



Over our Dead Bodies: A Study of the Fantastic in Short Stories by Lesser-Known Women Authors from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean

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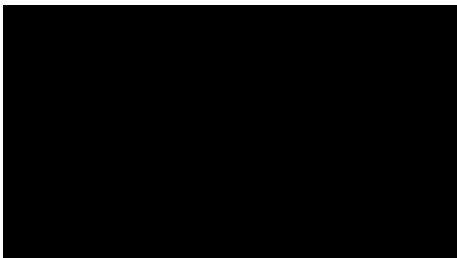
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Abstract

This thesis examines a selection of twelve short stories of the Fantastic written by women authors from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, who are not included in the literary canon. These authors employ the compelling strategies afforded by the Fantastic to speak out against injustice, inequality, oppression, and other social and political challenges. The canonical theories of the Fantastic will be utilised in the analysis of the stories with a particular focus on theorists who have brought a unique Latin American approach into the corpus of Fantastic criticism. This approach is key to understanding a recurring theme in the stories analysed: the body as a place of resistance. Thus, the theoretical concepts explored in this study revolve around narratives of the corporeal body and body studies. A close reading of each story will reveal how the body and its sub-themes – the corporeal body, the non-corporeal body, and the double – are combined with the Fantastic to convey the authors' key messages.

Certification

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.



2 May 2024

Lynette Grivell

Date

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For the selected stories, where possible, I have purchased the book by the author with the story being studied, preferably the original print edition, as I wished to support the authors and their publishers. In some cases, these original editions are not available, and I have purchased a subsequent edition, such as Claudia Hernández's *De fronteras* (2007), which was originally published as *Mediodía de fronteras* in 2002. A few of the books are either not available for purchase from overseas destinations including bookstores (new or second-hand), or are no longer in publication, such as Mildred Hernández's 'Paranoica City' (2002). I obtained the story from purchasing the anthology *Tiempos de narrar: cuentos centroamericanos* (2007). Otherwise, I tried to obtain pages through the University of New England's Library of the first publication of the authors' books.

Content warning

This thesis contains descriptions from fictional stories that are sometimes confronting, disturbing and violent. It includes references to the death of children, corpses, blood, mutilation and dismemberment, cannibalism, sexual violence, violence, murder, torture, rape, sex and masturbation, suicide and self-harm, sexism and misogyny, discrimination, and body dysmorphia and dysphoria.

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

“Lo Fantástico nos salva de la realidad.”

Ana Martínez Castillo

This thesis examines a selection of twelve short stories of the Fantastic written by women from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, who are not included in the literary canon. The authors I have selected for this study have powerful stories that speak out against injustice, inequality, an oppressive society, or other challenges which they may encounter in their daily lives, but they do this through the compelling strategies afforded by the Fantastic. While the Fantastic may not literally “save us from reality” as Martínez Castillo says above (Martínez Castillo), especially when one’s reality may be confronting, it provides a way of accepting what is real by twisting it to be unreal. Authors of the Fantastic create a real world, much like our own, in which the possible and the impossible co-exist (García and López-Pellisa 7). Women writers are drawn to the Fantastic due to its subversive nature (Duncan 201), especially when dealing with contemporary social issues and taboo subjects. In Fantastic fiction, women authors can speak about forbidden and marginal topics, disguise meanings, and break the structure of authority. Women writers, who have always been at the margin whether they reside in Europe, Africa, or Latin America, have always had to invent new ways to tell their stories and new ways to survive (Agosín 13-14).

My study aims to identify some common features in these non-mainstream works of literature, thus enhancing scholarly understanding of the features and trends of this literary genre. While there is a large volume of work on male authors of the Fantastic from Latin America, with many being considered part of the literary canon, very few women authors are acknowledged,

and even fewer from the smaller Central American and Caribbean nations. Accordingly, this project focuses on Fantastic short stories by women writers from Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Puerto Rico, as writers from these countries are even less represented in books and publishing. My study draws more attention to these authors and addresses some of the gaps in the studies of their works.

Patricia García's 2019 study, 'Spanish and Latin American Women Writers in the Literary Canon: A Paratextual Study of Anthologies of Fantastic Literature (1946–2016)' was a springboard for this thesis. When I started my journey with this study in 2020, I sought to include stories from both male and female authors of the Fantastic. However, I discovered that there are many women writers of the Fantastic and they were underrepresented in anthologies, and this turned my attention to focus on women authors for this study. While other editors of anthologies have recognised that there are only a few women writers in anthologies of the Fantastic, such as Marjorie Agosín (16) and Cecilia Correas de Zapata (xvi), García's statistical analysis gathered paratexts from 110 anthologies, from which she concluded that there is a lack of key female names that serve as referents for the Hispanic Fantastic. Her study, which was intended to motivate intervention in the existing canon to include women authors (García 591), underpins the aims and objectives of this thesis. My study builds also on García's co-authorship with David Roas 'Introduction: New Perspectives on the Female Fantastic' (2020), Roas's study 'The Female Fantastic vs. The Feminist Fantastic: Gender and the Transgression of the Real' (2020), and other scholarly articles by and introductions to anthologies of the Fantastic published between 1977 and 2019.¹

¹ See: *Insólitas. Narradoras de lo fantástico en Latinoamérica y España*, by Teresa López-Pellisa and Ricard Ruiz Garzón (2019), *Unraveling the Real: The Fantastic in Spanish-American Ficciones* by Cynthia Duncan (2010), and *Le fantastique féminin: d'Ann Radcliffe à nos jours* (1977) and *Le fantastique féminin: d'Ann Radcliffe à Patricia Highsmith* (1995) by Anne Richter.

The Fantastic

What is the Fantastic?

I nearly reached the point of believing.

Tzvetan Todorov

The Fantastic is a literary genre in which the possible and the impossible are confounded together in a story. They coexist in a realistic or everyday setting, that is, not in a fantasy or make-believe world (García and López-Pellisa 7; Oxford Reference). What makes the Fantastic different from other genres is the hesitation that the reader experiences when something happens to the protagonist, but the reader is left with no explanation for this strange event (Todorov 25). The reader hesitates as he or she has to make a choice: either the event was a product of the imagination, in which the laws of our world apply; or the event took place in a reality where the laws of our world do not apply. The Fantastic occupies the space while the reader is hesitating and deciding between the two options (Todorov 25). The stories are generally quite short, often only a few pages long. However, there are times, even in these short narratives, when the reader gets close to believing what happened; however, he or she is still unsure (Todorov 31). The Fantastic's major characteristics of doubt, uncertainty, ambiguity, the unknown, and the frequent use of the imperfect tense, combine to create uncertainty for the reader. Modalisation is also used by authors,² which keeps the reader in the world of the real and the unreal at the same time (Todorov 37-40). However, the reader does not question what he or she is reading, whether it is about a young woman who transforms into a doll, or a family that sees reflections of deceased family members in their dining-room mirror

² Modalisation is the addition of some relative meaning to a sentence by using modal adverbs or expressions, typically to mitigate the impact of what is being said. For example, when "it is raining outside" is changed to "perhaps it is raining outside", the adverb 'perhaps' turns the sentence into probability. Other examples of modal adverbs include 'maybe, probably, a little, at least, a bit, all things considered,' etc. and expressions such as "I believe, it seems to me," etc. (Colucci 62-64).

instead of their own reflections. As a consequence of this ambiguity and doubt, the reader must decide the outcome of the story for themselves. In his seminal work, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975),³ Tzvetan Todorov, whose structural analysis is considered to be the starting point for studies of Fantastic literature, insists that it is hesitation which sustains the life of the Fantastic (Todorov 31), which is why it is mostly suited to short stories. However, Cynthia Duncan argues that “if the Fantastic is a literary game, the reader will willingly choose to suspend disbelief for as long as he or she wants, and as many times as he or she likes” (Duncan 21).

Finally, fantastic literature should not be confused with the other similar genres of magical realism, science fiction, surrealism, fantasy, or utopian/dystopian fiction. The differences are explained more fully in Chapter 2.

The Fantastic in Latin America

The Fantastic is a widely popular literary genre in Latin America. According to Doris Meyer, the Latin American public has an expectation that its writers will stand up for issues of national concern, or at least weave their political dissent into their ‘creative literature’ (Meyer 7). The Fantastic offers the tools to do this as it is a means of discussing current political and social problems under the guise of an escapist and non-threatening literary form.

In Latin America, Fantastic literature began to prosper in the late nineteenth century, boosted by the rise of secularism, popular interest in the occult, a booming publishing industry and large waves of migration, mostly from Europe (Duncan 8-10). In particular, the development of cities and urbanisation are fundamental for Fantastic literature because the stories are

³ Todorov’s book was first written in French, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970). The first edition in English was printed in 1973. I am using the 1975 edition.

generally set in urban surroundings. Moreover, the Fantastic has strong ties with Europe and flourished in Latin America in areas where the European influence was strongest, above all in the large cities close to the Río de la Plata, notably in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, as they became established as modern nations. These socio-historical circumstances affected the perspective of writers and are reflected in their stories. The Latin American Fantastic continued developing through the twentieth century but increased in popularity after the publication of *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940) by Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo. This book explained the Fantastic to those readers who were not familiar with the genre, and it produced “a dialogue about the Fantastic in which Latin Americans would play a vital part” (Duncan 9). Further interest in this book increased during the Latin American literary boom in the 1960s and 1970s, following the release of works of authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar. A new generation of readers became interested in Fantastic literature, both in Latin America and Europe. According to Duncan, this converted the Fantastic into an important literary genre after “a mid-century angst on both sides of the Atlantic, rooted in different causes but with the same general effect” (Duncan 9, 11), with the most enduring tradition coming from South America, particularly the regions with the strongest European influence (Duncan 38). The authors did not work in isolation but drew inspiration from each other, thanks to a phenomenon described by Argentinian author Julio Cortázar as follows: “Suddenly, and without logical and convincing reasons, a culture produces in a few years a series of creators who spiritually fertilise each other” (Cortázar and Safir 527).

Argentinian Fantastic theorist Ana María Barrenechea notes that the Fantastic is a practical means of self-expression for Latin American authors, which also draws attention to social problems (402). During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and without abandoning their colonial heritage, the countries of Latin America oscillated between capitalism and feudalism. It is a story of contradictions that reflects the changes that occurred in these countries and

societies, which includes independence from Spain, lack of or slowness to improve their societies after their independence, urbanisation, migrations from rural areas to cities and immigration from other countries, civil wars, and dictatorships, among other factors that played a role in the formation of the new nations. According to Duncan, Roger Caillois identified the Fantastic as: “the counter voice to scientific progress and projects of modernity and industrialisation” (qtd. in Duncan 14), and to highlight certain social problems, which, in Latin America, have been amplified by a series of tumultuous events. With these factors all coming into play, the Fantastic is deployed by Latin American authors to oppose “the established positivistic discourse in society” (García and López-Pellisa 12). Duncan suggests that imaginary fiction was designed for “bourgeois, urban readers” in Latin America (1), taking on undertones of elitism and escapism which still exist today, and, as it clashes with reality, it becomes an intellectual game. While Duncan opines that Fantastic fiction cannot be taken seriously as other, more socially-oriented fiction (Duncan 1-2), such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee, I argue that my analysis challenges this perception because I examine stories that tackle important and serious issues, such as gruesome murders in conflicts and violence against women. While the Fantastic invites the reader to play a game, to “accept the unacceptable” (Cortázar and Safir 524), and to suspend disbelief, it often allegorises or makes metaphors of some serious issues, which will be discussed in the analyses of the stories.

In this study I will draw on existing theories of the Fantastic to analyse my chosen stories within the Latin American perspective. Firstly, I will use the theories of Tzvetan Todorov whose analysis searched for common structural features in different texts to provide a strong definition of the Fantastic (Jackson 5). This explains why his study is so important and generally used as the starting point for most of the Postmodernist Fantastic. The other major theories I will be utilising are by Ana María Barrenechea, Rosalba Campra, Jaime Alazraki, and Rosemary Jackson. Their theories offer a different perspective of the Fantastic, such as social

and political allegories, the importance of silences or gaps as elements of expression, problematic plots that have no solution, and the Fantastic event appearing very early in the narrative. This study will show how, when the author employs a narrative with a Fantastic event, the reader may come close to believing that it is real, accepting the strange situation and continuing to read the story. Later theorists built on Todorov's studies and argued that it is not limited to a short period of the nineteenth century as Todorov insisted, but they suggest that the Fantastic changes as society changes over time. This has been proven by the recent proliferation of women writers, whose books have gained international recognition.

Research questions and key concepts

This study will also examine the reasons for which the Fantastic has become and has remained an important choice of genre for women writers from Latin America and explore why women, particularly those from Central America and the Caribbean, are underrepresented in the literary canon, despite the importance of their works. This research will therefore provide new knowledge on Fantastic literature written by women authors who have been practically invisible internationally. The body plays a significant role in women's literature, as it reflects both individual and cultural experiences. Feminist theorists recognise the biological body as a site of lived experiences, and that these lived bodies "are centres of perception, action, and lived experience rather than mere objects" (Goulimari 4). These living bodies are also shaped by gender, race, sexuality, and other factors. One of the main aims of this thesis is to investigate how women writers have used the Fantastic and narratives that centre on the body to subvert the authorities and the patriarchy. The body is at the centre of this study as it is also in constant change — it is either subjected to changes or when humans make voluntary changes to it — and as such, it reflects the socio-political situation of these countries. In our patriarchal world, women's bodies have been objectified in mythology, literature, and in the media, and the

perception of the woman's body has oscillated from lustful desire to hateful misogyny (Chaitanya). Women writers want to explore and control how women's bodies are perceived, controlled, and constrained by societal norms, including dress standards, beauty, reproductive rights, diversity, and women's agency, or the lack of it. Therefore, women's writing provides a way to challenge these norms and stereotypes. These authors can subvert the traditional (masculine) narratives by portraying women's desires, sexuality, and their experiences, especially those which were once considered to be taboo, or had been silenced. French feminist Hélène Cixous stated:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence," the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word "impossible" and writes it as "the end".
(886)

Since the key theoretical concepts explored in this study revolve around narratives of the corporeal body and body studies, it will draw from the body theories of Margo DeMello (2014), the collection of body studies by Bryan Turner et al. (2012), and Jean Franco (2013) who discusses violence against the body, amongst others, and examine how my selected authors use narratives that centre on the body in their Fantastic stories. According to DeMello in her book *Bodies Studies: An Introduction* (2014), the body is both the source and the target of power and it is a powerful means of social control. However, she states that the body is, for the most part, socially constructed, and women are now using narratives that centre on the body to challenge social norms, the state, society, the Church, and their families (DeMello 13, 19). The Fantastic, being a literature of subversion as Jackson describes it (9), is the perfect tool for the selected

authors to draw attention to the plight of people, especially women and minority groups, who are being subjected to domination, manipulation, violence, coercive control, and other means of subjugation or oppression. In particular, the concept of the patriarchy is raised many times in the stories; patriarchy can be defined as a society in which power is possessed by males or by elite males and where power is passed down the male lineage (Christ 215).

DeMello argues that feminists have played the greatest role in redefining body studies in recent times. They have challenged the age-old traditions of women forgoing education for child rearing and the female brain being rated secondary to the woman's appearance. She states that every policy decision regarding women in the Western world relates in some way to the body, notably in the reproductive process (DeMello 17-18). However, Latin American feminism is different from the US or European versions, due to cultural differences. According to Ofelia Schutte:

For many women, the preservation of the integrity of the family (under redefined conditions) is an essential part of their feminist praxis. This aspect of the women's movement in Latin America is likely to be misunderstood in the United States, just as the individualism that marks North American and Western European feminism is not readily translatable into a Latin American cultural context. [...] The significance of gender issues clearly transcends issues concerning the family. (78)

This link between feminist principles, the family and overcoming patriarchal obstacles is a common thread in most of the stories, from Leonara Carrington's 'La debutante' (1939) as the young girl tricks her mother and family and dresses up a hyena to go to the ball in her place,⁴ in both Jacinta Escudos's 'Yo, cocodrilo' (2008) and María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra's 'Muñeca rota' (2014) as the protagonist in each story plans to escape her tormentors by

⁴ Carrington was a strong feminist.

transforming into something else, the aunt's suffering and revenge against the male doctor who did not cure her in Rosario Ferré's 'La muñeca menor' (1976), and the woman in Cheri Lewis G.'s 'Mujer hecha pedazos' (2013) trying to retain her individualism.

Continuing the theme of patriarchal expectations of women, the theories of beauty and body appearance of DeMello, Jane Goodall (1999), Susan Bordo (2003), and Bryan Turner et al. (1996 and 2012) will be applied to the stories. Women have been compelled to enhance and retain their youth and beauty, which is indicative of fertility. The young woman's body is considered to be the 'normal' woman's body (DeMello 46), and this is strongly played out in the media, including social media. Bodies that do not achieve this (almost) impossible standard are viewed by some people as imperfect, even ugly. Bodies with disabilities are analysed in 'La muñeca menor' and 'Muñeca rota', using the disability theory of Douglas Baynton (2013) and DeMello, as the women in these stories overcome their disabilities and triumph against the patriarchy or their abusers, with the aid of the Fantastic.

The alteration or transformation of the body is central to six of the stories being examined. Authors use alteration or transformation (or metamorphosis) as an allegory or a satire of something horrific in life, whether it be related to the family, people's behaviour, society, the city, the authorities, and politicians. Alteration can not only also be used to view how life has changed for the protagonist, but also to view how life really looks from an outside perspective. The transformation of the protagonist in the stories is often a means of escape from either their tormentors or the patriarchy, as in 'La muñeca menor', 'Muñeca rota', and 'Yo, cocodrilo'; the latter two stories the protagonist is transforming into a different being. However, transformation is also a concept for changing appearance and identities, as in Esther Díaz Llanillo's 'El vendedor de cabezas' (2009), and the negative transformation to an invisible

woman in Linda Berrón's 'El eterno transparente' (1992), reflecting the woman who is taken for granted.

Some of the Fantastic narratives analysed in this thesis feature fragmented bodies. While DeMello notes that the fragmentation of women's bodies is the result of sexualisation of body parts, especially the breasts and buttocks (16), in my chosen stories there is a lack of sexualisation and objectification of the female form, except for 'Muñeca rota' (discussed in Chapter 5), in which the protagonist's extremities fall off and she is only left with her "penetrable parts" (Pérez Cuadra 27). Instead, the fragmented or broken body could be linked back to the countries' histories, which have been fragmented through colonialism and wars. Neo-colonialism, *Latifundismo*, and imperialism from the United States of America (USA) have constrained development both economically and socially (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 283-284). The fragmentation of the body into parts in some of the stories still refers to the corporeal body, or the identity or the will of the person, being broken at some point. The protagonists in the stories are either changing body parts for something better, putting their pieces back together and carrying on, or seeking revenge on those who had let them suffer, while at the same time mocking the new regimes or societies. The majority of women writers chosen for this study have instead directed their focus to other parts of the body, such as the head, arms, and legs, to reflect the change to the protagonist or to society in their story. For example, in Díaz Llanillo's 'El vendedor de cabezas', people can purchase different heads to change with their own to become a different person, to change their appearance or their identity, and it also reflects the changes in Cuban society after the Revolution. Fragmentation is also a concept in Lewis's 'Mujer hecha pedazos', in which a woman has her body parts fall off suddenly, but the story is really about women pulling themselves back together after life's challenges and continuing with their lives.

Mutilated, dismembered or dead bodies are key concepts in five of the stories being examined. Mutilation of a human being is an act of extreme violence with the aim of maiming or disabling the human by injuring limbs or organs, or severe disfigurement (Häkkinen-Nyholm et al. 933). This is the key concept in Escudos's 'Yo, cocodrilo', referring to female genital mutilation. Dismemberment can be defined as the intentional removal or detachment of the larger sections of the body (Petreca et al 889), which is the concept in the story 'Manual de hijo muerto' (2007) by Hernández. In this story, the parents receive the dismembered body parts of their adult child to reassemble for the funeral and burial. Dead bodies are also the theme in Ramos's 'Para elegir la muerte' (2000), which has a satirical look at death choices for sale, while a married couple tries to dispose of a dead body in Mildred Hernández's 'Paranoica city' (2003). While these three stories about deaths are linked or loosely linked to the violent histories of the countries, in others the protagonists use death as a means of escape, as in Amparo Dávila's 'El huésped' (1959) and Carrington's 'La debutante'. Jean Franco's theories of mourning, disappeared persons, and dismemberment will be applied to 'Manual de hijo muerto', as the short story deals with a family's mourning process. Franco's study is particularly important as it is centred on violence in Latin America.

Another side of the body is the non-corporeal body, such as that of a ghost. In María Elena Llana's 'En familia' (1983), the deceased family members, or ghosts, are reflected in the mirror in the dining room. The other non-corporeal body being analysed in the stories is the invisible woman, that is, the woman who is taken for granted by her family, colleagues, and so on, and who becomes invisible to them. The invisible woman is the theme in Linda Berrón's 'El eterno transparente' (1992). By using the Fantastic in their stories, the authors are challenging male dominance that has excluded women and made female power invisible (Jones, 153).

The double is also quite prevalent in Fantastic stories. It has a naturally subversive character as the appearance of a double in a narrative has a destabilising effect on the story (Dale 3). In literature, the double often occurs when a pair of characters, who either look exactly alike or bear a strong resemblance, are present in the same setting at the same time. They generally represent opposite characters, one good and the other evil, such as Mr Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), who becomes a threat to Dr Jekyll. While doubles represent another side or another facet of the main character, their importance is they are both linked to each other. However, doubles are not all opposing characters to the protagonist and may also take a completely different form. They may be an extra character, that is, not a likeness to the main character, such as the hyena in Carrington's 'La debutante' or the doll created for the youngest niece in Ferré's 'La muñeca menor'. Doubles may act differently or in collusion with the protagonist, such as in 'La debutante', in which the protagonist and the hyena collude to get the hyena to attend the ball in her place. Narratives about doubles also include mirrors, reflections, and dual and multiple personalities or selves, and the one frequently used by the authors studied and in Latin America, the Other. The concept of the Other relates to a person or persons who may not share the same views or have the same culture as the self. In Latin America, the Other has strong links to colonialism. This Other becomes a source of fear or a threat, due to some type of difference, such as race, gender, ethnicity, disability, appearance, real or imagined. As fear is a powerful motivator, this Other may need to be avoided, shunned, altered in some way, contained, or, in extreme cases, eliminated. This is one of the themes in Amparo Dávila's 'El huésped' (1959), in which the guest becomes the Other.

Narratives of the corporeal and non-corporeal body, the double, alteration, and mutilation have been chosen as they are the most prevalent themes in the stories studied. These concepts were identified by using a matrix of themes for each story (see Chapter 2) and are used by women

authors of the Fantastic to push back against the authorities and the gender-based systems that have been imposed on women for thousands of years. The stories will also be analysed as allegories of Latin American history, politics, and society, including the challenging place women occupy in society, and men's attitudes towards women. The major themes identified from the stories reveal that the concerns of women writers in the late 1930s, when Carrington wrote 'La debutante,' were not so different from those of the 2020s, for example, from being trapped in the home or being trapped by violence, either domestic violence or through armed conflicts.⁵

My chosen women authors have not shied away from situations that they may have either experienced first-hand, witnessed, or suffered in their country, such as the dismembered body in Hernández's 'Manual de hijo muerto' and the dead bodies in Ramos's 'Para elegir la muerte'. They are also protesting about crimes against humanity perpetrated in other countries, not just Latin America, as in Escudos's 'Yo, cocodrilo' which deals with female genital mutilation. However, the authors are generally not writing about these situations or events in a shocking or horrifying way. Instead, by writing Fantastic narratives, they sometimes set themselves apart from the narration, as can be seen with the detached manner in 'Manual de hijo muerto', which softens the impact of the gruesome story content. On the other hand, the authors may use humour, generally black humour, absurdity, satire, and irony, to not only mitigate the impact, but also to provide a contrast to the sombre, strange, or horrific events being narrated: humour versus disgust, light versus dark, good versus evil. The humour and horror theories of Noël Carroll (1999) will be utilised to reveal how the combination of humour and horror can be employed in a way that makes the reader laugh as these literary devices provoke different human reactions. Carroll explains that horror is connected to the violation, problematisation

⁵ A more detailed discussion of the themes is in Chapter 2. Appendix D contains a list of all the themes.

and transgression of society's norms, categories, and concepts. At the same time, incongruous humour is also linked to the problematisation, transgression, and violation of society's norms, as it provides the juxtaposition of contrasting events or merely inappropriate transgressions of these norms. The reader incorrectly assumes that something else is going to occur, but what happens instead is unexpected and contrasts this expectation, making the reader laugh (Carroll 152-154). When the reader willingly suspends disbelief, fantasy is discounted as the mix of horror and humour is designed to promote laughter rather than fear or tension (Winter 22). Carroll's theories of humour and horror are particularly relevant for 'Manual de hijo muerto' and 'Para elegir la muerte'.

Turning away from the opposites of humour and horror, I will now examine the puzzling issue of why only a few women writers are included in the literary canon.

Why women writers are underrepresented in the literary canon

Women writers, particularly from Central America and the Caribbean, have been underrepresented in the Latin American literary canon, despite the high number of women writers of Fantastic stories and the significance of their works.⁶ However, an increasing number of women writers from Latin America are now achieving more recognition as their works are published. In addition, they are winning more literary prizes, being included in more anthologies, and garnering/attracting more scholarly interest. In fact, it would appear that this decade is experiencing a boom in women's published literature, if not solely in the Fantastic, then in similar genres or modes, like the 'insólito' (the unusual), science fiction, and weird fiction. The works of Mexican and South American writers such as Cecilia Eudave,

⁶ For example, see García, Patricia. "Spanish and Latin American Women Writers in the Literary Canon: A Paratextual Study of Anthologies of Fantastic Literature (1946–2016)" and Roas, David. "The Female Fantastic vs. The Feminist Fantastic: Gender and the Transgression of the Real.", as well as Appendix B of this thesis.

Iliana Vargas, Samanta Schweblin, Mariana Enríquez, Liliana Colanzi, Giovanna Rivero, Solange Rodríguez Pappe, and Mónica Ojeda, amongst others, are not only attracting recognition and literary prizes,⁷ but are also being translated into other languages, including English.⁸ Despite this, women from Central America and the Caribbean are not as represented as women from Mexico and South America, and even less so than male authors.

When I interviewed author María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra on 26 September 2023, she explained that while certain independent publishers have managed to have some impact outside of the region, the publishing market in Central America is disconnected from the rest of Latin America. This disconnect means that it is difficult for the reading public to obtain works by these authors. Some of the authors have gained access to the market by securing publishing contracts in other countries; for instance, Claudia Hernández published in Guatemala and Chile, and Jacinta Escudos in Spain. This has been their only way to achieve recognition; otherwise, no one would know about their works. However, while there are some larger publishers, such as Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial in Mexico City,⁹ in general, Central American authors continue to operate in the shadows, almost like a closed shop. Pérez Cuadra lamented that “las editoriales [independientes] un día están, al día siguiente ya no existen”. She noted that some women writers’ books are kept in storage, but they do not sell, and that means that they are not included in any writing boom or achieve any recognition.

⁷ For example, Rivero won the Premio en Cuentos Franz Tamayo for *La dueña de nuestros sueños*; Eudave won the Premio Nacional de Novela Corta Juan García Ponce prize in 2007 for *Bestiaria vida*; Schweblin won the Premio Casas de las Américas in 2008 for *Pájaros en la boca*; Rodríguez Pappe won the Premio Joaquín Gallegos Lara prize for *Balas perdidas* in 2010; Ojeda won the Premio Príncipe Claus Next Generation award in 2019; Enríquez won the Premio Herralde de Novela in 2019 for *Nuestra parte de noche*; Colanzi won the VII Premio Ribera del Duero prize in 2022 for *Ustedes brillan en lo oscuro*. Schweblin has also won the National Book Prize in 2022 for *Seven empty houses* (the English translation of *Siete casas vacías*) and has been shortlisted twice for the Man Booker Prize.

⁸ For example, recent English translations of Schweblin’s *Seven Empty Houses* (2023) and Enríquez’s *Our Share of Night* (2022) from the original Spanish editions *Siete casas vacías* (2015) and *Nuestra parte de noche* (2019) respectively.

⁹ Grupo Santillana sold Editoriales Santillana and Alfaguara to Penguin Random House in 2014. Santillana now publishes textbooks for the education sector in Latin America.

Independent publishers, such as Das Kapital, now offer their services to publish books for these authors, generally through self-finance by the author. For example, Pérez Cuadra obtained a grant, which assisted with publishing her book *Una ciudad de estatuas y perros* with Das Kapital in 2014, and Claudia Hernández used Piedra Santa Editorial in Guatemala to republish *De fronteras* (2007). In addition, there are the university presses, such as the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras. In 2022, Pérez Cuadra worked with a Costa Rican company operated by women, Abecedaria Editoras, to publish *Una ciudad de estatuas y perros* in electronic format to reach a wider readership. While this was a very successful and affordable option with readers purchasing the book from all over the world, Pérez Cuadra found that readers in her home country preferred a printed paper book to an electronic version, so domestic sales were low.

Pérez Cuadra's issues with the availability of publishing in Central America are echoed by Claudia Hernández, who, in an interview with Gabriela Alemán in 2019 stated that El Salvador is "un país donde las editoriales básicamente no existen".¹⁰ On why she published *Causas naturales* (2013) with Editoriales Santanilla in Guatemala, Hernández explained: "porque ya no había editoriales en El Salvador. Es que de una a una fueron cerrando. No hay dinero, y alegan que no hay suficientes lectores que compren libros. Por eso es mi insistencia en que los cuentos tienen que ir por una vía gratuita" (Hernández "Writers").

Access to publishing has been difficult for a long time in Latin America. Even back in the 1960s, Mario Vargas Llosa asked: "How can literature exist in countries where there are no publishing houses, where there are no literary publications, where if you want to publish a book, you must finance it yourself?" (Santana Acuña 40). Accordingly, a few Central American women authors have taken publishing into their own hands. Linda Berrón established the

¹⁰ Hernández, Claudia. "Latin American Writers Series: Claudia Hernández." Interview by Gabriela Alemán, *Latin American Writers Series: Claudia Hernández*, 19 November 2019.

publishing company Editorial Mujeres in 1991, dedicated to publishing books written by Costa Rican women. It was the first publishing house for books written by women in Costa Rica, and the third publishing house for women's writing in Latin America. Berrón was the editor from 1991 to 2009. Editorial Mujeres published eleven books in 1991, including books of poetry, and has edited books such as *Relatos de mujeres* (1993) and books written by women in other countries. Both Cheri Lewis G. and María Eugenia Ramos have established their own publishing companies to get their books to the market (Ediciones de la Ardilla and Editorial Guardabarranco respectively). Bolivian author Liliana Colanzi also established a publishing company (Dum Dum Editora) which assists other authors to get their books published.¹¹

Pérez Cuadra also noted that there are difficulties when translating and disseminating books (or electronic books) to different parts of Central America itself, as there are different languages spoken in different zones within each country. For example, many people on the Caribbean coast may not be able to read a book published on the Pacific coast, so books may need to be published in Spanish, Creole, and English. In addition, access to translation is also lacking in many areas. However, she notes that the immediacy of electronic and internet media, such as personal websites and blogs, can assist with the dissemination of works.¹²

Despite some of the publishing difficulties faced by the authors, various anthologies of Fantastic stories were sourced for this project that contained stories from both male and female

¹¹ Liliana Colanzi is a Bolivian author, editor, and journalist. She established her publishing company in 2017. She holds a PhD in Comparative literature from Cornell University (USA) where she is a professor of Latin American literature.

¹² The website Red de Investigación de las Literaturas de Mujeres de América Central (RILMAC) promotes the study of literature written by Central American women and aims to make their works more widespread in the literary world. <https://rilmac.org/>. The Red Europea de Investigaciones sobre Centroamérica, (RedISCA), operates in a similar way. <http://redisca.org/>. Pérez Cuadra has used the blog *Animal Inédito* to provide access to her works. <https://animalinedito.blogspot.com/p/maria-del-carmen-perez-cuadra.html>. The blog *Hablemos, Escritoras* is a site for authors from South America and Spain. <https://www.hablemosescritoras.com/>.

authors.¹³ These anthologies were extremely important to this study, as they provided not only some of the texts of the Fantastic stories discussed in this thesis, but also information on the history of the Fantastic in Latin America and in some cases, information about the authors of the stories. While searching through these anthologies, I discovered that they included very few stories written by women, except for Alberto Chimal's anthology (2016), of which half the stories were written by women. However, after further searching, I discovered the anthologies of Cecilia Correas de Zapata (1990), Marjorie Agosín (1992), García and López-Pellisa (2019), López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón (2019), and Richter's two anthologies (1977 and 1995), which contain only stories written by women. These five books are important to women writers of the Fantastic as evidence of women's writing, and for their stories to reach a wider readership. Richter and García and López-Pellisa talk about a 'female Fantastic' or a 'feminine Fantastic', in which the authors take a feminist viewpoint, using the supernatural to subvert expectations and norms (Richter "Highsmith" 10; García and López-Pellisa 17). Richter theorises that women speak differently, that they have the 'privilege' of thinking other than by reason (implied that they do not think like men), "en utilisant aussi leur corps, ses instincts, ses souvenirs, ou cet impondérable qu'il est convenu d'appeler l'âme" (Richter "Highsmith" 10). She notes that only the modern Fantastic is 'truly feminine' and reveals the eternal woman, while the traditional Fantastic gives a forced or entirely false vision, as it refers to something else, such as a historical anecdote or a moral sentence, and took pleasure in frightening the reader, often with dark and sinister settings (Richter "Highsmith" 11).

A brief discussion of each of these anthologies is in Appendix B.

¹³ The books were edited by, in alphabetical surname of the editor(s): Marjorie Agosín, Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo (probably the most famous anthology of Latin American Fantastic stories), José Ricardo Chaves, Alberto Chimal, Celia Correas de Zapata, Patricia García and Teresa López-Pellisa, Óscar Hahn, Teresa López-Pellisa and Ricardo Ruíz Garzón, José María Martínez, Ana María Morales and José Miguel Sardiñas, Anne Richter (1977 and 1995), and Ethan Sharp and José María Martínez.

The chapters

This thesis is divided into eight chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks for the thesis and then explains how these theories will be employed in my analysis of the stories. It discusses canonical theories of the Fantastic of Todorov, Barrenechea, Campora, Alazraki, and Jackson, how they can be applied to the stories, and the implications of using these theories. This chapter also clarifies how the stories were selected for the thesis by using a matrix of the themes identified in the stories.

One of the objectives of this thesis is to showcase the authors who have been overlooked in the literary canon for the Fantastic, both in anthologies and other studies. Therefore, to provide the readers with more information about the authors being examined, a brief biography of each of the twelve authors is in Chapter 3.

A key underlying theme in most of the stories is each country's history, which is, in many cases, tied to colonialism. In Chapter 4, the history and socioeconomic conditions of the author's countries are briefly reviewed, mainly starting from their independence from Spain. Each country's history is complex, driven by many internal and external factors – political, economic, social, and their cultural histories — especially in relation to their integration into the new economic world order that developed in the twentieth century. These factors play an important role in the stories as they form the background to why the authors use the Fantastic to subvert and/or protest what has happened, or continues to happen in some cases, in their countries.

Chapter 5 deals with the first major concept of this thesis, the corporeal body. In this chapter, the four stories in which the theme of the corporeal body is most important are analysed in depth and examined according to the theories of the Fantastic and the theories of body studies of DeMello (2014), Turner et al. (2012), and Franco (2013), amongst others. This chapter deals

with the fragmented corporeal body and transformation. Fragmentation is important to the Fantastic because it reflects the fragmented societies the authors have lived or continue to live in. There is also physical transformation in many Fantastic narratives, that is, changing appearances, which reflects transformation of the protagonists' inner selves, but may also be an allegory of the constantly changing society. The fragmentation in 'El vendedor de cabezas' by Díaz Llanillo relates to a shop that sells heads to change or improve a person's appearance and identity, which has strong links to Cuban identity. In Ferré's 'La muñeca menor', the protagonist's leg, which has been attacked and occupied by river shrimps, is a reference to colonialism and imperialism on the island. In 'Yo, cocodrilo' by Escudos, a young woman transforms into an animal to escape a cultural ritual of her village, while in Pérez Cuadra's 'Muñeca rota', the young woman uses her willpower to escape her abusers and transform and metamorphosise into another living being.

Moving from living beings to non-living beings, the five stories with the strongest theme of either the severely fragmented body, notably a dismembered body and the dead body, or the non-corporeal body, such as that of a ghost, are analysed and examined in detail in Chapter 6. In all these stories, the Fantastic events add an absurd, grotesque, or a darkly humorous angle to what is often macabre or frightening subject matter. The gruesome subject of dead bodies is the focus point for three stories. 'Manual de hijo muerto' by Hernández is written as an instruction manual, directing the parents of an adult child how to reconstruct the body in preparation for the funeral and burial. Ramos's 'Para elegir la muerte' has its protagonist entering a store which offers deaths for sale, and while not as confronting as Hernández's story, presents the violent deaths that many historical figures have faced. These two stories have the strongest ties to Latin American history. Mildred Hernández's 'Paranoica city' tells the tale of a young couple who shoot an intruder in their home. The couple become increasingly anxious and nervous, or paranoid, as they plan to dispose of the body without being seen. The other

concept in this chapter is the invisible woman, which highlights the struggles that women have faced to achieve status or credibility in the workplace, in the home, or in the public sphere, such as for female politicians. Women's work has been, for the most part, confined to the private space — generally unpaid labour in the home, unseen and unheard. Berrón's female protagonist in 'El eterno transparente' experiences a series of strange events, such as her shoes not fitting, and in the end, she is a stranger or invisible to her family and colleagues. Lewis's 'Mujer hecha pedazos' is about a woman who literally falls apart. Her body parts fall off from time to time for no reason, but she reattaches them to her body without any drama.

However, a fragmented person can also be fragmented in other ways. A well-used motif in Fantastic literature is the double, often portrayed as the alter-ego or 'evil twin', but also the double can be someone or something that is not the same. Stories with the motif of the double, the mirror and the Other are examined in Chapter 7. The theories of the double will be examined, in particular, how the double has been used extensively in Fantastic stories written by Latin American authors. A brief history of the double in literature is also provided, as well as the double in Mesoamerican history, together with an explanation of why authors use the double. The double is a key element in 'La debutante' by Carrington, which tells the story of a young girl who uses her friend, the hyena, as her substitute (her double) for going to the debutante ball. The story of 'El huésped' by Dávila is about a house guest — someone or something — who is brought home by the protagonist's husband, without her permission, and becomes more sinister and threatening as the days pass. In contrast to these two stories, Llana's 'En familia' has the themes of the mirror and the Other, as a family sees the reflections of deceased family members in the mirror instead of their own. The unusual situation is accepted by the family until cousin Clara comes to stay and disrupts the status quo. It is also a story of Cuban past and present; for some Cubans, time has stood still.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that women writers of the Fantastic use narratives that are centred around the body as a means of subversion of authority. While there is a large body of scholarship on writers, including women, using the Fantastic to subvert or mock authority, the body has not been a specific focus of their studies. My thesis will not only contribute to existing research in women's writing but it will also address a gap in women's Fantastic literature.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Research Methodology

This thesis analyses a collection of stories written by women authors of the Fantastic that do not form part of the traditional literary canon. My initial survey identified eighty-eight stories written by forty-one women authors. Six non-Fantastic stories, such as science fiction or ones that did not have a Fantastic event that could be identified were discarded, even though the compiler of the anthology had listed them as a Fantastic story.

A matrix in Excel was developed according to the various themes identified in the stories. In total, fifty-two themes were identified, within the three key literary time periods: Modernism, Boom and Post-Boom.¹⁴

The stories were sorted initially according to the date written or published, then by country of the author, and after this, the categories were narrowed further. The first review reduced the number of themes to twenty-eight, and then a further review reduced them to five:

¹⁴ See Appendix D for the full list of themes.

Table 1.1 — The initial key themes identified from the matrix.

Theme	Description
Body	The major category of the project. Includes: the body (alive or not alive), the corporeal parts of the body, the senses, identity and loss of identity, memory, illness and diseases, madness, trauma.
The Double	Includes: the double, the false double, the Other, mirrors and reflections.
Impossible journey	The journey and the impossible journey. It can also include identity and loss of identity.
Violence	Includes: physical violence, domestic violence, psychological violence, macho behaviour/the patriarchy, wars, oppression, dehumanisation, dictatorships, apocalypse, horror, curfews, and corruption.
Satire and/or allegory	Stories with an allegory and/or satire to underscore failings in the political or other systems.

These key themes informed the final selection of the stories for the thesis. Socioeconomic background and Latin American history are overarching themes in many of the above categories but were not identified as categories on their own. Apart from Latin American history and the economic and political conditions of each country, it encompasses economic and social issues of social classes, poverty, the income equality gap, and the gender gap. This subject is investigated in more detail in Chapter 4. Similarly, feminist theories will also be woven into the analysis of the stories but are not the main focus of my analysis.

After a review of the chapters, the initial themes as listed in Table 1.1 were reduced further to three major themes: the corporeal body, the fragmented and non-corporeal body, and the double. Violence was removed as a potential chapter, in part due to the extensive amount of material needed to incorporate it into the thesis, and most of the stories having violence as a theme in one way or another. The impossible journey was also removed as a major theme as, while it is important to the Fantastic more generally, it did not fit with the overarching theme of the body. Satire and allegory were not going to be a chapter in the thesis but were used to assist in the choice of stories.

The choice of stories proved to be more difficult than I first envisaged. The final selection was based on their thematic relevance and the style of writing. By using the matrix mentioned above, the stories were limited to those that had at least four of the five main initial categories chosen: the body, the double, violence, the impossible journey, and the bestiary.¹⁵ The other category is allegory/satire, which was a deciding category for the final stories chosen, as it can often make a confronting event amusing, such as political violence, or take it to an absurd level, while also emphasising the author's underlying point.

From the initial list of stories, the search criteria were narrowed to only include the stories from women from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean who are not included in the literary canon, and to focus the research on a smaller area. Narrowing the focus of countries would also reduce the research needed for each country to identify factors from their history which have likely influenced the stories by the authors, such as conflicts, dictatorships, and so on. This reduced the number of countries to nine, with twenty-five authors and sixty-two stories.

¹⁵ The theme of bestiary was also one of the initial categories, as my Honours thesis was centred on how writers of the Fantastic used bestiary to highlight the social issues. However, it was quickly discounted for this thesis as the major theme identified was the body.

Finally, twelve stories written by twelve authors from nine countries were chosen, with two stories chosen from the Boom period and the remainder from the Post-Boom period, as follows (in alphabetical order of author surname):

Table 1.2 — Authors, home countries, and story chosen¹⁶

Author	Home country	Story Chosen
Linda Berrón	Costa Rica	El eterno transparente (The Eternal Transparency) (1992)
Leonora Carrington	Mexico	La debutante (The Debutante) (1939)
Amparo Dávila	Mexico	El huésped (The House Guest) (1959)
Esther Díaz Llanillo	Cuba	El vendedor de cabezas (The Head Trader) (2009)
Jacinta Escudos	El Salvador	Yo, cocodrilo (I, Crocodile) (2008)
Rosario Ferré	Puerto Rico	La muñeca menor (The Youngest Doll) (1976)
Cheri Lewis G.	Panama	Mujer hecha pedazos (Woman in Pieces) (2013)
Claudia Hernández	El Salvador	Manual de hijo muerto (Manual of a Dead Child) (2007)
Mildred Hernández	Guatemala	Paranoica city (Paranoid City) (2003)
María Elena Llana	Cuba	En familia (In the Family) (1983)
María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra	Nicaragua	Muñeca rota (Broken Doll) (2014)

¹⁶ See Chapter 3 for the brief biographies on each author.

Author	Home country	Story Chosen
María Eugenia Ramos	Honduras	Para elegir la muerte (To Choose Death) (2000)

Theoretical Framework

The genre of the Fantastic has often been described as difficult to define, which may be part of its attractiveness to readers: it touches or breaks the boundaries of reality, and it offers spaces for subversion and disorder by its use of imagination. The Fantastic resides in the *always possible* (Agosín 13; author’s emphasis). Despite this, there are aspects of the genre which can be identified. The main sources for understanding the genre of the Fantastic have been the canonical theories of Tzvetan Todorov, Ana María Barrenechea, Rosalba Campa, Jaime Alazraki, and Rosemary Jackson.

The key study of the Fantastic is Tzvetan Todorov’s book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975). Todorov used a structural analysis which searched for common structural features in different texts to provide a solid definition of the Fantastic (Jackson 5). This explains why his study is so important and generally used as the starting point for Post-Modernist studies of the Fantastic. Todorov theorised that there are three requirements for the Fantastic to exist in a story. First, the narrative must convince the reader that the story is set in the real world (not a fantasy world) and, from the events described, the reader must hesitate between a rational or a supernatural explanation. Secondly, the reader must identify with the protagonist, and thirdly, the reader must reject allegorical or poetical interpretations of the narrative. According to Todorov, the Fantastic can be defined as the momentary hesitation by the reader to an impossible event that occurs in this ‘real’ world of the story and the reader is confronted with two (or more) possible explanations, both appearing valid (Todorov 25, 31; Duncan 21). The reader hesitates between accepting a supernatural event

(Todorov called this ‘the marvellous’) or a rational explanation (‘the uncanny’, such as a dream), and narratives that are suspended between the two are the Fantastic (García and López-Pellisa 6). According to Todorov, the reader’s perception of the Fantastic event in the story gives it its transitory nature and it is the hesitation (by the reader) which sustains the life of the Fantastic (31). Todorov insisted that the Fantastic only existed for a short time in the nineteenth century, as a tool to treat taboo themes, and that it lost this social function through developments in psychoanalysis and [implied] technology (166-168). He only mentioned one author from the twentieth century, Franz Kafka, in the final chapter of his book, and did not include any authors from Latin America. While subsequent theorists of the Fantastic and critics have stated that Todorov’s theories are too rigid and rejected some parts, in general, these theorists have mainly built on his theories and will be discussed shortly.

Despite the shortcomings in Todorov’s theories, I will be employing his concept of the world of the Fantastic being like our own world, and not a fantasy or science fiction world. There are no ‘other’ worlds in the stories by the authors being examined, and most are situated in an urban or rural setting, and in or around a home. His second requirement is that the reader must identify with the protagonist, which is possible in all stories in this study, as the protagonists are everyday people. However, I do not agree with Todorov on his insistence that hesitation sustains the life of the Fantastic, which implies that the hesitation is presented only once. While this is the case in ‘Paranoica city’ (examined in Chapter 6), it is not in the other stories analysed in this thesis. Instead, I agree with Cynthia Duncan who argues that: “if the Fantastic is a literary game, the reader will willingly choose to suspend disbelief for as long as he or she wants, and as many times as he or she likes” (Duncan 21). This applies to the neo-Fantastic stories (explained below), in which there is no ‘rupture’ in the story to make the reader hesitate and some of which are discussed in this thesis, as well as longer Fantastic stories, such as ‘Aura’ (1962) by Carlos Fuentes, ‘La casa inundada’ (1960) by Felisberto Hernández, and ‘Tlön,

Uqbar, *Orbis Tertius*' (1940) by Jorge Luis Borges. The reader is a willing participant in the story and accepts it as a game. Many critics, including Roger Caillois, Louis Vax, Jaime Alazraki (23), Samuel Coleridge, Flora Botton Burlá (7, 14, 50) and Harry Belevan (47) agree that the Fantastic is a game, while Rosemary Jackson (1) and Magalí Velasco Vargas (32) add that Fantastic stories have the power to seduce the reader, and that the reader is happy to be engrossed and deceived by the narrative.

One of Todorov's other conditions is that allegory cannot exist in the Fantastic "as it says one thing and means another" (Fletcher, qtd. in Todorov 62) and that it provides a meaning to the Fantastic event. Argentinian theorist Ana María Barrenechea does not agree, noting that:

"Así se explica también que — contra la opinión de Todorov — se vea el caso de que lo alegórico refuerce el nivel literal fantástico en lugar de debilitarlo, porque el contenido alegórico de la literatura contemporánea es a menudo el sin sentido del mundo, su naturaleza problemática, caótica e irreal". (395)

I agree with Barrenechea; allegory is important to the Latin American Fantastic as it reflects the absurd and meaningless nature of the world we live in. Allegory, often together with satire, is used by authors to draw attention to social and political problems in their countries. For example, Hernández uses the Fantastic and allegory in 'Manual de hijo muerto' to address the violence in El Salvador, especially during the civil war late last century. Likewise, Ramos uses allegory and the Fantastic for similar reasons in 'Para elegir la muerte', and Ferré uses the Fantastic and allegory to highlight issues of colonialism and imperialism, as well as macho culture, in Puerto Rico. Allegories of social issues can also be brought to light in stories with doubles, according to Robert Rogers (159-160), and this is the case in the stories being discussed in Chapter 7 that centres on doubles. In the stories about doubles analysed in this thesis, 'La debutante' is an allegory of high society, 'El huésped' is an allegory of macho

culture, and 'En familia' is an allegory of the changes in Cuban society following the Revolution.

Instead of the hesitation sustaining the Fantastic as Todorov suggested, Ana María Barrenechea insists that it is the problematisation of the coexistence (absence or presence) of normal and a-normal events narrated, not the doubt about their nature which is the base for Fantastic stories (392-393). In her article 'Ensayo de una tipología de la literatura fantástica' (1972), she theorises that Fantastic stories are problematic plots which are organised in a way in which some information is provided, other information is hidden, and there is a discontinuity in the chain of causes and consequences which makes the story unsolvable for the reader (Sharp and Martínez 11-12). By eliminating the need for an explanation for the Fantastic, Barrenechea establishes three types of distinct orders as ways of emphasising the central character of subversion of rational order, with a problematic meaning: everything narrated is either the order of the natural, the unnatural or a mixture of both. The mixture of both causes the problem and thus the Fantastic (Barrenechea 393). In this study, Barrenechea's theories reveal the coexistence of the normal and a-normal events in the narrated stories, and the reader is not expected to hesitate or form a conclusion. For example, in 'En familia', the reader accepts the existence of an old mirror that reflects deceased family members and not the reflections of the living family, and in 'Mujer hecha pedazos' the reader accepts that a woman's limbs fall off for no apparent reason but can be reattached easily. I will be employing Barrenechea's theories to this study as her theory of the coexistence of the real and the impossible, without the reader hesitating, is applicable to almost all stories being examined.

