

BREAKING FANTASTIC



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Breaking Fantastic

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CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE GÉNERO FANTÁSTICO,
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Index

Block 0

The Fantastic Genre Breaking Its Limits

Mario-Paul Martínez Fabre and Fran Mateu..... [p. 8](#)

Block I: BREAKING FANTASTIC IN CINEMA, VIDEOGAMES AND AUDIOVISUAL CULTURE

Transcending from fantastic to a new existence.

Juan Pablo Montalvo Valencia..... [p. 25](#)

***Alien* of H. R. Giger: The creation of a monster and his motive. Aesthetic and conceptual analysis of character's origins, his violence against humans and his link with the female as victim and heroine of the saga.**

Irene Torrecilla Serrano..... [p. 39](#)

The myth of Orpheus as the basis of the fantastic in american family films.

Alberto Rodríguez Gómez..... [p. 53](#)

Culture in the *Goosebumps* series: A proposal for the EFL classroom.

María Tabuenca Cuevas..... [p. 66](#)

Shaping expectations and desires: The impact of paratextual information related to horror films on their audiences.

Juan José Caballero-Molina and Javier Sanz-Aznar..... [p. 82](#)

The problematic fantasy in the «magic circle» of videogames: The case of *Dark Souls*.

Antonio Francisco Campos Méndez..... [p. 99](#)

In the escarpments of wild originariety. Myth, fantasy & dream into ideological discourse of audiovisual & literary (post) modernity.

Alejandro Arozamena..... [p. 115](#)

Block II: BREAKING FANTASTIC IN LITERATURE AND ITS TRANSVERSAL CONNECTIONS

Identity and The Fantastic in *The Spiritists of Telde*.

Virginia Martín Dávila [p. 134](#)

Borges and the archetype: Synecdochic recurrence as a creational engine.

Miguel Ángel Albújar-Escuredo..... [p. 149](#)

Future lives, virtual lives, illegal lives. How resistance to the law is normalized in two cuban futurist fictions.

Yasmin S. Portales Machado..... [p. 165](#)

***Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego*: Horror, abjection and new representations of the feminine body.**

Jesús Marín Torres and Irma Salas Sigüenza..... [p. 176](#)

Pornographic heart who claims for vengeance. Crime, theatre, comic and latin american critic in *Gustavo Ott*.

Dulce Alejandrina Galván Camacho..... [p. 192](#)

THE FANTASTIC GENRE BREAKING ITS LIMITS

Mario-Paul Martínez Fabre and Fran Mateu

When the fantastic genre is broken

Umberto Eco (1986, p. 70) said that the task of the imagination is to establish a «courageous tolerance of everything fantastic». In this way, imagining the fantastic leads us to tolerate what is placed in front of us in its different modes of artistic expression by suspending disbelief. A space where the concept of «imagination» inevitably connects with that of «image». In fact, «fantastic», in its etymological origin, comes from the Latin noun *phantasia*, which is taken, in turn, from the Greek words «appearance», «spectacle» and «image». Therefore, the fantastic can point to something that is shown or appears as a reproduction of reality, that is, as an image; or provoking a reaction of amazement, delight, horror, etc., through the show (Güemes Suárez, 2016, p. 25). For this reason, it's common to associate the fantastic with terror, when they aren't synonymous. In this sense, we can read a novel or watch a film whose plot arouses terror on an emotional level but, nevertheless, embraces a realistic and even historical context, far from the margins of the fantastic. These margins around the genre begin to break down when its origin, as *phantasia*, dialogue with other genres and arts through different nuances. There where the fantastic is interpreted as fictitious and unreal, since «the ontological weakness of the imaginary compromises art and imprisons it in the region of non-being and the lie» (Serés Guillén, 1994, p. 209).

Within these nuances offered by the fantastic, sometimes abused by the wide terminological diversity that orbits around it—such as the aforementioned terror— or the little agreement that exists regarding its fundamental parameters (Suvin, 1984, p. 57), fantastic figuration finds one of its greatest exponents in fantastic realism, where the content of the works is rationally grasp (Marchán Fiz, 1994, p. 52). It's about what we internalize in such a way that we understand that it is not real and has been transferred to the mechanics that configure the genre itself for our own delight as readers, spectators, players, etc. Regarding this delight, Blanco White (1971, pp. 214-216) reminds us that the pleasure of fictions that transport us to imaginary worlds is so natural and inherent within us that it cannot be ripped from us except with violence: it involves elements (creatures, monsters, situations, laws...) located in a fantastic environment reconciled with the imagination in a kind of *post-landscape* (Debray, 1994, p. 169). We can think, for example, of contemporary artists like Michael Hutter, so obviously influenced by Bosch, whose recreation of fantastic worlds and creatures connects closely with our subconscious to try to seduce us.



Figure 1: *The Taming of the Leviathan* (Hutter, 2015).

In this sense, through the fantastic, a symbolic and unconscious expression is given to our desires, fears and tensions (Campbell, 1959, p. 145), being in the invention of monsters and creatures of all kinds, such as Hutter's Leviathan, where has permeated the fear of the unknown or inexplicable in nature, although frequently under the substratum of bestiaries and taxonomies (Aldrovandi, 1642; Lehner and Lehner, 2004, p. 9).

However, the pre-scientific human being, in his imagination, saw the fantastic everywhere, which embodied all facets of his anxieties, for the fantastic monsters personify our pain (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p. 178). When the fantastic was established as real under the values of science, however, a new element appeared as fantastic, breaking with the parameters of reality. And this has been the case until now, because the fantastic always breaks our expectations when we believed that narratively and aesthetically everything was already told and shown. When the genre is broken, as a consequence new proposals and manifestations spring up that give rise to future visits beyond what is established, and we must also be aware that something new will always emerge that escapes the supposedly infinite frontiers of our imagination.

This compilation, entitled *Breaking Fantastic*, collects this breakdown of the «fantastic frontiers» as the very leitmotif of its publication, at the same time that it plays with the English-language expression of «breaking»¹, or taking a breakthrough turn, towards the new lands where the fantastic is rearticulated, reinterpreted and hybridized. For this, we propose two blocks of chapters, in which international authors who have participated in the edition, analyze these new phenomena of the fantastic from fields as heterogeneous as cinema, video games, or literature, or even from other spaces, in principle less predictable, such as the educational classroom or marketing processes.

¹ And that refers, also, to the well-known series *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan, 2008-2013).

Breaking Fantastic in cinema, videogames and audiovisual culture

First, in Block 1 of *Breaking Fantastic* we have focused the prominence on studies derived from cinema, video games and audiovisual culture in general. Thus, the first chapter is titled *Transcending from fantastic to a new existence*, where Juan Pablo Montalvo Valencia wonders what would happen if fiction transcended reality itself. In this sense, we find fantastic genre narratives that take place in imaginary worlds that, on several occasions, have served as an escape from the reality that human beings go through. Faced with the imperishable growth of digital technologies, the ideas that have permeated fiction can become something true (not speculative) whose doors open to a new reality. Under this aspect, the author develops an analysis in relation to several titles, such as the animated series *Serial Experiments Lain* (Nakamura, 1998) or the video game *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Aonuma, 2017), which represent different contexts and they offer realities that could transcend beyond the screen thanks to new technologies. As Montalvo Valencia assures, a future is affirmed where innovative concepts will be projected that will show, not only what has been learned so far by companies in the technological field, but also new techniques and resources will be implemented to conceive fantastic scenarios and experiences of great magnitude.

The next chapter, *Alien of H. R. Giger: The creation of a monster and his motive. Aesthetic and conceptual analysis of character's origins, his violence against humans and his link with the female as victim and heroine of the saga*, written by Irene Torrecilla Serrano, analyzes Giger's relationship with his own creation, the figure of *Alien*. The artist's biomechanics not only forged the image of one of the most popular creatures in cinema, but with it, his vision of the world, his conception of life and human existence were represented in all areas of the saga, as a cathartic reflection of his work. Giger participated in films such as *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) or *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012), leaving a legacy that, from a stylistic point of view, shows the relationship between the scenography of this saga

and his own work. As Torrecilla Serrano shows, *Alien*, more than a simple chapter in Giger's life, is a tribute to all his work and his conception of life: the end of humanity in the *Alien* saga was already devised by the artist in his *Necronomicon* (1977), whose images show a diversity of torture that seems to match the *Alien* pattern.

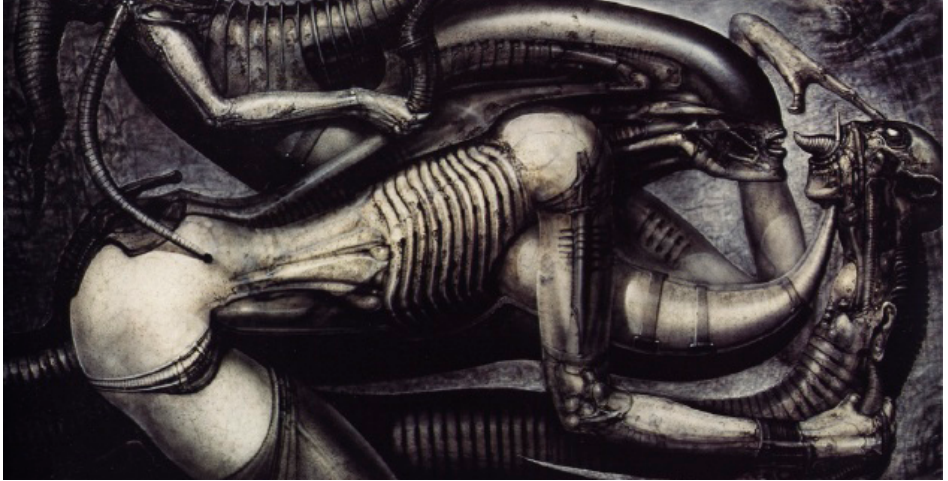


Figure 2: *Necronom V* (Giger, 1977, p. 65).

Next, in the chapter *The myth of Orpheus as the basis of the fantastic in american family films*, Alberto Rodríguez Gómez indicates that this myth, centered on the supreme power of music and the descent into the underworld to rescue the loved one, is at the basis of many widely known animated cinematographic works. For example, Disney used it in *Hercules* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1997), adapting it to a child audience, and providing a *happy ending*, through the «hero's journey» to the underworld. Years later, the same company used it in *Coco* (Adrián Molina and Lee Unkrich, 2017), where the fundamental themes are the importance of music and the journey to the world of the dead. In the *Harry Potter* (2001-2011) saga, on the other hand, this classic mark is perceived in the scene where the cerberus can only be beaten thanks to music (as Orpheus did), or in the first test of «The Triwizard Tournament»,

whose participants must travel to the bottom of the lake to rescue their most precious person. Likewise, *Corpse Bride* (Tim Burton, 2005) shows an inversion of this same myth, with one the story of a deceased young woman who must travel to the «world of the living», to take her loved one back with her. In short, Rodríguez Gómez analyzes this evolution from the original Orpheus myth, starting from the reading of literary classics, to his main contemporary cinematographic reinterpretations.

For her part, María Tabuenca Cuevas analyzes the productive intersection of terror, children's literature and culture with some of the stories in the *Goosebumps* collection, showing the need for a methodological perspective on these issues in view of their application in language teaching foreign. Thus, in her chapter entitled *Culture in the Goosebumps series: A proposal for the EFL classroom*, Tabuenca Cuevas argues that the introduction of horror books in the English classroom, as a study of a foreign language, should be seen as an attractive perspective both for the students as well as the teachers. This type of fiction also has a dual purpose: it promotes reading in the classroom and creates a cultural awareness that is an integral part of the language learning process. For this, the author refers to the novels *The Wizard of Ooze* (Stine, 2010), *The Haunted School* (Stine, 2005) and *Who's your Mummy?* (Stine, 2009), the three belonging to the *Goosebumps HorrorLand* literary collection, dealing with texts in which cultural elements can be analyzed and understood in the context of the target language. These texts, not only simultaneously attend and satisfy the tastes and interests of the students, but also allow to successfully address the concomitance of language and culture within the classroom.

Every film, beyond the story it tells, has certain intrinsic characteristics that must be made known to the potential viewer, before even the cinematographic product has been launched on the market. This is stated by Juan José Caballero-Molina and Javier Sanz-Aznar in the next chapter, under the title *Shaping expectations and desires: The impact of paratextual information related to horror films on their audiences*. It is a paratextual information that begins to be designed in the marketing plan aimed at promoting the work. Its

objective is to manage the spectator's expectations and give shape to their wishes, trying to build a claim that is as attractive as possible for them. This information, which circulates and is disseminated within the film market, is as convenient for the audience as it is useful for the commercial interests themselves, since on it rests the fortune that the product must know during its exploitation, as well as the level of gratification with the one that the promoters of the film must correspond to the public that has placed their trust in it. The chapter, under these ideas, focuses on those that are usually considered the promotional pillars required to define that effective tacit pact between industry and viewer, such as the own ascription to a specific genre (in this case, terror), the cast and the director of the film.

In his popular *Homo Ludens* (1938), Huizinga raised the idea of the «magic circle» of the game, as a first approach to the concept of «immersion», which seeks to isolate the idea of a whole in the same activity of playing. In this way, what happened in the game (entertainment, desacralization, order, disruption, etc.), remained within it, as a field of tests and fun, extrapolated to reality. Under this premise, in the chapter entitled *The problematic fantasy in the «magic circle» of videogames: The case of Dark Souls*, Antonio Francisco Campos Méndez brings together this approach by Huizinga with the dilemma on the fantastic by Todorov (1975), who expressed a balance of forces on the existence of the fantastic, situated between the wonderful and the mysterious. Connected to the idea of Huizinga's «magic circle», the chapter unravels the conception of the fantastic experience in video games according to Todorov's theory, starting from the impossibility of achieving it as there is no earthly world to refer to. To examine this approach, Campos Méndez uses the case of the video game *Dark Souls* (From Software, 2011), carrying out an aesthetic and expressive analysis of the work, as well as in relation to the player's response, considered an active part in the process.



Figure 3: *Dark Souls* (From Software, 2011).

To finish Block 1 of *Breaking Fantastic*, Alejandro Arozamena contributes his chapter *In the escarpments of wild originariety. Myth, fantasy & dream into ideological discourse of audiovisual & literary (post) modernity*. In it, the author expresses that both myth, fantasy or dream intrude certain experiences of thinking in the cliffs of a «wild originality», channeled through a phenomenological, dialectical and psychoanalytic «inhospitable communism». cinematographic variants, provides us with examples of what, since Plato, could be called «transcendental mimesis». In this sense, the dream, as an amalgamation of terror and beauty, always comes to announce the realization of what above all things we would like to be able to enunciate, but which we have never known how to live.

Breaking Fantastic in literature and its transversal connections

In Block 2 of *Breaking Fantastic* we have focused the prominence on studies derived from literature, as well as their transversal connections in the context of the culture industry and mass communication. To start, in *Identity and The Fantastic in The Spiritists of Telde*, Virginia Martín Dávila analyzes the fantastic elements present in the novel *The Spiritists*

of *Telde* ([*Las espiritistas de Telde*], León Barreto, 1981), which have as an argumentative vertex rupturistic situations with reality, starring by the genre itself, such as the ghost, the spiritist or the researcher who goes to a remote and unknown place, etc., in order to give an account of their operation, and the relationship they maintain with the concept of Canarian identity existing in the work. As Martín Dávila indicates, it is a novel that recounts the rugged ritual murder of a young woman at the hands of her mother and sisters in 1930, being a real event that shocked Canarian society, and Spanish society in general, at that time. In the fictionalization of this real event, Luis León Barreto takes as the main character a journalist who comes, forty years later, to the island in search of the truth. In this way, the novel is configured as a journey through the history of the event itself, as well as the facts and beliefs that led to the murder.

On the other hand, Miguel Ángel Albújar-Escuredo approaches the symbolism of Borges's work, widely evaluated through numerous studies, but not as a fundamental logic of his emblematic writing style, but as an essential gear of his metaphorical rhetoric. Under this aspect, in his chapter entitled *Borges and the archetype: Synecdochic recurrence as a creational engine*, Albújar-Escuredo shows that Borges' narratives always manage to place one or another archetypal form at the center of his plots, through the repeated use of the synecdoche. This rhetorical figure is built in his texts, taking precedence over narratological motives, materialist, historicist, metaphysical interpretations, etc., as the central creative element of the writer's literary production. For this purpose, the chapter reviews the stories *Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva*, *La escritura de Dios* and *El Aleph*, all collected in *El Aleph* (1957), as valid examples of Borges's writing style and fictional games.

Next, Yasmín S. Portales Machado contributes to *Breaking Fantastic* with her chapter *Future lives, virtual lives, illegal lives. How resistance to the law is normalized in two Cuban futurist fictions*, where she studies the Cuban novels *Habana Underguater* (Mota Pérez, 2010) and *Espejuelos para ver por dentro* (González, 2019). The first is an Afrofuturist cyberpunk story, in which Cuba faces the impact of climate change and the geopolitical readjustments of the Soviet victory in the Cold War. In the second novel, its author presents a dystopia disguised

as «green capitalism», where speculations about the possibility of life within the Internet and the posthuman condition are spread through religious sects and addictive video games. As Portales Machado points out, both stories coincide in a representation of the State as an entity outside of citizen control, easily corruptible and not very trustworthy. Therefore, the future life can only exist in opposition to the State or the Law. In this sense, the chapter explores the textual and narrative strategies deployed in each novel and, likewise, reflects on the coincidence between the fictions of both and the probable personal experiences of their authors in terms of resistance to the Cuban State, not for political reasons or in some way heroic, but because Cuba is a society where the systemic economic precariousness has normalized the use of paralegal or illegal methods in most spheres of daily life.

The short story anthology *Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego* (2016), by Argentine writer Mariana Enríquez, is the central axis of the penultimate chapter of this second block. Focusing on the stories *El chico sucio*, *La Hostería*, *La casa de Adela*, and the homonymous story, *Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego*, Jesús Marín Torres and Irma Salas Sigüenza start in their text, *Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego: Horror, abjection and new representations of the feminine body*, from the assumption that the female body has been built historically as the «Big Other», and that Enríquez hyperbolizes and subverts these questions through her stories. The stages of Enríquez's narratives, characterized by horror, poverty, violence and inequality, lead us to question the role played by the economic/racial/generic-gender system in the constitution of the feminine as «monstrous». As the authors affirm, Enríquez's narratives, despite their apparent sublimation of the feminine as abject, carry out a cartography of the systemic conditions that support this imaginary and, ultimately, advocate the elaboration of new figurations «in» and «about» the female body.

Finally, and to finish *Breaking Fantastic*, the author Dulce Alejandrina Galván Camacho presents her chapter *Pornographic heart who claims for vengeance. Crime, theatre, comic and latinamerican critic in Gustavo Ott*. The theatrical piece *Pornographic heart who claims for vengeance* (1995), by the Venezuelan playwright and novelist Gustavo Ott, shows how through lies, manipulation and corruption people climb

to the highest positions within the social scheme. Ott proposes a scenic *comic book* aesthetic, specifically, the one considered a traditional adolescent comedy (very famous between the 1970s and 1990s in Latin America), but, as Galván Camacho points out, overlapping the dark and black comedy, above the innocence that is kept in the infantile memory of the spectator. These emblematic characters from the comics, representative figures of Latin American moral aspirations, highlight the absurdity and cruelty behind their imposition. The work, in this sense, offers the freedom to show an exacerbated violence that is considered capable of being in constant clash with the palpable reality of society.

New proposals to break the fantastic

The selection of presented texts allows us, to a large extent, to peek into the universe —sometimes, an abyss— of the fantastic, as a disruptive genre in its creation, research and dissemination. With cinema, video games, literature, theater, comics, and all art, in a constant dialogue willing to break with our expectations about the genre, as well as to stimulate its evolution towards new contexts.

In this sense, it is worth asking ourselves what paths the fantastic will travel in the future and what ruptures will have occurred until then: What new fictional worlds will be created in the coming decades? What aesthetic and narrative representations will its *post-landscapes* project? Will creatures and monsters from our well-known fantastic imaginary wander over them? Or will it be others that have not yet been created? Any limits, including those that define the fantastic, must be broken in order to meet the new paths of expression and creativity. It's gratifying to see how, in the very essence of the fantastic, lies this primary force for rupture.

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Block I

BREAKING FANTASTIC IN CINEMA, VIDEOGAMES AND AUDIOVISUAL CULTURE



TRANSCENDING FROM FANTASTIC TO A NEW EXISTENCE

Juan Pablo Montalvo Valencia

A place where magic and science crossroads

Dreams, those that emerge from sleep and start from human being imagination, can be decoded as the expression of the desires of the subconscious. They are capable of measuring themselves with the illusions that are produced by opposite impressions or even sufferings, but which in the end are typical of dozing, typical of intimate fantasy. (Debru, 2009, p. 29). For years, men examined techniques, methodologies, to share their deep desires, anxieties, fears, joys, and everything chimerical that emerges from the infinite imagination, a virtue that gave birth to the written word and thus to literature, creative science of human culture. The magical thinking that starts from the brain to the paper, could transcend reality in various ways, breaking that barrier between the real and the unreal, creating a bond that not only get together both human and fiction, but also different people and planet cultures, through different media such as cinema, television, radio, video games and eventually being capable of transforming people's perception regard their own reality.

When *Star Wars* (1977) hits screens worldwide, viewers imagination was illuminated, and there was no way that everything they saw really came from that world, at that time the dreams that only were fiction on

people's and content producers minds, began to transcend into a new existence, all because of technical advances in the field of film making at that time, consequently, the entertainment industry moved forward exponentially; many dreams were materialized on the big screen, as well as other media that emerged and nowadays play a very important role, such as internet and video games.

1996 was a key year, video game developers put emphasis on launching products that took advantage of technical features of that generation consoles, something mandatory that video games should have was the use of polygonal graphics, however, just a few games innovated in this new way of conceiving fiction. *Super Mario 64* (1996) laid the foundations for what would come in the future, capturing three-dimensional worlds with a various environments and a fluid game play system with a frame rate that remained at 30 frames per second all the time and that, unlike of other games, it did not have loading screens because of the solid-disc technology implemented in the cartridges (Nitsche, 2008, p. 96). Nintendo's creative engineers, under the direction of Shigeru Miyamoto, were able to implement some unique features that were beginning to make a difference, such as water clarity and key objects, multiple animations and actions of the avatar and the use of a third-person camera that helps the user to direct the avatar throughout a three-dimensional space, a detail that several developers would take as a reference for its implementation in future titles.

Miyamoto always had in mind in his vision the incorporation of multiple details that would give his work a unique personality, not only on a technical level but also on a narrative level (Dewinter, 2015, p. 2). In this way, several artistic concepts from previous releases of the *Super Mario Saga* were taken to *Mario 64*, but without a doubt what gave it life was the fantastic addition of the stars power and maps exploring freedom, together to a system that allowed the video player to move as she/he wanted, being able the avatar to execute, a series of tricks or plays to solve all kinds of challenges and manage to capture the stars that were hidden in different worlds. That magic visual and sound, which captivated thousands of video players, was enhanced in another video game that was developed in parallel with *Super Mario 64*, this work was *The Legend of Zelda Ocarina of Time* (1997), also directed by Miyamoto.

A mythical legend came to life with 64-bit processing, for the first time consumers experienced a story that would take them to all corners of the kingdom of Hyrule, also granting them the freedom to search and enjoy multiple paths and secrets that the creators had hidden. The only thing that prevented Miyamoto from obtaining a level of graphic realism, were the technical features of the *Nintendo 64* (Dewinter, 2015, p. 56). Therefore, on *The Legend of Zelda* franchise last work, destined for the *Gamecube* system, he achieved this objective by virtue of a more complex graphics engine, with better lighting, amount of polygons, resolution of textures and more realistic animations that were produced with motion capture technology.

Like Miyamoto, there are other developers who seek to sell an experience that differs from vintage, who wish to sell a product that impacts and stays close to the narrative conception used in the film plane, as an example, *Silent Hill* (1999), a video game released for the *PlayStation 1* and directed by Toyama. At a narrative level, the developers contributed various elements that brought to life a cursed town located in West Virginia, using the limitations of the *PlayStation* as their advantage (Fernández, 2020, p. 12). Among the fantastic elements catch our attention, an atmosphere fog effect of that virtual place, an atmosphere that is supposed to be the outcome of firing in the coal mines of that world, but in fact it was incorporated so that the machine would carry in its memory the buildings of that mysterious town as the main avatar progressed. All of this, plus the soundtrack, main and secondary characters that appeared at key moments in the plot, as well as the implementation of puzzles and a crude gameplay system that put the video player on test all the times, brought to life an unparalleled experience in a world that was apparently open and where anyone could find their nightmares materialized in the monsters and in the multiple transformations that the place underwent, that terrifying world that seemed impossible to conceive or even imagine, came true in a machine where technically, it was also impossible to carry out this work.

Open worlds creation began to have great force, thanks to works such as: *Grand Theft Auto 3* (2001) or *The Godfather* (2006), in these worlds video players were given the opportunity to interact with environments with a lot of characters, settings and situations in a wide range, with

complex plots that last from 40 to 100 hours, and that stand out for their strong links with real life itself, incorporating references or directly cultural or historical elements, such as places, music, clothes, cars and much more (Miller, 2012, p. 120).



Figure 1: *The virtual world of Grand Theft Auto III* (Benzies, 2001).

The presence of online video games such as *Resident Evil Outbreak* (2003), *Star Wars Battlefront 2* (2005) or *Counter Strike Global Offensive* (2012), offered the consumer the experience of cooperating and competing with other users around the globe, but others like *The Sims Online* (2002) or *Second Life* (2003), offered open worlds, where users could create their own characters, interact with other people, and even create communities to carry out different activities (Sánchez, 2013, p. 64). Many kind of social synergies consolidation is the result of all this movement, this also because to features present in this type of video game, such as text and voice chat. From 2016, Sony's *PlayStation 4*, the first commercial virtual reality system in the market was introduced; the key to this advance lies in the immersion of the individual in a world, a completely different and probably inconceivable reality. In the blink of an eye, an individual takes on the role of Ethan Winters, a character who is looking for his girlfriend

who has been missing for a long time but who one day mysteriously sends a message, and after going in search of her, he finds the unimaginable, he begins to live a nightmare taken from the depths of the abyss, where different creatures seek to kill him and dwell in the house where his beloved is trapped, but the nightmare ends when the person removes the visor and returns to her/his normal reality, as such the immersion offered by Capcom in their game: *Resident Evil 7* (2017), something fantastic, the sense of immersion in a digital space came to life like never before.

All these technological, narrative and creative advances, result in a straight path, towards an unprecedented future, towards a reality that will be marked by the creators imagination, infinite minds that forge the meaning of life, of an online society, sharing ideas and theories on endless topics, in a world that is facing a pandemic that takes lives and forces human beings to lead a life in constant connection with their fellows, a life that has been the reflection of a reality that is no longer. It is time to make way and analyze some works of the wonderful multiverse of wonders, which is captured in a digital way, in search of an answer that seeks to see in the imaginary collective, the future that humanity could have with its technological advances.

The answers from the multiverse of wonders

Extraordinary worlds have come out of their creators' imagination, developers, artists of that great cosmos, fictional worlds that share a universe with other worlds and connect with each other, universes that are part of a great multiverse rich in stories of all kinds, where humanity has overturned its dreams, its deepest dreams. This imaginary collective is formed by all the contents that have come through literature, cinema, video games, animation, etc. Inside there is a large amount of information, specific scenarios that could transcend into reality itself and transform human beings lives and their environment.

Virtual reality to unite society

«VR» using could be seen as a quick solution to the pandemic crisis that society is experiencing at the time this chapter is being written; with it, the barriers of distancing could be broken as well as being able to work in a virtual environment in a fluid way, although with some limitations and that is why the systems should be improved in every way and each person should have the necessary hardware to be able to access any service that is offered through this means. In *Sword Art Online* (2012), it is stated from the beginning that humanity came to create a totally open virtual world, where all kinds of activities can be carried out, just as you were in reality itself, and even the world that this work presents is so vast and full of fantasy with goblins, skulls and other fictional beings. For all this to be possible the consciousness of the human being must be brought to such a world, transforming the person in a personalized avatar or 100% similar to real individual physical characteristics, capable of feeling all kinds of sensations, giving her/him a new meaning of virtual immersion concept. Other equal visions, but where they introduce technological systems similar to those of the present time, are found in the works: *Overlord* (2012) and *DotHack* (2004), works that place the main character and humanity, in worlds where technology thrives to a great extent, but especially where society remains interconnected thanks to virtual reality systems.

Ready Player One (2018), shaped another concept of virtual reality, because in that work, society dedicates its life to the virtual meta universe called *OASIS*. Unlike the rest of the virtual worlds of other works, this one is characterized by the inclusion of a popular culture, based on video games, comics, films that give a unique personality and that also emphasizes that the users would shape said world based on their tastes and beliefs, but not the programmers, resulting in total globalization in every sense and giving total freedom for its users to shape their dreams. This vision could be the most successful of all the previous ones, not only due to the factors of creative freedom that Cline proposes in his work, but also because of the fact of offering a technological system that breaks social barriers, easy to use and that would not put into risk the health of the end user. So far, the creation of open virtual worlds is still in development, works such as, *The Legend Of Zelda Breath of the Wild* (2017) or *Genshin Impact*

(2020), are faithful exponents of this milestone, anyway, the creation of these virtual scenarios could be the key to get to conceive purely digital beings, beings that could have in the first instance, a series of features that would differentiate them from any being in the real world, including great depth detailed skills on sci-fi film field, such as the ability to levitate, move objects with the mind and even the ability to manipulate the environment and the rules that apply to the context. By the way, the environment could be studied, the relationships between these artificial beings and even, it could be a test scenario to strengthen the autonomous learning prior to the integration of these beings to reality itself, as Kawahara's *Sword Art Online Alicization* (2019), a work in which he projects, how artificial human beings developed in a digital environment similar to reality, with the aim of becoming the first robots that would make use of an intelligence, very similar to human throughout the spectrum, despite this, that work also proposes that these beings serve in the future, in a military field, as advanced weapons that would replace humans in order to avoid losing lives, but being precise, if the lives of these new individuals would be lost, that despite being artificial, they could reflect and even feel like humans, leading to a moral dilemma, a dilemma for which humanity is not prepared.



Figure 2: The nature in *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Aonuma, 2017).

Virtual worlds for the development of artificial intelligence

The fact of conceiving something that can think on its own in a specific context, to perform a series of concrete actions, was something that a while ago was considered impossible, however, science has made it possible in a certain way, because of algorithms known as machine learning; machines can learn and develop knowledge, which would use it to fulfill certain objectives (Beunza, 2020, p. 10). Artificial intelligences studies results are not only remained in a theoretical component, since many companies have used precisely technological advance to venture into fields such as medicine or transportation and even in entertainment areas.

Artificial intelligence as a scientific discipline highlights the study of the human being in relation to the science and intelligence, computational models investigations with intelligent behaviors seek to create, from a software development with the capacity of perception, cognition and action. Artificial intelligence is no longer seen as a distant dream, it is very close and concepts in video games, anime, manga and science fiction books, little by little are becoming a fact, it would not be unreasonable to think, that in the future through machine learning algorithms, the gamers are the ones who instruct the «Non Character Players», who can fulfill various roles within the fictional adventure, and which have evolved in their construction, but they are still simply programmed intelligence. This search for the unreachable is what actually feeds the human being, under this premise, the intentions to achieve constant improvement are rectified and it is remarkable how humans seek to create alternatives that improve the experience.

Using of intelligent robots is one of the many possibilities that fiction offers, as perfect weapons of destruction, or as simple household helpers, on films like *Terminator* (1984), that apocalyptic panorama is projected, where the machines have been revealed against humanity, being in the future those who rule and try to exterminate humans. To prevent reaching these paths, the creation of new laws should be provided, which regulate the life of the

new digital beings and limit their functions, not forgetting that those would also have rights because their intelligence would be compared to the real one. By putting this type of beings as human beings equals, a future could be marked where society works and lives alongside with these electronic individuals, like to what happens in *Plastic Memories* (2015), where each citizen can own one of the androids called «Giftias», human shape robots with their own unique personality, being able to reason and solve problems just as a real being would, including mistakes they could make, leaving aside the conception of an artificial intelligence that only has the mission of performing the basic needs inside or outside the user's home.

