that non-human nature and naturism (i.e., the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues" (Warren 4). In this case, it explains the connection between the myth of *La Llorona* and the historical protagonists of the conquest and colonization of the lands of the New World.

Eco-feminism emerged in the late 1970s. It has traditionally had ties to feminist peace activism and to the feminist spirituality movement, and been immersed in copious maternalist rhetoric and imagery. Unlike earlier feminists, who considered motherhood as oppressive, eco-feminists and third world feminists of color find the connection with nature empowering because of their identification with the earth mother as the Great Goddess of all creation and transformation in nature. While the mindset that drives the rape of the earth in the name of progress or the destruction of the enemy in the name of war, "requires the ability to see oneself as entirely separate from the other, mothering requires a constant identification with another person. In anticipating a child's needs, in offering care and protection, mothers demonstrate an alternative mode of relating" (Umansky 148). This principle of bonding and interconnectedness takes the form of other-mothering and community mothering, and can be performed by men, gays, or other women who are not blood related. In the end, the power of nature supports all kinds of life. This spiritual belief in the power of nature is found in the ancient myths of all cultures, according to Joseph Campbell, and their stories point the way to a more spiritual life existence. "The revelations of the Great Goddess, mother of the universe and of us all, teach compassion for all beings. There also you come to appreciate the real sanctity of the earth itself, because it is the body of the Goddess. [...] The Goddess is within as well as without. Your body is of her body. There is in these mythologies a recognition of that kind of universal identity" (*The Power* 182).

La Llorona is a Mexican ecological myth in which the river is the Great Goddess's womb. She is the personification of nature as the Aztec dual Goddess of life and death, *Cihuacoatl*, who wailed at night warning her children, the Nahuas, about an invasion and transformed them into fish in order to save them. In this context, death is understood as a transformation and return to life on earth. The Nahuas were first conquered by the Aztecs, who "vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian America" (Anzaldúa 27), and then by the Spanish, who introduced the similarly patriarchal Christian religion. After the conquest and the imposition of Christianity, the myth of *La Llorona* is about a mestiza woman who, like the Christian Virgin, bears the name Maria. She was beautiful and proud, but she was poor. She married a man from a higher social class, one who owned of land and animals, and together they had two children. However, he would leave her alone for months at a time, and eventually married a woman from his own wealthy class. In anger, she threw her two children into

the river and then died of pain and anguish. The story goes that until this day villagers hear her crying by the rivers asking: “Where are my children?” They continue to warn children not to walk alone near the rivers lest *La Llorona* mistake them for her children (Hayes 1-22).

Since this myth continues to thrive in oral retellings, as well as plays, stories, novels, films, and other popular cultural expressions, its narrative has taken on many variations. Chicana feminists⁴ have created many empowering versions of it in such forms as stories and murals. Among these are: Sandra Cisneros’s short story *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), Gloria Anzaldúa’s fairy tale *Prietita y La Llorona* (1995), Cherrie Moraga’s play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2001), Juana Alicia’s mural La Llorona’s Sacred Waters (2004), and many more. In 2008, Domino Renee Perez published *There was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*, which analyzes more than two hundred cultural artifacts that retell the myth of *La Llorona*. Perez finds that “La Llorona serves as a kind of cultural ambassador who can bring diverse communities into conversation about the cultural, economic, political, and social issues that inform the lore” (9).

The film *Mama* (2013) is a text that numbers among the more modern variations of the tale. The myth is not explicitly mentioned because this time *La Llorona* is not just the Great Mother of the Nahuas, Aztecs, Mexicans, and Chicanos; she is now the Great Mother of all creation. “When analytical psychology speaks of the primordial image or archetype *an sich* of the Great Mother, it is referring, not to any concrete image existing in space and time, but to an inward image at work in the human psyche” (Neumann 3). Its symbolic expression is in “the figures of the Great Goddess represented in the myths and artistic creations of mankind” (3, 6). As such, the myth of *La Llorona* will help us approach the unrepresentable primordial image or archetype *an sich* that lies in the inherited unconscious mind of all beings to which Neumann refers. After all, “everything that is stated or manifested by the psyche is an expression of the nature of things” (Jung *The Earth* 82). In the film *Mama*, we may observe how the archetypal feminine of the Great Mother is brought to life through childhood consciousness and manifests itself in the child-mother connection. Only two young girls know about the existence of Mama; however, both the story’s adults and its viewers are eventually made aware of the power of Campbell’s claim that: “we need to reconnect with nature” (*The Power* 31).

Mama is *La Llorona*

The two characters that act as investigators in this film help viewers understand that Mama is *La Llorona*. Both the psychologist Dr. Dreyfuss and Annabel keep looking for clues and asking a young girl, Victoria, one question: “Who is Mama?” It is up to the viewers to read the intertexuality of this film and remember the old Mexican myth of the conquest, which, in my view, is comparable to the ghost of *La Llorona* to the extent that it crosses frontiers of time and space. *La Llorona* is the narrative of a traumatic memory that repeats itself in different versions from generation to generation by word of mouth, in literature, songs, films, and other representations of popular culture. According to Lynn Abrams, a memory is a process of remembering:

the calling up of images, stories, experiences and emotions from our past life, ordering them, placing them within a narrative or story and then telling them in a way that is shaped at least in part by our social and cultural context... Memory is not just about the individual; it is also about the community, the collective, and the nation. Memory is key to our identity; without our memory we have no social existence. We depend on our memory to conduct our daily lives. (78-79, 82)

We can deduce that the film is creating a new version of the myth of *La Llorona* insofar as the narrative contains certain key elements, the foremost of which is a parent who is separated from his or her children by death after which the orphan children are left in complete abandonment.⁵ Their father falls from grace in the social hierarchy when his company loses a lot of money in the 2008 economic crisis. When he throws a bottle of pills out of the window while driving in an early scene, we assume that he suffers from some kind of neurosis or anxiety requiring medication. His persona, or social role, is of primary importance to him, and he cannot imagine any

other kind of existence without a prestigious job and status. His world has been destroyed and his already weak and dependent nervous system is unable to withstand the pressure. He takes on the role of *La Llorona* as a killer in distress and later appears as a ghost that wants to protect the girls he tried to kill. Here, we have two connected stories in the film that contain these elements, the first of which takes place in the present. Victoria is three years old and Lili one when their distraught father, on medication, kills their mother, who was also his work partner. He also injures his male partner and decides to shoot his two daughters before committing suicide. If the spirit of Mama had not killed their father, Victoria and Lili would have been victims of femicide⁶ or gendercide,⁷ considering that the mother has already been killed.