Like Barrenechea's hidden information, the theories regarding silences in Fantastic narratives by Rosalba Campra are relevant for this study. Campra's key paper 'Los silencios del texto en la literatura fantástica' (1990) informs us that: "no se trata solamente de rellenar huecos, de

resolver ausencias, sino también de desenredar la maraña del enunciado mismo, de lo dicho” (Campra 49). Therefore, she states that there exists another type of transgression that plays with the instability between what is said and what is not said (Campra 51). Campra suggests that silences draw spaces of anxiety: darkness, a lack of explanatory words, an illogical conclusion, abrupt or shortened endings, and lines of writing that are out of place. She informs us that when it is impossible to find the cause of an event, the Fantastic tension appears, resulting in a void, some openings, or a silence in what is narrated, and “la falta de cohesión del relato en el plano de la causalidad” (Campra 56).

I am employing Campra’s theory in this study as it offers a way to read the silences and spaces that can be found throughout my chosen stories, which are created intentionally by the authors to elicit doubt or uncertainty in the reader. Silences explicitly appear in twenty-two of the stories investigated, including ‘El huésped’ by Dávila, ‘Manual de hijo muerto’ by Hernández, and ‘Muñeca rota’ by Pérez Cuadra. For example, in Dávila’s ‘El huésped’, the silent approaches and stalking by the house guest creates fear in the protagonist and her maid, but also there is no explanation for his stay and his strange actions. On the other hand, in ‘Manual de hijo muerto’, there is no explanation regarding who killed the child, who sent the body to the parents, how the body was received, and so on. Missing information also forms part of Campra’s silences, and the most used form in all stories, is the anonymity, either for one protagonist or all characters, except for ‘El eterno transparente’ and ‘Mujer hecha pedazos’. The lack of a named character or characters makes their stories more universal, as their stories are shared by many women (and men) around the world. These nameless bodies could be linked to the missing persons in times of political oppression in Latin America, who had their identities erased deliberately by the perpetrators. Nameless bodies may also be an archetype of how women are treated in society and their place in the community – invisible and silenced.

Campra also suggests that there are other forms of silence, such as “el silencio de ese ‘otro lado’ que se opone al mundo de la normalidad cotidiana; el silencio al parecer irrompible de la criatura fantástica” (Campra 57). Campra states that “*the intruder is always the Other*” (60; my emphasis), while Simone de Beauvoir adds to this noting that “woman remains always the Other [...] the hostile Other is precisely woman” (“Facts” 54). The Other is particularly important in the Latin American context because of the attitude of the conquistadors of the Americas with respect to the indigenous populations, with the indigenous peoples being the Other (and similarly for the First Nations people in Australia with the arrival of white men). The Other is the ‘not-I’ and something to be feared, controlled, or removed. The silence of the Other is also important, and it can be applied to other humans, as well as fantastic creatures, such as vampires, werewolves, and ghosts. The silence in the text or the silence of the Other makes it impossible to recognise the word of the Other. Two examples of this type of Fantastic silence appear in my analysis of Llana’s ‘En familia’, as the ghost family in the mirror do not speak, for a voice would signify a body. Likewise, the house guest in ‘El huésped’ also does not speak. The Other, historically as well as fictionally, results in aphasia (the loss of the previously held ability to speak or understand spoken or written language). Jackson also offers a theory on silence in the Fantastic. She states that “[t]he Fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (4). Jackson’s theory of silences and invisibility is applied in this study, principally to ‘El eterno transparente’, in which the protagonist gradually becomes invisible to her family and workmates, as she is taken for granted, but also to Marta in ‘Mujer hecha pedazos’ and the aunt in ‘La muñeca menor’. The silenced and invisible people also relate to the colonisation of Latin America, with the original inhabitants and the imported slaves treated as invisible by the colonisers and the imperialists. The Fantastic theories of both Barrenechea and Campra are

important to this thesis as they add a Latin American perspective, something which Todorov's theory lacks.

Jaime Alazraki's writings on the Fantastic offer ideas and insights into how the genre has changed in response to these social and political changes. In his article "¿Qué es lo neofantástico?" (1990), Alazraki theorises that the Fantastic has evolved during the twentieth century, from the sudden intrusions or shocks in the style of the authors of the nineteenth century,¹⁷ into a form where the Fantastic event in the story is more subtle, but challenges everyday life. He called it the neo-Fantastic and noted that the Fantastic event is introduced in the very first few sentences of the story, with no gradual progression, and no Gothic shocks (Alazraki 31). The reader is not alarmed or surprised by the unusual event as it is written in a non-threatening way, "una manera marcadamente trivial y prosaica, sin advertencias premonitorias, tramas ad hoc y atmósferas apropiadas" (Alazraki 26). I am employing Alazraki's theory to determine to what extent my chosen stories reflect this evolved and typically Latin American form of the Fantastic. For example, in 'Yo, cocodrilo', the protagonist is said to transform into a crocodile in the first sentence: "En las tardes de color me convierto en cocodrilo" (Escudos 81). In other stories, such as 'Mujer hecha pedazos', 'Manual de hijo muerto', 'Para elegir la muerte', 'En familia', and 'La debutante' the Fantastic event appears either in the first few lines or in the first paragraph. The only outlier is 'El huésped', in which the protagonist introduces her fear of the house guest in the first line, is there any element of menace.

Todorov has been criticised by other theorists for his comment that the Fantastic only existed in a short period in the nineteenth century for its treatment of taboo themes but lost this social function due to the developments in psychoanalysis (Todorov 160). Jackson states that the

¹⁷ For example, 'The Black Cat' (1845) by Edgar Allen Poe, in which the 'Gothic' shock occurs at the end of the story.

Fantastic is alive and relevant in the twentieth century (and beyond) and it has assumed different forms (165). Martha Nandorfy reinforces Jackson's claims that the Fantastic is an "unconscious form of discourse" that can only be "understood in a subversive relation to the dominant ideology of a given period" (Nandorfy 106). Likewise, Alazraki notes that the neo-Fantastic of the twentieth century has evolved and moved with changing society, not just pivoting around a Fantastic element, but by its authors' "visión, intención y su *modus operandi*" (Alazraki 28). Both the real and the unreal need to be determined, and this changes throughout time; some things that were unreal in the 1950s are real today, and our cultures and values as a society have changed as well, often through technology. Nandorfy states that Alazraki's theory differs from Todorov's and Jackson's as he "does not draw simplistic distinctions between mimetic, marvellous and Fantastic modes, but instead associates all three with a new perceptual frame that attempts to overcome the repressive structures of our Aristotelian tradition" (Nandorfy 110). Therefore, the Fantastic is as relevant now as it was in the nineteenth century, as it follows, mocks, challenges, and subverts a changing society. As society changes over time, so does the Fantastic to transgress and challenge these new standards, and this is particularly relevant for my study.

There are very few works that conform to Todorov's rigid theories, and he does not include any Latin American authors in his study, as he concentrates his theory on authors from Europe and the United States of America from the nineteenth century, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allen Poe (Duncan 24). In contrast, Barrenechea continually refers to a variety of Latin American Fantastic authors in her study, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Graciela Gámbaro, Elena Garro, Juan José Arreola, and many others. Alazraki mainly concentrates on Cortázar in his article, while Campa refers to works by Cortázar and Fuentes, as well as a few women authors (although not Latin American), such as Emilia Pardo Bazán and Daphné du Maurier. These Latin American perspectives of Fantastic theory, particularly the use of allegory and

satire in their stories as Barrenechea suggested, are particularly relevant to the women writers in this study as they live and operate within the social and political context of Latin American culture.

This thesis will weave together the ideas of these theorists to build the framework for analysis of the Fantastic in my chosen stories. The theories of Todorov and Barrenechea will be employed to elucidate what makes the stories Fantastic, but Barrenechea's theory of the coexistence of the normal and the abnormal in the story will be used to determine the focus of the Fantastic, rather than Todorov's hesitation. In contrast to Todorov's assertion that the Fantastic did not exist in the twentieth century, Alazraki's theory of the neo-Fantastic will make it possible to show how the stories are representative of the genre in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as they align with changes in society. Campora's theories will be employed to show how the authors employ silence and space effectively which are produced purposefully to create doubt in the mind of the reader, with Jackson's related theory of the unseen and the invisible applicable for the same purpose.

I will incorporate body study theory into my framework as it was identified by the matrix as a major theme in all stories and it will be read within the context of Fantastic criticism. While body studies is a very broad topic, this thesis will concentrate on theories regarding beauty standards. Margo DeMello (xvi, 3, 14, 30, 162, 174-176, 198), Jane Goodall (157, 160), Susan Bordo (248), Bryan Turner et al. ("Body", 23; "Handbook" 380-381), all criticise Western society's focus on beauty, body image, and the perfect body. Douglas Baynton's 2013 study about disability, including a discussion on women and notions of beauty and disfigurement (18) and DeMello's theory on disability as partially a social construct (28), are employed in this thesis. In addition, DeMello notes that the more the disabled body deviates from the perfect body, the more it is viewed as ugly to able-bodied people (29-30). Disability,

imperfect beauty, and appearance are key themes in ‘El vendedor de cabezas’, ‘La muñeca menor’ and ‘Muñeca rota’. In ‘El vendedor de cabezas’, people purchase a different head so that they can improve their appearance or create a new identity. In ‘La muñeca menor’, the protagonist retreats from society when her leg swells and emits an odour after river shrimps invade it and she loses most of her mobility, while in ‘Muñeca rota’, the central character does not have arms or legs and therefore no mobility and is violated because of her vulnerability.

Continuing the theme of violation and violence, Jean Franco’s theories on disappeared bodies and mourning because of armed conflicts (“Cruel”, 192-193) and the dismemberment of bodies will be utilised in this study. These theories particularly relate to ‘Manual de hijo muerto’ with the return of a dismembered body, and in ‘Para elegir la muerte’ for the types of deaths for sale, some of which refer to the deaths of historical figures. Female circumcision is also a form of mutilation, and DeMello’s theories regarding this practice, including its support by women (123-125), are applied to ‘Yo, cocodrilo’. In this story, the protagonist is trying to escape the practice of female genital mutilation (even though it is not explicitly mentioned as such) by transforming into a crocodile. Franco’s other theory on the invisibility of women (“Beyond” 507) states that the public (visible) space is designated for males and the private (invisible) space (the home) is designated for females. This theory is applicable to many of the stories, as women try to break free from the female stereotypes of the patriarchy. For example, in ‘El huésped’, the female main character is trapped in the home with a house guest, while the aunt in ‘La muñeca menor’ no longer leaves the family home as she does not represent the perfect female. In addition, her last niece to marry is dominated by her husband and confined to the home.

This study will incorporate the relevant ideas of these theorists to build the framework for analysis of the body in the stories, within the Fantastic setting. The theories of DeMello, Turner

et al., Bordo, and Goodall will be employed to critique society's fascination with beauty and the perfect body, while Baynton's theory will look at disability and how that is employed in Fantastic stories and contrasts with the image of perfection. Franco's key theories of violence and bodies, as well as the invisible female space, are important for many stories in this thesis.

The Difference between the Fantastic and other close categories or genres

It is worth explaining the differences between the Fantastic and other close categories or genres, as they are often confused or used interchangeably, especially outside of Latin America. Patricia García states that the main difference between the Fantastic and other similar categories, such as science fiction, fairy tales, the marvellous or fantasy, is that *conflict is absent from the latter categories* (my emphasis). With its realistic and everyday setting, the Fantastic is the "only literary form in which the supernatural element is presented and perceived as impossible" (Garcia and López-Pellisa 7).

The Fantastic has strong links to surrealism. The emergence of surrealism in Paris after World War I, initiated by the avant-garde movement of art and literature, influenced the development of both the Fantastic and magical realism. Artists such as Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Luis Buñuel, Max Ernst, and Leonora Carrington, together with Latin American artists or authors such as Pablo Neruda and Frida Kahlo, were part of these groups in Paris, which in turn, influenced later artists, and some of the most famous writers of the Fantastic and magical realism, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Juan Rulfo and Alejo Carpentier. Both the Fantastic and surrealism experiment in the narrative style and linguistically, and use dreamlike, bizarre, or macabre sequences or unrelated objects. Linda Zee notes that there are links "on occasions between the literature and the socio-political context in which it is produced" (Abrams 194; qtd. in Zee "Boundaries" 412). However, she adds that the Fantastic is not explicitly a rebellion against restrictions and restraints placed on

writers or the public, as even though the main fear or cause of the hesitation in the Fantastic sometimes stems from the unconscious mind, “the written manifestation of the Fantastic is far removed from the automatic or stream of consciousness writings that surrealists aspired to” (“Boundaries” 42).

Both the Fantastic and magical realism have a few common themes and it is worth introducing these points up front. Neither are logical and both explore the internal world of the protagonist(s) and internal conflicts. Finally, the actions in the story have no explanation.

The major differences between the Fantastic and magical realism will now be discussed. Magical realism is linked to nature, mythology, and folklore, but it is also linked to psychoanalysis due to the influence of surrealism. Magical realism occurs in worlds where there are indigenous communities, communities of people with African heritage (especially former slaves) and rural communities. While it is a world of dreams, faith is an important element in magical realism, and it is not questioned in the literature. Magical realism is also a mixture (and clash) with the Catholic religion that was imposed on the indigenous and African cultures. Therefore, the three mythologies in magical realism are, in order: indigenous, Catholicism and African.

In magical realism, the reader does not doubt, as he or she knows that the strange events belong to the magical world; in the Fantastic, the reader hesitates or doubts. If, in Fantastic literature, the body is threatened by malefic spirits, in magical realism the spirits are won over by desire. In Fantastic literature, the unyielding moral scale states that every transgression is identified with the ‘bad’, while in magical realism, exuberance, and sensuousness triumph (Ubidia 105). The Fantastic is linked to the internal world of the protagonist, urban living, and cities, and to the process of urban modernisation that took place in Latin America from the second half of

the nineteenth century. There is no mythology in the Fantastic, but everything happens in a seemingly rational, everyday world.

The main difference between the Fantastic and fantasy is that the Fantastic is set in a realistic, everyday world while fantasy is set in a completely make-believe world. In fantasy stories, feelings of fear, including uncanny sensations, are non-existent; there is no conflict, unlike the Fantastic, which “is always presented as a conflict within a fictional world” (García and López-Pellisa 3). Therefore, in my opinion, a weakness of Jackson’s book is the failure to define the difference between the terms ‘fantasy’ and ‘Fantastic’. Her interchangeable use of the terms creates doubt or frustration for the reader.

The major difference between the Fantastic and science fiction is the key word: ‘science’. Science fiction generally presents what is not currently a reality but through technological innovations, may be so in the future. This includes space travel and the corresponding discovery of life on other planets (or the arrival of alien life to Earth), time travel, and so on. This coincides with Todorov’s ‘marvellous’ in that the laws governing the characters and their situations are different from those known by the implied reader, but they are accepted without question, the same as in fairy tales and folk stories.

Bruce Sterling states that science fiction is a modern genre, as it deals with scientific and technological plausibility, which distinguishes science fiction from earlier speculative writings and other contemporary speculative genres such as fantasy and horror. According to Sterling, science fiction arose in Western societies, following the social transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution. These changes led writers and intellectuals to imagine and draw conclusions regarding the future impact of technology. By the beginning of the twentieth century, certain themes had developed, such as time travel, space travel, robots, alien life forms

and other worlds. Sterling notes that the topics often addressed in science fiction writing include:

[p]rophetic warnings, utopian aspirations, elaborate scenarios for entirely imaginary worlds, titanic disasters, strange voyages, and political agitation of many extremist flavours, presented in the form of sermons, meditations, satires, allegories, and parodies — exhibiting every conceivable attitude toward the process of techno-social change, from cynical despair to cosmic bliss. (Sterling)

Sterling also states that science fiction writers often pursue new scientific and technical developments in order to predict the techno-social changes that will shock the readers' sense of cultural decency and expand their consciousness. He noted that H.G. Wells's literary career gave "ample evidence of science fiction's latent radicalism, its affinity for aggressive satire and utopian political agendas, as well as its dire predictions of technological destruction" (Sterling). Science fiction boomed after World War II in the USA, boosted by scientific feats of nuclear energy, atomic bombs, the invention of space travel, men on the moon, and the possibility of cloning human life. I will now briefly explain some differences between science fiction, fantasy, and utopian/dystopian fiction in relation to the Fantastic.

While some of the topics and definitions of science fiction could also be said of the Fantastic, David Roas states that science fiction is different from the Fantastic as there is no conflict between the real and the unreal ("Desestabilización" 94). This implies that the entire narrative in science fiction is based in the unreal or imagined, which is the second major difference. However, Anna Day disagrees, noting that science fiction deals with the possible and is grounded in scientific principles. She adds that the main difference between fantasy and science fiction is that fantasy deals with the impossible and the realm of imagination, where the writer creates the rules, whereas in science fiction, physics and nature create the rules (Day).

Zee posits that science fiction, utopian/dystopian fiction and the Fantastic are frequently confused between themselves. She states that:

The relationship between the Fantastic and utopian/dystopian fiction can be seen both in the creation of alternative realities and the exaggerated representation of social and political ills. However, most utopias/dystopias are presented under the guise of a distant (geographically or temporally) land, and the Fantastic operates on the premise that this is the reader's contemporary world somehow gone astray. ("Boundaries" 42)

Conclusion

Using a matrix to identify the different themes, twelve stories were finally chosen from the key themes that were written by twelve different authors from nine countries: Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Panama. The major theme identified by the matrix was the body, either the corporeal body, the fragmented body, or the non-corporeal body. The double was also identified as a major theme. Authors use narratives that centre on the body, together with the Fantastic, as a tool for social criticism against the patriarchy, the Church, and the authorities, and even their families.

The canonical theories of the Fantastic have been employed to analyse the stories being studied in this thesis. First, Todorov's key conditions for the Fantastic were examined, and his ideas of a story set in the real world like our own and the reader identifying with the protagonist incorporated into this thesis. However, his other rigid conditions have been rejected for the most part by subsequent theorists. Rather than using Todorov's idea of the reader's hesitation sustaining the Fantastic, Barrenechea's theory of the possible and impossible co-existing in the story, being the basis of her theory the Fantastic, has been applied to most of the stories. Campra's theory of the silences or missing information in Fantastic stories is also relevant for

this study, as it is a subversive element in the story and creates doubt in the mind of the reader. Alazraki's neo-Fantastic concept that the Fantastic appears in the first line or early in the story without any Gothic-type shock is also important and has been applied to most of the stories. By drawing on these various theorists to build up my framework, I will show how my selected authors have used the Fantastic in the stories examined in this thesis as a tool of social criticism, and that it changes over time as society changes with social and political outcomes.

The body theories of beauty and the perfect body are particularly relevant for this study and will be read in the context of the Fantastic. Body theories from DeMello, Bordo, Goodall, and Turner et al. will be employed in the analysis of the stories to reveal how the authors criticise society's focus on female perfection, and Baynton's theories on disability are relevant in this context as well. Franco's concepts of violence against the body are utilised in the stories that are linked to historical events in the authors' countries.

Before I provide some background to the social and political history of each country from the start of the twentieth century, the next chapter provides a brief biography of each author as part of my objective to raise their profiles in literary circles.

Chapter Three: Biographies of the Authors

“Pero, a fin de cuentas, yo quería que el tema fuera la mujer nueva.”

María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra

One of the aims of this thesis is to showcase the women authors who are not in the literary canon of the Fantastic. In order that the readers of this thesis may know a little more about my chosen authors and their backgrounds, I will now provide brief biographies in alphabetical order of their surname.

Linda Berrón (1951-), Costa Rica

Poet and teacher Linda Berrón was born in Spain. She moved to Paris after she married a Costa Rican man, to study literature and obtained her teaching qualifications there, and then further qualifications in Costa Rica and Madrid. Berrón has worked in adult education in Central America and Paris, education programs in the public administration and has performed as a cultural attaché in the Costa Rican Embassy in Madrid. She has edited books, brochures, and magazines in the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of External Relations, and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. In 1991, she founded the publishing house Editorial Mujeres, the first publishing house for books written by women in Costa Rica, and the third publishing house for women’s writing in Latin America; Berrón was the editor from 1991 to 2009. Editorial Mujeres published eleven books in 1991, including books of poetry, and has edited books such as the anthology *Relatos de mujeres* (1993) and books written by women in other countries. The now-acknowledged suppression of women’s writing and their invisibility in literary circles (Russ “Suppress” 46, 65-66, 74, 78; Expósito García 95-96) makes Berrón’s achievements even more impressive.

Berrón has published three books of stories, *La última seducción* (1989), *La cigarra autista* (1992), and *El eterno transparente* (2021); an anthology of stories written by Latin American women, *Todo va de cuentos* (1991); a novel *El expediente* (1989); and a play, *Olympia* (1998), which was presented by the National Theatre Company of Costa Rica in 2003. Her stories have appeared in numerous national and international anthologies.

In 1990, she was awarded the IV Premio Internacional de Narrativa de Mujeres de Habla Hispana in Madrid; in 1991, the Premio Único de Cuento de los Juegos Florales de México, Centroamerica y Panama in Guatemala; and in Costa Rica, the Premio Áncora de Literatura in 1992-1993, amongst other prizes. Berrón is a supporter of environmental causes in Costa Rica.

I will be analysing Berrón's story 'El eterno transparente', written in 1992 and first published in 'Espejo de paciencia: Revista de literatura y arte' in 1996, and later published in Berrón's book *La cigarra autista* in 2002. The story commences with strange things happening to the female protagonist, such as her keys not unlocking the door and her shoes being too big for her feet. Her workmates do not recognise her and when she returns to her home, her family do not recognise her either, until she finally disappears. It is a story about the invisibility of women.

Leonora Carrington (1917-2011), Mexico

Life imitating art, or perhaps art imitating life, is the best way to describe surrealist artist and author, Leonora Carrington. Her art and writing provide a glimpse of her humour and how her surreal life and art aligned: delicateness and decadence, animals and humans, worldly and unworldly. While her inclusion in this thesis of Central American and Caribbean authors may seem unusual due to her English origins, she lived most of her life in Mexico, obtained Mexican citizenship, and the Mexicans adopted her as one of their own citizens. She established her life of art there, under her own rules. Some background to her history will now make this clear.

Carrington was born in Lancashire, England, into a wealthy family but rebelled against this familial authority from an early age and refused to behave in the way that was deemed proper by high society, including the subaltern behaviour required as a woman. She was expelled from two Catholic boarding schools, briefly attended an arts academy in Florence, and was expelled from a Parisian finishing school.¹⁸ Her father, a wealthy textile manufacturer, had her committed to a mental institution. When she recovered, she studied art in London and there met Max Ernst, the surrealist painter from Germany and many years her senior, who was also married. In 1937, Carrington ran off with Ernst to Paris, where they joined the surrealist movement with other famous artists such as Salvador Dalí and Pablo Picasso, and then moved to southern France, where they painted and wrote. However, she was not content to merely be the muse or a submissive woman-child and she created her own works and started to establish herself as an artist in her own right. In 1939, at the start of the Second World War, Ernst was arrested and sent to a prison camp. Carrington was distraught and ended up in an asylum. She was rescued by her childhood nanny and escaped France through Spain, Portugal, and South Africa, but not without further damage to her mental health. She married Renato Leduc, a retired bullfighter, and moved with him to New York City and then to Mexico City in 1942, where they divorced amicably. Firmly established in Mexico City, she continued her work and was an activist and a defender of women's rights. She met and married Chiki Weisz, a Hungarian resistance photographer in Mexico City, and together they had two sons. Carrington spent the next sixty-nine years in Mexico City, painting, sculpting, and writing. Surrealist art, with its outlandish juxtapositions, allowed Carrington to depict her life and the folly of those that she knew or despised, including many surrealist artists who treated women poorly, often only as objects. Her own family was a matriarchy, as her two best female friends, Kati Horna

¹⁸ Finishing school is an old-fashioned term. They are also called charm schools.

and fellow artist Remedios Varo, helped to blur the boundaries of care and art (Emre). She was one of the founders of the Women's Liberation Movement in Mexico in the early 1970s.

In the 1990s, Carrington created large bronze sculptures, some of which were publicly displayed in Mexico City in 2008. In 2005, one of her paintings, *Juggler* (1954), sold at auction for \$713,000, then “believed to be the highest price paid for an artwork by a living surrealist artist” (Blumberg). Also in 2005, Carrington received Mexico's National Prize of Science and Arts. It is estimated that she produced between 1,500 and 2,000 artworks in her lifetime and some of her sculptures are on public display in Mexico City, including *How Doth the Crocodile*, which weighs five tonnes. Carrington's house in Mexico City was opened briefly to the public as a museum in May 2021.

Carrington wrote her autobiography *Memorias de abajo* in 1940 and wrote many other books, including *La trompetilla acústica* (1974), *The House of Fear* (1937), *Le dame ovale (The Oval Lady)* (1939), *El séptimo caballo* (1977), *The Milk of Dreams* (2017) and *The Skeleton's Holiday* (2018).

In Joanna Moorhead's biographical book about ‘her long lost cousin’, Carrington told Moorhead that “every piece of writing she ever did was autobiographical” (34), and the story is unsubtly a mockery of her adolescent life. Carrington rejected her own upbringing and left for the artistic world of Paris before she was twenty years old. When she passed away in 2011, she was considered to be the last of the surrealists (Blumberg).

I will be analysing Carrington's first story, ‘La debutante’, originally published in 1939 in her collection of short stories, *The Oval Lady*. In this story, the female protagonist recounts her time as a young debutante in England.

Amparo Dávila (1928-2020), Mexico

Mexican author Amparo Dávila is considered to be an emblematic writer of Mexican Fantastic literature, even though it took a long while for her work to be recognised, mainly due to her gender, the same as other female Mexican authors. She wrote poetry first, but it is her short stories which gained her fame. She started writing short stories when she moved to Mexico City in the 1950s. There, she worked as a secretary for Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes, who encouraged her to write and opened his literary circles to her. Her first collection, *Tiempo destrozado*, written in 1959, gained her respect in the literary world, which, as Matthew Gleeson notes, was probably ‘grudgingly given’, as this book was only published six years after Mexican women were granted suffrage (Gleeson). This was followed by *Música concreta* and *Árboles petrificados*, the latter of which won the Premio Xavier Villaurrutia in 1977. Dávila built her literary career in “wilful defiance of both peers and parents who believed that it was absurd for a woman to move to Mexico City from the provinces in hopes of pursuing such a vocation” (Gleeson). After a long period of inactivity, she published a book of stories in 2008 *Con los ojos abiertos*, which was republished as *Cuentos reunidos* in 2009.

Many of her stories have female protagonists, driven close to the point of insanity by their oppressive home lives, lack of agency, and social circumstances. However, Dávila stated that she did not align herself to any particular cause, feminist or other, claiming that her work was universal and was not intended to have a feminist- or gender-specific viewpoint (Gleeson). Dávila wrote experiential stories, taking what she had experienced as a starting point and then converting it into a Fantastic story, with the psychological confronting the real, or vice versa.

At the end of 2015 she was awarded the Medalla Bellas Artes in recognition of her work and in the same year, an eponymous prize, the Premio Nacional de Cuento Fantástico

Amparo Dávila, was created and is awarded explicitly to stories of the Fantastic by emerging writers in Mexico.

I will be analysing one of Dávila's most famous short stories, 'El huésped', published in 1959 in her book of short stories, *Tiempo destrozado*. The unnamed female protagonist is annoyed that her husband has brought home a guest to stay in their home without her permission. The house guest's unusual and sinister behaviour makes the woman more fearful as the story progresses.

Esther Díaz Llanillo (1934-2015), Cuba

Esther Díaz Llanillo was a storyteller, short story writer, essayist, librarian, and literature researcher. She studied language and literature at the University of Havana and obtained her PhD in 1959. Afterwards, she worked at the Casa de las Americas and conducted literary research work with the Institute of Literature and Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences of Cuba. She was awarded the Antonio Barrera prize from the Cátedra de Literatura Cubana e Hispanoamericana and achieved honourable mentions in the 1999 and 2000 Alejo Carpentier competitions for two of her stories, 'Cambio de vida' and 'Regresión'. In 2004, she was awarded the Distinción por la Cultura Nacional.

In 1999, Díaz Llanillo published *Cuentos antes y después del sueño* which is divided into two parts: nine stories ('stories before sleeping') which were written in her youth and previously published in the book *El castigo* in 1996 and in various anthologies. The second section of fifteen stories was written around 1990 ('stories after sleeping'). For Díaz Llanillo, the 'sleeping' represents the almost thirty-year hiatus in which she did not publish anything, although she did continue writing (M.L. García 32). Some of these stories have also been published in anthologies. She subsequently published *Cambio de vida* (2002), *Entre latidos* (2005), *Los rostros* (2008), *El vendedor de cabezas* (2009), *Hablando de fantasmas y mucho*

más (2011) y *La antología* (2011). Her book *La otra realidad* was published posthumously in 2016.

As with all the authors studied, Díaz Llanillo's stories are set in real spaces such as the home, the kitchen, the shopping precinct, and other normal surroundings, but in these spaces, the unexpected is disruptive, and her characters may find themselves trapped in an atmosphere of anguish and desperation. On the other hand, her protagonists may partake in extraordinary events that change their daily routine (Cooper "Esther" 2015).

I have chosen Díaz Llanillo's humorous 2009 story 'El vendedor de cabezas', published in the collection of stories with the same name. It is a story about a man who sells heads which people can change for one different from their own. The female protagonist gradually falls in love with the man but does not understand why he has never changed his head. The story is about identity, and how we all want to change our appearance or look like someone different or someone better.

Jacinta Escudos (1961-), El Salvador

Jacinta Escudos has written novels, short stories, articles, and essays. She has also been an editor, translator and facilitator of writing workshops, as well as a collaborator in the newspapers *La Nación* in Costa Rica, *La Prensa Gráfica* in El Salvador, and *El Nuevo Diario* in Nicaragua. She was a writing resident in the Heinrich Böll Haus in Germany and in La Maison de Étrangers et des Traducteurs de Saint-Nazaire in France in 2000 (López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón 353).

Escudos has published ten books, including novels and short stories, such as *Maletas perdidas* (2018), *El asesino melancólico* (2015), *Crónicas para sentimentales* (2010), and *El diablo sabe mi nombre* (2008). Escudos won the X Juegos Florales in El Salvador in 2001 for *Crónicas*

para sentimentales and the I Premio Centroamericano de Novela Mario Monteforte Toledo for her novel *A-B sudario*. She still lives in El Salvador and conducts writing workshops, cultural broadcasts, and writes a fortnightly column ‘Gabinete Caligari’ in *La Prensa Gráfica* (López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón 353).

I have chosen the story, ‘Yo, cocodrilo’ which was published in 2008 in the book of short stories, *El diablo sabe mi nombre*. It is a confronting story, set in a rural village, about a young girl who does not want to go through a ritual, and transforms into a crocodile in order to escape it.

Rosario Ferré (1938-2016), Puerto Rico

Rosario Ferré was the first lady of Puerto Rico, in more ways than one. Her father was Governor of Puerto Rico, and in 1970, she became the Acting First Lady (and simultaneously First Daughter) of Puerto Rico after her mother passed away. Ferré spent much of her life rebelling: rebelling against her privileged upbringing, her family, and as an adult, rebelling against “her Puerto Rican compatriots of all political stripes” (González 167), including her father who was pro-US state, often writing the opposite of what they expected her to do. In 1970, she founded the avant-garde literary journal *Zona de carga y descarga* with her cousin, poet and novelist Olga Nolla, which aimed to popularise Puerto Rican and other Latin American authors as a reaction to the existing literary canon (García and López-Pellisa 65; González 168). Due to this journal’s success, as well as scandal from publishing ground-breaking gay fiction, Ferré gained entry into the intelligentsia in Puerto Rico. The journal is still politically radical and favours Puerto Rican independence (González 168). Ferré worked as a journalist for the liberal newspaper *El Mundo*, and was in charge of the opinion column, which allowed her to express her liberal ideological and feminist views. In fact, feminism and anti-patriarchy became strong themes in her works.

Ferré's first book, *Papeles de Pandora* was published in 1976 and her second book, *Maldito amor* in 1986, was a satire of music wars. In her 1980 work, *Sitio a Eros: Trece ensayos*, she examined feminism and feminist authors, such as Mary Shelley and Virginia Woolf, and developed a controversial distinction between male and female writing, which she called 'difference feminism'. In one of her other works, *El árbol y sus sombras*, written in 1989, she wrote twelve essays on literature written mainly by Latin American authors and poets. Ferré also wrote a collection of children's stories, *Sonatinas* in 1989,¹⁹ which fused folk tales, popular culture, and fairy tales with the aim of subverting the social order (García and López-Pellisa 66). She also published poetry and some of her works have been published as bilingual versions, distinctive of her cultural background, or into English, including the *House on the Lagoon* (1995), which was short-listed for the National Book Award in the USA.

Ferré has been the recipient of many literary awards. In 1992, she received the German LiBeraturpris award for female authors from Africa, Asia, Arab and Latin American countries. In 1997, Brown University (Rhode Island, USA) awarded her a doctorate *honoris causa*; in 2004, she received a Guggenheim Fellowship, and in 2009, she was awarded the medal of Premios Nacionales de Cultura del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.

I have chosen Ferré's most famous short story, 'La muñeca menor', published in 1976 in her first book, *Papeles de Pandora*, for analysis in this thesis. It is the story of a maiden aunt, who confines herself to the family home due to a childhood injury. The aunt makes dolls for her nieces as they grow up and for when they marry. When the aunt learns that the doctors could have cured her injury years earlier, she creates a special surprise for the doll for the youngest niece.

¹⁹ The title has the same meaning in English: sonatinas, short sonatas; in other words, short stories.

Claudia Hernández (1975-), El Salvador

Claudia Hernández studied journalism at the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas in San Salvador and subsequently obtained a degree in communications and public relations at the Universidad Tecnológica (The Modern Novel). At the end of the 1990s, when she was in her early twenties, Hernández started to publish separate stories in the supplement *TresMil* of the newspaper *CoLatino* and in the magazine *Hablemos* in *El Diario de Hoy* in El Salvador.

Hernández has written several books of short stories. Her first book, *Mediodía de fronteras* was published in 2002. It was subsequently republished in 2007 as *De fronteras*, with stories added from those she wrote between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five and other stories removed (Ortiz Wallner 1). She has written other collections of short stories, namely *Otras ciudades* (2001), *La canción del mar* (2007), and *Causes naturales* (2013). Her first novel was the bilingual Spanish/English book called *They Have Fired Her Again* (2015), and she has subsequently published a trilogy of novels about the constant conflict environment in Central America: *Roza, tumba, quema* (also translated into English as *Slash and Burn*) (2017), *El verbo J* (2018), and *Tomar tu mano* (2021).

Hernández is noted by many critics, such as Alexandra Ortiz Wallner (9), Misha Kokotovic (1), Hilda Gairaud Ruíz (20), and Emily Vásquez Henríquez (121), to be a writer who depicts the trauma associated with the civil war in El Salvador, and the violent peace period afterwards in the 1990s (the peace accords were signed in 1992) but does not explicitly refer to it in her books or characters. The turbulence of those times permeates her stories. According to Linda Craft, Hernández stated in an interview that “Creo que somos convulsos porque no tenemos dirección ni orientación” (182).

Hernández is the only Salvadoran woman writer to be awarded the Premio Juan Rulfo from International France Radio, which she won in 1998 for her story ‘Un demonio de segunda

mano'. She also won the Anne Seghers Prize (Germany) in 2004 for her published works, *Otras ciudades*, *Mediodía de frontera*, and *Olvida uno* (2005). This prize acknowledges authors committed to making a more just and more humane society through their artistic production. In 2007, she was included in the Hay Festival list called Bogotá39. This list unites (in Bogotá, Colombia) thirty-nine writers under the age of thirty-nine, who, according to the panel of judges, are important and up-and-coming authors with the talent and potential to define the future of Latin American literature.

I have chosen 'Manual de hijo muerto' which was published in the 2007 collection of short stories, *De fronteras*. This short story is written as an instruction manual, providing directions to the parents on how to reassemble the mutilated parts of their adult child to prepare it for the funeral and burial. It satirically deals with the violence against citizens, the disappearance of citizens, and the disposal of victims' bodies.

Mildred Hernández (1972-), Guatemala

Mildred Hernández is a Guatemalan author of prose and poetry with a Master's degree in Urban Education from the Instituto Normal de Centroamérica (INCA) in 1984 and a philosophy degree from the Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala. She obtained a teaching degree for middle school in 1992, a Master's in Hispanic Literature at the Universidad Rafael Landívar (Guatemala) and a doctorate in education at the Universidad de La Salle Costa Rica in 2009.

While in her first year at high school, Hernández wrote her first literary work, and it was of such quality that her teacher did not believe that she wrote it, being only thirteen years old at the time (Ferdinand). She published her first articles in the then (now defunct) daily newspaper, *El Gráfico*, during the thirty-six-year armed conflict in Guatemala.

Hernández was one of the first female authors to publish after the end of the armed conflict in 1994. Her first book was a collection of short stories, *Orígenes*, in 1995, followed by a book of poetic prose, *Diario de cuerpos* in 1998. These were followed by a book of short stories, *Paranoica city* in 2002; her first book of poetry *Palabras enredados en los dedos* in 2012; and the novel *Erótica de la ciudad* in 2018. Her short stories have appeared in various anthologies. Hernández regularly writes opinion articles in the website Plaza Pública.

I have chosen ‘Paranoica city’ from the 2002 book of short stories of the same name. The story is about a married couple who hear an intruder in their home, and the husband shoots him dead. They then become more stressed as they try to dispose of the body without being seen, and when they do, there is a surprise waiting for them when they return to the car. This story is different from most of the others being examined in this thesis as it has a large amount of dialogue, which is unusual in a Fantastic story.

Cheri Lewis G. (1974-), Panama

Cheri Lewis G. is an author, scriptwriter, and creator of an animated children’s television series. She obtained a marketing degree in 1995 from the Universidad Católica Santa María La Antigua in Panama City and has been a columnist for the daily newspaper *La Prensa* and the magazine *Blank*.

Lewis has published three collections of short stories. Her first book of twelve short stories, *Abrir las manos*, was first published in 2013 and republished in 2015 by a Guatemalan publisher for distribution in Central America. In 2018, she published a book of three short stories, *El hilo que nos une*, and in 2021 another book of ten short stories, *Esto no es vida*. Lewis’s book titled *Soy una ciudad llamada Panamá*, was published in 2019 as part of the Comisión de los 500 años de la Alcaldía de Panamá and the United Nations Development

Program. Her first children's book, *De la magia y otros recuerdos* was published in 2015. It was followed by *Vivir con alegría* in 2018, and *La zorra y el conejo* in 2023.

Lewis's short stories have been included in *Guía de viajes de almanaque azul* (2013), *Antología de narraciones de los talleres literarios de Panamá (2010–2011)*, *Venir a cuento: Cuentistas emergentes de Panamá (2012-2019)* (2019). In 2017, her work was published in two anthologies, *Historias de dos ciudades, cuentistas de Panamá y El Salvador*, and in the anthology of minifiction promotion of Latin American women against gender violence *¡Basta! 100 mujeres contra la violencia de género de Panamá*. Lewis's work was also included in *En plena forma. Cuentos panameños 2003-2017* (2018), an anthology of thirty-two living authors from Panama who have written in this time period.

Lewis has won numerous prizes for her works, including the inaugural Premio Sagitario Ediciones de Narrativa Ariel Barría Alvarado in 2021 for *Esto no es vida*. In 2017, she won the Concurso de Literatura Infantil Carlos Francisco Changmarín from the Ministerio Nacional de Cultura with *Vivir con alegría*, and in 2023 for *La zorra y el conejo* under the pseudonym 'Jaromir'. She obtained an honourable mention for *De la magia y otros recuerdos* in 2015 from the same competition. In 2018, she won the Concurso Nacional de Cuento José María Sánchez with her work *El hilo que nos une*.

Currently, she is creative director at Jungla Cartoons, Inc., where she is a screenwriter and composer for animated series and digital comic books. She has produced the first animated series for children in Panama: 'Siniestro Mu y las vacas lobotómicas', after producing it first in comic form, followed by two other animated series called 'Los colorados' and 'Cuéntamelo Chabelito'. Lewis has her own publishing company, Ediciones de La Ardilla, which has

republished her books. She is a strong supporter of the environment and a defender of squirrels (ardillas),²⁰ the latter at an international level.

I chose ‘Mujer hecha pedazos’ from the 2023 collection of short stories, *Abrir las manos*. It is the story of a man and woman who meet at a party. Everything seems normal until the woman’s arm falls off and she reattaches it as though it is an everyday occurrence. The story provides a humorous narrative of how women can fall apart due to events that happen in their lives, but how they can pull themselves together and continue, putting events behind them.

María Elena Llana (1936-), Cuba

María Elena Llana is a journalist, foreign correspondent, short story writer and a poet. She graduated in journalism, and even though she worked in different areas of the press, she specialised in cultural reporting in Asia. This not only permitted Llana to work in Vietnam and China as a cultural correspondent, but also to attend numerous events with artists and intellectuals in Cuba, Europe, and Latin America (Llana “Address” 225).

La reina was Llana’s first collection of short stories, published in 1965. She continued writing during the 1970s, but as the state favoured socialist realist literature over magical realism or the Fantastic during those years, she wrote more for her own pleasure. While raising her two sons, Llana wrote radio programming, which she could do from home and using this experience, she taught radio writing in Cuba and in Mexico. When her sons grew up, she returned to her career as a journalist and short fiction writer (Llana “Address” 225).

Llana’s collections include: *Casas del Vedado* (1983), for which she won the Premio de la Crítica, *Castillos de naipes* (1999), and *Apenas murmullos* (2005), amongst others. She has

²⁰ Lewis has loved squirrels since she was a little girl.

also written children's novels, publishing her first novel in 2012, *Sueños, sustos y sorpresas*. One of her most recent books, *Domicilio habanero/An Address in Havana* (2014), is a bilingual anthology of her stories, from 1965 to around the early 2010s, which have women protagonists at "the centre of the convergence of narrative times within a limited space – an address in Havana — offering an interesting portrait of the construction of female subjectivity throughout the last fifty years" (Cooper "María").

In December 2023, Llana won the Premio Nacional de Literatura 2023 from the Instituto Cubano del Libro who described her as "una de las más importantes cuentistas cubanas contemporáneas" (Candela).

I chose Llana's 'En familia' published in 1983 in her book of short stories, *Casas de Vedado*. It is probably her most famous Fantastic short story and tells the tale of a family whose large mirror in the living room is inhabited by deceased family members, and while initially astonished, the family all accept this as an everyday thing. There are no problems until cousin Clara comes to stay and wants to change the status quo.

María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra (1971-), Nicaragua

María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra is a Nicaraguan essayist, poet, and author of short stories and novels, who has worked as a secondary education teacher and as a television presenter. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in Managua, a Master's degree in Latin American literature from the University of Pittsburgh, and has completed a doctorate in literature from the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Chile in 2021. Her essays, poetry and short stories have been published in Nicaraguan newspapers, journals, and anthologies. According to Willy O. Muñoz, Pérez Cuadra's narrative is at the leading edge of storytelling written by Nicaraguan women, as she deals with subjects that are rarely touched

upon by her peers, such as homosexuality and lesbianism (406). She centres her narratives in the diverse and contradictory aspects of being a woman (Meza Márquez 126). As Muñoz notes:

Su prosa franca, a veces cáustica, lúdica y humorística, codifica las múltiples facetas de la mujer nicaragüense: su domesticidad, sus enfermedades, sus frustraciones, sus deseos, su erotismo; sus esfuerzos por liberarse de la opresión patriarcal y la inevitable posibilidad de ser violada. Por otra parte, Pérez Cuadra enriquece su literatura con múltiples estrategias, como el tema onírico, y emplea varias modalidades, como la sátira, lo grotesco y el surrealismo. (406)

Pérez Cuadra was co-founder of the Seminario Permanente de Investigaciones de Literatura Centroamericana of the UCA; a director of the group of the Asociación Nicaraguense de Escritoras (ANIDE), and on the editorial board of ANIDE for their eponymous journal.

Pérez Cuadra has won numerous awards for both her poetry and prose. She received the First Prize in the Rafaela Contreras Competition in 2004, sponsored by the ANIDE, the group that was responsible for the publication of her first collection of short stories *Sin luz artificial* in 2004. In 2008 she won first prize in the Concurso Nacional de Poesía Inédita for 'El cisne', convened by the Instituto Nicaragüense de Cultura y la Alcaldía de Ciudad Darío. Pérez Cuadra obtained a grant from the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes of Chile to write her second book of short stories, *Una ciudad de estatuas y perros*, which was published in 2014. The same year, she obtained first prize in the María Teresa Sánchez Competition for her book of poems *Letras para ser embalsamadas*. She has also published a book of minifiction, *Rama. Microficciones* in 2016 and her most recent publication is the book of minifiction stories, *Isonauta*, which was published in 2020. Her unpublished book, *Diálogo entre naturaleza muerta y naturaleza viva y otras respuestas pornoeroticidas*, was awarded a Mención de Honor in the Concurso de Poesía "Mariana Sansón" in 2003. *De amores*, a

collection of stories, and *El monstruo entre las piernas y otras escrituras antropomorfas*, another book of poems, remain unpublished (Múñoz 406). In 2022, Pérez Cuadra won the Premio Centroamericano de Literatura Rogelio Sinán, organised by the Universidad Tecnológica de Panamá y el Ministerio de Cultura, for her novel *Memorias de una hija imaginaria* published under the pseudonym Claudia.

I have chosen ‘Muñeca rota’ published in her book of short stories, *Una ciudad de estatuas y perros*, in 2014. This story tells the tale of a young woman whose extremities fall off gradually, and while helpless and vulnerable, she is aided by her sister. The girl is abused by men, but dreams of escape, and coerces her sister into a plan to flee her violators.

María Eugenia Ramos (1959-), Honduras

Poet, actor, and storyteller, María Eugenia Ramos published her first story, ‘Quink’, inspired by fairy stories, in the magazine *Ariel* when she was in primary school. She studied journalism and literature at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, majoring in literature. During these years, she was a student leader and obtained prime places in public speaking and in theatre as best actress. She has worked in editing offices, and offices of communication and education.

In 1978, Ramos won first prize in the poetry section in the literary competition, Independencia Nacional, sponsored by the Banco Atlántida. In 1989, she published a book of poems, *Porque ningún sol es el último*. Her first collection of short stories, *Una cierta nostalgia*, was first published in 1998 in ‘Hondulibros’, a cultural supplement by poet Óscar Acosta to the Honduran newspaper, *El Heraldo*, and subsequently as a stand-alone book in 2000. She also published an essay ‘Yo, tú, ellos, nosotros: apuntes sobre la praxis poética y vital de Clementina Suárez’ in 2002. In 1992, her story ‘Una cierta nostalgia’ received the Primer Premio en el Certamen Bicentenario del Nacimiento de Francisco Morazán.

Ramos founded the publishing house Editorial Guardabarranco jointly with her husband to promote and diffuse literary and artistic works by young people. This publishing house printed her book *Una cierta nostalgia*. However, after the couple separated, she stopped working in the business, although the company is still producing a few books annually.²¹

I have chosen ‘Para elegir la muerte’, published in 2000 in the book of short stories, *Una cierta nostalgia*, in 2000. This story is about a man who enters a store that offers death choices for sale. He wants to choose his own death within the next year and the female assistant shows him the types of death on offer, all for a reasonable price.

Conclusion

Each author has a very different background and varied careers which makes them all fascinating people. Almost all women have a tertiary degree, or they may be involved with literature in some form, or as journalists for the printed and online media, or conducting writing workshops.

For almost all these authors, the stories I have selected have links to their country’s history, and the next chapter briefly looks at the historical and socio-political events of each country, from around the beginning of the twentieth century.

²¹ See: Ediciones Guardabarranco <https://isbn.cloud/hn/editorial/ediciones-guardabarranco/>. The last work published on this website was in 2019. Accessed 28 March 2024.

Chapter Four: Historical and socioeconomic conditions

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a brief overview of Mexican, Central American, and Caribbean history, society, and politics from around the turn of the twentieth century to the present day. These factors play an important role in the stories as they provide a reason for the authors to use the Fantastic to subvert and protest against events that have occurred, or continue to occur, in their countries. Many of the authors grew up in turbulent times and this instability is the underlying theme in their stories.

Each country's history is complex, driven by many internal and external factors – political, economic, social, and their cultural histories — especially in relation to their integration into the new economic world order that developed in the twentieth century. The greatest internal factor for each country is the shedding of neo-colonialism and *Latifundismo*, which have constrained development both economically and socially, but also underpin the nations' histories over this period (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 283). I will now discuss these two factors in turn.

Neo-colonialism was the change from Iberian imperial control over the Latin American countries to European and North American economic control from the late nineteenth century, as Latin American countries provided the raw materials and foodstuffs for export to North America and Europe. In turn, capital flowed into Latin America to build infrastructure such as railroads, wharves, and processing plants, enabling the region to integrate into the world economy. The United Kingdom (UK) and later the USA replaced Spain and Portugal as the dominant master, and this neo-colonial economic system created a dependency on these zones for Latin America, which would haunt its countries later in the twentieth century with huge

foreign debt burdens owed to the USA, Europe, and the UK (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 251).