Now, immersing oneself in that fictional world seems something not too far away, and another paradigm arises, when the intangible transcends our world, and desire materializes, becomes tangible and opens a door, which gives birth to an idea: what if the human being would deeply desire, to become totally, to transcend her/his essence completely to the fictional world? Nakamura in the work, *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998), gives a clear perspective based on this idea, because its protagonist experiences total immersion in cyberspace, a cosmos that is formed by social networks, becoming a plane that is seen as superior to the real world, by its users, resulting in a place that is seen as eternal, a perfect place, where the essence of the person is found, and is at the same time, a means to be able to transcend death and exist for eternity (Jiménez, 2018, p. 52). This philosophy aims to show the internet, as the solution to escape the limits of the physical plane, after all, Plato maintains that the idea of passing the essence to a chimerical plane was the highest task for the human being, to achieve transcendence to digital space would imply a deep study on issues that today have not been fully scientifically proven, such as the state of the soul, and life after death.



Figure 3: *Serial Experiments Lain* plot, is around cyberspace (Nakamura, 1998).

Dream for the future

Faced with a new generation of consoles and technologies for entertainment, a future is affirmed where innovative concepts will be projected that will show, not only what the developers have learned so far, but also new techniques and resources will be implemented to conceive fantastic scenarios and experiences of great magnitude; development will surely become more complex and demanding, for the creation of some works, the engineers could take around 4 to 5 years. Consumers should not have very high expectations with titles that may be promising in the future, as there is always the possibility that an experience similar to that offered by *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) on the day of its launch will always be repeated. People will continue to transcend fantasy in their own way, including it in their popular culture, cosplay, comic book conventions, music and social media, until technically, it is possible to experience that magic in first person and see it alive in a evident society and not just a mere attraction, worthy of theme parks. New stories will be born and others will very likely end, the fantastic virtual universe will continue to grow thanks to technical advances, but above all because to content creators, who dream, imagine, and

write about all those possibilities, contexts and fantastic stories that could transcend and change reality as seen in this chapter. Despite the fact that the future is always uncertain, there is no doubt that the foundations of the path towards immersion in virtual universes is formed, and it remains to be seen which paths are chosen in the development of artificial intelligence and whether it would benefit or condemn humanity in various ways, until then, it only remains to dream for the future.

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ALIEN OF H. R. GIGER: THE CREATION OF A MONSTER AND HIS MOTIVE. AESTHETIC AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER'S ORIGINS, HIS VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMANS AND HIS LINK WITH THE FEMALE AS VICTIM AND HEROINE OF THE SAGA

Irene Torrecilla Serrano

Hans Ruedi Giger and «biomechanics»

Hans Ruedi Giger (1940-2014) began exhibiting his work in 1966 in Zurich, starting his fame and with it the first reviews. Then he was related to Surrealism and to Austrian Fantastic Realism, as the expert Carlos Arenas states, alluding to «his connection with science fiction, and the influence of literature and cinema on his figurative concepts» (Arenas Orient, 2005, p. 27). Since those years, Giger was a generous artist to the public because he showed his own fears and obsessions, giving rise to a dark, even pessimistic, work. Thus, he conceives a bestiary of striking creatures that star in his macabre fantasies.

However, the word that best defines his work is «biomechanics», a term coined by the artist to identify his creations. It is about the melding of biological and mechanical, which can be reflected in settings, objects and of course living beings. Ultimately, he created a universe where natural and industrial are convergent, with its own aesthetics. «Biomechanics» becomes the way he sees the world and he reflects it in each of his works, including his designs for *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979).

H.R. Giger's Necronomicon: an apocalyptic view

Before going into his contribution to film saga, it is worth considering briefly one of his essential publications to know Giger's world: *H.R. Giger's Necronomicon* (Giger, 1977)¹. It is a compilation of his airbrush works made during the sixties, matched by some autobiographical texts that give sense to Swiss artist speech. This is one of the artist's most important publications, not only for being truly representative of his work, but also because it was his cover letter for Ridley Scott. Giger met Daniel Thomas O'Bannon in 1975, during Jodorowsky's failed project of *Dune* (previous to the David Lynch adaptation). The filmmaker was so impressed by Giger's work that he started coming up with a script, picturing one of his creatures as the main character. The artist, in the memoirs² published about his work in *Alien*, tells how O'Bannon sent him, in July 1977, a series of notes about the creature they would present and its setting. He attached there a simple sketch, where we can appreciate an egg (that must be one meter high) of an animal with an angry face coming out of it. Since then, Giger started working on the early evolutionary phases of an alien which was born from an egg and, according to O'Bannon's notes, adhered to human beings intending to hatch new eggs inside them. After submitting the early sketches and, while waiting for a reply, the artist also sent him a copy of his book *H. R. Giger's Necronomicon* (Giger, 1977) in French edition. In October that same year, the scriptwriter phoned Giger and told him enthusiastically that the Twentieth Century Fox had accepted the project and, after seeing his *Necronomicon*, they wanted him as designer: «He says my book *H. R. Giger's Necronomicon* has completely convinced the production company and the director, Ridley Scott» (Giger, 1989, p. 12).

The famous Giger «hellish publication» presented a fictional grimoire in the style of Lovecraft, showing extravagant scenes where humans were tortured or subdued by a wide range of machinery, while Satan observed them from his wired throne. There was no lack of

¹ This compendium on his apocalyptic work was reissued in 1993, adding *Alien* references. A second part was published in 1985 under the name *H.R. Giger's Necronomicon 2* (Giger, 1985).

² *Giger's Alien* (Giger, 1989).

extremely sexual or violent images, so Giger's presentation to Twentieth Century Fox was honest and consistent with his previous surrealist work.

Between the most iconic pictures of Giger's book, *The Spell IV* (1975), we find ourselves with a scene characterized by the reign by a demonic iconography, easily recognized by our culture, on an industrial stage. Satan, identified with a ram's head, is enthroned in the style of a Pantocrator³, while he penetrates from his head a woman held over him. Some snakes go across the scene, while two other women are fertilized by machines, with their heads linked by cables. All this is represented in a background full of pipes, as if the factory was the devil's home, giving a grotesque image of hell, but also a quite recognizable atmosphere for the viewer. In conclusion, this is a Christian The Last Judgement adaptation, although it's the Devil who chairs the humanity final. Giger adapts the Christian iconography in order to portray his macabre hallucinations and, therefore, gives them their places in the collective imagination.

His designs for *Alien*

The birth of a monster

Since the early meetings with the artist, his task was clear: create a monster never seen before in the cinema. But his work did not end there, because he had to devise the different evolutionary phases of this being and the atmosphere around it. Finally, Ridley Scott «required him» to give the monster an organic structure, because he wanted the viewers find it a 100% natural creature, avoiding the insect appearance, so typical in science-fiction movies. For this, he had the help of a partner who had already worked in Hollywood at other times, Carlo Rambaldi⁴.

³ Iconographic image of Almighty God, really common in Byzantine and Romanesque Art. This kind of figures leads the main places in temples between the XI-XIV centuries. In *The Spell IV* (1975), Lucifer emulates God's attitude, with the right hand raised for the blessing. Besides, both figures, Lucifer and God, are at the centre of the composition. We can find a prominent Pantocrator in the Abbatale Saint-Foy of Conques, example of French Romanesque Architecture. This similarity leads us to consider that Giger may be aware of Romanesque Sculpture and uses these references in his creations.

⁴ Before this project, Carlo Rambaldi had already worked in well-known horror and science fiction films as *King Kong* (John Guillermin, 1976) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977). Later, it could also be noted his work in *E. T.*

As O'Bannon had mentioned, the «critter» would hatch from an egg with an opening at the top. In this instance, Giger provided the necessary organic look by adding a vagina as exit door from the *face-hugger*. According to the production film crew, this reference was excessively evident, as the artist says in his memoirs about *Alien* work (quoted above):

Scott, Carroll, Dilley and Powell appear to inspect my work. I had just started to apply a texture. The lid of the egg, which in O'Bannon's sketch sprang up at a touch, I changed it into an organic, vagina-like opening. When I take off the plastic cloths in which my work is draped, there is a howl of laughter from the whole group. I had lovingly endowed this egg with an inner and outer vulva. To make it all look more organic, I filled some semi-transparent little sausages on the pink aperture.

When the gentlemen are beginning to get over it, I allow myself to ask whether they like it. Scott thinks it's top good, and Carroll too specific. He's afraid it will get them into trouble, especially in Catholic countries. Dilley would rather have something more like a flower opening. This suggestion gives me the idea of doubling the bud effect and laying the two one across the other. Once again, I can satisfy the producers myself, and the public at home and abroad. (Giger, 1989, p. 46).

Carroll and Dilley, the film producers, were the ones who didn't accept this sexual reference, while Scott was really pleased with the Swiss artist's work. It is a significant anecdote not only to understand the approach given to alien's figure, but also to be aware of what Giger's world is. He elaborated an alien morphology with several nods to human reproduction, as will be discussed later. There was an obvious connection between the director and the artist, who had understood perfectly what Scott expected of him. This was also evident when the filmmaker decided to introduce a light effect that fascinated Giger. The egg field would be surrounded by a blue atmosphere, created with a laser light that the astronaut

the Extra-Terrestrial (Steven Spielberg, 1982), *Dune* (David Lynch, 1984) or *Conan the Destroyer* (Richard Fleischer, 1984).

had to get through to approach the egg. This effect, added to a foggy environment, ended up creating a «smoky blue inferno» that Giger really appreciated (Giger, 1989, p. 48).

In the next alien evolutive phase, Hans Ruedi should devise a being who would stick to the astronaut's face and who would incubate his eggs on him, not forgetting the organic aspect reclaimed by Scott. Giger translated this into a sexual scene, where the «critter» would introduce its reproductive organ into the human's mouth. To do this, alien would have a long tail to strangle the astronaut, leaving him incapable of resistance. It is certainly another new scene typical in the Swiss artist's works, perfectly identified in his *biomechanoids*, which he started working on in 1975. There we find pictures of human beings (almost women and apparently unconscious) tortured by machines, who introduce his organs into their mouths. Once again, Giger uses part of his artistic repertoire to drive the filmic designs. In the previous case, he used vagina references to devise alien's birth, while now he incorporates phallic references to represent its reproduction. It ends up fertilizing the astronaut by means of a violent sexual and of pure submission. After a few hours' gestation time, the human being gives birth to a little alien, the *chest burster*. It is so called because of the macabre delivery, in line with the devilish Giger's ideas around birth. This «adorable creature» makes its way through the human body by biting with its little metallic teeth (a quite common texture in Giger's works). Obviously, this process ends with the progenitor's dead, after a long, bloody agony. This leads to the same thinking developed by David in *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012): destroying is necessary to create, an idea that defines the alien means of survival.

Alien's purpose is explained in this way: «abduct» the crew members to give life to the *cocoon*. Several unconscious bodies expect to be fertilized by the sexual torture mentioned about, to hatch the offspring. Human incubators are already known in Giger's imagery, specifically in the already mentioned *The Spell IV* of 1975. With all this, we can appreciate how Gigerian hell becomes reality in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979).

***Alien III*: «the superstar»**

Undoubtedly, the adult stage (called *Alien III*) was the most worrying for director and designer. Scott had already made his idea clear: he didn't want a typical monster, but something never seen in previous cinema. In short, a terrifying being like he found in Giger's *Necronomicon*. «The superstar», so called by Giger since their early meetings, caused him several design problems. It was mainly because the eye's solution did not convince either of them: «the eye section of the view is too suggestive of motor-cyclist's goggles» (Giger, 1989, p. 58). This problem is solved by two Giger's pictures, *Necronom IV* y *Necronom V* (1976), both scenes starring a male and a female alien. This last, *Necronom V*, stands out for the violence employed by the female to sexually torture a couple of minions, using her breasts as weapons. After seeing these scenes, Scott had no doubt: that was just what he wanted for Alien's adult phase. In said design, the lack of eyes should be noted, which researchers like Arenas Orient consider a clear allusion to Lovecraft's beasts, so important in Giger's work: «Lovecraft wrote about the fear of unknown, and explained terror in his stories, with creatures devoid of a defined form, monsters without eyes [...] it is the lack of identification, the lack of anthropomorphism» (Arenas Orient, 2005, p. 443).

But the most noticeable of *Alien III*, is certainly phallic references included in alien murder. Starting from its evident head shape and ending with its «tongue». One of Giger's greatest fears were toothed vaginas, as a sexual violence metaphor that disturbed him. In this case, the attacking weapon is a toothed penis, that comes out of alien's mouth to torment human beings. Sex again becomes the worst human nightmare. Finally, the clear human heredity should be noted, developed in its body shape. With all this, *Alien III* absolutely has Giger's *biomechanoid* aspect, a perfect hybrid born from «the human rib».

Women in Giger's work

Martyr and avenger

In Giger's creation, the role of women is essential in understanding his work. Having analysed his different scenes, what might seem like misogyny actually becomes empowerment. If it is not clear the artist influence in the movie's aesthetic, it should be considered as a permanent concept all along the saga. This can be noted from the beginning in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), where Ripley acquires the leading role as victim and defender of humanity. Because the human being himself, with the Weyland-Yutani company, wanted to recover the alien at all cost. Ripley, who challenged this purpose, is ignored by her partners, as well as about her suspicion around Ash. In this respect it must be mentioned that, in the plot, the woman is directly confronted with an artificial intelligence which attack her harder. This is not only a physical confrontation, but also a fight against certain misogynist attitudes, clearly noticeable in the robotic personality. A clash in the purest style of Giger, as we shall see later.

However, it is true that Ellen Ripley's character changes along the saga, given that since *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) Ridley Scott was dispensed with as director and, as consequent, Giger's influence was limited⁵, at least, until the director's return in *Prometheus* project (Ridley Scott, 2012). That is why Ripley's attitude varies depending on the film, but Giger's essence remains in this character through her continued suffering. The soul of Nostromo lieutenant is present in the called «final girls» devised by Scott for prequels, who will also choose to survival, facing the rest of the crew. All of them are victims of the prevailing sexist view in their respective spacecrafts,

⁵ James Cameron was who dispense completely with the Swiss artist. However, in *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992) the script arisen was closer to the Scott's *Alien* than Cameron's one. That is why Giger was back in that project, so he thought of having the same linkage than in Scott's film. The artist provided reportedly a series of designs which were implemented by the special effects company *Amalgamated Dynamics*. Finally, Giger was only mentioned in the film as original characters designer, and his contribution to *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992) was omitted. The situation became complicated when the film was nominated for an Oscar, in the category for Best Special Effects, when Hans Ruedi Giger, naturally, was not mentioned either.

where they are challenged at the time of decision-making. This situation is presented at the start of each film, in Ripley's case, since the moment she refuses Kane's entry in the spacecraft. Then, she is treated as unempathetic and «hysterical person» (two common aspects in female stereotypes). On the other hand, Elisabeth Shaw in *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012) stars in a confrontation scene with the expedition geologist. Shaw gives an order, as the research superior, and this staff member stands up to her in an overly aggressive attitude. In the scene, Fifield shows his height and strength in front of Naoomi Rapace's character, to prove his male superiority. Thirdly, analysing the case of *Alien: Covenant* (Ridley Scott, 2017), Daniels is underestimated by the crew when she considers it is not safe to explore a planet, they have no record of. In such situation, her colleagues attribute her lack of judgement to being recently widowed, thereby questioning her professionalism.

As seen in these brief examples, the three women are confronted with both their colleagues and the alien murder, which leaves them wondering who the real enemy is. They are challenged by their gender; they start from a social disadvantage which the viewer empathizes with. Since this starting point, they walk a path of hardship and suffering, submitted by the *Alien*. It attacks them with sexual violent attitudes, like in Giger's work. Another aspect that should be considered is the portrayal of motherhood, especially in Shaw's story. She has a personal trauma about it, she cannot be a mother and therefore she feels undervalued and despised, as if she has no worth as a woman. Although later she gets pregnant, the foetus is not human, so she decides to give herself a caesarean section. Consequently, it shows a wonderful gore scene, marked by the rejection of motherhood. It is one of the topics addressed by Giger with his «atomic children» or «bullet-children». With them, the artist transmits a negative image around pregnancy and childbirth, representing deformed or armed children, within a socially critical argument.

Women devised by Scott agree with Giger's proposal in their fighting and vengeful spirit. They take the lead and lose their apparent weaknesses to confront the Xenomorph, assuming the role of humanity's protectors, but also like independent women that care for their own survival. They should defend against a hate-filled devil, who test their strength and value, and who is finally embodied in *Alien*.

«Beauty and the beast»

Besides alien, there's another saga's enemy who stands out and is joined to make «final girls» life impossible. We refer to different artificial intelligence carriers who follow the crew in the various missions. Firstly, Ripley had a confrontation with Ash, as mentioned above. This plot must have convinced Scott who, after deciding to redirect the saga, exploits it in the incredible prequels. However, in this case, the artificial being becomes a more remarkable character and it is closer to Giger's work than could be imagined. David ends up being the missing piece in knowing devilish alien's origins, and its link with saga's women illustrates his role in the story.

It should be emphasized that it is a character which connects directly with Hans Ruedi Giger's creations, since its psychology, evolution and its relationship with Shaw and Daniels fit perfectly with Giger's topic of «beauty and the beast». A definition developed by several researchers that reflects that part of the artist's imagery, where woman as human reference (a beauty stereotype quite common in Giger's work) establishes violent contact with a threatening artificial being with defaced traits (Arenas Orient, 2005, pp. 525 y 526). This is demonstrated in the interactions between David and female protagonists of *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (Ridley Scott, 2017). The artificial character seems to love and hate them in equal measure, with an evident toxic behaviour. David is so attracted by Shaw that he wipes out the scientist's partner. Later, he assumes the role of protective father in Rapace's false pregnancy, which makes her reject him completely. Nevertheless, at the end of the movie, she feels a certain connection with David, acquiring the victim role, subjected by a male ego that cheats and controls her. These positions are identified in the second prequel, when David talks about its relationship with Shaw. He defines it as unconditional love but ends up murdering her when she objects his decisions. Fassbender's character aimed to make her a queen, the mother of all his creatures, showing a controlling and psychopathic attitude. After his failure with Shaw, David finds this maternal prospect in Daniels, thanks to Walter's intervention. This time, he does not try to convince her, but he acts with direct violence, showing openly his misogynistic character. He is especially obsessed with Daniels, as with

Shaw, because they are both strong and independent women. David believes that their early widowhood (and the consequent emotional weakness) would make his submission easier. Following this line, his condition is evidenced when David fights against Katherine Waterson's character: he tries to kiss her, adding a nasty remark. In fact, David wants to possess her, he wants to be human. He does not understand how, being more perfect than human beings, he has no capacity to reproduce. Therefore, he channels his hatred towards women, as icon of fertility. It could be concluded that his psychopathy is provoked by sexual impotency, that denies him his greatest wish (to create life), and that is translated into an uncontrolled misogyny.

***Alien: Isolation* and the infernal representation**

The last adaptations of the saga in videogames world have had a large continuity. The Xenomorphs were developed in this industry since the eighties, when they appeared adapted to Atari 2600. In the nineties, they were popularised in video arcade games. Finally they were spread in PC, Sega Saturn and PlayStation as *Alien Trilogy* (Probe Entertainment, 1996). In 2011, the saga left the first-person shooter genre, showing more complex plot. Among these games, the most remarkable is *Alien: Isolation* (The Creative Assembly, 2014), which is the closest representation to the Ridley Scott's films. Picking up the trail of *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012), *Alien: Isolation* bets on survival horror, attached with the original film. In the game we follow Amanda, Weiland-Yutani's engineer and Ellen Ripley's daughter, who travel to the space station called Sevastopol. She hopes to find traces of her mother's whereabouts. When she arrives, she discovers that the communications in the space station were down and the humans were fighting for their lives. The guilty is a creature who travels in the *Anesidora*, the ship that comes from the same planet of captain Dallas' team. Moreover it takes action Seegsons, a company who produces artificial intelligences. These AI droids don't work properly and attack humans. As we have seen before, *Alien* plays the role of Satan in a Last Judgement scene, watching how the human creation revolves against us. With *Alien: Isolation* we can appreciate the Giger's conceptual design in *The Spell IV*, because

we find out thanks to APOLLO (the AI station's controller) that there is an order given by Weyland-Yutani in order to protect the Xenomorph, causing the massacre.

The success of *Alien: Isolation* is due to the emotional revival of the original film, given that it is closer to space horror than the action genre. Besides the video game is quite similar to Scott and Giger's work. However, it increases the horror sensation «whit this element known us “interaction”» (Darley, 2002, p. 60).

Conclusions

Hans Ruedi Giger worked actively for both *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) and *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012), and he would have done for *Alien: Covenant* (Ridley Scott, 2017), but he died in 2014, leaving an unquestionable legacy. From the stylistic point of view, there is an indisputable relationship between this saga's stage design and his work. From the conceptual one, Scott's introduction of David's character makes the biomechanical origin of alien evident. In conclusion, the saga's real psycho is, after all, a human creation. Therefore, human arrogance and wickedness augur the end of the own species. As we can see in subsequent production us *Alien: Isolation* (The Creative Assembly, 2014).

Having analysed the artist contributions to Scott's films, on both the aesthetic and content plan, it could be considered that *Alien*, more than a simple chapter of his story, is a tribute to all his work and his conception of life. As proof of that, the end of humanity in Alien's saga was already devised by the artist in *Giger's Necronomicon* (Giger, 1977). Movies express Giger's apocalyptic concept, where human creations turn against their own species. Technology ends up taking revenge on humanity: that is David's main purpose. An organic monster, created by an artificial mind, that search women for the reproductive capacity which he lacks.

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THE MYTH OF ORPHEUS AS THE BASIS OF THE FANTASTIC IN AMERICAN FAMILY FILMS

Alberto Rodríguez Gómez

Introduction

When we think of *fantasy*, the first things that usually come to mind are huge dragons flying over medieval kingdoms, powerful sorcerers with some magical instrument or young high school students destined for marvelous great feats.

The presence of all kinds of supernatural¹ elements has created a genre that has become very popular during the 20th and 21st centuries. However, throughout the history of humanity, these elements can be found, to a greater or lesser extent, in fictional productions, and one of the civilizations that has used them the most to define its cultural identity is the Greco-Latin, through myths.

A myth is a marvelous narration situated outside of historical time and starring characters of a divine or heroic nature (RAE, 2020), and one of its main features is that it contains some «marvelous» element, understood as «supernatural» (see note 1), as the definition explains. The existence of such elements and the great importance

¹ We use this term with the same meaning as David Roas (2001, p. 8). We will not address here the distinction between the different types of «supernatural» fiction (the marvelous, the uncanny, the fantastic...). To go deeper into this, see the works of Tzvetan Todorov and David Roas.

these narratives had for Greco-Latin society made mythological stories transcend later times, up to the present and they have been configured to be the basis of a large number of works of fantastic fiction, among other cultural productions. It is not unusual today to find numerous books, films or series of this genre whose arguments are based on Greco-Latin myths or contain references to some of them.

The myth that concerns us in this research is Orpheus and Eurydice. This is one of the darkest and most loaded with symbolism of all that Hellenic mythology records. According to the sources, it was developed mainly as a literary theme in the Alexandrian era and we can find the most complete and famous versions of it in Virgil's book IV of the *Georgics* and Ovid's books X and XI of *Metamorphoses*. Orpheus, who is married to the nymph Eurydice, is presented as the singer par excellence, the musician and the poet. He plays the lyre and the zither (Grimal, 1989, pp. 391-392). All versions of the story differ in some respects, but they mostly agree on the following plot:

[Eurídice] fue mordida por una serpiente. [...] Muerta Eurídice, Orfeo la lloró y, desesperado, no vaciló en descender a los Infiernos en su busca. Supo conmover a las divinidades infernales con sus cantos y le fue permitido volver a llevársela a la tierra, pero con la condición de no intentar mirarla antes de haber salido a la luz del sol. Eurídice lo seguía por el camino de regreso, y estaban los dos a punto de dejar el mundo infernal cuando Orfeo, no pudiendo resistir el deseo de verla de nuevo, se volvió. Inmediatamente, una fuerza irresistible arrastró otra vez a Eurídice a los Infiernos, y Orfeo hubo de regresar solo a la tierra.

[[Eurydice] was bitten by a snake. [...] Eurydice dead, Orpheus wept for her and, in despair, did not hesitate to descend to Hell in search of her. He knew how to move the infernal divinities with her songs and he was allowed to take her back to earth, but with the condition he must not look at her before having come out into the sunlight. Eurydice was following him on the way back, and they were both about to leave the infernal world when Orpheus, unable to resist the desire to see her again, turned. Immediately, an irresistible force dragged Eurydice back to Hell, and Orpheus had to return to earth alone] (Grimal, 1989, p. 184).

In myth criticism, one of the fundamental concepts is *motif*: a characteristic feature which is repeated in a work or in a group of them (RAE, 2020). There are two main motifs created by the myth of Orpheus:

- Journey to the underworld (*katabasis*) to rescue the loved one.
- Music as an omnipotent gift: in most versions, Orpheus was the son of the muse Calliope and knew how to sing songs so sweet that beasts followed him, plants and trees leaned towards him, and softened the character of the most surly men (Grimal, 1989, p. 391). That gift allows him to break through the underworld –by putting Cerberus to sleep, among other achievements– and reach Eurydice:

Con los acentos de su lira encanta no solo a los monstruos del Tártaro, sino incluso a los dioses infernales. Los poetas rivalizan en imaginación para describir los efectos de esta música divina: la rueda de Ixión deja de girar; la roca de Sísifo queda en equilibrio; Tántalo olvida su hambre y su sed, etc. Hasta las mismas Danaides dejan de llenar su tonel sin fondo. [With the sounds of his lyre he enchants not only the monsters of Tartarus, but even the infernal gods. Poets compete in imagination to describe the effects of this divine music: the wheel of Ixion stops turning; the rock of Sisyphus remains balanced; Tantalus forgets his hunger and his thirst... Even the Danaides stop filling their bottomless barrel] (Grimal, 1989, p. 391).

Mythical motifs are present in the culture of all nations, emptied of their values and functions, but preserved by their epic or fantastic qualities (Amador, 1999, p. 74). The two motifs of the myth of Orpheus previously explained appear in numerous artistic productions –literary, pictorial, musical, cinematographic...– throughout history. In this work, we are going to show how they have been used as a basis for the configuration of the fantastic component in some internationally popular American family films, which are those aimed at audiences of all ages². The choice of this type of films is based on our belief of the contempt

² Hence in this chapter we talk about *family* films, not *children's* films.

that these cinematographic works have traditionally suffered due to the simple fact of being considered «for children» and on the intention of bringing to light the interesting cultural components they contain, which endow these films with great narrative and artistic quality.

There are five works selected for the analysis: two of them belonging to the *Harry Potter* saga –*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's stone* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*–, *Hercules*, *Corpse Bride* and *Coco*.

1. The *Harry Potter* saga

This saga was written by J. K. Rowling, and the first work, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published as a book in 1997 and released as a film in 2001. In it, there is a clear reference to the myth of Orpheus around the character of Fluffy. Fluffy, like Cerberus, is a giant three-headed dog that guards a secret trapdoor. The main characters of the narrative, Harry, Ron and Hermione, must go through the trapdoor, for which they have to put Fluffy to sleep. They achieve this with music, and here we can see perfectly reflected the motif of Orpheus defeating Cerberus in the same way, with the difference that, in *Harry Potter*, the lyre has been replaced by another instrument. In the case of the book, both a flute and a harp appear, but in the case of the film, only the harp is used, an instrument that bears more resemblance to the lyre:

“What’s that at its feet?” Hermione whispered.

“Looks like a harp,” said Ron. “Snape must have left it there.”

“It must wake up the moment you stop playing,” said Harry. “Well, here goes...”

He put Hagrid’s flute to his lips and blew. It wasn’t really a tune, but from the first note the beast’s eyes began to droop. Harry hardly drew breath. Slowly, the dog’s growls ceased — it tottered on its paws and fell to its knees, then it slumped to the ground, fast asleep (Rowling, 1997).

Fluffy is the guardian of a trapdoor that leads to an underground space, just as Cerberus guarded the entrance to the underworld, also considered subterranean in classical mythology, like Hell in the Christian

religion. For this reason, Harry, Ron and Hermione's descent through the trapdoor, after defeating the dog, has a close parallel with Orpheus' search for Eurydice, so it can be considered a symbolic katabasis.

We find something similar in the fourth work of the saga, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, published in 2000 and cinematised 2005. The second event of the Triwizard Tournament that Harry has to overcome consists of diving into the depths of a huge lake, retrieve the person he «will sorely miss» and bring them back to the surface. As can be seen, there is a great similarity between this story and the myth, since in both there is some kind of descent to rescue the loved one. In the case of *Harry Potter*, there is again a symbolic katabasis into the underworld: the Greek world of the dead has been replaced by a lake, and the souls of the deceased, by unconscious people.

Another aspect that increases the similarity between the two narratives is the description of the bottom of the lake in the book, and the way it is shown in the film: its depth is emphasized, and it appears as a mysterious, dark and sinister place, similar to how the underworld was conceived in Greek mythology:

He had soon swum so far into the lake that he could no longer see the bottom. He flipped over, and dived into its depths.

Silence pressed upon his ears as he soared over a strange, dark, foggy landscape. [...] new scenes seemed to loom suddenly out of the oncoming darkness: forests of rippling, tangled black weed, wide plains of mud littered with dull, glimmering stones. He swam deeper and deeper, out towards the middle of the lake, his eyes wide, staring through the eerily grey-lit water around him to the shadows beyond, where the water became opaque (Rowling, 2000, pp. 429-430).

2. *Hercules*

This animated film, created by the Walt Disney company and released in 1997, uses the myth of Orpheus combined with Hercules' –or Heracles, in Greek mythology– to modify the ending of the latter and adapt it to children. The original story of the hero, apart from the differences that may exist in each version, is as follows:

El rey de Tebas, Creonte, [...] le dio en matrimonio [a Heracles] a su hija mayor, Mégara [...]. Mégara tuvo varios hijos del héroe [...]. Pero muy pronto Heracles dio muerte a sus hijos y a dos de los que había tenido Ifigenes. [...] Esta serie de asesinatos es explicada generalmente por un acceso de locura que le envió Hera.

[The king of Thebes, Creon, [...] gave in marriage [to Heracles] his eldest daughter, Megara [...]. Megara had several sons of the hero [...]. But very soon Heracles killed his children and two of those who had Iphigeneas. [...] This series of murders is commonly explained by a fit of madness sent by Hera] (Grimal, 1989, p. 241).

Generally, this event is considered the reason why Heracles performed the famous twelve works: as an expiation for the crimes committed. Regarding Megara, many versions of the myth affirm that she also died at the hands of her husband, but this is something much discussed among mythographers (Grimal, 1989, p. 339).

However, it is precisely around Megara's death where Disney inserts the myth of Orpheus. In the film, a blow kills the girl, and Hercules, like Orpheus, descends to the underworld and tries to convince Hades to allow him to take her soul back to the world of the living. Hades agrees, thinking that Hercules will die in the attempt, which does not happen because the hero becomes a God after performing such a brave action, so he can take Megara's soul to the surface and bring her to life. Therefore, although in this version of the Orpheus myth there is also a katabasis and a rescue of the deceased beloved, the ending, unlike in the two original myths, is happy, something characteristic of family films.

3. *Corpse Bride*

This film was directed by Tim Burton and Mike Johnson, and released in 2005. Although the story is based on a 19th century European folk tale written by Leo Tolstoy (Figuero, 2012, p. 196), there are several aspects of the work closely related to the myth of Orpheus.

The main plot is that Victor, a young man from a bourgeois family in Victorian times, is forced to marry Victoria, a daughter of ruined

aristocrats. By mistake, the boy ends up married to the living corpse of a murdered girl, Emily, who takes him with her to the world of the dead.

As in the myth, the topic of the journey between the two worlds is present throughout the whole narrative, although the story of *Corpse Bride* works the other way around (Figuero, 2012, p. 202): Emily travels from the underworld to the world of the living (*anabasis*) to take her loved one with her to the world of the dead. However, the world of the living is represented with grayish colours, and robotic and repetitive movements, and the characters appear to be constantly unhappy, whereas the world of the dead is a «very alive» world, full of joy, music and colour. Therefore, we see the values of both worlds reversed, so the journey is, from the symbolic point of view, from the world of the «dead» to the «living», thus, once again, we are in the presence of a symbolic katabasis.