The narrator tells us a story about violence against women: two girls being lost and the murder of their mother. Although it is not a fairy tale, it does show how reality can act as a medium for mythical stories. This narrator is a figure from the media, a radio/TV news reporter or a documentarian. After first hearing the narration through a voiceover, we are shown how the deed is accomplished later in the film. This retelling is performed through audio and audio-visual media because the new storyteller of modern times is mediated through technology. His story is continued by the film itself and in this cycle of repetition, it resembles that of *La Llorona*, but with a twist. In this 21st century transgressive version of the myth, a crying man, the father, replaces the crying woman as the figure who comes from the dead as a guilty ghost to protect his children later on.

Victoria, the older girl, learns another version of the myth of *La Llorona* from a storyteller that uses lullabies and dream images: Mama, a spirit that acts as her guardian angel. Mama tells Victoria a 19th century version of a similar story in a dream, which for us is a video of her session in hypnosis. We only listen to the story and see Victoria's mouth translating and voicing Mama's story. She is narrating orally what Mama showed her in a dream, and we will see it too when Mama shares her story with Annabel in a dream as well. The film makes it clear that even though Mama cannot produce words because she is not part of the symbolic world, she can narrate her story in images, and communicate through music and touch. Victoria sets the story in an indefinite past, as if it were a myth or fairy tale. She also connects the episodes using cause-effect logic:

It was a long time ago. A lady ran away from a hospital for sad people. She took her baby. They jumped into the water. She fell into the water, but the baby did not. She does not know what happened to her baby. She went walking in the woods, looking for it. She searched for a very long time. Then she found us.

After listening to this story, Dr. Dreyfuss visits the archives of the city and finds written records and the remains of a baby that prove Mama is the spirit of a woman called Edith Brennan. She was in the St. Gertrude Asylum, close to Douthat lake. Interestingly enough, the spirit of Mama meets the girls in a house called Helvetia, near the same lake and next to a cliff. Helvetia is the Latin name for Switzerland. This reminds us that we have kept in our memories the symbol of a woman to represent a nation's territory. The name Helvetia on the cabin door pinpoints the fact that this space is Mama's womb, a safe place where the girls will develop until they grow and enter the symbolic world of the city. However, their connection to Mama will never be broken. The roots that Lily holds onto when she sleeps act like an umbilical cord binding the past with the present and growing into the future. Our memory of Mama is a rhizome in the unconscious, the roots of a tree that continue growing because this tree is the way of life itself (Carl Jung *Four* 44). This is why there is a crack on the wall, a gateway in this countryside cabin that connects to another crack in the wall in the closet of a modern house in the city. This gateway acts like a time machine, and when Dr. Dreyfuss discovers it, Mama has to kill him to protect it. Her womb has been invaded without her blessing, and it is in danger of being objectified by scientists and maybe destroyed in the name of science and progress. As in the traditional myth of *La Llorona*, a female spirit wants to reenact killing her child, or children, in the river. However, the cycle of violence is broken because Dr. Dreyfuss and, later, Annabel are able to make the connection of cause and effect between the past and the present to understand Mama's needs. As a Native American woman with ecological consciousness⁸ says to Dr. Dreyfuss in the Archive Center, "a ghost is an emotion bent out of shape, condemned to repeat itself, time and time again, until it rights the wrong

that was done.” Mama is a ghost that seeks to make amends for past wrongdoings. She is a traumatic memory that is passed on and enacted to perpetuate the past and heal its wounds, rather like the myth of *La Llorona*, which we also need to analyze in detail. This film shows that the tales we are told as children are in part memories of real historical events. Both stories and histories are memories constructed out of facts and fiction, and when they are put into narrative, whether linguistically or visually, they are at once individual, collective, and as much a part of the past as they are part of the present.

***La Llorona* is Mother Nature**

Following Abrams, memories also define how we behave in the present; therefore, if we want to control violence in the modern world, we need to find its roots in the past. Although the Mexican myth of *La Llorona*, The Weeping Woman of the River, has been reworked in the Spanish-Canadian *Mama*, this film retains the essence of the original story. In so doing, it demonstrates how revisiting the myths and events of a past era can shed light on our understanding of the present. In this case, *Mama* suggests that the modern world’s financial crisis of 2008⁹ has its origins in the unlimited accumulation of profits through the appropriation and colonization¹⁰ of foreign lands that followed the discovery of America, Africa, and the new route to India in 15th century. The same was done in Canada in the 15th and 16th centuries, and in Australia in the following centuries, claims Vandana Shiva (23). The conquest of the Aztec Empire by the Spanish in 1520-1521 changed the worldview of Amerindians from an organic view of nature as mother earth and Goddess to a hierarchical division of humans vs. nature, which has been labeled as “split culture” by Griffin. She claims that “we are divided, [split], against ourselves. We no longer feel ourselves to be part of this earth. We regard our fellow creatures as enemies. [Our split selves forget] that like the forest we destroy, or the rivers we try to tame, we are nature (9-10). It is a delusion of power over nature. “We are possessed by an illness created by our minds, an illness that resembles sado-masochism, schizophrenia, paranoia- all the forms of the troubled soul” (Griffin 16). Plumwood uses the term “master consciousness” instead of split culture because she emphasizes that the split maintains a relationship of master to slave by using: “backgrounding or denial of dependency, radical exclusion through hyperseparation, incorporation as lack and negativity, instrumentalism or objectification, and homogenization or stereotyping” (48-53). This split or master consciousness against nature starts with the biblical myth of Genesis when man is supposed to have ruled the earth (Ruether 1993), and it is reinstated by the scientific revolution. “For science, too, told us not to trust our senses, that matter is deceptive, and that we are alien to our surroundings” (Griffin 9). Caputi proposes a counter education based on Green consciousness. Green, the life force, maintains energetic communication with all beings, and raises awareness of the profound consequences of each and every action due to the underlying interrelatedness of all that exists/ [...] Popular culture continues to serve as a continuation of ancient and/or alternative oral traditions, including these principles of Green consciousness (*Green* 40-2).

When the Spanish conquered with the sword and the Christian cross and created a New Split World against nature and its Goddesses, this traumatic epistemological change gave birth to the story of *La Llorona*, a myth that is still being retold with many modern variants, one of which now critiques the abuse of mestizo women and the pollution of rivers.¹¹ This connection between women and nature being conquered, raped, and murdered has been widely studied by Mary Daly (1978), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Jane Caputi (1993), Linda Hogan (1995), Andrea Smith (2005), among others.