Neo-colonialism is particularly evident in Puerto Rico's history, which was on the cusp of gaining independence from Spain in the late nineteenth century. It had obtained a large degree of autonomy from the declining Spanish power, but had an autonomous government for only four months, before the USA intervened in Cuba, and military forces invaded and occupied Puerto Rico in July 1898 (González-Cruz 8). Many Puerto Ricans supported the invasion by the USA, as they viewed Spain as backward and the USA represented modernisation, democracy, and innovation. As a result, the invasion was met with little resistance (Ávila-Claudio et al.). Spain ceded Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico as the spoils of war to the USA and to liquidate its war debts. The USA formally acquired Puerto Rico under the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1898 and installed strong-armed military governors on the island (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 585; Meade 130). Except for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, the USA did not colonise the rest of the Americas as Europe had done earlier, but instead flexed its military power. When local workers demanded higher wages from US companies, or when Latin American governments tried to tax or nationalise US companies, the USA overturned the 'offending' government and installed a more compliant regime (Meade 217). Puerto Rico's annexation as an unincorporated territory of the USA resulted in it becoming a colonial state, as US control and subsequent dependency has been at the expense of the development of an independent nation and economy (González-Cruz 23).

For many Latin Americans, oppressive control changed from neo-colonialism to *Latifundismo*. *Latifundismo* is defined as large private landholdings usually worked by slaves or other unfree labourers often tied to the estate through debt peonage. The owners of these large landholdings were the wealthiest in the community and they controlled and dominated all aspects of

community life, as well as influencing the government and the Church. The term *latifundia*, originating in ancient Rome, is now used interchangeably with other words for the large estates, such as *hacienda* and *estancia* (Meade 29). Perhaps the strongest example of *Latifundismo* (in the countries included as part of this study) is in El Salvador, which has suffered from a high concentration of land, wealth, and politics in few hands, the so-called 'Fourteen Families', which led to high inequality, dependence on a single crop, exploited peasantry, and crushing repression of protest (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 469; Meade 291-292).

The new economic forces increased the trend of urbanisation in the major cities, created the bourgeoisie and wage-earning working class, in which women played an important role, and decreased the peasantry and indigenous communities. These new market forces led to the convergence of public and private life, which further exploited women, who were usually low wage earners in menial jobs or performing unpaid labour in their patriarchal home. The same market forces drove migrant labour to the urban slums in search of employment in the factories, and then to foreign countries as immigrants (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 284).

These new social structures also created political alliances and protest movements that eventually became revolutions, starting with the Mexican Revolution in 1910 against the right-wing dictator and oligarch, Porfirio Díaz. It was the first revolution to displace the *latifundia* and peonage systems and control the foreign investment in the nation's resources. However, in the constitution of 1917, the bourgeois revolutionary side was victorious, and put the goals of the capitalist developers ahead of the workers and peasants (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 285). The other notable social movement is the Cuban Revolution of 1959, led by Fidel Castro and his revolutionary army of men and women against the right-wing dictator, Fulgencio Batista. Castro later created a socialist government, which caused severe political tensions with the anti-Communist ideologies of the USA's administrators, who

imposed economic sanctions against Cuba which stand to this day. In contrast, the failed revolutionary movements in Guatemala in the late 1940s and early 1950s did not result in the hoped-for changes to land tenure and political control (Meade 227).

The imperialist administrations, either Spanish or from the USA, created crop monoculture (or low diversification in crops) in many countries, which led to severe swings in economic benefits and downturns for the Latin American countries, depending on the climate, world demand and world prices. Monoculture or low diversification in crops include sugar cane in Cuba and Puerto Rico; bananas in Honduras and Costa Rica; and coffee in Guatemala, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. However, the ruling elite, oligarchs, and foreign companies, such as the North American Minor Keith's United Fruit Company, controlled the markets and the profits to the detriment of the local farmers, who were poor and isolated in many cases. Economic shocks, such as the 1993 so-called 'banana wars' initiated by the European Union, also adversely affected Latin American nations (Brenes and Madrigal 97).

In conclusion, the Spanish domination and 'masters' were replaced by the 'Colossus of the North'²² - the USA - which emerged as a hemispheric and then a global economic and hegemonic power in the twentieth century. It sought to take control of and intervene in the politics of Latin America, generally due to its struggle for global supremacy against the Soviet Union (Anderson 225). The USA also sought to take control of Latin America's resources with the profits returning to the USA — an example of this is the United Fruit Company controlling fruit production and exports. The USA exploited each country's resources, including labour, for its own gain.

²² This phrase was first coined by Nicaragua's most famous poet, Rubén Darío.

Historical conditions

The stories examined in this thesis revolve around issues of identity, namely loss of identity, multiple and constructed identities, and national identity. For example, Díaz Llanillo's 'El vendedor de cabezas' is an allegory of the many different cultures and identities in Cuba, especially the African cultures, and that Cuba is not just one culture, that of the Spanish colonisers.

Latin America is a very diverse region, but the countries within it have been "divided by almost as much as that which unites them: different colonial heritages and histories, and radically different geographies, demographies, and ethnic compositions" (Lowenthal). The term Latin America refers to the region of the Americas where the predominant language is one of the Romance languages, that is, derived from Latin. From Mexico in the north, to Chile and Argentina in the south,²³ these countries have been shaped by European imperialist (mainly Spanish and Portuguese, but also French) rule over hundreds of years, battles for independence from the colonial rulers, civil and guerrilla wars, and voluntary and involuntary immigration. In addition, many people outside of Latin America are aware of some of the indigenous cultures, of which the Aztecs, the Maya and the Incas are the most well-known, but their histories may not be so well-known, nor do they know about other indigenous peoples and cultures, such as the Taino in Puerto Rico or the Lencas of Honduras. Victor Ramos states that immigration over the past two centuries to Latin America, especially from Europe and North Africa, increased the diversity of cultures and is the principal constituent factor in Latin American identity (121). However, Nikki Sullivan poses the question: how does any person identify themselves with respect to their ancestors or to a 'Motherland'? A person may

²³ The exceptions are Belize, Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname, and a few of the West Indian countries.

have thousands of direct ancestors. She notes that identifying *with* a particular group is not the same as identifying oneself *as* part of a particular group (Sullivan 111-112; author's emphasis).

Carlos Fuentes' book *The Buried Mirror* (1992) focuses on the attempts by Latin American countries to break free from their Iberian colonial domination and culture and to establish their own identity, culture, and societies. Fuentes laments that this has not yet been achieved, and the countries exist as disunited, fragmented societies. He associates this torment of being torn between two worlds to the Totonacs and the Maya who buried mirrors to guide them to the underworld. He links the image of the mirror to the present day and the double or the 'buried' mirror back to Spain. That is, looking from Latin America to Europe and back, never breaking free from their colonisers, nor making significant changes to society, such as erasing the feudal models from the past. Instead, Latin American countries are left with an imperfect society which is weakly democratic and based on models of development that do not equate with the social reality (Fuentes 9-11). In the sixteenth century, Latin America was a utopian dream for Europe, but in the nineteenth century, Europe, notably France, became the utopia for Latin American countries. Latin America's sources of primary commodities, such as wool, sugar, cotton, and rubber, that supported the new lifestyles of economic liberalism, did not bring about political liberalism (Fuentes 278-279). Fuentes posits that the political institutions need to adapt to social demands, not just technology, and urges Latin America nations to do what the revolutions were expected to do: bring economic development, together with democracy and social justice. He laments that this has been the countries' greatest failure over the past five hundred years and asks: "Is not the mirror both a reflection of reality and a projection of the imagination?" (Fuentes 11, 355).

The major discontent, and indeed, a strong undercurrent in Latin American Fantastic literature, is the failure of Latin American countries to establish their own identities. Their revolutions

did not break the mirror back to Spain, and successive governments and military regimes have not broken the old practices — the ruling elite, the oligarchs, the gaps between rich and poor, and the oppression — that still exist,²⁴ the latter in varying degrees, which emerged again in the COVID-19 recession in 2020. Adding to this, the new imperialist force from the north, the USA, took control of the major economic forces and sources of wealth in their countries, leaving the citizens no better off.

The countries geographically located south of the USA are multicultural – people of indigenous, European, and African descent, who coexist with immigrants and people of descent from other regions and countries such as the Middle East, China, and Japan. There are also mixed-race groups, either through the initial European conquests or through traditional marriage, such as the *mestizos* (Spanish and indigenous) and *mulattos* (Spanish and African)²⁵. The other large group is the *criollos*, or creoles, who are people born in Latin America with European descent. There are two major languages in Latin America — Spanish and Portuguese — and minor languages such as French, English and a large number of indigenous languages. In Mexico alone, there are sixty-eight distinct indigenous languages spoken and the Maya family of languages contains twenty-eight languages (Turner-Trujillo et al. 2017).²⁶

Given this cultural heterogeneity, Victor Ramos asks if there is such a thing as Latin American identity and who should be included or excluded, or more simply, “who are we?” and “who is the Other?”. He refers to Aristotle, who introduced the composition possibility of the “same” (as me) and the “Other” and notes that identities are built on the relationship between the “I”

²⁴ Fuentes first published his book, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World*, in 1992, to tie in with the quincentennial anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the American continent. While noting that it was one of the greatest events in human history, he states that many Latin Americans “wonder if there is anything to celebrate” (Fuentes 9). In 1992, many Latin American countries were suffering severe economic downturns and crises: “A sense of frustration, of dashed hopes and lost illusions” (Fuentes 9).

²⁵ The term ‘mulatto’ is now considered to be outdated and offensive.

²⁶ This is the same for the Australian indigenous peoples. There are more than two hundred and fifty languages and eight hundred dialects, although ninety percent are threatened with being lost forever. See: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/languages-alive>.

and the “you”, the “us”, and the “Other”. To hide or eliminate the differences, there exists the dialectic conceptions of we/others, specific/common, local/global, past/future, cooperation/confrontation, all in action and constructing the present time. Social identity is the dynamic and ambivalent result of the tension between these contrary and common elements, and in Latin America, it is expressed in the polar extremes of the Europeans and the indigenous peoples. He opines that Latin American identity, like other social identity groups, is built, above all, with and through relationships with ‘other groups’ and in the context of emergence and development in the capitalist system/world. Diverse civilisations, contradictory cultures and interests within this emergence and development process enable the creation of new cultural combinations and civilisations that are contradictory, impure, disproportionately mixed, and articulated by domination and resistances (V. Ramos 118-120).

There are contradictions and many clashes of social groups throughout Latin American history. The desire to be liberated from the Spanish Crown and Spanish masters to create their own identity has not yet led to a satisfying conclusion. Instead of being controlled by European rulers, society ended up being controlled by dictators, large landowners, oligarchs, the elite, and multinational corporations, all with corrupt and/or vested interests to retain their control, leaving the poor and indigenous peoples trapped in poverty. The gap between rich and poor widened. Political changes tended to swing towards the extremes of right and left. Immigrants from Europe to the Latin American cities did not find the better lifestyle that they hoped for and were lonely, poor, and disillusioned.

Independence from Spain

The battle for independence started with the 1791 slave revolt in the French colony of Haiti, continued through Mexico, which gained independence in 1821, and then the other countries of Central and South America. The armies of Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín and others

secured independence in the culturally fragmented countries. Cuba and Puerto Rico remained loyal to Spain until they were ceded in the US-Spanish war of 1898. However, independence did little to improve the livelihoods of most Latin Americans; the system that began with the conquistadors – the exploitation of the poor and indigenous peoples by the rich (and few), the concentrated land ownership, and inequalities – remained unchanged. The fortunes of the rich and large landowners survived the independence wars intact. The legacies of semi-colonial feudalism clashed with the emergence of liberalism, which was rooted in the theories of free trade, low tariffs, and individual rights. However, liberalism did not benefit the majority, especially the indigenous peoples (Meade 79).

The aftermath of independence left countries economically devastated, politically fractured, and culturally divided, and under pressure to create independent states (Meade 79).

The new imperial power – the United States of America

Apart from Iberian imperialism, the USA has intervened in Latin American economies and politics since the nineteenth century, taking over as the new imperialist force as the empires of Spain and Portugal waned. The USA took half the Mexican territory in 1846 when James Polk moved against it, and US intervention was rampant in the Caribbean. After liberation from Spain, Puerto Rico became a *de facto* colony of the USA; Cuba was given pro-forma independence, but subsequently slapped with the Platt Amendment which gave the USA the right to interfere in Cuban affairs. The USA took the province of Panama from Colombia in 1903, cut it in half with the Panama Canal, and put the Canal under US control (Fuentes 325).

Further control by the USA and powerful US corporations, such as the United Fruit Company, over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not benefit the economies of Latin America, and in many cases, living standards worsened. The revolutions of the twentieth century also

did not bring about the hoped-for changes in society, politics, improved living standards and the reduction in corruption. Victor Ramos notes that it was difficult for the people to reconstruct their societies and countries from the 'rubble' left over from the subjugation and destruction by the former political powers, be they from Spain or from within their own countries. In addition, he laments that 'impositions' of new metropolises, immigrants, new methods of production and new ways of life, thinking and praying, and domination, led to the new resistances and collaborations with heroes, traitors, brought about victories, and defeats, so writing the new history of light and shade and of a contradictory identity. He states that Latin American identity is the representation of Latin American societies in a state of permanent construction/deconstruction. It is the asymmetric fusion of different civilisations and diverse practices and actions taken/in progress, driven by common and diverse interests and challenges (V. Ramos 122). These differences are not necessarily irreconcilable between countries, regions, towns, and classes on the continent, but they join to resist the external and internal domination and the sharing of new societies and cultural impositions. The development of Latin American identity has been constructed/reconstructed inside an economic and world framework that commenced with the conquest and colonisation, continued through the dependence/independence stages, to the current stage of globalisation and neoliberalism. The response of the elites to the new societies and global dominance has been more repressive actions, while the citizens have resisted and demanded more justice, democracy, and cooperation. However, the outgoing socio-economic-cultural structures and the elitist empowering of the post-independence process is the base of the Latin American contradictory identity in which there is a permanent tension: on one side, the narrow and excluding interests of the nationalist elite and on the other side, the national popular and inclusive interests. This contradictory identity is reinforced in the double expression of struggle/collaboration in the development process. It is made explicit in the

resistance/genuflection against the neo-liberal model of globalisation, which is not a socioeconomic model but an esoteric-religious one. The colonisation process has not ended. The modernisation of the Latin American identity cannot avoid these realities and new tensions created by new situations and identities (V. Ramos 122-123).

The Central American countries have been experiencing similar conditions in their development. The indigenous populations were suppressed by the Spanish conquistadors and colonising forces, and in some cases, exterminated, either by force or by European diseases. African slaves were bought and imported to work on the land, in mines, or as domestic labour. All countries sought independence from the monarchy and obtained it, but these countries are still seeking their own identities.

In conclusion, there are two adverse common factors which stand out over the past two hundred years: the imperialistic influence of the United States of America and crop monoculture (notably sugar, bananas, or coffee), the latter affecting most of the Central American countries and often with the greatest portion of earnings going back to the USA. Each country's histories and socioeconomic conditions, mainly from the twentieth century onwards, will be discussed briefly in turn; starting from the north and working downwards.

Mexico

Both stories from Mexico analysed in this thesis have a woman rebelling against a member of the family. In Carrington's story, 'La debutante', the young female protagonist rebels against the demands of her mother, who wants to fit into high society, as she does not want to attend the ball in her honour. She dresses her friend the hyena in disguise and the hyena attends on her behalf. The hyena is the double of the girl, and Carrington herself who rebelled against her privileged upbringing, which is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

In a similar way, the protagonist in Dávila's story, 'El huésped', rebels against her oppressive husband. This woman is confined to her home in a remote location. Her husband brings home a house guest, without the wife's permission, and she must deal with this character who becomes more threatening as the story progresses. The husband brushes off the woman's demands for the house guest to leave, saying: "Te acostumbrarás a su compañía y, si no lo consigues..." (Dávila 17), implying a threat to the wife that he must be obeyed, and: "Cada día estás más histérica..." (Dávila 21), inferring that the wife has psychological issues. At the end of the story, the protagonist and her maid take the matter into their own hands and kill the house guest. When the husband returns home, the wife greets him with the news that the house guest passed away suddenly and unexpectedly (Dávila 23).

The rebellion of the protagonists in both stories resonates with Mexican history. The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) is well-known internationally for the imagery of its freedom fighters: men with large moustaches wearing large sombreros and draped in bullet belts, like Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919). However, what is not well-known is the part played in the Revolution by women, who joined the revolutionaries. These women provided support as cooks, nurses, spies, and more, such as the *soldaderas*,²⁷ who walked alongside the men carrying weapons, food, and supplies, and sometimes fought in battle by their men's sides (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 328; Meade 164-165). While some women joined with the revolutionary armies as they believed in the cause, others joined the revolutionary forces as a way of obtaining food for themselves and their children, as well as earning money, as farming had been disrupted by the battles and their men were in combat. Unfortunately, some women were forced into prostitution to escape poverty, while others were forcibly taken (Meade 165;

²⁷ The term means 'one who takes a soldier's pay', from *soldada* (Meade 165). These women had more of a support role, and they are different from the women fighting soldiers who volunteered as a soldier and were officially recognised as such. These fighters often commanded their own units (Reséndez Fuentes 525-526).

Reséndez Fuentes 528, 535, 543). In the latter days of Porfirio Díaz's rule, supplying the troops became a thriving business for women (Reséndez Fuentes 530).

Some women joined their husbands in the Federal army as support for the soldiers as they did not want to be left alone for long periods of time (Reséndez Fuentes 531). This loneliness is reflected in Dávila's character, representing the woman at home, left alone, subservient to the male, who also wanted to break free from the oppressive dominance. The female protagonist fights for her freedom, her rights, her agency, and against her oppressive and controlling husband.

The Massacre at Tlateloco Plaza in Mexico City in 1968 in which many student protestors were killed and injured set off a chain of demonstrations and civil unrest throughout Latin America in the late 1960s and through to the 1980s. Strong military control over citizens, suppression of activities and disappearances were synonymous with these black periods of Latin American history (Meade 255-257). Revolution is part of Mexico's history and is part of both Carrington's and Dávila's stories. It is also part of other Caribbean and Central American histories, which will now be discussed.

The Caribbean

Cuba

The title of María Elena Llana's book in which 'En familia' first appeared, *Casas del Vedado* (1983), refers to Vedado, which was once a bourgeois suburb in La Habana, which had many large old mansions. The splendour of the architecture of La Habana was symbolic of the city's importance in the colonial era (Meade 236). Llana is referring to these empty homes and mansions left behind, often in ruins or in deterioration, following the exodus of the bourgeoisie from La Habana in the early 1960s and another wave in the 1980s, when the book was

published (Riess 84; Sardiñas Fernández 145). The decaying mirror in ‘En familia’: “[...] la ovalada luna, un poco moteada de negro por la acción del tiempo” (Llana “Familia” 47) is a metaphor of the crumbling, old former mansions of Cuba. These once—grand buildings are either vacant, occupied by ghosts (in the story), or filled with extended families — the ‘survivors’ of the bourgeoisie — trying to survive on the harsh conditions brought on by the US sanctions (Tezanos-Pinto 24; Riess 84-85). The ghosts or the mirror family in Llana’s story recreate the experience of the middle-class that left the island after the Revolution, “los que no se fueron pero tampoco se quedaron” (Tezanos-Pinto 24) and are an allegory of the disappearing bourgeoisie that will eventually cease to exist in Cuba (Tezanos-Pinto 24). The characters in the story seem to be suspended, at the threshold between the world of the living and the world of the dead, just as Cuba seems to be partly stuck in its colonial past, and unable to fully develop its new identity. In an even more subtle way, Díaz Llanillo also introduces Cuban identity in ‘El vendedor de cabezas’. The people in the story buy a new head so that they can become another person. This represents the change in Cuban society, from something old into something different and desired.

In 1959, Cuba became the country that had the most successful and well-known revolution in Latin America, along with Mexico. The socialist revolution, led by Fidel Castro Ruz (1926-2016), Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara (1926-1967) and with only around three thousand guerrillas, threw out the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who fled to Miami with his closest confidants. The political power was concentrated in the hands of the members of the ‘Movimiento de 26 de julio’, Castro’s group who initially attempted to overthrow the government in 1953, which included many women.²⁸ As in Mexico, women had important

²⁸ Fidel Castro and a small group of revolutionaries led an unsuccessful attack on the military barracks at Santiago de Cuba on 26 July 1953. Castro was captured and imprisoned for nineteen months on the Isle of Pines. His defence at his trial included his famous quote: “History will absolve me”. The group, ‘Movimiento de 26 de julio’, formed during this time, with the support of many women and other anti-Batista groups (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 400-401; Meade 237).

roles in the Revolution, such as Haydee Santamaria (1922-1980) and Melba Hernández (1921-2014), who were part of the 26th of July movement and provided valuable support, and guerrilla fighters Celia Sánchez (1920-1980) and the Mariana Grajales Brigade (Las Marianas), an all-female military platoon (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 401). The regime established ties with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to diversify its dependence and to protect it from US interference. With economic and military support from the USSR, the revolutionary government greatly improved literacy and welfare, while reducing unemployment and unequal distribution of income (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 388, 401-403). Cuba's relationship with the USA deteriorated, and the USA's 1960 trade embargo on all exports to Cuba has never been removed. Cuba retaliated by expropriating US businesses on the island. The USA severed diplomatic ties with Cuba and launched the failed Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) invasion. Castro countered by swearing allegiance to the USSR, which pledged to defend Cuba by supplying arms, including missiles and aircraft capable of delivering atomic weapons. The 1962 'Cuban Missile Crisis' resulted in the removal of missiles from Cuba, under the agreement that the USA would not invade Cuba (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 404).

The Cuban Revolution was different from many other revolutions in Latin America. The guerrilla war was short-lived with limited property damage or loss of life. The farm workers did not demand their own land, but instead demanded higher wages and better working conditions. The government redistributed income to the urban and rural classes, which raised wages and purchasing power, and almost eliminated unemployment. It developed unused land, converted some sugar cane land for growing other crops which saved it having to import foodstuffs, and developed industrial capacity to raise living standards and productivity. It tried to reverse the trend of hyper-urbanisation – the concentration of citizens in one city — which was characteristic of other Latin American countries. The government poured money into rural

housing, lowering rents, and roads, but progress was slow due to scarce resources. While the US embargo caused shortages of parts and skilled labour, other socialist nations assisted Cuba. The USA tried to sabotage the revolution, which led to Cuba retaliating, by expropriating US mills, refineries, factories, and the banking system (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 404-405).

Despite these measures by the Castro administration, by 1980 and with increased economic issues, there was a huge out-migration of citizens, mainly to the USA. Barbara Riess states that there were successive waves of citizens who left Cuba, starting with the wealthiest layers in pre-Revolutionary social structure (many 'urban white creoles'), and "peeling off" of the upper and middle classes who left the island to either wait for the Revolution to end, or to escape permanently. However, she notes that an undetermined number of people stayed, convinced that their place in society would be able to bear any transformation of the Revolution, but describing those who remained as a marginal social class. These 'survivors' continued to live in Cuba on the margins of society. Llana wrote about them and called them: 'los que no se fueron pero tampoco se quedaron' (Riess 85), which evokes the characters in Llana's story 'En familia'. Even though Llana was raised in a relatively affluent family who lost their wealth in the Revolution, Riess posits that Llana's representation of this marginal group is an example of "an alternative performance outside of the 'revolutionary' national narrative" (Riess 84-85). Llana was one of the few women to publish prose fiction after the Revolution (many did not, including Díaz Llanillo until much later), and she weaves the Fantastic and social commentary into her fiction. Riess likens her fiction to Mexican author Juan Rulfo's *El llano en llamas* (1953): Llana creates ethereal figures that suffer the consequences of a large change in society. These characters ('those that did not leave but also did not stay') provide a subtle perspective of the change in national identity in revolutionary Cuba. They were ideologically and critically reviewed from within Cuba as being characters

who stubbornly yearned to return to the heinous past but turned their back on the more respectable reality, and inhabiting an alienated reality which was destined to disappear (Cancio Isla 2, qtd. in Riess 85; Yáñez “Vedado” 70-71, qtd. in Riess 85).

After the fall of the USSR, Cubans started to recover from the devastating impact of the loss of Soviet support. Llana’s characters became less controversial and had “diverse interpretative possibilities within esthetic or feminist frameworks” (Riess 86). As a result, her stories were studied and published. Her characters experience everyday situations with multiple time and space representations (Riess 86), as in ‘En familia’. Her bifurcations of time in the past and the present in the mirror represent Cuba, before and after the Revolution, as well as societal roles. Llana has characterised Clara as a revolutionary figure, as she has qualified as a dentist (even though she is non-practising) — a position held by few women before the Revolution — but also a rebel in the family, disobeying the norms and upsetting the daily life of the family and ghost family.

As noted briefly above, Díaz Llanillo did not publish between 1966 and 1996, in part due to the period in Cuba called the *quinquenio gris* (the grey five-year period), roughly 1971 to 1976, which was a time of severe censorship of artistic works that were not in line with the Socialist ideals. Díaz Llanillo noted that fantasy was not an acceptable genre and that she would publish again when the painful time had passed (Díaz Llanillo 510).

The fall of the USSR in 1990 had a hugely negative impact for Cuba and while Cuba’s standard of living slumped, Cubans survived this era, calling it the ‘Special Period’ in peace time. Economic growth returned around the end of the century, based on aggressive tourism marketing to Europe and Canada, sustainable farming based on Australian methods, oil-for-sugar deals with Venezuela, and strong investment from Europe, notably from Spain. Since 2003, the USA has been the main food supplier to Cuba, under a special provision that

permits food exports. However, Cuban workers, even doctors, gave up their jobs to work in the higher-paying tourist trade, and prostitution re-emerged, which had disappeared when the revolution took control (Meade 241-242). The major benefits from the Revolution were the social improvements: high literacy, equal access to free education, and free health care. Some Western countries do not offer this to their citizens (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 409-411) but the country is still under a command economy.

Díaz Llanillo did write again when conditions eased in Cuba, and her story 'El vendedor de cabezas', written in 2009, is a testament to the changing Cuban identity and society as the country emerged and remodelled itself following the withdrawal of Soviet support.

At the time of writing (August 2024), the sanctions are hurting the people, and the state is not able to manage the rampant food and petrol shortages, waste disposal, increased poverty and hunger, electricity blackouts, and the failing health system and civil infrastructure. Against increased oppression, Cuban citizens are demonstrating against the regime that brought significant change back in 1959 and demanding freedom once again (Colomé).

Puerto Rico

The consequences of colonisation by Spain and then the USA has led Puerto Ricans to an identity crisis, as they do not completely belong in either of the two colonising forces and are constantly battling to create their own identity (Santos Phillips 119; Urrea 279, 297). This identity issue for the Puerto Rican people is reflected in Ferré's 'La muñeca menor', in which there are multiple identities for the doll (see Chapter 5). The Puerto Ricans, subjugated by economic and cultural colonialism and imperialism, have resisted these impositions, and have tried to regain control (Urrea 290; Zee "Rosario" 103, 105).

There are many metaphors in the story of Puerto Rico and its people. In 'La muñeca menor' the river shrimps which *invade* and *inhabit* the aunt's leg are not only a metaphor for the invasion and penetration by Spain and the USA, but also of the 'new bourgeoisie' that fed itself on the old rural aristocracy in Puerto Rico. In addition, the river shrimps angrily emerging from the niece's (or doll's) *downcast* eyes in the conclusion are an allegory of the Puerto Rican people fighting for their identity, existence, and right to be autonomous. The doctors are allegories of the greedy colonisers: the older doctor benefiting from the aunt's misfortune to pay for his son's education, and the young doctor selling the diamond-encrusted eyes of the doll for money. They also both represent the new colonial force of the USA, with its never-ending control of Puerto Rico, neither willing to allow them to become a US state, nor willing to accept a predominantly Spanish speaking state, nor willing to allow them to become a nation outright. The USA ensured that Puerto Rico would always be dependent on US support.

While there is no direct mention of the time setting in Puerto Rico of 'La muñeca menor', it would appear to be the turn of or the early twentieth century as the fictional family's wealth from its large sugar cane plantation was diminishing due to US imperialism. Ferré wrote the story in 1976, so it may also be a protest about the 1967 plebiscite that was held to determine the future of the island. However, it was "no match for the repressive apparatus" of the USA which intervened in the elections by infiltrating various committees, conspired against the institutions that desired to participate, and sought to destroy the left-wing. The outcome maintained the status quo for US interests (González-Cruz 17-18).

Central America

Throughout the past two centuries, the Central American nations – Guatemala, Nicaragua, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama²⁹ — have struggled to maintain control of their countries, due to intense pressure and interference, often from external influences. With the exceptions of Costa Rica and Panama, they have been fragmented and are desperately poor and prey to both tormentors from abroad and domestic dictators. International governments, notably the USA, and foreign companies have targeted their resources for their own political or private gain (Meade 122).

Prior to the independence of each nation from Spain in the nineteenth century, the five republics of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica were provinces under the control of the captain general of Guatemala, headquartered at Guatemala City.³⁰ When Mexico proclaimed independence from Spain in 1821, Central America followed, and proclaimed the Federal Republic of Central America in 1823. It abolished slavery and the clergy's special privileges and established free contract labour and free trade (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 224-225). However, the wealthy landowners and merchants still held power in many areas and mobilised their private workforces in efforts to retain control of their regions. The Central American union started to crumble when it became obvious that the states were not able to finance their own governments and the federal government in Guatemala City. When liberalism was abandoned, it led to a three-year civil war, after which the national government was defeated by the liberal Francisco Morazán,³¹ who defended his position from El Salvador. At the same time, Guatemalan governor Mariano Gálvez, launched economic and social reforms, including marital, educational, and judicial reforms. Land concessions were

²⁹ Belize is not examined in this thesis. It is formerly known as British Honduras.

³⁰ Panama at that time was a province of Colombia.

³¹ Francisco Morazán appears in Ramos's 'Para elegir la muerte' as one of the choices, *Una cierta nostalgia*, p. 29.

offered to foreign companies if they also developed basic economic infrastructure. However, the large landholders did not support the changes and weakened by the onset of a cholera epidemic, the Gálvez regime was defeated by the conservatives, including the clergy. Rafael Carrera led a revolt in 1838 and took Guatemala City in 1842, defeated Morazán, and the republic ended, but what started as a lower-class protest ended up as a conservative government controlled and funded by the merchant oligarchy. When US filibuster William Walker tried to establish himself as president of Central America,³² in a show of unity, the Central American nations joined together to defeat Walker and his army in 1857 (Keen and Haynes “Independence” 225-226).

Growing global demand for coffee and bananas in the nineteenth century provided export-led economic growth for the Central American nations. However, the liberal reforms to achieve this growth kept intact the existing class and property structures, resulting in concentration of land ownership, exploitation of labour, and an increased inequality gap. Their economies were based on one or two agricultural exports, with foreign control of most resources, and acceptance of US hegemony in the region (Keen and Haynes “Independence” 274).

The wars of independence failed to realise the hoped-for changes in each Latin American country. In the challenging process of decolonisation, the new republics were confronted with many obstacles, including economic stagnation, regionalism, political instability, and US imperialism (Keen and Haynes “Independence” 226).

Guatemala

While Mildred Hernández’s story ‘Paranoica city’ is not an allegory of a particular event in Guatemalan history, it does reflect the country’s violent past and present, and the culprits who

³² The term ‘filibuster’ has a couple of meanings. In this case, it refers to a person who wages an unauthorised war on a foreign nation.

have largely gone unpunished. In ‘Paranoica city’, an unnamed married couple shoot and kill an intruder in their home at night, then dispose of the dead body by driving to a park and throwing it down a ravine. Through the entire process the wife fears that they are being watched. When they return to their car to drive home, they find another dead body in the boot. While the wife becomes more frantic, she assists her husband to dispose of both bodies and they are both pleased that they were undetected, at least not arrested by the police. The lack of police presence also links to the weak law enforcement bodies in Guatemala, and it is not to say that the police did not put the second body in the boot.

Guatemala has had a long history of exploitation of land and labour by the elites and *caudillos* (a *caudillo* is a powerful political figure or strongman; Keen and Haynes “Independence” 199) and is reliant on foreign investors and markets for trade on a limited number of goods. It has a large indigenous population who are poor and isolated (Meade 232). From the time of independence to the 1940s, Guatemala was ruled by various military regimes who served the interests of the landed elite and the export markets (Meade 225). In 1944, the ‘October Revolution’ by junior military officers who sought social equality led to a new government and constitution, based on the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Economic plans followed, but many did not see fruition due to a number of attempts to overthrow the government. The democratic process was weak, and power was still maintained by the elite, the small number of large landholders, such as the United Fruit Company,³³ which also controlled the freight costs and the telegraph service, and imposed segregationist (racist) policies on Guatemala (Meade 225-226). The CIA forced the President to resign in a military coup and installed a military strongman in his place in 1954, handing the leadership back to the oligarchy and foreign multinationals (Meade 226-227). Guatemala then entered its darkest

³³ The United Fruit Company owned 85 percent of the land.

period from 1954 in a 36-year civil war, characterised by the brutal oppression of the indigenous peoples by the military, the police, and civilian death squads. Entire villages were annihilated and there were extensive civil and human rights violations by these corrupt forces. The country suffered both economically and socially, the latter being the devastating effects on its human capital. Despite this, there were widespread social movements in the 1950s that demanded more equitable social and political orders, but they were heavily suppressed by the military and the entrenched elite, backed by the US government and multinational corporations. The ruling elite refused to share any part of their wealth with the impoverished majority, and Guatemalans suffered terribly from the consequences of this greed (Meade 232; Keen and Haynes "Independence" 455).

Despite the 1996 Peace Accord and return to civilian rule, the government has not established a fully functioning society, as the country's weak and corrupt law enforcement bodies cannot contain the powerful organised crime gangs that are believed to be behind the continued attacks on human rights defenders (Meade 227). Almost four decades of military dictatorships, state-backed terrorism and oligarchic rule has left Guatemala politically divided, socially unstable, and with its economy in ruins. The people's goal of national development and social justice has remained elusive (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 459).

Honduras

In Ramos's 'Para elegir la muerte', the protagonist's friend, Dr Santana, chose to die as a missing delinquent three weeks earlier. Samuel, the central character, is not sure why Dr Santana chose to die as a rebel, when the man in his lifetime was tied to the patriarchy, the Church, and had very conservative views, including against abortion. Samuel's bewilderment about Santana's unusual behaviour contributes to the doubt and uncertainty in the story. The reference to Santana's rebellion raises the ghosts of political oppression in Honduras and other

Latin American countries where the disappearance of political and left-wing citizens is part of their historical struggles. Ramos is dissenting US involvement in Honduras during last century, both from a capitalistic, imperialistic, and hedonistic point of view. In particular, she is protesting against the Reagan administration's massive increase in militarisation and military spending in Honduras, and how they used the country for their own political plans in the neighbouring countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua. Furthermore, the failed return to civilian rule for Honduras from decades of military regimes in the early 1980s, distorted by US intervention, led to an increase in human rights violations, and reductions in political freedom and the free press. US foreign policies consistently ignored and subverted the interests of the Honduran people, and the Honduran governing class and elite allowed it to happen, also to their own advantage (Shepherd 123, 131, 138).

Since the early 1990s, Honduras is the only Latin American country to have its democratically elected President ousted by the military. The 2009 coup had the backing of the Honduran elites and US military training and aid (Williams and Disney 17). The weakness of the legal system was exposed when it failed to defend Honduran citizens: there was no impunity for human rights abuses, free speech was censored, and social mobilisation was blocked. The legal system, that is, judges, police, and public attorneys, not only did not react, but became an accomplice of the offenders (Salomón 58). Ramos's story is a protest against the assassinations of revolutionary and political figures in Latin America, as well as consumerism, colonialism and US imperialism.

Nicaragua

Pérez Cuadra's story is partly influenced by Nicaragua's troubled history over the past 125 years or so. 'Muñeca rota' reflects a broken country, and the escape of the central character reflects the flight or exile of some citizens to other countries. The story can be read as an

allegory of the civil war in Nicaragua, with the sisters representing the two sides: broken and rotten versus good, the Somozas and their supporters versus the Sandinistas, the Sandinistas versus the Contras, and more recently, Ortega versus his opponents. The protagonist is an allegory of Nicaragua, rotting and unable to move forward from the oppressive dictatorships which have ruined the country. Her desire to escape her body and flee is like the Nicaraguan people trying to flee from their oppressors and wanting a desirable change: maybe not pure capitalism but something more sustainable for all citizens. Similarly, the sisters' accustomisation to each other's appearance could be an allegory of some people being numb to the violence around them, like in some long-running wars.

'Muñeca rota' links to the Nicaraguan citizens' desire for a utopia and independence from Spain. In the story, the two places to which the protagonist escapes to in her dreams are the Corn Islands and Solentiname, which relate to the historical side of Nicaragua's colonial occupation. The Corn Islands were incorporated into Nicaragua in 1894 as they were previously British protectorates.³⁴ Nicaragua leased the Corn Islands to the USA in 1914 for a period of ninety-nine years but the lease was terminated in 1971. Solentiname is an island in Lake Nicaragua, a community founded on utopian ideals by Father Ernesto Cardenal in 1965. Cardenal's leadership also contributed to the islands' participation in the ongoing Nicaraguan Revolution and some residents fought for the Sandanistas (Sultan). For the protagonist in 'Muñeca rota', Solentiname is a reference to utopia and independence. In the end of the story, the main character escapes and transforms into an aquatic plant but is free from her abusers.

Continuing the theme of freedom from oppression, women have played a significant part in Nicaragua's guerrilla movements, as well as in communities, religious organisations, trade unions, and human rights organisations. Women comprised one-third of combatants, many

³⁴ The English name tends to be used more by Nicaraguans instead of the Spanish *Islas del Maíz*.

joined the army, others organised their own battalions, and a few became field commanders (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 468). However, women's rights, such as reproductive rights, job equality, and resources for children, have been largely ignored. Gioconda Belli reports that sexual exploitation and male dominance of women guerrillas undermined their acceptance as equals (Belli, qtd. in Meade 321). Daniel Ortega's disregard of women's rights (when re-elected as President in 2006) is a result of both his fundamentalist Christianity and his attempts to appease the right-wing. Mónica Baltodano, the only woman guerrilla commander of the Sandinistas, states that Ortega is too subservient to the Church,³⁵ the bankers, and the US Conservatives' agenda on reproductive rights, attributing this to his political insecurity (Meade 321). However, Keen and Haynes take an opposing view, stating that women gained appreciably during the revolution as they acquired paid employment (as men were absorbed into the war), and after the revolution, gaining equal pay for equal work, paid maternity leave, funded day care centres, and some legal protections. Literacy rates improved due to free education, but after a prolonged war and a decade of US intervention, the country's economy, social order, and its political alliances were fractured (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 468-469).

Ortega's regime has become increasingly oppressive over his tenure and with his wife Rosario Murillo as Vice President, they now rule with an iron fist and have taken a hard line on dissent. Ortega's regime violently suppressed democratic protests in 2018, which led to the imprisonment of political opponents, business leaders and members of civil society, including bishops and priests, and attacking freedom of expression from all sides, as Ortega tightened his grip on power (Linthicum). To justify his actions against the Church, Ortega alleges that "bishops were part of an attempted coup to drive him out of office in 2018 because they

³⁵ Ortega's relationship with the Catholic Church has deteriorated significantly since the 2018 protests.

supported anti-government demonstrations that his regime brutally suppressed” (Catholic News Agency). Ortega’s total control of the electoral tribunal eliminated the opposition parties, and he imprisoned seven opponents who tried to compete. Freedom of press has almost evaporated with Ortega attacking and muzzling the press on both sides (Linthicum). Ortega’s desire to align with Russia is also of concern to Nicaragua’s neighbouring countries, which feel threatened and are concerned that Nicaragua has brought in offensive, not defensive, weaponry (Baires).³⁶ In February 2023, Ortega made 222 citizens stateless, including authors Sergio Ramírez, Gioconda Belli, and members of the clergy, who subsequently obtained citizenship in other countries (Phillips). In 2024, Ortega and Murillo are tightening their grip on Nicaraguan society, as well as continuing their strong persecution and repression of the Catholic Church.

El Salvador

Claudia Hernández’s ‘Manual de hijo muerto’ is an allegory and denouncement of the many victims assassinated by the state in El Salvador, notably through the Salvadoran civil war and the death squads that slaughtered many civilians, but also the violent and unstable period afterwards, supposedly in a time of peace. The manual instructs parents not to seek out those who murdered their child, which is Hernández’s denouncement of the perpetrators of violence in her home country who were rarely brought to justice or received the penalties they deserved.

Hernández does not allude to the Salvadoran civil war in her stories *per se*, but to the “troubled and enduring effects in the paradoxically violent peace [period] of the 1990s” (Kokotovic 54), and more importantly, to the subsequent process of national reconciliation in which war crimes went unpunished and without accountability (Kokotovic 54-55). As

³⁶ This comment has been included as this part of the thesis has been written during the time of Russia’s war with the Ukraine from 2022.

Yansi Pérez notes, the violence in Hernández's stories comes from this brutal conflict and aftermath, but her approach and the memory of this war is unique, as she subverts the mourning through irony, sarcasm, and the absurd. She states that mourning is the mechanism which people use to confront the unbearable weight of their traumatic past, such as those who are left behind after a civil war (Pérez "Memory"). Mourning represents the total restitution of a loss, and one of the subversive mechanisms used by Hernández in 'Manual de hijo muerto' is irony and sarcasm "as an ethics that attempts to anesthetize" [sic] as the parents attempt to reconstruct the body of their child using an instruction manual (Pérez "Memory"). In this way, the mourning process is interrupted, stripped of its sensitivity and humanity, and offered to the reader in a grotesque and unemotional way. Pérez adds that in the typical mourning process, there is a process of acceptance of the loss: the acceptance of absence and the recognition that the loss is irreplaceable and cannot be exchanged (Pérez "Memory"). The inability for the full mourning process to occur is taken to the absurd level. This can be pivoted back to Salvadoran history and the civil war and the subsequent period of peace. As the perpetrators of atrocities were rarely brought to justice, Hernández asks: how do Salvadorans remember and commemorate their dead in a country that has not accounted or held those accountable for the dead, and how to mourn in a country that does not have the mechanisms to confront the past? (Pérez "Memory"). Ignacio Sarmiento states that in Salvadoran fiction, mourning may be understood as an unfinished process that challenges the official objectives of "healing the wounds of the past" and restoring the community. Hernández puts the dead to work and deploys unfinished mourning as a demand for justice for the crimes committed by the state (Sarmiento 395, 399).

In 1993, the UN-sponsored Truth Commission for El Salvador released its long-awaited report in which it claimed that the state, death squads and allied paramilitary groups were responsible for 85 percent of human rights violations committed during the war and 95 percent of the

killings, and that only five percent were attributable to leftist guerrillas.³⁷ The report also implicitly blamed the USA, noting that many atrocities were committed by death squad leaders who had been trained by the US military. However, shortly afterward, the Salvadoran government passed an amnesty law that gave war criminals immunity from prosecution (Moodie 5; Keen and Haynes "Independence" 477; Sarmiento 396). This amnesty was aimed to reunite the country, but with no prosecution of those who committed war crimes, I ask: how are people supposed to forget, or forgive? This is, in part, one of the strongest undercurrents of Hernández's story: the body in pieces arrives at the parents' home (the private space), with instructions to reassemble it for burial and to mourn, and, after the burial, to forget who was responsible and how it happened. The returned mutilated body exonerates the murderers from their actions. There is no longer a person (a complete body) who has ended his or her life at the perpetrators' hands or methods, and who can be wiped from their memories more easily. The parents must reconstruct the body of their child for burial, but it is a new body, that of a reconstructed being with no identity. The reconstruction of identity in this story is an allegory of the proposed reconstruction of El Salvador after the twelve-year civil war that ended in 1992 and left the country in pieces. However, in March 2022, the President of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, initiated a massive campaign against criminal gangs and gang-related violence after an especially violent weekend. Around 53,000 gang members were captured, doubling the previous number of incarcerations (Cruz and Speck), and thousands were transferred to the largest maximum-security prison in the world, El Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo.³⁸ Homicide rates decreased by seventy percent in 2023 compared with 2022. Bukele was re-elected as President in 2024.

³⁷ United States Peace Institute (1993): 'From Madness to Hope: The 12-year War in El Salvador: Report on the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador'. This is the English translation of the original: 'De la locura a la esperanza: La guerra de 12 años en El Salvador'. Further details in the Works Cited.

³⁸ See: "Thousands of Tattooed Inmates Pictured in El Salvador Mega-Prison."

Costa Rica

While Berrón's story, 'El eterno transparente', does not appear at first glance to tie in with Costa Rica's history, it can be read as an allegory of patriarchal culture, with the protagonist, Deyanira, becoming invisible to her family and work colleagues, and her husband mocking her body size, wanting his dinner, and so on. Clothing that does not fit can be read as a metaphor which implies that the protagonist no longer fits into the role imposed by society and is no longer needed or noticed by society and her family.

Costa Rica was not colonised by Spain in a large-scale occupation like the other Central American countries, due to its lack of mineral resources, lack of a native population,³⁹ heat and humidity, thick jungles, and diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. Settlers eventually moved to the cooler climate of the mountains and worked the land themselves in small holdings. Unlike its neighbours, Costa Rica has enjoyed relative political stability since it gained independence from Spain in 1821. In addition, the ruling elite did not need the military to maintain control but had a system of swapping the control of government between the Liberal and Conservative parties.⁴⁰ However, in 1948, this pattern was stopped by José Figueres Ferrer, who took control with the support of a rebel army in a short-lived civil war. This governing body initiated economic and social reforms that have continued through to this century, retaining the peace and prosperity for Costa Rica. The most important of these was the abolition of the army, which removed any incentives for war and the accumulation of weapons which consumed the minds of militaries of other Latin American nations. The banking system was nationalised, women obtained voting rights, and the governing body

³⁹ The arrival of the Spanish brought European disease which wiped out many of the small native tribes. Others were killed in the small wars with the Spanish.

⁴⁰ There were a few military dictatorships in the late nineteenth century.

established methods for the democratic transference of power between the political parties, with elections being held every four years (Meade 207, 209).

Costa Rica has a strong focus on education and has high literacy rates, comparable to the USA and Cuba, and has a well-managed national health service. The extent of income inequality has not been as high as in other Latin American nations, contributing to the nation's stability, as well as the absence of the military (Meade 209-210). However, in the early 2010s, there was high unemployment, inequality, and corruption, which led to the election of the left-leaning Citizen's Action Party, rather than one of the two traditional parties. Corruption is still an issue for the country (Fuchs).

Costa Rica invests heavily in and promotes its diverse tropical fauna and flora and extensive wildlife reserves internationally, which are now major tourism drawcards.

Panama

Lewis's story 'Mujer hecha pedazos' is focussed on the main character's desire for self-control and self-determination. The protagonist's battle to be independent can be read as an allegory of Panama's battle for self-governance of its own territory after the Canal agreement was struck with the USA.

Panama's history is strongly tied to the Canal. While it had been mooted for centuries, the gold rush in California (1848-1855) created the need for a shorter route from the US west coast to the Atlantic east coast, rather than go around the Tierra del Fuego or transport goods across land (Meade 122; Keen and Haynes "Independence" 226).⁴¹ Panama obtained official independence from Colombia in 1903 and the new Panamanian government signed a treaty with the USA for it to have perpetual rights to the control of the Canal Zone for US\$40 million

⁴¹ In the sixteenth century, King Phillip II of Spain had previously dismissed the idea of a canal.

(Meade 124).⁴² However, the USA converted Panama into a sovereign nation, and cut it in half with the US-controlled Canal Zone and the waterway (Fuentes 325). The trans-oceanic transport route through the Canal Zone opened in 1914 and was controlled by the USA until the 1970s, when the Carter administration renegotiated the canal treaty with President Torrijos in which the canal would be jointly managed from 1979, and US bases dismantled. Torrijos agreed to this and to move towards a democratic government in order to obtain US support for the treaty, but he died in a plane crash in 1981. Aristedes Royo, the then Minister for Education, succeeded him for a few years, but after this, the country was dominated by military chiefs, including General Manuel Antonio Noriega, a former CIA informant. In April 1988, the USA imposed sanctions on Panama to force the de facto President Noriega to resign, which did not work, and only led to a deterioration in the economy (Conniff and Bigler, 29, 37; Keen and Haynes "Independence" 601). The USA invaded Panama in 1989 and seized Noriega on drug charges, which paralysed the economy.

Panama had a rough road towards democracy after the 1989 invasion, as promised aid from the USA did not eventuate. However, guaranteed canal payments and foreign corporations and capital helped the economy to recover. The turnover of the Canal to Panama on the last day of the twentieth century created a new chapter in their history (Conniff and Bigler 30). Relations with the USA improved, especially after September 2001 when Panama negotiated a new security agreement, counter-narcotics operations, and collaboration on shipping and border protection (Conniff and Bigler 129). A free-trade agreement was reached between the two countries in 2011. Despite improved economic conditions, corruption was still rife in the government and the country was branded as a grey-listed tax haven. Nevertheless, the Canal management restructured its tolls and relations with the shipping industry, achieved economic

⁴² The Canal Zone was a 16-kilometre strip around the canal, 8 kilometres either side of the canal. It was an unincorporated territory of the USA inside Panama from 1903 until 1979, when it was incorporated back into Panama.

savings and efficiency gains, and sought ways to integrate itself more with the national economy. In 2014, the Varela government addressed corruption issues from previous governments, the issue of the Panama Papers,⁴³ saw the completion of the Canal expansion and completed unfinished public works (Conniff and Bigler 129-131).