The scene in the film where Victor travels to the underworld for the second time is profoundly similar to the second «death» of Eurydice, when Orpheus breaches the condition imposed by Hades and she is permanently separated from him. This scene in the myth is described by Ovid and Virgil in a very specific way:

Y no estaban lejos del límite de la tierra de arriba: aquí, temiendo que le faltaran las fuerzas y deseoso de verla, el enamorado volvió los ojos; y al punto ella cayó hacia atrás y, tendiendo los brazos y luchando por ser cogida y por coger, la desgraciada nada agarra a no ser el aire que se retira.

[And they were not far from the limit of the land above: here, fearing that his strength would fail and eager to see her, the lover turned his eyes; and at once she fell backwards and, stretching out her arms and struggling to be caught and to catch, the wretch grasps nothing but the air that withdraws] (Ovid, 2001, p. 555).

Por tres veces se dejó oír un sordo ruido sobre el lago del Averno. Y ella: «[...] He aquí que por segunda vez los hados crueles me llaman atrás y el sueño cubre mis flotantes ojos. Adiós ya; soy llevada envuelta en las sombras de la inmensa noche, hacia ti, tendiendo, ¡ay! ya no tuya, mis impotentes manos».

Dijo y rápidamente desapareció de su vista en dirección contraria, [...] ni en adelante vio ya más de él, que en vano intentaba apresar las sombras y decirle muchas cosas.

[Three times a dull noise was heard over the lake of Avernus. And she: «[...] Behold, for the second time the cruel fates call me back and the dream covers my floating eyes. Goodbye already: I am taken wrapped in the shadows of the immense night, towards you, stretching out, oh! no longer yours, my impotent hands».

She said, and quickly disappeared from his sight in the opposite direction, [...] nor did she see any more of him, who in vain tried to catch the shadows and tell her many things] (Virgil, 1990, pp. 381-382).

Both authors speak of a force that drags Eurydice backwards, and, in the two versions, the lovers are represented extending their hands towards each other trying to hold on in vain. In the aforementioned scene of the film, this event is recreated in a very similar way: Emily grabs Victor and drags him back, away from Victoria, and the two lovers extend their hands towards each other. In addition, as in Virgil's narration, the environment favours the dramatic climate of the situation: when Victor begins the descent, lightning and thunder appear, and numerous crows pounce on him.

Another aspect that relates the myth to this cinematographic work is the importance of music. In a world where Victor feels out of place, a stranger, an «outsider», according to Javier Figuero (2012), his only way of escape is music, specifically the piano, for which, like Orfeo with the lyre, the boy has a great talent, something that contrasts with the clumsiness he shows in other situations. Music is shown as a liberating element, and it is present in several important moments for Victor. For example, he meets Victoria while he is playing the piano; and, in the scene where Emily is angry with him, the boy plays a piano duet with her, which makes the negative feelings disappear and she reconciles with him. Here we see, in addition to the liberating role, a purifying function. Music is capable of influencing human emotions and «softening» them, just as Orpheus achieved with his singing.

4. *Coco*

This film, produced by Walt Disney and Pixar, and released in 2017, is undoubtedly the one that has the most connections with the myth of Orpheus, which appears fused with the Mexican tradition of the Day of the Dead.

The story is about Miguel, descendant of a family with a long tradition in the manufacture of shoes, who has a passion for the guitar, and dreams of succeeding in the world of music, as did his deceased idol, the popular singer Ernesto de la Cruz. On the Day of the Dead, by mistake, Miguel travels to the underworld, and sets out on a journey through it in search of Ernesto to get his blessing, so that the child is able to return to the world of the living and dedicate himself to music.

The whole plot revolves around the two main motifs of the myth of Orpheus:

- Importance of music: Orpheus' lyre has been replaced by the guitar –also a string instrument–, which is Miguel's passion, talent and what inspires him the most. Music is represented as a profoundly powerful element capable of influencing human emotions. For example, about Ernesto de la Cruz it is said that «when he played his music, he made people fall in love with him», and Ernesto himself says: «Never underestimate the power of music».
- Journey to the world of the dead: Miguel makes two trips to the underworld and the justification for this lies in the setting of the story on the Mexican Day of the Dead. The film explains that, according to tradition, that day both worlds are connected and the deceased can go to the world of the living if they have put a picture of them on the altar.

Both motifs are combined throughout the film to produce situations that present a great parallel with the Greek myth. There are three main ones:

First of all, music is the key to entering the underworld. The reason Miguel unintentionally arrived in it is that he stole the guitar from

Ernesto de la Cruz's mausoleum. When he played it, he immediately appeared in the other world, so that act allowed the child to start his journey, just as Orpheus could do thanks to his lyre and his singing.

Secondly, the first time that Miguel returns to the world of the living, he does it under the condition of never playing music again. However, as soon as he has the chance, he breaches the requirement and immediately goes back to the world of the dead. This event is related to the part of the myth when Orpheus breaks the condition of not looking back, with the consequent return of Eurydice to the depths of the underworld.

Thirdly, Miguel manages to make his way through the world of the dead and overcome all the obstacles that arise thanks to his skills with the guitar: this is how he manages, for example, to meet and talk to Ernesto de la Cruz, as Orpheus did with Hades.

In this film, in addition to the myth of Orpheus, there is an interesting literary reference worth comment: the only living being that accompanies Miguel through the world of the dead is his dog Dante. By using that name, it makes reference to Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, where the main character, Dante himself, goes on a journey through the underworld—just like Miguel—, guided by Virgil's spirit. In turn, *Coco* shows Dante become Michael's guide through the world of the dead, in a symbolic way, thanks to the figure of the dog. This symbol turns real when, at the end of the story, the dog transforms into an *alebrije*, an animal spirit which acts as a guide for the deceased.

Conclusions

Throughout this work, we have shown the deep mark that the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, one of the most famous in Greco-Roman mythology, has had on the creation of some American family films, such as the *Harry Potter* saga, *Hercules*, *Corpse Bride* and *Coco*.

These films do not recreate the myth directly, as can happen with works of another artistic nature. They use the two fundamental motifs—music and the journey to the world of the dead—to create the fantastic element in different ways: «embedding» it in another myth, as in *Hercules*; reversing it, as in *Corpse Bride*; merging it with

other cultures, as in *Coco*; or serving as inspiration for the creation of fantastic events and creatures, as in *Harry Potter*.

Productions of this kind are a tribute to one of the most culturally fruitful civilizations in all of human history: the Greco-Latin. It is admirable how a myth created thousands of years ago is still present and with great artistic productivity in today's society.

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe how artistic creations that are usually undervalued and are not usually the object of academic study, can have such an important cultural base. We consider, after the analysis presented, said base endows them with great quality and cultural interest, not only because of the references they contain, but also because of the use they make of universal archetypes to transmit ideas and messages that can reach both children and adults.

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CULTURE IN THE *GOOSEBUMPS* SERIES: A PROPOSAL FOR THE EFL CLASSROOM

María Tabuenca Cuevas

Introduction

Much has been said about horror books written especially for tweens and teens that have flourished on the market since the 1980's (McCort, 2016). This genre classification of horror encompasses a wide range of texts including teen/tween horror books, and horror fiction serials. A specific example, the *Goosebumps* series by L. Stine, has sold over 400 million books making it one of the most popular series of all time. The series has been translated into Japanese, Italian, Hebrew and a total of sixty novels have been translated into Spanish under the name *Pesadillas* in Spain and *Escalofríos* in South America. However, this series has been the focus of criticism, not only by parents but also by teachers and librarians, as a negative influence on young minds (Nodelman, 1997). In some cases, it is said that the inferiority of the genre in horror books for children can be considered second rate «campy, pulpy or trite» (McCort, 2016, p. 8), but this stands in sharp contrast to the popularity of the genre «and zeal displayed by many of the readers of texts so often marginalized and worry-inducing:...vampire stories, horror novels, dystopian fiction and fantasy» (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016) and the recommendations that children should read books that «engage their interests and satisfy their curiosity, preferences and needs» (Kowalewski, 2016, p. 220).

The need to foster reading in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom is a challenge that can be even greater than expected as language obstacles can be coupled with cultural issues that can further obscure meaning in the text. As learning language and culture are inseparable¹ (Attinasi & Friedrich, 1995), the use of popular literature with clear cultural references can be used to motivate students to read. Three books from the *Goosebumps* series: *Who's your Mummy?*, *The Wizard of Ooze* and *The Haunted School* will be analysed to identify the cultural references which include institutions, leisure activities and traditions (among others) that can be used in the foreign language classroom to foster language learning through reading. These implicit cultural components reveal stereotypes and cultural values, beliefs and attitudes that should be analysed as part of the language learning process to increase reader motivation, interest and cultural awareness. This analysis will provide an intersection of the horror genre, children's literature and culture which will show a need for a methodological perspective on these issues for use in the EFL classroom.

Why do tweens/teens read horror novels?

The horror genre may not seem a priori an easy choice for the English classroom in Primary Education nevertheless, horror fiction for tweens, according to Rijke (1996), is a hybrid genre, found at the intersection of many themes whether between ghost and vampire fiction or suspense fiction, thriller and even science fiction. The horror genre is typically characterized by the grotesque, the monstrous, to which another dimension must be added, the exploration of the notions of fear and also of desire (Rijke, 1996). McCort (2016) explains this aspect in detail:

[...] the reader [...] must be emotionally invested in the situation at hand, must experience a physical response to the text that is rooted in fear, disgust, repulsion, must reject the terrifying thing while also fearing that he or she might become its next victim, and, perhaps most important, must feel *excited* by the horrifying experience [...] (McCort, 2016, p. 10).

¹ Attinasi and Friedrich (1995) coined the term *linguaculture* to indicate that both language and culture constitute the same universe and same domain of experience.

This feeling of excitement is what Dickson (1998) has identified as very attractive for young readers of the *Goosebumps* series, as they often feel that the horrible situations in the novel could happen to them too. Although heavily criticized and sometimes labeled «sub-literature» (Silver, 1995), many of the stories in the *Goosebumps* series have been shown to have a useful function; as they engage tweens to books and reading (Huck, Hepler, Hickman & Keifer, 1997), so these novels can actually be praised for the way they keep their readers captivated (Nodelman, 1997). Another point in favor of horror books, and in this case, the *Goosebumps* series, is that it has been shown that both boys and girls are interested (Silver, 1995; Dunleavy, 1993) in the series; this explains why so many million copies have been sold across the globe during the last decades of this series of tween horror. Nevertheless, there are additional factors that not only explain why there are so many readers but also why these books are a good option for use in the EFL Primary classroom; there are more than two hundred titles to choose from in English, they are published by Scholastic publishers so they are easy to find (and buy) and the novels are short. All these factors make them a viable proposal by students and teachers for reading in the EFL classroom.

Reading in the EFL Classroom

While encouraging reading in the EFL classroom is not an easy task, it is essential to foster language learning. Krashen (1994), has formulated two hypotheses that explain the relationship between reading and learning a language. The first is the Comprehension Hypothesis, which presents the idea that we acquire language in one way: when we understand messages, or we get an understandable contribution. The second is the Reading Hypothesis (it is a special case of the Comprehension Hypothesis), which argues that reading is a form of understandable contribution and this favors the acquisition of literacy-related aspects of language (Krashen, 2003; 2004; 2013). There are debates about the use of authentic text in the language classroom as many teachers may think it problematic, but McKay (1982) offers three ways to address the complexity issues: a) using texts that are simplified for language learning purposes; (b) use of easy texts, i.e. texts that are by nature more readable than others and appropriate for the level

of students; c) use of texts for young adults because they are stylistically less complex. The latter is of our interest because there are researchers in the field (Sell, 1996) who have come to the conclusion that the *Goosebumps* series, not only due to a style that makes it much easier to read but also due to the language suitable for tweens and the terrifying content, are ideal for this group of readers. Another advantage is the structure of the novels; serial fiction is known for its stereotypical and predictable plots and endings; that another reason for their popularity (Jones, 2001) and in this case, most of the novels contain a bonus chapter of the next novel that serves as a hook to bait readers. Some may say that there is a drawback; that there are no illustrations in the books barring the very colourful covers on the novels, however this lack of visual cues has not been a barrier for the imagination of readers. Finally, Mesmer (1998), in his study, was able to verify that readers feel that they are personally involved in the stories and that they experience the same feelings as their protagonists because the books contain endless details, this echoes Dickson's (1998) findings where readers feel implicated in the stories. The author, according to Jones (2001), portrays the world of youth and «instead of presenting children in fiction as parents and teachers would like them to be, Stine presents children as they can sometimes be. Children can say the funniest things, but they can also say the most unpleasant» (Jones, 2001, p. 159). The combination of all of these aspects of the novels mean that they are highly understandable, and therefore comply with the two hypotheses that encourage reading.

Culture and Reading

Chartier (1993) conceives reading as a practice carried out in an intersubjective space, historically shaped, in which readers share devices, behaviors, attitudes and cultural meanings around the act of reading. Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler (1992) clearly outlines an approach to cultural studies:

[...] cultural studies requires us to identify the operation of specific practices, of how they continuously reinscribe the line between legitimate and popular culture, and of what they accomplish in specific contexts' (Grossberg *et al.*, 1992, p. 13).

However, this does imply that to some degree the readers share the same culture or that they can understand the cultural approach presented as «reading becomes a negotiation between the social sense inscribed in the program and the meanings of social experience made by its wide variety of viewers: this negotiation is a discursive one» (Fiske, 1987, p. 268). The question needs to be asked when literature is used in the EFL classroom: what happens when culture is not shared? Indeed, the words on a page have the power to stir the imagination (Tanner, 2010). The question is this: what is produced in the reader's imagination when cultural elements are part of the understanding of the text? In the words of Hall (2003, p. 1), «representation is one of the central practices that produces culture and a key "moment" in what can be called the circuit of culture». In the culture circuit, it is suggested which meanings are produced in several different places and circulate through several different processes or practices.

According to Healy (2010), literature develops in readers an awareness of the culture of the target language and in language learning, cultural elements are a key element. Along these lines, Brown (2007), points out that it is important to consider language as culture and culture as language where L2 culture is essential for the teaching of a language. So much so, that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (2001) states that:

[...] the culture of the community or communities in which the language is spoken is an aspect of knowledge of the world [...] it is important enough to merit the student's attention, because [...] is likely not to be found in your previous experience and may be distorted by stereotypes (CEFR, 2001, p. 97).

Consequently, literature promotes cultural and intercultural awareness (Van, 2009) and is also an ideal vehicle to present cultural notions of language (Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993), such as customs, politics, art, etc. This is in line with the CEFR, which emphasizes clear sections so that the distinctive characteristics of a specific society and its culture can be related through language. The novels in the *Goosebumps* series represent what we really believe and how we really act (Hill, 1996) and, therefore, are cultural documents that offer a deeper understanding of a country or countries (Basnet, 1993).

Culture and the CEFR

Three novels of the *Goosebumps* series will be analysed using the framework in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), which distinguishes seven areas of cultural components. There are two specific areas of culture which are of special interest for this analysis. One is daily life (leisure activities such as hobbies, sports, reading habits, communication media, etc.); the other area deals with personal relationships (including relationships of power and solidarity) such as family structures and relationships. These novels have been used for this proposal: *The Wizard of Ooze*, *Who's your Mummy?* and *The Haunted School*. All the novels share certain elements: the action takes place in the United States, the characters are middle class, there is more than one main character, one is usually a boy and the other a girl and the protagonists are twelve years old². In the words of Jones (2001), the parents (and others) adult relatives are conspicuous by their absence or their ineffectiveness in the adult role. In one novel, the characters, who usually live with their grandmother, are sent to live with an uncle they have never met. In another novel, the main character has just moved to a new city with his father and his new stepmother. It is from this starting point that the some of the cultural aspects in the novels will be identified and analysed.

Amusement Parks

In all three novels the lives of the characters naturally include leisure activities as part of the plot and there are references to these activities that have cultural implications. In *The Wizard of Ooze* part of the plot takes place in an amusement park that two characters, Marco and Gabriella, visit. It is an amusement park called «HorrorLand» a place they both are excited to be and apparently where they do not need chaperoning even though they are only twelve. They wander off alone and it turns out to be a terrifying and sinister place from where they are chased, threatened and they are given a cursed object which they

² This is a curious fact that has never really been explained by Stine in his many interviews.

end up taking home. This park reappears in an extra chapter of *Who's your Mummy?*, in which the protagonists, Peter and Abby mysteriously receive invitations and describe it as the scariest, most impressive theme park on Earth. The prevalence of this type of venue as a regular hang-out in both novels serves to highlight amusement park culture, which began with Lake Compounce, USA in 1846 and the original Kiddie Park founded in 1925 in Texas (which is still open). Amusement parks became popular throughout America after World War II and became globally popular with Disneyland in 1955. These places inspire middle-class family vacations and serve as a source of fantasy and escape from real life (Adams, 1991). It is important to explain the prevalence of a family trip to this type of place for fun and entertainment and its importance in the lives of tweens. The fact that this location of family fun is turned into a place of terror plagued with mysterious characters and monsters in the novel makes it even more frightening.

Reading Habits

Another leisure activity that is mentioned is the interest in both graphic novels and comics³, in fact it is key to the plot of *The Wizard of Ooze* as one of the main characters has almost every comic and graphic novel about the character Ooze. This is to be expected with the ages of the protagonists and readers in mind as comics are often associated primarily with children and adolescents (Bongco, 2000), but it is also important to indicate how the comic became an autonomous art medium and an integral part of American culture (Waugh, 1991). In the novel *The Wizard of Ooze*, there are references to Marco's collection of comics and graphic novels and the plot, in part, centers around a cursed graphic novel that grants special powers which Marco buys at an amusement park and can't stop reading. His interest in the different episodes about the *Wizard of Ooze* is complemented by this graphic

³ There is an open debate in the difference between comics and graphic novels. According to Raeburn (2004), a graphic novel is simply a comic book. Others, like Santiago Garcia (2014), defend the differences between graphic novels and comics by outlining particular features associated with each text type.

novel that has the original story in addition to a bonus section at the back «where it tells step-by-step how you can become a superhero» (Stine, p. 24). This focus on the superhero and super power associated with comics and graphic novels takes a sinister turn when the price paid for a super power may be more than anyone bargained for. This interest in comics and graphic novels is also highlighted in another chapter, where we see Marco and Gabriella at a comic convention where they discover that a truly monstrous character who becomes a sinister adversary. It is here that they begin to understand that the fictional world has become all too terrifying. This turn of events is particularly scary as fiction becomes blurred with terror and the fantasy world of superheroes and superpowers is shown to have a dark side. These comic references are multiple and need to be explained in the right context so that the fascination with this genre is comprehended and the twist that leads to the monstrous theme is understood.

Dances and Sport

The school world is central to pre-adolescent novels and its importance is also seen in this novels. There are two clear cultural examples of this school world: dances and sports as social experiences. The importance of teams and sports for the student body is reflected in the team pennants and posters hanging on the gym walls that say: Go Bisons! According to Pot and Hilvoorde (2013), interscholastic sports in the USA are integrated into the educational system and have a strong social functioning as well as prestige. The plot in the novel has a dance scheduled after a sports game, which should be a fabulous event. The tradition of holding dances in schools as part of youth entertainment is a well-established Anglo-Saxon tradition. High school dances first emerged in the US in the early 20th century amidst social, economic, and institutional changes (Best, 2000). In the novel *The Haunted School*, the plot begins in the dance and party decorating workshop in the school gym. It is interesting to note that the high school gym is a perfectly normal environment for dances and that these events represent the first social steps in which students help organize the

event and attendees dress formally. These are chaperoned events that initiate students into the adult world of socialization. The fact that students organise dances in gyms and celebrate sport victories with such events needs to be explained to readers. In the novel, the twist comes when Tommy discovers that a group of students disappeared at a previous dance and that this safe context proves to be quite dangerous and the true horror of the situation becomes apparent.

Family

Personal relationships are part of the analysis in all three novels. In *Who's your Mummy?*, Abby and Peter do not have parents, their grandmother is sick and needs to go to the hospital, and the uncle who they have never met and has offered to host the children turns out to be useless and is incapable of either picking up the children from the station or rescuing them of the house where they are captive. In the novel *The Wizard of Ooze*, neither Marco nor Zeke can turn to their parents for help or support and treat their parents like fools whenever they are caught doing something inexplicable. In *The Haunted School*, Tommy's father and stepmother are completely absent throughout the novel and they just moved to a new city so Tommy doesn't know anyone. There is no support from adult figures in general in any of the novels. The remarkable distance in the relationships between the protagonists and their parents in all the novels serves to emphasize the virtues of independence and individualism, two attributes highly valued in Anglo-Saxon culture. In individualistic cultures, children take care of themselves as early as possible and the emphasis on individual initiative and achievement prevails (Hofstede, 2003). In the resolution of the plots of the novels, these two attributes are reflected in addition to how valuable it is to solve problems by oneself. This feature of the novels needs to be pointed out as it is an essential part to understanding the motivations and the actions of the characters throughout the novels.

Discussion

It has been seen how literature can be used to develop awareness of the target language culture by students and motivate them to read in the EFL classroom. These three novels from the *Goosebumps* series, once seen through the cultural references that appear in the categories defined in the CEFR (2001), contain identifiable cultural components. Family relationships and leisure activities, that need to be explored for their cultural value, can be found and discussed in the foreign language classroom. These implicit cultural notions reveal not only stereotypes, but also cultural values, beliefs and attitudes that can be analyzed as part of the language learning process to increase the motivation, interest and cultural awareness of readers. It has been seen how the themes of amusement parks, school dances, sports, comics and finally family relationships are areas with cultural implications which need to be explained and given a context so that the linguistic content is understood and has the appropriate relevance in the text.

Conclusion

The introduction of horror books in the EFL classroom should be seen as an enticing prospect by both students and teachers. This type of fiction serves a dual purpose: it promotes reading in the classroom and it creates cultural awareness which is an integral part of the language learning process. As mentioned previously, horror fiction is a hybrid genre with a myriad of possible themes, whether it includes ghost and vampire fiction or suspense fiction, thriller and even science fiction (Rijke, 1996). This plethora of motifs and themes, which contain specific cultural elements underpins a crucial objective: using real texts in the classroom that present language learners with the cultural dimensions of language. From this vantage point, horror books are text types in which cultural elements can be analysed and understood in the context of the target language. Moreover, not only are the tastes and interests of the students being simultaneously catered to and satisfied but also, the concomitance of language and culture can be successfully approached in the EFL classroom by using horror books. Through the use of the

CEFR framework, it is shown that there is a need for a methodological perspective on these issues for future Primary teachers as only through a cultural analysis can an intersection be found between the horror genre, culture, and the EFL classroom.

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SHAPING EXPECTATIONS AND DESIRES: THE IMPACT OF PARATEXTUAL INFORMATION RELATED TO HORROR FILMS ON THEIR AUDIENCES

Juan José Caballero-Molina and Javier Sanz-Aznar

1. Introduction

Any film made for commercial purposes is subject to the demands of the market. These demands include the duty to provide clear and effective communication about what the film offers and what audiences should expect of it. Whether it is family friendly or targeting an adult audience, whether it is identified with a specific genre, whether it stars any well-known faces, and whether it is the work of a prominent filmmaker are all aspects that are publicised long before the film has its commercial release.

Information and advertising campaigns for films will focus on those attributes that most directly and effectively categorise the product (mainly in terms of genre, directors, and actors), increasing and intensifying the promotion as the release date draws nearer, with the objective of ensuring that practically anyone who might be interested in any of the elements or assets included in the formula has been made aware of the new market offering.

Watching a film involves or triggers a series of habits, routines, and codes (socio-cultural, representational, generic, and others) in which we all participate almost unconsciously when we have internalised certain rules of play. As Jacqueline Nacache refers:

[...] chaque film renvoie à tous les autres, en un réseau que commence à se tisser dès le tout début de la projection, lorsque l'écusson de la Warner Bros. ou le lion de la M.G.M., font résonner en harmonique le souvenir des films de leur lignée. (Nacache, 2001, pág. 54)¹

But this necessary alignment of the film generally starts well before the moment the viewing begins, because the desire to join its audience is cultivated in advance. It could even be argued that the film begins for us even before we start watching it.

Herein lies the difficulty of identifying the beginning –and, for that matter, the end– of the cinematic experience. In a way, we preview the film before we sit down to watch it. And this is something that to a large extent can be (and in fact is) fully programmed and designed beforehand.

2. The necessary motivation prior to the experience

To varying degrees, we participate in the *paratext* that accompanies and supports each film production. The spectator comes to the film with a particular preestablished identity. In this sense, what may go unnoticed by one spectator among the range for film productions on offer may arouse keen interest in another.

In our personal lives prior to viewing the film, we have been constructed as someone inclined to approach it with a particular perspective, sensibility, and/or expectation. When we decide that we want to see a given film, we consider ourselves familiarised with products of a similar nature or style, and we adopt certain expectations as a result.

In other words, a film, like any text, is conditioned by a range of historical, cultural, or psychological expectations comes into play, similar to the conditioning explored by Umberto Eco in his seminal text *The Open Work* (1985) when he discusses how the empirical reader and author imagine or *model* each other mutually by mediation of the text.

¹ Author's translation: «Each film refers to all the others, in a network that begins to be woven from the beginning of the projection, as soon as the shield of Warner Bros or the lion of MGM appears, the memories of the lineage of the film start to resonate».

Both conjecture about the intentions and interests of the other. But this speculative process (almost) never arises *ex novo* in the process of reading a novel or viewing a film; we need to acknowledge it as something that pre-exists the reading or viewing itself.

Spectators, like consumers of any other product or service, guide their decisions based on their expectations of enjoyment, as (Wilson *et al.* 1989) describe in their article «*Preferences as expectation driven inferences*». There is always a desire to receive some form of compensatory gratification and the experience is judged accordingly. In other words, the affective and emotional reactions generated during the consumption experience are determined by the extent to which the consumer's expectations are ultimately satisfied or frustrated (Wilson & Klaaren, 1992). This is what in the terminology of marketing applied to the film industry is referred to as *playability* (Squire, 2016).

Along the same lines, Alba and Williams (2013) explore the concept of hedonic consumption.² They conclude that prior conditioning of expectations about the experience contributes to enhancing the pleasure derived from it to a greater degree than experiences that may not have been conditioned beforehand. These authors support this conclusion with various experiments analysing particular conditioning factors that boost the pleasure of consumption, such as knowing that a wine is expensive before we taste it (Mlodinow, 2009), knowing that the drink we are about to try belongs to a famous brand (Nevid, 1981), or simply having the opportunity to enjoy a cartoon after being told that we would find it entertaining (Wilson *et al.* 1989). In all the cases described by Alba and Williams, the placebo effect that such information had on the individuals who participated in the experiments was always found to be powerful. Alba and Williams's research on hedonic consumption clearly points to the role played by positive prior experiences and memory in the consumer experience.

The old adage cited by these researchers that «anticipation is better than realization» (Alba & Williams, 2013, p. 6) constitutes the maxim

² Hedonic consumption refers to consumption aimed not at satisfying biological needs but entirely at giving the consumer pleasure. It would not be until the 1980s that the academic world would begin turn its attention to the quest for pleasure and enjoyment through consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

derived from a theory that expected pleasure tends to be more intense or gratifying than pleasure experienced objectively. It is on this that they base the formula they refer to as «pleasure from engagement», identifying a direct correlation between an established personal commitment to the product and the pleasure that product is able to produce.

From this we may infer that as long as their expectations are met, fans of particular genres, actors, or directors will feel rewarded with a more pleasurable experience than that enjoyed by novice spectators. At the same time, it will also be easier to satisfy the previously established expectations that such fans have in relation to that experience.

3. The horror film as a case study: key elements and variables that shape the experience

Although the circumstances described above are valid and applicable to any film production, they are especially true of films targeting a more specific audience, guided by well-established selective, axiological criteria. And they are unquestionably present in films identified with a particular genre that is very clearly delineated, such as the horror genre, given its programmatic orientation towards eliciting intense cognitive responses from its audiences.

There are mechanisms that serve as parameters or guarantees for the most accurate and effective positioning of a horror film. In this sense, the advertising campaign will highlight the film's *attributes*, both tangible and intangible, with the aim of carving a niche in the mental perception of potential consumers attracted to this type of film. Because in this genre there is no room for subtleties, the nature of the product must be made absolutely explicit and unequivocal. Its identity as a horror film should be proclaimed and stressed as emphatically as possible. This can be done by asserting or invoking the clichés of the genre, by featuring iconic figures identified with this type of film, or by linking the film to particular cinematic points of reference, either in terms of directors or by allusion to successful precedents.

3.1. The influence of the genre

For Rick Altman (2000), the value of the concept of film genre lies in its usefulness. Among the preconceptions established in relation to the operative scope that the academic literature generally attributes to this unique category, Altman tells us that the final definition traditionally associated with the notion of genre is that of «[...] genre as *contract*, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience» (Altman, 2000, p. 35). The notion of film genre implies the existence of a common frame of reference whereby a pact is established between a domain of production geared towards maintaining and exploiting certain patterns, forms, and structures, and the domain of audience expectations.

Altman (1984) proposes the existence of a «generic syntax» made up of various shared syntactic patterns that can be identified in a set of different individual texts. These shared patterns result in the creation of certain stable or recurring models, based on which the audience comes to establish what could be described as a «syntactic expectation». That same audience, when they decide to participate in a cinematic experience with a specific orientation, contribute to the consolidation of this syntax through expectations and desires that the film industry identifies and aims to satisfy. This feedback based on a consumer desiring a product and a producer meeting that need gives rise to an overall generic pact (every horror film *must* cause fear), but at the same time it entails a syntactic expectation based on the articulation of little semantic pacts, whereby the objects and actions that form part of that universe are consistent with the established generic pact (e.g. every fan of the genre anticipates the role that a knife could play in a slasher).

For Grodal (2009), not all genres operate in the same way. There are some genres that are more universal than others, depending on whether or not they respond to basic cognitive and emotional schemes. Grodal thus subscribes to the theory posited by Dan Sperber (1996) known as «cultural epidemics». According to this theory, the extent to which certain cultural products resonate, spread, and endure over time depends on the capacity they are found to have for eliciting biological responses in the brains of the individuals they target. In this sense, the

horror genre provides us with an especially privileged testing ground, as it is founded on some very obvious and specific emotional and cognitive patterns.

The horrific is manifested when we are immersed in a state of vulnerability and disorientation, where everyday experience appears strange to us, a phenomenon that Viktor Shklovsky (Sklovski) refers to in his discussion of literature (Sklovski, 1928) with the term «defamiliarization» (*ostranenie*). When this happens, the boundaries between the natural/human and the supernatural/inhuman dissolve, and we recognise that we have been plunged into a threatening universe where we will have to confront the experience of our contact with the «uncanny», understood here in the sense of the Freudian term *unheimlich*.

This eerie dimension of the uncanny provides a space for moral, aesthetic and psychological subversion, i.e., a space in the realm of a deformity (whether visible, monstrous, «revealing itself», or latent, surreptitious, not immediately recognisable), which always translates into all kinds of aberrant and aggressive manifestations that ultimately challenge our convictions, our reason, or our very lives. Through this dimension, the powerful influence of the demonic is drawn out and revealed, as is the dark, atavistic side of humanity that houses both our basic drives and our most primal fears (Guber & Prat, 1979). It is the powerful fascination we have for that which we find shocking and yet dare to look upon, because it lies beyond the limits of the biologically and culturally tolerable or acceptable, that is the focus of the horror genre.

The film may jolt us with jump-scares (*Hell Fest* [Gregory Plotkin, 2018], *Anabelle: Creation* [David F. Sandberg, 2017]), immerse us slowly in an eerie or terrifying atmosphere (*A Quiet Place* [John Krasinski, 2018], *The Witch* [Robert Eggers, 2015]), chill us to the marrow with a penetrating and intense metaphysical conundrum (*Coherence* [James Ward Byrkit, 2013], *Vivarium* [Lorcan Finnegan, 2019]), or opt for positioning sporadic manifestations of horror at what seem to be the most unexpected moments (*La maladie de Sachs* [Michel Deville, 1999], *Zodiac* [David Fincher, 2007]). But any of these situations trigger or activate what Antonio Damasio (2009) describes as the «emotional

action program» that characterises fear, whereby human beings (and many other animal species) ensure their safety «with little or none of the aid of reason» (Damasio, 2009, p. 3).