Since the Spaniards conquered the Aztecs, the great Goddess was divided into many aspects that Anzaldúa calls “*Antigua, mi Diosa*, the divine within, *Coatlicue-Cihuacoatl-Tlazolteotl-Tonantzin-Coatlalopeuh-Guadalupe*-They are one (72). Moreover, Anzaldúa adds that *La Llorona* also is a combination of *Virgen de Guadalupe*, a Spanish Virgen that is Indian because she is the Great Goddess, and *La Chingada*,¹² Malinche (52), the Amerindian translator and lover of the conquistador Hernán Cortés. Malinche gave him a son, but he later deserted her and went on to marry two aristocratic Spanish women. Malinche was then forced to marry a soldier. In common with Malinche, the new land in South America stopped being *terra mater* (mother earth) to become *terra nullius* (dead or empty life for biopiracy through enclosure and marketing of all natural resources for bottled water and

soft drinks by corporations like Coca-Cola and Pepsi), [which is a post-modern conquest], according to Vandana Shiva (22-23). Third world women represent the conquered land, like Malinche. They are denied love as women and respect as mothers, and are then left to experience the abandonment and loss of their children, who forget their original culture and become assimilated by first world countries. The fact that the unrecognized son of Malinche and Cortés represents the first mestizo marked the Mexican identity with orphanhood because this mestizo's father did not marry his mother, as Octavio Paz explains in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), and "La Chingada [the abused woman] is one of the Mexican representations of Maternity, like *La Llorona* or 'the long suffering Mexican mother' [we Mexicans] celebrate on the 10th of May" (67). This celebration is also for the Mexican Goddesses who had to be buried but are remembered through the Virgin of Guadalupe, a mestizo virgin.

The story of "*La Llorona*" is clearly based on socio-economic, class, ethnic, and gender differences" (Ramírez 23). A film that retains many of the traditional version of the story is René Cardona's *La Llorona* (1960), in which the story is presented as a curse. In the 16th century in New Spain, a Spanish military man called Don Nuño de Montesclaros [of the clear mountains] falls in love with a poor Amerindian woman who was daughter of an Amerindian Princess and a Spanish Conquistador, Luisa del Carmen [of the Virgin of Carmen].¹³ He puts her in a house with the promise of marriage. Once she finds out he is to be married to a rich white creole, she goes mad and kills her two children. However, she cannot enter heaven until she finds the souls of her children, so she becomes a ghost that over generations attempts to kill other mestizo children of her bloodline while they are unwatched by their parents. As Ramírez points out, we can observe that Luisa was rejected because of her low social standing, while her ethnic identification and gender were connected with nature as a piece of land to be possessed, used, and abused. This is the story parents tell their mestizo children to protect them from danger in a classist society. *La Llorona* is a hybrid story with Christian values and a Nahua Goddess that has now become monstrous. The character of *La Llorona* herself is blamed for acting like a woman scorned because, like nature, she is supposed to be always giving and serving with no expectation of reciprocity, like *The Giving Tree* (1964) by Shel Silverstein. In most versions, *La Llorona* is clearly connected to nature because she drowns children in a river, an act which was construed as returning them to live in mother's earth womb as in *Ciualcoatl*'s myth.

In Bacchilega's study of postmodern fairy tales, we find that "a story carries us down to a narrative's shared roots with history, knowledge, and wisdom... we continually invent ourselves, because the stories we tell produce and find us in the past, and enable us to live through the present's uncertainties by projecting us into the future" (W.F.H. Nicolaisen in Bacchilega 24). Accordingly, the film *Mama* is framed as a fairy tale because children, who represent our past, are free from the split culture or master consciousness that is shaped at home when the father has control over the mother and the children, and which is reinforced by the Christian religion that demands obedience to "the law or name of the father."¹⁴ In this way, the audience can both experience the children's connection to Mama and understand the mother's love that she feels for them. Campbell defines this kind of love as Agape: "love thy neighbor as thyself-spiritual love. It does not matter who the neighbor is" (*The Power* 186). This feeling of unity with Mama and nature is contrasted with the rejection created by our visual culture that personifies Mama and the two girls as monstrous and in need of control and civilization. Similarly, the film suggests that it is Mama's love that creates a better future for the characters, who are immersed in the modern world of endless accumulation of wealth and which leads them towards self-destruction, money-making routines, and the rejection of motherhood. It is only after their encounter with Mama that characters mature and achieve individualization.¹⁵ "My self," says Carl Jung, "is not confined to my body. It extends into all the things I have made and all the things around me. Everything surrounding me is part of me [...] A community is based on personal relationships" (*The Earth* 155), which suggests there is an interconnection between all beings in our environment. This is why, in our split culture, nature/matter and spirit are yearning for each other, and love is the union of opposites symbolized in the search for the Grail, the feminine principle of the womb¹⁶ (Campbell 196-7).

Mama is Mother Nature

In order to establish that Mama is a Nature Goddess, we need to enter a mythic space which belongs to

fairy tales and dreams. “Everything begins with a story, sometimes a made up one, sometimes a true one” (*Godesses* 3), says Jane Caputi, whose sentiment is echoed at the beginning of the film when we see the words: “Once upon a time” traced on the screen in a brownish tone over a black background. The phrase appears to have been written by a child using a dirty finger. This initial detail is important because each sequence uses a different earth shade¹⁷ that colors the whole frame, and, in darkening and blurring our vision, produces a dreamlike state that permeates the film. It also establishes the story as a bedtime fairy tale whose details are initially withheld from the viewer. Instead, we hear the voice of the narrator, a radio newsreader who says he can summarize his story with one word: “panic.” Instantly, we know that this is a horror story and maybe a work of fiction. We also learn that it includes reality in the form of the financial crisis of 2008. He compares this one to two previous crises of the 1930s and 1980s, knowing that financial collapse and human want represent adults’ worst fears. As we are to see, the panic of becoming poor can make a successful businessman shoot both his partners, his estranged wife and a friend, then abduct his two daughters and kill them both before ending it all with his own suicide. This kind of rage killing has become common in our competitive capitalist world, where people believe their existence depends on their reputations and jobs.¹⁸ Some are unable to envision another way of life away from their workaholic and consumerist routines, which, as we witness in the film, seem to destroy the bonds that hold their families together. The coldness that we associate with the color blue, together with cold wintry weather, visually represents an emotional frigidity and the absence of warm family love. Only when the father lights the fire in the hearth does he seem to summon Mama’s warm loving care, and that is when we, the viewers, become aware of the dangers of living in a split culture. According to Jung, “where love is lacking, powers fill the vacuum” (*Four* 22), and when that power is taken away, the father’s world collapses.