Panama has been working with the United Nations and promotes itself as a bio-diverse country and a tropical haven. Its citizens are now some of the richest in Latin America, although inequalities still exist. The Panamanian government sought international assistance to improve the transparency of its financial industry. While its tax-haven status was removed in 2017, corruption, criminal gangs and slow development remain challenges to Panama (Conniff and Bigler 131).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the historical, political, social, and cultural factors in each author's home country have played a large part in the formation of their stories. For some authors, such as Llana and Díaz Llanillo, these themes are more subtle, as the authors were writing under strict censorship controls. In contrast, other authors have openly used political and historical themes or backgrounds to their stories, such as Hernández's 'Manual de hijo muerto', which is a brutal account of the assassinations in El Salvador. Similarly, Ramos's story protests the assassinations of political figures but in a more light-hearted way, while Mildred Hernández's 'Paranoica city' may be referring to the violence in Guatemala. One strong societal theme is the invisibility of women, which appears in Berron's 'El eterno transparente', Dávila's

⁴³ In 2016, the 'Panama Papers' were leaked documents from Mossack Fonseca, Panama's fourth largest offshore law firm. The files revealed that prominent politicians and their families and associates from around the world had hidden billions in assets in tax havens created by Mossack Fonseca, but mainly in other countries. Panama and its banks were only marginally involved, but "the alliterative tag sounded good on the evening news" (Conniff and Bigler 298-299).

‘El huésped’, and Ferré’s ‘La muñeca menor’, linking it to machismo and the patriarchy, both of which are evident in almost all my chosen stories. There are strong themes of colonialism and/or imperialism in the stories by Ferré, Carrington, and Ramos, and all stories have revolution as a theme in some form. As noted before, these authors wanted to rebel against the forces that were oppressing the people of their countries and have used the Fantastic to voice their protests.

Chapter Five: The Corporeal Body

“En las tardes de calor me convierto en cocodrilo.”

Jacinta Escudos, ‘Yo, cocodrilo’

“El cuerpo de la mujer tiene sus miedos muy particulares.”

Mariana Enríquez

The Corporeal Body and the Fantastic

The Fantastic, being a “literature of subversion” as Rosemary Jackson calls it (180), has been employed by the authors in this study to break down the body (the centre of power), take it apart or eliminate it. Apart from introducing various motifs, from ghosts to transgressive impulses such as cannibalism, and abnormal psychological states such as paranoia and insanity, the Fantastic also subverts the gender differences of male and female, as well as animals, minerals, and vegetables, which are blurred in the attempt to smash normal perceptions of the way we see things (Jackson 48-49).

As women’s bodies have been controlled by others for millennia, women authors are now using narratives that centre on the body to protest against this control, rebel against those who try to impose control on them, and to take control of their own bodies and their own lives. This subversion is often meant to shock the reader, or at least make them feel uneasy, and the authors are using these narratives to highlight the issues facing them or the other women in their countries, and to make these issues and their suffering known to the reading public in other countries.

Fragmentation of the corporeal body

“For the exile[d] writer, language is the means by which the connection with a fragmented culture can be maintained.”

Amy Kamisky, about Cristina Peri Rossi and Luisa Valenzuela, authors of the Fantastic (42-43).

Perhaps one of the most famous modern representations of a physically broken body is Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's self-portrait 'La columna rota' (1944). In addition to suffering pain caused by polio, Kahlo suffered near-fatal injuries in a vehicle accident in 1925, after which she wore a plaster corset as part of her recovery. Confined to bed to recover, Kahlo worked from her bed, painting not only her family and friends, but also herself, using a mirror placed by her bed. Her surrealist paintings of her isolation, suffering and pain are internationally famous. The impact of her illness and injuries allowed Kahlo to explore her ideas of feminism and womanhood and use her medical conditions to make sense of her life and build her career as an artist (Fulleylove). She tried to recreate and hide her body defects by wearing trousers and eventually long native skirts to hide her deformed right leg. By doing this, she transformed herself into a unique, brightly decorated, and flamboyant artist (Ankori 46). At her first exhibition in New York City, when looking at the many skirts she painted in her self-portraits, Kahlo was reported to have said: "I must have full skirts and long, now that my sick leg is so ugly" (Fulleylove). Her right foot and leg eventually caught gangrene and were amputated in 1953, a year before her death (Ankori 157). This reference to a sick leg (and a smell emitting from the leg, but not gangrene as in Kahlo's case) is the focal point of the fragmented body in Ferré's 'La muñeca menor', which is discussed in this chapter.

In Fantastic literature, the author's narrative may focus on the hands, eyes or other body parts reducing the world of the protagonist(s) for the prospective reader, drawing the focus to small areas and intensifying the dramatic effects which may (or may not) follow. In this way, the reader becomes more involved in the story. For example, in Ferré's 'La muñeca menor'

mentioned above, the reader focuses on the aunt's leg, as well as how the aunt skilfully makes dolls by hand, while in Díaz Llanillo's 'El vendedor de cabezas', the reader focuses on the types of heads being purchased. In Claudia Hernández's 'Manual de hijo muerto' (see Chapter 6), the reader becomes more involved in the story as the parents sew the body of their child together. In another of Hernández's stories, 'Molestias de tener un rinoceronte' (2007), which was not included in the final selection, the reader's focus is drawn to the young man's missing arm through Hernández's skilful narrative. She mentions the lack of an arm eleven times in the story of just over two pages, while the attention of the people of the village is directed to the young rhinoceros, which is small and playful, like a puppy.⁴⁴

The fragmented body, which underlies many of the Fantastic stories analysed in this thesis, is often a metaphor representing the authors' towns, cities, and countries, which have become fragmented through their histories of colonialism, revolutions, wars, dictatorships, genocide (see Chapter 4), or other extreme weather events such as hurricanes and earthquakes. Their daily life and their communities became fragmented and unable to function normally, which frequently resulted in the creation of dysfunctional societies of oppression, elitism, and wide income inequality. Fragmentation is important to the Fantastic because it reflects the fragmented societies its authors have lived or live in. There is also physical transformation in many Fantastic narratives, that is, changing appearances, which reflects transformation of the protagonists' inner selves, but can also be read as an allegory of a constantly changing society.

Fragmentation and metamorphosis are employed by authors to convey something, often a change of some kind, with positive or negative results. These changes may be changes in society, human behaviour, or the appearance of the person or other life form.

⁴⁴ See Appendix C for this list and where to find the story.

The fragmentation in the first story, 'El vendedor de cabezas', relates to a shop that sells heads to change or improve a person's appearance and identity, which reflects the Cubans' struggle to find a national identity. In the second story, 'La muñeca menor', the fragmentation relates to the protagonist's leg which has been occupied by river shrimps, which results in her metamorphosis later in the story. In the third story, 'Yo, cocodrilo', a young woman metamorphosises into an animal to escape a cultural ritual of her village, while in the final story, 'Muñeca rota', the young protagonist uses her willpower to escape her abusers and metamorphosise into another living being.

'El vendedor de cabezas'

Díaz Llanillo's 'El vendedor de cabezas' deploys the theme of the fragmented body in a humorous and satirical way. The head trader sells new heads of any style, shape, hair colour, and so on, to suit the buyer's desires. The story centres around a woman, Elvira, who enters the store to view the heads and befriends the head trader who, contrary to his customers, has not changed his own appearance with a new head and he is satisfied with the one he has. The woman is keen to coax him into changing his appearance. In this story, one identity is exchanged for another, but poses the question: does our identity, that is, what is inside of us, really change? If we change our identity, by putting on a new head or our external appearance, does our 'old self' disappear?

The subtle humour in the story commences with the title. Díaz Llanillo has written this story with an omniscient narrator inviting the reader to enter the head seller's store in an unnamed town and country, but there is a warning sign which reads: "Se prohíbe el acceso a los menores" (Díaz Llanillo 499), and the humour continues. The reader is immediately drawn in (or invited to participate in) the story from the invitation, but also from the strange and restrictive sign, making the reader curious to find out what is inside. Descriptions of the types of heads on

display are then provided, including those with different hair lengths, eye and skin colours, and facial shapes (advertising the suitability of faces, such as with a strong chin for managers and boxers). The Fantastic has crept into the story and the reader accepts that the store does indeed sell heads. In Alazraki's definition of neo-Fantastic, there is no 'shock value' like in Gothic stories — the reader expresses no horror about a store which sells heads, nor does the reader question how the buyer changes the head and retains the 'old' head. There is no mention of the disposal of heads.

The head seller's heads do not need to be compatible with the appearance of the buyer; a person with pale skin is free to choose a head with dark skin tones, and vice versa. The change in heads can also influence the buyer's behaviour: a timid person could use a head that makes him or her appear stern, eliciting greater respect from others.⁴⁵ Heads can be made to order, for a higher price, and the existing head can be removed, and the new one installed for a modest sum.

Elvira enters the store and asks about the sale conditions and products on offer. She carefully notes the head seller's appearance, which, the reader learns, is not handsome. The friendship between Elvira and the head seller grows stronger over the following months. Despite Elvira's requests, the head seller will not change his head as he uses his imagination to create them by observing those around him, noticing their desires, frustrations, needs and fantasies. At this point, Elvira asks him to change his head for one she likes, which he does, after closing the store. Elvira and the head seller become lovers, and after some time together, Elvira slips out

⁴⁵ The descriptions of the heads may be linked to physiognomy, that is, discerning a person's character from their facial features or body parts. Scientists in the nineteenth century used physiognomy to prove their theories that criminals and people of different races or cultures were racially inferior in character, morals, and intelligence. Physiognomy is still linked to racism, as current proponents associate criminality and aggression to non-white facial features (DeMello 108-109).

one night to the shop and finds his original head. She yearns for this man of whom she became so fond, collects the head, and returns to the room where the head seller lies sleeping.

The key theme in Díaz Llanillo's tale is identity, and more specifically, that human desire to change their identity (and appearance) to be something that they are not: more beautiful, more handsome, belonging to a different ethnic group, or of different personality traits. These identity changes are expected to bring positive outcomes not only to the person changing her or his head, but also to family members, the workplace, and social circles: perhaps they may attract a new suitor or greater respect from students or clients.

Abril Trigo defines identity as both feeling apart from others and being part of others. She notes that it is the uncertain result of the process of socialisation, which begins with the mirror stage theory of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) (Trigo 202). In 1936, Lacan presented a paper on what he called the mirror stage of human development as he wondered how children developed their relationship to their bodies, given that they are born in an immature state. His theory states that children, between the ages of six months and eighteen months, identify with their image in the mirror. Instead of only seeing parts of himself or herself, that is, the body in 'bits and pieces' such as hands or feet, the infant can see the complete whole self in the mirror. The infant will stand up (assisted by an adult if very young) to view his or her full form, so that the infant sees how he or she will become as an adult. The infant's jubilation at this realisation is tied to the time-based logic that the infant appears to be "*already* what he or she will *only later become*" (Gallop 120; author's emphasis). Trigo adds that the child elaborates his or her own corporeal image and emotions toward the Other (Trigo 202). The mirror is a form of temporary dislocation of self-identity. If the mirror is a reflection of the self, then how do we see ourselves? How does society see us? Do we move outside of ourselves and put on a mask to hide our true selves in the gaze of others?

Shadi Bartsch states that the mirror “encourages its viewer to self-congratulation rather than self-correction” (185), and that it provides a distorted image of the viewer, often for vanity or erotic purposes rather than for self-improvement (Bartsch 184-185). The link with hidden selves, the masked self, is generated from the gaze of the other which stimulates the emergence of an ethically untrue self. The truth lies underneath the mask. The heads in Díaz Llanillo’s story are a mask and a change of identity, either for a short term (amusement) or long term (permanent change) to be something we are not but want to become. Without doubt, the buyer would look at themselves in a mirror when trying out a head for self-approval, but this is not mentioned. As noted above, the head seller noticed people’s desires, frustrations, needs, and fantasies, and created the heads to allow his clients to change their identity, and profit from their insecurities. The heads can also be used to *hide* one’s identity, to hide from view how one appears to the gaze of others.

Women have been continually pressured to enhance their youth and beauty, which is indicative of fertility; the young, pre-menopausal body is considered to be the ‘normal’ woman’s body (DeMello 46). Following the increase in print and visual mass media over the past sixty years, the cosmetics and anti-aging industries are multi-billion-dollar industries. In fact, in 2020, it was reported that Latin American women in the USA spent 30 percent more on cosmetics than their peers, in part due to the size and youth of this group. While some of these young women use bright cosmetics as an act of self-expression, others are becoming liberated and feeling happy with their looks (Collins),⁴⁶ like the head trader. A person’s bodily appearance is key to their identity (Dumas 380), and a person’s worth is often tied to their appearance and age (specifically, youth); being ugly, obese, or merely plain or old is often equated with being unlovable or unwanted. Body appearance issues or lack of value often intensify as people age

⁴⁶ See: Collins, Allison. "The Latinx Beauty Shopper Outspends Peers by Nearly 30 Percent." *Women's Wear Daily*, Beauty Inc website.

and experience the onset of wrinkles, sagging skin, increased weight, change in body shape, thinning hair or loss of hair, and so on, as contemporary society places high importance on youth and beauty. Women are judged more harshly as they age, and many middle-aged women find that their personal identity has been ‘betrayed’ by their visible signs of ageing. In 1972, Susan Sontag exposed the double standard of ageing in men and women, noting that men are allowed to age without scrutiny while women are not (Sontag; Dumas, 380). Women suffer the most due to the almost impossible standards enforced by the beauty and youth culture of contemporary Western society, even more so with magazines and modern social media. Nelly Arcan used the expression ‘Burqa of Flesh’ as a metaphor to criticise women’s fear of revealing their ‘true self’ (face and body) behind an artificial covering of cosmetic procedures (Arcan, qtd. in Dumas 381).

In Díaz Llanillo’s story, the head seller shows some of the normal signs of ageing for a male: thinning hairline, thin lips, and glasses with thick lenses. He does not want to change his appearance, perhaps fearing a change in or even a loss of his identity, a consequence confirmed by Elvira’s yearning for his original head some time after he is finally persuaded to wear a new one. Elvira’s continued persistence for him to change his head to a more handsome one has subtle irony: it is almost a role-reversal for the male/female dichotomy of the standards and societal pressures of appearance and ageing. There are connections between the ageing process and the consumer capitalist culture Díaz Llanillo may be highlighting these links. The body, particularly the face, reflects the person’s inner character, and therefore, the self (Featherstone 193).

Altering one’s appearance may result in changing or losing one’s identity. Extreme oppression and torture can also lead to a loss of identity and of the sense of self caused by stress, and traumatic effects (Scarry 35). Loss of identity is also important in Latin American history and

culture as many people were taken by military forces and their bodies never recovered, such as in Argentina in the ‘dirty war’, in Chile during the reign of General Pinochet, and also by paramilitaries and drug cartels in other countries such as México (*los desaparecidos*). In addition, loss of identity can be linked to colonisation, which has determined the subjugation of the indigenous peoples in the Caribbean and other parts of Latin America in the initial conquests by the Spanish.⁴⁷

By playing with the idea of identity, Díaz Llanillo shows that contemporary Cuban society is made up of many cultures and identities, not just one culture originally from European (see Chapter 4). However, the theme of identity could be more closely linked to Cuba’s long history of colonialism and trade. Until the mid-eighteenth century, Cuba was a key trading port between Europe and Latin America, particularly for the Spanish treasure fleet, but also for the rest of Latin America. However, it was a sparsely populated country and somewhat neglected by Spain, due to its lack of natural resources and indigenous people to exploit, until the sugar boom of the eighteenth century. Wars in the nineteenth century decimated the creole ruling class and bankrupted Spanish interests, while US entrepreneurs filled the vacuum (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 239-243). However, racial segregation was not eliminated, even after emancipation, and white supremacists ruled the island. This discrimination created two Cubas – one with long Spanish cultural traditions such as Catholicism, and the other “centred around African santería (a syncretic popular religion) and ñañigos (secret mutual aid societies)” (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 244). Even though Spain ceded Cuba to the USA in the war of 1898, Cuba was never free from either country to create its own identity, until the Revolution of 1959 (and still the USA continues to occupy Guantanamo Bay). As noted in

⁴⁷ This will be expanded later in this chapter.

Chapter 4, Cuba and other Central American and Caribbean countries are still struggling with their own national identities.

Loss of identity can be a consequence of the dehumanising effects of industrialisation, urbanisation, modernisation, and technology. Many authors have described these dehumanising effects, which lead to loss of identity and self-worth, in their Fantastic stories, often with biting satire against their negative impacts (including loss of employment as machines take over) and against capitalism, imperialism and consumerism. In Alicia Yáñez Cossío's satirical short story 'IWM1000' (1975), teachers have been replaced with a machine, the IWM1000, which contains all human knowledge. The people become so dependent on the machine, they begin to lose their identity and memories of how to do things on their own, such as how to read and write. When they decide to try to live without the machine, they find that they cannot do so. They go back through history to learn the symbols of how to write. Even though this story was written almost fifty years ago, it reflects today's technology-reliant societies. We are now so dependent on these machines, computers, mobile phones, and so on, that these devices may make us lose our identities.

Díaz Llanillo's story is the only one in this thesis which has a moral, teaching her readers to be happy with what they have. The key points of this story are the critique of consumerism and capitalism which is expressed through the role of transactions in the Fantastic.^{48,49} Consumer culture has highlighted the commercialised body as central to people's self-identity. This shift occurred simultaneously with the change in structure in the advanced capitalist countries in the

⁴⁸ Transactions, that is, the buying, selling, an exchange of goods, or a trade, are often a theme in Fantastic stories. In Díaz Llanillo's story, it is the trading of heads.

⁴⁹ These two subjects are linked: while consumption is the engine of economies and the major indicator of growth (Trigo 200), consumerism is the high level of consumption or the public desiring 'wants' rather than 'needs'. Consumer capitalism is more deeply capitalistic than free-market capitalism, as it is the capitalist companies' manipulation and exploitation of these desires ('wants') for generating profits and the continual production of novelty and new images to stimulate desire. However, while these new products may be marketed as exotic, they are not allowed to subvert the existing representations of beauty or success (Bordo 25).

second half of the twentieth century. The structure of society changed from hard work coupled with frugal consumption, to hard work and hedonistic consumption, with advertising that promoted appearance (Shilling 2). Díaz Llanillo lived her entire life in Cuba, and although she wrote this story ten years after the USSR dissolved (the former USSR being an important source of trade for resource-poor Cuba), the impacts of colonialism, consumerism, and fifty years of socialism are reflected subtly in her humorous story.

‘La muñeca menor’

‘La muñeca menor’ by Rosario Ferré utilises the themes of body fragmentation and transformation. The central character in the story is the unnamed aunt, who lives with her family on their large sugar cane plantation in Puerto Rico. The other protagonists are also unnamed: the youngest niece, the young doctor, and his father, also a doctor. While there is no direct mention of the time setting, it would appear to be around the turn of or during the early twentieth century, as the family’s wealth is diminishing due to US imperialism.

The fragmentation relates to the *invasion* of the aunt’s body by river shrimps after a swim in the river when she was a young and beautiful woman. There is no explanation for why the river shrimps could not be removed from the aunt’s leg, but the reader accepts this and continues to read. The aunt subsequently confines herself to the home due to her shame of being seen in society with a swollen, infected, and almost useless leg, which oozes liquid that smells of sweetsop (also known as custard apple fruit).⁵⁰ The once-beautiful aunt decides not to marry and have children, as she feels undesirable due to her lack of mobility and her perceived loss of attractiveness, indicating that a woman’s self-worth and desirability is linked to the masculine desire for female beauty, which in turn, is linked to social and economic power (Birmingham Pokorny 77). She has been “castrated sexually” and removed from the public

⁵⁰ See the analysis of ‘La debutante’ in Chapter 7 for more information about the sense of smell.

space – the male space – to the female space, the private space inside the home (Román Capeles 59). Instead, she devotes her life to her nine nieces and creates dolls for them, that is, the aunt is creating bodies.⁵¹

The aunt's injured leg has impaired her mobility, and she suffers from the discomfort, pain, and shame, and she shuts herself away from the outside world. Lennard Davis notes that disability theory starts with the construction of normalcy, which he argues creates the "problem" of a disabled person (Davis 1). DeMello agrees that disability is partially a social construct; if a body that has two functioning arms and legs is considered normal, then anything outside of that is categorised as disabled. People who become disabled not only suffer physically, but also mentally, from an extreme decline in their self-esteem and their social status, often becoming 'invisible' to society, which explains the aunt's behaviour. Social scientists use the term "embattled identity" for this condition, as the person is now dominated by their current physical ailments rather than their previous social attributes. DeMello states that "the newly disabled person experiences not only an altered body, but an altered consciousness as well, resulting in a damaged self" (29). Some able-bodied people believe that as people with disabilities depart from the ideal, they become ugly and repulsive. As women are expected to be sexually attractive, any woman with a body that falls short of the norms is a heavy burden; disability can de-feminise them (DeMello 28-30). DeMello notes that one reason that disabled people are so stigmatised (by the able-bodied), is that they remind them of their own vulnerability. At some point in the future, if we live long enough, we will be disabled in some way, whether it be reduced or loss of vision, hearing, mobility, or something else (DeMello 30).

⁵¹ It is worth mentioning that many cultures use and have used dolls, such as Russian Matryoshka dolls, Guatemalan worry dolls (*muñecas quitapenas*), *muñecas limé* from the Dominican Republic, Mexican María dolls, and voodoo dolls. An analysis of dolls in Latin American and other cultures would warrant further investigation.

The aunt's body becomes the site of this physical and social immobility, which becomes more apparent as the story progresses. Her rocking chair also develops into the symbol of her immobility, from which, in the end, she does not move; the irony being that the chair moves (rocks), but the aunt does not. At the same time, the aunt has become the Other — the one different from 'I' or 'us', due to her disability — and is at the service of the family. Interestingly and deliberately, there is no mention of the nieces' parents: they are absent from this story. The family revolves around the aunt, especially when she becomes immobile, and the nieces undertake her errands. The aunt is the family matriarch and the surrogate mother to the nieces. She is a constant reminder of what the family had been, as well as shielding them from the family's slow decline from the wealth that they once possessed. By making the aunt the centre of the family, Ferré has connected her story to Taino myths.⁵² The Taino people were the indigenous people of the Caribbean islands when Columbus arrived in 1492. They lived in Cuba, Jamaica and the Bahamas, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands (Oliver 8). Zee explains that Taino women had more control over their society than women of European descent at the turn of or the early twentieth century, when this story is most likely set. Taino society was matriarchal, with most community activities, including ceremonies and arts, controlled and/or conducted by women, including the determination of the line of succession (Zee "Rosario" 103).

Initially, the aunt created the dolls for the girls to play with, but as time progressed, the aunt refined her skills, and created dolls in their exact likenesses each year for each niece as they grew up, including exact measurements of their height. When the aunt became obsessed with making a new doll, the family would be required to go to the town to purchase the wares, so that she could collate and assemble the various body parts of the dolls. Sometimes the aunt

⁵² While there is no explicit mention of the aunt's ethnicity, which is most likely to be of European descent, her central role in the family evokes Taino myths and the matriarchal society.

would go to the dolls' room and talk and cuddle the dolls, connecting with her past and the child's past, creating life and an identity for the doll and giving life to herself. In so doing, the aunt creates the daughters that she does not have. The dolls, made to represent the rite of passage of girls to women, also symbolise what is expected of them: beauty, delicacy, purity, and lifelessness, certainly no life or mind of their own, and confinement to the home, as dictated by society and the patriarchy (Sloan 39), and the aunt is aware of this fate for her nieces. Until recently, girls were generally expected to play with dolls, and then to become the doll's replica when they grew up, that is, beautiful, adorning the home, subservient, and silent (Velázquez 6).

Ferré's detailed description of the crafting of each doll can be viewed as constructing a body: the aunt creates the dolls, piece by piece, and the 'birth' of a new doll creates excitement in the family, making the aunt part of the reproductive cycle. The dolls are fabricated by increasingly precious materials and fabrics over the passage of time, which may reflect the loss of social status and wealth by the family and the aunt trying to compensate for this loss. The aunt makes a wax mask of the child's face and covers it with plaster on both sides "como una cara viva dentro de dos caras muertas" (Ferré 4), but also recreates both a living face crystallised by time and a happy memory for herself. The construction of the face and head is extremely skilful, using dried gourd to fill in the head, with "infinita paciencia" (Ferré 4), and this filling could be similar to a human brain. The colour of the porcelain hands is whiter than the face, which indicates a wealthy woman (one who does not work in the fields), but also the class difference between the European immigrants and the Creoles of Latin America and the Caribbean and refers to the preference of whiter skin over Creole skin. The only part of the dolls not made by the aunt are the glass eyeballs, which she imports from Europe. She soaks these eyeballs in the stream for days so that they can learn the constant movement of the river shrimps' antennae in the river. This ritual process represents the link with the aunt's past and the infusion, in part

or in whole, of the aunt's identity and life into the doll and the source of her reproductive powers; her body being inhabited forever by the river shrimps (Zee "Rosario" 104).

The river shrimps in the aunt's leg are also a metaphor of the 'new bourgeoisie' that fed itself on the old rural aristocracy in Puerto Rico, as well as representing the privileged position of men in Puerto Rican society, at the expense of women (Urrea 289). The aunt's handiwork is also a reminder to the nieces of the expectation that they will be lifeless dolls, exploited by their husbands, as the aunt was exploited by the doctors, and which occurs to the youngest niece in the end of the story. It also reflects the history of the patriarchy and colonial dominance in Puerto Rican society, in which women are expected to reinforce traditional and ideological roles in a male-dominated system, notably from the aunt's initial resignation of the river shrimp in her leg and her self-imposed 'unworthiness' to be part of society (Birmingham Pokorny 76-77).

We learn that the aunt's ailment could have been fixed when she was initially examined as a young woman. The doctor's son examines the aunt and remarks to his father (the original doctor), in front of the aunt, that the elder doctor could have cured her from the start. The elder doctor replies that he wants him to see what had funded the young man's education for the past twenty years. This is the turning point of the story as the aunt's maternal instinct and self-commiseration ruptures, and she seeks justice and revenge. She realises that the river shrimp could have been removed from her leg years earlier; she could have married and taken up her rightful place in society. She uses the youngest niece as an unknowing tool for her punishment on the doctors. The wedding doll for the niece is filled with honey, which the aunt does with all the wedding dolls, but she also adds the full set of the niece's baby teeth in its half-open smile, making it more life-like,⁵³ as well as the aunt's diamond earrings inside the

⁵³ The story did not indicate whether the aunt inserted baby teeth in the dolls for the other nieces.

eye pupils. When she gives it to the niece and her husband on their wedding day, she kisses the niece and says: “Aquí tienes tu Pascua de Resurrección” (Ferré 5). The explanation of this comment is made clearer at the end of the story. While the doctor makes the niece sit motionless on the balcony (just like the doll that sits motionless on the piano) to show the town that he has married into the old sugar cane aristocracy, he greedily prizes out the diamond earrings from the doll’s eyes and pawns them for a fancy gold watch.

The niece realises that her husband has no soul, and she disposes of the doll, but we do not learn what she did with it. She has also lost her identity as she is now just a trophy (or doll) for her husband to flaunt to the town. Her physical and emotional well-being has been manipulated, like her aunt’s was with the young doctor’s father (Zee “Rosario” 105). The husband comes seeking the doll as he has sold the porcelain hands and face for a good sum of money to the village women, believing that it will increase his standing in society as he considered that it looked like St Veronica in the Lent procession. However, the niece informs him that a swarm of ants are devouring the doll’s body underground as they found the honey inside it. The doctor digs up the garden that night but can find no trace of the doll or the pieces he desperately wants to sell.

While the actual doll disappears as it is eaten by ants, the niece slowly transforms into the doll. She sits on the balcony and is immobile, while she remains inwardly resentful. However, at the same time, she must remain beautiful, as she is evaluated by the male gaze, and she is viewed as the prize of the doctor. The niece transforms into the conforming, obedient, patriarchal image of the woman confined to the home.⁵⁴ The niece in ‘La muñeca menor’ is an allegory of upper-class women who are ‘sugar (honey) and spice and all things nice’, but

⁵⁴ The doll/double appeared in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman* (1885) and Ira Levin’s *The Stepford Wives* (1972), or the ‘automaton’ described by Hélène Cixous: “Women have no choice other than to be decapitated, and in any case the moral is that they don’t actually lose their heads by the sword, they only keep condition that they lose them - lose them, that is, to complete silence, into automatons” (Cixous and Kuhn 42-43).

who are not mobile outside of the home and are inwardly resentful, as the niece becomes in the story (Franco “Heroines” 112). However, the niece becomes more immobile, with a downward gaze exactly like the doll on the piano and dressed the same: she starts to metamorphosise into the doll or become the double of the doll. In addition, while the husband ages, the niece does not; with her doll-like porcelain skin, she is eternally the beautiful, young trophy wife of the husband, so desired by men.

In the conclusion of the story, the aunt, the niece, and the doll are all metamorphosised into one body and they are all alive (Urrea 290). This body of the aunt/niece/doll subsequently fragments, as the river shrimps merge from the empty eye sockets. The aunt takes her final revenge on the doctors as she becomes a raging monster.⁵⁵ It is worthwhile noting that after the aunt gives the doll to the youngest niece, the aunt disappears from the story until this final paragraph. The niece/doll is no longer the prized, immobile beauty on the balcony, but a monster, the Other, and this allows her to break free from the gender and colonial impositions inflicted on her by her husband and society (Fraser 27). This is the Resurrection to which the aunt alluded when she gave the niece the doll: the niece frees herself from the chains of society and her husband’s dominance and obtains her own identity. The river shrimps sprouting out of the eyes of the doll are a metaphor of men who deprive women of their eyes. Men want to “rob women of the look that is power and reduce their knowledge to the instinctual” (Franco “Heroines” 112). These women are left uneducated and blind in society when eyes (vision) are vitally important to obtain knowledge. In addition, they are also robbed of their identity as the eyes are the mirror of one’s soul. In this way, men (and society) shut women out from positive knowledge and reduce women to instinctual forms, thrust back to nature, to motherhood and childbearing, forced to be like nature as they are scrutinised by the male gaze.

⁵⁵ In an interview, author of the *Fantastic/the unusual* Gemma Solsona Asensio stated that the complete and perfect beauty of dolls is both sinister and monstrous: it is both artificial and not natural (Solsona Asensio).

However, the angry river shrimps are the other side of nature (Franco "Heroines" 112): they have now become the means of counterattack and resistance, as they emerge from the eyes, symbolising the vision that women have been denied. The river shrimps are associated with the aunt throughout the story, and now the aunt takes her revenge on the young doctor and his father for failing to cure her, for exploiting her condition for financial gain (which could symbolise the exploitation of women) and for taking advantage of and removing liberties from her niece. The river shrimps are also a combination of metaphors: female sensuality and masculine aggression in the form of penetration; aristocratic decadence, the new bourgeoisie, and personal and national resistance (Urrea 290). These river shrimps are the progeny of the original river shrimp in the aunt's leg, linking back to the reproduction by the aunt of the dolls, as well as to indigenous reproductive mythology of the Yanomami people of the Amazon. The myth of 'The man with the impregnated calf' is about the two men who created the world. One impregnated the foot of the other, which made this man's calf swell up, and the man gave birth to a baby girl. The girl grew up quickly and the man took her for his wife. The couple had a baby and gave the baby to the other man, which is how the Yanomami proliferated. Zee notes the strong similarities between the two stories, as the river shrimp lodges itself in the leg of the aunt, and in the end, the descendants of the original river shrimp emerge from the doll's eyes ("Rosario" 104-105). She further adds that ancient myths equated women with nature (Mother Nature) and in this story, with nature's help, the river shrimp, Ferré's women gain control over their lives and bodies.

In 'La muñeca menor', Ferré has included issues of gender, race, and class which were rarely raised in previous Puerto Rican narratives (González 167, 169). Ferré was passionate about her country and its citizens, and, through her writing, critical of Puerto Ricans not having their own identity. In addition to the double discussed above — the niece and the doll — there is another double in 'La muñeca menor': the Puerto Rican people, subjugated by economic and

cultural colonialism and imperialism, but also capable of resisting these impositions and regain control (Urrea 290; Zee “Rosario” 103, 105). These were Ferré’s greatest topics of interest and the causes that she pursued for most of her life: women and the Puerto Rican people.

Metamorphosis and transformation

The words metamorphosis and transformation are often used interchangeably and deal with the concept of change through physical and mental growth, and evolution, such as the metamorphosis of a tadpole into a frog, and a caterpillar into a butterfly. These changes represent progress and development and enable the organism to improve, adapt to the environment, and allow its species to survive. However, there are times when metamorphosis occurs because of a certain mutation or a pathological change in the body or body issue which can cause cancer and even death in living beings, and not just humans: for example, the facial tumour disease that affects Tasmanian devils and threatens to wipe out the species.⁵⁶

As a literary device, metamorphosis refers to the change or transformation by a character, an object, and sometimes a concept in a story. This transformation is often symbolic and serves various purposes within the narrative, such as social commentary (Ellis). For example, in ‘Yo, cocodrilo’, the transformation of the main character is a symbolic representation of the protagonist’s alienation from the village women and customs, and in ‘Muñeca rota’, the protagonist’s transformation is symbolic of her trying to escape her abusers.

Metamorphosis, tales of rebirth, redemption or “regression to spheres beyond the reach of patriarchal powers” are frequently present in Fantastic stories written by Latin American women (Zee “Boundaries” 57-58). Women writers aim to subvert the traditional roles forced on them by the male-dominated society by creating characters that assume forms and functions

⁵⁶ For more information, see the University of Tasmania website: <http://bit.ly/3R08mGR>.

not normally assigned to women, including non-human forms. Anger, driven by fear, provides the means of escaping the confines of a conservative society, which frees women to live as equals, or at least enact their revenge (Zee “Boundaries” 58).⁵⁷

In general terms, metamorphosis represents a world in constant change, whether it be imposed, intentional, or casual. Above all, metamorphosis encompasses the notion of movement, and represents a substantial change in an individual, thing, or a situation. This movement towards someone or something implies transience and mutations, and these conditions can have negative connotations which lead to unsettled feelings. On the other hand, this instability can insinuate the “el potencialidad subversivo o (re)creativo de los cuerpos” (Jossa “Subversivos” 15). The lack of a fixed dimension facilitates change. In this way, metamorphosis is the movement of the body towards another body, between the outer limits and the undefined, but it is not necessarily monstrous or pathological (Jossa “Subversivos” 15). Yansi Pérez notes that metamorphoses and mutations are spaces or environments in movement and constant change, where the borders “entre lo propio y lo ajeno, lo puro y lo impuro, lo sagrado y lo abyecto, el afecto y la aberración, lo lícito y el crimen, y lo animal y lo humano, están en constante proceso de transformación y redefinición (“Metamorphosis” 167).

It could be argued that authors use metamorphosis to reveal and highlight the ugly sides of human nature and behaviour. Stories of mutation or metamorphosis put in question the very definition of what is human and the definition of humanity. Mutations or metamorphoses include and merge with the Other that is almost always an animal, or a space marked by the wretched, the impure, the rejected, the unclean, the darkness, or the obscure (Pérez “Metamorphosis” 164). Because it encompasses these fears and desires, metamorphosis

⁵⁷ Anne Richter, author of the first anthology of the Fantastic written only by women, borrows a phrase from Monique Watteau’s *La nuit aux yeux de bête* (1956), which is very appropriate for this chapter: “Fie-toi à ta peur et à ton corps” (Richter “Arte” 155). See Appendix B for a brief discussion on Richter’s books.

has been used in many literary works, from antiquity to the present day. Transformation can be a means to or a consequence of escaping violence and aggression and appears in classical works, such as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the *Popul Vuh* of the Maya, the multiple metamorphoses of Hunahpú and Ixbalanché are characterised by the amplification of the existent qualities of these two heroes, as after many adventures they ascend to the Heaven to become the sun and the moon (Jossa "Subversivos" 15; Keen and Haynes "Ancient" 27). The transformations from human to changed, hybrid or non-human forms can be the metaphors of the evil and horrors of society and human behaviour, such as H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), which was written when vivisection was debated and denounced by society, and Charles Darwin's *Theory of Evolution: Origin of the Species* (1859) was gaining popularity, but many people were also very fearful of Darwin's theories. Despite the frightening things metamorphosis can represent, evolution — metamorphosis of a species over a period of time — is a natural phenomenon (Clarke 1). With transformation, the intervals between things, time, and space, become central to the Fantastic, such as occurs in Franz Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' (1915) (Jackson 48), the short story that is generally regarded as one of the canonical texts of the Fantastic in the early twentieth century.

The following two stories feature protagonists who metamorphosise into non-human forms: 'Yo, cocodrilo' by Jacinta Escudos, and 'Muñeca rota' by María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra. It could be argued that the aunt/niece also metamorphosise into non-human form in 'La muñeca menor' above.

'Yo, cocodrilo'

Escudos's 'Yo, cocodrilo' is an aggressive and provocative story. It is also an explicit protest and denouncement of the cultural ritual of female genital mutilation. Escudos also diverts the full blame of the procedure to both the women who endorse it and the patriarchal society.

The story is written in the first person, and the protagonist informs the reader in the first line (and in the title) of what the story is about: “En las tardes de calor me convierto en cocodrilo” (Escudos 81). While the transformation of the girl into a crocodile is a-normal, according to Barrenechea, it does not cause a huge rupture in the story. Rather, it is the problem of the real and unreal that the girl can change between human and animal forms at will. There is no obvious time for the setting of the story, and one may assume it relates to the present day in an unnamed village in an unnamed country with a young female protagonist who does not want to go through with the ritual. The name of the ‘ritual’ is not mentioned initially; if the reader has not immediately guessed to what it relates, upon further reading, it soon becomes clear that the ritual is female genital mutilation, also called female circumcision. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), this procedure comprises the partial or total removal of, or injury to, the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. The WHO states that there are no health benefits for girls and women from this procedure (WHO).

The protagonist’s mother insists that the girl must undergo the ritual, and not to be afraid as “todas lo hacían” (Escudos 83). If she does not, the mother continues, no one will pay for her dowry, and she will be lustful and unfaithful. The village belief is that a girl who does not submit to the ritual will turn into a crocodile, which is considered a fitting punishment for those that reject this tradition. However, the protagonist prefers to be a crocodile than be tortured. She has witnessed the full horror and pain experienced by the other young girls, including her own sister, screaming as they are held down by the women, as “la curandera cortaba con un cuchillo un pedazo de carne, del tamaño de una oreja, allí de donde salen las aguas del cuerpo. Y la sangre brotaba roja, en abundancia” (Escudos 84). The girl then describes how nothing would stop the flow of blood or the pain for the girl who has been mutilated, and then adds how these girls are subjected to it by their mothers and older sisters, while other women cut out the parts and then sew the mutilated girls up with hemp and needles made from thorny

plants. Some girls die after the procedure. To avoid the mutilation, the girl runs away and turns into a crocodile, never to change back into human form. With her fellow crocodiles, they attack the village, kill the women, and then kill the girls, as “las niñas no eran felices nunca, después del ritual” (Escudos 85).⁵⁸

When a girl or woman subverts the status quo or cultural norms, it becomes a larger transgression and a greater blight on society. Many feminists argue that girls and boys are raised and treated differently: Simone de Beauvoir (“Second”, 305-306), Bell Hooks (18-19), Mary Douglas (4), Elaine Showalter (196), Kathleen Jones (165), and Mariah Burton Nelson (144, 146), amongst others. The title of Burton Nelson’s 2004 article says it all: ‘Boys will be Boys and Girls will Not’ (144-147). Girls are expected to conduct themselves in a quieter and more demure manner than boys. In ‘Yo, cocodrilo’, the girl’s trust in her mother and her community has been betrayed, and in particular, she has been sold out to a cultural ritual by her mother. Escudos’s use of the mother as the traitor is the cruellest form of fear and creates not only the strongest sense of fear but also strength for rebellion by the young protagonist. The girl subverts the mother and the village and says to herself that “prefería ser cocodrilo, indigna, impura” (Escudos 84). The dignity of being a woman is also linked to the ritual, as they become respected members of the society when it has been done. However, it is produced by the control of the female body, including sexual control, and the community produces a new body for its women. The body transformed by the ritual is therefore a political tool, a means of reducing the community’s phobias and fears of impurity, in part, through sexual dalliances by women, but nothing is generally implied about men’s sexual behaviour. Away from this

⁵⁸ The story is like Horacio Quiroga’s ‘Juan Darién’ (1920), in which the protagonist is a tiger, but lives as a young boy amongst humans due to the love and devotion of his human mother. The school inspector exposes him as a tiger, the people of the village try to kill him, but he escapes, joins an ambush of tigers, and returns to the village with the other tigers to enact his revenge.

social and political transformed body, live monsters (crocodiles), the unclean and impure (Pérez "Metamorphosis" 177).

However, there is the psychological side, which Jackson also included in her theories of the Fantastic. The trauma and fear of the young girl about to undergo forced genital mutilation is not glossed over. The way Escudos has written the story makes the reader a participant in the story: the reader feels the fear and pain of the girl, as well as horror towards the genital mutilation, and these emotions build as the story progresses. In addition, the girl's desire for revenge against her mother and the other women also increases to a climax at the end of the story.

Escudos's underlying protests of this violent mutilation have several viewpoints. First, there is forced mutilation of the body by the cultural customs imposed by the women. This forcing of genital mutilation is endorsed by the patriarchy, including by some religious leaders, to maintain the purity of the girl so that she is valuable for marriage. The women of the village, including the girl's mother, wield a manipulating discourse to force the subjugation of the body to the ritual. The mother said that no man would pay a dowry for a girl if she did not go through with the ritual, and that she would be immoral and unfaithful to her husband. Horrific images of how the girl's body will degenerate are also psychologically forced onto the girls to ensure that they go through with the ritual. The WHO states that genital mutilation is a cultural practice that is performed to suppress women's sexual urges and to ensure chastity prior to marriage and marriage fidelity. It is one method of controlling women imposed by the patriarchy. As Escudos writes, there was no way to stop the bleeding, including putting mud on the cut area, and it is no wonder that some girls die afterwards (84). The irony is that the (unclean) mud would cause infection, when the women are saying that not having it done makes a woman unclean.

Secondly, the girls are held down by the women, with their legs forced open to enable the mutilation to take place. The village women endorse the procedure and do not protect the girls from mutilation, potential infection, and death as “todas lo hacían” (Escudos 83). These girls are forced to do something against their will, often screaming in fear and in pain when the procedure is done without anaesthetic. Escudos is clearly highlighting the control of women’s bodies by the patriarchy and cultural norms. Forcing women to do something with their body against their will is a violation of basic human rights, to which I include prostitution, rape, pregnancy or abortion, and the choices for the latter two, forced sterilisation, virginity tests, and even forced marriage and human trafficking (usually as sex workers in another country).

Thirdly, the protagonist dreams of sexual intercourse, in which the crocodile’s tail becomes a phallus, making her both man and woman, turning her into a hybrid of man-woman and human-animal. This hybrid of man-woman-girl-crocodile is Escudos’ prime use of the Fantastic and the subversion of cultural expectations. In the dream, the protagonist experiences orgasm, something which is denied to her and other women by genital mutilation. The sexual pleasure secretly experienced by her in the dream, if it were a dream, is of her in both male and female form – almost androgynous as she experiences the pleasure of both sexes — and contributes to her decision not to go through with the ritual. As Judith Butler says:

I think there is a real question for me about how such gender norms get established and policed and what the best way is to disrupt them and to overcome the police function. It's my view that gender is culturally formed, but it's also a domain of agency or freedom and that it is most important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms, especially against those who are gender different, who are nonconforming in their gender presentation (“Behaviour”).

The protagonist would rather be unworthy and impure, and a crocodile, than go through with the ritual. She has two alternatives: the metamorphosis into a crocodile or death, rather than go through with the mutilation (Pérez "Metamorphosis" 179). The protagonist has discovered her own identity and sexuality and will not conform with what is expected of her by the patriarchy.

The key part of the story is the girl's metamorphosis into the crocodile, but she does not view the metamorphosis as something horrid or frightening.⁵⁹ Instead, she narrates: "Me parece curioso. Ser animal y ser persona. No me preocupaba, me parecía divertido" (Escudos 82). This is one of the characteristics of the Fantastic: the rupture in the story does not cause the protagonist to hesitate, even though the reader may but is less likely to find it strange as the girl has not recoiled in horror. While some may consider the tail between the girl's legs to be something monstrous (Pérez "Metamorphosis" 179), the girl does not think her hybrid form is monstrous, rather her body has been reinvented and is now unclassifiable (Jossa "Subversivos" 25). She does not identify with being male or female. The final metamorphosis into the crocodile allows the girl to take control of the situation, her life, and her body. She wants absolute freedom from the repressive society and to exercise her natural instincts (Pérez "Metamorphosis" 178-179). The mutation to girl-crocodile has given her strength and new possibilities, including her sexual freedom.

The choice of the crocodile and not another animal is very deliberate. The genital mutilation produces an incomplete and artificial body, but it is a political one; it is a body that has been created by a community from its phobias, such as strict adherence to the village and cultural norms and subjugated and subordinate women rather than liberated women. If these norms are not followed, their fears are realised with impurity, filth, and a woman/monster. To the villagers

⁵⁹ In Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915), the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, did not show any fear of turning into a cockroach.

(inhabitants of a tropical country), their most feared monster is the crocodile, the ferocious, man-eating amphibian that has inhabited their waterways since prehistoric times. In contrast, author of the Fantastic *Giovanna Rivero* states that mutations make the human body return to the pure soul (and desires) of the animal, to the symbolic meaning of the animal; it constructs characters and conflicts, possibilities, and pathways. The presence of animals denotes a mutation of the archetypes (*Rivero*).⁶⁰

It is worthwhile mentioning here the symbolic significance and importance of the crocodile, notably in Mesoamerican history and ideology. Crocodiles were primarily associated with fertility: the earth, the timely arrival of rains, and agricultural fertility. As it is an animal that lives both in water and on land, the Maya believed that it impregnated one with the other and created life. Later in Mayan history, crocodiles were linked with the elite in several Mayan groups, as they legitimised power, including Itzamná, who was a god of the nobility. To the Maya, the human world was a region that floated in the prehistoric sea; sometimes the earth was depicted like the back of a crocodile. The crocodile was also embodied in Olmec ideology, not only for its links to earth and fertility, but also in power for trade in its skins and other products, such as meat (Thurston 18). In order to survive, crocodiles search for water, a crucial element for the fertility of the earth; and like a celestial element, water is obtained from the sky through rainfall. Therefore, the crocodile is linked to the terrestrial and the celestial (Vargas Pacheco and Arias Ortiz 1, 4-5). The crocodile is also at the top of the aquatic food chain and is a fearsome predator, including to humans, hence the fear of the villagers in the story – their link to life (water) is inhabited by monsters (crocodiles) (Thurston 1).

To avoid the ritual, the protagonist's body mutates into a crocodile, including the tail that is either a penis or an enlarged clitoris, making her half female/half male. In this mutation,

⁶⁰ Interview with *Giovanna Rivero*, 26 November 2021. Universidad de Alcalá, online.

Escudos echoes the theories of Judith Butler, who states that male and female is a human construct:

Nobody is born one gender or the other,” says the philosopher. “We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman”. [...] We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that *nobody really is a gender from the start*. I know it's controversial, but that's my claim (“Behaviour”; my emphasis).

The girl's metamorphosis into a mutation of crocodile male/female does not disgust her,⁶¹ but pleases her, as the transformation is the way to escape the village, the patriarchy and obtain her sexual freedom and her new identity. Her change into a crocodile is only disgusting to those in the village (perhaps they may have forgotten their Mayan ancestry), including to her mother, with whom she no longer has a relationship. Instead, she has obtained a body of strength (stronger than the men of the village) and fear. As part of her changing identity, she also has no relationship with the other young girls of the village, and the crocodiles kill them all, because they were never happy after the ritual. The protagonist has found a way of co-existing with her changed and mutating form, a new way of living with her humanity and inhumanity. Rather than live with humans, with their violent and controlling rules, she prefers to be inhuman and grotesque, to inhabit the margins of society and be excluded, but included as an animal. This humanity, defined by ethics (dignity) and sacred-religious opinions (purity) wields repressive power.

⁶¹ In contrast, Gregor Samsa becomes disgusted with his body in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.

Lastly, and most importantly, the young protagonist takes control of her body. She does not want to go through with the ritual and does not want others' will or cultural expectations to be imposed on her. She becomes both terrified and enraged at her mother's betrayal. She has two choices: succumb and be a woman, or become an animal and destroy. She transforms permanently into a crocodile and returns with her fellow crocodiles (possibly an allegory of other women who do not want to be mutilated or more globally, women against this procedure) and kills the village women and girls. We can ask ourselves: who is the monster? In this story, the villagers who demand the ritual and the women who impose it are the monsters, or more broadly, those societies who impose their wills on others, often by violent means, either physically or psychologically.

Many countries around the world have banned female genital mutilation ('FGM', see Figure 1), but there is still a long way to go. In 2020, 98 percent of women or girls aged between fifteen to forty-nine years in Somalia had undergone female genital mutilation or cutting, followed by Guinea with 96 percent and Djibouti with 93 percent (Sawe), even though FGM is officially banned in some of these countries.⁶² In most countries where this practice is common, the majority of women state that it is a form of torture. The WHO states that:

Figure 1.



Source: www.statista.com

⁶² See: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the full list of countries where FGM is banned.

It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against girls and women. It is nearly always carried out by traditional practitioners on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security, and physical integrity; the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and the right to life, in instances when the procedure results in death (WHO).

The WHO reports that 200 million women and girls alive today have had the procedure in thirty-one countries that report population data, and that no religious scripts prescribe the practice. The WHO states that the procedure is mainly done on girls between infancy and fifteen years of age (WHO).

Many societies have gendered puberty rituals, marking their transition from adolescents to adults. While there are more rituals for men, there are some for women, but the focus is different. Men are celebrated for their achievements, often through bravery, while girls' transition to womanhood is through menstruation, which happens through the body's natural function, and is not viewed as an accomplishment. There are very few rituals that celebrate a girl becoming a woman, and for the most part, it is hidden from society. While many societies practise male circumcision legally and culturally, for women it is different. Male circumcision, while painful, is generally performed soon after birth, and therefore the trauma is not remembered. It has been developed into a medical procedure performed in hospitals, with surgical tools and proper hygiene, whereas female genital mutilation continues to be performed in private, often in unsanitary conditions, at an age where the trauma will have a huge impact. As mentioned above, female circumcision is used to control female sexuality, ensuring the purity of the male lineage (DeMello 123-125).