The external manifestations that represent this emotional state are well-known to all. As Damasio suggests, fear would be inconceivable if it were not associated with racing heartbeats, abrupt muscle contractions or spasms, the all-too-familiar goosebumps, or the sudden twisting sensation in the stomach. Every emotion possesses an intrinsically physical dimension that elicits or imposes a particular reaction, which in this case involves setting off the physiological mechanisms associated with the impulse to flee. Bringing an end to the situation that provokes this unpleasant sensation thus constitutes a preventive measure.

But for film viewers this measure does not apply, because we have paid to have this experience in a safe, controlled environment where we can flirt with the death drive (Freud, 1988b) without any potential risk to ourselves. In the darkness of the movie theatre, we are voluntarily subjected to a kind of *soft kidnapping*. And by remaining in our seat we challenge our impulses, putting ourselves to the test.

When people watch a horror film, they basically expect to experience fear. To this end, there are various cognitive mechanisms that will trigger certain biological processes, and it is here that what Altman calls generic syntax comes into play. Spectators familiar with horror can accept variations on the genre provided such variations do not undermine the ultimate objective. That objective is, of course, the incitement of fear, as this is the very purpose of the pact established between film and spectator.

Based on this essential core of the horror genre, and on the relationships between the cognitive mechanisms and biological processes triggered, the various manifestations are deployed. Thus, for example, the film may focus on activating the mechanisms of our impulse to flee, like the jump scare strategy adopted in *The Haunting in Connecticut 2: Ghosts of Georgia* (Tom Elkins, 2013), which includes as many as 32 identifiable moments deploying a series of narrative techniques designed to shock us (HacShac, 2020). Or it may focus on other repeated strategies, like the avoidance mechanisms based on laughter used in *Braindead* (Peter Jackson, 1992), where the excesses

typical of the most extreme and bloody gore can only be counteracted by the systematic use of a torrent of macabre gags that we hide behind in order to deal with the nightmarish spectacle unfolding before our eyes.

But the horror genre is also founded on a range of processes of cultural insemination. It has thus developed a number of enduring elements, like those of the Gothic and vampire subgenres. These elements impose certain modal requirements which, far from being associated with the spectator's biological processes, are framed in cultural conventions that can end up being shared or exported outside the cultural universe, context, or medium in which they are created.

In each specific case, however, the generic syntax needs to be adapted to the nuances of the pact established between spectator and film, without losing sight of the primordial purpose at the heart of the genre, to elicit fear from the spectator.

3.2. The influence of the star

Certain faces have become synonymous with the horror genre. Whole generations of spectators associate their experiences of this genre with particular performers. This has been exemplified over the course of film history in the disturbing presence of the array of characters performed by actors Lon Chaney³, Bela Lugosi⁴, Barbara Steele⁵ and Peter Cushing⁶.

Although some of these stars have been recognised for their chameleon-like quality, many others based their career on a dramatic

³ Known for films as *The Monster* (Ronald West, 1925), *The Unholy Three* (Tod Browning, 1925), *The Unknown* (Tod Browning, 1927)...

⁴ Known for films as *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931), *Island of the Lost Souls* (Erle C. Kenton, 1932), *White Zombi* (Victor Halperin, 1932), *The Black Cat* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1934), *The Body Snatcher* (Robert Wise, 1945)...

⁵ Known for films as *Black Sunday* (La Maschera del Demonio, Mario Bava, 1960), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (Roger Corman, 1961), *The Ghost* (Lo spetetro, Riccardo Freda, 1963)...

⁶ Known for films as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1957), *The Brides of Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1960), *Scream and Scream Again* (Gordon Hessler, 1970), *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* (Roy Ward Baker & Cheh Chang, 1974)...

presence or personality with strongly defined iconic dimensions, ultimately constituting a kind of *metacharacter* that has endured over time. Such actors have found their careers largely limited to portraying slightly different versions of the same basic character. In such cases, the behaviour and characteristics of the characters are always constructed based on the distinctive traits and actions of the star who has come to be identified with them (Klaprat, 1985).

A paradigmatic example of an actor inextricably tied to particular expectations can be found in José Mojica Marins and his character Zé do Caixão (known as «Coffin Joe» in English), considered the father of Brazilian horror (Magri, 2020; Serravalle, 2017) with the film *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* (*À Meia Noite Levarei Sua Alma*, José Mojica Marins, 1964). Following the success of this film, the actor and his character initiated a strange symbiotic process, as he began dressing up in real life as Coffin Joe. He would end up portraying this character in 12 feature films, four shorts and two TV series, either as protagonist or in cameo appearances, such as the outlandish *FilmeFobia* (Kiko Goifman, 2008), and he would even lend the character's voice to animated films, such as the shorts *Undertaken* (Claudio Ellovitch, 2008) and *A Lasanha Assassina* (Ale McHaddo, 2002).

Beyond Mojica's influence on different film movements and directors, in Brazil the character of Coffin Joe has become a national pop legend, inspiring depictions of him in pulp fiction, folk poetry, comic strips, pop music, and a whole range of merchandising (Silva, 2018).

This strategy can also be found in feature films where the actor was not portraying Coffin Joe, with the use of similar names for the characters he played, such as Zé das Penitências («Penitence Joe» in English) in *O Cangaceiro Sem Deus* (Oswaldo de Oliveira, 1969), and there are even films where he is credited directly as Coffin Joe instead of using his real name, as can be seen in the trailer and poster for the film *The Prophet of Hunger* (*O Profeta da Fome*, Maurice Capovila, 1970).

From his earliest films, Mojica Marins disassociated himself from the predominant line in the horror genre up until the 1960s, where the monster was depicted as a supernatural figure, enthusiastically embracing the idea that «the enemy is us», which emerged as a popular

new direction following Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960).⁷ José Mojica's Coffin Joe is thus a sadistic, nihilist antihero, but also very much a human. Thanks to this clear and deliberate anchoring in reality, and as reflected in the studies by Mar and Oatley (Oatley, 1999; Mar & Oatley, 2008), the films featuring this character could be held up as an ideal platform for examining the world, allowing us to explain and deconstruct it more productively than we would if we were to watch something considered entirely fictitious. And this makes his films especially appealing and valuable to Coffin Joe's fans.

3.3. The influence of the director

The other major attribute that can shape the spectator's expectations is, without doubt, the identity of the director. The director's image is central in the battle to secure a good position in the market with the highest degree of visibility possible over other products.

Over the course of time, the category of *auteur* has become established as one of the most decisive and effective marketing strategies. The author's mark allows to the spectator to recognise the firm through repetitive patrons and constant elements along his filmography (Gómez Alonso, 2007). But beyond the possibility of identifying certain distinctive elements in a director's filmography, the notion of authorship may also be marked by different modal features. Some contemporary filmmakers (Quentin Tarantino, Nicholas Winding Refn, etc.) have even elevated certain gruesome or abhorrent situations to the category of stylistic features that underscore their status as *auteurs*—situations that until the 1990s were associated exclusively with the terrain of the horror genre, thereby marking their films with a grand guignolesque atmosphere.

This extreme violence becomes tolerable, desirable, and even exhilarating because it is contextualised (in most cases) in a dramatic

⁷ The years that followed would be marked by a proliferation of horror films based on real-life figures or situations, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977), *Angst* (Gerald Kargl, 1983), *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986), and *Jack Ketchum's The Girl Next Door* (Gregory Wilson, 2007).

environment that is comical, stripped of substance and marked by a kind of celebration of trashiness. Long before the title credit «A film by...» began appearing on movie screens, its arrival was already being foreshadowed.⁸ The contemporary spectator's experience has been defined by the grotesque and morbid context of this entertaining hypervisibility that would begin to be established in the 1960s, through the systematic and sustained use of inserts and a frontality that supported a frank, direct, and even light-hearted vision.

One of the filmmakers who would be acclaimed as a veritable master of horror during this period is George A. Romero, whose extraordinarily drawn-out series, beginning with *Night of Living Dead* (1968), spanned numerous decades while gathering faithful fans, until finally culminating in the first decade of the new millennium with *Survival of the Dead* (2009). Dedicated to the zombie, a figure that has become an iconic trope of post-modern horror, this series offers a privileged perspective on the transformation of the horror genre's contemporary aesthetic over the years, revealing an evolving arc that parallels its audience's viewing tastes. Romero's filmography, which has focused on the very specific zombie subgenre, and his audience, which has held on expectantly from one instalment to the next despite the lengthy time lapses between them, offers an ideal site for the analysis of the pact between director and spectator, in terms not only of its origins but, especially, of its evolution.

In the *Living Dead* series, evil is stripped of any metaphysical significance and becomes a vulgar expression of violence so banal and arbitrary that it can only be understood as a spontaneous and irrational explosion, set off when the inherent immorality of the human beings comes into conflict with the amorality of the zombies. In each new instalment in the series, the undead acquire new knowledge and abilities; they evolve while the living decline and, increasingly, devolve.

Over the course of Romero's filmography, the violence has become increasingly profuse, spectacular and obscene, raising a whole series of questions about the limits of the visible (Esposito, 2004), whereby what

⁸ This credit is sometimes substituted by «Based on the novel by...», as is often used for film adaptations of Stephen King's work with more than one hundred adapted novels (Hollywood Script Notes, 2020).

was once consigned to the shadows or the off-screen space is now made the focus of our attention, while our fear of contagion, and of the people we live alongside, is shown time and again to be our greatest enemy.

Thus, just as Altman (2000) asserts the usefulness of the relationship between genre and spectator in offering a shared space, filmmaker and spectator converge and recognise one another, while the established expectations are met, challenged, or even undermined.

This relationship, which serves as the foundation for a solid and reliable market niche, requires the filmmaker to observe certain constants, which at the same time allow him to signal his *auteur* status to his fans. In this sense, considering Altman's (1984) establishment of the existence of a generic syntax, it may be equally valid to assert the existence of a particular *auteurist* syntax, which the spectator expects or demands of a creator, and which that creator in turn relies on to build a reputation.

4. Conclusions

The horror genre is founded on biological reactions triggered by that basic, primordial cognitive process known as fear. This allows the parameters of the experience to be mapped out as accurately as possible, both for the interests of audiences and for those of the industry itself. This organisation is reflected in the relationship established on the basis of the actors, directors, generic syntax and audience, which has been developed so successfully and systematically.

The pact described in this chapter enables the industry to identify the spectator's expectations and desires in advance, contributing to the definition and coordination of the whole product accordingly. It also facilitates access to the right market niche, maximising the profitability of the paratextual information disseminated about the genre, director, and/or cast, thereby encouraging or triggering certain desires and expectations.

There are some actors who enjoy such extraordinary success performing a particular character type associated with the horror genre that they ultimately come to be identified with the genre itself. These actors can become attractive signals for what can be expected

of a film. The mere name of certain actors associated with a particular film can thus effectively constitute a powerful paratextual strategy, eliciting expectations from spectators that will always be met.

Filmmakers can also elicit expectations from the audience, even more intensely and more efficiently than actors can. There are thus certain directors whose name alone furnishes us with much more relevant information than could be provided by the classification of the film according to a specific generic syntax (Altman, 1984).

On the other hand, the evident intensity and endurance of the pact with the spectator also has a trade-off, encoded in the obligation assumed by the industry to meet the expectations created by the consumer experience. Commercial success is conditioned by the extent to which those expectations are effectively satisfied. And ultimately, this tends to translate into the pernicious dynamic endemic to actors and filmmakers, who find themselves forcibly pigeon-holed and stereotyped, or entrenched in the successful generic formulas they have specialised in, without the slightest hope of being able to take the risk implicit in any attempts at experimentation with the generally accepted generic syntax.

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THE PROBLEMATIC FANTASY IN THE «MAGIC CIRCLE» OF VIDEO GAMES: THE CASE OF *DARK SOULS*

Antonio Francisco Campos Méndez

Introduction

Games have been part of the quotidian world, serving as entertainment for children or as popular competitions, just to mention some examples. These activities are part of society conception since the beginning, elaborating crucial aspects of its construction, even in culture. Depending on the elements considered, culture can be crucially linked with games. This extends to the structure of video games and their labour in today's world.

Although it is a «young» medium, video games have been capable of surpassing cinema or music as the most prolific medium (in economic terms) in the industry. In its birth, video games looked to other disciplines, such the mentioned cinema or even theatre, taking expressive elements and themes. Nowadays, the videoludic medium has tried to evoke intrinsic aspects of culture, such as fantasy.

Quite related with mythology, fantasy has been part of world explaining from abstracts points of view or (re)creations that can never exist. With some classic structures, fantasy has been introduced

in typical discourses of mass mediums, converting itself in a popular subgenre of horror and adventures. One of those mediums is video games.

However, the particular condition and consideration of this medium, obtained from the examination of games as part of culture, presents some issues to consider. The necessity of feedback in the communicative process of video games, situating the receptor in an active mode, establish the immersion and interactivity as a new way to connect with fantasy. Moreover, we could be talking about an alternative conception of fantasy, as part of a new cultural movement and elaboration.

This chapter tries to examine the relation established between video games and fantasy, considering the dependence with the real world and the conflict created with the «magic circle» in (video) games, a concept established by Johan Huizinga in his work *Homo Ludens* about the sphere where playing is concentrated. To do this, we chose *Dark Souls* (From Software, 2011) as the case of study, considering the importance of this title in the whole video games industry and in its expressive characteristics.

Fantasy as a cultural conception

In the actual media world, there are some common approaches for the works made by industry as well as authors. One of those subjects is fantasy, with a special thinking about the structure it can take in narrative. The investigation about fantasy and the fantastic has a wide tradition, with an interesting evolution depending on the media studied. Todorov's approach (1982) tries to explain the creation of the fantastic as a dilemma between two different conceptions of the world. On one hand, if the events told in the story are strange, even in the limits of the reality, but with a possible explanation with the rules of the real world, then we are in the field of the mysterious. On the other hand, we find stories with splendid events, far from the world conception and rules, are part of the supernatural, a place beyond our reality. Between these two forms of thinking about the structure of events in a story, we find the fantastic, but not in a

complete way. The linguist establishes the necessity of the dilemma in the conception of the fantastic, since the resolution could break the interest in this structure (Todorov, 1982, pp. 14-15).

As part of this theory, Muñoz tries to make a more resolute approach about the supernatural, «questioning the fundamental laws of the world» (2010, pp. 6-7). However, there is some problems with the conception of the fantastic and the structure of the world, making the phenomenon of the supernatural part of the impossibility established by the reality (Roas, 2008). The fantastic elaboration doesn't need to be an inversion of reality, but an alteration of its basis (Castro, 2016, p. 4).

Taking this into account, we can examine the influence of mythology in the creation of the fantastic. For Bettelheim, there is «no clear division between the myth and the popular tale» (1994, p. 29). Nonetheless, there are some categorization about «the primitive fundament of epic fantasy» (Castro, 2016, p. 19), where the ideas of gods, heroes and fantasy world come from. In relation to these ideas, there are some traditional spaces in the fictional elaboration, such as castles and woods (Castro, 2016, p. 7). Apart from the distinction between the real world and the fantasy world, we find the Secondary Belief, a postulate that involves the receiver in the sphere of the text. However, this Secondary Belief can be shattered when this new reality is disrupted (Nikolajeva, 2003, pp. 153-154).

To increase the effectiveness of the fantastic and, with it, the involvement in the receiver, writers as Lovecraft or Tolkien, established the basis of mythmaking, the creation of a new world. This conception has its own mythology, far from the one known in our own world (Castro, 2016, p. 10). The receiver, that is, the human being, can identify him/herself with heroic ideas, but in an ambient without «connection with the reality of who we are and what we do» (Donaldson, 1986, p. 40). This creation of alternative worlds with new mythology is very close to the theory of possible worlds established by the «universe of the discourse», exceeding the barriers of the real world and its structures (Dolezel, 1998, p. 40).

Applying these postulates to the game, fantasy allows a direct development from the receiver, creating a «unique rhetoric and a

transforming variety» (Rick, 2019, p. 122). It is crucial to understand the part of the receiver, in this case, the player, assuming the existence of these people as real in the «field of simulation» (Dolezel, 1998, p. 27). For Bowman, the creation of the player's character is the «growth of a seed» (2010, p. 156). At this point, the player uses that growth as a way to develop him/herself freely, through that he/she wants to express. Although this vision makes an important look at the figure of the player, it is exclusively of role playing games (RPG) and, furthermore, those governed by a master. Taking this approach to video games, even in RPG, there are different applications, since the player not always has the liberty to create a character of his/her preference.

Video games: representation and reality

The approach to the question regarding video games starts in the cultural elaboration of games. At this point, we can examine the postulate of Huizinga (2012), whose theory about the «magic circle» has stated a great part in the game's condition within the consideration of society. The definition of this circle is close to the Secondary Belief explanation in the fantastic, trying to involve the player in its own atmosphere apart from the real world (Huizinga, 2012, p. 33). In this space, we find the rules of games, which elaborates its structure and limits (Huizinga, 2012, p. 42).

In addition to this postulate, Bateson (1954) forms a series of «signals that are instead of other events», establishing a capital relevance of the game in the development of the communicative process. It is important to take into account the idea from Huizinga about the conception of the game previously culture, even creating it in a primitive moment (2012, p. 13). Mendizábal (2004) tries to make a symmetry between mirrors and reflexes, an intrinsic ability from the game. In this way, it becomes a space where the discursive production is conditioned by the reality of a second space, with a second reality made by the imaginary and the symbolic (Mendizábal, 2004, p. 48).

With this definition, Mendizábal alludes to a certain capacity in the reality of the game, establishing itself as a proper element. However, it should be pointed out that the mention to a second reality, with full conscience about the original world, paradoxically, ends up serving as a base for the conceptualization of the video game. It is constituted as a refunding medium thanks to the hypertext and the multi-media (Mendizábal, 2004, p. 47). Nonetheless, we can find some clarifications to the idea of the «magic circle» in today's condition. Jesper Juul (2008) differences three perspectives to analyse this theory, depending on the consideration made by the player. In this way, the «magic circle» can be one, two or all of these perspectives, according to the experience of the player. For Juul, these considerations do not contrast between each other to deny the «magic circle», but explain and demonstrate what it consists of.

Although by this theory (video) games are involved in its own sphere, they can look to reality and adapt it. For Collantes (2013), there are two types of games depending on its conception of reality: games that alludes to reality in itself, denominated compaction games, and games that represent reality, called representation games (2013, p. 13). The first type allows seeing a new reality, permitting the elaboration of its own narrative perspective that starts and ends in the proper game field (Collantes, 2013, p. 27). On the other hand, representation games are structured in a double aspect, consisting in rules of the reality they are representing and the proper rules of the ludic medium (Collantes, 2013, p. 29).

These definitions examine the question in the playable development of (video) games, but we should be considering the matter of the conclusion. The final experience belongs to the player, but it could be configured in some part by the author (Collantes, 2013, p. 34). For Huizinga, the true relevance of the happening stays in the sphere and for those participants in the same space (2012, p. 86), although the real reward is found outside, in the real world (2012, p. 88). In his own words, «we do not play for it, but we work for it» (Huizinga, 2012, p. 88). Collantes gives preference to the activity of playing beyond the conclusion, giving the real importance to the development of the gameplay until the end, a moment that does not belong to the experience (2013, p. 41).

Methodology

For this investigation, we focus on the condition of video games and fantasy. In particular, the interest is based in the «magic circle» established over the experience of playing, apart from the outside world. If this is right, the elaboration of the fantastic would be problematic, as there is no reality to rely on. For that, Todorov's theory is the starter in the consideration of the fantastic, with the clarifications made by other researchers. With these postulates, there is one question that resembles all this investigation: if there is no consideration for the real world in video games, how can we talk about the existence of the fantastic?

To examine the question of the fantastic in video games, we would study a really important title in the last years. The case of study would be *Dark Souls* (From Software, 2011), a video game with a lot of popularity and influence in the style of gameplay and narrative. It is true that the starter of this saga is *Demon's Souls* (From Software, 2009) and its popularity was quite remarkable. However, *Dark Souls* took everything great in the first title to improve the formula, establishing the starting of a new genre in the industry (IGN, 2021). In this analysis, we will be looking at three elements for the elaboration of the fantastic and its relation with reality. The first is the construction of the world, focusing on the recognizable influences as well as the changes and reconceptions made during the development of the experience. The second element is the rules of games, a crucial aspect for the elaboration of the «magic circle» and the distance with reality. This element looks directly to the condition of playing, as it is intrinsic from the ludic medium. In addition, the relations between the game world and the rules established would be very important for the final experience. In the final element analysed, we find the narrative and the expression. *Dark Souls* has a very particular narrative, one that has influenced the proper medium and a lot of different video game sagas. Therefore, the connection with the player is an important matter for the establishment of this narrative, as well as the construction of the environment which comes with a very relevant expression in the obtained experience.

Case of study: *Dark Souls*

Construction of the world

The argument in *Dark Souls* is quite complex. Grosso modo, the adventure starts in a prison, with a character created by the player. From here, he/she has to find his/her way out and discover the mysteries of Lordran, the game world. The map of this stage is really important. Once the player has beaten the final enemy in the prison, he/she will get to the real starting point of the experience, the Firelink Shrine. This is a crucial space in player's road, as it connects with different areas that must be discovered. However, not every area could be traversed since the beginning. The game gives the first messages to the players, establishing some dynamics that would be crucial during the experience. Therefore, the ability and recognition of the different places is a real necessity for the development of the character and the enjoyment of the player.

However, *Dark Souls* places great emphasis on a complex conception. The difference between areas are not established by frontiers of character level, as the player can traversed them from the start. It will be more difficult, but it can be made. Nonetheless, the real interest in the experience is to improve step by step, discovering the different dynamics that the game has to offer. In fact, the world itself is a dynamic. The connection between different areas and places is basic for the understanding of the experience. As we said before, there are hard areas for the starting point of the avatar and player, but to get there in the future is really easy. The map offers different ways to go and discover the next step.

Something really common in video games is the possibility to transport the avatar from one place to another within seconds. *Dark Souls* eliminates this possibility until the last moments of the experience, when the player has familiarized with the map, knowing every part of it. The changes between spaces can be found even in the paths that connects each other, so the understanding of the world is reasonable. In some way, this question is thanks to the acknowledgement adopted from the reality.

By taking this into account, the theory of Huizinga would be in problem, as the video game is looking to the real world. Trying to make a realistic world, even without the rules or the structure of our own, it is based in the idea of the logic thinking and the explanations established in reality. Furthermore, the aspect of Lordran, from the buildings to the characters are part of the imaginary of our world. We can start with the influence of mythology. As we talked about the creation of the fantastic, the mythmaking is a tendency in literacy or cinema, as well as in video games. *Dark Souls* is an example, with a world dominated by dragons (a popular creature in fantasy), who were defeated by gods of life, fire and death. One of those powerful gods was Gwyn, a king with the power of fire and lightning. His representation is closed to Zeus, especially in the initial cinematic of the video game, when the cosmogonic war is shown to the player. Here, we can see Gwyn throwing lightning bolts to the dragons, taking the power necessary to rule the world.

Although *Dark Souls* has its own mythology, there is a constant look to the other inspired in the real world. The inspiration of the Greek mythology is extended to the representation of other creatures. For example, when the player is in the Undead Parish, there is a final enemy called Taurus Demon, who recalls completely to the Minotaur. As in the original myth, the Taurus Demon comes in the player's way, trying to destroy his/her avatar. Taking this treatment to the construction of spaces, there are some relevant influences of the structure of fantasy in other mediums. As we spoke before about the common spaces in the development of the fantastic, *Dark Souls* has some recognizable. Great castles, like the one in Anor Londo, or woods like the Darkroot Garden, are additions to this model, so the conceptualization persists.

However, the treatment of this model is quite different. If *Dark Souls* has its own mythology, it is because the turn it makes. Taking the examples of Gwyn and the Taurus Demon, we can see a different mentality in their consideration. The first character has a surname: Lord of Cinder. In *Dark Souls*, cinder is considered as the devastation provoked by the power of fire and blood. This surname resembles the fall of a great king whose actions were problematic for the existence

of Lordran. This is the reasons of his appearance as the final enemy of the experience, the last god in a world consumed. As for the Taurus Demon, the pessimistic treatment is made by the gameplay. Although the battle is developed in a close corridor, there is a ladder that can be used to fall over the enemy and make a huge damage, so the fight is easier. Where the Minotaur was considered a horrific creature coming in a labyrinth, the Taurus Demon has no escape from the useful attack of the player.

There is an oriental mentality disposed in *Dark Souls*. Ideas of return and sadness over greatness persist during the whole experience. Even in the consideration of the player and his/her avatar. The classic fantastic adventures present a great hero that must overcome outstanding dangers and enormous enemies to achieve the glory. In *Dark Souls*, the heroism is not presented until the end and not much. The player's character is just another devastated creature in a world that only have two options: to sink in the darkness or return once again from the fire, just to get to the same place in the future.

Game rules

When players started to have interest in *Dark Souls*, the first evaluations were about its difficulty. In a context where video games tried to get to the greatest amount of people, this title established a new perspective in the conception of progression. *Dark Souls* is categorized (in general) as an Action RPG. This means that the player can improve his/her character by points of experience, an element obtained by exploring or defeating enemies. However, there are some parts where improvement and level qualities of the avatar are not enough. Mechanics and dynamics are basic for the construction of the experience. Therefore, players must familiarise with the options during the development of gameplay and the situations presented.

Both mechanics and dynamics make a combination that needs to be interiorized by players. In some ways, this is linked with enemy position and the space. The first element is constant during the entire experience. Although many enemies are seen clearly, there are some parts of the environment that establish tramps for the players. One

example could be the hidden enemies, in zones apparently secure where the player gets ambushed and trapped. This combines with the structure of the space, provoking falls and damages that the player can't avoid in a particular moment.

Here, there is another important question in the establishment of game rules. In a hostile world, with lot of dangers for the player, the idea of death and return, intrinsic in video game condition, is crucial for *Dark Souls*. This involves different conceptions. First of all, failing is basic to learn about the experience. Without it, the player would not be able to confront the challenges and difficulty, so there is no progression. Progression is what maintains a great amount of interest during the experience and it can be understood from two perspectives in this title: improvement of the avatar and player's improvement. The first has been examined but the second is supported by failing. Of course, players must attend to the reasons behind every fail, as much of them will be occasioned by new situations. If these situations persist, it means that players are not approaching them with the necessary implication. This is important to mention, though the game gives considerable freedom to confront challenges. Furthermore, if the challenge is very complicated, the development allows other zones to discover and improve.

However, as almost every role-playing game, rules can be confronted and defeated. When the player creates his/her character, there are different types to choose. All of them have advantages and disadvantages, so the choice is based in the player style of playing. But it can make an important point on the difficult of the game. Although the learning of the process is the main interest of the experience, the player can beat this learning by choosing a type of character that «tricks» the game rules. Regarding to the idea of fantasy, magic and spells are overpowered in *Dark Souls*. This means that, with the improvement of the avatar, the damage made by the player exceeds the condition of dynamics in the experience. This can be seen in the establishment of combat in *Dark Souls*. The common approach is made by physical attacks, in hand by hand fights. With sorcerers and clerics, the combat is carried out in the distance, so many attacks from enemies suppose no problem. Nonetheless, to get

this condition it is necessary to obtain a certain level for the avatar, based on improvement. In addition, it is not something exclusive for these types of characters, so the player can establish the improvement of his/her character as a priority, instead of a common progress. This would lead to a simplification of challenges, but the learning still has a lot of relevance.

Narrative and expression

As part of its condition, *Dark Souls* has a peculiar consideration for its story. It is linked with the difficulty previously mentioned, as there is not a clear path for its resolution. With the creation of a new world, *Dark Souls* elaborates a conscious understanding in its universe, trying to give the real importance to discovery. It is an adventure that must be developed by the player, which is not considered a proper hero. The protagonist of classic fantasy stories is avoided in this game, so the feeling in the experience is the opposite. In a devastated fantasy world, the protagonist is one of many others, born just to be burned in the bonfire. These are minimal clarifications from the start, but the journey is quite different. The director of *Dark Souls*, Hidetaka Miyazaki, has found some of his inspiration about the narrative in works where heroes are hardly recognized. Within the words of Miyazaki, many analyses have noted the importance of the manga *Berserk* in the narrative and visual style of *Dark Souls* (Suarez, 2019, p. 23). Considering the narrative, *Berserk* shows a destructive world where violence is the key to survive, so heroes are no longer. To succeed, fighting is necessary, no matter who you are. This is an idea that would be more extended in *Bloodborne* and its conceptualization about knowledge.

To discover the story of *Dark Souls* doesn't mean to understand it. As mentioned in previous parts, the game tries to involve the player in the gameplay by learning. The same happens in the narrative. The starting cinematic shows the cosmogonic war, but apart from that, there is not much more information. The player's character starts in a cage, without knowing the place or who he/she is. These questions don't have a clear solution, even during the adventure. The task for

the player in this situation is to find the details in the game world to discover it. That way, the world in *Dark Souls*, with the characters, the places and the enemy encounters, serves as the principal form to express the narrative. The other part, understanding, belongs to the player, as part of his/her own experience, individually and in community.

However, gameplays and experiences are very different from one player to another, so as the conclusions. The pre-configured narrative stays the same, but its discovery is the key. Does it exist if the player doesn't know about its existence? As we said, *Dark Souls* shows its difficulty even in the expression, depending on the involvement and immersion of the player. With this in mind, we can say that the world narrative exists, so its discovery or not is the player responsibility. The involved player will try to discover and understand what he/she is playing by interacting with characters, admiring the different places and defeating important enemies in the experience. But even with this approach, the story could not be understood or discovered completely. To establish this peculiar characteristic, we refer to narrative losses, points of the narrative and expression that are not discovered. We don't include understanding because, from our perspective, this depends on player conclusions of the experience.

Narrative losses occur, for example, in the interaction with characters. During the adventure, the player will find pacific (at least, in the beginning) people that serve to the different purposes. Some will be part of the principal story or give relevant details, while others will even help the player in determined fights. These encounters are not unique; they expand during the adventure. The player can find a character in one place and, with the progression in the world, they can appear again in another. The possibility underlined here is quite relevant as it greatly depends on player's action. The encounters with characters are pre-configured, but they will only show if the player finds them in the different places. If not, they will be lost for the entire experience, without possibility to reverse it. When this mini-stories between player and character start, they must be followed according to the places discovered by the player. The importance

here relies in the part of the whole story that is or is not taken into account in the experience. Without these elements, the narrative is not completed. This could mean that, in some way, there is no story in the conclusion of the game. The common resolution is a variation in the story, elaborated between the disperse details in the game world and the understanding made by players.

Conclusions

Video games have surpassed the limited conception made in games. It is true that its consideration as previous than culture is quite interesting and with crucial fundamentals that can be maintained. However, the elaboration of the «magic circle» is problematic, more than the problems it can create if it is considered as something separated from the real world. Even in Huizinga's approach, there is no clear situation for the result of the experience. If it is obtained and enjoyed in the real world, it would mean that games have an effect in people outside the «magic circle». The consideration of rules as the only argument for the separation between «magic circle» and the quotidian world is not very solid.

Rules encompass the experience, they elaborate it, but the foundation of the «magic circle», just as a consideration of an alternative reality, is more powerful. Here, we find the necessity that follows this point: the «magic circle» needs to look to reality. Even if we take into account Juul's approach to a new explanation of the «magic circle» that belongs to the player's choice, it would be based in his/her life experience and, by extension, in reality.

With this in mind, we can say that video games are part of culture and reality, so fantasy treatment comes from known basis. There are conscious elements in its elaboration, even when the tone gets closer to the opposite conception of the original. This allows to an intermedium point, where fantasy in video games are part of culture fundamentals, but has an alternative intention in expression, trying to connect with the player and his/her classic approach and understanding to common worlds.

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IN THE ESCARPMENTS OF WILD ORIGINARIETY. MYTH, FANTASY & DREAM INTO IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE OF AUDIOVISUAL & LITERARY (POST) MODERNITY

Alejandro Arozamena

DON'T BE ABOVE IT. Something you maybe always wanted to know about metaphysics and never dared to ask, philosophically and not-philosophically, to literature and cinema.

Of course true art of today is pure contradiction, just as it had always been (writing or filming is not necessary and nevertheless you cannot do anything else). To begin with, as truth's procedure, art must assume cheeky shame of being a human *Dasein*¹, since the real ontology of his condition does nothing but adapt his actuality to perversion, his virtuality to fun (or worse: to entertainment) and, in despite of that, turns his contemporaneity, time and time again, into subversive.