Parallel to our real world, this film invites us to imagine another one that can be accessed through the dreamlike state it suggests. This is the world of Mama, who communicates through dreams, games, snarls, and lullabies because it is pre-symbolic. It is a world free of social pressure to succeed and accumulate wealth and fame in posterity, a world that we leave behind in early childhood. When the neurotic father survives driving off a cliff with his children in the car, we, the viewers, are afforded a glimpse of this world. Instead of crashing to their deaths, the father and daughters land near an abandoned wooden cabin in the middle of a forest surrounded by a snow plane. A statue of a wolf¹⁹ seems to look at the newcomers, and if Clarissa Pinkola Estés is right about women having the same instincts as wolves (11), then this is a sign that the characters are entering a feminine space. In fact, the cabin may be seen as a mother’s womb because within it the girls will be able to survive the cold winter and lack of love that surrounds them. Victoria, who is three years old, alerts the father to the presence of somebody inside the cabin, and, once they enter, she sees a woman outside whose feet do not touch the ground. However, her father does not pay any attention to her because he is busy making a fire and then handling the gun with which he plans to kill them. He removes Victoria’s broken glasses and makes her turn around to see a deer in order to shoot her from behind. It is at this moment that Mama, with her Melusian body of living tree roots, grabs him from behind and kills him in a deadly embrace to protect the two girls. Mama represents the embodiment of *Ciualcoatl*, Mother Earth, the clothonic Goddess that protects and nurtures children. Having saved the girls from their father, she helps them survive by feeding them with cherries. And just as the tree goddess offers an apple to Eve in pagan versions of the story, so here does Mama represent in incarnation of that ancient nature goddess before she was demonized by Christianity.

Visually, Mama is, in the words of Freud: “the dark continent” (212), a term he used to describe the sexual life of adult women. Furthermore, Mama is like a black hole in a wall with cracks around it that resemble female genitalia. This hole produces a dark moth before emitting a tangle of serpentine tree roots from which finally emerges a skinny woman that can bend like a spider and crawl like a snake.²⁰ Sometimes only her hair shows on the surface because she moves through the floor and walls, like serpents, worms and tree roots that live in earth itself. According to Carl Jung, the masculine is represented by the trunk of a tree and its roots are the maternal feminine that show the mother-child relationship (*Psicología* 135).²¹ Furthermore, one of the tree drawings of Jung’s patients looks exactly like the frightening crack on the wall with roots coming out of it which, in its resemblance to female genitalia, causes such intense feelings of attraction and repulsion in the male characters of the

film (*Psicología* 128-29). Mama's head moving under the floor and walls until we see her on the surface is also another vagina dentate image, like Medusa. It is only after she opens her mouth and gives an angry look that she petrifies the diegetic and non-diegetic viewers. More than the fear of castration, which women cannot experience, it is the space of that hole, the lack of form, the source of all creation and destruction that terrifies us. It is the fear of being swallowed, losing the self, and dying, oblivious of growth and transformation. The person who emerges from the cave is not the same as the one who entered.

Because we do not remember life in our mother's womb when we are two, nor how the Nahuas lived when they believed in *Ciualcoatl* or how other ancient societies ran their matriarchies, the film does not show the five years that Victoria and Lili spend living with Mama. This silence is filled with the drawings that the two girls did on the walls of their cabin shown as the opening credit sequence. These images resemble the first cave-dwellers' paintings of hunting in prehistoric times. The girls' drawings are photographed by Dr. Dreyfuss, who, as a scientist, wants to control nature and explain our origins with his symbolic/rational/scientific approach. He states that Mama is his real object of research. However, he can only learn more about her by studying the girls.

Because repressed memories are silenced in the civilized and symbolic realm, we have to imagine and be open to read and listen to Mama's messages and images in dreams. She shares these dreams with Victoria and Annabel, but also with us, the viewers. We need to know her story in order to understand her pain and change the pattern of violence. We also learn that the five years that Victoria and Lili spent acquiring Mama's culture are only expressed in the drawings that are shown for two minutes in the film. Other than this, we have two video recordings of Dr. Dreyfuss, who uses hypnotherapy to question Victoria about Mama; photographs; and a baby's remains. All these are objects with a story to tell and a history to be traced. What we can observe from the drawings is that the girls kept warm with wood fires, ate cherries, slept together, played with the moths, were protected from the wolves, walked both on all fours and upright, played with a doll, climbed trees, dreamed of flying, sometimes got poisoned, and learned about death by seeing animals die and become a part of nature again. This concept of death as regeneration is what both girls maintain till the end, and it becomes the elixir they bring from the past and which is offered as an avenue for salvation in a modern world bereft of any meaning save that of making profits. Although this film romanticizes our connection to Mama as mother-nature, articulated on the DVD cover in the words "a mother's love is forever," her love is not unconditional as it is in Silverstein's story of the *The Giving Tree*, where the tree mother's love and generosity, given without any thought of return, are ultimately destroyed. Mama, in contrast, is more human because she looks for reciprocity from the girls and takes vengeance on those that hurt her. She is both the memory of maternal love and the maternal pain inflicted on her. Mama is a giver of life and death symbolized in the uroboros, "the serpent which at once bears, begets, and devours" (Neumann 30).

Violence against Mama

At the beginning of this paper, a first hypothesis was presented which argued that this film is in dialog with ecofeminism because it equates violence against women with violence against nature. How did women become identified with nature rather than men? Ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood points out that Western thought has a dualistic structure that naturalizes gender, class, and race and nature oppressions, with the superior side being the one on the left:

"culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female, mind/body, master/slave, reason/matter, rationality/animality, reason/emotion, mind/spirit, freedom/necessity, universal/particular, human/nature, civilized/primitive, production/reproduction, public/private, subject/object, self/other" (43).