However, DeMello also notes that women continue to perform this procedure on their daughters and granddaughters in certain countries, to the criticism of feminists and other anti-female circumcision proponents. She sympathises that for many women in the countries where it is practised, marriage is their only opportunity in life, and the chances of finding a husband who can provide for them, especially if he is higher in status, should not be totally discounted. As adultery in these countries is punishable by death, chastity is important, and these women believe it creates a bond between them and their husbands. Female circumcision is not restricted to non-Western countries. DeMello also states that female circumcision was practised in Victorian times on women diagnosed as hysterical or nymphomaniacs (DeMello 125).

Escudos's story also has political undertones. The killing of the village women by the crocodiles can be read as an allegory of the assassinations of village people or marginal groups by the paramilitary and other groups in El Salvador in the post-war period. This was not a time of peace or great political or cultural changes, but a period during which the people had to deal with the results of the revolutionary movements. Giorgio Agamben states that: "el conflicto político decisivo, que gobierna cualquier otro conflicto, es, en nuestra cultura, el que existe entre la animalidad y la humanidad del hombre" (102; qtd. in Pérez, "Metamorphosis"; 168). When the areas of human dignity, values, and respect are undermined, they become separated: life from the political, humans from animals, and men and women from each other. Politics is the way of either demarcating these lines or defining them (Pérez "Metamorphosis" 168). Escudos' story ties in with the timeline of the potential metamorphosis of the body of the Salvadorian nation worn out and sick from injustice and oppression. In the mid-1990s, the people of El Salvador had to take stock of both their achievements and the damage left by the war, as well as the persistence of elements of discrimination and economic injustice, and a new social and political environment. This period was categorised by a blurring of the historic

memory and unending grief, similar to what will be discussed in the story by Claudia Hernández (see Chapter 6), where social violence was a daily reality which sat alongside the unliveable. There existed only one alternative: a mutation or metamorphosis to something on the border of humanity (Pérez "Metamorphosis" 176). Escudos' emphasis is first on the transformation of the human body and therefore the social body (Jossa "Devenir" 159).

Regan Boxwell opines that Escudos uses animals and human/animals to engender the possibility for change, not totally as anti-society or anti-patriarchy. He states that the possibility for change lies in anti-hegemonic logic, and opportunities to escape established practices. Therefore, he believes that Escudos uses the function of the animalisation of sexuality not just simply as an allegory of males in a corrupt society: the strategy to animalise the female protagonist allows the author to inscribe the subversive possibilities that the animal offers – qualities that permit the female protagonists to survive and rise above the so-called 'aesthetics of cynicism', posited by Beatriz Cortez.⁶³ This gives the author room to move on the norms of society, such as maternity and the division of roles between men and women. Boxwell notes that the patriarchal roles of men and women are reversed in 'Yo, cocodrilo'. On the one hand, the animalisation of the male characters (a very small role in this story) demonstrates the dehumanisation of society after the civil war in El Salvador (and other Central American countries) and how it permeated daily life. On the other hand, the animalisation of the females, not only the young protagonist, but also the women of the village through their rituals, establishes the renegade actions that subvert the power relations that continued after the wars. Escudos also subverts the norms by inverting the gender roles – the girl/crocodile becomes the source of power and aggression in the form of the crocodile (Boxwell 2, 6).

⁶³ Cortez theorised that Central American literature written since the 1990s (after the post-conflict periods), has an element of discontent, or 'aesthetics of cynicism', as the hoped for 'utopian' resolutions from the various revolutions did not materialise (Cortez 23-24).

Walter Mackenbach and Alexandra Ortiz Wallner's study of violence and narrative in Central America states that throughout the long period of war and state terrorism, the internal war and its consequences have not ceased, but instead show a shift in the phenomenon of violence. Previously, the violence was strictly limited to the public sphere and to the political sphere; now, it has moved to all spheres, including the private spaces of the home:

La literatura plantea la pregunta por las (im)posibilidades de la convivencia humana *con* violencia. La historia de una vida familiar "casi normal" deviene [...] [una] metáfora de la tragedia de toda una sociedad, de la "condición centroamericana" contemporánea (Mackenbach and Ortiz Wallner 82; authors' emphasis).

In conclusion, Escudos has written a confronting and unapologetic description of female genital mutilation. There is no humour or satire to lighten the seriousness of the issue she is tackling, unlike many of the other stories in this thesis. The tone of the narration is sombre throughout, building to the crescendo of the death of the village women. Her protagonist subverts the cultural norms and metamorphosises into a crocodile to escape the ritual. It is a 'double subversion', as Ana Martínez Castillo calls it (Martínez Castillo),⁶⁴ as she is subverting both the patriarchy and the women who endorse the procedure as a cultural norm. With this ritual, the community defines and delineates itself and the humanity of its members, and to not go through with it is a transgression of the community's laws, signalling to it that one is beyond what is considered human and must be outcast to the margins and peripheries of society, and convert oneself, literally, into an animal (Pérez "Metamorphosis" 176).

⁶⁴ Ana Martínez Castillo used this phrase in: "Conversación con Ana Martínez Castillo." Interview by Ana Casas and David Roas, *III Ciclo de Encuentros con las Escritoras de lo Inquietante*. Universidad de Alcalá, Spain. Zoom Conference 29 October 2021.

‘Muñeca rota’

María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra’s story is also unnerving and confronting, written in the first person from the perspective of an unnamed female protagonist. She narrates the gradual fragmentation of her body: first her arms, then her legs, and finally her breasts. Her entire body is rotting, and some parts fall off by themselves, and she is only left with the penetrable parts of her body. She is fed up with being feminine and wants to be something different, but not a man, as she does not want to be something she finds repulsive. She asks her sister, Socorro, who has one green iris and one black one, to take her for a trip around the bay. While the protagonist deprecatingly describes herself as a worm or an amputated millipede, she believes that Socorro is not afraid of her appearance. However, as the protagonist dreams frequently, Socorro sometimes worries about her mental state. To calm her, the main character often tells stories to Socorro, who frequently falls asleep during the story.

Socorro takes the central character close to the edge of the pier. The protagonist wants Socorro to take her closer to the edge, but Socorro is uncomfortable as she believes it is too dangerous. The protagonist convinces her that nothing is going to happen; she knows that she worries about her and realises that she is her only family. Socorro agrees, and the protagonist tells her a new story, which is like a fable.

The story is about a man who catches a mermaid in his fishing net. The lower half of her body is that of a woman, while her top half is that of a fish. The mermaid sings a song to the man with the intention of devouring him afterwards. The man kisses her instead, and she nearly bites off his ear with her fish teeth. The man becomes sexually aroused, hits the mermaid three times to near unconsciousness, and violates her. He is exhausted afterwards and falls asleep. The mermaid wakes up and sees a blood-stained worm poking out of his trousers and eats it. After drinking the human blood, the mermaid starts to transform into a woman, but staggers

and falls into the water. As a human, she cannot breathe in the water for her gills are disappearing.

The protagonist asks Socorro to close her eyes and imagine what comes next, and when she does this, the protagonist jumps into the water, ready to surrender to her fate. Socorro screams for help but no one is around. The protagonist feels sorry for her sister as she would feel guilty but hopes that she will forget about the incident soon and make the most of her life. The protagonist falls slowly down into the sea and does not fight it. Afterwards, she metamorphosises into a different being.

The final paragraph is like an epilogue: the protagonist has become a plant, food for other sea dwellers; she can change between being masculine or feminine. Her body is old plastic that has been taken advantage of by the anemones and her broken doll's body is now truly hers.

There is no explanation for the protagonist's loss of limbs at the beginning of the story in line with the characteristics of the Fantastic. The lack of limbs is related to the implied reader in a calm, factual manner. The description in Pérez Cuadra's story is also ambiguous as to the reason that the protagonist's body is rotting, with the body parts eventually falling off. Instead, she has accepted her new appearance, despite deprecatingly describing herself as a worm or an amputated millipede. She wants to change, transform, or rid herself of her body and wants to explore other body form possibilities. However, becoming a male is not an option, as this idea is repulsive to her, but maybe something else, or perhaps death, which is implied but not stated.

The mermaid's fable is another Fantastic story within the story. The mermaid is the reverse of what a reader would expect. In this story, her bottom half is that of the woman and the top half is fish. The reader may hesitate at this point of the story, as the description of this mermaid and her behaviour, is not the classic one in fairy stories or fables and is therefore subversive. The mermaid's unusual form is crucial to the story: her bulging vagina is mentioned in the first

line of the fable to emphasise the mermaid's female half of her body. The mermaid sings to entice the man, as she wants to have sex with him and then devour him. Her body and behaviour are therefore non-conformist, compared with the young heroines in many fairy tales like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty.⁶⁵ The mermaid's body is overwhelmingly attractive to the man who rapes her after beating her senseless. While mythological merpeople were portrayed as harmless, the sirens in Greek mythology were said to sing beautifully to lure sailors to their deaths on rocks, or to devour them (Jossa "Desvestirse" 129). In Homer's *Odyssey*, there is no mention of the sirens' appearance, but post-Homeric literature created them as monstrous, cliff-dwelling, female creatures – half-woman, half-bird — who lure sailors to their deaths with beautiful song (Felton 120-121). For the ancient Greeks, women's biological ability for childbearing associated them with wild natural forces that were beyond male control, and sirens and other female monsters represent this male/female conflict (Blundell 17-19). Adding to the perception of women as terrifying and destructive monsters, they sometimes produced children with physical abnormalities and the myths of Medusa, Scylla, and Charybdis, amongst many others, all express men's fear of the destructive potential of women. The myths fulfil a male fantasy of conquering and controlling women; however, men are (and were) also capable of monstrous, savage, and unruly behaviour that makes them no different from these terrifying mythological creatures fought by the ancient heroes (Felton 105).

The description of Socorro's eyes is another puzzling part of the story (until the end): one black, the other green, with thick eyelashes. The reader does not necessarily hesitate at this point as

⁶⁵ For example, Cinderella was beautiful but treated harshly by her stepmother and stepsisters. Her fairy godmother helped her get to the ball and meet the Prince. In contrast, Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1836) is more tragic but has a moral in the end. The mermaid falls in love with the Prince after saving his life when his ship sinks, but he does not realise that she saved him, and he falls in love with another girl. After trading her voice for the chance of a human body with the sea witch, she does not gain a human soul as he marries the other girl. However, she learns that when she dies, there is life after being a mermaid, and that her kind actions will gain her a soul after three hundred years, or even earlier, if the merpeople find good children in homes.

there is little shock value, as some people do have different coloured eyes, although this is uncommon. The different eye colours also link to the binary opposition that permeates the story – Socorro and her sister are neither dolls nor humans. There are other irreconcilable opposites: man/woman, siren/woman, dead/alive, animate/inanimate, beauty/ugliness, land/sea, able-bodied/disabled, and mind/body. The name of the sister, Socorro, is important to the story, as it translates to ‘relief, help, or support’, which is exactly what the character of Socorro does – she helps her sister who is unable to move with no legs, or handle anything with no arms (Jossa "Desvestirse" 128). Socorro is doll-like with her thick, curled eyelashes but she also has flaws. She accepts the protagonist’s lack of limbs and rotting body, while the protagonist accepts Socorro’s eyes of different colours. At this point, the reader may realise that both the protagonist and her sister are dolls (as the title of the story suggests). The irony is that the protagonist thinks that Socorro is more afraid of her (the protagonist’s) dreams and horror stories than her body appearance. While the sisters unconditionally accept each other’s flaws, there is no mention of other family members in the story (Jossa "Desvestirse" 128).

Metamorphosis and transformation are central to this story. The protagonist is transforming at the beginning of the story, as her extremities are falling off or disappearing. She states that every part of her body has turned rotten and has collapsed under its own weight and laments that she is only left with ‘penetrable’ parts – her eyes, ears, mouth, anus, and vagina (Pérez Cuadra 27). She wants to try other life forms, other possibilities, or perhaps kill herself (Jossa "Desvestirse" 128). She is trapped in her broken body, but her mind is completely free; her willpower (her mind) helps her broken body to escape by jumping off the pier. She takes control of her body in the final part of the story, which is the key point of the narrative, something she could not do beforehand as she was helpless and needed Socorro’s assistance. In the final epilogue, the protagonist narrates from a different body or life form, that of an aquatic plant. The epilogue has made the story circular as it begins and ends with the

metamorphosis of the narrator, with the metamorphosis of the mermaid in the middle (Jossa "Desvestirse" 130).

The dream of the mermaid is the main character's desired violent revenge on the men who abused her. The irony in the fable is that the mermaid, after the violent act of castrating the man and drinking his blood, transforms into a complete woman, which is the second metamorphosis in the story. On the one hand, as she has become human, she has lost her mermaid/fish gills and starts to drown as she does not know how to swim like a human being. On the other hand, the protagonist, in an incomplete woman's body, does not drown when she throws herself into the water, as she is a doll, but transforms into a plant and food for aquatic life, which is the third metamorphosis. A young woman (a doll) with no arms, legs, and breasts, transforms not into a beautiful princess, but into a life-giving plant. She has also transformed from a highly sexualised (and abused) object to a more maternal figure, one that nourishes life. This relates back to Classical mythological tales, such as the story of Persephone's abduction by the underworld god Hades, which is a coming-of-age tale, and serves as an explanation of alternation of the seasons. There is a strong connection between the fertility of the land and the fertility of females; the metamorphosis of the protagonist relates to her femininity. In addition, she was previously totally dependent on assistance, had limbs falling off which was outside of her control, but has finally escaped the body she detested. In the end, she is at last in control of her body in the sea and is free, while on land her body was prostrate, and she was trapped inside. She can only be free in her imagination, and neither history, politics, nor socio-economic issues can control her imagination. Her dreams are also an impression of complete freedom.

The protagonist is also free of control by the patriarchy, by men who only saw her as an easy vehicle for violation. In this way, the story is similar to Inés Arredondo's 'Orfandad' (1979),⁶⁶ in which the protagonist, a young girl, has had her arms and legs amputated as a result of a car accident which killed her parents, and she is tied up and violated by the hospital staff as she is helpless. However, 'Muñeca rota' is different, as her sister accepts her as she is, while the protagonist in 'Orfandad' is shunned by her remaining family as she is not perfect.

The mermaid could also be the double of the protagonist, who wants to be other forms other than her highly dependent body. She desires something wildly different, hence the narration of the fable to her sister. There is also an identity issue with the protagonist, as she wants to be another body or being, but she does not know what, which explains the unusual form of the mermaid. All she wants to do is to flee from her existing body which has been violated by men. The castration of the man by the mermaid is the protagonist's desired revenge on men because of how men have abused her. On the other hand, it is also a simple metaphor of a fish eating a worm. While the transformation of the mermaid to a woman leads to her possibly drowning in the sea, the protagonist jumps into the sea, but lives, as she transforms into another being, one that is non-human.

There is also an element of 'inbetweenness' in the story, particularly for the protagonist: she is neither one thing nor the other – not woman, not mermaid, not plant, not water, not earth. There is a continual conflict present and an undefined identity. Her body is not defined which leads to the process of transformation to a life form where she has finally found her place in the world.

⁶⁶ My version of Arredondo's story is from: Chimal, Alberto (Ed.) *La tienda de los sueños: Un siglo de cuento fantástico mexicano*. Kindle edition.

The final transformation is the protagonist's new body dwellers: the anemones, which have taken advantage of her form. The choice of anemones is not only convenient, as they grow on hard surfaces, such as coral, rocks, barnacles, and hard plastic (such as that of a broken doll's body) but also very deliberate and significant, as certain types of anemones can change between male and female as desired, while others can reproduce asexually.⁶⁷ This reference to non-gender alignment ties the protagonist in her/his new form to the LGBTQ+ community using the subversive nature of the Fantastic, again going against the ideals of the patriarchy and the Church. Pérez Cuadra is highlighting that humans do not need to have a gender, that they can be a particular gender, switch between genders, or be non-gender aligned. Examining these stories through the lens of LGBTQ+ theories could be a fruitful path of inquiry, although it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

While the protagonist appears to die after she jumps into the water (Jossa "Desvestirse" 130), she narrates from her new body form in the epilogue and is therefore living. I argue that she did not die when she jumped into the water, as she was never a living being: she was a doll. Instead, she has transformed from a non-living being into a living organism for aquatic life. Her once putrid parts now have sea algae growing on them which nourishes aquatic life and links her to the mermaid. Even if she did die, as Jossa suggests, she narrates this final part as a living being.

A doll is the protagonist of this story, as we saw in Ferré's 'La muñeca menor'. The doll or mannequin is a masculine fantasy of the ideal woman: she may be impossibly beautiful, have the ideal body, and does not speak (meaning she cannot talk back, scold, and nag). The doll is 'feminine' in appearance and "reduced to a dummy over which total control can be exercised" (Armitt 198), a stereotyping of women that connects fantasy and reality, but also "from myths

⁶⁷ For sea anemone information, see: www.vedantu.com/animal/sea-anemone.

to fairy tales, high art, and pornography” (Armitt 199). Armitt describes a doll as an important image for young girls as it is a focus for their fantasies. Miriam Formaneck-Brunell agrees that dolls are sold to promote self-fulfilment for girls through “superficial, sweet maternity and very earnest materialism”, but then is more scathing, noting that feminists have “interpreted dolls as agents of a hegemonic patriarchal culture in which girls were passive consumers” (1). She adds that women and girls have struggled for the cultural control of dolls that represent their gender identity, and that dolls hinder the development of girls as they only represent static interpretations of maternity, femininity, and domesticity, that is, “little mothers” (Formaneck-Brunell 1, 5). Isabel Largaúa and John Dumoulin support this view. They note that the ‘inevitable’ gift a girl gets (family finances permitting) is the traditional doll, with the usual trousseau of brushes, mirrors, pots, pans, and so on. They ask: “¿por qué no se le regala una ametralladora o un juego de carpintero?” (Largaúa and Dumoulin 125). Together with these early objects of play, girls also receive a long list of prohibitions aimed at creating fear of life outside of the family (Largaúa and Dumoulin 125).

Simone de Beauvoir is even more blunt. She opines that the doll is the girl’s compensation for not having a penis. While a doll represents an entire body, it is a passive object. The girl pampers the doll and dresses it up as she would herself in her dreams, and considers herself to be a doll, in the doll’s image. Through these images she learns the words ‘ugly’ and ‘pretty’ as she tries to resemble this image, comparing herself to the fairy stories she hears or reads or sees, and by age four or five she has developed the need to be admired (de Beauvoir “Second” 303-304).

The protagonist’s final line of the story, when she indicates that she is a doll, also reflects the story’s circular nature, linking back to the title. The significance of the doll is two-fold: it is an object, which means it can be cast aside and replaced, and it also reflects the objectification of

women in contemporary society. The doll can either be the perfect woman-doll that men desire, or the mistreated doll, alluding to the mistreatment of women and how they can be thrown away like objects, abandoned and broken (Jossa "Desvestirse" 131). Pérez Cuadra may also be referring to consumerism and the 'throw-away' society of the twenty-first century, from dolls, televisions, mobile phones, clothing, and human beings. These 'thrown away' women have either been replaced by a 'newer model' or they have aged and have lost their beauty. Both DeMello and Jane Goodall criticise the desire for women to achieve the perfect body (DeMello xvi, 3, 107, 198; Goodall 157). Goodall notes that perfect beauty, and the acceptance of not being able to achieve such (as a failure), is dictated by the beauty industry, supplemented by often strict regimes of diet, exercise, and purchasing products of all types. Bryan Turner states that the shape and image of the external body provides value and meaning to the self, but that "the regulatory control of the body is now exercised through consumerism and the fashion industry rather than through religion" ("Body" 23; qtd. in Goodall 157; Turner et al. "Handbook" 249). Cosmetic alterations are not limited to women; Michael Jackson is the most famous male to have had cosmetic surgery to alter his appearance (DeMello 173; Goodall 160).

Turning back to the central character in Pérez Cuadra's story, her body is not perfect as she is physically impaired, and she cannot move without Socorro's assistance. Christopher Faircloth argues that disability is not based on illness but on the oppressive society that marginalises disabled people and makes them victims (256). He states: "the 'disability problem' lies within structural issues and societal attitudes of the able-bodied. In short, disability is *caused* by society" (Faircloth 257, author's emphasis). This statement directs disability theory away from the individual to social causes such as discrimination and stereotyping "which serve as enablers to disability" (Faircloth 257). In 'Muñeca rota', there is no mention in the story of how Socorro takes the protagonist to the bay and the pier, nor of a method of transportation, including a wheelchair. The protagonist in the story has low self-esteem and is the Other, due to her

physical impairment and abuse by her violators. Turner notes that there is an inherent idea of ableism in our culture that is designed to exclude the Other:

There is pressure within the social sciences, as in medicine, to “normalise” the body, whereby a body with impairment is an unusual or abnormal body in need of compassion [...] Disability activists emphasise the human rights aspect of disability and argue that it is a normal condition in all human populations. (“Medical” 185).

The counterpart to the ‘normal’ is the ‘monstrous’, making the opposite to a normal person a defective one. This also transferred into political views, that revolutionaries were ugly, murderous monsters while the aristocracy was beautiful and cultured — the duality of the natural versus the monstrous (Baynton 17-20). In the nineteenth century, people with physical impairments were put on show as ‘freaks’ in ‘freak shows’, circuses, and other venues, following the expansion of cities and areas of public recreation. The freak is always the Other, which Fiedler described as a “mirror of our nightmare image of what we are or might become” (Fiedler, qtd. in Gerber 16). Disability shapes the self by “transforming the relationships between the self, body image, and the social world” (Turner “Medical” 176). As noted above, in Pérez Cuadra’s story, the sisters accept each other’s impairments or differences unconditionally, while society does not, reflected in the violations by men who see the protagonist as ‘just a hole’ and inferior – the worthless toy to be thrown away after use.

The doll is also linked to the idea of the passive, available and practically inanimate indigenous body, viewed from a colonial perspective. It relates to the original occupation of Latin America by the Spanish, and the treatment of the indigenous people as unarmed and friendly primitive people who were quickly viewed as “fit to be ordered about and made to work, to sow and to do aught else that may be needed” (Fuentes 8). Native Americans were kidnapped, enslaved, and often murdered. When the indigenous people died in large numbers, either from disease

or poor treatment, they were replaced with slaves from the African continent, who were kidnapped and sold to large landowners or miners. These people were not free until slavery was abolished, but their freedom was still marred by their subjugation to the colonists. Similarly, the sexual violence against the protagonist is related to the perception of the passive female from colonial times, as well as her availability. The protagonist is prostrated, and her inability to move is like the women, the African slaves, and the indigenous workers under colonial rule, until she frees herself through her own will by diving into the water.

Pérez Cuadra has written a complex and rather disturbing short story that is an allegory of women being throw-away objects, used, abused, broken, and abandoned. However, it also reflects their desire to be free of their bodies and their lives, and to transform to another identity, one that does not have to be female or human. As we see in Escudos' story and Judith Butler's claims, male and female gender is a human construct and that nobody is born one gender or the other ("Behaviour"). The protagonist and her sister are not human, they are dolls made of hard plastic. According to Jossa, the theme of plastic occurs frequently in Pérez Cuadra's stories, as a synonym of falsity and complacent fiction, which is an effect of the global economic empire and its constraints ("Desvestirse" 131).

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed and discussed the stories that have a major focus on the corporeal body. Women's bodies have always been under scrutiny, whether fully covered, nude, their shape, their reproductive needs or desires, or as sites to be controlled by people with no claim to them. This is why women authors use narratives that centre on the body as a means of protest against those who try to control or oppress them, making the reader a participant in the story, imagining that it is his or her body being controlled or punished. The Fantastic, being a literature of subversion, is the perfect tool for the authors to vent their criticism. Their

subversion, sometimes horrific and grotesque, can shock the reader, but it is used to highlight what has happened, or is still happening, in real life — the injustices and the oppression. The Fantastic has also been used in narratives to subvert gender differences between male and female, questioning the reality of these gender differences, why they exist at all, and discussing the concept of non-gender alignment. At other times, humour and satire are used to mock injustices, often taking the humour to an absurd level.

The authors analysed in this chapter have used narratives that centre on the fragmented body to link to a fragmented society, such as ‘El vendedor de cabezas’, which has the major theme of identity, linking it not only to body appearance and the search for one’s identity, but also to Cuban identity – a land of many cultures. In a similar vein, ‘La muñeca menor’ links the invasion of the aunt’s leg to Puerto Rico’s colonial past, as the country has not shaken its (invading) colonial or imperial rulers, making the country ‘immobile’ in its own quest for either self-governance or to be part of the USA.

Narratives of transformation and metamorphosis have also been used by the authors to highlight the changing societies in their countries, from colonisation, conflicts, and in some cases, transitions towards peace and democracy. However, these hoped-for positive changes are still peppered with issues which link to the past, such as corruption, oppressive rulers, and large gaps between the rich and the poor. ‘Muñeca rota’ is an allegory of the fight for democracy in Nicaragua following the conflicts in the twentieth century, but also the fight by women for control of their bodies, as the central character metamorphosises to escape these threats. I have drawn on disability theory to emphasise the difficulties that these people face daily – the central character is an allegory of the ‘disabled’ country. ‘Yo, cocodrilo’ also has the protagonist metamorphosising into another being to escape the real threat of female genital mutilation, which is often controlled by the society, culture, and/or the religion of certain

countries. Again, the protagonist takes control of her body, but in this case, takes violent revenge on her oppressors. The use of the Fantastic allows these authors to bring the 'unreal', and their hoped-for dreams, into the real.

Chapter Six: The Fragmented and Non-Corporeal Body

The Fragmented, the Non-Corporeal Body and the Fantastic

This chapter deals with two types of bodies: the dismembered or dead body, and the non-corporeal body such as that of a ghost. Through an examination of the stories in this chapter, I will demonstrate how the authors have used narratives that centre on either the fragmented or non-corporeal body in their stories, together with the Fantastic, often making the narrative ludicrous. At the same time, the stories will be analysed as allegories of Latin American history, politics, and society, including the challenging place women occupy in society, and men's behaviour towards women.

The first three stories deal with dead bodies, and I will analyse how the authors use the Fantastic and narratives that centre on dead bodies to highlight the injustices that have occurred in their countries. Claudia Hernández's 'Manual de hijo muerto' is a confronting story as it deals with the dismembered body of an adult child which has been returned clandestinely to the parents for burial. It has been written in the style of an instruction manual, which converts the grotesque nature into something more humorous, but it is a biting satire of the violent daily life in which Hernández grew up. In contrast, Ramos's 'Para elegir la muerte' is presented in a more light-hearted way. A young man enters a store and wants to choose his own death from a variety of options that are presented to him, as his friend had chosen his own death a few weeks earlier. It is not a pro-suicide story, but one that presents the violent deaths that many historical figures in Latin American history have faced. Mildred Hernández's 'Paranoica city' is different again, as a young couple deal with an intruder in their home, whom the husband shoots dead. The couple become increasingly anxious and nervous, or paranoid, as they plan to dispose of the body without being seen.

The invisible woman, that is, the woman who is invisible to those around her or to society is the theme of the next story. Berrón's female protagonist in 'El eterno transparente' experiences a series of strange events: her shoes do not fit, her workmates do not recognise her, and in the end, she is a stranger or invisible to her family. The final story, 'Mujer hecha pedazos' by Cheri Lewis G., is about a woman who literally falls apart. Her body parts, such as an arm or a hand, fall off from time to time for no reason, but she calmly reattaches them to her body.

'Manual de hijo muerto'

Claudia Hernández's short, satirical story, 'Manual de hijo muerto' (2007)⁶⁸ presents the reader with the most gruesome case, that of a mutilated and dismembered body. The story consists of only seven paragraphs, with two extra boxes of additional information or warnings, and provides instructions on how parents should reassemble the body parts of their dead child who has been returned to them to prepare the body for the funeral, the viewing, and entombment. Hernández has written the narrative from an unemotional, distanced third person perspective, in a polite instructive writing style, using the imperative mood at times ("únalas", "preste especial atención a", [107-109]), similar to a cooking recipe or an instruction manual for a child's toy, hence the title.⁶⁹ The narrator's style, voice and tone are consistent throughout the story – giving simple instructions but with indifference and very little empathy, except for suggesting that having a good box of tissues would be handy. Thus, the narrator is distanced from the recipients of the body.

⁶⁸ This story was first published in *Mediodía de fronteras* in 2002, Publisher: Dirección de Publicaciones e Impresos, San Salvador. I cannot locate a copy of this original publication and have used the 2007 edition, *De fronteras*. Publisher: Editorial Piedra Santa, Guatemala.

⁶⁹ Julio Cortázar also used the Fantastic for eight instructions in 'Manual de Instrucciones' (Instruction Manual), the first chapter in *Historias de Cronopios y de Famas (Stories of Cronopios and Famas)* (1962). Examples: 'Instrucciones para Llorar' and 'Instrucciones para Subir una Escalera', amongst others.

The instructions are written in a manner reminiscent of the guidelines in some torture manuals which use short, concise commands in an impersonal tone. A few examples from a CIA training manual are:

H-1. 1. “No two questions are the same. Each is shaped definitively by the personality of the subject.”

I-7. 2. “Keep the questioning focussed on the requirements.”

I-8. 3. “Cover all the elements of who, what, when, where, why, how.”

I-15. 1. “Do not allow the subject to determine your exact area of interest.”

(The National Security Archive, CIA Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual).

The relevance of mentioning this CIA Manual is that it was applied by the US-trained military in Latin America. Some of the short sentences in Hernández’s manual are similar to the CIA Manual, such as “Preste especial atención a las manos y pies”, and “Para evitar hundirse en la tentación de elaborar hipótesis y encontrar culpables mediante las señales que dejan, cúbralos con guantes y medias de algodón oscuros” (Hernández 109).

From the starting line of Hernández’s story, or indeed the title, the reader is in no doubt as to the content of the story, that it is dealing with the body of a dead child. The reader accepts these macabre instructions and may hesitate for a few seconds but continues reading about the dismembered body of an adult child who had been missing for a few days before being returned to his or her parents, without question. These victims of violence are treated as objects by the narrative, chosen with good reason by the author, as she has softened the otherwise horrific impact of the contents of the story by converting it to an instruction manual. The mere fact that it is a manual for reconstructing a dead child implies that receiving the body parts of dead

children is a regular occurrence, and forms part of Hernández's irony and parody of events in El Salvador, particularly during the civil war in the late twentieth century. In addition, part of her irony is that the parents *need* a manual to reconstruct the body. This is another protest about the violence that Hernández grew up with and lived through during the civil war; the brutality was so extreme a manual was needed to reconstruct a body.

'Manual de hijo muerto' starts at 'Página 23', with a subtitle, 'Cuando el hijo está en forma de trozos', which indicates satirically that this is a section within a larger book of how parents are to deal with the various ways/formats in which the implied state is returning their dead child to them (Hernández 107). At the same time, it implies that the other sections refer to equally atrocious ways of disposing of or dealing with a body. This section deals with the dead child returning in pieces and provides instructions for the parents on how to assemble the pieces together in preparation for the funeral, albeit with much care as the pieces are delicate and may come apart when handled. There is no description of how the pieces of the dead child are returned to the parents, whether it is in a box or some other type of container, by courier, posted, or just left at the door with the Manual and perhaps a note. There is no information about who the audience is for the Manual's recipients, and the reader presumes that the parents or loved ones are the target audience. There is also no description of the pieces, for example, full arms, half arms, head attached or detached, and so on. This missing information can be explained by Campra's theory of silences in a Fantastic story: the lack of information becomes a void in the script, even though the reader may not question this fact. Hernández leaves it open for the reader's imagination to complete the missing details.

The parents are instructed to ensure that the child is their own by means of their distinguishing marks, a simple viewing, or by checking further through dental records. The dead child can be reassembled on the dining room table or on their bed, but care must be taken as the reassembled

parts may come undone if a parent or loved one has the urge to embrace the dead body. In this way, the Manual moves the legacy of the war from the public space to the private space (the home), leaving the citizens to deal with the outcomes privately. Parents are instructed to join and sew the dismembered pieces together, overlapping them slightly, so that they do not fall apart, and to avoid putting shoes on their feet, as shoes are too heavy, implying that the sewn-up feet may fall off. References to torture are made but also softened by the instructive nature of the text, as the parents are directed to cover the body's injuries, which could be ligature marks on wrists and ankles, with gloves, and socks, and to cover the facial injuries with heavy makeup. There is also a subtle instruction to the parents to avoid smoking around the corpse as ash may fall on the body parts, which may refer to victims who had cigarette burns on their bodies from the perpetrators as part of their torture. In addition, the parents are advised not to make assumptions or to seek out those responsible for their child's death, but to grieve the death of their child with the family and friends. This is Hernández's denouncement and protest (and irony) of how the perpetrators of violence in her home country were rarely brought to justice or received the punishment they deserved.

The final paragraph of the story is very brief and bleak: "Muéstrela a familiares y amigos...Llore cada vez que alguien mencione su nombre" (Hernández 109). Through imperatives and very short sentences, it instructs the parents to display the body to the family and friends, sharing photographs of the child when he or she was alive, and to cry every time someone mentions his or her name. The irony here is that the parents would not need instructions to do this. Hernández is implying that Salvadorans have lived with violence for so long that they have become accustomed to violence and funerals, including those of young adults. The black humour of the warning box, the tip box and the footnotes add to the irony of the story.

By taking the instructions to an absurd level, Hernández has written ‘Manual de hijo muerto’ as an allegory and denouncement of the many victims assassinated by the state in El Salvador. In particular, she is not only alluding to the Salvadoran civil war (1979 to 1992) and the death squads that slaughtered many civilians, but also to the violent and unstable period afterwards, supposedly in a time of peace.

Children are considered to be innocent and pure, and while the bodies that are being returned are of an older child of “24-25 años” (Hernández 107), there is still an implied loss of innocence. It is interesting that Hernández uses the term ‘child’ for this age group, even though most parents still call their offspring ‘my child’ or ‘my children’ when they are adults. The term ‘child’ is very emotive; the reader is therefore asked not only to note the horror of death and dismemberment, but also the aftermath for the parents who must bury their child. Hernández thus taps into the human instinct to react with even more horror towards violence towards children. While Hernández could be reducing the horror for the reader of a younger child’s body being dismembered, she replaces this with the horror experienced by the adult victim, who would be more consciously aware of the brutality he or she would be about to face. The mutilated body is dehumanised and stripped of its identity through its dismemberment; it must be reassembled by the parents to a body that appears closer to normal. It also represents disassociation by the murderers for their actions, as there is no longer a person (a complete body) who has had their life ended at the assassins’ hands or methods, and who can be wiped from their memories more easily.

As noted above, the writing style of the story and the black humour soften the impact of the otherwise horrific content of a child’s dead body parts being returned to the parents. The humour provides the contrast or the opposite to the terrible events of the story (pain and death), taking it to an almost absurd level: absurdity/humour versus the disgust of the grotesque event

of a child's body returning in pieces to the parents; light versus the obscurity and darkness of evil people or war. However, as Ignacio Sarmiento states: "¿Qué hacer con los muertos?" (Sarmiento 395). The incomplete, mutilated body is returned clandestinely, but at the same time, most visibly (in parts), and the parents are expected to mourn in silence, while it is implied that those who committed the crime went unpunished. Families want to bury their dead so that they have a place to go to mourn their passing and a place to go to remember them. Parents of children who have disappeared, with no trace of their body, yearn to have a body returned to them so that they can bury and mourn their child. Even though the child's death would be considered the worst-case scenario by most people, never having a body or knowledge of their whereabouts is worse, and the mourning and despair continue infinitely (Franco "Cruel" 192-193). The families suffered what Franco calls a "triple deprivation – of a body, of mourning, and of a burial" ("Cruel" 192-193), exacerbated by amnesties that protected the military after the dictatorships ended. As Franco notes: "While one suspects that the disappeared person may be dead, nobody knows the truth. Doubt, prolonged over time, is a highly productive way of sowing fear" ("Cruel" 192).

Mourning is normally considered to be the total restitution of loss. Hernández uses irony and sarcasm to subvert the mourning process, with the body returning clandestinely in pieces. The third person narrator (the instruction manual) gives cold, formulaic instructions to the parents to assemble the pieces together for the pre-burial viewing and the burial, which have "stripped the pathos" of the mourning process for the parents by making them grieve in silence (Pérez "Memory").

A mutilated body is the pinnacle in torture and violence. It is a sign to the community, the authorities, or the intended recipients of the remains that the perpetrators are "fighting to defend their reputation for brutality and the image of control in the territories they claim" (Tuckman).

Terrorist attacks, notably suicide bombers, have as their major target not the people killed or maimed, but the eyewitnesses and those viewing it through the media (Turner “Handbook” 217), particularly since the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001. At times, the assassins have left the body or bodies in full public view, parading these ‘necrosapes’, as Ana Guglielmucci calls them, to obtain media coverage of their deeds and to achieve notoriety and control by fear (556). A mutilated body is a strong method of control and intimidation of an individual, a family, the community and even the government: people will not travel to the area if there is a heightened threat of violence. The perpetrators use this treatment (sometimes on public display) to impose a ‘culture of terror’ on their victims, or the public in general (Guglielmucci 556-557).

Dismemberment of a corpse is rare, even though the actual frequency of dismemberment is increasing globally, but it is an even worse crime than the murder itself (Petreca et al. 888, 892). Dismemberment refers to the body of the victim being cut into pieces with a sharp instrument, generally soon after the death, in order not only to conceal the crime, but also to make it easier to move the body, without raising suspicion (Dogan et al. 542). Indeed, the main reason for dismemberment of a corpse is to dispose of the physical evidence of the murder, but this is not the case in this story, as the pieces have not been disposed of, but instead returned to the parents for burial. However, the reason for the return of the body to the parents is another ‘silence’ or ‘hole’ in the story, something left unsaid, which may cause the reader to question why it was done this way. The perpetrators may have been known to the parents or the child and because of this, felt a sense of guilt or shame, therefore returning the body pieces to them, but it could also be an act of intimidation. It is implied that the child’s disappearance was not referred to the police, implicating the role of the state in the atrocity. It is left for the reader to decide.

The appearance of a dead and mutilated body or bodies causes fear and mistrust in the lives of the family and friends, the local people, and it affects their relationships with the people and the space around them; no one knows whom to trust, people become reluctant to leave home, they become careful about what they say in public and whom to confide in. Sometimes the people are too scared to go to an area of mutilated bodies to identify them, for fear of their own lives (Guglielmucci 561). This fear also relates to the parents, who are instructed by the manual to keep their silence and not to search for the culprits. Their silence also keeps their fear retained inside the home (the private space), and possibly the homes of their friends, as the perpetrators are unknown. Particularly gruesome crimes like dismemberment, while relatively few, play on the public's mind and become a primary concern that must be eradicated (Petreca et al. 888).

Hernández has centred her story around torture and dismemberment to denounce the authorities in El Salvador who permitted crimes such as kidnappings, torture, disappearances, and murder, to largely go unpunished. The reconstruction of the child's body in the story is an allegory of the proposed reconstruction of El Salvador after the twelve-year civil war ended in 1992 with a peace agreement between the warring parties. Shortly afterwards, the Salvadoran government passed an amnesty law that gave war criminals immunity from prosecution, which was aimed to reunite the country, but with no consequences for those who committed war crimes (Moodie 5; Keen and Haynes "Independence" 477; Sarmiento 396). In an interview with Gabriela Alemán of the Stone Institute for Latin American Studies in 2019, Hernández recounted: "Ahora ha perdido la etiqueta de guerra, pero sigue sucediendo de la misma manera". She also discussed growing up as a child in El Salvador, and learning the word "no" as a young child:

[...] a las palabras, siguen manos. Manos que se ponen sobre tu boca, manos que se ponen sobre tus ojos, que es tu mamá intentando que no veas los cadáveres que están en la calle camino a la escuela. [...] Es tu abuelo que está intentando que no mires, que están llevando a una persona fuera de la casa, cerca de donde tú estás pasando. (Hernández “Writers”)

This was the daily life of violence and fear, either from an oppressive regime, guerrillas, paramilitaries, or foreign armies. Hernández has sought to neutralise the effect of her confronting story by converting it into a satirical instruction manual, parodying and also highlighting the violence in El Salvador.

‘Para elegir la muerte’

Like Hernández, María Eugenia Ramos also employs black humour in her treatment of death in ‘Para elegir la muerte’. While she breaks the mould of reality and social norms, at the same time, everything seems perfectly acceptable and like an everyday situation.

The story has two protagonists: Samuel, and the unnamed woman at the store, and is set in an unnamed city. It begins with Samuel entering the store where he is politely greeted by the female attendant. Samuel responds to her offer of assistance: “Vengo a escoger una muerte” (Ramos 23). Samuel’s statement about choosing a mode of death subverts the accepted norms that accept death as a natural process and deprecate suicide. Samuel recounts to himself the death of his teacher, Dr Santana, who had chosen to die as a missing ‘disappeared’ politician. He also wants to choose his mode of death, within the next year, as his legal affairs will be in order by then. However, there is no explanation of the association between Samuel and Dr Santana — whether he is a friend, a family member, or his medical professional. The reader is not informed why Dr Santana chose to die as a delinquent, nor given any reason or reasons why Samuel wants to die.

Samuel is presented with tapestries that illustrate different types of death on offer, including by crucifixion, atomic bomb, shark attack, guillotine, as an astronaut lost in space, and murder-suicide. The choice of using a tapestry rather than a more modern version of a catalogue, poster, or a website, has significance in several ways. Firstly, it could be linked to the famous European war tapestries, such as the Bayeaux Tapestry of the Norman Conquest of England of the eleventh century, which provide a woven account of the battles. Secondly, in Mesoamerican cultures, woven tapestries were highly prized by the Inca, with the finest woven fabrics reserved for royal and religious functions, and tributes, and even placed in coffins (Cartwright). Likewise, the Maya are recognised for the beauty and quality of their textiles, particularly given the simple tools used to create them, even to this day. With the use of weaving, Ramos has also added a touch of magic to her story, as weaving has been central in some fairy stories. In the 'The Six Swans' by the Brothers Grimm (1812), the sister weaves cloaks of nettles to enable her bewitched brothers to return to human form. Weaving is also present in the ancient myth of Penelope, wife of Odysseus, who unravels her weaving each day to delay her suitors' advances while she waits for Odysseus to return. By choosing a tapestry as the medium, Ramos combines the traditional art with the modern, linking the past to the present with weaving.

After Samuel views many of the tapestries, the shop assistant states that it is a privilege to choose one's death and that Dr Santana was a satisfied customer. However, the reader does not know if he was truly satisfied, other than choosing the method of his own death, which is consistent with Campra's theory of missing information. Campra stated that silences in Fantastic fiction result from an instability between what has been said and what has not been said, such as a lack of explanatory words, an illogical conclusion, or lines of writing that are out of place (Campra 52, 56). Samuel is confused about how Dr Santana could end his life as a delinquent or a guerrilla, as the latter was an esteemed man, who had met the Pope, and was

on the directorship of many organisations including the Anti-Abortion League, suggesting a deep conservatism. Ramos thus mocks both capitalism and consumerism on both counts, as in times when money can buy almost anything, even one's death can be bought for the right price. She is also protesting against the patriarchy, with references to the Church and the Anti-Abortion League, both of which try to control women's bodies, and the directorships of organisations, without doubt, dominated by men.

Unable to decide on the mode of his death after being shown more tapestries, Samuel notices an indistinct room in which he finds the tapestry of the death by firing squad of Francisco Morazán (1792-1842), the former President of the United Provinces of Central America in the nineteenth century, who was also the head of the State of Honduras. The assistant will not enter the room, remarking that Samuel is entering at his own risk and very few people go into that room. Curious of whether Dr Santana chose a death from this room, Samuel notices from the doorway the fearless appearance of Inca revolutionary Túpac Amaru II (José Gabriel Condorcanqui [1738-1781]) as he is being torn apart by the horses. This gruesome torture failed, and he was subsequently killed and dismembered by the Spaniards. Samuel steps inside the room towards the tapestry that depicts the roof of the little school at La Higuera where Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (1928-1967) was captured by Bolivian forces on 8 October 1967. He was imprisoned with his fellow fighters in the two-room schoolhouse, interrogated and executed the next day.

The violent deaths depicted in the tapestry also recall a person's loss of identity at death. If a deceased person's loved ones can locate the body, they will move it to another location for a proper burial, as was the case with the remains of Che Guevara in 1997 (Johnson 336). The missing body — the disappeared one, even for the Hiroshima bomb victims - also represents a loss of identity as there is no physical body. However, as noted above in the analysis of

Hernández's story, disappeared bodies cause significant trauma for families, and oppressors use this method of fear and control to maintain their authority. There is also the change of identity on death as Samuel was considering (and Dr Santana chose), perhaps to make peace with oneself for past wrongs, or to right a conscience to appease a god, or it may be the last act of self-indulgence to die as a popular figure in history.

The irony in this story is that the characters represented in the tapestries, both fictional and real, *did not choose their own deaths*. Therefore, the buyers are selecting deaths on their own terms and are averting unchosen deaths, generally at the hands of others, such as by oppressive regimes or violent groups.

While mourning is not a large part of Ramos's story, the protagonist appears to be mourning the death of his teacher Dr Santana, in part as he cannot understand why he died as a missing rebel or delinquent, when the man in his lifetime was tied to the patriarchy, the Church, and had very conservative views, including against abortion. Ramos is again subverting cultural norms, as when buyers purchase the death of choice, they lose their identity on death as they are *dying as someone else*. While the story could also be further linked to the 'Right to Die' movement, that is, euthanasia or suicide, which is against conservative and religious ideologies, the possibility of choosing one's death may be a better option than a potential brutal death by an oppressive regime or a violent vigilante group.

Ramos's story is also a political allegory of the conflicts in Honduras and other Latin American countries in the latter half of the twentieth century. She is denouncing the countries that permitted crimes such as kidnappings, torture, disappearances, and murder, as well as the assassinations of revolutionary and political figures, including Morazán, Túpac Amaru II and Guevara (Shepherd 114, 137; Williams and Disney 17). She also criticises capital punishment imposed by authorities, the patriarchy, and the Church, such as those depicted in the tapestry

of French feminist and activist, Olympe de Gouges, who was beheaded by guillotine, and a young Arabic woman burnt at the stake during the Inquisition. Like Hernández, Ramos brings the reader into the story, in this case with the viewing of the selection of death choices in the tapestries and walking into the prohibited room to view the more notable Latin American historical figures. Finally, Ramos's story is a non-threatening protest against consumerism and US imperialism in her country, which uses humour, satire, and irony to temper the macabre theme.

'Paranoica city'

Mildred Hernández published 'Paranoica city' in 2003. The story is written in the third person, with two unnamed protagonists who are a married couple. There is a large amount of dialogue between the couple, which is unusual, as most Fantastic narratives have little or no dialogue.

The story commences with the couple hearing noises inside their house at night; their house is situated in an unnamed town or city, but presumably in Guatemala, and most likely Guatemala City. The husband heads to the kitchen with his gun, they do not turn on the lights and they try to remain silent. The husband sees the shape of a man in the kitchen, while the woman hides. Fearing that he may be attacked, the husband shoots the intruder and kills him. The woman wants to call the police, but the husband refuses as he does not want to go to prison. Instead, he wants to dispose of the body at Las Guacamayas, which is a park in Guatemala City. They get dressed, wrap the body in garbage bags and put it in the car. The woman reluctantly goes with her husband to dispose of the body, but she is nervous. The man assures her that no one saw or heard anything. The woman worries about the children, but the husband gets angry, and she becomes even more terrified.

The couple arrive at the destination, open the trunk, and take the body out. They argue about where to leave the body and the man becomes angrier. The body is heavy, and it takes them

twenty minutes to get to the bottom of the ravine and dispose of it. They return to the car, noticing that they had left the boot open. They look inside, to see another lifeless body, bigger and heavier than the one they had just dumped. The woman thinks they have been seen and starts to cry. The husband orders her to grab the dead body's feet, and they take it out of the car, close the boot, and take it down the same path to the bottom of the ravine and drop it close to the other body. They return to the car, drive home, and lock the doors. They decide that they will burn their clothes and wash the car in the morning. After all this, the wife takes two tranquillisers to calm down and the husband pours a large rum: his main worry is that he was wearing his favourite shirt (which is about to be burned). The wife says she will buy him a new one the next day.

The matrimonial banter between the protagonists is humorous and highlights the patriarchal and macho dominance of the male. The Fantastic incident — the unexpected and unexplained appearance of a second dead body in the boot of the car — is more in line with Barrenechea's a-normal event and the problematisation of this event, as well as Campra's silences relating to missing information, which I will discuss shortly. There is also no explanation of why Hernández used the English word 'city' in the title, rather than the Spanish word 'ciudad', while she made the adjective 'paranoica' (paranoid in English) feminine to agree with the feminine noun 'ciudad'. It also partially relates to both protagonists in the story, particularly the woman, as they become increasingly stressed that they will be seen due to the crime they have just committed, but it does not relate to a person who is living continually with paranoia. The name of the city, Paranoica city, is most likely a loose reference to Guatemala City during the chaotic and violent times in the twentieth century (see below and Chapter 4).