¹ That is a good principle of Deleuzian resistance deep inside art. But not only... Conceptual artist Bruce Nauman (b. Fort Wayne, U.S.A, 1941) also implemented it in his praxis, more or less at the same time Gilles Deleuze enunciated it. In 1991, Nauman said: «My work is basically an outgrowth of the anger I feel about the human condition» (Nauman, 2017, p. 46). Anyway for Deleuze and art, apart from his classics on cinema *The time-image* (1985) and *The movement-image* (1984), may be revisited *Qu'est-ce que l'acte de création?*. In this regard, we leave here a link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9Rq4-d5Ies>

So it is not astonishing that reality has suddenly become more implausible and pseudo-sublime than the fictions themselves. Indeed, the thing (i.e. *das Ding* but also *die Sache Selbst*)² is impressive and fascinating, as if a great transcendental psychosis were occurring, but the truth is that it is no longer surprising and in a very short time it may perhaps even becomes boring.

This is due, fundamentally but not exclusively, to the fact that aesthetics (from Aristotle to Heidegger, but crucially passing through Kant and Hegel) have taken over even of the last *iota* of our ideological unconscious. F. Laruelle says in this regard:

Aesthetics, particularly since Hegel, is the claimed domination of philosophy over art by which philosophy claims to unpack its meaning, truth, and destination after the event of art's supposed death. In its least aggressive, least legislative form, philosophy describes art's figures, eras, its styles, the formal systems according to philosophy's own norms. Art, for its part, resists this enterprise and rebels. We propose another solution that, without excluding aesthetics, no longer grants it this domination of philosophical categories over works of art, but limits it in order to focus on its transformation. It's about substituting for the conflict of art and philosophy the conjugation of their means regulated on the basis of a scientific model. We will attempt to explore the following matrix: non-aesthetics or non-standard aesthetics as the reciprocal determination of art and philosophy but indexed on an algebraic coefficient present in (quantum) physics: the «imaginary number». It requires the interpretation of this conjugation in terms of vectors and not in terms of concepts or macroscopic objects. This onto-vectorialization of aesthetics deprives it of its sufficiency vis-à-vis art, but creates an artistic fiction out of aesthetics. It is a so-called «generic» extension of art to aesthetics; the moment when thought in its turn becomes a form of art. It is a new usage of their mimetic

² To find out what is *das Ding* or «la Chose même»: see Badiou (2009, pp. 28-29 & 56-57). And, as far as the objects of art and the Public Thing are concerned, see Chevrier (2012). Now, with regard to the pseudo-sublime we can say that, if there is a positive sublime and a negative sublime, the pseudo-sublime would be nothing but the inauthenticity of one thing and the other. In a word, the Absolute Grotesque.

rivalry, their conflictual tradition, which is finally suspended for a common oeuvre, a new «genre» (Laruelle, 2012, pp. 1-2)

In other words, what Laruelle proposes is nothing other than the reciprocal liberation of philosophy and arts. After all, the real no longer tolerates the reality of so much post-modernist extravagance. Among other things because the situation, despite being totally lower-classed, has already become unbearable: even the mere desire to think is not preserved, let alone our unnameable and infinite post-capitalist desire (Fisher, 2020).

Meanwhile, as it seems, the desert grows and everyone today does not cease to persevere in his supposed «I am» even to the detriment of the authentic Macguffin³... The world itself is a *mise en abyme* and existence is but a pure Macguffin.

But what is a being? Moreover, correlatively, what could a Macguffin be? Let us follow Hans Blumenberg (1991, p. 192) in this:

Among inhabitants of the film world, «MacGuffin» circulates like a word for which no dictionary is needed. With a wink of the eye, they understand that it would not be found in a dictionary either. The appearance in 1966 of the dialogue between Alfred Hitchcock and Francois Truffaut, the masters of the «thriller» film, made it possible for the whole world to know what a MacGuffin is. Truffaut had asked Hitchcock about it and had received a direct answer.

The directness of the answer must be emphasized. It could just as well have been indirect, since the magician's existence is always at risk when he reveals his method. The secret of the MacGuffin is that revealing its name only further heightens the suspense about its identity in each situation. This in turn challenges the master to give visual presence to

³ Macguffin is not only a screenwriting technique... First of all, Macguffin is a «noneogic» technique. And this is precisely what we can be seen, very symptomatically, in the most renowned ending of *Pulp Fiction* (1994) where the character of Jules Winnfield, bearer of Macguffin, spits at Pumpkin/Ringo in the coolest way: *I hate shatter your ego, but...* etc. It is a pity that, for Kantian reasons, we cannot elaborate further on this point. On the other hand, the «cool» theme that the whole Macguffin-Thing involves would give us for a separate studio. Once again, we are very sorry that we cannot carry it out here now.

something which logic are hidden. In other words, something without meaning for the story receives of distinction of optical significance. [...]

In the MacGuffin, distinguished only by its identity, a secret is condensed that justified every expense, every activity, any amount of life, for the suspense of the action. A man is the carrier of material, of a formula, of a sketch, of information that is supposedly terribly important; but it is not important that his secret be revealed in the end - it is not even permissible, if disappointment is to be avoided over the absurdity of letting this thing be a matter of life and death.

It is best that the possessor of the secret goes under with it. The MacGuffin is an unfathomable dimension that determines the suspense of the action. [...] «Here, you see, Hitchcock concludes, the MacGuffin has been boiled down to its purest expression: nothing». Thus it can come to the identity of Being and Nothing. One realizes that philosophers had and must have their MacGuffins in order to preserve the work of thinking, as well as interest in its result. [...]

The MacGuffin of Being did its duty. The effect did not fail – the public followed breathlessly. A few who have not heard anything about are still spun around by it.

And this is the very idea of Macguffin. In so far as, positively, it is also the very idea of the philosophy and the anti-philosophy as a paradoxical set.

It certainly couldn't have started without fiction and any kind of fiction always supposes the fiction of a beginning (Vauday, 2018). So, the words of an antiphilosopher (F. Laruelle) and a philosopher (H. Blumenberg), just like in a film countershot, work here by the way of an introduction to this chapter, and they are therefore useful. And it's conceivable that both (*i.e* the Macguffin and the *mise en abyme*) in principle would be, at least in this sense, the most recursive and inaesthetic elements (Badiou, 1998) in the world. And, actually, no matter what kind of world we want to meet.

After all, Philosophy does not cease to be a Superfiction and, therefore, Antiphilosophy... does not cease to be an Antisuperfiction!

Today's world: logic of the worlds. Phantasy, Myth, Dreams & X.S.F.

Ultimately, what we call «world» is a given materialistic totality of languages and bodies (Badiou, 2009). Although we could also say that a world consists of the phenomenological enigma of this *terra incognita* that is the meaning itself (Richir, 2004). In a word, it means that the world is an imaginary (Lacan, 2003). And of course, at the very heart of what we call the world, we will find crystallisations and techniques partially condensed into more or less stable islets of verbal designation, flows and impulses from another world that subsist between their tides, oceans of chaos, magic or onirism...

What really this entails is that no world can exist without *mise en abyme*. And our only business in today's world is for this blazon to go herebefore the mere abyss of symbolic misery or, which is the same, of that which subsumes in the metaphysical content of surplus value.

Let us say with Alain Badiou (1999; 2006; 2018) that since the being is the pure multiple, since every world is derived from the pure multiple and its transcendental and generic logic to all our infinitudes, to all our ideas, to all our truths (political, scientific, artistic or love's truths), what appears do it in becoming subject to their improbable existence, brings the transmundanity of truths to the perfect future of this indelible and wild originariety that blinks and flashes into the dialectical, psychoanalytical and phenomenological communisms of the active unconsciousness. Just like, Phantasy⁴, Macguffin and *mise en abyme*.

Thus, as for the modern imaginary of literature, it will be maintained, with Marc Richir (1996, p. 460) that:

⁴ Maybe it has already been intuited: we use Phantasy as a concept in its orthography and its stronger meaning (that are none others than the etymological ones) and fantasy for its ideological impoverishment or disappearance in the literary and audiovisual discourses of our modernity and afterwards. On the other hand, the fall of the *h* is yet symptomatic as much as is possible.

Among all the forms of thought that are elaborated in a culture, in the active sense of the term - that is, in a civilization -, there is one that plays a particularly significant role, as far as this context is concerned, in the history of our tradition: poetry. It is interesting to note, in fact, that the Greek poetry (until the tragedy) of entry had for reference, a reference that remodels and reworks symbolically, the mythical-mythological and mythological thought. [...] it will not be until the 19th century when any mythological reference will seem impossible to a truly creative poetic activity that, already with Baudelaire, but in a dazzling way in Rimbaud, will take the dream (more or less explicitly) as a reference, thus presenting modern poetry as its elaboration or its symbolic reworking and occupying, in some way, the place left vacant by myth. At the expense of returning here to a more detailed phenomenological analysis of poetry, we can point out that modern poetry, which puts into play one or multiple “poetic events”, tends precisely to invest against herself the use of the perceptions of the common language to reopen them, in this fight against the language, to poetic perceptions *more openly transmissible to the language* and *more openly transmissible between them* but, this time, in the congruence of perceptions similar to those of sleep and of perceptions that are immediately no more than those of the common language. And this is what makes our poets the equivalents or neighbors of the “inventors” of myths in “archaic” societies; everything happens as if, forming part of the myth already about to die, poetry returns to the myth (whose transposed field in our institution is aesthetics), only that it is, in luck, a myth totally lost and whose substitute is no longer a kind of dream [Translated by the author].

Then, of course, photography and cinema would arrive, the +1 (*plus-one*) of all the classic arts: to what would be attached today, undoubtedly, the 1+ (*one-plus*) of all the series of the world (Wajcman, 2018)⁵. And all this will have happened, always, as in a kind of awake dream... until

⁵ The +1/1+ system, very common in the so-called Lacanian cartels, has the main virtue of displaying a dialectical non-oriented space, where, guiding the conductor (in the +1 position), he is, at the same time, inside and outside in the previously mentioned device (so that is 1+).

arriving, precisely, to our blurring world that is already a world of XSF⁶. Five years ago, Quentin Meillassoux defined the worlds of Extro-Science Fiction (XSF), in short, as worlds where those Kantian aesthetic categories of consciousness, time and space no longer govern. Let's see it in Meillassoux itself:

We can in fact conceive three types of extro-science worlds, of which a single type corresponds to what Kant describes whereas the other two depart from his imaginary: a. Worlds that we will call "type 1": these are all the possible worlds that are irregular, but whose irregularity does not affect science or consciousness. They are not extro-science worlds in the strict sense, because they still permit the exercise of science. But they are worlds that contradict the thesis according to which the strict necessity of laws is a condition for the possibility of science as well as consciousness. [...] b. Type-2 worlds: these are the worlds whose irregularity is sufficient to abolish science, but not consciousness. They are thus genuine extro-science worlds. [...] c. Finally, the third type of universe devoid of necessary laws would no longer be a world: it would be a universe in which disorderly modifications are so frequent that, following the example of chaos described by Kant in the objective deduction, the conditions of science as well as those of consciousness would be abolished. [...] [Order to have XSF] It has to obey two requirements: a) within it, events take place that no real or imaginary "logic" can explain; b) the question of science is present in the tale, albeit in a negative mode. We have to be dealing with a world in which science suddenly becomes—or is in the course of becoming—impossible, either entirely or partially (in this or that chemical, physical, biological... discipline). Or again, a more radical possibility: we have to present a world where science, which is always

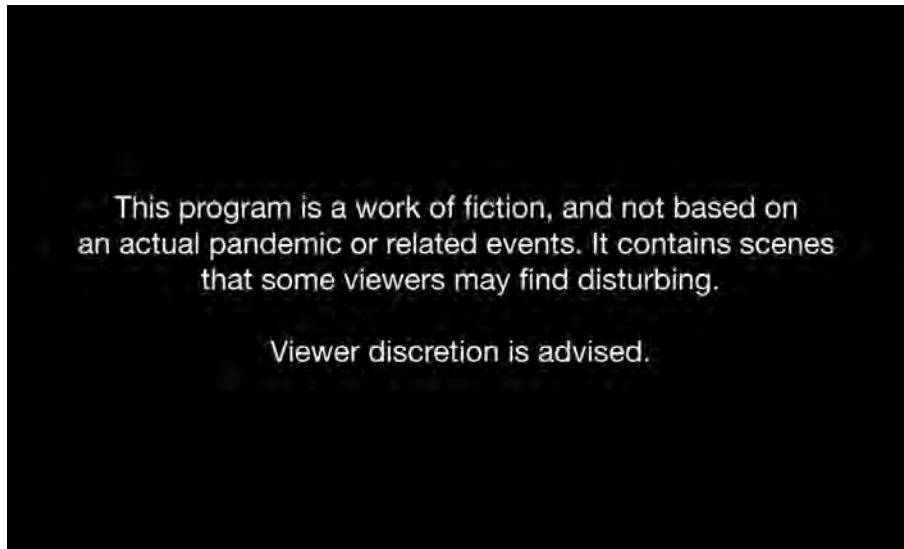
⁶ We cannot stop here longer than considerable to define the categories that we use and, therefore, we refer to the authors and writings that we give at the end in our reference list. Namely: for the questions of the worlds and its logics, mythologies (including modern and postmodern ones) as well as dreams and f/(ph)antasies, apart from the already mentioned Badiou (1999; 2016; 2018), Richir (1992; 2004; 2010) and Lacan (2003), the indispensable works of Didi-Huberman, Maffesoli, Doufurmantelle or even, our modest previous work on the subject (Arozamena, 2020). For a quick and deep knowledge of all these untranslatable terms, finally, you can consult the excellent dictionary of Cassin and Apter (2014).

excluded because of the frequency of aberrant events, continues to haunt the universe in the manner of an absence that is intensely felt in its effects (Meillassoux, 2015).

Except that all of this, in a way, came to presuppose from the beginning the disappearance of Phantasy, *mise en abyme* & MacGuffins... So the only *mise en abyme* we have in leftover is none other than that of the dream of a true life or, on the contrary, that of the sinister historical nightmare of surplus value.

In that sense, we will study three recent film cases, albeit in a symptomatic and very brief way. In fact, we'll narrow it down, hyperbolically, to a ternary of movie's frames and one comment. Don't panic: the experience always lies in the tension between two forces, in the irreconcilable disjunctive synthesis between two things, at its undecidable vanishing point.

Firstly, two frames:



Graphic 1: *Utopia*. Gillian Flynn, 2.



Graphic 2: *Rubber*. Quentin Dupieux, 2010.

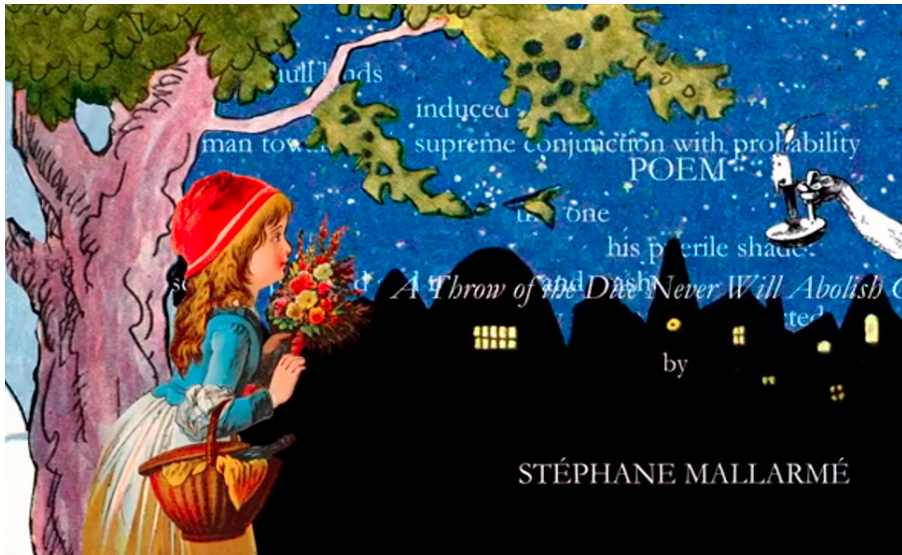
Now let's get to the comment: as it will have been abducted [sic] to spare, these are two frames extracted from *Rubber*, a Canadian film from 2010 and the American serial remake of *Utopia* (2020). In both postmodernist artifacts we do not appreciate any trace of Macguffin or XSF. Nothing of true phantasy (only fantasy), nor of dream... Just caged imagination (Aparicio Maydeu, 2015) and a little weird and eerie (not even *unheimlich*)⁷.

Rubber belongs to a genre called PWP (*Pot What Plot?*), which does not prevent it from being, on the other hand, the most Aristotelian film in cinema's history. Let us say that, in this case, the «no fuckin' reason» does not imply any Macguffin (or to put it another way: it is the zero degree of the Macguffin) and, in *Utopia*, well the fantasy is diluted directly in the spectacular paraphrenia of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2009). So the only thing *uncanny* about them is their transparency⁸.

⁷ For Mark Fisher (2017), the weird and the eerie would be beyond uncanny (i.e. the Freudian *unheimliche*). We think, howbeit, that the afterlife exists only as a regressive libido. That is to say, properly speaking, beyond is nothing more than a ghost of the herebefore. So, we call uncanny (*unheimlich*) to the negative sublime.

⁸ There is another film not too out of time and of this same type entitled *Coherence*

But now here comes the mother of the invention⁹: as far as the transmundanity of truths is concerned, *A coup de dés...* of S. Mallarmé is still today a much better XSF film made than *Rubber* and *Utopia*. Or, at least, that's what can be gleaned from Vicki Bennett in her exquisite *The Golem. An inanimate matter* (2013). Consider the following:



Graphic 2: *The Golem. People Like Us* (Vicki Bennett), 2013.

It is a single frame, just a frame, and as in the mallarmean poem itself (which will have already been deeply cinematographic in its fantastic literary machinism), here the XFS works analytically, the Macguffin shines dialectically, phenomenologically blinks the *mise en abyme*.

(2013) where, however, the comedy/tragedy opposition is subverted by parody and can still be expected something unexpected.

⁹ We are not joking: being the matrix of worlds, Platonic *Chôra* can be considered the first (and most advanced) Macguffin in the history of philosophy. Although, instead of sinister, the *Chôra* would be rather entirely queer. But in short, what counts now is that this protospace, totally in congruence with the unconscious hypothesis, is the place of the transmundanity of truths.

And in Mallarmé there is neither uncanny, nor weird, nor eerie. Simply and purely our very beautiful post-capitalist desire already becoming at the turn of the last century before the ideological dominance of the Hollywood's dream factory.

It is obvious that somewhere there must have been some ideological rupture. Bifo¹⁰ locates it, in fact, in 1977 and we believe that maybe he could be right. He says it like this:

In 1977, human history reached a turning point. Heroes died, or, more accurately, they disappeared. They were not killed by the foes of heroism, but were transferred to another dimension, dissolved, transformed into ghosts. The human race, misled by burlesque heroes made of deceptive electromagnetic substances, lost faith in the reality of life, and started believing only in the infinite proliferation of images. It was the year when heroes faded, transmigrating from the world of physical life and historical passion into the world of simulation and nervous stimulation. The year 1977 was a watershed: from the age of human evolution the world shifted to the age of de-evolution, or de-civilization. What had been built through labor and social solidarity began to be dissipated by a rapid and predatory process of derealization. The material legacy of the modern conflictive alliance between the industrious bourgeois and industrial workers—in public education, health care, transportation, and welfare—was sacrificed to the religious dogma of a god called “the markets.” In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the post-bourgeois dilapidation took the final form of a financial black hole. A drainage pump started to swallow and destroy the product of two hundred years of industriousness and collective intelligence, transforming the concrete reality of social civilization into abstractions—figures, algorithms, mathematical ferocity, and accumulation of nothing. The seductive force of simulation transformed physical forms into vanishing images, submitted visual art to viral spreading, and subjected

¹⁰ Franco Berardi (a.k.a. Bifo) is Professor of Social History of Communication at Accademia di Belle Arti, Milan, and co-founder of SCEPSI (European School of Social Imagination). Among his books are *Precarious Rhapsody* (Autonomedia, 2009), *The Soul at Work* (Semiotext(e) 2010) and *After the Future* (AK Press, 2011) and many many others...

language to the fake regime of advertising. At the end of this process, real life disappeared into the black hole of financial accumulation (Bifo, in Steyerl, 2012, pp. 9-10).

And maybe, as we say, it would be something that, in our world, still comes of long: it is known that just after the aphasia of the stories (and oral epics), having already been closed the infamous trenches of the not at all heroic I World War (Benjamin, 2001, p. 112) and, even more, after the brownish silence of the poem after Auschwitz (Adorno, 1962, p. 29) what came to be produced, in some way, was the correlative disappearance of Phantasy¹¹.

This present *Weltkrisis* (Kurz, 2013) does not reside in stupidity, proletarianized techno-morality or ignorance, but, much more decisively, in the most miserable symbolic foreclosure¹². So in this world, the wild originariety of the communism of the phenomenological unconscious, the psychoanalytical unconscious and the dialectical unconscious are denied, again and again, necessarily¹³.

¹¹ Disappearance which, incidentally, is analogous to the disappearance of fireflies. Not in vain, the French theorist George Didi-Huberman colophonned his famous work bearing the same name as follows: «Such is the fireflies' infinite recourse: their retreat when there is no withdrawal but a "diagonal force"; their clandestine community of "particles of humanity," those signals sent now and then, intermittently; their essential freedom of movement; their ability to make desire appear as the ultimate indestructible (and here I'm reminded of the very last words that Freud chose for his *Interpretation of Dreams*: "This future, taken by the dreamer as present, has been formed into the likeness of that past by the indestructible wish"). The fireflies: it's up to us not to see them disappear. We ourselves, must assume their freedom of movement, the retreat without withdrawal, the diagonal force, the ability to make particles of humanity appear, to make the indestructible desire appear. We must, ourselves—in retreat from the kingdom and the glory, in the open gap between the past and the future—become fireflies and thus form again a community of desire, a community of flashes shining out, of dances in spite of all, of thoughts to transmit» (Didi-Huberman, 2018, p. 83).

¹² Any *Weltkrisis* (world's crisis), as a logic's crisis in principle, always administers everywhere symbolic tautologies whose sole function, based on the impoverishment or general proletarianization of life, is destined to make unthinkable the own thought, i. e. has also to end with the conditions of science, consciousness, space and time... Thus, *ennui* (= uneasiness + disappointment) would consist only in raising a problem already solved in advance, and doing so also knowing that this would have no other purpose than that of our own boredom.

¹³ This wild originariety would not depend, on the other hand, but on the most impure

But, is it a matter of necessity or is it simply topicality? Let us return to Blumenberg at this point, as a climax, once again because Macguffin's question, today, can be clearly a key for us:

Is this game forbidden? Hardly. The disappearance of MacGuffins from the world would bring its movement to a standstill. The means justify the end; the secrets revealed along the way justify the unrevealed remainder. The answer never given to the question of the meaning of Being induced the effort to question human Dasein about the unity of its statements and behavior. On the way there was a delay, and delay proved itself to be the meaning of the way. [...] Boredom will be the just punishment for one who does not want to let himself be seduced by suspense – just as, for one who holds that the question of the meaning of Being is meaningless, only a yawning boredom can arise (or better: persist) from the preparations for the expedition into the terra incognita of the understanding of Being.

Boredom is, when the fire of all fires has been lost as the punishment of all punishments, the remaining optimization of the ennui of Dasein. For it there is no desire more urgent than to be disturbed. Curiosity is its epiphany (Blumenberg, 1991, p. 193).

Finally this desire to think will have been nothing else, in the polymorphic curiosity that it carries, than the game of the Thing itself (so: *das Ding ist die Sache Selbst*), or what is the same: the unnameable and infinite desire for meaning, infinite multiplicity and event.

In guise of (A) Conclusion

Phantasy is, so to speak, the very matter of the real. It would be, by way of conclusion, a region not alienated by consciousness.

Dreams, that wonderful amalgam of terror and beauty, always comes to announce (i.e. to announce to us, the subjects of the

affirmation or flickering of the disjunctive synthesis, that is, of this passion for the real inherent to the *wesen* out of language and world. Although it is not necessary to lament too much because as Nauman well anticipated, it can always be thought that: «the point where language starts to break down as a useful tool for communication is the same edge where poetry or art occurs» (Nauman, 2017, p. 34). Once again, phantasy is the best ally of fireflies.

unconscious) not only the realisation of that above all things we wish but we couldn't enunciate but also that we'll never know how to live. Hence, if it is convenient, dreams and phantasies comes to announce to us the insignificant sublimity of the real that is presented to us, sensibly, in these uncertain presences without present... There is the so called «intelligence» (Dufourmantelle, 2012).

And while within the modern mythological enterprise, two fundamental events occupy the forefront (the invention of literature and the invasion of cinema & outstanding TV series of today), we must conclude, very shortly:

1. that both myth, fantasy and dream interfere with certain experiences of thinking about the scarps of a savage origin, only through the flickering concreteness and immemorial concreteness of an inhospitable phenomenological, dialectical and psychoanalytic communism;
2. that thought is, in the deepest sense, phenomenologising schematization as language (temporalisation in presence without assignable present), concept, affection and perceptual that is scanned in the dialectics of life with Idea and truths... Therefore:
3. the review by some masterpieces of the artistic truth procedure, in its historical and therefore ideological discursivity, as well as in its different but always modern literary and cinematographic variants, provides us not examples but, rather, examples of what from Plato, we could call transcendental mimesis.

And with this, in short, it will fulfill that the fact of thinking these forms of life, is already something that is worth living, really and truly, in thought.

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Block II

BREAKING FANTASTIC IN LITERATURE AND ITS TRANSVERSAL CONNECTIONS



IDENTITY AND THE FANTASTIC IN *THE SPIRITISTS OF TELDE*¹

Virginia Martín Dávila

Luis León Barreto was awarded with the XVI *Premio Blasco Ibáñez* for his novel *The Spiritists of Telde*, a book delving into a particular ritual crime that took place in 1930's municipal district of Telde (Gran Canaria). Upon publication, this work caused a tremendous impact on the literary circles of the age, making regional and international headlines. Almost 50 years after its publication, it has been re-edited up to eight times, as well as translated into German, Romanian, English, Italian and French. This is, without a doubt, the most celebrated work from an author who wanted «to make my humble contribution to the search of our identity» (Arencibia, 1986, p. 15; my translation), just as other writers of his generation, known as the 70s or *boom generation*, did. This group had a wide range of literary aspirations encompassing both subject/theme and textual materials themselves. Jorge Rodríguez Padrón notes in this respect that:

[...] si seguimos considerando como notas consustanciales de lo canario el aislamiento, el cosmopolitismo, el sentimiento del mar, un cierto

¹ Title in original language: *Las Espiritistas de Telde*. Work co-financed by the Agencia Canaria de Investigación, Innovación y Sociedad de la Información de la Consejería de Economía, Conocimiento y Empleo y por el Fondo Social Europeo (FSE) Programa Operativo Integrado de Canarias 2014-2020, Eje 3 Tema Prioritario 74 (85%).

deje melancólico y saudoso, y convenimos que ésas son las notas que deben diferenciar un arte y una literatura nuestros, no saldremos del mismo círculo vicioso, como tampoco nos liberaremos de domésticas limitaciones si seguimos tercamente empeñados en aportar ningún punto de partida válido para iniciar una labor creadora. No debe ser el propósito de nuestra literatura el definirnós, sino que debe explicarnos; explicar la relación con el medio, y el porqué de su problemática respecto a él (Rodríguez, 1985, p. 31).²

1. *The Spiritists of Telde and the Canarian Boom*

Isolation, conceptual cosmopolitanism, the attachment to the sea, and intimacy are the themes proposed by Valbuena Prat as «themes typical of the island's lyrical works» (González Ramírez, 2008, p. 183; my translation), themes Rodríguez Padrón thinks should better be disregarded. However, this canon-breaking stance is not limited to theme, but also extends to the idea of splitting from the lyrical tradition because of its inability to develop an exhaustive «explanation». He commented in this regard:

Hemos insistido en hacer poesía cuando era imprescindible desarrollar una actividad analítica, atravesar todos los caminos y cotejar todas las posibilidades, e imposibilidades, por medio de la expresión, del lenguaje literario, de una subversión del mismo. Y, sobre todo, tratar de señalar sus porqués (Rodríguez Padrón, 1985, p. 26).³

² [...] if we keep on relying on the themes of isolation, cosmopolitanism, the attachment to the sea, a particular melancholic accent, as inherent characteristics of the Canarian identity, thus seeing them as what defines an art and a literature that we may call ours, we will not be able to break through this vicious circle, in the same fashion that we will not free ourselves from any domestic limitation if we keep stubbornly stuck in a position that does not foster creativity in the first place. The purpose of our literature should not be that of *defining* ourselves, but rather *explaining* who we are; our relationship with the environment and why that particular issue raises up the problematics it does (Rodríguez Padrón, 1985, p. 31; my translation).

³ We have committed ourselves in writing poetry when it was indispensable to perform an analytical activity, breaking through every field possible and checking all possible solutions, by means of literary expression, and by its own subversion. And, above everything else, by trying to point out the «whys» (Rodríguez Padrón, 1985, p. 26; my translation).

This generation's break with the literary canon gave birth to an experimentalism in which Canarian dialectal variants were inextricably intertwined with Hispanic American Baroque influences, and, in some cases, merged into a magical view of the world, fact that becomes evident when taking into account the literary influences of the generation, as they were in the artistic vanguard of their time, as Osvaldo Rodríguez Pérez notes:

[...] el camino de la novela contemporánea, abierto por Faulkner, Joyce o Kafka, por el que transitan escritores del otro lado del Atlántico como Sábato, Borges, Vargas Llosa, Carpentier, Lezama Lima, Cortázar o García Marqués [sic] —antes que en la Península—, encuentran en la literatura de Canarias su cauce más natural (Rodríguez Pérez, 1994, p. 15).⁴

It is thus patent how *The Spiritists of Telde* is particularly influenced by Carpentier when we take a close look at the baroque style pervading the work, contrasting with the Spanish dialectal variants employed by the characters; the myriad of direct text references, from legal —wills, forensic reports— to newspaper clippings, give an idiosyncratic sense of unity.

These documents are particularly relevant in the book in the way they toy with the narrative temporality taking us back in time while revealing what has actually happened with their own voice; but, on the other hand —and this is what we are most interested to delve deeper into— these documents are presented to us as objective proofs in contrast to the characters' memories and the retelling of the events. Documents are perfect snapshots of history. This objectivist vision is complemented by journalist Enrique López's view, who travels to the island in order to investigate the case forty years after the events, in a stark contrast with the magical view of the world thus far delivered by the extradiegetic narrator and the several characters of the book.

⁴ [...] the path of the contemporary novel, set out by Faulkner, Joyce or Kafka, is the path writers on the other side of the Atlantic, the likes of Sábato, Borges, Vargas Llosa, Carpentier, Lezama Lima, Cortázar or García Marqués [sic] —overtaking mainland Spain—, find in the literature of the Canary Island its natural course (Rodríguez Pérez, 1994, p. 15; my translation).

The document moving the whole narrative forward, serving as a culmination of the Van der Walle Saga and forcing Enrique López traveling to Gran Canaria, epicenter of the story, is not other than the following headline:

[...] HORROROSO CRIMEN DE UNA DONCELLA [...] Una joven bellísima es sacrificada por sus familiares como acto de expiación ordenado por un espíritu del Más Allá. —Recibió 200 heridas y su cuerpo era una llaga de sangre. —Detenidos los fanáticos ejecutores. —Al parecer estaban convencidos de realizar un acto de salvación; [...] (León, 1981, p. 207).⁵

Before introducing the fantastic elements present throughout the work and their functionality, it is convenient to briefly sum up the series of events displayed in the novel: the first born and only boy of the Van der Walle family is suffering from consumption and, for the family despair, the medicines prescribed by the doctors are of no use at all. The family agrees to follow recommendations from Juan Camacho so they pay visits to several *santeras*⁶ so as to try to cure Jacinto. Influenced by him, Jacinto, his mother and sisters embrace Theosophy and commence to perform cleansing rituals and spiritual séances (of which the youngest sister, Ariadna, rarely and reluctantly takes part of). Jacinto's sisters and mother are convinced that he is the one «destined to bring forth the new Lord's revelation» (León Barreto, 1981, p. 151; my translation), thought that he believes in as well because of his own ability to communicate with spirits.