Susan Bordo adds to this that "the period of colonial conquest of the west from the fourteenth century onwards brings to the forth civilized / primitive as a variant of reason / nature and of reason / animal and mind / body, and the rise of science brings to the fore subject / object dualism" (Plumwood 44). Mama is identified in this film with all the elements on the right side of the list. Visually, she is like the untamed nature that colonists still strive to dominate and possess, and monstrous because such wildness lacks a defined self. Mama is dual or multiple. She is nature, female, body, slave, matter, animal, emotion, necessity, primitive,²² reproduction, private, object, and other. This explains why, for Julia Kristeva, the abject is feminine and a source of horror.²³ In becoming abject, the feminine is punished for existing as chaos threatening civilization and order. The impulse to bring

it under control is justified through dual hierarchical thinking, and it is no surprise that science typically chooses woman over man as the object of study. However, the film provides an alternative perspective in the sense that while Mama may represent a strange and frightening presence to adults, she is not abject for the girls, at least for the five years that they are under her protection. Abjection is thus exposed as a civilized construction of our split culture. Lili, in fact, is incapable of seeing Mama as abject. The final embrace of Lili and Mama at the end shows love between them. For most of the film, we observe Mama nurturing and playing with the girls; however, Victoria's glasses represent the development of a split self, and only when she removes them is she able to see Mama as a non-ajacent being. Mama is configured from the primordial archetype of the Great Mother, who tries to enter the symbolic world through its cracked walls. She is in the process of becoming tree, moth, snake, spider, human, and according to Neumann, when this happens, "she has three forms: the good, the terrible, and the good-bad mother. The good feminine and masculine elements configure the Good Mother, who, like the Terrible Mother containing the negative elements, can also emerge independently of the Great Mother who is good-bad and makes possible a union of positive and negative" (21).

It is no coincidence that before becoming a weeping woman battling conflicting emotions of love and anger like *La Llorona*, Edith Brennan had been hospitalized in Saint Gertude's Asylum, which was closed in 1878. Since she may have had a child out of wedlock, the family never claimed the baby's remains, and his bones lay in a box in the archive files of Clifton Forge Public Records Center. She is remembered as "Mad Edith Brennan," and we do not know why she became mad. Mad can be interpreted as angry or also crazy. We see her stab a nun in the heart with what looks like a knitting needle; however, if we look more closely, we can see that it is a lobotomy needle. She has clearly been an object of physical and psychological study for the scientists, who regard her as a seething vessel of emotions without thoughts. She reproduced herself but was not valued as a productive member of society because not many women were educated at that time. We see a priest and some country men running after her when she runs towards the cliff with her baby. She is both scared of and angry with religious and scientific institutions, whose respective members, in having penetrated her both sexually and surgically. This trauma is symbolically represented when, in death, she becomes associated with the threatening hole of her vagina; Mama, as Edith Brennan's ghostly alter ego, always appears through a menacing crack in the wall.

This image of the threatening vagina surfaces again in the crack that appears on the girls' bedroom wall. In this instance, the 'chasm' is placed in their closet. They are never afraid of it, but it represents a kind of Pandora's box for Annabel, who has to take care of the girls. She avoids finding out what is inside it and follows Victoria's command of "Do not open it." From the very beginning, we hear her thanking Jesus for not being pregnant, so it is clearly established that she does not want to be a mother. Annabel is scared of experiencing violence against the feminine, so she runs away from Mama when she sees her. Even Victoria, who loves the company of Mama, imitates Annabel's behavior and shares her perspective of Mama as a mad monster for a while.

It is important to observe that the film's parallel narratives signal that past violence inflicted on the Nahual Goddess has been repeated with variations in Malinche in the 16th century, in the myth of *La Llorona*, in Edith Brennan's tragic story set in the 19th century, and in Annabel, Victoria, Lily and the girls' biological mother, who is labeled as deranged in the 21st century. Thus, there is a history to the memory of being separated from the Mother Goddess, or nature, which has resulted in an impulse not only to view her as inferior, but also to control and dominate her. This creates the foundation for a split culture. In order to heal this split, the individual first has to acknowledge that he or she has created a spectral shadow self and, second, to bring that shadow into the light by assuming its characteristics because they are no longer devalued.

Mama is Annabel's Shadow

According to Plumwood, we have a dualistic structure of thought, so Mama's motherly love can only be understood by Annabel's lack of this kind of love. Throughout the film, Mama appears when Annabel is unaware of her presence because she identifies with the superior aspects that Plumwood lists on the left side. This explains why she has a tomboy look. She dresses in black as if she has killed some aspects of her feminine side. One of her

t-shirts says: ‘Misfits’ and has a skull on it. She has a split self. Mama is clearly Annabel’s shadow. (See figure 1)