Silence, absences, or a lack of information are important parts of the Fantastic as they create doubt or hesitation for the reader. Campra's theory on silences in the Fantastic can be applied

to ‘Paranoica city’ as a way to read and understand the missing information in the story. There is no explanation of how the second body arrived or who left it in the boot of their car, nor why this other person or persons did not dispose of it in the gully or somewhere else. There is also no explanation of why neither the servants nor the neighbours heard gunfire (or the sound like firecrackers) when the husband shot the intruder, nor why the children did not wake, nor why anyone stirred when they drove out in the middle of the night. This ‘everyday’ couple owns a BMW car, which is a luxury vehicle, and may point to the husband being more than he seems or their income being earned from illegal or clandestine work. In addition, there is some missing information on how close the protagonists live to the Guacamayas Park, as the park is around sixteen minutes’ drive from the Plaza de la Constitución (the centre) in Guatemala City.⁷⁰ There is no time frame in the story of this journey, but the reader can presume that the drive did not take a long time, so it cannot be the Guacamayas conservation park which is eleven hours’ drive from the city.

There is a strong focus on hearing in this story. There are many references to noise, stifling noises, and silences. From the start, there are references to hearing: “¿Oíste ese ruido?”, *susurró* la mujer a su marido” (Hernández “Tiempo” 101; my emphasis). There are many other references to hearing and silence, such as whispering, hushed voices, the husband *hearing* the intruder’s noises more clearly as he is putting on his slippers, the gunfire sounding like firecrackers, the woman hearing her own voice, agitated breathing, stifling a sigh, creeping softly through the house, jingling keys, chattering teeth (from the cold), the protagonists reassuring themselves that none of the servants or neighbours heard anything, not talking to each other, no sound in the dark of night, rustling leaves, and so on. Hearing is associated with sound, deafness, language, and communication, as well as the physical outer ears. Sounds in

⁷⁰ This and the next distance have been measured using Google Maps. See: <https://www.google.com.au/maps/>.

literature are used to create an atmosphere, such as floorboards creaking, and to evoke different emotions in readers such as fear or tension. In this way, sounds enhance the immersive experience for the reader, allowing them “to hear through the ears of the writer” (Mansell 155). Sounds in literature are therefore subjective and their interpretation is based on the experiences of the reader. Nevertheless, sounds also make the reader an accomplice in the story, as the reader of ‘Paranoica city’ feels that he or she must also be quiet, feeling the tension and nervousness of the protagonists, and perhaps remembering things done in the past that they wanted to remain concealed or secret, even as children.

The lack of explanations contributes to the Fantastic atmosphere which is a key element of the Fantastic. The protagonists want to remain unseen in the literal sense. For example, they checked to *see* that the street was clear before they drove off, the husband stated that no one *heard* or *saw* anything; *watching* to see what was happening around them; they were sure that no one had *seen* them (after disposing of the first body); then, after finding the second body, had they *been seen?*; and, taking a last *look* around (after disposing of the second body). The emphasis on these two senses – vision and hearing, the most important senses for humans – project and instil their fear in the reader that almost becomes paranoia, as the reader follows the central characters’ progression of not wanting to be seen or heard.

Death and violence are also central to the story. The husband shoots the intruder and kills him, without a second thought, as he believes that if he spoke to the intruder, he would be attacked. He does not want the wife to call the police as he does not want to go to jail. The reader, especially the Guatemalan reader, accepts this violent act under the guise of protecting the family, which is discussed below. Under Article 38 of the Guatemalan Constitution,

homeowners are permitted to own a gun 'for personal use' and the right to bear arms is recognised, but with strong restrictions.⁷¹

The husband's macho behaviour is important and worthy of inclusion, as it highlights gender and power dynamics. There are many references to his behaviour and his increasing anger towards his wife, making the wife more scared of him than the intruder, and adding to the paranoia in the story. For example, the husband states: "si no fuera tan violento..." (Hernández "Tiempo" 103) but is finishing the sentence which his wife started in which she blames him for their predicament. Other examples include: the wife obeying the husband's orders and being compelled by a voice that is not hers; the husband's voice sounding threatening; the woman seeing the furious expression on his face that always makes her petrified; the husband telling the wife to shut up; the husband glaring at his wife with pure hatred; and the husband's tone being an unavoidable imperative.

In 'Paranoica city', the macho husband appears to be protecting his wife and children from the intruder – "Si no fuera tan violento, ahora quizás, en este mismo momento estarían haciéndonos lo mismo, o a los niños" (Hernández "Tiempo" 103). The husband refers to 'they' rather than 'somebody' or a single intruder, which raises doubts about his real occupation, especially with two references to the BMW car that the couple apparently owns. The price of a new BMW 330I sedan car in Guatemala at the time of writing (2024) is around 527,000 quetzals (more than \$104,000 Australian dollars; Carrocarros), while the yearly salary of a Guatemalan person is 50,400 quetzals (around \$10,000 Australian dollars; Stotz),⁷² and there are still large income inequality gaps.⁷³ There is the possibility he is involved with the drug trade, gun trafficking, or is part of one of the gangs in Guatemala, although the reader may presume that

⁷¹ See: Article 38 of the Guatemala's Constitution of 1985 with Amendments through 1993.

⁷² Accessed from website: For car prices: "Carrocarros."
For income: Stotz, Jon. "Average and Minimum Salary in Guatemala."

⁷³ See: World Bank "World Bank Guatemala Overview."

his real intention is to protect his family. There is no information about his occupation, which could be a hitman. The reader must decide for themselves.

Linked to machoism and gender roles, there are also references to the woman's traditional role, which resonates with the invisible women at the centre of the following two stories. The husband orders her to check on the children first, and later she worries about the children being left on their own and crying, to which the husband discounts her concerns. On a similar theme, there are a few references to the woman being on the verge of hysteria or paranoia,⁷⁴ which she admits herself, and the husband initially tries to calm her, but later, loses his patience: “calmate o te dejo con él” [the dead body in the ravine] (Hernández “Tiempos” 104). In Hernández's story, the wife's stress is a natural consequence of the husband's violent action (towards the intruder) and aggressive behaviour (towards her), and it is implied that he has been aggressive and violent in the past, which would increase her anxiety and terror in the traumatic situation of being an accessory to a murder and clandestinely disposing of a body. She does not witness the murder; she only hears the gunfire, and she may fear for her own life. Hernández is protesting machoism and the patriarchy in Guatemala, with the husband's increasingly aggressive behaviour towards his wife.

In conclusion, Hernández has delivered a humorous story, with a large amount of matrimonial banter, of a seemingly everyday couple, caught up in the suspense of a dramatic event which would make any person nervous, anxious, and slightly hysterical. Her inclusion of a Fantastic event — the unexplained second dead body in the boot of a car, placed by an unknown party or parties — while making the story humorous subtly highlights the everyday violence that Guatemalans have faced, especially in the twentieth century with a series of brutal military

⁷⁴ The word hysterical comes from the Greek word ‘hystera’, meaning uterus, which may explain why, in the political and patriarchal order, women are often considered to be hysterical or ‘controlled by the womb’, and it was thought to be inherent in the gender (Gatens, 24-25).

dictatorships. These regimes were backed by the Guatemalan oligarchs, the US Government, and the US-owned United Fruit Company, the latter which owned large tracks of Guatemalan land and controlled the Guatemalan economy.⁷⁵ The agrarian reform in the early 1950s of elected President Arbenz threatened these stakeholders, and the small landholders obtained the support of the working class and organised uprisings to obtain higher wages. The US Government accused Arbenz of being pro-Communist, and imposed an arms embargo, after which the Guatemalan government imported Czech arms. However, the army officers would not arm the civilians, and the US launched a campaign of terror against the civilians, bombed the capital, and many civilians were slaughtered. Guerrilla warfare ensued, but the military retaliated, notably in 1982 when many indigenous peoples were machined-gunned under ‘scorched earth’ tactics, with the Church and aid agencies treating the survivors. The country transitioned to an unusual democracy with elections in 1985, even though fewer than 50 percent of the people voted, to rebuild the country and obtain foreign aid. Despite this, the army retained control of the rural areas, burned Maya villages, and killed more than 30,000 villagers, according to estimates. The army tried to resettle the surviving Maya and reorganise their societies, backed by foreign arms, hardware, and military advice. However, economic aid from the USA and Europe fell below expectations, and Guatemala’s economy stagnated and then slumped. Guatemala was named as the worst human rights violator in Latin America in 1990, with El Salvador a close second (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 452-458).

In a 2018 interview with Rafael Cuevas Molina in Costa Rica, Hernández stated that she writes to (re)produce reality. “¿Mostrar una realidad es hacer una denuncia? En todo caso, depende de la realidad que se muestre, depende del contexto en que se evidencie”. Hernández has certainly made the dialogue between the couple appear very normal and real, under the

⁷⁵ A 1950 census revealed that two percent of Guatemalans controlled almost seventy-five percent of the arable land (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 454).

circumstances of the event (Hernández “Mostrar”). The final line of story, with the wife saying she will buy the husband another shirt, makes the last word hers. For the first time in the story, she appears calm and controlled. Even though she may appear to be in silent acquiescence to the husband, it also indicates the return to the routine of daily life for both of them as though nothing had happened.

The invisible woman

While ‘Paranoica city’ is about an ‘appearing’ body, the final two stories in this chapter feature disappearing bodies and the invisibility of women: the invisible woman or women taken for granted by their partner, their children, other family members, in the workplace, in the community in general, and as authors. Too often, women have heard the phrase: “A woman’s place is in the home/kitchen”. By default, it would also include women in politics, heads of companies, global organisations, and so on. Kathleen Jones states that the invisibility of women stems from the separation of men and women into the public space (men) and the private space, notably the home (women). As women have been excluded from this public space, they do not learn how to lead others with an authoritative manner. Jones argues, therefore, that the patterns of socialisation for the private space educate women in subordination; the male concept of power has excluded women and made female power invisible, “either because it is different from male power, or because it is wielded in the private sphere” (152-153). Jones adds that men have allowed power to equal authority, but that political opinion has long recognised the difference between the two. Authority has been conceptualised to exclude women’s voices (153). Joanna Russ also notes that the social invisibility of women’s experiences is a socially arranged bias and not a failure of communication (“Suppress” 48). This invisibility of women is discussed in the following story,

‘El eterno transparente’. It is also a theme in ‘El huésped’ by Amparo Dávila, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

‘El eterno transparente’

Compared to the above three stories, ‘El eterno transparente’ by Linda Berrón does not deal with the physical breaking of the body. Instead, there is transformation in her story, which is the gradual disappearance, dissolving or transparency of the body of the protagonist, as her body ceases to exist in its full form. This annihilation of the body includes the main character’s loss of everything, as well as her identity.

The story commences with the female protagonist, Deyanira, trying unsuccessfully to open a door (to her home, but this is not initially obvious). Puzzled, she tries another key to the same effect. Deyanira knocks on the door and the maid lets her in; everything else appears to be normal. When Deyanira asks her husband how he entered the house,⁷⁶ he is surprised and annoyed by her question, and he scoffs that it must be a different key. He then brushes aside her queries and puzzlement by asking if they (Deyanira and the children) have eaten already, as he has a meeting to attend that evening, thereby diverting the attention to himself and his needs.

The next morning, while getting dressed for work, Deyanira finds that her blue shoes are too big, as are all her other shoes. When she comments to her husband about this occurrence, he mocks: “¿Te estás haciendo pequeña?” (Berrón “Eterno” 18). Puzzled again, she puts cotton in the tips of the shoes to make them fit. The couple eat breakfast in silence.

Deyanira hobbles to work, wearing the oversized shoes, and, on her arrival, she finds the door of her office open, and another woman at her desk. When Deyanira questions why she is there,

⁷⁶ Deyanira’s husband’s name is Luis Alberto Martínez, which we learn near the end of the story.

the woman, Marta, responds that she is the secretary to don Julián. Deyanira becomes annoyed and angry, explaining that she is his secretary, and looks for the family photos she had displayed on the desk, but the photos are not there: only one of Marta's boyfriend. Deyanira becomes more desperate, asking her to check with the other office workers. Marta insists that she is mad and calls don Julián, who confirms that Marta is his secretary, not Deyanira. Deyanira insists that she has been his secretary for the past six years, but don Julián claims that she is confused, that he does not know who she is, that she has never worked there, and that she should return home and rest. He politely suggests for her to see a doctor, turns away and becomes lost in the illuminated office. Deyanira leaves the office, still dragging her shoe, climbs onto a bus, and becomes lost in thought. After alighting from the bus, she walks home, but finds that it is taking longer to get there and seems to be uphill. She is becoming exhausted.

The school bus comes along and Deyanira sees her oldest son run towards the garden, but she does not see Pablo, the younger son. When she asks him where Pablo is, he responds that he does not know who Pablo is and that he has no brothers. The door of the house opens, and the maid (who does not recognise Deyanira) and another woman ask Deyanira what she wants. When Deyanira asks the woman who she is, she replies that she is the wife of Luis Alberto Martínez (Deyanira's husband). Deyanira turns and leaves.

In 2021, Berrón stated in an interview with Amalia Chaverri Fonseca of Autoras EUNED that most readers do not realise that, after this point in the story (almost at the end), the narrator switches from the omniscient narrator to the husband's viewpoint. This occurs in the penultimate paragraph, as Luis returns home and alights from his car. While the narration switches to Luis' perspective, it remains in the objective voice of the narrator:

Desde la acera vio a una mujer que salía de su casa, la mirada ensimismada en sus zapatos azules. Observó con atención que, a medida que avanzaba, se iba haciendo cada vez más pálida y transparente, hasta que desapareció (Berrón “Eterno” 21).

According to Berrón in this interview:

En el puro final, las dos últimas líneas, el narrador viene a ser el marido. Entonces, lo que ahí se pone de manifiesto es que el personaje de ‘El eterno transparente’ de alguna manera porque es visto, es porque los demás, el jefe, el marido, los hijos, tienen como una subjetividad propia, sino que todo depende del su problema por no decir lo que realmente pasa, y su problema es visto, no por el narrador, sino por el marido [...] Que me costó muchísimo acabar ese cuento [...] elegí cambiar de narrador. (Berrón “Presentación”)

Berrón also stated in this interview that the story is a parody of the famous phrase ‘el eterno femenino’ which for millennia has defined the role of women: obedience, subservience, silence, and invisibility.⁷⁷ The husband sees ‘a’ woman, but does not recognise that it is Deyanira, his wife, nor does he mention any recollection of her in his past. The story has a Fantastic finale: the reader questions what happened to Deyanira and must come to a decision: whether she disappeared or not, and if not, to decide where she has gone. I had originally thought that Deyanira was a ghost, and she was returning to her home and workplace, unaware of her real situation. It would also explain why Luis sees her disappear at the end. Readers may also ask if it was a dream or Deyanira’s hallucinations, or question whether she was going mad. It is interesting that Marta thinks Deyanira is mad and don Julián asks her to go home to rest and see a doctor, implying that Deyanira has an anxiety issue. These are the types of critiques or

⁷⁷ Berrón might also be referring to the play *El eterno femenino* (1974) by Rosario Castellanos.

gaslighting that Deyanira (and other women) face if they challenge expectations of them and are an indication of the lack of appreciation for their invisible labour.

The allegory of and motivation for Berrón's story is the invisibility of women: invisible women in the home, 'taken for granted' by the partner, the children, other family members, their workplace, in society, and in the political sphere (Jones 152-153). It may be a sad and adverse consequence of those women who believe it is their role to serve their families under the patriarchal gaze, but instead, these women are taken for granted and subsequently become invisible in the family members' lives, as well as in the workplace. The gradual disappearance of Deyanira reflects patriarchal society's attitudes towards women, not only invisible in the public space, but in the private (domestic) space as well – unseen and unheard – not just to the male household members, but to the other family members as well. Mothers, aunts, sisters, and daughters are there in the background, invisible and waiting to attend to someone's needs. This is exemplified in the story by Luis's annoyance at her difficulties with the key, wanting his dinner, mocking his wife's body size, as well as Deyanira waking up early to get the children ready for school, and eating breakfast in silence with Luis. In addition, there is the metaphor of the blue shoes that do not fit, implying that Deyanira no longer fits into the role imposed by society and is no longer needed or noticed by society and her family. While the colour of the shoes has no meaning, the phrase 'put yourself in someone else's shoes' (the expression in Spanish is: 'ponerse en los zapatos del otro') may have more meaning.

Kathleen Jones' theory of invisibility is corroborated by Patricia García and Teresa López-Pellisa's introductory notes in their book *Fantastic Short Stories by Women Authors from Spain and Latin America* (2019), in which they discuss ghost stories being indications of women being confined to the home during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They note that women were "as invisible in society as ghosts might be" (García and López-Pellisa 12),

and the exclusion of women in property and custody rights put them under the control and confines of patriarchal law. This also explains why ghost stories are frequently set inside a home, the private space, often turning it into a threatening domain (García and López-Pellisa 12). However, the term ‘ghost’ is sometimes employed figuratively to talk about someone being invisible or unseen, like Deyanira in this story – someone who is always there, expected to be there, taken for granted and therefore not seen. In this way, ‘El eterno transparente’ could be classed as a ghost story, as its central character is invisible. Ghosts can also be references to past historical and colonial horrors, such as the conquest of the American continent, the dictatorships, and the oligarchs.

Joanna Russ also notes that the public invisibility of women’s experiences is a socially arranged bias and not a failure of communication (“Suppress” 48). Russ was even more scathing in her 1972 article in which she stated that women’s roles in literature are often only images of women: depictions of social roles that women are expected to play, who exist in relation to the male protagonist, and, at the worst, represent male fantasies of what they want to love, fear, or hate (Russ “Heroine” 5). She lamented that “woman as intellectual is not one of our success myths” with heroines being restricted to “one vice, one virtue, and one occupation” (Russ “Heroine” 8-9), which seems to be the role that Deyanira is expected to perform. However, since Russ’s article was written in 1972, there has been an increase in leadership roles for women. There are and have been female Prime Ministers in many countries (such as Jacinda Ardern, Benazir Bhutto, Helen Clark, Julia Gillard, Golda Meir, Angela Merkel, and Margaret Thatcher), and Nobel Peace Prize winners (Mother Teresa [1979], Rigoberta Menchú [1992], and Malala Yousafzai [2014]). Both Russ and Mercedes Expósito García discuss the suppression of women’s writing and their invisibility in literary circles (Russ “Suppress” 46, 66, 78, 114, 140; Expósito García 95-96), as well as the absence of women in other areas of the arts, such as female choreographers in ballet until the mid-1960s (Russ “Suppress” 101).

Edith Showalter states that women need to come out of the wilderness or ‘wild zone/female space’, which is invisible to male control, to address “a genuinely women-centred criticism, theory, and art, whose shared project is to bring into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak” (201). Showalter notes that women have been muted, silenced, and that the blanks, gaps, and silences are not the spaces where women’s consciousness can be revealed, but instead, are the blinds of a “prison-house of language” (Showalter 193).

Luce Irigaray wrote extensively on the opposing poles of male/visibility-female/invisibility that controlled the psychoanalytical core of the studies of Freud and Lacan. She opines that since the feminine has been conceived simply as the negative counterpart of the male, women have been pushed to the outside of the theory, or included in male theory, because they could not conceptualise it. Female sexuality therefore was converted into a hole in psychoanalytic theory (Irigaray, qtd. in Burke 289; Castro Klarén 187). Likewise, Isabel Larguía and John Dumoulin state that women’s position in primitive societies are determined by their productive use, which is performed collectively. When these community structures are dismantled and replaced by the patriarchal family and economic production and consumerism, women’s work and roles have no market value. Despite being on the margins of production, these authors opine that women constitute the *invisible* economic backbone of society and that the *invisible* production of the ‘ama de casa’ (housewife) is the workforce: physical and spiritual efforts by the other family members (including hers) in their daily work and in the public sphere (Larguía and Dumoulin 120-122; my emphasis). Larguía and Dumoulin also state that men’s work is socially visible, as it is involved with the methods of production of goods and in economic trade, while women’s work (home duties) is invisible (Larguía and Dumoulin 120). There may be a subtle reference to this point in Berrón’s story when Deyanira’s husband visibly drives up to the home, after his day away at work. Larguía and

Dumoulin argue that the division of labour between men and women is the cause of gender typologies of masculine and feminine and has led to the invisibility of women (Larguía and Dumoulin 123-124). In addition, the work performed by women in the home frees up men to work in the paid economy, but, at the same time, marginalises women’s work in the household, rendering it invisible. The utilisation of this surplus (male) labour by capitalist companies would not have occurred without the invisible work performed by the women in the domestic space, but they add that women cannot participate in the public space unless they are relieved of the ‘excessive’ burden of domestic work (Larguía and Dumoulin 123, 129). In Berrón’s story, the protagonist is invisible in both the public space and the private space, and her efforts do not appear to be valued in either.

Feminist scholars argue that the practice of authority depends on how patterns of socialisation are established in the private space, and that these patterns have educated women to perform the subordinate role for thousands of years, like many of the women protagonists in the stories in this thesis. These patterns of power have excluded women and made their power invisible; either because it is different from male power or because it is conducted in the private space (Jones 153). However, Claudia Lima de Costa contends that feminists have unwittingly, and unintentionally, helped maintain the invisibility of women’s power by prioritising the general struggles against inequality and repression over women’s specific issues and keeping the split between public and private space (de Lima de Costa 176). In Latin America, the subordination of women is intensified by their confinement to the private spaces: the home, the convent, or the brothel. Franco posited that the following terms are interchangeable (I have added the extra column on the right, in italics):

Male	Mobile (active)	Public	<i>Visible</i>
Female	Immobile (passive)	Private	<i>Invisible</i>

(Franco “Beyond” 507)

One of the most vocal activists on women's invisibility is Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, who states that women's invisible role (in the home) is vital, not only for defining women in their generic constitution, but also because their work is indispensable for 'the others' (the family), even though it is unpaid. She notes that there is an *emotional* division of labour, that is, the emotional support of the others in the family, but adds that this work is done under extreme oppression: it is work, it is not 'libre', and it is invisible (Lagarde y de los Ríos 121, 124, 131, 134; my emphasis). In Berrón's story, Deyanira does not have emotional support from her family, which may contribute to her loss of identity and self in the end, as she realises that they do not value her at all.

One final point about invisibility: when don Julián tells Deyanira to go home and to see a doctor, he turns away, and from her point of view, he *becomes lost* in the office. He has become invisible to her, as his support was not there for her, the same lack of support as from her family.

'El eterno transparente' is also a story of a woman losing everything in the public and domestic spheres. Deyanira loses her access to the house (the key), her shoes, her clothing, her office, her job, her status in society (due to the loss of the job and as a married woman), her children, her worth to her family, her husband (to another woman, and it becomes apparent that it was the other woman's shoes she was trying to wear), her maid, her home and her reason for being. Everything is in the process of disappearing for Deyanira. Even the title of the story is a denunciation of the invisibility of women: they have been and still are invisible and transparent, and victims of society's 'place' and space for them: out of sight. In fact, 'El eterno transparente' is the title of Berrón's collection of stories published in 2021.⁷⁸ In addition, there is the opposite to invisibility – the visibility: the husband, the manager, the children, the maid, and the people who have taken her place. Her husband has the final 'word': he sees her [his invisible wife]

⁷⁸ Berrón, Linda. *El eterno transparente*. Librería Virtual UNED, Costa Rica. 2021.

but does not really notice her or recognise her. However, he is the one giving her reality and visibility and her reality is dependent on him seeing her.

‘Mujer hecha pedazos’

‘Mujer hecha pedazos’ by Cheri Lewis G. of Panama deals with the fragmented body of a woman, Marta, whose body parts fall off for no apparent reason, but she can easily reattach them as though nothing has happened. The focus in this story is not her falling body parts, or a failed romance, but that Marta is an independent woman who is making different choices, perhaps more so than any of the other women in the stories in this thesis. After she is broken by life’s trials and tests, she can pick up her pieces and carry on, with no fuss.

It is a humorous story with two protagonists, Eduardo the narrator, and Marta, whom he meets at a birthday party. Eduardo sees Marta talking to a friend, Cristina, and comments that he saw nothing strange about Marta until her arm falls off. She picks it up calmly, reinserts it to her shoulder, and continues talking as though nothing unusual has happened. Eduardo thinks it must be a prosthesis, as there is no blood, but he notices the fingers moving normally. Cristina introduces them and they immediately hit it off, being able to talk about any topic. Eduardo is too embarrassed to ask her about her arm, but finds the conversation enthralling, and forgets about it.

When they move out to the balcony, Marta’s left hand falls off, but when she bends down to pick it up, it slips to the floor below. She rushes down to pick it up, and Eduardo follows her, nervous about the danger of the racoons finding it first. They take a while to find it, and she inserts it into her wrist as though nothing had happened. Eduardo asks her why this happens, and she responds that she does not know the reason. Her parents had many tests and procedures conducted on her, but they only traumatised her. She became tired of all these tests, decided to live with her condition and accept it as normal. When Eduardo asks her if she has ever lost her

head, she replies that she has, but not physically. She once lost her head for a man and that was worse as she was left heartbroken, and it took her a long time to pick up her pieces. He notices that Marta looks a little sad when she says this, but then she laughs it off. She tells him that she once lost her leg at the beach, which was luckily recovered by a friend who could swim. Eduardo wants to spend more time with her, but Marta is leaving the next day for Buenos Aires, where she is interpreting for a medical conference. She says that the job is a good fit for her as she works in a booth where there is less chance of scaring someone if a limb falls off. However, Marta laments that it seems completely normal for someone to have breast implants and flaunt them to the world, but people become scared if they see a limb fall off, as she adjusts her leg which had just fallen off.

They continue to talk until someone comes to pick her up, almost at dawn. They farewell each other with a big hug. Eduardo likes being close to her. Afterwards, they continue to write and ring each other often. He recounts that the last time he spoke with her she told him that she had been drunk at a party and lost an arm. Noone could find the arm, no matter how hard they tried. Eduardo says to her that it's strange to lose an arm like that, but she responds that she has lost her keys, passport, wallet, the love of her life, so losing an arm was not a problem.

The reader does not question the Fantastic events in this story, that is, Marta's body parts falling off for no clear reason. The Fantastic in this story matches Alazraki's criteria in which the Fantastic element is introduced in the very first few sentences of the story, with no gradual progression and no Gothic shock (Alazraki 31). The falling limb, while sudden and unusual, does not overly disturb the reader. Eduardo states: "Mi primera impresión al verla no fue nada extraordinario. En realidad, me parecía muy normal..." (Lewis G. 1), until her arm falls off. Marta reinserts the limb and continues talking as though nothing unusual has occurred, and the reader also starts to consider that things are now normal again, until her hand falls off. The

event is swept aside as Marta reattaches the limb and acts as though it is all very normal, reassuring the reader. Likewise, Campra's theory of silences in the Fantastic can also be applied to the story, as there is no explanation of why Marta's limbs fall off, nor the ages of Eduardo and Marta – young or middle aged – or of any other relationships Marta had prior to her encounter with Eduardo, other than the man who hurt her. These questions are left to the reader to decide.

Marta's parents sent her for many tests and surgeries to find the cause, but with no result and the treatments left her traumatised. After years of suffering these tests, she got fed up with it and learned to live with her parts falling off from time to time and accepted it as normal for her. Her parents do not want to accept her with her imperfections, or at least that is how she sees it, and she feels that she is being forced to be something she is not. Marta may be more traumatised by her parents' not accepting her as she is, as an 'imperfect' daughter. As a result, she often laughs off the loss of body parts; this is her way of dealing with the unusual events, which are often shocking or surprising to other people. She carries on as though nothing has happened.

Unlike other women protagonists of my other chosen short stories, Marta is an independent woman. Marta is different from Deyanira in 'El eterno transparente' and it is important to note the differences in changes in women's conditions during the thirty years between when the two stories were written. Marta is an accomplished professional, who is about to attend an important conference in Buenos Aires as an interpreter, and she has a dynamic role in society. Despite this, she has no interaction with other humans when she is working in the booth. In contrast, Deyanira is a secretary in an office and her role is more passive, but she has contact with more people in the office. Deyanira is married, has two children, a maid (none of whom notice her) and a house; she fulfils the roles expected by society as a wife and mother. In

contrast, Marta is not married, she will not settle for any man, and does not appear to need a permanent relationship, and she has no children. Even so, Marta is in a constant state of falling apart as she has felt forced to be something that she is not, but she can pull herself back together and carry on, accepting what has occurred. She is an independent woman who is making different choices to those expected of her, and she maintains her agency: this is the focus of the story. She can fall in (or out) of love, but only with the right man. If this does not work out, she is happy to be alone. She has her own career. Her relationship with Eduardo, while friendly, is still at a distance. While they ring and write to each other, there is no mention of them dating after their first meeting at the party.

Lewis's 'Mujer hecha pedazos' employs similar themes to Pérez Cuadra's 'Muñeca rota' in which the protagonist's body parts are also falling off. While Marta's body carries on within its own disintegration, the protagonist in 'Muñeca rota' feels helpless and vulnerable, as she cannot reattach her body parts. It is only when she jumps into the sea and becomes another life form that she is in control of her body. Marta also shares similarities with Clara in Llana's 'En familia'. While the living family deride Clara for doing 'a man's job' (implying she is not employed in a 'woman's role' and is not dependent on men for an income), Clara is unmarried, but has a degree, even though she does not have a professional life. She only prescribes remedies for the family, and she still embroiders with the female family members.

Enrique Jaramillo Levi opines that the story implies a psychosomatic response to the trauma experienced by Marta from the failed relationship with the 'love of her life', and while trying to laugh it off, she has not recovered (Jaramillo Levi). Marta tells Eduardo that she lost her head for a man, which she added was worse than physically losing her head: "Quedé con el corazón destrozado, Eduardo. Me costó mucho reunir luego mis pedazos, y eso que, como ves, tengo una vasta experiencia levantando trozos de mi cuerpo" (Lewis G. 3).

However, as I have noted above, the failed romance is not the focus of the story: it is Marta's agency and independence to pick herself up and carry on, even after a broken heart and other upsetting events in her life.

There may be psychological possibilities for Marta's loss of limbs, but they are mostly outside the scope of this thesis. I will, however, offer three possibilities. One explanation of the body parts falling off is that Marta perceives her parents' concerns and their numerous attempts to find a medical explanation for this unusual condition almost as an aggressive interference. Their projected shame towards Marta's imperfection, especially when she was younger, continues to traumatise her. The second explanation is that it represents, or is an allegory of, how women are pulled in different directions by their partners, families, workplaces, society, and cultures. Every time a woman helps others – her partner, children, parents, workmates, the school council, or attending a protest in the street — she is giving that person or persons a piece of herself. Her body is never truly her own. Lastly, Marta may have used the failed romance as an excuse, as it is something that most adults can understand, rather than being unable to provide an explanation to Eduardo for the falling body parts.

Marta picking up her body parts (both physically and metaphorically) is a sign of her agency. She may be heartbroken, but she is not afraid of being alone. It is revealed that Marta is an accomplished interpreter; with translating, the translator is filtering the voices of others, and they are echoing different voices, but the translator or interpreter always adds something of their own. The irony is that Marta, like the book or person being translated, is imperfect too, as her body parts fall off, but she has accepted this as normal. Jhumpha Lahiri notes: "In Italian I am thinking differently, because I feel free from my English brain, my English emotions. It puts me in another dimension, and I feel untethered" (Goldstein 39). Marta likes her job as she can hide her falling body parts in the booth and perhaps like Lahiri, she moves into a different

emotional state. Interpreters or translators must pull things apart and put them together again, like Marta's body parts. In life, there is interpreting and performing. The Spanish word for perform – *representar* — has two meanings: to act, and to deliver. The link to interpreting is that interpreters must perform and interpret all the time in their roles. As Lahiri states: “Writing in another language represents an act of demolition, a new beginning” (Goldstein 39).

After Marta tells Eduardo that she likes working in the interpreting booth, she notes that people are strange; they fear a limb falling off but think that it's completely normal for breasts to be cut open and large silicone implants inserted. These new, enlarged, and fake breasts are then flaunted for the world to see (Lewis G. 4). While both Lewis and DeMello point out the hypocrisy of women revealing their breasts or breast implants as being acceptable by society (Lewis G. 4; DeMello 273), Lewis notes that a fallen limb provokes fear. Susan Bordo states that the number of cosmetic surgery procedures, legitimised by music and film stars, almost doubled in the USA from 1981 to 1989 as they became “another fabulous fashion accessory” to be talked about and flaunted in the media (Bordo 246), as many people have become addicted to achieve the ‘perfect’ body (Bordo 248). Both DeMello and Jane Goodall also criticise the desire for women to achieve the perfect body (DeMello xvi, 3, 107, 198; Goodall 157). Goodall notes that perfect beauty, and the acceptance of not being able to achieve such, is dictated by the beauty industry, supplemented by often strict regimes of diet, exercise, and purchasing products of all types. She also states that magazines preach the ethics of women ‘accepting themselves’ with their natural bodies but criticises the same magazines for interspersing the edition with ‘uncompromising’ images of what is ‘acceptable’ (Goodall 157-158). Beauty and perfect bodies are becoming a commodity which can be purchased by the wealthy who publicly flaunt what they have had done, but those who cannot afford to change their appearance are at a disadvantage (DeMello 187). However, in ‘Mujer hecha pedazos’, Marta has accepted her body and its flaws but recognises that other people do not.

One final point is that there is no direct English translation of the title ‘Mujer hecha pedazos’ that can convey that the subject (*mujer*) is subjected to this treatment (*hecha*). In addition, *pedazo* is used in expressions that tend to objectify a woman, e.g. ‘un pedazo de mujer’, which translates to the offensive slang expression of ‘a piece of arse’ in English.

Lewis has written a light-hearted and amusing story about a woman falling apart and trying to put her pieces back together again throughout her life. She deploys the Fantastic to create the absurd occurrences of Marta’s body parts physically falling off, and being reattached without any drama, as part of her normal day – a life she has become accustomed to and laughs it off. It is a story of an independent woman who, despite what life throws at her, recovers, and carries on. It is also a story of how women are always giving parts of their body to others throughout their lives, by physically lending a hand or helping in some way, so that their bodies and lives are never their own. Marta’s agency and dignity, that is, her acceptance of herself as she is, make hers an ideal story on which to finish the chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed and discussed stories that have a major focus on the fragmented body and the non-corporeal body. In all these stories, the Fantastic events add an absurd, grotesque, or an amusing angle to often what is macabre or frightening subject matter. Dead bodies, the most gruesome of subjects, have been the focus point for three stories. The authors use these extreme images to highlight the violence that occurred in their countries, particularly the unpunished crimes against their families, friends, resistance fighters, politicians, and even citizens of other countries. However, the authors incorporate black humour and satire to reduce the impact of the otherwise horrific content to provide the contrast or the opposite to the extreme events of their stories.

The examination of the invisible woman (or women in general) underscores the struggles that women have faced to achieve status or credibility, in the workplace, or in the home, or as an author. While men's traditional work has always been visible, such as on the farm, roads, railroads, in the city, and the office, in what is called the public space, women's work has been, for the most part, confined to the private space, generally unpaid labour in the home, unseen and unheard. The women in 'El eterno transparente' and 'Mujer hecha pedazos' resist in varying degrees; the resistance is there, but the invisibility continues.

On a totally different view of the fragmented body, and in a more light-hearted way, fragmented body parts physically detaching from the body are the hyperbolic allegory of women, or anyone, trying to put their pieces back together again after dealing with life's setbacks. Marta in 'Mujer hecha pedazos' is able to recover and continue being independent, unlike the doll-woman in 'Muñeca rota' in Chapter 5, but both women make their own choices.

A fragmented person can also be fragmented in other ways. A well-used motif in Fantastic literature is the double, often portrayed as the alter-ego or 'evil twin', and this will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: The Theme of the Double

“Any of us could be the man who encounters his double”.

Freidrich Dürrenmatt, *Der Doppelgänger*

“Al otro, a Borges, es a quien le ocurren las cosas”.

Jorge Luis Borges, *Borges y yo*

Introduction

The theme of the double is intrinsically subversive, which is why it often features in Fantastic literature. It is by nature ambiguous, paradoxical, and impossible. The mere appearance of a double in a narrative has a destabilising effect as it implies an intrusion from one world into another or a clash of worlds, one which is real and the other which is not (Dale 3-4). The double can be a person, often an alter-ego or a split personality, an animal, or an object that becomes the catalyst that triggers desires, instincts, or depravities that are hidden deep in the soul of a character. In addition, the process of metamorphosis can also create a double. The double emerges as the enemy of rationality and the more consistent picture of the main character (Gross 29).

The traditional double in literature can generally be put into two categories. The first is the alter-ego or identical (or near identical) double, who may be either the perpetrator of identity theft or a paranoid hallucination by the protagonist. Doubles do not need to look physically like the principal character. Instead, they may be something completely different, and they may act differently or in collusion with the protagonist; they reflect the wild side of humans. The other type is the split personality or an unleashed monster that acts separately from the main character. The principal idea of the double motif is the impossibility of encountering oneself as another, and that the two are identical in some way (Faurholt). Examples of these

are the double in Llana's 'Nosotras' (1965) in which the protagonist receives telephone calls from herself, and in Hernández's 'Invitación' (2007) in which the main character encounters both her younger and older selves in the street.

The double can take a non-human form such as an animal, like the hyena in Carrington's 'La debutante' (analysed below), which is the alter-ego of the protagonist and is dressed up to attend the debutante ball in the girl's place, or the rhinoceros in Hernández's 'Molestias de tener un rinoceronte' (2007), in which the protagonist has a young rhinoceros follow him like a puppy, but the rhinoceros is actually the double of the young man who is seeking attention for his lost arm. The double can be an object, like the doll in Pérez Cuadra's 'Muñeca rota' and in Ferré's 'La muñeca menor' (both analysed in Chapter 5). The double can also be the result of a metamorphosis, as in Escudos's 'Yo, cocodrilo' when the young protagonist transforms into a crocodile and takes her vengeance against the villagers for supporting genital mutilation (see Chapter 5).⁷⁹

This chapter discusses two other different representations of the double which are not the traditional double; namely, the duplication and fragmentation of a character through a mirror, and the double as the embodiment of otherness. The duplication and fragmentation of a character via a mirror is the first type of double. While mirrors normally reflect a person's image, the reflections in the mirror in the dining room in Llana's 'En familia' (analysed below) are not of the family sitting at the table, instead they are the images of deceased family members, moving almost in unison with the living family. The second type of double is the person or thing which is the Other – the conflict between the self, the 'I', and the 'not-I' which is the Other. Themes of the self contend with consciousness, that is, vision and perception,

⁷⁹ Another story examined with doubles but not included as part of this thesis is Hernández's 'Carretera sin buey' (2007). In this story, a man is very distraught that he killed an ox while driving on the road. He returns to the spot and transforms into an ox to replace the animal, with the assistance of the protagonists.

while the themes of the Other deal with the unconscious, usually transgressive forms of desire (Jackson 51-52). The Other is not the main character in the stories, but it is another being that has a profound effect on the protagonist.

A brief history of the double

The concept of the double in narratives was specifically isolated and given a name in the nineteenth century, notably in German Romantic writers such as E.T.A. Hoffmann (Ernst Theodore Amadeus Hoffmann, 1776-1822), to become one among the most popular motifs in Romantic literature. According to Ralph Tymms (29), Leslie Dale (16) and Magalí Velasco Vargas (60) amongst others, the German writer and philosopher Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825), who wrote under the name of Jean Paul, was the first person to coin the word *Doppelgänger* (double goer or double walker in English) to describe the concept of the double. According to Lexey Bartlett, the double is also known as the ‘shadow-side’ which is “the opposite in quality to the conscious personality, and this idea — that the second of two personalities is simply [*the*] *Other* — indicate the second state can easily be conceived as opposite to the first and thus potentially be easy to distinguish” (Bartlett 21; my emphasis).

As mentioned above, the double is often the alter ego of a character, a person that has the same name and roughly the same appearance, such as in Edgar Allen Poe’s *William Wilson* (1839), or is identical to that person, like in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Double* (1846). Magalí Velasco Vargas states that the theme of the double has its primordial and folkloric base in the magical-religious thinking of the villages in Mesoamerica, such as: “la sombra como desprendimiento del ser vivo; la posibilidad de desasirse del cuerpo a través de la magia para trasladarse en el espacio como espíritu o materia; la transmutación en animales, como sucede en la cultura mesoamericana con la creencia del nahual” (61).

The double is a mythical theme which can be seen in motifs such as twins, and sibling rivalry between the same or both genders. They represent the balance in not only the natural forces, but also the spiritual power of order and chaos. They are the irreconcilable opposites, such as life/death, good/evil, mind/body, feminine/masculine, and so on (Velasco Vargas 61-62).

While the double in Romantic and Gothic literature is horrific due to its moral implications, in the twentieth century, after Freud's theories of psychology were accepted, the horrific aspect of the double has diminished and has been replaced by the acceptance of the natural duality in humans (Bartlett 25-26, 47). Bartlett opines that the change from Modernist fiction's horrific double occurred in Joseph Conrad's *The secret sharer* (1910), the difference being that there *is no fear of the double and it becomes difficult to recognise* (Bartlett 40; my emphasis). The postmodern double or multiple allows the characters of the story to respond to a challenge in their lives with creativity, as the "additional selves help them to cope with the world they live in" (Bartlett 42). This would particularly be the case for the authors discussed in this thesis who lived in times of conflict, dictatorships, social unrest, or tense internal political struggles.

Bartlett notes that the postmodern double or multiple identity is now accepted as revealing perspectives on culture, history, and the issue of the self. She opines that it is now one of the best, most honest ways to express human behaviour (Bartlett 47). This thesis analyses the ways in which authors use the double in narratives of the Fantastic to reduce the impact of the horrific and the depraved, often with humour and satire and the inclusion of a social and/or political message.

Robert Rogers notes that the double may be used to represent the division of the human mind, often to depict the extremes of good and evil in each person (Rogers 44, 46). He states that the best way to portray conflict which exists in the mind (wishes, dreams, and so on) is to imagine it as interpersonal conflict, with the parties being at opposite poles to each other (Rogers 64).

Therefore, this representative function of doubling leads to the main purpose of doubling – that of the *defence mechanism of projection*. Self-defence mechanisms can also include isolation for split personalities, the ‘phantom limb’ as the denial for loss of the limb, and mechanisms “of displacement, repression, regression, reaction-formation, and turning against the self” (Rogers 64; my emphasis).

In contrast to the Gothic novelist, the modern novelist, while using the motif of the double, does not put a moral judgement on the irrational, or at least, reveals some tension between the sympathy for the amoral freedom and the judgement of the behaviours of these fictional characters (Rosenfield 338). Clare Rosenfield notes that in the twentieth century,⁸⁰ the author’s use of the double is intentional. Ambiguity has replaced the diabolic double and is a characteristic of the modern story (Rosenfield 336). This resonates with Fantastic literature as ambiguity is a key feature of Fantastic narratives.

Another reason why writers use the theme of the double is to highlight loss, both loss of identity and loss of references. Velasco Vargas states:

Con la división, la multiplicación, el reflejo o la fabricación el doble conduce al personaje a confrontarse con sus propios temores, sus fallas, sus deseos; dudará de su integridad física y psicológica, la pérdida de estas referencias afecta a su vez su contacto con el mundo, el caos sobreviene. El doble representa en la literatura la violación de la unidad de carácter del personaje; precisamente esta violación es lo que caracteriza el poder del doble: cuestionar y replantear la identidad. (64)

Along similar lines, melancholia has been linked to ‘pathological’ repetition, where people cannot escape their past (Patrick 135), likewise it must be difficult for those people who have

⁸⁰ Rosenfield’s article was written in 1963.

experienced traumatic events to ‘easily’ put aside those memories. Henry F. Majewski considers that melancholy produces a *doubling* of the personality, where happiness or the optimum life are situated somewhere in the past or the future, while the present is the source of anguish (Majewski 27; my emphasis).

I propose another reason for the use of the double in Fantastic literature: some writers use the character of the double to portray the alternative to their real world in which they have experienced a traumatic event. As noted above, the double is used as a coping mechanism, and therefore its use allows authors to manage and survive the events that they are faced with or have faced, with the addition of the Fantastic to either mock or take the event to an absurd level to highlight the horror that they have experienced (Bartlett 42).

The double in Latin America

The double is used frequently in Fantastic literature, although it initially attracted scholarly interest only within the field of European literature. While the double became a strong motif in Latin American literature during the twentieth century, it existed in Mesoamerican beliefs long before the arrival of the Europeans. Binary opposition characterises Mesoamerican, pre-Columbian cultures, such as the double-headed serpent in Mayan beliefs that covers and embraces the earth, which activated the universe and brought life to the earth (Léon-Portilla). In Mesoamerica, the doubling or hybridity in the figure of the nagual (also *nawal*, *nahual*) is not harmful, but a guarding spirit (Alcalá González and Bussing López 12; authors’ emphasis), as in *Hombres de maíz* (1949) by Miguel Ángel Asturias. Velasco Vargas states that: “La creencia del nahual se extiende por toda Mesoamérica. Era una especie de alter ego de la persona o de la deidad; generalmente, era un animal en el que se podía convertir un individuo de personalidad fuerte; los brujos y los reyes tenían un nahual” (61).

Apart from being pervasive in myths and religions, the double also connects with historical and social issues in Latin America, particularly to colonialism and the continent's troubled past. The colonial past is important for Latin American literature, as it deals with the hybridity and the linguistic and cultural variety (or differences) of the continent, such as indigenous, mestizo, African, and creole cultures, the clash with the European cultures, and the cultures that developed since the European invasions (Alcalá González and Bussing López 2). Justin Edwards and Sandra Vasconcelos state that "transculturation often arises out of colonial conquest and subjugation, particularly in the post-colonial era when indigenous cultures articulate historical and political injustices while struggling to regain a sense of cultural identity" (Edwards and Vasconcelos 1). Alcalá González and Bussing López add that doubles also address the "legacy of colonisation and slavery in the region, by focusing on how the *violent* mixing of indigenous cultures and European conquerors produced hybrid (mestizo) cultures that gave rise to doubles and other transformations" (3; my emphasis). While their study was focused on Gothic literature, this aspect of doubling is also applicable to the Fantastic, as they note that there is a cross-over between the Fantastic and the Gothic.

The double can also be an allegory of the social issues in a country, with one of the doubles representing the good and the other the bad, or an old society and a new or changed society, such as after the Cuban Revolution. According to Rogers, allegories tend to demonstrate battles of some type, often literal, but figurative as well. Sometimes the journeys of the allegorical hero or heroine are so perilous there are sub-battles along the way, and often mental battles with the double (Rogers 159-160).

Notwithstanding this, the battles with the double are often not violent, but emotional battles or battles of persuasion. As noted above, doubles are sometimes portrayed through an animal, and certain human vices are often embodied in these animals, or the animal may already possess

traits that the human desires. An animal can also be a projection of the wild, natural, and pure side of humans, and this is the case with the first story being analysed in this chapter.

‘La debutante’

In Carrington’s ‘La debutante’, a girl’s mother is holding a debutante ball in her honour, but the girl detests the falsity of these events and the people. Her friend, a hyena, offers to attend in her place, but they need to make the hyena look more like the girl so that her family will be fooled. In order to change the hyena’s appearance, the hyena eats the girl’s maid, and after skinning the maid’s face as a disguise, the hyena attends the ball, dressed like the girl.

The story is semi-autobiographical. It is written in the first person with an unnamed female protagonist (unsubtly Carrington) and a female hyena as the other main character, with the girl’s mother playing a minor but important role (indiscreetly Carrington’s own mother). There are two settings in the story: the Paris Zoo and the debutante’s room. The protagonist tells us that the hyena is her friend and the two converse; the girl teaches the hyena French, and the hyena teaches the protagonist her own language. When the girl laments that she does not want to go to the ball, the hyena comes up with the idea that she could go to the ball instead. The girl helps the hyena escape from the zoo, and they dress the hyena up in the girl’s clothing, albeit with minor difficulties, such as navigating high heels. The problem for the girl and the hyena, after covering most of the hyena’s body, including with gloves to hide her hairy arms, is making her look more like a young woman. It is the hyena’s idea to call the maid, kill her, tear off her face, and then wear the maid’s face at the ball. The hyena eats the maid, and subsequently admires herself in the mirror with the new face that she has eaten around the edges to fit. At the ball, the hyena is insulted by the others at the table who say she smells. She stands up, tears off the face and eats it, and jumps out of the window; the reader must guess whether the hyena was not caught or ended up in her cage at the zoo.

The main Fantastic event is in the first paragraph as the reader accepts that the young woman and the hyena can converse with each other and learn each other's language. The reader also accepts that the hyena is educated, can teach its own language, and is broadly tame. The way the paragraph is written in a matter-of-fact tone does not create shock for the reader and corresponds with Barrenechea's theory of the problematisation of the Fantastic. Barrenechea opined that it is the problematisation of the coexistence, that is, the absence or presence of the events narrated which is the base of the Fantastic in a story (Barrenechea 392-393). The Fantastic is used to bring out the absurd events in 'La debutante', with the hyena playing out these roles, such as dressing up in the girl's clothes, walking in high heels, admiring herself in the mirror, eating around the maid's face to use it as her own, and finding an embroidered bag in which to put the maid's remains to eat later.

The hyena as one of the main protagonists is an interesting choice by Carrington who was an animal lover (Blumberg), so it is not surprising that the girl in 'La debutante' freed the hyena from the cage. Merve Emre suggests that Carrington was an avid reader of Lewis Carroll and Jonathan Swift,⁸¹ and that the hyena may have been inspired by Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) in which Alice shouts: "Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyena, and you're the bone" (Carroll 5; qtd. in Emre). Carrington may have used the comedic characters of Carroll's stories to reflect the familiar aspects of her daily life, but with new disguises to highlight the absurdities and capriciousness of high society. Carrington, being a feminist, may also have been deriding Horace Walpole's expression about eighteenth-century writer and political activist Mary Wollstonecraft, whom he called a 'hyena in petticoats' (Gatens 24). The clothing that the hyena wears is a mockery of what girls had to wear at debutante balls, and Carrington did not want to be remembered for her clothing (Moorhead 25). Emre suggests that

⁸¹ The protagonist is reading Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) while the hyena is at the ball (Carrington 6).

while a hyena dressed as a woman is artificial, humans are also artificial, including women dressed in fine clothing. The girl and the female hyena join to counter royalty, high society, the British empire, and capitalism, which have as their starting point the domination of women and nature (Emre).