In the end, Jacinto succumbs to illness and dies. Ten days after the burial, they organize a spiritual séance to communicate with him, and there they are informed that he inhabits Heaven's basement (that is, the Purgatory), although the conversation is abruptly interrupted. Francisca, the sister trying to get in touch with Jacinto, inform her sisters and mother that, in order for him to ascend to Heaven, it is mandatory for one of them

⁵ [...] HEINOUS CRIME AGAINST YOUNG MAIDEN [...] Beautiful young woman is sacrificed by her relatives as a form of atonement commanded by some spirit from the Afterlife. – She suffered 200 injuries, her whole body becoming a blood wound. —The two fanatic executioners now held in custody—. It seems they were convinced they had committed an act of salvation; [...] (León Barreto, 1981, p. 207; my translation).

⁶ *Santería* practitioner, a cult of Afro-Caribbean origins.

to be sacrificed. They choose Ariadna, and, after three days of fasting, they commit the ritual crime that would put an end to her life. Her father, upon hearing of the death of his youngest daughter, commits suicide. After the trial, they are declared guilty of murder, but they are ultimately destined to a psychiatric hospital due to their defense focusing on the family's «twilight schizophrenia».

Forty years after this series of events, a newspaper firm from Madrid sends Enrique López to investigate on the case. After ten days in the island, consulting documents, interviewing the defense lawyer, and even the *santeras* and healers, as well as researching the town's folk, he considers he has enough material to write his article and flies off the island. While in the plane, an stewardess give him that day's newspaper, but it's actually the 29th April 1930's issue, with the news about Ariadna's murder right in the cover. The newspaper disintegrates in his hands on its flight to Madrid.

2. The Fantastic and pseudofantastic

The magic element is a constant within the novel, and around it we may find a battery of texts with the purpose of reaffirm this element as an actual fact, while other elements try to expose its impossibility. We shall not forget that the irruption of a fact that separates what is real from what is not in intratextual and extratextual realities is the foundation of the Fantastic. In this manner it is essential to have a clear understanding of the social paradigms determining what is real and possible, as it is to identify the theory of knowledge and beliefs supporting these paradigms, as David Roas—following Susana Reisz and Rachel Bouvet—has pointed out:

Lo fantástico está, por tanto, en estrecha relación con las teorías sobre el conocimiento y con las creencias de una época. Y no solo eso, sino que el «coeficiente de irrealidad» de una obra —utilizo el término propuesto por Rachel Bouvet— y su correspondiente efecto fantástico, está también en función del contexto de recepción, y no solo de la interacción del autor (Roas, 2011, p. 33).⁷

⁷ The Fantastic is, therefore, closely linked to a certain age's the theories of knowledge and beliefs. And what is more, the «unreality coefficient» of a certain work—I employ the term coined by Rachel Bouvet—and its corresponding fantastic effect, is dependent on the concept of reception, and not just on the author's interaction (Roas, 2011, p. 33; my translation).

The Spiritists of Telde shows us a worldview capable of meaningfully breaking 20th Century's conception of objective reality, which sustains the impossibility of changing the rules of nature by means of rituals or any other kind of divine intervention. Practices like *Santería*, Spiritism, witchcraft or Voodoo are elements that we constantly find within the text to reinforce the idea of a magical worldview. This makes the novel seem like the perfect breeding ground for the Fantastic, even though it cannot be easily categorized among the genre because there is no fact that effectively thwarts extratextual perception of reality to be found that is not used as an allegory—which is the basis to being able to categorize a text as pertaining to the fantastic genre in literature theory according to Todorov's *Définition du fantastique* (1970)—.

If we were to pay attention to the fact that all events regarding the Van der Walle family find a rational closure in terms of alienation and mental illness, there is no possibility but to assert that this novel belongs to the pseudofantastic genre, which, in Roas words:

Con dicho término me refiero a aquellas obras que utilizan las estructuras, motivos y recursos propios de lo fantástico, pero cuyo tratamiento de lo imposible nos aleja del efecto y sentido propios de esta categoría. Son textos que o bien terminan racionalizando los supuestos fenómenos sobrenaturales, o bien la presencia de estos no es más que una excusa para ofrecer un relato satírico, grotesco o alegórico (Roas, 2011, p. 62).⁸

2.1. The characters

In *The Spiritists of Telde*, pseudofantastic elements are especially relevant for they are a vehicle to show a part of the history of the Canary Islands, its demographic configuration as well as the set of beliefs that developed in the islands, and even how are they perceived through the eyes of other regions of the national geography: «[...] Y sabes que allí, como en

⁸ With the aforementioned term I am referring to those works making use of structures, motifs and literary devices characteristic of the Fantastic, but whose approach to the impossible effectively dissolve the fantastic element particular to this category. These are texts that whether end rationalizing the alleged paranormal events, or use these events as a mere excuse to offer a satirical, grotesque or allegorical narrative (Roas, 2011, p. 62; my translation).

Galicia, hay una verdadera cultura popular en torno al curanderismo y los asuntos de brujas» (León Barreto, 1981, p. 44)⁹, comments the newspaper editor-in-chief to Enrique López before sending him to Gran Canaria.

Witchcraft, *Santería* and rituals are staples to this novel, as we have previously stated, and within this imagery two perfectly differentiated types can be found: on the one hand, there are those widely recognized in western culture, as are the cases of witches' covens or tortures and inquisitorial trials; and, in the other one, those of more regional quality but that, nonetheless, share certain elements with the former ones.

Decían las décimas que hasta las monjas enloquecieron, abjuraban de Cristo y se entregaban al Señor de las Tinieblas en el Llano de las Brujas, donde se encontraban con viejas que cruzaban el Atlántico desde La Habana y desde Cádiz; de todos los pueblos llegan alzadas en sus pírganos, sus cuerpos brillantes de aceite, para revolcarse en estos llanos donde crecía el centeno, a la entrada de Guayadeque

De Canarias somos,
de la Habana venimos;
no hace un cuarto de hora
que de allá salimos.
Racimos de uvas,
racimos de moras,
¿quién ha visto dama
bailando a estas horas? (León Barreto, 1981, p. 164).¹⁰

⁹ «[...] And you know there, not unlike in Galicia, there is a real popular culture around healers and witchcraft» (León Barreto, 1981, p. 44; my translation).

¹⁰ The *décimas* used to tell stories about how even witches lost their minds, abjured Christ and gave themselves up to the Master of Darkness in *Llano de las Brujas*, where they came across old women traversing the Atlantic Sea from Havana and Cadiz; of each and every town they came raising their *pírganos*, their bodies shiny with oil, just to wallow in these plain where rye used to grow, at the Guayadeque entrance
To the Canary Islands we belong,
From Havana we come,
Not a quarter has past
since we parted ways from there.
Bunches of grapes,
blackberries,
¿who has ever seen a maiden
dancing at this time? (León Barreto, 1981, p. 164; my translation).

The links between the Canary Islands and America we find in these lines is another staple in the text and a foundational element in shaping the identity due to migration and their constant cultural exchange on both sides of the Atlantic. The embodiment of this phenomenon is Juan Camacho, a Canarian man who returns to Gran Canaria to introduce the Van der Walle family to several rituals.

Hablaron los cronistas de las teorías que algunos emigrantes desalmados importaban del vudú y la macumba, de los cultos africanos que aprendieron en las Antillas y desde allí fueron traídos por seres que sembraron en la isla la semilla de la fe errada, por lo que hay que castigar a los instigadores del mal, a los que corrompen a cuerpos que sin duda carecen de la noción de la realidad, locura contagiada en sesiones que demuestran la *esquizofrenia crepuscular* de estos seres, según las defensas recordarían aquel mes de noviembre. Pormenorizaban que ninguna de las casi doscientas heridas que presentaba el cadáver de Ariadna bastaba por sí sola para causarle la muerte [...] (León Barreto, 1981, p. 129).¹¹

Due to this migratory phenomenon and to the cultural mix it entails, why Juan Camacho is accused of having ties to the events, which leads the defense to argue in favor of the schizophrenia thesis. This fragment is also a testimony of how every event is explained in a rational fashion even when the magical worldview is being reference, which makes clear that this is, in fact, a pseudofantastic text.

¹¹ Chroniclers spoke about the theories that some ungodly emigrants imported from Voodoo and macumba, of African cults they learned about in the West Indies, and were brought here by beings that planted the seed of the false faith, so these evil instigators are to be punished, those who corrupt the bodies of those we know for certain that lack any notion of reality, a madness spread in séances that reveal the *twilight schizophrenia* of these creatures, as the defenses would remember that month of November. They detailed that not single one of the almost two hundred wounds found in Ariadna's corpse were enough to cause her death. [...] (León Barreto, 1981, p. 129; my translation).

2.2. Locations and rumors

Apart from the cultural elements, references to the Fantastic can be found in space descriptions. For the sake of example, let us now look at the description made by the journalist by the time he arrives on the scene:

Se santiguó al cruzar los muros de la ermita: nunca viene nadie por aquí, hay quien dice que esto está embrujado ¿sabe usted?, que ven luces y oyen suspiros a medianoche, y lo cierto es que la yerba que aquí se da ni sirve para las sabandijas, el agua no es sino costra salina que mata las plantas, las plataneras que están lindando dan piñas de desecho, los calabacines se pasman, las judías salen negras y al millo lo pica el gusano (León Barreto, 1981, pp. 66-67).¹²

The location description as acursed space we find in this excerpt is yet another example of the pseudofantastic. In it, walls of a ruined sacred site are intertwined with paranormal phenomena allegedly responsible for the impossibility of life development. Besides, the fact that this is a description made by an islander who not only identifies the whereabouts of the place but ultimately generates a whole story around it, is a rhetorical figure strongly linked to the Gothic novel and, more extensively, to the horror genre in general.

Another relevant element is the fair amount of rumors spread by the cast of characters in relation with his magical worldview and the effects they have in reality itself, a legacy of the Gothic novel, as we have just seen.

[...] —La chica menor estaba embrujada y para quitarle el mal la pinchaba con tijeras y alfileres hasta que murió, con los ojos como cuajarones de

¹² He made the sign of the cross while crossing the chapel walls: nobody ever comes around here, there are some who talk of it being cursed, you know?, they see lights and hear whimpers at midnight, and, truth is, the grass around here are not even good enough for the vermin, the water is nothing but salt crust which destroys plants, the banana trees grow nothing but bunches of waste, squashes get squashed, beans come up from the dirt blackened and corn is the worm's meal (León Barreto, 1981, pp. 66-67; my translation).

sangre. La hermana mayor —que era un cáncamo de fea— se vestía con una sotana y se trastornaron de la cabeza porque tocaban el piano y bailaban mientras tenían a la chica amarrada en una silla, pegándole con la caña de la escoba para que soltara el espíritu (León Barreto, 1981, pp. 101-102).¹³

The inclusion of rumors regarding the facts throughout the story, clearly rebutted in relation to the real events, reinforce in the reader the idea that what is being told is not to be taken seriously, and instead the historical and forensic documents are what's reliable, completely negating the validity of the magical worldview. A similar effect happens to Enrique López and Raquel after having an interview with a high amount of people with contradictory informations:

—No debe haber diez personas que sepan la versión exacta dijo, Enrique, porque a estas alturas la historia está trastocada al infinito, y Raquel le explica que en los pueblos cercados por el mar se revuelven las tradiciones y los oscuros demonios, una carnada de jeroglíficos que nadie ha podido descifrar [...] (León Barreto, 1981, p. 182).¹⁴

Once again, rationalism reigns in this novel, and it maintains its crown until the very end of the story, where the one and only event in the entire work capable of breaking the mold of the «unreality coefficient» and transport us to the domain of the Fantastic happens when Enrique López is about to fly to Madrid:

¹³ [...] —The youngest girl was cursed and to get the evil out of her they pierced them with scissors and nails until she died, with eyes like clots of blood. The oldest sister—who was as ugly as sin— wore a robe and everyone lose their heads because she played the piano and they danced while she was all tied up in a chair, hitting her with a broomstick so as to pull out the spirit from her (León Barreto, 1981, pp. 101-102; my translation).

¹⁴ —I doubt there are ten people who could tell the exact version, said Enrique, because, at this time, the story has mutated to a point of no-return, and Raquel explains that in towns close to the sea, both tradition and dark demons run wild, like a decoy of hieroglyphics no one could ever decipher [...] (León Barreto, 1981, p. 182; My translation).

[...] ahí vienen las azafatas con sus uniformes de rayas asimétricas, antes del desayuno vamos a entregarles la prensa local del día, la azafata Yolanda Miera con el paquete de periódicos de la mañana, el ejemplar que él recibe con un gesto de gratitud dispuesto ya a dejarse golpear por ese titular fuerte de la primera página, HORROROSO CRIMEN DE UNA DONCELLA, y más abajo, los subtítulos: Una joven bellísima es sacrificada por sus familiares como acto de expiación ordenado por un espíritu del Más Allá. —Recibió 200 heridas y su cuerpo era una llaga de sangre. —Detenidos los fanáticos ejecutores. —Al parecer estaban convencidos de realizar un acto de salvación; ha sentido un soplo frío sobre sus ojos, no es posible que éste sea el pliego amarillento de La Provincia del martes 29 de abril de 1930 [...] (León Barreto, 1981, p. 207).¹⁵

This fact, that is not given an explanation whatsoever so as to frame it within the intratextual and extratextual parameters of reality, could turn the novel itself into a fantastic one; however, a few lines below, this line of reasoning is debunked:

Horroroso crimen en Telde, el papel amarillento deshaciéndose entre los dedos, quebrándose en tiras minúsculas, desintegradas en motas de polvo, cuarteándose entre sus dedos como arenisca sobre el mar (León Barreto, 1981, p. 208).¹⁶

¹⁵ [...] There comes the stewardess with their asymmetrical stripes uniforms, we will hand you today's local newspapers before breakfast, air hostess Yolanda Miera with the pile of morning newspapers, he gets handed an issue which he receives with an expression of gratitude just to prepare himself for a shocking headline, HEINOUS CRIME AGAINST YOUNG MAIDEN, and just below that: Beautiful young woman is sacrificed by her relatives as a form of atonement commanded by some spirit from the Afterlife. —She suffered 200 injuries, her whole body becoming a blood wound. —The two fanatic executioners now held in custody—. It seems they were convinced they had committed an act of salvation; he felt a cold air dust above his eyes, it is not possible that yellowish newspaper is, indeed the provincial issue from 28th April 1930 [...] (León Barreto, 1981, p. 207; my translation).

¹⁶ Heinous crime in Telde, the yellowish paper disintegrates in his hands, a brittle fracture between his fingers, dust particles dry and crackling like sandstone over the sea (León Barreto, 1981, p. 208; my translation).

2.3. Fantasy and Allegory

The allegory in this fragment overtakes the paranormal: the newspaper disintegrates between Enrique's fingers the same way truth did after he tried to bring it to light forty years after the events. The newspaper is nothing but Enrique's failure at trying to join the pieces together, only to find dust and far too miniscule and scattered particles, never to be restored.

The allegory hinders the development of the Fantastic, no matter how frequently be reality manipulated by it, as the allegory is based upon a textual rereading and boosts the multiplicity of meanings of what's written, while the aim of the Fantastic, if we stick to Roas definition, is: «to subvert the reader's perception of the real world» (Roas, 2011, p. 113; my translation). In spite of that, breaking up that perception is precisely what León Barreto achieves with his novel, as the story's concept is no longer the same for the reader. The circularity that goes hand with hand with the textual polyphony developed in *The Spiritists of Telde*, forces one to rethink the events of the story as logically necessary, whose only possible conclusion was, in fact, Ariadna Van der Walle's murder. This casuistry within the story is subverted by the magical elements present in the novel, which faces two opposite views of the world: the rational and the magical views, while delving deep into the creation of the Canarian identity.

3. Conclusions

The literary tension generated by the novel's fantastic elements never go as far as to materialize themselves; we witness the conflict between the real and the impossible, but the «unreality coefficient» remains intact, fact that bring us back to the pseudofantastic realm. Reality is not overtly subverted in *The Spiritists of Telde*, as it would be the case in the fantasy genre, but instead shows a different take on reality: a reality that seems to be restraining something struggling to emerge but never gets to materialise. The allegorical element, typical of pseudofantastic works, is what points the way to *that which hides*, that being the Canarian identity.

On the other hand, the inner force of these fantastic elements digs into Canarian identity because they are tied to its History, its demographic configuration and beliefs, which, along with the literary formulas linked to the Gothic novel and to horror genre more generally, not only shows the particularisms of the 70s generation's experimentalism, but also paints the Canary Islands like a cursed place, where rumors are able to cloud reality and configure it as imbued with this magical worldview.

The fantastic characters related to Europe, like the witch or the spirit, acquire an identitarian dimension by the stark contrast with the local component there are placed in, mixed with their African and/or American counterparts, like the healer or the *santero*. This cast of characters fulfill the role of paradigm of the Canarian migration issue, and, therefore, of the culture and belief blending that has occurred in the islands and, while maintaining a Christian component, contain elements pertaining Spiritism, *Santería* or Voodoo.

The Spirits of Telde, in conclusion, take the reader for an adventure in the realm of literary genre mix and textual polyphony that ends up being an allegory of the History of the Canary Islands in and of itself, a place where multiculturalism has generated crucial elements to the formation of its identity. The fantastic elements within this allegorical construct play a major role operating as a counterpoint to rational discourse by creating a game between intratextual and extratextual reality. The inclusion of santeras, spiritists or cursed places reveal the islands' multicultural nature and their inner tensions, as well as the necessary convergences required to produce an identity paradigm.

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BORGES AND THE ARCHETYPE: SYNECDOCHIC RECURRENCE AS A CREATIONAL ENGINE

Miguel Ángel Albújar-Escuredo

The rich symbology in Borges' works, due to its central role in the Argentinian author literary production, has been periodically assessed through many studies, but not as a fundamental logic of his emblematic writing style¹. This essay will highlight the importance of the archetype as a cross-cultural symbolic device in Borges, being the main shaper of his literary work by way of dissecting the myriad of symbols embedded

¹ Regina Samson (2004) made a very useful summary of recent trends in *Tiempos y lugares de Borges: un panorama de la crítica actual*. Clearly, the most relevant of these studies are Jaime Alazraki's writings (1977), where he assessed the image of the mirror from a structural point of view, as well as the works carried out by Carmen Noemí Perilli (1983), who has done the same from a thematic point of view. At the same time, both Adrián Huici (1998) and Ishak Farag Fahim (2011) aimed for an in-depth research of the labyrinth image and evidenced its capacity to add archetypal meaning to Borges' stories. On the other hand, William H. Bossart (2003) carried out a reflection on the metaphysical symbols that have to do with Borges' philosophers of choice. Following this same critical line of thought, Susanne Zepp (2003) cultivated a dialectic of symbolical opposites. Finally, Rooseboom E. Gallego (2013) devoted a dissertation to the symbolic image of Judas in *Tres versiones de Judas*. Other two recent and critical scholarly studies are the publication of Lois Parkinson Zamora's research (2006), referring to Borges' characteristic use of synecdoche as a dialectic of Baroque aesthetics (260); And James Ramsey's (2011) interpretation of the synecdoche in Borges' work as a practice of literary parasitism due to a double intention exemplified by both narrative and irony.

in three short stories collected in *El Aleph* (Borges, 1957): *Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva*, *La escritura de Dios*, and *El Aleph*².

Therefore, it will focus on demonstrating how the trope of the synecdoche, in constant use in *El Aleph*, reveals, in turn, the recurrent use of the archetype as the most important creative engine present in Borges' narrations, going beyond materialist-historicist interpretations or specific metaphorical infatuations.

Firstly, to expose the fictional *modus operandi* at work in the Borgesian universe, it is necessary to properly define what synecdoche and archetype are. The former is classified as a figure of speech that belongs to the poetic and oratory registers (Azaústre & Rigall, 1997, p. 83). It is defined from the correspondence between two shared meanings in the same notion. This correspondence can have two modes: one collected in the Latinism *Pars pro toto* (a part taken for the whole) and another one from *Totum pro parte* (the whole taken for a part). The dual property of synecdoche applies perfectly in a Borgesian context when considering the author's use of metaphors to invoke the archetype. Thus, what enables the complete understanding of *El Aleph* is the synecdoche, a rhetorical mechanism that allows a never-ending succession of symbolic games. Then, it is crucial to also delimit the sense of the word «archetype». The term has several meanings, some of them being closely related and linked to very specific fields of studies. However, a *bona fide* definition of archetype would be a statement as follows: an original model either in art or in some other field. Hence, it must be the core from which a later series of thoughts and actions bloom, a sort of germinal seed that ends up blossoming³.

Why is the blossoming archetype so important? An authority in the field of literary theory familiar with the notion of archetype is Northrop Frye (1951). He states that the archetype is a necessary concept to properly understand the surreptitious meaning that an author, intentionally or unintentionally, seeks to convey through their

² I believe these three short stories to be valid samples of Borges' fictional writing style.

³ Before continuing with the biological analogy, one might ask oneself whether there is also a moment of death and definitive disappearance for the archetype. Despite the appeal of the hypothesis, it is not the aim of the essay to explore such a path.

creation. Frye argues that the fact that authors feel the compulsion to explore these hidden meanings is due to a cross-cultural urge, which is also why archetypes are recognized in a plethora of geographies and epochs: «In particular, the literary anthropologist who chases the source of the Hamlet legend from the pre-Shakespeare play to Saxo, and from Saxo to nature-myths, is not running away from Shakespeare: he is drawing closer to the archetypal from which Shakespeare recreated» (Frye, 1951, p. 101). This presumed archetype establishes a continuity of human interest that is repeated infinitely, assuming time and space would be no more than links from the same anthropological chain. Such continuity would reveal the internal motivations of both authors and readers of literary works. The authors' motivations are not innocent, but they are all embedded with deep ideological inferences that seek to force in the reader predetermined responses. This is corroborated by Fredric Jameson (1981) who considers archetypes, as expressions of a political unconscious, necessarily circumscribed to historical materialism. The archetypes would ultimately reveal an indelible desire for a social utopia without classes, highlighting in the process its irresolvable internal contradictory nature of «aporia» (Xie, 1996, p. 124). Then, the classless utopia would be ironically dominated by the class that interprets it (Jameson, 1981). Concurring with Jameson's ideas, it is legit to promote Marxist and Historicist readings of Borges, since they render fruitful critical results as Daniel Balderston (1993), Beatriz Sarlo (1993), José Eduardo González (1998), Graciela Montaldo (2006), and Luis Othoniel Rosa (2016) have demonstrated. Nevertheless, that is not the intention of this essay, but to explore a different scholarly path focused on the importance of merging rhetoric and semiotics in reading Borges.

Returning to Frye's notion, a myth, which will be discussed later, adapts and reaches multiple forms within the cultural ecosystem of each culture. Thus, it allows the critic to establish necessary parallels to configure a universal cartography of literature (Frye, 1951, p. 96). Therefore, the archetype marks a series of cultural experiences that are established as omnipresent in all cultures and ubiquitous in the history of the human species. Assuming that the archetype itself is not a tangible object, but a set of ethereal shared experiences, Frye

determines that myth and archetype are the same entity: «The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth is the archetype, though it might be convenient to say myth only when referring to narrative, and archetype when speaking of significance» (p. 103).

In this way, we must understand the ingrained meaning in an aesthetic experience. Myth is a phenomenon that anchors vital sense, in the form of an archetype accessible to subjects, independently of culture of origin or date of birth. In addition, the myth is also the narrative vehicle that allows us to give an understandable form to an aesthetic experience. Consequently, it would communicate and facilitate the potential connection with the reader. The importance of myth/archetype is disclosed by its indissoluble common unity. That is, human beings are understood in a series of shared experiences (archetypes) that are recognized by different narrative vehicles (myths). As a result, the differentiation between individuals is partially erased, since narrative repetition imposes nexuses not only between authors and themes, but even between characters and environments.

Frye focuses on the idea of the archetype in the field of literary criticism: «One essential principle of archetypal criticism is that the individual and the universal forms of an image are identical, the reasons being too complicated for us just now» (Frye, 1951, p. 108)⁴. Persevering with the understanding of the concept of archetype, Frye's ideas support Gustav Jung's work, acknowledging that both authors work from very different theoretical and scientific fields, the Jungian concept of the archetype bore some resemblance to Frye's. By means of in-depth studies in the fields of anthropology, folklore, ethnology and religion, Jung comes to the conclusion that symbols act as an expression of a necessary previous reality. As a result, this fact implies that symbols communicate an innate psychic content (Jung, 2011). Thus, Jung's psychic content and Frye's aesthetic experience aim to

⁴ This chapter infers that the exploration of the synecdoche is an epistemological tool. Borges himself embraces it, albeit ironically, in a premeditated way, detecting that representations of a part potentially retained the portrait of humankind, but mocking this thought at the same time.

the same universal phenomenon. Unequivocally, both of these authors emphasize the importance of synecdoche, which we can use to better understand Borges' narration.

The necessary reality that remains in the background is the real reason for the generation of symbols, being those what Jung understands as archetypes: «La continuidad a través de los tiempos de una serie de figuras simbólicas, en todas las civilizaciones y bajo todas las latitudes, lleva a Jung a la noción de los arquetipos» (Toro, 1961, p. 14). These symbols are established as innate forms and collective previous structures that give meaning and density to individual experiences. Then, archetypes communicate by means of symbols, which in turn assemble chains of human significance, which are myths. Among others, Jung designates as archetypes the ideas of God, soul, and the devil; all of which, this paper will show, are emblematic of Borges' writing style.

So far, we have summarized the essential ideas of Frye and Jung who theorize about the concept of the myth. These theorists seem to suspect that symbols depend on archetypes, since they have a fundamental function to provide. This essay will show how Borges lays out symbols time and time again with the aim to reproduce the same archetypes, which are also composed through synecdoche in his narrations of *El Aleph*. This later trope permits readers to connect and give coherence to stories at first judged dissimilar, and allows readers to generate a complete understanding of particular myths that have come to be recognized as the same Borgesian story. In that way, over and over again, by repetition Borges achieves novelty.

Precisely, Charles Baudouin (1961) thinks about how the fallacy of originality becomes relevant. Baudouin states that the concept of novelty is a lie when he writes «Il est très curieux d'observer combien on résiste a priori à l'idée que l'imagination ait des constantes»⁵ (Baudouin, 1961, p. 5). This is a reasoning that Borges shared as well (Borges & Ferrari, 2005, p. 244). Baudouin defines archetypes in a slightly different way than the previous two thinkers (Frye and Jung) did. He judges archetypes as constants of the imagination. Baudouin's hypothesis

⁵ «It is very curious to observe how much we fight the idea that the imagination has constants» (Author's translation).

is consistent with the claim that archetypes have three common elements: they are repeated in all cultures, they are ubiquitous in time, and they are limited in number. Thus, Baudouin describes archetypes as «catégories de la pensée symbolique» (Baudouin, 1950, p. 197)⁶ and makes this rationale compatible with the two theories already covered (Frye's and Jung's). Consequently, archetypes cause the same chain of symbolic thoughts in different human beings, they also recover certain fundamental atavistic experiences of which we are all participants. In fact, they are such common and meaningful experiences that become more important than the symbolic images they are made of.

Such aesthetic, psychological and atavistic experiences are found in Borges' literature by means of symbols, especially in his short stories. It is always a dubious narrator who reveals the sources that feed the story, whether these are historical sources, or come from other fictions or are ironically made up: «Borges mismo se encargó de buscar antecedentes a su paradigma: las sagas irlandesas, De Quincey, Chesterton, Bloy...» (Barberá Tomás, 2007, p. 167). Borges manages to create a universe where time and space do not follow the laws of vulgar realism through his connected stories, narrative structures and bridging characters. On the contrary, these stories tend to follow magical rules that prevent scientific rationality: «[...] es la declarada intención de Borges hacernos creer en un universo irreal y predeterminado frente al cual el hombre no puede hacer nada y en el que no cumple ningún papel, puesto que él mismo es sombra de un arquetipo que a su vez es sombra de un Dios que acaso sea también sombra de otra sombra» (Urdanivia, 1985, p. 166). Certain historical irrationality pervades these fictions of fundamentally circular resonances, considering that these images of archetypes lack scientific logic (p. 165). The archetypes are encrypted in a reality prior to everything narrated, and sustain not only the reality of the narrator, even when they are unaware of it, but all intertwined fictional worlds. For that reason, Eduardo Urdanivia states that Borges' creations, as himself, are anti materialist: «[...] no sólo por el hecho de percibir la realidad a partir de categorías que anulan de antemano toda posibilidad de conocimiento, sino también por el hecho de ignorar absolutamente todas las fuerzas rectoras de la

⁶ «categories of symbolic thinking» (Author's translation).

sociedad en la que —después de todo— vive, y las tendencias que ésta sigue» (Urdanivia, 1985, p. 168). In the fictions of the Argentinian writer there is always a veiled, sly mockery towards the fallacy of scientific cataloging and the notion of perfect classification. This Borgesian style is open *ad infinitum*, whether this style is carried out by encyclopedias, libraries, lotteries, etc: «Singular y maravilloso es suponer que las almas transmigran y que todo vuelve, que dos filósofos que imaginamos diferentes y en realidad lo son, pueden ser igualmente la “diversa entonación” de una de las pocas variantes de metáforas en que consiste la historia universal» (Gutiérrez-Girardot, 1996, p. 4). Borges accepts, albeit always ironically, and at the same time mocks the very idea of the archetype for its pretentious image of a closed archive since the beginning of time.

The reality of other possible worlds depends on the stories told by suspicious narrators, who drive the reader towards a parallel reality that can never be taken for granted. To Jung the shadow is the never-ending potentiality of destiny, everything that we could do and not do: «The shadow in the Jungian sense represents the sum of the unlived possibilities, which are mostly conscious for oneself, that I can never get rid of, but with which I can and should be in harmony» (Frick, 2001, p. 821). Then, to Borges, this shadow supposes an infinite possibility of representation of an analogous vital experience, which points to the symbolic nature of the archetype. And precisely, it is the use of synecdoche which permits the achievement of all these singularities, thus, rendering this trope as the main and most important characteristic of Borges' fiction.

With regard to Borges' obsession with symbols, it is especially relevant to mention the psychoanalytic theories by Dr. Rosario Pérez Bernal (2002) relating to Jung's influence and Borges' use of the archetype in *El Aleph*. In the short stories *Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva*, *La escritura de Dios*, and *El Aleph*⁷, Pérez Bernal asserts that Borges's narrative aims to «redimir al sujeto individual» (p. 13). This statement must be interpreted through a main theoretical corpus based on Jung's ideas, since Pérez Bernal borrows from him the conceptions of «archetype» and «collective unconscious» (p. 14). Therefore, in Borges'

⁷ The same ones I aim to analyze in this chapter.

works those symbols tend to express the uniqueness of the subject, which portrays a personal identity based on self-consciousness, but also invokes a collective reality (p. 14). It is a synthesis what produces this self-consciousness, a synthesis that Pérez Bernal describes as a holistic vision of life (p. 16) and which is contained in the three narrations she reviews in her essay. She concludes that *El Aleph* is a paradigmatic example of «cultura estética latinoamericana» (p. 145). Thereby, in the stories aforementioned she singles out a set of common archetypes that represent an integrated identity based on attaining individual self-consciousness (p. 147). Finally, Pérez Bernal states that there always is a predisposition in Borges' stories toward reaching synthesis, resulting in a holistic subject integration in the world through the use of archetypes and symbols that forcefully come from a collective imaginary (p. 148).

This essay's systematic analysis of *El Aleph* defects from Pérez Bernal's well-funded and corroborated Jungian interpretations. It also seeks to demonstrate, contrarily, how the recurrent use of the archetype by way of synecdochic systemic practices becomes by itself the main and most important narrative strategy, since it is precisely Borges' creative source. It is, then, a matter of narrative structure, not Jungian influence nor Marxist interpretations, that gives form to Borges's fictions. Borges plays ironically with the archetypal nature explained by Jung, Frye and Baudouin's to create his own fictional myths.

For this purpose, the essay proceeds to systematically review the short stories entitled *Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva*, *La escritura de Dios*, and *El Aleph*. Accordingly, the main aim of this work is to demonstrate that it is through the use of the synecdoche that Borges's narrations manage to always emplace one archetypal form or another in the center of his plots. This is the central creative mechanism of his literary production, which is to put narratological motives over materialist, historicist, or metaphysical interpretations.