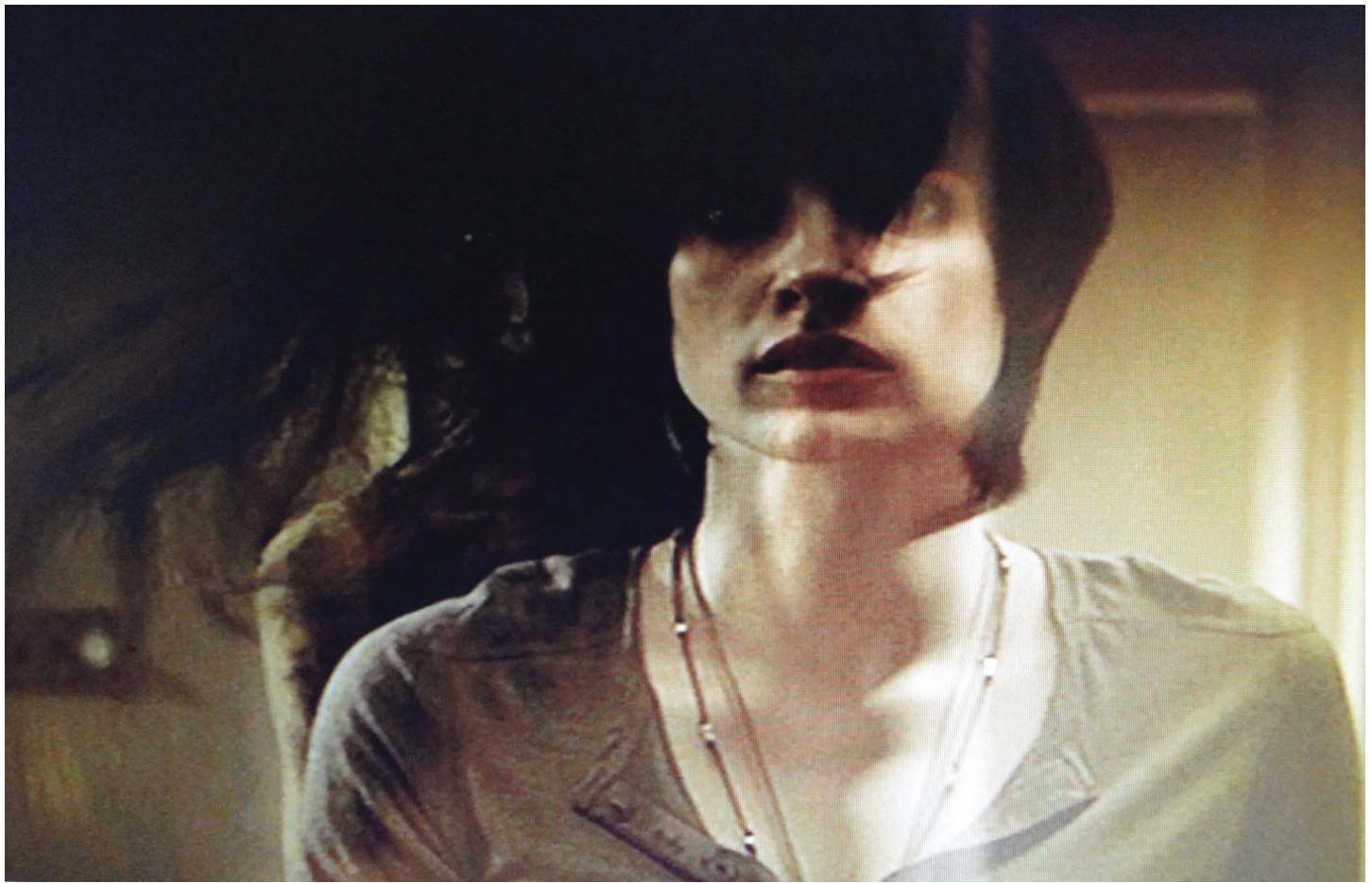


Fig. 1²⁴

Annabel belongs to the world of the living and the light, while Mama belongs to the world of the dead and the darkness, like the shadow that the sun creates with the moon. In a patriarchal culture, there is a hierarchical split between the conscious, the things we are aware of when we use reason, and the unconscious, things to which we only have access in dreams. The destroyed and denied feminine aspect that lies in our unconscious is symbolized by the moon and the snakes, animals that regenerate and experience rebirth. “The Mesoamerican Moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui, daughter of the Gorgon-like ‘Serpent Skirt’ goddess, Coatlicue, was decapitated by her brother Huitzilopochtli” (Caputi *Gossips* 162).

According to Carl Jung, Freud only deals with the repressed contents of a personal nature in a lifetime, which Jung calls the personal unconscious; however, there is also a collective unconscious²⁵ for Jung. It is collective because it is universal and inborn. It is an inherited memory of our evolution contained in archetypes, like patterns of behavior in biology. These memories come back to us in dreams, visions, myths, and fairy tales. They can become historical formulae. They also take color from the individual consciousness that connects with them (Jung *Four 3-5*). Included among them are the Mother, Father, Shadow, Spirit, and Trickster. In this film, the archetype of the mother is also the archetype of the shadow because we live in a patriarchal culture that devalues the feminine. According to Neumann, the darkness of the womb as a cave or vessel is a subterranean darkness comparable with hell and night. The Archetypal Feminine, as container, gives and holds. It contains opposites, and the world actually lives because it combines earth and heaven, night and day, death and life (44-5). This is why the archetype of the mother is the Great Mother or Mother-Goddess, which has been denied in the name of a male God that takes only the heaven, day, and light and casts away earth, night, and death on the devil or feminine

principle during the conquest of the Nahuas.²⁶

As the Shadow, Mama generally appears behind Annabel, but she also surfaces under her bed, or on top of her. Mama works as a doppelgänger. Scientist Peter Brugger notes that a doppelgänger is seen when we are “stressed, lonely, or our brain injured, or there is a tumor in it” (1). However, in myth they have always existed as they do in literature and film. Mama or *La Llorona*, emerges as the Jungian shadow, the colonized land represented by the denied female power of *Cihuacoatl* that threatens to come back to destroy European civilization and restore the order of a previous culture. This primal mother is associated with “still waters, a tree, a snake, a cave...” (Jung *Four* 15), which are all elements of nature that provide an environment for the evolution of plants, animals, and humans. In addition, she is “the loving and the terrible mother” (Jung *Four* 16) because there is no duality in her.

Mama as the Great Mother is the source of creation and transformation before things get separated from her to become something else.²⁷ Therefore, if Annabel needs to alter her psychic pattern once she moves into a house with her boyfriend to look after two children, she needs to face her shadow: Mama. We hear Annabel scream both in her nightmares and when she is awake and forced to confront Mama physically. We then hear her say to her boyfriend: “Mama is real. Dr. Dreyfuss knew it.” This is her first step in accepting the shadow, that is, her feminine side. Unlike the heroes who always embark on a journey to battle with a monster to restore order and perpetuate the split culture,²⁸ the film offers the viewer the choice of two endings. One of them deals with the archetype of rebirth or transformation through union with the primal mother, meaning that death is just a change of state. This happens when Lili²⁹ chooses to remain with Mama over the civilized family into which they were trying to acculturate her and split her consciousness. There is a scene where Lili is watching TV, and she says: “chop, chop, chop” when she sees that on the screen. Lili also eats live moths, so it is not surprising that she chooses Mama or *Cihuacoatl*, *La llorona*, because she unconsciously knows that nature is in constant and endless transformation, as in the Nahual culture. Mama’s gift of transformation and rebirth is part of our material existence, as well as our spiritual connection with her as divine nature. For Alaimo, “we are permeable, emerging beings, reliant upon the others within and outside our porous borders [connecting us with dirt, bacteria, and micro-organisms], which remind us that we are never disconnected from our environment,” (156) that is, from Mama. The second ending is ambivalent: Annabel could become a traditional mother in a patriarchal family, or she may gain her individualization as a mature subject and have the opportunity to create a new family in our culture in a way that does not require biological children. In other words, she might achieve motherhood through adoption after coming to love a child. This is the kind of other mothering that eco-feminists and third world feminists of color find empowering: motherhood by choice and as a process of creation and transformation. She is reborn as a woman that is not afraid of her strong feminine aspect, but feels empowered by it and able to mother Victoria. Maybe this is a play on words meaning that she has achieved victory in integrating her shadow self.