The hyena is also viewed, perhaps unfairly, as not only an unattractive animal (compared, say, to a lion), but also as a silly animal. This is mainly due to the complex vocalisations of the spotted hyena, by which they communicate with other hyenas in their ground, and which sound like a hysterical, human laugh (Gatens 26). Carrington may also be using the hyena to ridicule not only the above-mentioned plastic girls of high society as silly beings, but also to reflect her own rebellious personality. The hyena can therefore be read as the central character's double.

At the ball the hyena is betrayed first by her strong odour and then by her bestiality. In 'La debutante', the hyena is the agent of transformation: it is the girl's double. The hyena is in fact the girl's escaping both the ball and her parents' smothering and despised lifestyle, which is what Carrington did in real life, subverting the authority of her parents and society and escaping to the world of art and Surrealism in Paris. The maid is not only the sacrificial agent, but also the civilising agent (who cared for the family) and therefore, in rebellion, the girl considers her an enemy to her fantasy world, who must be destroyed. The reader can view the violent event of the hyena eating the maid's face as a parody of debutante culture, with the maid being reduced to meat and the debutante circuit being a 'meat market' (Lyon 165). Finally, the girl's disobedience and her refusal to attend the ball represent the failure of transformation, so the girl's entry into maturity will not occur. The uncovering of the hyena leads to chaos: she eats the maid's face and vanishes, while the ball(room) has been shed of all that is false (Knapp 526-528).

The theme of smell is important to the story and relates to the hyena. The hyena is a nocturnal and malodorous animal that forages for carrion at night, which makes it an expression of aggression by the central character. The girl's bedroom is where the transformation takes place as the hyena changes into the human clothing but remains an animal. When the mother unexpectedly enters the room, she can smell the hyena, but commands the girl to take a bath, rather than searching for or recognising the real source of the odour. The theme of smell also appears in 'La muñeca menor' (see Chapter 5), in which invasion of the river shrimps in the aunt's leg makes it ooze a substance that smells like sweetsop. Olfactory rules of health and cleanliness have been linked with moral purity ('Godliness'). Many social norms stipulate against foul odours and that "rules have been strictly and invariantly enforced throughout successive historical waves of the sanitisation movement [...] as a force of civilisation of manners and a corrective response to odourphobia" (Waskul and Vannini 55). The public nature of odour explains why it is directly related to morality, such as when Jesus was anointed with perfume, and in direct opposition with the private sense of taste (Waskul and Vannini 55).

Bettina Knapp opines that the society depicted in the story is matriarchal: the mother represents order and conventions, while the young girl rejects the need to conform to expectations with the aid of the hyena (Knapp 527-528). It reflects the social structure of hyenas, which is also matriarchal as females dominate the males (Smith and Holekamp 336). The structure of Carrington's story has feminine undertones, from the image of the room, the accessories (dress, shoes, and gloves) that the hyena wears, and the medium for the change (the maid), making the story reverse lycanthropy, with the hyena becoming human. Knapp also links this story to ancient coming-of-age rituals: the zoo (the preparation to the initiation), the room (the test or transformation), and the ball (the failure of rebirth or of passing the test). However, there is no rite of passage, no sacrifice or mutilation, maybe as the transformation in this story is not the same as in 'Yo, cocodrilo'. Zoos place animals under human observation and keep

their natural instincts caged and repressed, and the debutante is confronted with her own repressed instincts when she views the hyena at the zoo (Knapp 527).

Carrington's story uses black humour to highlight her distaste for high society, its expectations, and the masked and false behaviours of its participants. French writer André Breton defined black humour as what it is not: it is not joviality, wit, or sarcasm. It is "a partly macabre, partly ironic, often absurd turn of spirit that constitutes the 'mortal enemy of sentimentality', and beyond that, 'a superior revolt of the mind'" (Breton 2).⁸² Carrington's black humour is revealed in her emphasis in two pragmatic parts of the story: the girl wants the hyena to kill the maid quickly as she does not want her to suffer, and the hyena decides to retain the feet in a bag (doggy/hyena bag) to consume them later, in part to conceal the crime and in part to not waste food. However, ultimately, it reveals her rebellion against her upbringing and society, both in her writing and her painting (Shandler Levitt 67). In life, Carrington despised the life of high society from a young age and rebelled against it: "I've always detested balls especially when they are given in my honour" (Carrington 3). Carrington lamented that on the night of her presentation at Buckingham Palace in 1935: "I was wearing a tiara...and it was biting into my skull" and she was "appalled, horrified and humiliated" by these functions (Moorhead 21-22). That debutante ball in 1935 was the last one she ever attended, and the last time her family ever told her what to do. Moorhead reminds the reader that debutante balls were restricted to the rich, those with royal titles, pedigrees and large land holdings that went back generations. Very few families with 'new money', like the Carringtons, were permitted entry into this circle. While the other girls may have felt secure in this particular environment in society, Carrington was horrified at the blatant inequality of how women were regarded and treated and resented and rebelled against her privileged upbringing (Moorhead 24-25).

⁸² Page vi of Kindle Edition. Carrington's story is a chapter in this book.

After 1950, Carrington's rebellion against the bourgeoisie became ideological and directed at the patriarchy. She opined that humanity would progress if a female divinity became important and more feminine qualities were adopted, therefore creating an equal male/female balance and a healthier society (Helland 57, 60). In 1970, she even described herself in an essay as a 'female human animal', reminding us that we are all animals, and that 'female' is a biological category, as Butler noted years later. Carrington lamented that male human culture forced female humans into "prescriptive conceptual vessels labelled 'woman'", which became a life-long source of indignation for her, not only due to the misogyny, but also for its anthropocentric ignorance (Lyon 164).

Carrington created her female protagonists as active figures rather than the passive figures or victims generally depicted by male Surrealists. Her rebellion sent her along a different path, and her Surrealist art's outlandish juxtapositions enabled Carrington to expose the follies of the humans she was both acquainted with and detested, and it enabled her characters to be "gloriously unhinged" (Emre). Carrington did not want to be subjected to the false and cosseted life of a wealthy young woman, trapped by the rules of the patriarchy and a marriage in high society. She wanted to be free to pursue her artistic talents under her own rules, and her love of animals — which she did. Carrington has used black humour and the Fantastic to partner the young female protagonist with a hyena, her double, to soften the impact of the mutilation and death of the girl's maid to escape going to a debutante ball.

'En familia'

'En familia' by María Elena Llana is a story about a family who see the reflections of their deceased family members appear in the mirror by the dining table, instead of their own reflections. The mirror is frequently used as a motif or device to introduce the double in Fantastic narratives. The reflection in the mirror is often the subject's Other or alter-ego

“suggesting the inseparability of these devices and mirror images from Fantastic themes of duplicity and multiplicity of selves” (Jackson 43-45). Jackson states that the notion of ‘paraxis’ introduced optic imagery in relation to the modern Fantastic for many strange worlds that are located either in, through or beyond the mirror. She notes that there are spaces behind the image, or dark areas, from which anything could emerge (Jackson 43). Jackson adds that a mirror not only produces distance, but also creates a different space in which our beliefs about ourselves undergo changes. With the self being presented in another space, the mirror presents different versions of the self, something different or someone else: “It employs distance and difference to suggest the instability of the ‘real’ on this side of the looking glass and it offers unpredictable (apparently impossible) metamorphoses of self into other” (Jackson 87-88). Mirrors provide a source of terror, linked to the Narcissistic fear of death and attraction (Meckled 108).

The reflection in the mirror highlights the liminality of this type of double; it is between two different places or states at the one time, making it the perfect vehicle for the Fantastic. In the next story, the mirror does not reflect the present, but instead reflects a land where time stops still.

In ‘En familia’, the family accepts the strange situation that there are different reflections in the mirror, and the living and ghost families live peacefully together. However, things become disrupted when Clara, the narrator’s cousin, returns from holidays and finds out about the ghost family in the mirror.

The story is told by an unnamed, first-person, female narrator who informs us that the large mirror in the living room is inhabited, and that the family, initially surprised, has accepted it and they continue with their normal lives. The narrator explains that the inhabitants of the old mirror are deceased family members, although ghosts are not mentioned specifically, and as

such, the living family's life is not disturbed or threatened, and they keep the 'secret' to themselves. Despite this, the family takes a while to get used to sitting in their normal chairs as instead of seeing their own reflections in the mirror, they see someone else seated on the corresponding chair. Nothing else is altered in the mirror, although the protagonist notes that it looks like an old movie: the mirrored movements by the deceased family members are slower than those of the living inhabitants, as if it were the reflection of another reflection.

Things change when cousin Clara – 'Clarita', the Spanish diminutive form of her name – returns from vacation, and the narrator forewarns the reader that there is trouble ahead. Clara is the same age as the narrator, but bolder and more confronting than other family members. Despite this, they tolerate her behaviour as she is one of the first women dentists in the country, a living proof of her standing in society and theirs as well. The family is proud of her, and she becomes the family's 'oracle': prescribing medicines, determining fashion, attending the theatre, and so on. Although she is a qualified dentist, she has never practised the profession, and she behaves like the other women in the family when she embroiders sheets with the older women, waiting for a suitor who is never chosen for one reason or another. This alludes to the patriarchal society and women's place being in the home, as Clara is of marriageable age (and so is the narrator, but this is not mentioned).

When the main character's mother informs Clara of the inhabitants in the mirror, she does not say anything, checks for herself, and seems to accept it. She sits by the bookcase and looks to see which family member is sitting on the other side of the mirror, and almost insults Gus, one of the mirror inhabitants. She waves to him, but he does not respond in kind. The narrator notes that there has not been a great exchange [of emotions or response] between the mirror people and the living family and she feels that Clara's self-esteem would be dented. Clara moves the mirror from the living room to the dining room, by the dining table, so that everyone

can be together when eating. Despite the protagonist's mother being worried that the mirror family will leave or become annoyed, nothing happens. In fact, the narrator finds it comforting to sit at the table every day and to see so many familiar faces, with about twenty people seated each day. It gives the impression of a large, happy family, even though those on the other side are a little pallid and their meals appear grey and washed-out. Clara sits at the side of the table in correspondence to the seat of the aloof Eulalia in the mirror. Eulalia, who was Uncle Daniel's second wife, was always unapproachable and lazy in life, and the protagonist describes her as the most distant of all the mirror people. When Clara asks Eulalia to pass the salad, Eulalia disdainfully passes the ghostly salad bowl to Clara across the mirror, who defiantly eats the greyish, semi-transparent tomatoes, while Eulalia smirks mischievously. Clara turns pale and collapses against the mirror.

After the funeral, Clara appears on the other side of the mirror. The living family feels betrayed by the behaviour of the mirror family, believing that they had abused their hospitality. Despite this, the living family cannot decide who is whose guest, and blame themselves for their carelessness, as well as Clara's irresponsibility. In the end, they decide that there is little difference between the before and after Clara, and they continue with their lives as normal. The narrator takes Clara's place at the table. Each day, they become less certain which side of the mirror is life and which is the reflection. The narrator feels closer to the mirror family and believes she can hear soft sounds from the other side, such as glasses clinking. However, she is troubled by Clara's misbehaviour and feels that she will be the target of Clara's slyness. She notes that Clara has been doing her best to get her attention and trying to tempt her with a nice piece of pineapple, even though it is a bit washed out.

Unlike many of the other stories written by other authors researched in this thesis, Llana's story is a humorous observation of family behaviour and is not particularly confronting. It is a story

of the overlap of the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible. The reader must decide which side is real and which is the reflection, and who is whose guest.

Ulises Escobedo Hernández opines that there are three recurring themes in the stories in Llana's collection *Casas del Vedado*, which includes 'En familia': death, feminism, and the domestic space, while José Miguel Sardiñas emphasises that it is the *bourgeois* domestic space (Escobedo Hernández 1-2; Sardiñas "Orden" 147; "Personajes", 149; my emphasis). In addition to these themes, there are the topics of class differences and age differences. Each of these themes will now be discussed.

Firstly, like many of the stories in this thesis, 'En familia' is set in the domestic space, the private space, which is generally associated with women. It is situated in the living room and then the dining room as the mirror is moved and the family start to take meals together.

Age is the next theme which relates to both the age of the house and the age, or generation gaps, of the people. While the home is not physically described, it is most likely of a reasonable size, as it has both a dining room and a living room and would be suitable for a middle-class family. The large, oval mirror is described as "un poco moteada de negro por la acción de tiempo" (Llana 47), which implies that the house is starting to become run down due to a lack of building materials. There are generational differences in the story as well, starting from the narrator and Clara, who would be in their early twenties, to the narrator's mother, and then the mirror or afterlife family, some of whom died young, and others would be around the mother's age.

The family is also an allegory of Cuba, from before the Revolution to the future, with family members still needing to be careful of how they conduct themselves (in the early 1980s and beyond), under the watchful (mirror) gaze of the authorities. According to Rosa Tezanos-Pinto, the ghost family are "los custodios de la experiencia de una generación y de una nación

imaginaria que existe al margen de los propósitos anchurosos de otra utopía: la del sistema revolucionario cubano” (25). The change to Cuban society brought about by the Revolution becomes the cause of the time-space division between the ‘real’ and the ‘mirror’ families. Llana’s characters mark the omnipresence of that which remains broadly unchanged in Cuba after 1959 (Riess 102).

Feminism is also a strong theme, and the major characters are female: there is the unnamed auto-diegetic narrator and her mother, cousin Clara, and the indolent deceased Eulalia. However, there is no mention of a father or male head of the household, either in the living family or the afterlife family. I will return to the point of the male family figure shortly.

Clara is the embodiment of feminist ideas. She qualified as one of the first female dentists in the unnamed country, presumably Cuba, and is a source of pride for the family. In contrast, the narrator mentions that Clara also borders sheets with the older women of the family while she waits for a suitor who never arrives, which means in part that Clara has to conform to social norms and in part because she rejects all suitors to retain her freedom. Near the end of the story, the narrator states that, when Clara is eating the salad that Eulalia passed to her, she looks at the family defiantly “como el día en que se matriculó en *una carrera de hombres*” (Llana 50, my emphasis). While it may seem strange that the narrator refers to a woman enrolling in a ‘man’s subject’, especially in Cuba, making it seem like a ‘bad thing’, this is another of Llana’s feminist messages, implying that women can do anything. As Karen Wald states, after the 1959 Revolution, Cuban women won most of the issues that women in other countries were still fighting for: equal education, equality in legal issues, equal pay, job opportunities, childcare, access to birth control, control over their bodies, family planning, and access to abortion. The opening of childcare facilities increased women’s participation in the workforce (Wald 15). In contrast, despite these gains, Cuban women report a ‘gender paradox’: the Cuban government

is committed to equality but is shackled to the historic patriarchal structure (Aho 113), which may be behind Llana's subtle feminist messages. Since Cuba remains a patriarchy, women and the family group sustain the family, manage budgets with little money, manage family relationships, and do almost all the domestic work, giving the family a matrifocal leaning and a certain amount of power in the family. This matrifocality has its roots in the dual marriage system from Colonial times throughout the Caribbean, in which legal marriages were only permitted for white elites, while the rest of the population lived in consensual unions. These unions were (and still are) unstable and insecure relationships for women, as the marital relationship has been broken down over time by slavery, migration, and divorce, which has led women to rely on other women for emotional and economic support (Safa "Hierarchies" 42-43). In 'En familia', Clara may have been punished with death for her masculine attitude, including her refusal or continual delays in getting married, and as such, female solidarity is missing when Eulalia betrays Clara.

Due to increased women's participation in the workforce, male roles as the provider were threatened. The role of 'breadwinner' created a man's authority in the household and if the married woman replaced him as the primary income source, marriages sometimes failed. This led to an increase in female heads of households in Cuba and other Caribbean nations, especially among Afrodescendants, and also worldwide. However, because of the high proportion of consensual unions in the Caribbean, which are less stable than legal marriages, it led to more female-headed families, especially among younger women, and very few differences between racial groups (Safa "Female" 60-61; "Hierarchies" 47). In the post-revolutionary period, women's work habits changed more than men's, as they found work opportunities and avenues for self-improvement, and became the major decision-makers in the family. Free access to childcare and education allowed more women to head single-parent households, with less reliance on male breadwinners (Safa "Hierarchies" 42-43). The Castro

government was displeased with this situation and tried to encourage conjugal arrangements and marriage by making them more egalitarian and prestigious. The government introduced the Family Code in 1975, which decreed equal responsibilities between husbands and wives and removed distinctions between consensual unions and legal marriage (Safa “Hierarchies” 47).

Llana’s reference to men’s and women’s roles appears, on the surface, to indicate that the women in the story support the patriarchy. Before the Revolution, Cuban women were “largely housewives, prostitutes, or maids”, with only a few educated, middle-class women working in clerical and service positions (Wald 14). The Revolutionary leadership focussed on reducing social and class inequality and wanted participation from all sectors. The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (the FMC) was charged with increasing women’s workforce participation (Safa “Hierarchies” 43). Equal pay for equal work has long been in play, and women work in every field, including industrial, agricultural, technical, and professional occupations (Wald 14-15). In fact, Fidel Castro’s insistence on women’s equality in 1990 at the FMC was extremely important, or the macho culture would not have changed, and nothing would have been done to relinquish male privileges (Wald, 15). More likely, Llana is stating that Cuban women are more accustomed to non-gender specific roles as Western societies were back in the early 1980s, despite the initial gains by the women’s liberation movements in the West. For Cuban women, there was still an unequal share in the work in the home, and they worked to improve this inequality through the FMC. However, Safa opines that Caribbean women (from Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico) are now well-educated and autonomous and will not return to the role of the subservient member of the household, with many being the principal breadwinner (Safa “Class” 228).

Llana also juxtaposes the past with the present: women's roles in the past and the then present day (the story was published in 1983), like the reflections of the deceased (past) family members and the living members in the household. Clara left the house and the family, changed (studied a man's discipline), returned, tried to change the family (by moving the mirror), failed to conform, and became the Other. The ultimate consequences of Clara's actions result in her being trapped to her family forever, instead of her respectable position as one of the first women dentists in Cuban society (Sardiñas "Personajes" 145). In a way, she represents the changes, sometimes sudden, which have affected the people of Cuba, and she can be read as an allegory of Cuban society. Both the living and mirror families were happy, or were settling in, with the (post-Revolution) status quo, until Clara returned and tried to change it. Llana wrote this story in the Cuban literary period called the 'cuentística de lo cotidiano' which was broadly between 1979 and 1989,⁸³ in which she uses the Fantastic for subtle social criticism (Tezanos-Pinto 22). The spectres or mirror family recreate the experience of the segment of society – the middle-class – that left the island after the Revolution, either hoping to return one day or some left with no intention of returning, and are an allegory of the disappearing bourgeoisie that will eventually cease to exist in Cuba (Tezanos-Pinto 23). The old mirror is a metaphor of the crumbling, old former mansions of Cuba, which are either vacant, occupied by ghosts of the past, or filled with extended families, trying to survive on the harsh conditions brought on by the US sanctions. These 'survivors' of the bourgeoisie live on the island on the margins (Tezanos-Pinto 24; Riess 84-85).

⁸³ The Cuban post-Revolution literary writing periods were: 'The five golden years' (1966-1970), when most literary works were confined to expressing the Revolution's objectives; 'The five grey years' (1971-1976), when there was a temporary lapse in control of literary works; 'Enlightened storytelling' (1976-1979) reflecting the transition from the grey to the light, when other opinions and positions were solidified, 'The storytelling of daily life (1979-89) (Tezanos-Pinto 22), and after this period, 'The new ones' (Riess 88). The latter period represents the period after the fall of the USSR and its aid and military support for Cuba.

There is a particular focus on class issues in this story, especially those of the middle class. The middle class is linked to the capitalist past and moral decline, with cultural references such as customs, mobility, interpersonal relations, and allusion to good ancestry, including the title of the book, the rich suburb of Vedado in La Habana (Sardiñas “Orden” 147). Clara, now a dentist, represents the family’s aspirations to belong to a higher-class, and the family are proud of her as her achievements also increase their social standing. Many of the former mansions are crumbling, a symbol of past capitalist extravagances and the elite class that once lived in Cuba. There is the other layer of the new class of ‘those who stayed’ and supported the Revolution, or at least, managed with what little they had after the sanctions imposed by the USA. They now occupy the former homes of the bourgeoisie. ‘En familia’ appears to have a female-headed household, which is, according to Safa, generally found among the poor, where women have always supported the family and maintained solidarity; the extended family is a principal resource, especially for single mothers. The levelling of gender, class, and racial hierarchies in post-Revolution Cuba is the result of the abolition of the dual marriage system, while female-headed households and interracial unions increased. However, these gains reversed slightly during the Special Period from 1989 due to the withdrawal of Soviet support (Safa “Class” 235-236). In the twenty-first century, access to foreign exchange may be a source of class division; those involved in the tourist industry would have had access to US dollars and the Cuban tourist currency (formerly the Cuban Convertible Peso, or CUC, which was abolished in January 2021) and, even today, there are still Cubans who trade in US dollars or Euros and remain wealthy,⁸⁴ under the radar of the authorities.

The mirror is almost a protagonist in ‘En familia’. It is the bifurcation between the past and the present and when Clara relocates it closer to the table, it enables the families from the

⁸⁴ The Cuban government suspended cash bank deposits of US dollars in June 2021. The Cuban peso is pegged 1:1 to the US dollar. The Cuban peso is now the only currency in Cuba after the withdrawal of the Cuban Convertible Peso (for tourists) in January 2021.

present and the past to be virtually seated together. As noted above, the mirror is pitted and old, making it an allegory (and a reflection), both literally and metaphorically, of Cuba's past. It is where time stops still: the mirror does not provide a reflection of the present, neither of the family nor Cuban society, but a reflection of the past, as the deceased family members are reflected instead of the living family members. The mirror represents the pre-revolutionary, bourgeois Cuba, with its mansions, gambling houses and vice, which are now crumbling and decaying,⁸⁵ emptied when the bourgeoisie fled the island, leaving the ghosts of the past (Riess 84; Sardiñas "Personajes" 144). While many Fantastic stories have a tension between the past and the present, which in this story also occurs in the mirror, 'En familia' also reflects the tension between the pre-Revolutionary past and the present day in Cuba (Sardiñas "Orden" 147-148), but with both sides juxtaposed and 'living' at the same time.

The mirror is how the Fantastic event appears in the story as we first learn that the mirror shows the deceased family members rather than the reflections of the living. Clara's transition to the other side of the mirror is also a Fantastic event, and the reader accepts both of these a-normal situations without question. Clara's transition is also an allegory of the transition of Cuban society after the Revolution. The mirror, which produces doubles, enables Clara, through her boisterous personality, to leap backwards in the past. As José Miguel Sardiñas informs us:

Nada más firme, entonces, que el árbol genealógico, la tradición, el pasado, los muertos, el espacio sin tiempo, detenido, quieto: el espejo donde el presente no produce un reflejo, sino una imagen simétrica del pasado. Desde este punto de vista, Clarita frente al espejo, frente al objeto que produce dobles [...] usa su dinamismo para dar un salto hacia atrás, en un esfuerzo por encriptarse y quedar definitivamente fija en una dimensión ajena al devenir. ("Personajes" 145)

⁸⁵ Fidel Castro closed the gambling houses when he took power in Cuba.

The families are living a stale or stalled daily existence, which Llana called *los que no se quedaron pero tampoco se fueron* (Riess 85), those who had to face the radical social changes in Cuba.

Like some other Cuban writers, Llana did not publish any works during the 1970s, as she had published *La reja* (1965), which was more in the revolutionary framework in the 1960s and was developing the strong female characters for *Casas de Vedado* (Riess 91). Riess notes that Llana supplements the meaning of material objects, including the importance of the mirror, not as the basis of the transformation of Cuban society, but “rather as the basis for conserving the identities of those who struggle to maintain their upper-class status quo” (Riess 96). She notes that the stories in *Casas de Vedado*, like ‘En familia’, do not exactly ‘fit’ with revolutionary themes, but provide an alternative view of the concepts of time and progress in daily revolutionary life (Riess 94). Llana does not mention the word ‘revolution’ in her story (or any other story in the book). However, through the large mirror which bifurcates the [then] present, she invites the reader to “ponder the marginal voices’ reiteration of the same embroidered societal roles”, despite the country’s supposed progression of the national fabricated identity and life (Riess 95).

Llana’s ghosts are the imaginary nation that anticipated a utopian outcome from the Cuban revolution (Tezanos-Pinto 25). This utopia was the hoped-for social justice and prosperity that would replace the evils of prior corrupt regimes (Juan-Navarro 1), like the utopia anticipated by the Europeans when they migrated to America (Aínsa 7-10). In ‘En familia’, Llana has not only written a story about the confused marginal class, but she also provides a critical and satirical interpretation of this Cuban utopia. Llana repositions the time and space of part of a nation that was starting to disappear when she wrote the story. She uses satire and humour, which operates within the context of the Fantastic, to impart social commentary on Cuban daily

life. While she does not elaborate about the glorious stage of the Revolution, cheer the leadership, or promote the politics, she does highlight the compromises between Cuban society and those who imposed the conditions on them (Tezanos-Pinto 27). The slow-moving daily life, reflecting on the past, provides a vision of the transitional time with the Cuban people, “los que no se quedaron pero tampoco se fueron”, who are (in 1983) still not united in the context of the Revolutionary national narrative (Riess 97).

The Other

The theme of the Other is also used quite extensively in the Fantastic. Sometimes the Other can reveal the main character struggling with his or her identity. The Other is not the main character in the story, but another being who has a profound effect on the protagonist. Very simply, a person or persons who may not share the same views or have the same culture as oneself could well be branded ‘the Other’. This Other becomes a source of fear, due to some type of difference, such as race, gender, ethnicity, disability, appearance, real or imagined. As fear is a powerful motivator, this Other may need to be avoided, shunned, altered in some way, or, in extreme cases, eliminated.

The origins of the Other emerge in the beginnings of the history of humans, between different tribes, or perhaps even within tribes, different races, and people from different countries. For Latin America, after Christopher Columbus’s arrival in 1492 and the subsequent invasion of the country by the conquistadores, the indigenous tribes and civilisations were the Other; they were considered by the invaders to be primitive and sub-human. They did not conform to sixteenth-century, Euro-centric, Catholic practices, neither in their clothing, nor their religious practices, nor their standard of communication.⁸⁶ However, as history has proven, the

⁸⁶ Similar assessments were made of the Australian First Nations peoples three centuries later.

American First Nations peoples, such as the Maya and the Incas, were more advanced in other areas of their culture than the Europeans at that time (Fuentes 124).

The theme of the Other is often harnessed to conjure up the existence of an evil or monstrous being that interacts with the protagonist, to “torment the protagonist or to draw him or her to the other side” (Zee “Boundaries” 19). This happens in ‘En familia’, when Clara tries to tempt the narrator to the other side of the mirror, and in ‘El huésped’, which is examined below, with the behaviour of the house guest.

As Lisa Onbelet suggests: “Otherness has also been associated predominantly with marginalised people, those who by virtue of their difference from the dominant group, have been disempowered, robbed of a voice in the social, religious, and political world” (Onbelet). When discussing marginalised groups, women, since the time of Eve, have always been the Other (de Beauvoir “Facts” 54-55). This is also true for some Fantastic stories, in which male narrators place female characters initially as their mirror image or double, but later as the Other, such as in Julio Cortázar’s ‘Casa tomada’ (1946, see brief summary below), ‘Casa de azúcar’ by Silvina Ocampo (1959), and ‘En memoria de Paulina’ (1948) by Adolfo Bioy Casares. However, as the men struggle with the sexual differences, the woman becomes the Other, and patriarchal culture continues to control the female. The men explain the ‘bothersome’ female Other using the Fantastic or supernatural events (Duncan 42-43). Duncan notes the following about these stories:

The female metamorphoses from the double into a mysterious Other, a metaphor for longing and repressed desire, and the male, if he is unable to recover the illusion that they are two halves of a single whole, resorts to the Fantastic as a mechanism for dealing with the rupture. Women are disappeared from the text or swept aside, leaving only the male narrator’s reconstructed idea of them in their place. (42)

Duncan suggests that there is unconscious desire on the part of the male, who experiences conflict between narcissistic and romantic or sexual love, in particular in Cortázar's 'Casa tomada'. In this story, a middle-aged brother and sister, who are both unmarried and live in the family home, become increasingly unnerved as the house becomes occupied by strange, unseen 'others'. The male narrator shifts from "I" to "we" and back, and he tries to integrate the feelings of the sister and 'speak' on her behalf. Critics have opined that the story has strong sexual undertones, bordering on incestuous, and that the sister either does not exist, is the double of the male narrator, or is, in fact, the Other. She tends to fade almost out of the story, even though both brother and sister flee the house in the end to escape the 'unseen' others (Duncan 145-149). However, there is a second (or third) 'Other' in the story: the house is both an Other and a protagonist.

Zee notes that women writers, through Gothic fiction from the mid-eighteenth century, started to present the Other "which had to be challenged before they could hope to gain stature in the male-dominated world" ("Boundaries" 55), to highlight the social and psychological constraints they were confronted with each day. The fear felt by the protagonists in the stories (and the intended reader) masked the authors' anger at the patriarchy and their place in society as the Other (Zee "Boundaries" 55). This type of 'Other' is the focus in Dávila's 'El huésped', which is analysed below, as the protagonist is fearful of the house guest, but also her controlling husband. However, in many modern Fantastic stories, the Other does not appear as the Gothic monster, but as a human being (Bartlett 25), often as the woman, as noted above.

In 'El huésped', an unnamed house guest becomes the Other and the focus of fear for the wife, her housekeeper, and both women's children, as they feel trapped in the house with this unwanted guest. In the end, they kill the house guest, and the wife announces what they have

done to the husband in a “matter-of-fact and triumphant way” (Frouman-Smith “Descent” 203). This story is now discussed in more detail.

‘El huésped’

Amparo Dávila’s ‘El huésped’ is one of her most famous short stories. It features an unnamed female protagonist and is written in the first person. It begins with two short sentences: “Nunca olvidaré el día en que vino a vivir con nosotros. Mi marido lo trajo al regreso de un viaje” (Dávila 17). The protagonist explains that the husband has brought a guest to the house, without her permission, and this guest both unnerves and horrifies her; in fact, she could not contain a cry of horror when she first saw him. She describes him as a grim, sinister man, with yellow, round, unblinking eyes that seemed to penetrate through people and objects. There is no explanation of who the guest is, not even his name, how he is acquainted with the woman’s husband, or why he brought him home as a guest.

The young woman states that she has only been married for three years, and has two young children, that they live in a small village that is almost a ghost town, far from any city, and that she is unhappy. The woman’s isolation has made her vulnerable, which is evident from her nervousness in the initial paragraphs. She explains that her husband treats her like a piece of furniture that goes unnoticed, a fact that resonates with the ‘marginal and dreary’ reality for women who lived in México, and particularly in Mexican rural society, early- to mid-last century (Frouman-Smith “Patterns” 50). The husband’s disdain towards his wife is reinforced by his comments to her about the house guest: “Es completamente inofensivo” and “Te acostumbrarás a su compañía y, si no lo consigues...” (Dávila 17). Clearly, the husband is threatening to throw the woman out of the home with his macho behaviour, and as they live in a Rulfo-like isolated area, it would be difficult for her to return to any family she may have with no financial means to support herself. The other members of the household – the

protagonist's children (also unnamed), the maid, Guadalupe, and Guadalupe's son Martín – are also fearful of the house guest. Only the husband enjoys the guest's company. The guest is assigned to the corner room of the house, which is cold and damp, and he sleeps during the day. The protagonist continually complains to her husband that she wants the guest to leave, but the husband refuses, exerting his authority over the household.

While daily life continues as normal, the presence of the guest continues to unsettle the women. He sometimes appears behind the protagonist when she is cooking, completely frightening her, or stands in the arbour in front of the door to her bedroom, or in a dark corner; she believes he is stalking her and hates the children. The protagonist and Guadalupe never mention his name, always referring to him as "he" (Dávila 19). Guadalupe takes his meals to him, or rather, flings them into his room, and he insists on only eating meat, refusing anything else. The women and children eat together in the protagonist's bedroom. One night, she wakes up to find him peering over her and she throws the gasoline lamp at him, which he dodges, and it catches fire. Guadalupe helps her to extinguish the fire.

The protagonist's relationship with her husband deteriorates further, and few words are exchanged; he displays no empathy or affection towards his wife. When Guadalupe goes shopping one day, the protagonist hears Martín crying and strange shouting, to find the house guest beating the young boy. She attacks the man in a rage with a heavy stick and the effort causes her to faint. Guadalupe returns and is furious to find her boy injured, but he recovers. The woman fears that Guadalupe will leave her, and she will be alone in the house.

When her husband returns, the protagonist demands that the guest leave before he kills the children, but he responds that she is just hysterical and that the man is harmless; the husband's comment is sexist. The wife considers escaping but knows that she has no family to go to and

no financial means. She is alone and trapped. The children are terrified and will not play in the garden. The women plot their revenge.

The husband decides to go to the city for a few weeks and the women have their chance. The women cut some planks and quickly seal the door to the house guest's room while he sleeps. The house guest lives for many days without air, light, and food, and tries desperately to get their attention, to no avail. He lives for almost two weeks and when the women can no longer hear any noises, they still wait two more days before opening the door. When her husband returns home, the protagonist informs him that the house guest met a sudden and disconcerting death.

Dávila's tale of domestic horror begins in the first paragraph, as the reader must make up his or her own mind as to who or what the house guest is. The selfish husband brings home this house guest, who invades the 'feminine' spaces of the home as assigned by the patriarchy: the kitchen and the bedroom (Pennington). The story has feminist undertones, even though Dávila insisted that her stories were not written with this in mind, nor were they gender-specific, but intended as universal stories (Gleeson). Despite this, the story depicts women breaking free from the role that society places on women – being at home, waiting for the husband and children to return to respond to their needs, desires and wants.

Fear is the key element in the story: fear of the unknown, of the Other, of the husband (and indeed of men), of being alone. The story is told by a first-person narrator, and we never learn her name nor that of her husband and children, only the names of her domestic help and her son. Campra's theory of silences can be applied to this story: missing information, the unsaid, the lack of explanatory words, that silences draw spaces of anxiety like the dark corners where the house guest lurks. The lack of explanations of why the husband brought the house guest home, who or what he is, or his name, are the missing information in the story. In

addition, the difficulty to communicate results in silences – her husband is not interested in her problems with the house guest, and that the methods of communication are very difficult. The protagonist tells us that Guadalupe is also afraid of the house guest, but the reader is not sure if it is the same type of fear, as the house guest does not pursue her like he does the protagonist (Corral Rodríguez and Uriarte Montoya 218). She is also afraid of her husband and does not lock the door to the bedroom (to keep the house guest out) in case her husband comes home late and finds it locked. She worries that he will think that she is having an affair, even though she suspects that he is being entertained elsewhere. The children are also silent: they play outside quietly, but there is no conversation from them in the story, other than when Martín is hurt by the house guest.

As Campra says: “The intruder is always the Other” (60) and right from the beginning, the house guest is viewed as an intruder and the Other. The main character’s fear, loathing, and mistrust of him is immediate; the husband brought him home from his trip without consulting her. Her description of him is chilling, non-human, grim, and menacing; the yellow eyes signify something sinister or devil-like. In fact, the reader is not sure whether the guest is even human or an animal. By referring to the house guest as “he” and not mentioning a name, the women do not give him an identity or identify him as a human being. This continues to create doubt and fear for the reader and retains the house guest as a ‘non-person’ (Corral Rodríguez and Uriarte Montoya 214-215). The house guest only eats two meals a day, at dusk and in the early morning before he goes to bed, hinting at some sort of nocturnal being.

I suggest that there are other possibilities of who or what the house guest may be. The first is that the guest is the double of the husband, as in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The double of the husband reflects his true nature; while on the outside he appears to be non-violent, he harasses his wife psychologically, is uncomplimentary and unsupportive towards his wife.

The second possibility is that the house guest is the protagonist's projection of what she really thinks of her husband – mentally abusive, macho, disparaging about what she does including her care of the children, treating her like a piece of furniture, mocking her, criticising her, and keeping her locked in the home, away from anyone who could help her. He is also having extramarital affairs of which she is aware but can do nothing about. She is resentful, she wants to break free, and she wants to kill him as the only way to achieve this. Her husband is a monster that must be overcome, even though she is afraid of him. By killing the guest, she overcomes her fear of her husband, and his controlling ways, and gains control of her life.

The main character narrates at the beginning of the story that she is very unhappy in her short, three-year marriage. The fact that she remains unnamed is significant, as it reflects women's second place in society (Frouman-Smith "Patterns" 51), the invisible woman of Chapter 6. While it is not stated explicitly, the woman is mistreated, and is a victim of psychological domestic violence by a controlling husband. Her husband threatens her at the beginning that if she does not get used to the house guest's presence, then there would be *unspoken* consequences (my emphasis). The husband's continued indifference towards his wife, his lack of communication and his implied extra-marital affairs (the hatred towards his wife who will not give him what he wants) all point to his patriarchal or macho behaviour. Dávila is objecting to the mistreatment of women in the home, whether the abuse is verbal, physical, or both.

However, while the wife fears her husband, she also fears what will happen to her if he does not return as she is not able to leave the home and has no income. At the time the story was written, many women, especially if they had no financial means, were trapped in their homes, and the home became a source of fear. There was also the 'unknown' outside of their homes. For authors of the Fantastic, this 'everyday' terror becomes a social issue that they want to bring into the open. The fear does not have to be a person or thing, but it can be the house.

Zee notes that the gothic theme of the woman trapped or confined within a home or a room remained popular with women writing in patriarchal Latin American societies, long after British and European women writers had surmounted the cultural obstacles and became successful (“Boundaries” 90).⁸⁷

The third possibility is that the protagonist’s fear and hatred of the house guest originate from being left alone in the large house with young children, isolated, and without a support network, that is, no family who live close by, no friends, no medical support, no community, nor possibly any support from the police. The house is the woman’s prison, and she can see no escape, although she is happiest when she is outside the home, working in the garden. The protagonist says that she wants to escape from the house, her husband, and the house guest, but cannot, as she has no money or family, she feels alone, like an orphan. She is even afraid that Guadalupe will leave, and she will be alone. María Fernanda Ampuero opines that all the houses in which family members are mistreated are bewitched [or haunted] houses, and she believes that Dávila thought this as well. She then mentions that Freud first coined the word for the ‘uncanny’ with the German word *Unheimlich*, which in Spanish translates as ‘sinister’ (Ampuero). *Unheimlich* is the negation of *Das Heimlich*, which signifies what is homely and familiar, friendly, and cheerful, but it can also mean that which is concealed from others, hidden, secret and obscured. However, Jackson points out that *Unheimlich* also has another meaning, like *Das Heimlich*, which is to uncover, reveal and expose that which is normally hidden, so the semantics for both words have double meanings: *Unheimlich* uncovers what is hidden and transforms the familiar into the unfamiliar (Jackson 65). Regarding Dávila’s story, *Unheimlich* means unfamiliar,

⁸⁷ In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Rochester’s wife Bertha is secretly kept locked in the attic and becomes the ‘mad woman’ in the attic, the hysterical woman, according to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979).

uncomfortable, and strange and indeed fearful in the home; it is no longer a place of safety, a place of tranquillity, it is now threatening, a 'no home', an *Unheimlich*.

'El huésped', like some of the other stories in this study – 'La debutante', 'La muñeca menor', 'En familia', 'El eterno transparente', and 'Paranoica city' – is set in the house, the domestic space, which, for most of these women, is the space over which they have dominion and authority. Women have traditionally been kept in the private space by the patriarchy, while the men occupy the public space – places of authority, religion, decision-making, and brothels.

The fourth possibility is that the house guest is non-human: it is an animal, almost devil-like, with round, yellow (non-human) piercing eyes. The house guest never speaks, sleeps all day, and tends to be active from dusk. He/it eats only two meals a day, and only meat. The silence of the animal or non-human cries may mean that it is a real animal. The protagonist has converted her fear of being alone and transformed the house guest into a threat and an evil being, and the combination of her fear and violence that she has retained internally has been let go, and she has projected it all to the guest. As a victim of psychological violence as well as being ignored and discounted by her husband, it results in her wanting to kill the house guest.

There is the possibility that it is a paranoid delusion of the main character. She becomes anxious that the house guest is stalking her and hates both her and the children. Her husband notices and mentions to her that she is becoming more hysterical, feigns concern for her state of mind, and reiterates that the house guest is harmless. Dávila stated that reality, like money, has two faces: the external face, in which everything can be explained and understood, is logical and makes sense, and the internal face, which is intimate, mysterious, and hidden, where strange things may happen, things may be illogical, unexplained, and one cannot understand what has happened (Burgo 452; qtd. in Cota Torres and Vallejos Ramírez 172). The reader

fixates on the movements and mindset of the protagonist, the strange events in the household, and the appearance and behaviour of the house guest (Cota Torres and Vallejos Ramírez 172).

Ampuero suggested in an interview in March 2022 that the house guest is not a person or an animal at all: it is syphilis. She explains that it is suggested in the first line of the story in which the protagonist states: “Mi marido lo trajo al regreso de un viaje” (Dávila 17). Ampuero adds that women caught a large percentage of transmissible sexual diseases,⁸⁸ for example, HIV, from their only sexual partner which was with their husbands. Many men infected their spouses with syphilis, and until the discovery of penicillin, it was incurable, especially for people with little or no access to medicine. Syphilis, if untreated, can damage any part of the body, including the nervous system, eyes, and brain.^{89, 90} Ampuero states that syphilis causes dementia and opines that this is why the main character is losing her mind, and why her husband (who has been unfaithful) accuses her of being more hysterical every day (Ampuero). This sinister disease is brought by her husband to their bed while in contrast, she has been faithful; it lives hidden in the darkness in the house. People in those days were ashamed if they caught syphilis, and many died without treatment before antibiotics were invented. Syphilis could therefore be one interpretation of the unwelcome house guest.

Of particular interest, the solidarity between the two women at the end is their way out of the threatening environment, especially for the protagonist. Dávila has created female characters that are the antithesis of the submissive mother, nurturer, and protector, as prescribed by androcentric Mexican society (Luna Martínez 7). The protagonist’s husband had no intention of changing the selfish circumstances he created, leaving his ego intact. The women’s invisibility has ended as they took control of the situation and challenged the rules, but their

⁸⁸ Ampuero did not provide a time period.

⁸⁹ See: Health Direct website, www.healthdirect.gov.au/syphilis#symptoms.

⁹⁰ Ampuero states that syphilis is a flesh-eating disease, which is why the house guest only ate meat, and nothing else.

nightmare has not ended. They are both still in the remote location and now must deal with the other monster who returned from his trip, and it is not known what they will have to do to rid themselves of him (Hernández-Sias 2019). This is for the reader to ponder.

Conclusion

The double appears in a different form in each of the three stories examined above. Carrington utilises the Fantastic to create an animal double, a hyena, as the alter-ego of the protagonist and I have used Barrenechea's theory of the problematic plot of the unreal and real coexisting in the story to analyse 'La debutante'. In Llana's story, the characters' doubles consist of their reflections in the mirror. The significance of this type of double is specularity, although this mirror did not reflect the family, it reflected the family members from the past. The double in Dávila's story is the Other — someone or something that may or may not be human but is not the protagonist. The stories also meet Alazraki's criteria of the early introduction of the Fantastic events in the stories, with no shocks: the girl's talking to the hyena in the first paragraph in 'La debutante', the family's acceptance of the mirror family in 'En familia', and, in 'El huésped', the protagonist's narration about her uneasiness of the house guest, also in the first few lines.

All stories in this chapter have a common theme of the society around them. In 'En familia', it is the crumbling society that is trying to remain dignified in Cuba, with the old and mottled mirror reflecting the past and present, as time almost stops still. The significance of the mirror in Llana's 'En familia' has also been analysed for its reflection of Cuban society in the decades following the Revolution. High society and its duplicity is the theme of 'La debutante', but the protagonist wants to escape it, and coaxes the hyena to go to the ball in her place. A lack of society is evident in 'El huésped', as the protagonist lives in a remote town that is almost a ghost town and is very alone. Allegories of society are common themes in two stories and are

emotional battles for the protagonists. The double of the hyena in 'La debutante' as an allegory of her trying to escape from the life she detested, while at the same time, mocking the false and privileged people of high society England. The families in 'En familia' are an allegory of Cuba's past and present, not only of Cuban society but also women's roles. It is also an allegory of the Cubans who stayed on the island after the Revolution and the disappearing middle class that fled to other parts of the world, leaving those behind to become accustomed to the changed society. In 'El huésped', the protagonist is battling the patriarchal role of women staying at home, the private space, and reliant on her husband for financial support.

The theme of fear is present in two stories. The house guest as the Other in Dávila's story invokes fear in the women and children, not only the fear of the unknown (the house guest), but also the husband and loneliness for the protagonist in a remote location. Campora's theory of silences in Fantastic fiction is particularly applicable to this story, as not only does the house guest move around silently and does not speak, but there is also no information about who or what he is or his background. In contrast, fear is not an apparent theme in 'En familia' or 'La debutante'. However, violence is a theme in two stories: 'La debutante' as the Fantastic is employed when the hyena kills the maid and eats the maid's face. Likewise, in 'El huésped', the women kill the house guest after the being scares the women and hurts the young boy. These two stories reflect Jackson's theory that themes of the Other deal with the unconscious, transgressive forms of desire (51-52), and the protagonists in both stories desire to escape from their prisons — the isolated home in 'El huésped' and the suffocating high society in 'La debutante'. However, while there is no explicit violence in 'En familia', there is malice in this story: Eulalia behaves maliciously towards Clara, as she passes her the food that will kill her. Eulalia smirks mischievously as she does this, implying that she knows something bad will happen and finds it entertaining. Likewise, the dead-Clara attempts to catch the narrator's attention and entice her to eat the ghost-food that would kill her, as it did Clara. Despite the

lack of fear displayed by the narrator and her family, that fear, or a feeling of uneasiness is felt by the reader, especially when Eulalia passes the food to Clara.

Freedom is a common theme in all stories, as the double brings about a change for the protagonists. In 'La debutante', the hyena dresses up as a girl so that the protagonist can be free from the high society ball; in 'El huésped', the killing of the house guest not only frees the protagonist from the creature, but also gives her confidence to face her husband. In contrast, 'En familia', the mirror family represents time standing still for many Cubans who remained on the island after the Revolution, while other Cubans escaped to freedom from socialist rule in other countries.

The authors have used the themes of the double, the mirror, or the Other to create the Fantastic event in the stories. These Fantastic events confront the protagonist (or the reader) with her fears, failures, or desires, resulting in a coexistence of the real and the unreal in the story. The characters were either rebelling against society and their families, their spouses, or a society which had changed too quickly, leaving behind those who chose to fight under the new rules. It is also employed as a coping mechanism, in order to make sense of chaotic situations (Bartlett 42). In each case, the authors have used doubles as metaphors or allegories of the changes or unchanged parts of society.

The longevity of the theme of the double in Fantastic literature is proof that the double can match changes in society and human behaviour. Regardless of how we see ourselves or others, the double can still tell us a lot about ourselves (Bartlett 344).

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This study has endeavoured to demonstrate the importance of Fantastic literature written by a selected group of women writers from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean who are not included in the literary canon. As discussed, the use of the Fantastic allows these authors to bring the ‘unreal’, into the real by presenting distressing topics or topics that are considered taboo.

While some authors have had to establish their own publishing houses to make their stories known and gain the recognition they deserve, in more recent times, the visibility of Latin American women writers has improved, and their stories have been included in several collections. While the anthologies shed light on some of these authors by bringing them to a wider readership, there is still a need for more in-depth analysis of their work, which is one of the aims of my study.

One of my significant findings was that in most of the stories examined, the body appears as a major theme, and this formed the basis of my thesis. The authors have written stories about fragmented or broken bodies, dead bodies, bodies that transform into another being (human, animal, or plant), dismembered bodies, disappearing bodies, and body doubles. I therefore chose to incorporate the body theories of DeMello on women writing narratives that centre on the body to challenge social norms, the theories of disabled bodies of Baynton and Turner, Franco’s theories of mourning and violence against the body, the body image theories of Goodall, Turner, and DeMello, amongst others, in my theoretical framework.

Body theory has supported my analysis as Latin American women writers of the Fantastic consistently use narratives that centre around the body as a method for rejecting control by the patriarchy and the authorities, to subvert those who try to impose control on them and take

control of their own bodies and their destinies. The authors use these narratives to underscore the issues they face and to make these issues and their suffering known to the reading public, not only in their own countries, but in other countries as well. This subversion in their stories is often intentionally meant to shock or disturb the reader, and the Fantastic, being a literature of subversion, is the perfect means for the authors to vent their criticism, as they can use it to satirise or challenge injustice. For example, the authors have employed the Fantastic and narratives about the body transforming into something else to highlight injustices, such as the girl transforming into a crocodile in ‘Yo, cocodrilo’ to escape female genital mutilation, and the woman in ‘Muñeca rota’ who escapes her abusers by jumping into the water and transforming into an aquatic plant.

In some of the stories the body is literally being broken at some point as a result of violence, while in others fragmentation concerns the identity or the will of a character. In the stories, by using the Fantastic, the fragmentation of the bodies of the protagonists relates to either changing body parts for something better, as in ‘El vendedor de cabezas’, putting their pieces back together and carrying on in order to retain their independence, like Marta in ‘Mujer hecha pedazos’, or obtaining revenge through the means of transformation, like the aunt in ‘La muñeca menor’.

My study has uncovered that many of the chosen authors have used humour (often dark humour) in their stories, which is another key finding. This is important as in many of the stories, the authors have used humour, satire, or irony, together with the Fantastic, to expose events or inequalities in their countries. When dark humour is combined with the Fantastic, the opposing poles of terror and the unexpected or the tragic make the reader laugh at an event that often may be shocking on its own (Roas “Risa” 13-16; Carroll 152-154). When the reader willingly suspends disbelief through the author’s use of the Fantastic, the mix of horror and

humour makes the reader laugh (Winter 22), such as at the satire and irony in ‘Manual de hijo muerto’, even though the subject matter is gruesome, or the amusing slant to the death choices offered to the protagonist in ‘Para elegir la muerte’.