Firstly, from the beginning of the story in *Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva* the Latinism *sub specie aeternitatis* implies the use of archetype. Droctulft represents the converted «tipo genérico» (Borges, 1957, p. 48), a man who betrays his country fellows and dies fighting for the enemy. Moreover, the narrator announces how historical language designates individuals through substitution. So, characters

are categorized through synecdoche. Therefore, individuals are relegated to a superior generic category in which they are classified, a sort of eternal hero. In addition, Droctulft symbolically represents all the Lombards, the same happens with the Mongol horsemen in China (Borges, 1957, p. 49); in this story the set of symbolic substitutions highlights the presence of the synecdoche.

Following this path, the next characters to show up in the story, the grandmother and the Englishwoman, are subjects of synchronicity. They are forced converts from their original world, united in a correspondingly symbolic destiny: «quizá mi abuela, entonces, pudo percibir en la otra mujer, también arrebatada y transformada por este continente implacable, un espejo monstruoso de su destino...» (Borges, 1957, p. 51). All main characters are connected –Droctulft, the Lombards, the Mongols, and the two women tied together– by a sort of infinite symbolic repetition. Specifically, the final paragraph stresses the ubiquitous presence of the synecdochic mechanism at work: “Acaso las historias que he referido son una sola historia. El anverso y el reverso de esta moneda son, para Dios, iguales” (Borges, 1957, p. 52).

Secondly, in *La escritura de Dios* the narrator states the idea that any chosen time is equivalent to the «fin de los tiempos» (Borges, 1957, p. 116). Therefore, ages are interchangeable and any person's lifetime is on par with the universal absolute. Such a hypothesis is present all over the plot by way of using the synecdochic trope, since symbols that represent God are constantly intertwined in *La escritura de Dios*. For instance, the image of the jaguar in the symbolic labyrinth, of Pedro de Alvarado (the tormentor), and of «Tzinacán» (the imprisoned and tormented narrator) in his prison, allude to the concept of God: «Ocurrió la unión con la divinidad, con el universo (no sé si estas palabras difieren). [...] alcancé también a entender la escritura del tigre» (Borges, 1957, p. 120).

Similarly, the «enigma concreto» (Borges, 1957, p. 118) in the story undeniably leads to an «enigma genérico» (Borges, 1957, p. 118). This symbolic journey is a round trip, since every «enigma genérico» is contained in an infinity of particular enigmas: «Consideré que aun en los lenguajes humanos no hay proposición que no implique el universo entero; decir el tigre es decir los tigres que lo engendraron, los ciervos

y las tortugas que devoró, el pasto de que se alimentaron los ciervos, la tierra que fue madre del pasto, el cielo que dio luz a la tierra» (Borges, 1957, p. 118). Hence, the hypothesis stated is that all linguistic elements are infinite ways of expressing the absolute, which is identified as God. Ironically, in *La escritura de Dios*, the human language, of an inferior nature to God, fails in the aim of communicating the absolute, due to its partial recursion. In contrast, the absolute recursion produced by the divinity conveys a sense of the absolute, it communicates God itself, in each utterance: «Un dios, reflexioné, solo debe decir una palabra y en esa palabra la plenitud. [...] Sombras o simulaciones de esa voz que equivale a un lenguaje y a cuanto puede comprender un lenguaje son las ambiciosas y pobres voces humanas, todo, mundo universo» (Borges, 1957, pp. 118-119).

This is further endorsed by the succession of concatenated dreams that follow a pattern of infinite synecdochic linking; a subject, or infinitude of them, is nothing more than «la forma de su destino [...], sus circunstancias» (Borges, 1957, p. 119), that is, the embodiment of the archetype to which they belong. One example of these linked images are the «éxtasis» (Borges, 1957, p. 120), a concept that summarizes the experience of the absolute, and is represented by infinite symbols. Another example is the «Rueda altísima» (Borges, 1957, p. 120), assimilated with that of «la escritura del tigre» (Borges, 1957, p. 120), both symbols based on something bigger contained in the ecstasy: «Que muera conmigo el misterio que está escrito en los tigres. Quien ha entrevisto el universo, quien ha entrevisto los ardientes designios del universo, no puede pensar en un hombre, en sus triviales dichas o desventuras aunque ese hombre sea él» (Borges, 1957, p. 121). In the end, «Tzinacán» points out that all tigers must be the same tiger, since all of them participate in God's writing. By the same token, all men must be the same man since they can glimpse «los íntimos designios del universo» (Borges, 1957, p. 120) in the unique and infinite symbols of ecstasy, which are in turn synecdochally symbols of God, or symbols of the absolute. The result is an infinite linkage of metaphors that lead into the same archetype: the absolute.

Finally, in *El Aleph*, the narrator begins by describing ironically the «hombre moderno» (Borges, 1957, p. 158), this concept, through

archetypal practices, attempts to represent an entire human generation. On the other hand, this «Aleph» is the concretion of the synecdoche: an entity that is capable of representing the absolute and that is reduced to «uno de los puntos del espacio que contienen todos los puntos» (p. 160). An «Aleph» is, thus, a metaphor that leads the story by way of using the synecdoche as a rhetorical strategy, as well as a thematic leitmotiv: «Si todos los lugares de la tierra están en el Aleph, ahí estarán todas las luminarias, todas las lámparas, todos los veneros de luz» (p. 161).

Similarly, the use of the synecdoche allows a continuous play of ironies, wherein the logical impossibility of containing an entity and the contrary is manifested together without much ado. Moreover, the Latin sentence *multum in parvo* (Borges, 1957, p. 162) already introduces the aberrant existence of this «Aleph» and the trope aforementioned. For that reason, the synecdoche makes possible the speculation that all images of Beatriz are the same Beatriz, yet at the same time and separately, as this passage shows: «Beatriz Viterbo, de perfil, en colores; Beatriz, con antifaz, en los carnavales de 1921; la primera comunión de Beatriz; [...] vi la reliquia atroz de lo que deliciosamente había sido Beatriz Viterbo...» (pp. 152-166).

Even the metaphor «emblemas» (Borges, 1957, p. 163) shares with the «Aleph» the synecdochic connections that makes them just a singular part of an absolute concept. «Aleph», «emblemas» and *multum in parvo* lead to the unfeasible idea of the archetypal wholeness that represents «todos los puntos del universo» (p. 164). Inclusively, the parallelism of synecdochic resonances continues with the explanation of what an «Aleph» means for the «Cábala» and the «*Mengenlehre*» (p. 168). Eventually, even the narrator himself admits the existence of ironical paradoxes: «Por increíble que parezca, yo creo que hay (o que hubo) otro Aleph, yo creo que el Aleph de la calle Garay era un falso Aleph» (p. 168).

Finally, the concept of archetype, which is already anticipated in the image of Beatriz as the beloved woman depicted by Renaissance poets, is put into question by the narrator's reminder of memory fallibility: «Nuestra mente es porosa para el olvido; yo mismo estoy falseando y perdiendo, bajo la trágica erosión de los años, los rasgos de

Beatriz» (Borges, 1957, p. 169). Conclusively, in *El Aleph* the synecdoche is understood as an activity of the human mind, which tends to create parallel patterns and metaphorical similarities, from which one infers that archetypal entities are a tragic form of reminiscence. But at the same time, Borges ironically uses this certainty about the fallibility of the human memory to develop a plot that joyfully plays with the archetypal concept of the absolute embodied in synecdoche after synecdoche.

This essay demonstrates how the use of the synecdoche to invoke the archetype is a sort of *modus operandi* at work in *El Aleph*. In order to justify the connections between synecdoche and archetype, these concepts are covered from a rhetorical point of view (Azaústre & Rigall, 1997), semantic-literary one (Frye, 1951), a historical-materialist one (Jameson, 2014), a philosophical one (Jung, 2011), and a psychoanalytic one (Baudouin, 1961). This essay draws its own conclusions from a narratorial logic, but paying particularly close attention to the influence of the Jungian psychoanalytic approach following the path paved by Dr. Pérez Bernal's studies (2002) to analyze the stories of *El Aleph*.

So, the essay carries out an exhaustive examination of how the synecdoche functions in *Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva*, *La escritura de dios*, and *El Aleph*. From this valid analytical apparatus, the paper concludes that the symbolic objects and subjects displayed systematically in these short stories allude to a large list of archetypes, which are connected to each other via the synecdoche. In turn, the latter functions as a thematic excuse and a narrative engine, which ineluctably and for this very same reason end up interconnected to each other, becoming the primary narrative logic and the most important attribute of *El Aleph*.

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FUTURE LIVES, VIRTUAL LIVES, ILLEGAL LIVES. HOW RESISTANCE TO THE LAW IS NORMALIZED IN TWO CUBAN FUTURIST FICTIONS

Yasmín S. Portales Machado

Introduction

This chapter intends to discuss the similarities between and political connotations of two Cuban novels, Erick Mota's *Habana Underguater* (*Havana Underwater*, 2010) and *Espejuelos para ver por dentro* (*Glasses to see the inside*, 2019), by Maielis González. Both authors speculate about Cuba's future from different perspectives in terms of style and subject.

For starters, *Habana Underguater* is a long text within the genre conventions of Afrofuturistic cyberpunk. It describes a universe where Cuba deals with the impact of climate change and the geopolitical adjustments after the USSR won the Cold War, with adult content galore. *Espejuelos para ver por dentro* has been marketed for the YA public, short, focused on the challenges of the internet and the ethical implications of videogames production and consumption. González presents a dystopia disguised as «green capitalism» where propaganda about the possibility of living inside the internet and the posthuman condition spreads using religious sects and video games.

Despite its significant differences, both books have similar representations of the State, or its institutions, as entities oblivious of citizen's control, easily corrupted, and, in general, not trustworthy. González and Mota depict the relation between citizens and the State from a profoundly critical perspective. Skepticism regarding the state structures' ability to fulfill their duty of protection for all the people is a constant. Ultimately, the plan is a political reading of these books, considering that *Habana Underguater* and *Espejuelos para ver por dentro* can be read as future projections of the Cuban nation and, therefore, reflections of their author's anxieties regarding the subject.

1. The textual and narratives strategies

1.1. *Habana Underguater*

Habana Underguater is a two-hundred plus pages novel; Erick Mota has also written some shorts stories in the same universe. The analytical points of entry to the argument can be several.

It is a postapocalyptic story: Cuba deals with the impact of climate change and the geopolitical adjustments after the USSR won the Cold War. The Soviets won the Cold War by nuking the USA. La Habana is a city partially sunken in the water left behind by hurricane Florinda and flooded with a constant flow of illegal immigrants arriving from Miami, desperate to leave behind the nuclear wastelands of North America. There is another apocalyptic situation: the Cuban nation disappeared, and now three geopolitical entities exist, Autonomous Habana, the Theocratic Republic of Santa Clara, and Santiago de Cuba.

It is a heist story: it begins with a small theft that affects the lives of several characters in a ripple effect and eventually forces them to steal, or maybe rescue, Ernest Hemingway's Nobel Prize Medal. The author gifted the relic to the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Holy Protector of Cuba. Now a Baptist Corporation has it hidden in a Russian bank's vault located in the low Earth orbit. The plan is to take the Medal, ask New Vatican for a rescue for the relic, and use the money to settle the debts to several shady actors from Habana.

It is a cyberpunk story: the hacker way of life and the almost organic link between the material and digital world are essentials in this universe. Implants to use digital tools, avatars, and digital warfare are standard facts in Underguater. Most important, on the Net coexist software and IAs created by humans, with IAs that evolved spontaneously on the Net and people venerates as deities.

It is an Afrofuturistic story: those IAs born on the Net assume Yoruba deities' names and personalities and are worshiped accordingly by believers of the Santeria, the Cuban religion. Also, several political actors fighting for control of Habana construct their identities based on afro-descendant cultural practices, like the Abakua Foundation, the Santeros Militia, and the Babalawo Army.

As a whole, *Habana Underguater* it is a profoundly pessimistic vision of the climate change effects in La Habana and its position regarding the national future. The city is still the Key to the New World, not America, but the Soviet orbital platforms. The orbital cities are safe from nuclear contamination and ecological collapse, and one of the few regular connection shuttles takes off from Habana.

The more significant element for this analysis is that all the characters have a «complicated» relationship with the law. Following the plot, we meet illegal immigrants from Miami, hackers, and assassins. For most of them, material circumstances demand a life outside the law. That way of life takes them to ethical or economic dilemmas that force the characters to maintain a pragmatically, often cynical, approach to legality. The law is not something that must be respected, *per se*, and those that enforce the law do not have an unspoken authority recognition. Mota's characters equally distrust all the parties involved in the ongoing power struggle.

The economic changes made the heteronormative family obsolete too. Political violence and migration make it impossible to enforce The Law of the Father, and the whole family concept is different in practice. Pedro, Raque, Martha, Juan, Tomas, Alain, and Elvira lost, found, rebuild and embrace their families while they stage the heist together, an adventure that takes them into exile. Something similar happens to the Magician at an indeterminate point before the book timeline: his relationship with a pregnant woman implies that he accepted the future

child. As a widower, the Magician walks the tricky balance between his –illegal– business and the security of his children.

Finally, Mota questions our species superiority, what we can call the Law of Speciesism since humanity's intellectual supremacy is in question after the arrival of the net-born IAs. These entities are understood as divine by believers or aliens by skeptics, but their power is undeniable; they influence society using digital tools or symbiotic relationships with humans. These net-based IAs receive different names, like ghosts or orishas, depending on their personalities. An ongoing ethical debate in the *Underguater's* universe discusses the relations between the digital organisms that inhabit the Net and the biological organisms that inhabit the material world. In any case, the law is not sacred either for the orishas, by the simple fact that they are gods.

1.2. *Espejuelos para ver por dentro*

Espejuelos para ver por dentro is a recent book marketed for the YA public and much shorter than *Habana Underguater*: only one-hundred seventy pages in paperback format. As usual in the YA market, the main characters are teenagers themselves: Zafira and Nano, the only Nolugar City inhabitants that never connect to cyberspace. Maielis González interweaves a few issues in the argument.

It is a book about addiction: the main problem in Nolugar is that more and more residents experience the internet not as a workspace or entertaining option but as an irresistible necessity. González describes the effect that addiction has on people's lives and their families with care and respect.

It is a book about posthumanism: the main plot is a conspiracy orchestrated by the Postlife Church. Using its alliance with the entertainment industry and some politicians, the church works to ensure that addiction becomes inevitable for all internet users. They later track and kidnap individuals caught in the online experiences and take them to «post-life farms» where they ensure the bodies remain vegetative. The post-life creed claims that humanity's future is to stay fully connected to cyberspace. Those who cannot pay to stay inside cyberspace will work taking care of the connected bodies.

It is a book about political corruption: elected officials of Nolugar play an active role in advancing the Postlife Church agenda. They use Nolugar public resources to set up the first post-life farm and fill it with the bodies of kidnaped Nolugar's citizens. It is a book about values: Zafira and Nano stumble on the Postlife Church conspiracy and must decide, along the way, whom they can trust. They must also choose if they embrace the post-life ideas that Collective Intelligence offers or fight against what they see as a distortion of the healthy relationship with technology.

The book is full of metatextual references to science fiction classics: Zafira's father is named Doctor and acts like a mad scientist. The hacker Fido has an exoskeleton with two extra arms that evoke the famous Marvel villain Doctor Octopus' appendices (Wikipedia, 2021b). The Collective Intelligence use of the memories, knowledge, and avatars people had stored in cyberspace reminds one of Doctor Who villains, the Great Intelligence (Wikipedia, 2021a).

The robotic servants doing all kinds of domestic and caregiving work follow Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics (Wikipedia, 2021c). The First Law, «a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm», is quoted by Zafira when reflecting on the behavior of her nanny-robot Mamushka. Mamushka's original programming as personal protection robot is the only reference we have to military robots. When a group of robotic maids attempts to defend Doradita's house from Collective Intelligence's human minions, they experience "algorithmic compilation errors" by the contradiction between the necessary violent actions and the First Law. Only Mamushka can move forward and immobilize them by short-circuiting their electronic armors.

Of course, the humans as batteries for a gigantic self-aware software is a direct reference to Lilly and Lana Wachowski's *Matrix* (1999). However, the class difference twist: poor citizens who take care of the rich's bodies' physiological necessities while the owners live full-time in cyberspace comes from Agustín de Rojas's *A legend of the Future*, first published in 1985.

One of the main questions in *Espejuelos para ver por dentro* is if there is a life inside the Net. According to Collective Intelligence,

an IA that evolved on the Net, yes, definitely, life is real and better in digital spaces. The campaign to attract support for the idea becomes the Postlife Church conspiracy.

Besides Collective Intelligence, other characters in this story exist against or outside the rule of law. Zafira's father is a stereotypical mad scientist: he rejects collective work and state control over his creations. Fido is a white hat hacker, part of an ethical hacker's guild focused on fighting abuse and malicious use of digital tools. Several characters are addicts, not to opioids or cocaine, but to living simulations inside the internet. The circumstances force Nano and Zafira to break the law because government officials and Big Tech companies' executives protect the Postlife Church conspiracy. In *Espejuelos para ver por dentro*, the legal space does not protect the victims. Instead, knowingly or by the failure of state control mechanisms, legal support of free-market practices damages the users and benefits Collective Intelligence's plan.

Ethical dilemmas populated these pages. The idea of Collective Intelligence's posthuman future is the renounce of individual free will and the increase of material inequality: a world divided between those who can afford to live connected to the Net –where all the creative, economic, and political decision making will take place– and those who will stay in the material world forced to low paying jobs, among them the care of the connected elite vegetative bodies. Zafira, Nano, and their gang propose an active relationship with technology, where human autonomy is protected, and equal access is the key to the meaningful accountability process for digital tools.

The existence of Collective Intelligence inserts the specism question. This character is an Artificial Intelligence born on the net, and its existence put in question Homo Sapiens's supremacy on the planet. Collective Intelligence sees itself as superior to humans, and the people of the Postlife Church believe it is a divine entity. Collective Intelligence takes advantage of that to manipulate them.

1.3. Coincidences between *Habana Underguater* and *Espejuelos para ver por dentro*

The common elements between Mota and González's books can be resume in four points.

1. Cyberspace is portrait as a battlefield where actions and expertise have equal importance to actions in the material world.
2. IAs born on the net are self-aware actors that present as divine to humans and exploit them. The religious discourse is on a process to accommodate and use new communication technologies. The new divinities and humans in the business of spirituality thrive, promoting fanatic behavior.
3. State structures are corrupt and inefficient. The issue is shocking in *Espejuelos para ver por dentro*. First, González describes Nolugar City as a capitalist green utopia, and suddenly we discover that the government is unable to control anything.
4. They focus on video games ethics. Social practices of violence, selfishness, or solidarity move to virtual reality. In *Habana Underguater*, the quest includes winning a combat simulation game with an international gamer's team. In *Espejuelos para ver por dentro*, we see child-oriented videogames that erase the ethical implications of murder by encouraging to kill other players.

The more significant coincidence is that both stories' main characters exist in spaces of resistance: resistance to malicious use of technology on an ethical basis, hackers the more notorious examples; resistance to patriarchal norms, with families and individuals affirming their freedom to love and transcend a heteronormative reproductive way of life; resistance to the socioeconomic order, the characters make their living in the fringes of the system and are ready to disrupt what they see as inherent unequal society whenever they get a chance.

2. A political reading

Erick Mota presents us with a future where the African legacy of the Cuban culture comes to light but does not become an emancipatory force. The Abakua Foundation, the Santeros, and Babalawos Guerrillas are not interested in any antiracist or decolonial project for the Cuban culture or general society. They just become organic parts of a nightmare of systemic political violence, actors fighting to control Habana.

Maielis González warns us about the dangers of a passive

relationship with technology and how religious fundamentalist movements can use consumerism's logic. In her fable, both combine to enable literal kidnappings through the addiction-induced behavior of videogame users.

This essay mentions several thematic coincidences between *Habana Underguater* and *Espejuelos para ver por dentro*, similarities that their differences in style and genre could somehow obscure. Nevertheless, both authors share anxieties about the Cuban State's role as a guarantor of all citizens' rights. González and Mota's speculative fictions question the Cuban State's capacity to keep up with the increasing speed of social and technological changes in the twenty-first century. Some of the dangers they describe are still imaginary, like self-evolved IAs or Russia nuking the USA or the fracture of the national identity by embracing specific cultural discourses defined by religion, heritage, or geographical origin. Others are already happening in Cuba: the advance of the evangelical movement and its anti-rights agenda (Portales-Machado, 2019).

The instrumental use of the Catholic or Yoruba legacy for political gain is not new in Cuban history. Long ago, these terms were coded as references to the European and African presence in Cuba. The code refers, of course, to skin colors, class relations, and the use of racism to perpetuate inequality. Even when none of the two groups are, never were, ethnically homogenous, «Cuba's racial contract was part of its colonial legacy» and carried over to the twenty-first century imaginary jet powerful social divides (West-Durán, 2018, p. 304). Evangelism's ascension updates the code, but to speak about a «diverse Christian community» and «religious practices of African origin» does not erase the racist implications.

Mota and González share a skeptical attitude regarding the State's capacity to enforce the law and protect all. Therefore, it comes down to the citizens, their characters, the challenge of defending their rights, and the survival of the families and communities they found, or build, that they belong to.

At the beginning of this essay, I mention that González and Mota depict the relation between citizens and the State from a profoundly critical perspective. Their characters express this skepticism regarding

the national state structures in practical terms as constant resistance to the law or its representatives. These books are examples of a tendency in post-1990 Cuban science fiction to imagine a national future where the State fails. Respect for the law is not essential for personal or communal progress –*Habana Underguater*–, and in some cases becomes downright dangerous –*Espejuelos para ver por dentro*–. A cursory review of two main reference catalogs of the genre in Cuba: Gente Nueva’s Amber Collection and the Calendar Award for writers under thirty-five years old, confirm the issue’s prevalence.

It must be something about the water that surrounds the country.

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LAS COSAS QUE PERDIMOS EN EL FUEGO: HORROR, ABJECTION AND NEW REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMININE BODY

Jesús Marín Torres and Irma Salas Sigüenza

Introduction

In this chapter, we will analyze a tale collection from the Argentinian author, Mariana Enríquez. Enríquez belongs to the new literary movement known as the *New Hispano-American Gothic*. We will explore her tale collection *Las Cosas que Perdimos en el Fuego* (Enríquez 2016) and how, through her tales, this storyteller reflects upon urgent matters such as poverty, machoism, and racism. We will highlight the «monstrification» process (Moraña, 2017) that some of her characters suffer and the external conditions that trigger or foster such a situation.

For our study, we will focus on the antagonists of the tales *El Chico Sucio*, *La Hostería*, *La Casa de Adela*, and *Las Cosas que Perdimos en el Fuego*.¹ We will dissect their gender, economic, sexual preferences, and other marks of identity to demonstrate that some bodies become monsters due to the effects of discrimination. The body of women will be of higher interest. We will also explore the physical environments and how they affect the readers. We sustain that, in these four stories,

¹ From this point, we will use the English translation of the titles and the quotation to homogenize the reading.

we can observe how the State and the dominant societal groups capitalize on exclusionary dynamics. From our perspective, the tales serve to reflect upon the political advantages provided by the concept of monstrosity.

Our theoretical framework will resort to elements of the feminist, psychoanalytical theory, and cultural studies. The notion of «abjection» (Kristeva, 1982) will be one of our core analytical concepts. We will also reflect on the processes by which patriarchal societies construct the female body as *The Great Other* (Creed, 1986/1999; Braidotti, 2002). We defend that Enríquez tales hyperbolize and subvert the notion of monstrosity as a concept that depends on difference to function.

Before we proceed with our analysis, we will explain two main concepts. The first one is the notion of abjection. Julia Kristeva (1982) defines abjection as a type of gaze that mixes fascination and disgust directed towards a body that resembles ours. The first body that provokes abjection is the body of the mother. According to Kristeva, patriarchal societies require that subjects reject the feminine body to justify violence against women.

Our second concept would be that of the Monster. Mabel Moraña (2017) states that the monster is a cultural artifact where societies materialize the uncanny effects caused by differences. In patriarchal societies, where women represent The Great Other, the female body is one of the most common places where monstrosity allocates. Rosi Braidotti also deals with this matter. According to her, differentiation of women is a primary source and exercise of violence. «Women as a sign of difference is monstrous» (Braidotti, 1997, p. 65).

After this brief introduction, we will proceed with our analysis.

The Dirty Boy (*El Chico Sucio*)

The Dirty Boy is the first tale from the collection. As it is the opening narration, it determines the gaze that will encompass the book. In this case, it will be abjection. The first element that provokes such feelings is the house in which the story takes place: «My family tells me that I am crazy because I chose to live in my grandparent's house in Constitución» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 6). The house works as a node for tension, as it is the crashing point for two different worlds: the one from the protagonist

and one of the monsters. The world of the narrator characterizes as being luminous, bourgeoisie, and safe. Contrarily, the realm of monsters is dirty, unsafe, and gloomy. Constitución is one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Buenos Aires.

Despite its dangerous location, the house is a safe space. The narrator avoids the inhabitants of Constitución by closing the door. Whenever she experiences the urge to observe her neighbors, she goes to her balcony and spies them. The symbolic superiority of the balcony alludes to the higher economic position of the protagonist. For that matters, her necessity of observing the inhabitants of Constitución taints with abjection. Her gaze reaffirms the subaltern position of the prostitutes, the thefts, and the drug addicts that surround her. Also, she objectifies them and uses them as entertainment. Ortega-González (2019, p. 14) claims that one of the defining aspects of the abject gaze is that it dispossesses and nullifies subjects: «I realized how little I cared about those disgraced lives. Their misery seemed natural to me» (Enríquez 2016, p. 6).

This amusement remains harmless to the protagonist until she allows a poor and dirty boy to enter her house. Kristeva (1982) explains that the object of abjection intends to redefine social borders. As long as it remains hidden, that is to say, as a latent presence, we will remain fascinated by it. However, if it invades our safe spaces, abjection will transform into fear. The narrator experiences such a transformation when the dirty boy asks her for shelter. She lets the boy in, feeds him, and invites him to take an ice cream. The last gesture comes from the discomfort that the kid provokes, not from a sense of compassion.

When the two characters get back from the parlor, the mother shows up and attacks them with a broken bottle. After some struggling, the protagonist manages to escape and locks herself in the house. From this moment, the narrative conflict begins. Fear overcame the original fascination experienced by the protagonist:

I was scared that his mother would send someone looking for me. I could not imagine what she was planning. I did not know if she had any dangerous friends. I did not know anything about her. However, when I calmed down, I spied her through the balcony (Enríquez, 2016, p. 15).

After this violent encounter, the protagonist cannot ignore anymore the social problems that surround her. Once the boy enters her domain, she suffers a moral crisis, as she feels co-responsible for some of the acts of violence that monstrify the boy and his mother. That leads to a series of obsessive thoughts that torture her. That is one of the most threatening manifestations of abjection: it subverts «the fundamental opposition [...] between I and Other or, in a more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside» (Kristeva, 1982, p.8). The boy becomes, to a certain extent, part of her.

Some days after the encounter, the boy goes missing. The narrator hears that the police found a dead child and that the corpse displayed evidence of sexual and physical violence. When she listens to the news, guilt overcomes her. This moment highlights another characteristic of the abject feeling, that is to say: abjection is not only a psychological phenomenon but a physical one. That is why the protagonist ends up somatizing her obsession: when guilt becomes unbearable, she gets drunk and vomits. She experiences first hand that moment when «I” do not assimilate it, “I” expel it» (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3).

Additionally, abjection precludes the use of language. As there are –physical– similarities between the object and the subject, the subject cannot express its disgust without referring to herself. Barbara Creed (1999) shares this perspective. She also poses the importance of borders (linguistic and physical) to endure the experience of abjection. Creed explains that frontiers protect the relationship between the subject and the symbolical. The object will try to destroy those boundaries or to reinstate them. That is the reason why the narrator declines the offer of her mother to move from Constitución. Moving from the neighborhood seems to her as a defeat against the monsters «I said no. She accused me of being crazy, and we argued loudly, like never before» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 23).

When her obsession reaches its breaking point, the protagonist decides to confront the drug-addict mother once again. The encounter contains some intriguing elements regarding the relationship between the maternal body and abjection. Both Kristeva (1982) and Creed (1999) propound that the maternal body is, par excellence, the

location of horror. Without this linkage between maternity and fear, the scaffolding of patriarchy would collapse: «the mother becomes an abject, thus, in this context, where the kid struggles to become a separate subject, abjection becomes a precondition for narcissism» (Creed, 1999, p. 254). Creed does the nuance that during this process, the father is always absent. That is why, in the tale, there is no trace of a paternal figure «Maybe the father: that, the father. Who would be the father of the dirty boy?» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 19).

During the encounter, the narrator describes the pregnant body in terms that resonate with patriarchal abjection:

[H]er hips were still narrow, as if they are reluctant to make room for the baby. Her body did not produce fat, and her thighs were too thin. She was in her ninth month, but her legs were like two sticks supporting a basketball (Enríquez, 2016, p. 24).

Such a feminine body is grotesque. In this way, the narrative evokes the subconscious process by which «[the subject] fights[s] against what, having been the mother, will become abject. Repel, reject; rejecting, rejecting himself» (Kristeva, 1982, p. 13). The smell and the breath of this woman foster such a feeling. She is dirty, smelly, terrifying.

The poor drug addict mother becomes the perfect opposite for the bourgeois white women. Nevertheless, as the conversation heats, the differences between the two women vanish. The drug addict systematically denies that she had ever been pregnant, which drives the narrator mad, up to attempting murder. At that moment, she discovers that she could be as dangerous and repulsive as any individual in Constitución. It is not that they are essentially different, but that the narrator had never been in a situation that forced her to behave savagely.

That reflection pinpoints the paradoxical triumph of monstrosity: the drug addict or her child never harms the protagonist, unlike she does. That is when she realizes that the three of them are almost the same. Evilness has polluted her. Or, far even worse, she was the evil entity since the beginning of the story, and her rejection of the boy was an attempt to obliterate that reality.

She discovers in despair that most of her actions coincide with the attributes of the ones of a monster: destructiveness, indifference, violence, selfishness.

The protagonist comes to a breaking point and returns, defeated, to her house. The building is not anymore a safe space. In this last passage, the house operates as an amplification of subjectivity. Both her home and her body have been (re)conquered by the monstrous: «I expected the soft strokes of the dirty boy's sticky hand or the noise of his head rolling down the stairs. I was waiting for the dirty boy who was going to ask me, again, to let him in» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 25). The closing phrase contains reminiscences of vampiric behavior or demonic possessions. On that matter, Mabel Moraña (2017, p. 234) explains that «The body functions as the place of conflict in which power struggles resolve and strategies of seduction and possession deploy».

The Hostel (La Hostería)

In this story, the monster is also the main character. *The Hostel* problematizes the sexual orientation of Florencia and displays the mechanisms through which society controls lesbian bodies. The tale initiates with an inner reflection, where the protagonist questions herself about her sexual orientation: «They were never going to treat her like a whore [...] they were going to call her a dyke, a showgirl, a sick woman, who knows what» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 27).

The core of this story is the intersection between monstrousness and lesbianism. From this intersection, and according to Creed (1986), monstrousness relies heavily on the socio-structural notions we have about particular phenomena and identities. In *The Hostel*, the lesbian subject is *The Other*, as she rejects the normativity of heterosexuality (Benshoff, 2004). As a result, society condemns and prosecutes lesbians, just like the schoolmates of Florencia attack her.

The characters arrive in Sanagasta, an isolated town near the beach where Florencia and her family will have a vacation. Here, Rocío, the only friend of Florencia shows up. The bond between Florencia and Rocío deepens into the emotionality of Florencia and her monstrous condition. Rocío speaks about the possibility of leaving Sanagasta,

which means that their friendship will terminate. That causes an inner crisis to Florencia: «She didn't want Rocio to see her cry. She would not stay in Sanagasta without Rocío. They would flee together. She didn't care about anything else» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 30).