Conclusion

Because films use visual language, they can employ both archetypal symbols and verbal language to narrate a memory that continues to influence our lives in the present and threatens to continue in the future if we do not deal with the past. Our western civilization has created a split culture that reveals a persistent desire to gain power over nature instead of a will to love nature and all it contains. This disassociation from our roots and past compels us to create shadows to compensate for the negation of our evolutionary origins. By considering nature as monstrous, we project our own shadow on others and devalue them to the point of justifying violence against everything we regard as inferior. Mama is another name for *La Llorona* and Mother Nature, both targets of abuse through the conquest and colonization of new territories and their people. Violence against nature and violence directed at women have been connected since the Great dual Goddess of all opposites and balance was replaced and demonized by a split culture of a wholly-benevolent male God who battles against all evil to keep boundaries and identities clear through justified violence by hierarchy in duality. Annabel is a modern woman who fears the abandonment similarly experienced by The Goddess, Malinche, Edith Brennan, and the orphaned girls of her

boyfriend. Additionally, Annabel herself comes from a broken family³⁰ and seeks refuge in a band and a boyfriend who shuns responsibilities in life until he is the only one left to look after his nieces. It is important to note that these girls do not enter their foster parents' lives alone, but bring Mama with them. Finally, the mystery is solved: who is Mama? Mama is the elixir that will end the long history of violence of the modern world. Once we accept duality without hierarchy and recognize our loving connection with all beings through our constant evolution and change, we will be able to live in harmony with the nature both inside and outside us. The fact that Mama continues to nurture the girls within civilization and transforms Annabel attests to the possible integration of Mama into our lives.

Both Annabel and Lucas, her boyfriend, have shadow selves to integrate in order to become accomplished individuals or individualized subjects of change, in Jungian terms. While Annabel learns to value and assume motherhood through Mama, Lucas does the same towards fatherhood through an encounter with the ghost of his twin brother. Once they are able to connect with others through love, they are able to recover harmony and create a family. Consequently, the archetype of the mother ceases to be a shadow in their lives. The final climax shows how they manage to make peace with the memory of Mama because the mother-daughter connection is reestablished. Mama is finally reunited with Lili, and their reciprocal love unveils the Eleusinian mystery of how to accept death as rebirth. The Eleusinian Mystery of the Triple Goddess symbolizes the three stages of development in every woman. In the Greek myth, we find Kore as the young girl, who later is referred to as Persephone when she is abducted and married to Hades, ruler of the underworld, and Demeter the mother or crone, who cries for her and does not accept the separation from her daughter. Demeter, a crying woman like *La Llorona*, manages to share her daughter with Hades according to the seasons of harvest, so Persephone might be seen as Demeter's fruit. In the film *Mama*, the happy arrangement with the underworld is made easier by presenting two young girls, Lili and Victoria, instead of one, Kore. Annabel is the woman about to enter marriage, so she is the heroine paired up with Mama as her crone side or shadow. Mama is a future version of Annabel, not only because Mama is older but, in the end, Annabel becomes mother to Victoria in the world of the living, while Mama remains as Lili's mother in the world of death and transformation, making our life cycle more evident.

The fact that Lili becomes a butterfly³¹ with memory of her sister and that Victoria is able to remember her as such, shows that butterflies, trees, stones, people, and all beings are part of what we become after disintegration and regeneration in the long term. The day we remember our interconnection with the environment, we will be victorious. I share Sheila Marie Contreras' affirmation that "whites in America would be better served by the indigenous mythologies of the continent, which have the capacity to interrupt the cycle of destruction launched by Europe and Euro-America" (129). After all, the myth of *La Llorona*, now *Mama*, is a cry for justice and reconciliation. Such a cry is finding some resolution in the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in countries with indigenous and colored populations where there is memory of femicide. Let's hope that more people stop denying or escaping in fear from *La Llorona*'s memory of our historic past. Now that we know who she is, we need to step forward and deal with our past in order to move away from a split culture that produces violence. Marx was aware that a specter was haunting Europe, the specter of communism, while Derrida held that the spirit of Marx was more relevant after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 because of the West's separation from the suffering in the world. We now know that such suffering is in the archetype of *La Llorona*, the Great Mother Nature calling for us.

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Notes

1 For instance, films that focus on our connection to nature and portray women defending the land in the time of the Spanish conquests are: *Return to Aztlán* (1991), *The Other Conquest* (2000), and *Eréndira Ikikunari* (2006).

2 An analysis of myth in our postmodern world is not *passé*. It was Lévi-Strauss who recognized that myths have never been lost and that “modern science is not moving away from these [supposedly] lost things, but that it is making increasing attempts to reintegrate them in the field of scientific explanation” (5). This is clearly observed in the film *Mama* when we see a psychologist obsessed with his research about the ghost of Mama.

3 In *The Power of Myth* (1988), Joseph Campbell states that we are in need of a myth for the planet. He claims that “we have to reconnect with nature” and realize again our interdependency with it. He further suggests that this connection is both spiritual and ethical by claiming that: “to say that divinity informs the world and all things is condemned as pantheism. [However], the idea is trans-theological. It is of an undefinable, inconceivable mystery, thought of as a power, that is the source and end and supporting ground of all life and being” (*The Power* 31).

4 Some Chicana Feminists have also written social theory to analyze the problems of Mexican Americans. I use Gloria Anzaldúa’s ideas about Mexican Goddesses. Chicano identity originated in the US in the 1960s out of the Civil Rights movement against racial discrimination. This term was not very popular before that time.

5 This fear of abandonment is classified by André Green as a psychic pathology in *The Dead Mother* (1999), edited by Kohon. Interestingly enough, Julia Kristeva, points out that our whole identity is based on a necessary separation from our mothers, who represent the semiotic realm associated with poetry and music, and to identify with the father, who represents the symbolic realm associated with grammar, syntax, and rules. Jacques Lacan adds that when the child enters a mirror stage, he learns to distinguish between the self and other, forming a sense of identity distinct from his mother (Famous 1). However, this film, which is a new version of the myth of *La Llorona*, suggests a healthy reconnection with the mother and the acceptance of a feminine aspect in all of us. In this film, our fear and violence against the feminine suggest that we do not have a healthy balance between the semiotic and the symbolic.

6 For Jane Caputi and Diana E. H. Russell, “femicide is sexist terrorism that is motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women. And it includes mutilation, murder, rape, murder, battery murder, immolation of witches in Western Europe and brides and widows in India, and murder of Latin and Middle Eastern women” (Price & Sokoloff 273).

7 This is a term used in *It's a Girl* (2012), a documentary about the selective genocide of girls. In it, gendercide is defined as “the systematic extermination of a gender group.”