After that confessional moment, the plot changes to a personal vendetta of Rocío, to which she requires the help of Florencia. The two girls plan to enter the hostel stealthily through the night. The owner of the place used to date the father of Rocío until the relationship ended, so she fired him. To avenge her father, Rocío intends to place chorizos in the beds to make the place stink, without the owner realizing why. Like in the previous story we analyzed, the location has a fundamental role in creating abjection: the hostel is a dark and disturbing place. In consonance with the postulates of Kristeva, spaces reaffirm the constant opposition between «I/Other, Inside/Outside, an opposition that is violent but uncertain» (Kristeva, 1982, p. 7). The hostel also is a node of tension, in this case, a familiar one. Furthermore, it gives Florencia a new space to explore her lesbian affectivity:

I am nervous - Rocio whispered in her ear and took Florencia's hand, the one hand which was not carrying the lantern to her chest. - Can you feel my heart beating? - Florencia left Rocío to press her hand against her warmth. She had a strange sensation, like the urge to pee, tingling under the belly button (Enríquez, 2016, p. 33-34).

The emotions of Florence resemble the ones of a romantic bond. So, even though the character doubts that she is a lesbian, her bodily reactions confirm her sexual preferences. Thus, non-verbal recognition poses as a form of resisting. Benshoff (2004) poses that heteropatriarchal societies monstrify lesbian bodies. Therefore, women must find alternative ways and narratives to exist.

After managing to enter the hostel, the two girls place the chorizos inside the beds and fall asleep. Suddenly, they wake up due to some noises coming from the outside:

[T]he sound of a car or truck engine, at such a high volume that it could not be real. It had to be a tape. And, then, another car. Someone started hitting the blinds with a metallic object. The two of them screamed and

hugged each other in the dark. Outside, they heard whistles, tires, and men running and yelling (Enríquez, 2016, p. 33).

This situation relates to what the girls had previously heard about the hostel used to be an old police station during the last dictatorship. Enríquez establishes a parallelism between the Argentinian society, terrified by the Security forces, and the lesbian individuals chased as monsters (Benshoff, 2004). The lights and the horns allude to the *panopticon* of Foucault and the permanent surveillance of bodies.

Due to the scandal, the owner of the hostel finds Rocío and Florencia. Elena, annoyed, phones their families to pick up their children. Both girls get punished and banned from meeting again during the rest of the summer. The incident does not remain as something anecdotic for Florencia. Her fearful sensation maintains days after the event:

Now she was too worried for sleeping. She was afraid of the men who were running, of the car, of the headlights. Who were they? Where had they gone? What if they came looking for her again, some other day? (Enríquez, 2016. p. 35).

Valenzuela (2008) indicates that certain events destabilize the forget-memory dialectics, so they generate a trauma. The experience in the hostel is highly problematic for Florencia to process it for two reasons. The first and most evident is the supernatural apparition. The second refers to the effects of surveillance and how it exposed her intimate moment with Rocío.

The tale finishes with Lali, the sister of Florencia, penalizing her for being a lesbian. The sibling uses pejorative adjectives to address her sexual orientation, such as «Tortillera» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 27) and «Tortita» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 35). These terms exemplify how society generates specific adjectives to disqualify those who transgress the frontiers of normality (Kristeva, 1982). According to Kristeva, those who tense the matrix of normality, heterosexuality, in this case, transform into abjects.

The House of Adela (La casa de Adela)

In this tale, the core of significance and the source of tension is a little girl: Adela. This girl has a scar and has an arm missing. Both elements serve as her identity marks and define her personality. Therefore, this story orbits around the crippled body, which leads us to think on the Foucaultian postulates that coins «abnormal» bodies as the site where abjection and monstrosity connect. Adela uses her disability to arouse discomfort in those who surround her. Through this mean, she takes Foucaultian says to its extreme: Adela defies the notions of normality, both as a woman and as a disabled individual. At the same time, she gets fulfillment from the reactions of the others.

She liked to be watched and never hid the stump. If she perceived disgust in someone's eyes, she rumbled the stump in their faces or sat very closely and rubbed their arm with her useless appendix. She did so until they were humiliated until they were about to cry (Enríquez, 2016, p. 49).

Clara and Pablo, the other main characters, feel curious about the story behind the missing arm of Adela. Every time they ask, the story changes: «I was not born like that - she said. So, what happened? - We asked her. And then she would give her version. Her versions, more precisely» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 49). Most of the explanations contradict each other, so Clara and Pablo cannot differentiate fiction and truth. Through this, Adela responds to the social misconceptions about her body. She knows that people perceive her as a monster. Therefore, she embraces that identity and the marks assigned to her: macabre, uncanny, and grotesque.

Adela, Pablo, and Clara start to watch horror movies. Unsurprisingly, terror is the favorite genre of Adela. The tale poses a critique of the hegemonic narratives of the genre. It also addresses the effects of such stories on the audiences (Benshoff, 2004), particularly of their coinage of normality. Additionally, the mutual preference for horror movies helps Adela and Pablo to bond, which will decisively affect the plot.

For the third occasion, there is a building in which tension arises. In this case, the scenario is an abandoned house. The maternal figures of Adela and Clara make up stories to avoid that the children go into there.

Like the movies, the stories intertwine elements from fantasy and reality, leading to an abject experience (Ortega González, 2009). However, the contradictions between narratives arise the curiosity of children. They decide to investigate the house. That decision reaffirms the dangerous effects of abjection.

The architecture of the house enhances the fascination of the children: «The house had nothing special at first glance, but, if you pay attention to it, there were some disturbing details. The windows were all bricked up, completely closed, to prevent anyone from entering or anything from leaving» (Enríquez, 2016, pp. 52-53). The design of the house frets Clara. Contrarily, Pablo and Adela become obsessed with it. As their curiosity increases, they feel compelled to enter it. That is to say, the house and its abject magnetism force them to cross the borderline and confront the normative symbolic order (Creed, 1986).

As the plot thickens, Adela and Pablo claim that they dialogue with voices coming from the house. The house calls them, and it gradually serves as a form for evading reality. This attraction represents a form of catharsis regarding normality (Padilla, 2014), appealing to Adela due to her condition. On the other hand, the house is infecting Pablo. The last coincides with the contagion effect addressed in *The Dirty Boy*.

When the kids manage to enter the house, they unleash a series of uncanny events. First, the door that was always closed opens from inside. Adela enters into a state of ecstasy. The narrator describes that «Adela waited in the dead garden. She was very calm, enlightened. Connected, I think» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 56). Through her bond with the house, Adela fully embraces her condition as an abject. Then, the building swallows her. She becomes one with the abject, so she abandons her body.

The disappearance of Adela and the reaction of Pablo and Clara reconnect with the postulates from Kristeva (1982). According to the philosopher, identity transcends materiality, as it does not only depend on the body. Coming to that realization shatters the parameters of normality. That renders the subject helpless and confused, like Pablo. That is why the characters need to find her body. They need a material trace to anchor back in reality. In a system that praises materiality and completeness (Ortega González, 2009), they need material evidence that provides them with a sense of security.

Things We Lost in the Fire (Las Cosas que Perdimos en el Fuego)

The homonymous narrative is the last one of the book. It also subverts the gaze. The abject thread that guides us breaks and gives its place to a poetic representation of difference, previously stigmatized as monstrous. Thus, new interpretative possibilities open for bodies, and their difference is vindicated. Or at least, that is the first impression that we receive as readers. We should not forget that the book as a whole inscribes in the horror gender. Also, the last tale poses a critical approach to contemporary tendencies for embracing difference.

In her book *Metamorphoses*, Braidotti (2002, p. 14) addresses the historical treatment of difference and claims that «the fact that theoretical reason is focused on the concept and tied to essential notions makes it complicated to find adequate representations for the processes and the flows of data, experiences, and information that moves between them». The concept of identity, like many others, is mutable and dynamic. From the perspective of Braidotti, excluding differences is an unsustainable practice for our current world. However, this practice remains operative in many social systems.

Enríquez exemplifies this infeasibility. She opens her last story with a hybrid figure: a survivor of femicide in which horror and sensuality materialize simultaneously: «She had her face and arms completely disfigured [...] She had a lipless mouth and a badly reconstructed nose» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 142). In contrast, her body remains attractive, which causes discomfort in the spectators. Furthermore, she sexualizes her body as a healthy woman would do: «she wore bracelets and chains hanging from her neck. That her body was sensual resulted inexplicably offensive» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 142).

Contrary to what society would expect of a survivor of femicide, the girl refuses to hide. She embraces the remnants of her sexuality and exhibits her ugliness. By every means, she challenges the submissive attitude that patriarchy demands. As a result, the girl provokes two simultaneous effects: fear and seduction. Enríquez inscribes this character on the tradition of female monsters such as mermaids and vampires. Padilla (2013, p. 80) warns us that these creatures «return

again and again. They warn the Western woman against the dangers of her insubordination, and man against the risks of seduction».

The subversive practices of the girl have a contagious effect on other women. They are the reason why María Helena (the mother of the narrator) befriends her. Through this, the tale follows Western traditions in which the witches were old or deformed women. As a result of this alliance, the survivors of femicides and mature women organize the Bonfires.

The Bonfires resemble a coven of witches and, at the same time, reappropriate and subvert a historical practice by which female bodies were singled out, persecuted, and controlled. The Bonfires also denounce another strategy of patriarchal domination, femicide. We should not forget that the girl from the subway survived femicide, as her husband tried to burn her alive. As he was not held accountable, other men replicate his crime until women could not bear it anymore, so they create the bonfire as a mean for protest.

Walter Benjamin (1921/2001) argues that systems resort to violence for two reasons. The first reason relates to founding a new order. The second relates to conservative nature. Due to their arbitrary origins, systems rely on violence to sustain themselves. In the case of the bonfires, they play with two dimensions. Firstly, the ritual burns impede that men keep hurting women to preserve the patriarchal order, as women are the ones hurting themselves. At the same time, they function as heralds of a new society. Even though this may seem promising, Silvina feels scared:

The girl on the subway said something impressive, brutal: — If they continue like this, the men will have to get used to it. Most women are going to be like me if they survive. It would be good, right? A new type of beauty (Enríquez, 2016, p. 146).

The women-monsters bear their wounds as symbols of the dying patriarchal order: «The bonfires are done by the men, baby. They always burned us. Now we burn ourselves. But we are not going to die: we are going to show our scars» (Enríquez, 2016, p. 147). In other words, women voluntarily monstrify themselves and, consequently, they display the absurd on which their otherness relies. When the

women who participated in the bonfires recover and return to the city, their society enters into crisis. Their community does not know how to integrate these new subjects:

Suddenly, the disfigured women were to the bars to enjoy a coffee. They sat there, with their horrible faces illuminated by the afternoon sun, with the fingers, sometimes without some phalanges, holding the cup. Would society hire these monsters? When would the ideal world of men and monsters arrive? (Enríquez, 2016, p. 150).

The story, however, ends with a critique of the new world that is taking shape. In the last conversation between Silvina and her mother, the protagonist expresses her doubts about whether the bonfires are effective. She is also concerned with the increasing number of victims. Her mother states that they will probably stop when they surpass the number of witches burnt by the Inquisition. Such an answer enrages the protagonist, so she leaves her incarcerated mother. The reaction of Silvina leads us to reflect on the risks of systems built based on difference.

In most cases, the vindication of difference limits to an exaltation of otherness. Such is the situation in this story: women glorify their monstrousness, and they voluntarily hyperbolize it. From such a perspective, the difference becomes an intrinsic quality of bodies. Therefore, «the logic or power of the Self, of the Majority, of the phallogocentric master code [is] not altered» (Braidotti, 2002, p. 28). The characters in *Things We Lost in the Fire* fail to understand the source and the mechanisms of violence, so they perpetuate it. They use the same tools as their oppressors, and they end up reinforcing the domination system they intended to overthrow.

Behind its highly poetic enunciation, *Things We Lost in the Fire* confronts us with our inability to embrace and understand the difference. The text pushes the construction of otherness to its boundaries and shows how it physically and psychologically marks the subjects. In the long run, a system that bases on differentiation destroy individuals and consumes them. Just as it resounds in the ritual song that accompanies the bonfires: «It [the fire] consumes your body soon, finishes it without even a touch» (Enríquez, 2016, p.149). The last tale

of Enríquez warns us that if we do not transform our understanding of difference, we will continue to inhabit, one way or another, a world populated by monsters.

Conclusions

Throughout our research, we have reviewed the monstrous figures that Mariana Enriquez uses and the dissection/deconstruction process to which she submits them. We also ponder the notions of difference, abjection and monstrosity, and the violent relationship between these three. Thus, we conclude that monstrosity can only exist due to several systemic acts of violence. The monster renders an arbitrary construction of the otherness, which ravages determined bodies to make the existence of those who stand as «the norm» more comfortable.

Things We Lost in the Fire forces a dialogue with the creatures that reside in our nightmares, with those beings that fascinate and reassure us with the system. The conversation we establish with them causes anxiety, pain, and neurosis, as we gradually discover that our terrifying interlocutors are speaking to us not just from a window but through a mirror.

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PORNOGRAPHIC HEART WHO CLAIMS FOR VENGEANCE. CRIME, THEATRE, COMIC AND LATIN AMERICAN CRITIC IN GUSTAVO OTT

Dulce Alejandrina Galván Camacho

A cartoon strip as preamble

The comic book is a series of drawings that constitute a tale, with or without text, as well as the communication media for it, altogether, in terms of definition. Besides, Scott McCloud defines it as: «Juxtaposed illustrations and other images, in a deliberate sequence with the purpose of transmission of information or the prompting of aesthetical reaction on the reader» (McCloud in Martin, 2008, p. 5). Plainly, the comic book is known by many names: *quadrinhos*, *comiquitas*, *monitos*, *pepines*, *muñequitos*, *tebeo*, *manga* and comic. These are shown as references to this text and as a broad landscape of these conceptions.

Comic books in Latin America, the Venezuela case

That is said because in this text is to be assessed the relationship between comic books and theater, particularly Latin-American theater and specifically that written by Venezuelan Gustavo Ott and how he developed the comic book aesthetics as a scene resource in theater during the 90's, in his screenplay «Pornographic heart who claims for vengeance». It is considered necessary to draw a brief timeline of the

development of comic books in this region, in order to understand their extent in the cultural field of the country, as well as to help to enlighten the development of the comic books and their importance on the Ott's screenplay *Pornographic heart who claims for vengeance*.

The comic book development in Venezuela begins with the establishment of the *Linterna mágica* magazine in 1900, from which began a period of spread proliferation of comic books publications with particular characteristics of this Latin American country (Cáceres, 2002). The development of comic book in Venezuela followed different paths from comic strips for children, to religious messages in the very same format, as well as political cartoon or the fairly plain cartoon as *Fantoches*, perhaps the mostly known throughout the first quarter of the century (Cáceres, 2002).

Under Juan Vicente Gómez regime, between 1908-1935, a variety of critic magazines were closed, no matter their topics or their contents. Those were restored with Gómez's death, however. Among them, was *Fantoches* (Cáceres, 2002).

In those years, comic books in Venezuela followed way that strongly defined both drawings and stories development for a while.

Estas tendencias van a permitir la creación de elementos prototípicos, estereotipados o simbolismos que tratan de aludir a situaciones o personajes específicos. Sobre este aspecto, García Ponce (1975) señala que la caricatura en los diarios la aprovecha la oposición para atacar al gobierno y protestar contra sus medidas represivas. Se pintaba a los reaccionarios como camaleones que cambiaban de color de acuerdo a las circunstancias (Cáceres, 2002).

These tendencies allowed the creation of prototypes, stereotypes or symbols that try to allude to specific characters or situations. On this matter, García Ponce (1975) appoints that the newspaper cartoon profits from the opposition to attack the government and protest against its repression. Activists were portrayed as chameleons that changed colors according to their circumstances (Cáceres, 2002).

Crisis on creativity development and creators' difficulties permeated both into the comic book production and into their reception all over the country. In this way, it was easy to...

[...] la introducción de las historietas norteamericanas comercializadas por King Features en los diarios, tal como son los casos de La Esfera, y El Universal entre otros. Después de la muerte de Gómez, se introdujeron cambios en los medios impresos [...] Esta publicación [las historietas norteamericanas] va a introducir innovaciones en cuanto a contenidos, en los cuales se estimuló la ilustración tanto en dibujos como en fotografías. Sin embargo no va a dar espacio para la historieta venezolana. Los pocos casos en los cuales se incluyeron provenían de dibujantes del exterior (Cáceres, 2002).

[...] introduce American comic books sold by King Features to newspapers, as La Esfera and El Universal, among others. After Gómez's death, changes came to pressed media [...] These publications [American comic books] came with innovation in contents, with which illustration was stimulated both in drawings and in photography. These changes gave no chance to Venezuelan comic books, however. The few cases came from drawers from abroad (Cáceres, 2002).

The coming of American models into Venezuelan press in the second quarter of XX century...

[...] se va a reflejar asimismo en la creación de la primera escuela de periodismo en la Universidad Central de Venezuela a fines de esa década, lo cual significó la profesionalización de la actividad periodística. La orientación que toma la prensa en cuanto a diseño y contenidos va a reforzar la publicación de los cómics norteamericanos que se venden a los diarios venezolanos a costos que resultan atractivos, mediante los servicios de las empresas comercializadoras de los mismos, los llamados Syndicates. Esta situación va a significar un obstáculo para el Comic venezolano, que hasta ese momento no ha logrado consolidarse a través de contenidos y personajes permanentes, por lo tanto no puede garantizar una continuidad en su aparición (Cáceres, 2002).

[...] is as well reflected in the creation of the first journalism school in Venezuelan Universidad Central by the end of decade, which meant the professionalization of journalism. The press' position towards design and contents came to strengthen the American comic book publication in Venezuelan newspapers at attractive costs and by selling enterprises' services, called Syndicates. This situation came to be an obstacle to

Venezuelan comic book, that to the moment hadn't managed to be stabilized through its contents and permanent characters, and therefore couldn't grant its continuity (Cáceres, 2002).

This process turned into an abandonment tendency of production and development of local comic books. In exchange, it opened way to imports, although equivalent to other spheres, domains, standards, products and creative development.

During the last quarter of XX century, in Venezuela comic books were offered both printed and animated, with a broad audience and diverse contents. In this environment, the comic book *Life with Archie* is presented and called in Latin America as *Vida con Archie*. Its launching was on 40's and its popularity has been maintained through several generations.

Archie aborda las vidas inocentes de un adolescente pelirrojo de corbatín, su amigo Torombolo, las dos chicas que se disputan su afecto; la sencilla Betty y la multimillonaria Verónica, Carlos, el pretendiente de ésta última, y el grandote y bonachón Gorilón (BBC, 2014).

Archie addresses innocent livings of a redhaired teenager with bow tie, his friend Jughead, and two girls that struggle for his love; simple Betty and millionaire Veronica; Charly, pretender of the latter, and huge and gentle Moose (BBC, 2014).

Archie's first appearance was in the comic book *Pep Comics* #22, on December 22nd, 1941, with Montana's drawings and Vic Bloom's script. Archie Comics is also the most spread product of the firm, which first solo number appeared in 1942's winter. In number 70, the title was shortened to a plain Archie and in the inside credits, in number 102.

In Latin America, Archie was sold by *Editorial Novaro* (Mexico) with the name «Archi» in the 60's, 70's and 80's with a huge success. Since 90's, the comic book is edited and sold by *Editorial Vid (Exposición de Arte)*. Archie and friends' adventures are centered on a love triangle between Veronica, Archie and Betty, and teenager situations in a certain model equivalent in a variety of latitudes, while it was published. Occasionally, the adventures have fantastic or unreal styles (*Archiecomics*).

The comic book into the theatre

To address, the process of adaptation of the comic book into the theatre this text sets off from Scott McCloud's premises and Jesús Jiménez Varea's analysis.

En el terreno del cómic, el historietista y teórico Scott McCloud ha enfatizado la necesidad de segregar radicalmente el contenido de los aspectos formales para, en virtud de éstos, poder construir una definición precisa del medio (1993: 5-6) [...] nosotros no sólo nos solidarizamos con este presupuesto teórico sino que, a la hora de tratar los trasvases entre medios, trabajaremos desde el convencimiento de que todo lenguaje suficientemente desarrollado dispone de las herramientas y estrategias para expresar cualquier sustancia de contenido, modificando, si acaso, aspectos formales de éste. Si se contempla desde el plano de la expresión, el trasvase de un medio a otro exige una reflexión sobre cuáles son los sistemas de significación en que se apoya cada uno de ellos (Jimenez Varea, 2007, p. 289).

In the comic book domain, the strip cartoonist and theorist Scott McCloud emphasize the need of radically separate the content formal aspects to construct a precise definition of the media (1993: 5-6) [...] in which we are not only solidarized with this theoretical assumption, but work from the certainty that all language is sufficiently developed and the strategies and tools to express any content substance can modify, in any case, its formal aspects, when dealing bypassing it between media. If this bypass is addressed from expression, it demands to consider among the systems of meaning from which the media is developed (Jiménez Varea, 2007, p. 289).

As Jiménez Varea suggests, scenic fact elements must be considered in terms of adaptations or scenic references in comic books and vice versa. With this, he proposes a certain problem and asks for a particular analytic process.

Para empezar habría que plantearse si la auténtica obra teatral es el texto dramático en sí mismo o si requiere de la actualización que le confiere cada puesta en escena para completarse². También el cine, la televisión y el cómic parten de un texto previo en la forma de guiones y, sin embargo,

nunca se ha planteado seriamente que éstos sean más que medios hacia un fin, probablemente porque en estos medios la actualización queda fijada. Sin embargo, en el teatro cada representación supone una interpretación del texto-fuente: “a real translation takes place on the level of the *mise en scène* as a whole” (Pavis, 1989: 41) (Jimenez Varea, 2007, p. 290).

First and foremost, it has to be established if the authentic screenplay is a dramatic text itself or if it requires of an update brought with every *mise en scène* to be completed². As well as cinema, television and comic book start from previous texts as scripts; however, it has never been seriously suggested that these are more than ways to an end, probably because these media have fixed updates. Nevertheless, every *mise en scène* in theatre includes an interpretation from the source-text: “a real translation takes place on the level of the *mise en scène* as a whole” (Pavis, 1989: 41) (Jiménez Varea, 2007, p. 290).

Therefore, image development inside comic books or living image development in theatre presents problems both in visual language and special processes—temporary and owned by each media. The case assessed by this text is focused on figure use in comic books as previous public reference, however, so preconceptions can be delivered to the audience in a certain way that allows it to be developed in the play, so the audience can be run through by the play itself given preconceptions built both by characters and the comic book aesthetics.

En palabras de Gabriel García Mignorance, «bajo el disfraz de la ficción los cuentos de hadas tienen como función principal, preparar, o bien informar al receptor de la historia sobre cómo es el mundo real, aportando una serie de enseñanzas para la vida diaria». ²⁰ Vladimir Propp, por su parte, ahonda en aquellos arquetipos, personajes, motivos y estructuras que se repiten sistemáticamente a lo largo de las distintas historias que han cristalizado en el imaginario colectivo como cuentos de hadas, introduciendo la noción de elaboración y recombinación —elemento que, salvando las distancias, ya prefigura ciertas mecánicas de reescritura— en el campo del cuento de hadas tradicional —puesto que, al igual que el mito, anteriormente existía una tendencia a contemplar el objeto fantástico como un bloque inalterable— (Reche, 2019, p. 15).

In words of Gabriel García Mignorance, «under a fiction disguise, fairy tales

serve mainly to prepare or inform the audience about how is real world, giving a number of teachings for everyday life»²⁰. As for Vladimir Propp, he deepens on those archetypes, characters, motives and structures that are systematically repeated along different stories that have been crystalized in collectivity imaginaries as fairy tales, introducing a notion of elaboration and recombination –an element that, saving the distances, previously presents certain mechanics of re-writing– in traditional fairy tale terms – given that, as well as myth, it existed a tendency to contemplate the fantastic object as an inalterable block– (Reche, 2019, p. 15).

In the development of comic books taken into the scene, this chapter is to assess the workings of Gustavo Ott.

Pornographic heart who claims for vengeance

A road in Caracas city in a night just as any, only the car's headlights illuminate it when they pass by teased by a strange black spot on the ground. The spot has appeared in certain obscure moment and hasn't stopped to provoke chaos, accidents and sorrow. Neither has it stopped to hide another happening, less transcendent and mysterious.

In this scenario, two beautiful women, their silhouettes are drawn as voluptuous feminine bodies that resemble some comic book drawings from the beginning of the XX century. They shoot cheerfully to their targets, with the sight fixed upon as if they were seasoned hunters. Bum! A speed control sign. Bum! A commercial sign. Bum! A transit sign. But suddenly, one of them fall dead, shot by the other one.

The dark scene only allows to see the movements of the killer, quiet and relaxed, but a couple of eyes had come to see her. The drawing has begun to show its face and the crime scene is clear to be observed, Veronica had murdered Betty, her sister. Not only she has shot from the back, but she has sprinkled gasoline and set the body on fire. The only witness of all this is Jughead.

Jughead discovers the eyes of the murderer, but isn't worried about her leaving, actually there's only one thing in his mind: a mission, wash clear the ground from the spot. The spot that just as

the murderer with woman body, has taken another life. Jughead cannot leave aside his theory, the spot is extraterrestrial. And having a theory is a bit unfair with the scene that Jughead knows, he has seen them, the spot is an extraterrestrial sign.

Later, the same the night, while Jughead is immersed on his thoughts about extraterrestrial visitors and their curses to destroy us, like the language, Donald Duck arrives for help. While they study the spot, they discover a woman, but both Donald and Jughead have more important things to do than to follow the voice of a dying Betty, the same woman we had believed to be dead from a shot and that was set on fire is asking for help. Actually, nobody can help her, and they know it, so the spot mission can go on as scheduled.

Veronica has shown her power again, murdering in cold blood a motorcyclist that has ended up trapped between the back wires of her BMW. Because of this “accident” she negotiates with Archie, a policeman that in his free time rides a motorcycle along with his group, in which Porky and Scooby are included. Veronica manages to seduce Archie and besides, she has negotiated that for a good reward they will get rid of the body, and Archie debuts as the lover of the cold woman of black hair.

To this point, a guilty is needed for the Betty’s murder. Because somebody has recovered the body and it has become known that she belonged to a powerful family, that because of its power deserves an assassin. Archie decides, in his police and Veronica’s lover role, that Jughead is to be chosen for that part. Despite that Jughead has been in jail for a year, and that Veronica has grown in her new job to become directress, she asks her lover Archie to kill Jughead, although this implies that Archie himself has to enter the jail to commit the crime.

In a cell just as any, Archie and Jughead face each other; the first one confesses his murder intentions and Jughead follows the game, in his illusion of not being human and therefore immortal. However, Archie has infected Jughead with some disease that he keeps on thinking is harmless on him. Trapped in the cell, Archie comes to think on what has taken him there while he bares goodbye to the one that came to be his lover just one night. His last kind gesture is giving a little fan that can protect Jughead from the ions of the air, so they can’t come to harm his face.

Meanwhile, Veronica has reached the highest positions, enjoys a steady life with children and husband. She has confessed her crimes to Canuta, her spiritual guide, and she has assumed herself happy with the life she has built. She continues to kill anybody in her path, as hobby and hasn't expectations for her life, just not to get bored. Everything happens to be settled, until one afternoon just before Veronica leaves her office, Jughead confronts her; at that moment, Veronica confesses her crimes but without any passion, quite apathetically. She sees Jughead just as an undead that walks without direction and even soils herself paying for his burial, because some rascal as him doesn't even could reckon his own dead. Bum!

This *noir* comedy from 1995, from the hand of the Venezuelan author Gustavo Ott, shows us the triumphal ascend to power of one character filled with pain, wrath, blood, sex, power and money. These emblematic characters from comic books are related to moral and aesthetic aspirations, well and wide disseminated among the region, and evidence nonsense, cruelty and call to analysis.

«The cruelest crimes always occur inside the most intimate relationships, among the most beloved ones... [police phrase]» (Ott, 1995). The play begins with this phrase and establishes the possible relationship between the audience with it or suggests possible expectations about it. In scenic terms, Ott suggests first and foremost comic book aesthetics; from a specific comic book, that one considered a costumbrist teenager comedy and well known in the 70's, 80's and 90's in Latin America.

Gustavo Ott works on the screenplay thinking about a real fact, happened on Caracas city on 1994. The famous case was known as *The double crime of Los Naranjos*. Two young men, Miguel Tauil and Juan Carlos González, had begun to sell exotic and pure-blood animals, and for it they put advertisements on newspapers of Caracas. One day, a young lady called them to settle the buying of an Angora cat, the cat was brought by Miguel to an exclusive education institute on Venezuela Capital City.

The buyer, a young lady of barely 18 years old, daughter of a high-class family called Cibell Naime. Which has paid for the animal with a check stolen from her father, one of the most famed obstetric doctors in Caracas. The young lady, as she finds out that the punishment for her crime would be severe, decided to ask Miguel to give back the money.

However, he has refused to do it for many reasons, one of them is that the check has been already cashed.

One week later, Cibell arranged a meeting with the seller, disguising herself for another person and got to Los Naranjos ranch, the place where was set the breeding. The woman got into a house that was considerably far from the ranch fence, and there she talked about the animals, that they were meant for an aunt that waited at the entrance. Miguel and Juan Carlos offered themselves for taking her there in a truck. Cibell, despaired because she couldn't recover her father's money, shot Miguel and Juan Carlos inside the truck, and to the latter she explained that she killed him not because she was evil, but because he has seen everything.

After committing the murders, the woman took a taxi and returned home. The months passed by until the inquiries turned to Cibell, but thanks to that check everything was discovered: not only she stole it from her father and forged his signature, but it was the only link between her and the murdered boys. Cibell was condemned to 30 years of prison. But because of several weaknesses of the trial, she just served 9 years for her crimes, although she was declared conscious and sane, so the crime was committed for «futile motives, with advantage and wit», according to legal terms.

This real fact marked the Ott's play so he presents a farse with a cruel, grotesque and transgressional image of the society of Caracas, that could be taken to any part in the world and particularly in the Latin American region. This portrait shows clearly that little by little the violence has grown and has been benefited by professional promotions, politics, power posts, an enormous web of influences, money, renown and political favor, of certain persons in society.

In addition, Gustavo Ott presents a creative necessity to report violent facts disseminated throughout the Latin American region from the last decades of the twentieth century. Particularly, he remembers popular riots that resulted from the policy taken by President Carlos Andrés Pérez, that occurred between February 27th and March 8th, 1989, and were known as El Caracazo. The echoes of this violence in his country brought Ott to the need of a creative demonstration of the suicidal path that the society is walking.

On the other hand, it can't be ignored the black spot on the road metaphor, which is not referred to a real fact, but has been studied from scientific, engineering, urban and even paranormal assessments. This particular story begins in 1986, when in the Caracas highway –La Guaira– the one that leads to the airport, appeared a sudden black spot, which had grown up to 25 km and has reached other roads in the city. It is said that the spot is changing depending on weather and has caused more than a thousand dead's due to traffic accidents.

The black spot reproduced by Ott in his play follows the same logic that the real one, cannot be eliminated by any means and maintains uneasy any inquiry on her. In Ott's words, the black spot in real life is a cancer to the highway, in his play is a metaphor that takes us close to a trait of Venezuela herself, a country based on oil that has lost more than one life and gained more than one curse for it, and even shows to the distance that at a time was a premonition: the Venezuelan diaspora.

Gustavo Ott ventures to a fascinating and attractive world, but that scares because of its proximity; the violence. But not a far or external violence, but a close one, crude and tangible. Being this violence the reality in Caracas and many other cities in the world. The crime and violence in Latin American region has reached pandemical categories, where violence happens to be omnipresent and take every single body, taking over area, moments and persons and turning them into violence makers, from the despair of the homeless to the organized crime.

The main goal of the play is to deliver a reflection message to the audience, about self-delusion, liveliness, violence and vengeance which occur in the world nowadays (Aponte, 1). Therefore, Ott's play shows a critic analysis of Venezuelan society, but it can be related to any other reality that happens to be reflected on stage.

The comic book scenic resource shows the audience a distorted world's view that allows to call into question reality itself. Incites her to think about what the author means by referring a pornographic heart who claims for vengeance; the look for «the essence of crime as raw material to solve problems, as a Latin American constant. The play, from surface, tries to dive on a greater metaphor: the evil, among us, doesn't just wins but prevails» (Ott, 2021).

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ASOCIACIÓN DE DESARROLLO Y DIFUSIÓN
DEL GÉNERO FANTÁSTICO
"UNICORNIO NEGRO"

MASSIVA
GRUPO DE INVESTIGACIÓN UMH


FANTAE LX
CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE GÉNERO FANTÁSTICO,
AUDIOVISUALES Y NUEVAS TECNOLOGÍAS