8 We can also notice the image of a wolf on the t-shirt of the Native American woman that defines what a ghost is to Dr. Dreyfuss. She belongs to a culture that has not forgotten the connection between nature/matter and spirit, like the Nahuas.

9 The crisis played a significant role in the failure of key businesses, declines in consumer wealth estimated in trillions of U.S. dollars, and a downturn in economic activity leading to the 2008–2012 global recession and

contributing to the European sovereign-debt crisis. (Williams 1)

10 Jane Caputi reminds us that “over 70 percent of the world’s uranium mining takes place on the traditional lands of indigenous cultures in Canada, The United States, Ecuador, Brazil, China, India, Central Asia, Siberia, and Australia, weakening environmental havoc, poisoning the land and the people, and continuing the genocide that began with colonialism” (*Gossips* 187).

11 It is interesting that a film about the Spanish conquest was made to address the problem of violence against mestizo women by privatizing water in Bolivia to give it to big foreign companies. *Even the Rain* (2010) by Icíar Bollaín ends up with friendship between a Spanish man and a Mestizo father and his daughter. Interestingly, the mother is not that friendly with the foreigner.

12 *Chingada* is an adjective that means raped, opened, taken advantage of, while the name *Malinche* was first used to refer to Hernán Cortés as Marina’s captain. It later became Marina’s name and synonymous with traitor because Cortés separated from her and her son, so her people punished her too with humiliation. *Chingada* is also Eve and the verb *chingar* means to open to and to impose superiority. Solitude started the day we got separated from the maternal (Paz 88).

13 The translation is mine.

14 This terminology has been used by Jacques Lacan in his seminar *The Psychoses* (1955–1956) to cover the role of the father in the Symbolic Order. Civilized behavior is achieved by the legislative and prohibitive function of the father and his rules. This is why Victoria is able to achieve a healthy balance by learning when to remove her glasses and when to put them on again. Mama reminds Victoria of this when she becomes scared of her and runs away saying that Mama is mad with her sister Lili.

15 For Jung, individualization is not to believe that we are separate from nature, nor our ego or persona, which he considers to be a mask we put on to fit in civilization.

16 A film that explores the symbol of the grail and the denied feminine principle through Mary Magdalene in Christianity is the *Da Vinci Code* (2006).

17 In the extras of the DVD the designer said that he used colors such as green, blue, and brown not only in the *mise-en-scène*, but also in the lenses because they were going with colors of nature. It is no accident that the sofas have flowers and there are always tree branches in Lili’s space, one of which she even holds onto as an umbilical cord that sends her to sleep.

18 According to Paul Buchheit, the growing American stress and suicide rates are also linked to unemployment and declining wealth. The rate has accelerated since the 2008 recession. (1)

19 There is an ancient connection of wolves to the feminine in our imaginary. For instance, Romulus and Remus are also twin brothers who survive by being milked by a wolf, and this is the myth of the origin of Roman Empire in our Western Civilization. Victoria and Lili are not twins; however, the myths of the origins of civilization are also myths about separation and the end of duality. The twin myth circulated among the Maya people long before the conquest, as narrated later on in the *Popol Vuh* of the 16th century.

20 Since the inception of patriarchal Christianity, the snake has represented an emblem of sin in Western culture, as well as “a symbol of the potential for self-creation. As an auto-generative act, the figurative rebuilding

of the serpent rejects a dependence on male participation in the process of creation” (Contreras 123). Therefore, it is clear that women’s dependency on men is the product of patriarchal myths that portray the snake as the diabolic symbol of sin.

21 The translation is mine.

22 It is important to remember Lévi-Strauss’s point that this term should be understood to mean without writing because one is no better than the other: “The way of thinking among people we call, usually and wrongly, ‘primitive’ – let’s describe them rather as ‘without writing,’ because I think this is really the discriminatory factor between them and us” (15).

23 Julia Kristeva theorizes this concept in her book *The Powers of Horror* (1980).

24 I took this photo with my camera.

25 When Jacques le Goff claims that collective memory in developed societies has new oral and audiovisual archives and that there is a democratization of social memory (99), he is only talking about conscious memory. However, we can observe that films like *Mama* can be seen as historical because they are trying to make a historiography with archetypal memories kept in the collective unconscious that Jung brings back to our consciousness through the study of symbols. Steve F. Anderson calls this phenomenon “visual or popular cultural historiographies” (5).

26 It is important to be aware of the fact that we can never have the same experience of the Nahuas because we belong to a different context. Moreover, our individual unconscious memory of the Mother Archetype has a personal, different color. As Maurice Halbwachs affirms, “there are hence no perceptions without recollections. But, inversely, there are no recollections which can be said to be purely interior, that is, which can be preserved only within individual memory” (168-69).

27 As great mother and goddess, Mama can create out of nothing and transform existing matter into something else.

28 Joseph Campbell studies the archetype of the hero in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*.

29 It is not that Lili chooses death over life, but she is choosing another way of living, like another culture which is no better or worse than another. In the thirties, says Benjamin Hale, “the psychologists Winthrop Kellogg and Luella Kellogg briefly raised a chimpanzee named Gua alongside their infant son, Donald. They aborted the project after nine months, because Donald seemed to be picking up more behaviors from the chimp than vice versa” (66). This may also be because the chimp was not using prohibitions like Lacan’s “law of the father” to civilize the child, but tender affection like Mama towards Victoria and Lili.

30 We hear her confess that she feels even responsible for her broken family, but that this one came already broken. Her friend suggests that she leave her boyfriend and his problems, but she stays because she loves him. Her friend laughs at her and calls her: “Ms. Sensibility.” However, if Annabel had not accepted to mother these girls, she would not have found a real connection with this new family she made for herself.

31 The butterfly is a symbol of the spirit, which is preserved in rebirth. For Jung, it’s a synonym of “the soul, that glancing, Aeolian thing, elusive as a butterfly” (*Four* 89). In Mexico and some parts of Southern California, old Mexican territory, Monarch butterflies cannot survive the cold winters of most of the United States so

they migrate south and west each autumn to escape the cold weather. The migration starts in about October or November of each year, but can start earlier if the weather turns cold sooner than that. These butterflies are seen as the souls of their ancestors, so Mexicans celebrate of the Day of the Dead in November with food and music to mark this happy reunion. The cycle of life and death is seen as natural and nobody gets scared of the sugar skulls or the bread of the dead, which represents a corpse. This is consumed to keep us alive and remind us of a communion with our past in the present. This celebration includes a tree that represents “the soul voyage to the underworld” (Romero 1).