The narrative device of the double is used by authors as a defence mechanism to challenge or mock what is happening around them. The double is a representation of the body, whether it is a likeness or not a likeness of the protagonist, or it is the Other. Carrington employs the Fantastic and the hyena as her double to take her place at the debutante ball, as she is mocking high society in her story. Writers also use the mirror as an entrance point for the double, which Llana uses to reflect deceased family members in ‘En familia’, which is a gentle allegory of the past and present Cuba (in the 1980s), and of the people who remained there after the Revolution.

The invisible woman and her invisible labour are significant findings in my study and are important to reveal the separation of male-female roles. This originates from women being excluded from the public space and residing in the private space, generally the home, while the public space is designated the visible male-dominated place (Franco “Beyond” 507). By being excluded from the public realm, women have been alienated from the power of authority, and as such, female power has been made invisible (Jones 153). The Fantastic is employed in Berrón’s ‘El eterno transparente’ to portray the woman who is invisible to her family and work colleagues. She is taken for granted and succumbs to their apathy until she finally disappears totally. In contrast, the woman in ‘Mujer hecha pedazos’ takes control of her life; she is an independent woman who is making different choices and can recover after being faced with life’s challenges.

There is a predominance of female protagonists in the stories, which is not surprising as my chosen stories are written by women. As noted in Chapter 1, women writers want to challenge

society's norms and stereotypes that impose controls on women's bodies by writing to expose these constraints. The authors in this study subvert the traditional narratives by portraying women's desires, sexuality, and their experiences, which previously were silenced. By using the Fantastic in their stories, the authors are challenging male dominance that has excluded women, made female power invisible (Jones 153) and allotted them to the invisible female space (Franco "Beyond" 507). Often these women protagonists, or at least one character in most of the stories, is unnamed, with the exception of 'Mujer hecha pedazos' and 'El eterno transparente'. An unnamed character makes their stories more universal, as their stories are shared by many women around the world. By identifying with the character, the reader is drawn into what he or she is reading, and social commentary can only occur if the reader is connected with the story. Nameless bodies can be associated with the missing persons in Latin America in their periods of political oppression, as well as being a model of how women are treated in society and their place in the community – invisible and silenced. As noted in Chapter 1, Barrenechea stated that the Fantastic is a practical means of self-expression for Latin American authors, as it draws attention to social problems (402). Her Fantastic theory is important for this thesis as, for the most part, the authors analysed have written Fantastic stories that focus on the problem of the real and the unreal. This coexistence of the real and the unreal in the story makes it unsolvable for the reader and leaves it up to the reader to make up their own mind as to the background of the stories.

The family is a key thread in most of the stories, especially female family members, as noted above. While women tend to have a central role in the narratives, I found that there is a conspicuous lack of male family members in some of the stories. There is no male character in 'Yo, cocodrilo', 'Muñeca rota', 'La debutante' and 'En familia' (other than a few minor ghost family members) as the authors of these particular stories are writing about women and women's issues. In fact, most of the stories portray men negatively, either as dominators like

the husbands in both 'El huésped' and in 'Paranoica city', the implied violators of the protagonist and the man in the dream who violates the mermaid in 'Muñeca rota', the greedy and exploiting doctors who did not treat the aunt in 'La muñeca menor', the self-preoccupied husband in 'El eterno transparente' who did not recognise his wife Deyanira, and self-centred Samuel in 'Para elegir la muerte'. The only positive male character is Eduardo, the narrator, in 'Mujer hecha pedazos', but he is not attracted to Marta and there is a desexualised relationship between them.

Many of the stories are set in the home environment, which is the invisible, private space, allocated to women, while the visible public space is set aside for men (Franco 507, Jones 152-153). In years gone by, women were confined to the home and very few women entered the public space. Men have equated power with authority which has excluded women's voices and made female power invisible (Jones 152-153). However, in most of the stories, the women take control of their destinies.

The pursuit of freedom or fleeing is an important and common theme in most of the stories, as the female protagonists are either seeking freedom from societal expectations, abusers, dominating males, the patriarchy, authorities, punishment, or an oppressive government. This is linked to the social and political events generally in the authors' home countries, such as in 'Muñeca rota', 'La muñeca menor', and 'El huésped'.

The above themes are conveyed in a more subtle way by the authors from Cuba, as they were writing under strict censorship controls. Llana's 'En familia' has the subtle and non-confronting message of the changes for the citizens who remained in Cuba to support the Revolution, and how time stood almost still for them, especially following the US sanctions. Díaz Llanillo's story is about changing identity to something desirable, but it is also about Cuban identity. In contrast, the authors from Puerto Rico, El Salvador and Honduras have

openly used political and historical themes or backgrounds in their stories. Hernández and Ramos have used themes of violence against citizens and political figures in their stories, while neo-colonialism and US imperialism is the background to Ferré's story.

One thing became clear during my investigation: the historical, political, economic, social, and cultural factors in each author's home country are overarching themes in the formation of their stories. This is my other major finding, as in many ways, the fragmentation of the body is an allegory of the countries' histories, which have been fragmented through colonialism, and are subsequently unable to shed neo-colonialism, *Latifundismo*, and imperialism from the USA. These factors have restrained development both economically and socially in Latin America (Keen and Haynes "Independence" 283) and these themes can be read either in the background of the stories, or by the use of Latin American Fantastic. Ferré's 'La muñeca menor' has neo-colonialism and imperialism as background themes, as well as links to Taino mythology. The family in her story were formerly wealthy landowners, but losing their wealth and status under US imperialism, although Ferré does not mention this explicitly. Likewise, Hernández's 'Manual de hijo muerto' has clear references to the violence during the civil war in El Salvador and the uneasy peace period afterwards, although these are also not mentioned explicitly, and Ramos's 'Para elegir la muerte' has connections to some historical Latin American political figures. In a similar way, the broken body of the protagonist in Pérez Cuadra's 'Muñeca rota' is an allegory of Nicaragua, a broken and fragmented country. In line with Barrenechea's theory that allegory often reflects the problematic and unreal nature of the real world (Barrenechea 395), the Fantastic has been used in these stories to draw attention to these issues, often taking events to an absurd level. Societal themes of the invisible woman and machoism are also evident in stories from Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Guatemala. Body invasions, like in 'La muñeca menor', are linked to the country's colonial past as are the ghost family members in the mirror in 'En familia'. They are a reflection and an allegory of the past

and present in Cuba. They are (and were), as Llana said: “los que no se quedaron pero tampoco se fueron”, those citizens who remained to patriotically face the radical social changes in Cuba after the Revolution. Likewise, the theme of the Other has strong links to Latin American history, from the time of Columbus’s arrival in America. Many of the stories reflect the transformations in the authors’ countries, from colonisation and conflicts to their shaky transitions towards peace and democracy, and currently deviating away from democracy. However, many of the governments of these countries still cannot escape the past, and, in some cases, corruption, oppressive rulers, and income inequality have not improved or, in fact, have worsened.

My theoretical framework, which drew on Todorov's seminal work, highly prioritised the theories of Latin American scholars. Over the course of my study, throughout which I have read my chosen stories through this Latin American lens, a Latin American Fantastic has emerged. Todorov’s first condition, that the Fantastic is set in an everyday world and not a fantasy world, is applicable to all stories. The Fantastic, particularly in Latin America, is generally set in an urban environment, which relates to the rapid urbanisation of the cities at the turn of the twentieth century following large waves of immigration. This is one of the key differences between the Fantastic and magical realism which were clarified in Chapter 2. The reasons for the large migrations are explained by José Luis Romero: “Porque hacia las grandes ciudades se dirigió preferentemente la inmigración, precisamente porque era en ellas donde esperaba encontrar la más amplia gama de posibilidades para tentar fortuna” (270). As noted in Chapter 4, these immigrants’ hopes and dreams were not fulfilled, and these dashed hopes form part of the angst of the Fantastic. In the stories examined in this thesis, the setting is the urban home or a workplace in a city or town, except for ‘Yo, cocodrilo’, which is set in a country village, and ‘Muñeca rota’, in which the protagonists are mainly sitting on the pier by the sea. The Fantastic event appears very early in the many of the stories in this thesis, in line

with Alazraki's neo-Fantastic theory, with no Gothic-style shock of the nineteenth century authors like Poe. It appears in the first line of 'Yo, cocodrilo', 'El huésped', 'Manual de hijo muerto', and in 'Muñeca rota', and in the first paragraph of 'El vendedor de cabezas', 'En familia', 'La debutante', and 'Mujer hecha pedazos'. In a similar way, Campra's theory of silences and missing information is also important, and appears in most stories, such as 'Manual de hijo muerto', as there are no details of who sent the body or how it was sent to the parents. All stories are therefore representative of the Latin American Fantastic.

My research has demonstrated the need for further studies of women's authors of the Fantastic in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, who have been underrepresented in anthologies and other studies of the genre. Further research would be very beneficial to map out the contribution to the genre of the Fantastic by women writers based in the smaller Caribbean countries, such as the Dominican Republic, or in Central American countries like Belize. Stories by women written in either Spanish or in English, such as Nalo Hopkinson from Jamaica, could also be investigated, as well as Fantastic stories written by Afro-descendant women. Another exciting area for further research is investigation into the women writers of the Fantastic from the Andean countries: Ecuador, Bolivia, Perú, and Colombia.

My hope is that this study into Fantastic literature written by women from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, will promote other research into their works, particularly among English-speaking readers. I will continue to present on their works at conferences, as I have already done at the conferences organised by the Grupo de Estudios de lo Fantástico in Torino, Italy, in June 2022, Santiago de Chile in 2023, and Braga, Portugal, in 2024, as well as the online conference for the Association of Iberian and Latin American Studies of Australasia in July 2022 and at the University of New England's Higher Research Degree Conference in

October 2022. I also have an article that has been accepted for printing in *Revista Brumal*, which compares and contrasts ‘Manual de hijo muerto’ and ‘Para elegir la muerte’. This article is the expanded version of my conference paper presentation in Torino.

My journey into Fantastic literature began in 2016 when I was first introduced to it and fell in love with it as part of my post-graduate Diploma in Modern Languages. The Fantastic in Latin America continued as the major subject for my Bachelor of Arts Honours thesis, and now has evolved into my doctoral thesis. My initial reactions were wonder and amazement, followed by laughter as I discovered how many of the authors used allegories and satire to mock the authorities or events in the region. I became an immediate *aficionada* of the Fantastic and I hope that readers of this thesis will become *aficionados* of Fantastic literature and will consider pursuing their own research into the genre.

My journey continues.

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Appendix A: Translated Stories

Authors' stories translated into English

Many of these stories have been translated into English in other books. Permission from the copyright holders has been obtained for these translations and attributed. My own translations are indicated, with permission from the author or copyright holder(s). I am extremely grateful to these people permitting me to print the story in English in my thesis. I have generally used the English spelling, not the US spelling of words which may appear in some of the printed books.

For those stories that I could not obtain [REDACTED] [REDACTED] the end of this Appendix for the reader to obtain the book from a bookstore or a library, or to purchase the Spanish version from good booksellers.

‘La debutante’ (The Debutante) – Leonora Carrington

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Permission obtained from the copyright holder, Mr Paul De Angelis, Literary Agent for the Estate of Leonora Carrington on 10 August 2022. Thank you very much, Mr De Angelis.

Carrington, Leonora and The Estate of Leonora Carrington. *The Complete Stories of Leonora*

Carrington. Dorothy Project, St Louis, MO, U.S.A., 2017, pp. 3-7

When I was a debutante, I often went to the zoo. I went so often that I knew the animals better than I knew the girls of my own age. Indeed it was in order to get away from people that I found myself at the zoo every day. The animal I got to know best was a young hyena. She knew me too. She was very intelligent. I taught her French, and she, in return, taught me her language. In this way we passed many pleasant hours.

My mother was arranging a ball in my honour on the first of May. During this time I was in a state of great distress for whole nights. I’ve always detested balls, especially when they are given in my honour.

On the morning of the first of May 1934, very early, I went to visit the hyena.

“What a bloody nuisance,” I said to her. “I’ve got to go to my ball tonight.”

“You’re very lucky,” she said. “I’d love to go. I don’t know how to dance, but at least I could make small talk.”

“There’ll be a great many different things to eat,” I told her. “I’ve seen truckloads of food delivered to our house.”

“And you’re complaining,” replied the hyena, disgusted. “Just think of me, I eat once a day, and you can’t imagine what a heap of bloody rubbish I’m given.”

I had an audacious idea, and I almost laughed. “All you have to do is go instead of me!”

“We don’t resemble each other enough, otherwise I’d gladly go,” said the hyena rather sadly.

“Listen,” I said. “No one sees too well in the evening light. If you disguise yourself, nobody will notice you in the crowd. Besides, we’re practically the same size. You’re my only friend. I beg you to do this for me.”

She thought this over, and I knew that she really wanted to accept.

“Done,” she said all of a sudden.

There weren’t many keepers about, it was so early in the morning. I opened the cage quickly, and in a very few moments we were out in the street. I hailed a taxi; at home, everybody was still in bed. In my room I brought out the dress I was to wear that evening. It was a little long, and the hyena found it difficult to walk in my high-heeled shoes. I found some gloves to hide her hands, which were too hairy to look like mine. By the time the sun was shining into my room, she was able to make her way around the room several times, walking more or less upright. We were so busy that my mother almost opened the door to say good morning before the hyena had hidden under my bed.

“There’s a bad smell in your room,” my mother said, opening the window. “You must have a scented bath before tonight, with my new bath salts.”

“Certainly,” I said.

She didn’t stay long. I think the smell was too much for her.

“Don’t be late for breakfast,” she said and left the room.

The greatest difficulty was to find a way of disguising the hyena’s face. We spent hours and hours looking for a way, but she always rejected my suggestions. At last she said, “I think I’ve found the answer. Have you got a maid?”

“Yes,” I said, puzzled.

“There you are then. Ring for your maid, and when she comes in we’ll pounce upon her and tear off her face. I’ll wear her face tonight instead of mine.”

“It’s not practical,” I said. “She’ll probably die if she hasn’t got a face. Somebody will certainly find the corpse and we’ll be put in prison.”

“I’m hungry enough to eat her,” the hyena replied.

“And the bones?”

“As well,” she said. “So, it’s on!”

“Only if you promise to kill her before tearing off her face. It’ll hurt too much otherwise.”

“All right. It’s all the same to me.”

Not without a certain amount of nervousness I rang for Mary, my maid. I certainly wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t hate having to go to a ball so much. When Mary came in I turned to the wall so as not to see. I must admit it didn’t take long. A brief cry, and it was over. While the hyena was eating, I looked out the window. A few minutes later she said, “I can’t eat any more. Her two feet are left over still, but if you have a little bag, I’ll eat them later in the day.”

“You’ll find a bag embroidered with fleurs-de-lis in the cupboard. Empty out the handkerchiefs you’ll find inside, and take it.” She did as I suggested. Then she said, “Turn round now and look how beautiful I am.”

In front of the mirror, the hyena was admiring herself in Mary’s face. She had nibbled very neatly all around the face so that what was left was exactly what was needed.

“You’ve certainly done that very well,” I said.

Towards evening, when the hyena was all dressed up, she declared, “I really feel in top-top form. I have a feeling that I shall be a great success this evening.”

When we had heard the music from downstairs for quite some time, I said to her, “Go on down now, and remember, don’t stand next to my mother. She’s bound to realise that it isn’t me. Apart from her I don’t know anybody. Best of luck.” I kissed her as I left her, but she did smell very strong.

Night fell. Tired by the day’s emotions, I took a book and sat down by the open window, giving myself up to peace and quiet. I remember that I was reading *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift. About an hour later, I noticed the first signs of trouble. A bat flew in at the window, uttering little cries. I am terribly afraid of bats. I hid behind a chair, my teeth chattering. I had hardly gone down on my knees when the sound of beating wings was overcome by a great noise at my door. My mother entered, pale with rage.

“We’d just sat down at the table,” she said, “when that thing sitting in your place got up and shouted, ‘So I smell a bit strong, what? Well, I don’t eat cakes!’ Whereupon it tore off its face and ate it. And with one great bound, it disappeared through the window.”

(1937-38).

‘El vendedor de cabezas’ (The Head Trader) – Esther Díaz Llanillo

Permission obtained from the copyright holder Cubanabooks on 4 October 2022. Thank you very much, Dr Sara E. Cooper.

Díaz Llanillo, Esther. *Sobre Espíritus y Otros Misterios / About Spirits and Other Mysteries*. Edited by Martiza Mora et al., Translated by Manuel Martínez and Sara E Cooper. Cubanabooks, Chico, U.S.A., 2022, pp. 495-498.

Note: The translators have translated the title as ‘The Head Trade’. My translation of the title is ‘The Head Trader’.

The store wasn't very big. In the translucent window, under a multi-coloured awning like a rainbow, the owner displayed a variety of heads. At the entrance was a sign proclaiming: "NO MINORS!".

Anyone could find a head to their taste. The ample selection for women included one with long blonde hair, stylish curls, green or blue eyes, and pale skin enlivened with rosy cheeks - Nordic heads were popular at the time. They could also choose African heads with nappy hair over faces black as shoe polish, highlighted by beautiful pupils like black buttons. You could find others that were Asian, with angled eyes and straight hair falling like a black cascade over the clean yellowish facial tones. And there were Arab faces with curly hair and deep almond-eyed gazes. There also were faces with Latin, Slavic, and Hindu features; each displayed a special touch of strange perfection.

As for the masculine heads, there were some that displayed short, severe haircuts, destined for military men. Others had long copious hair suitable for musicians, poets, and bohemians; some sporting a languid, amorous expression for the occasional ladies' man. Others had strong chins, useful for head supervisors, boxers, or businessmen. In short, there was enough variety ready to satisfy any whim or desire.

And the head didn't necessarily have to be compatible with the general appearance of the buyer. In this regard customers had complete freedom of choice. A person with white skin, even an albino, was free to choose an ostentatious African head. Likewise, a person with an intensely black body could very well top it off with a pale head. This occurred more frequently during carnival season when sales would skyrocket.

The influence exerted by such changes on the wearers' personalities, as well as the impression they made on others, was noteworthy. Thus, a timid professor of philosophy chose one with a surly expression in order to instil respect in his students. A movie star, now in her fifties, risked one with wild blonde hair, young eyes, and seductive lips, able to meet the requirements of the most demanding magazine covers. Not to mention people with disfiguring scars, undesired bald patches or, contrarily, too much hair when preferred to go bald as a fashion statement. There in the window a diversity of heads was on offer; the store was ready to cater to any taste or expectation.

Heads could even be made to order. To accomplish this, the client had an interview with the owner and gave him a photo or a drawing showing the desired characteristics. Of course, the price was higher in those cases.

Once a client had purchased their new head, they had the option of the store removing their current head and installing the new one – all for a modest price. The substituted one was returned to the buyers inside a big hatbox just in case they changed their minds in the future and wanted to use the original again.

Frequently people who were passing by the store would stop to look, admiring the prolific exhibit on the other side of the window glass. Elvira was one of them. One day she screwed up the courage to go in, meaning to ask the owner about his products and how one went about buying them. While they talked, she watched him carefully. He had a withered face, thinning hair, eyes that were much too small and set near his beak of a nose. Nevertheless, the conversation led her to recognise that he was a fount of knowledge, an amiable soul with an interesting personality.

He looked at her through thick lenses, with a watery gaze submerged in faraway distances. “He’s not a man to make a pass at a girl,” she thought. His lips were no more than a thin line, made only to draw out a pleasant smile, but never to laugh, as she later confirmed. The scarceness of hair, underneath which could be seen the innocence of his cranium, made her feel more compassion than attraction.

He had an attractive personality, but his head didn’t add anything to the package. “Why doesn’t he exchange his own head for another one?” Elvira asked herself with a certain amount of frustration after a few days of daily conversation with him, since stopping by the store on her way home from work had become a habit for her. She had decided to pose the question to him since by now they had started getting to know each other.

“There are lovely heads here.” And she looked around making a wide gesture with her hand. “You’ve never been interested in getting a different one? A good many people do it.”

“I’m satisfied with my own,” he affirmed with conviction.

“I understand.” she responded, disappointedly.

With the passing of some months, as their friendship grew, she understood that she could not live without his company, so she brought it up again.

“Everyone who comes here decides on a new model. Wouldn’t you like to be the owner of a lovely head like this one?” And she picked up one with a young and masculine face, lustrous and perfectly styled short black hair, dark eyes with a direct gaze, and thick lips that seemed voluptuous to her.

She thought she could make out a hint of melancholy behind his thick lenses, emanating from the distant landscape of his eyes.

“I can’t do that,” he answered.

“Look at how many there are here and how beautiful they are. Choose one! Why wouldn’t you?”

“Because I am the one that creates them all.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“That I imagine them inside my own head.”

“As simple as that? You think them into being?”

“Just like that. Each morning, before opening the store, I sit at this table, where you are now resting your hands, and I begin to imagine them with determined characteristics until they appear before me completely and exactly how I’ve imagined them. It is a task that inspires me and gives me pleasure.”

“How interesting! I never would have believed it. If it weren’t you telling me this...”

“I am very observant. I devote myself to analysing the people around me and to discovering their desires, their frustrations, their needs, and also their fantasies. My greatest hope is to make others happy. I want to be able to please them.”

“And you? Do you feel happy all alone among so many heads?”

He did not respond.

“And if I were to ask you...? If I were to ask you at this very moment to make me happy and exchange yours for one to my liking, would you do it...?” And now she dared to speak to him as though they were on intimate terms.

He still didn't answer, submerged in his contradictions.

She then took the beautiful and masculine head that she had already shown him and gave it to him with determination.

“I'll close the shop,” he concluded as he accepted the head.

Some years later, after they had gone through so many things together, in an unforeseen move she stood up in the shadowy room, left him alone in their soft bed, and set off toward the boarded-up store. She went in and, feeling her way, opened the wardrobe that for many years had only held - in a fine hatbox – his original head. She took it out of its container with utmost care, transfixed by a strange feeling of longing. An unexpected ray of moonlight revealed it to her: illuminated in its ugliness, intelligent and sensitive. The head with whom she could talk for hours without feeling bored, and - above all things - the one that possessed the rare gift of creation.

Without thinking twice, she put it back in the hatbox, which she carried gently as she resolutely made her way toward the bedroom where he was still sleeping, blissfully unaware of what awaited him (of all people), who, long ago, had been so successful in the head trade.

‘En familia’ (In the Family) – María Elena Llana

Permission obtained from the copyright holder Cubanabooks on 4 October 2022. Thank you very much, Dr Sara E. Cooper.

Llana, María Elena. *An Address in Havana / Domicilio Habanero*. Translated by Barbara

Riess. Cubanabooks, Chico, U.S.A., 2014, pp. 115-118.

When my mother discovered that the enormous oval living room mirror was inhabited, we didn't believe her. Then we were astonished. And finally, after some contemplation, we got used to the idea.

The fact that the age-spotted oval glass reflected the family's dearly departed was not enough to upset our daily routine. One does not air one's dirty laundry in public, so we kept the secret to ourselves. After all, it wasn't anybody else's business.

At any rate, it took some time before each one all of us would feel absolutely comfortable sitting down in our favourite chair knowing that somebody else was in the same chair in the mirror. It could be my grandmother's sister Aurelia (R.I.P. 1939), for example. Or, even if my cousin Natalie were sitting next to me, across from her we'd see my mother's uncle Nicholas (R.I.P. 1927). As could have been expected, our dead relatives mirrored the image of a family

gathering almost identical to our own. Nothing - the decor, the layout of the room, and the furniture, the light - absolutely nothing had changed. The only difference: they were on the other side.

I can't speak for the others but for me, rather than a mirror-image, it was more like seeing a worn-out old movie, gritty and clouded. Their efforts to copy our gestures were slower, restrained. As if the mirror were not truly showing an exact image but the reflection of some other reflection.

From the very beginning I figured things would get more complicated when cousin Clara returned from vacation. Lively and ambitious, audacious and determined, Clara gave me the impression she'd landed in this family by mistake - a suspicion somewhat bolstered by her having become the first woman dentist in the country. But I was wrong. The idea she might have been with us in error disappeared the moment she hung up her diploma and sat down to embroider bed sheets alongside my grandmother, aunts, and other cousins, and to wait for a suitable suitor to show up. And beaux there were, but there was always something or other wrong with them. Nobody ever really knew exactly what.

Although she never actually practised her real profession, Clara became the family oracle once she graduated. She'd prescribe pain killers and was the authority on fashion; she chose which shows to see at the theatre and decided when the punch had just the right amount of liquor for every party. Given her responsibilities, it was fitting she take a month off every year to rest at the beach.

That summer when she heard what my mother had found Clara paused, thinking. It was as if she was considering symptoms before making a diagnosis. She leaned in towards the mirror, so it was true, and cocked her head sceptically. Then she went immediately to her chair next to the bookcase and craned her neck to see who was sitting on the other side.

“Gosh, look at Gustavo,” was all she said.

There, in that very same chair, sat Gus. Some sort of godson of Dad's, he'd come to live with us after a flood in his own town. He stayed on in the somewhat ambiguous position of adopted uncle or family handyman. Distractedly fixing a radio tube or something, Gus did not return Clara's very democratic and enthusiastic wave. Surely, the mirror people weren't going out of their way to be sociable. This must have hurt Clara's pride, but she did not let on.

Naturally, the idea of moving the mirror to the dining room was hers. And so was its sequel: pulling the big table up close so we could all sit together for meals. Mother worried that all the fuss would upset the mirror people or run them off, but everything went fine.

I must admit it was comforting to sit at the table every day and see so many faces from the family. Not all were familiar, however. Some of those on the other side were distant relatives, and others, due to their lengthy – although unintentional – absence, were almost strangers. In all, we were about twenty seated at the table. Even if their gestures seemed more remote than ours, and their meals a little washed-out, we generally gave the impression of being one big happy family.

Clara and her brother Julius sat at the border between the tables. On the other side sat uncle Daniel's second wife Eulalia (R.I.P. 1949). Aloof and lazy in life, she was now the most distant of anyone on the other side. Across from her sat my godfather Sylvester, not a blood relative but always very special to the family. I was sad that he'd lost his ruddy complexion. His full face seemed to suggest perfect health, but he was as pale as a mannequin, faded after years in

a store window. This deathly hue did not suit the robust gentleman from Asturias, who most likely felt very silly under these circumstances.

For a while we are all together without further incident. But, we forgot about Clara. We'd carelessly left her seated at the edge – on the equator separating what was from what was not. It just seemed so commonplace; we should've taken better care. To make things worse, across from her sat a flimsy Eulalia. One evening, a typical Clara turned and addressed her as naturally as she had waved to Gus.

“Would you please pass the salad?”

Eulalia affected the haughty disdain of offended royalty as she passed the spectral salad bowl, filled with dull lettuce and greyish semi-transparent tomatoes. Clara, smiling mischievously at the novelty, gobbled it up, the same defiance in her eyes as the day she registered to pursue a man's career. There was no time to act. We just sat and saw her grow pale, her smile a little sad and uncertain, until finally she slumped against the mirror.

Once the funeral business was over and we'd sat back down at the table again, we saw that Clara had already taken a place at the other side. She was between cousin Balthazar (R.I.P. 1940) and great-aunt Federica (R.I.P. 1936).

After what had happened, things weren't the same. We felt betrayed in a way, as if they'd wilfully taken advantage of our hospitality. However, after some discussion, we remained divided on exactly who was hosting whom. Moreover, it was clear that our negligence and Clara's irrepressible scientific curiosity were partly to blame. And, since the days went by and there didn't seem to be much difference between what Clara was doing now and what she'd done before, we decided to overlook the incident and get on with things – becoming less and less sure each day which side was life and which its reflection.

As one indiscretion usually leads to another, I ended up taking Clara's empty spot by the mirror and am now much closer to them. In fact, I never know for sure if the distant rustle of the napkins, the slight clinking of glasses and silverware, and the movement of the chairs I hear is coming from there or if we're making the noises ourselves. Nor do I care. What troubles me, though, is that Clara doesn't seem to be behaving with the proper seriousness or dullness owed to her new position; I don't know how to put it. She still pulls the pranks we so loved her for. And the fact is, I am much more likely to be the target of her machinations than anyone else in the family, maybe because we're the same age and shared the same childhood games and adolescent anxieties.

It just so happens that lately she's been doing all she can to get my attention. Since last Monday she's been trying to pass me a pineapple this big, admittedly a little faded and a bit tart, but just right for making juice. Exactly, she knows, how I like them.

‘Para elegir la muerte’ (To Choose Death) – María Eugenia Ramos

Permission obtained from the author, Ms María Eugenia Ramos, to translate the story into English on 5 June 2022. Thank you very much Ms Ramos.

Ramos, María Eugenia. *Una Cierta Nostalgia*. Editorial Guardabarranco, Tegucigalpa, 2000, pp. 21-30.

Translated by Lynette Grivell, 1 October 2022

The glass door was opened with a bell ringing joyously. At the back of the room, decorated with medieval tapestries, a young woman with long flowing hair waited behind a counter. An aroma of incense floated between the foot lamps.

“How may I help you?” – the young woman’s voice was a small stream of honey falling in the half light.

Samuel advanced with a hint of shyness.

“I have come to choose a death.”

“For sure”, the young woman smiled. “You’ve come to the right place. Who told you about us?”

Samuel remembered Doctor Santana, in his glass and steel coffin, no paler or smaller than in life, with an unsuspected mark of dignity in his face, even with blood-soaked cotton swabs put in his nostrils and a bloody trickle flowing from his ear. He had chosen to die as a disappeared politician, no one was able to explain why, after having been a respectable right-wing Catholic, enemy of disturbances.

“A friend...” – he thought about giving the name, but then he told himself that it wasn’t necessary – “He died three weeks ago”.

“And you’d like to choose a death now.”

“Yes, well, not right now. I want to leave it reserved, let’s say, for a year from now. Is it possible?”

Within a year, the complicated matter of the judicial process would have been resolved one way or another by then. Fortunately, his ex-wife had remarried. Marisela, his daughter, would console herself quickly with the half a million that he would leave her after the total settlement.

“Of course it is possible, sir. We are here to help you. Have you already determined what kind of death you’d like?”

“Well, not really. Do you have a catalogue, a guide, or something similar? I’m sorry, I don’t know how this works.”

“Don’t worry, sir, no one knows. Come with me.”

The young woman left from behind the counter and he could see that her long hair and her adolescent virgin-like features were not out of place with her voice.

“In these tapestries” – the young woman pointed to the wall – “you will find different kinds of death. Here, for example, are the Philippine 800.

In the framework of grey and purple tones a white man with his feet and hands tied to a cross stood out, with his eyes turned in a painful expression towards the sky.

“A Spanish missionary crucified in the Philippines in the eighteenth century” – explained the young woman.

The next tapestry was an explosion of red and copper tones under a large leaden cloud, but no person or thing could be seen.

“What’s this?”

“Hiroshima” – the young woman sighed – “A very fashionable death in these days when almost all the atomic weapons have disappeared.”

Samuel hesitated. He had read that the most of those killed in Hiroshima had not felt anything. It could be an option. He thought about it for a moment, but after shook his head.

“Let’s look at others” – he asked.

In the third tapestry, a scientist was dying, infected by the same disease for which he was trying to find a cure. In the fourth, an old fisherman, tanned by the sun and salt of the sea, was dying fighting with a white shark. In the fifth, the head of Olympe de Gouges rolled off the guillotine. In the sixth, a young woman with Arabic features is dying burned at the stake in the Inquisition. In the seventh, a middle-aged man is lying with a bullet-hole in his temple, clinging to the inert body of a woman. Samuel was struck by the tortured expression, which he did not remember having seen even on the earthy face of Doctor Santana.

“He is a tormented one” – the young woman explained. “He killed his wife and then suicided afterwards.”

“He must have loved her very much” – Simon supposed.

“I don’t know, sir. We’re trained in different death techniques, but we don’t know what feelings those who die have. We haven’t been trained for that.”

“I understand” – Simon agreed.

As he moved towards the next tapestry, he inadvertently brushed against the arm of the young woman. She looked him in the eyes. Samuel felt completely relaxed, wanting to talk.

“You know” – he said in a low voice, but knowing that the young woman heard him – “I could never love my wife.”

“It’s natural, sir. Very few people can love anyone”.

“You’re right” – Samuel was surprised. “It’s more, not only my wife, I never have been able to love anyone.”

“As I said, that is typical of these times.”

“I confess that I am confused. After all, what is more important? To be able to choose your own death? Or is it true what they say in the old books, that if one loves, any death is good?”

“Well, that’s what the missionaries believed. But remember that being able to choose death is a privilege, not just in this century, but forever. Only that before it was reserved for the initiated, and now it is available for the public for a reasonable price. It is a great advantage, don’t you think?”

“Yes, for sure. Will that have been why Doctor Santana chose that kind of death?”

“What’s are you saying?”

“Doctor Santana. You know, it was he who left me a letter telling me about the service that you offer. I have been asking myself for three weeks why he would want to die like that. The beatings ruined him inwardly.”

“Ah, Doctor Santana” – the stream of honey continued falling without varying in intensity – “Yes, now I remember. He came two months ago to request the service. He was already an elderly gentleman. It makes me happy to know that he is another of our satisfied customers.”

“Did you look after him? What did he tell you?”

“I always looked after him, sir. There are not many of us young women who are qualified to do this job. Certain qualities are need, among them discretion. I can’t comment on what he told me.”

“Please, Miss. I need to know. That will help me make my choice. Imagine, a man so respected. He travelled to Rome every year and was received by the Pope. The government decorated him several times. He was an executive of various charitable organisations and of the Anti Abortion League, and ended up like this, as a criminal, or a guerrilla, or whatever.”

“Even client has their reasons, sir. We don’t intervene in this.”

“Yes, you’re right. I’m sorry” – Samuel conceded, discouraged.

“We’ll move on” – the young woman smiled – “I’m sure that after seeing everything in the showroom you’ll be able to make a decision. Perhaps even understand your friend.”

“He wasn’t exactly my friend” – Samuel murmured – “He was more like my teacher. I was perhaps too young to be his friend, and politics didn’t interest me, only business.”

In the eighth tapestry, it surprised Samuel to see nothing but a dog convulsing in the fog of death.

“A non-human death can be chosen?”

“The majority of humans die like animals” – affirmed the young woman.

In the following tapestry, Juliette was plunging the knife in her chest, falling flat onto the marbled face of Romeo. Further on, an astronaut was floating eternally in space.

Samuel went through the entire next line of tapestries, stopping in front of each one. Upon entering he had not noticed that the premises was so large. At the end of the room there was a door that led to another room, smaller and dimly lit. Samuel stopped at the doorway and strained to distinguish the images in the first tapestry. He wasn’t sure, but he thought he saw a man standing in the clear light of dawn before a firing squad. Even though it didn’t look much like the picture pages from school, Samuel believed that he recognised Francisco Morazán.

He wanted to enter to see better, but then noticed that the young woman wasn’t with him. On turning around, he saw that she had again taken her place behind the counter.

“I cannot go in” – she explained – “You will be walking that corridor under your own risk.”

“Why?”

“Very few choose these deaths. They are like the Philippine 800, only the missionaries trusted in life after death and received torment with joy.”

“And these?”

The young woman did not respond. Between the smoke of the incense, stronger every time, Samuel felt that his head was clearing up and that his eyes were able to see better even in the areas less illuminated by the lamps.

“These are deaths for love, right? They are not those that killed their wife, or even those of the missionaries, you have already explained to me why. These others are for unrequited love.”

“Romeo and Juliette died for love” – for the first time, the intensity of the golden stream had diminished.

“Yes, but they had each other, they could touch each other, be together, what do I know. These people died without having seen what they loved.”

“You could be right, sir. It’s an opinion.”

“Tell me why you won’t accompany me.”

“The company has its rules. In this corridor one runs the risk of not being able to return, of losing objectivity, of wanting to change one’s life forever, including by wanting to change one’s life through death. We can no longer guarantee anything, not even the moment of death. Even we employees are not exempt from running that risk.”

“Doctor Santana entered here, right?”

He no longer heard her reply. From the doorway, he believed he could make out the fearless features of Túpac Amaru between his limbs being torn by the Andalusian horses. Now, with his hand supported in the beam of the door, he began to take the first step towards the little tiled roof schoolhouse of La Higuera.

‘Yo, cocodrilo’ (I, Crocodile) – Jacinta Escudos

Copyright Jacinta Escudos. Permission obtained from the author, Ms Jacinta Escudos, to use the English translation by Eliana González Ugarte, in *Constelación Magazine*, on 9 August 2022. Thank you very much, Ms Escudos and Ms Ugarte.

Escudos, Jacinta. "Yo, Cocodrilo." *El Diablo Sabe mi Nombre*. Translated by Eliana González Ugarte, *Constelación Magazine*, 2020, <https://www.constelacionmagazine.com/post/i-crocodile>. Posted on website 11 August 2020, accessed 5 August 2021.

English translation by Eliana González Ugarte.

I turn into a crocodile on warm afternoons.

I head to the stream, take off my clothes, go in face-down, close my eyes, extend my arms, and open my legs.

I feel the desert winds embracing me with its hot currents. They melt me. They penetrate me down there. And something shifts, something that is no longer me, but a crocodile.

My new strength draws me in, seductively, the way a woman's hips dance when she walks. I have scales on my hands, and a new, extended nose attached to jaws filled with sharp and pointy teeth. The little critters run away from me and hide. They're afraid.

They're scared I'll open my jaws. They're afraid of my eyes.

At first, I didn't know what was happening. And then I remembered what was said in the village. A girl who doesn't submit to the ritual will turn into a crocodile.

I couldn't imagine how a girl could turn into a crocodile. But I wasn't supposed to ask. I'd later come to understand.

That first afternoon I turned into a crocodile was strange. I laid face-down in the stream because I was hot, and the heat makes me sleepy. I wanted to sleep, so I did. And when I woke up, I discovered I was an animal. I got to know my jaws, my new hands. If I twisted my body far enough, I could even see my tail. My very own tail!

I found it curious. To be an animal and a person. I wasn't worried; it was fun. I spent my afternoons in the shrubbery by the stream with my other crocodile friends. We talked about the animals they hunted, the young, the heat and the water. And we spoke of the people who lived in the village.

The other crocodiles couldn't believe I was human until they saw me turning back into myself.

The elder crocodiles said that a human who could turn into an animal had to be a sorcerer. And so, the other crocodiles began to respect me, and they promised to help me because they knew I'd be kind to them.

I had a great time with my friends. We swam, ate, and played. They taught me how to hunt. We stalked the animals that approached the stream's shore to drink water: impalas, buffalos, lions, elephants. And also, people.

I didn't like being human. I preferred my time spent as a crocodile. Mother had been clear. She said, you have to submit to the ritual. And I'd say, no, I'd rather be a crocodile. Mother would throw me to the ground and yell. The women would speak to me, telling me I had to do it and be unafraid, that everyone did it.

I cried. I didn't want to listen. I'd place my hands on my ears and wail. I knew of the girls' screams when they went to the ritual. I knew of the ones who died afterward.

You'll never get married, they'd say. And Mother would say, no one will pay a dowry for you. We'll be forever miserable. She'll be unfaithful, lustful, sick in the flesh, and her whole body will rot. Her parts will grow and grow and be as big as a goat's horn, they'd say behind my back.

I dreamed. In my dream I lay face up, naked. And in the dream, I saw that between my legs grew a long one-eyed serpent, thick and rigid, colored like my flesh, and I took the serpent's head between my hands, placed it in my mouth and began to feel strange things throughout my

body. And I awoke pressing my legs together, feeling like something moved in that part where water leaves the body. Something that moved and throbbed just as intensely as my beating heart.

They left me to my fate. Mother didn't want to hear of me. I slept and ate there, but they didn't care if I left or stayed. I was unworthy, and I feared that any day they'd take me by force to do that which they did to the others.

And I didn't want to be with them. I hated Mother. I saw her take my little sister; I saw her take others. My little sister cried for days and days, and all that came out of her body was blood. Lots of blood. Mother spent her days changing the blood-soaked cloths for other cloths, rusted by the poorly washed blood.

Once, I saw it all. I knew they took the girl to the healer's hut. The healer stripped her, and the women would hold the girl's legs open, and the girl would cry and howl like an animal for the slaughter, and the healer used a knife to cut a piece of flesh, the size of an ear, from there, where water leaves the body. And the blood sprouted red, in abundance. And there was no way to stop it, not with mud plasters, not with a mix of herbs. And the girls didn't drink concoctions or dusts to alleviate their pain, they were merely held by their own mothers or older sisters, while another woman cut their parts and sewed them up with reeds and needles made of thorny plants.

I'd rather be a crocodile. Unworthy. Impure.

One morning, Mother told me I had to go with her. I knew what that meant. She'd deceive me and take me to the healer. They'd subdue me; tie me up like an animal.

I ran. I ran desperately, screaming. I went to the only place where I had friends: the stream. I ran and got into the water, and I remember hearing a strange cry coming from Mother. She knew that was where the crocodiles lived. Mother thought I was dead.

I got into the water, and for the first time, I turned into a crocodile in the stream's dark depths. I came ashore as a crocodile, and the others followed me.

We went to the village and destroyed everything. The only beings we tore apart were the women. Some of my friends died. The men resisted. But we weren't interested in men. The women were the ones who did it all. The ones who maimed, forced, kept the legs open.

Mother died, and I saw her die, but she didn't know I was her daughter: I, crocodile. I personally participated in eating the healer. And we took care of everyone else too, because the girls were never happy after the ritual. It was an act of mercy to end them.

When we were done, it was because all the men had gone away. They were unable to defend their women. They ran frightened. Joyously, we clapped our jaws as a sign of victory.

Now I'm this village's leader. My crocodile friends have a good time. I no longer try to become human. I'd rather be like this, a crocodile, with a long serpent growing between my legs.

‘Muñeca rota’ (Broken Doll) – María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra

Permission obtained from the author, Dr María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra, to translate the story into English on 11 November 2022. Thank you very much, Dr Pérez Cuadra.

Pérez Cuadra, María del Carmen. *Una ciudad de estatuas y perros*. Abecedaria Editoras & Estudios Culturales S.A., Costa Rica, 2022, pp. 18-21. First digital Edition.

Original publication: *Una ciudad de estatuas y perros*, Das Kapital Ediciones, Santiago, Chile, 2014.

Translated by Lynette Grivell, 8 November 2022.

In the beginning, it was the arms, then the legs, and finally the breasts. Sometimes they wore out, they ached, they broke away by themselves. Every part of my body had turned into something rotten that collapsed because of its own weight. I was left with only my eyes, my mouth, my ears, my anus, my vagina - penetrable things. So came the day that I started to feel that my entire body was fed up with being so “feminine”. I wanted to stop being like this and to look for new things: I could not be a man, because I also didn’t want to be something that turned out to be repulsive to me. That’s why I asked Socorro to take me for a ride around the bay, and afterwards, I told her of my dream in which I was flying to Corn Island and Solentiname. She told me that I had strange dreams, and that she still hadn’t forgotten the last one that I told her about the insides of Cosigüina - the adventure with the man that was sandboarding on the sides of the volcano. Then I laughed out loud. I realised that my expressions were exaggerated, and it wouldn’t surprise me if Socorro was scared of me. She no longer seemed to be afraid of my physical state; however, I don’t believe that she’d think the same with respect to my mental state. Anyway, there wasn’t much I could do about it. With what hands would I push her? With what feet would I kick her? With what breasts would I breast feed her? With what heart? She was so sweet.

Socorro used to come along with me every morning – sometimes she fell asleep listening to my stories. And I watched her rest with her eyes half-closed, lined by those thick and curled black eyelashes. From my state of amputated millipede, I used to observe with curiosity the green pupil and the black pupil behaving in the dream like they were possessed by dissonant forces. Perhaps her tolerance of me had to do with mine of not bothering her about the fact that her eyes were different colours.

She took me even closer.

“Socorro”, I said, “up to what point are you capable of loving your neighbour?” And she was smiling like a fool when she answered me.

“Until infinity and beyond.”

“But what a funny girl,” I answered ironically.

I asked her to take me to the seat by the edge of the pier, even though she warned me that it was dangerous.

“I’m your sister, not your assassin,” she insists. And then I convince her that nothing is going to happen to me, I had to let her know that everything is fine, that I know that she worries about

me. I am her only family, I know it so well. She agrees, and then I say that I'm going to tell her a new story which I start without hesitation.

“Once upon a time there was a man who caught in his fishing net a mermaid, who had long voluptuous legs and a bulging vagina. She sang a magnificent song to him with her fish head, and she opened her vagina as she felt like devouring him. He, instead of throwing her back in the water, took her in his arms and kissed her mouth that wanted to gulp him down. But she almost chewed off one of his ears with her sharp fish's teeth. He, on seeing himself in danger in front of that wild beast with the uncovered vagina, became so excited that he started to search for his penis that already had protruded through his trousers. But before this, he gave her three strong sharp blows, on the fish head of the girl, that stunned her almost to unconsciousness. He put her in the small boat and started to have sex with her, remembering the good times that happened with Dorothy, his favourite hen.”

“But watch out, this is a long story,” I warn her. She shrugs her shoulders.

“The salty, cold wind blew, the fishermen's boats disappeared towards the horizon. Once he had carried out the act, the man was so exhausted and so satisfied that he fell asleep, and at the same instant that he finished, he forgot about her. Then the fish-girl recovers and, as she is more animal than human, she notices a blood-stained worm poking out of the fly of the man. She naturally opens her jaws wide and releases eagerly her small saw-teeth and ¡Bang! with a rapid bite detaches and eats that worm. When the man reacts it's too late. But something marvellous happens - when she drinks the human blood, she starts to transform into a person, and caught in a trance, staggers and falls. But now as a human being in the water, she can't breathe, she is losing her gills...little by little.”

When she is so intrigued, I ask her to close her eyes so that she pictures what comes next, to breathe deeply and for an instant, to hold the air in her lungs to imagine the protagonist's situation in the most accurate way. And then, when my guardian closes the black eye and the green eye, I, with all the force of my eel's or worm's body, I proceed to twist and jump into the water. I know that it is the deepest part, I know that I am a clumsy fish, without a tail and with short fins, and without feeling like fighting against whatever comes, I surrender - the water is my only salvation.

On the surface, Socorro screams for help but no one is going to hear her; at this hour, the fishermen are going far out to sea and the rest of the people are amusing themselves in the shops downtown. My poor sister, she is going to feel guilty. I hope that she forgets about this mishap soon. Now she is going to have even more time for herself. I hope that she knows how to make the most of it.

I fall slowly, I don't resist, I just fall. Time goes by and I don't fight against the agony that in any moment is going to end. Afterwards, I separate from my body.

A long dream, like an endless story that bifurcates in an infinite mirror, neutralises all my desires.

Today I see the sea filtered by an immense peace. Roots and branches have grown in every part of my body, now that I am the food of a new species of aquatic plants that can decide between the masculine and the feminine according to their needs, and so I don't care about the matter anymore. I can say that my body is not only an old plastic that has been wisely taken advantage of by the anemones. My broken doll's body, now, is truly mine.

‘El eterno transparente’ (The Eternal Transparency) – Linda Berrón

Permission obtained from the author, Ms Linda Berrón, to translate the story into English on 7 October 2022. Thank you very much, Ms Berrón.

Berrón, Linda. "El Eterno Transparente." *La Cigarra Autista*, Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, San José, Costa Rica, 1992, pp. 15-21.

Translated by Lynette Grivell, 8 October 2022.

When she tried to insert the key into the lock, she was surprised to find that it wouldn't go in. She tried again, but it wouldn't work. She tried with the other keys, but they didn't work either. She looked at the lock thoroughly: what would have changed it? It seemed the same as always, like the door, like the house. Likewise, the silver and round key was the same. Could it have scratched the lock?

She knocked on the door with a long insistence, two, three times. The maid opened the door, impatient and sour-faced. Without saying anything, she turned around and went to the kitchen.

Everything seemed to be in its place. She stored the key in her wallet.

In the garden, the children were playing with the dog. The afternoon was sunny. It removed the uncertainty from her, and she went over to them to give them a kiss. They didn't pay her any attention.

She sat down in the rocking chair to enjoy the freshness of the corridor for a while. The ferns were hanging without a breath of wind.

It started to get dark slowly. Shortly after, her husband arrived. He was complaining about the heat, the traffic jams, and the meeting that he had at eight o'clock that night.

"How did you get in the house?", she asked seriously.

He looked at her, amazed.

"How did I get in? As always. What's this strange question?"

"Did you open the door yourself?", she insisted with the same gravity.

"Of course not. The maid let me in. Listen to me, what happened to you?"

"I couldn't open the door. The key didn't go in the lock."

"Surely it was another key."

"No, it was the same as always."

"Are we eating now? I have a meeting at eight o'clock," he said from the dining room.

Deyanira, without thinking any more about the incident, but without forgetting about it either, continued with the evening routine.

The next day in the morning, she got up first as always. She supervised to make sure that the children were ready at seven o'clock, the hour that the minibus passed to pick them up.

When she'd finished grooming herself, she went to put on the low-heeled blue shoes and found that they were too big for her. She put them on again and again, but they always slipped off when she walked. She tried the black ones, the brown ones, the tennis shoes. All of them were too big.

Her husband was shaving, concentrated on his image in the mirror.

"How unusual! All my shoes are suddenly too big!", she said with an insecure tone in her voice.

"Are you getting smaller?", he asked, amused.

Deyanira returned to the bedroom. She looked, perplexed, at the pairs of shoes that she had tried on repeatedly.

"It's incredible," she said in a low voice while she filled the tops of the blue shoes with cotton.

They ate breakfast in silence. Deyanira did not dare to talk about something that seemed so absurd and yet so disturbing.

They said goodbye with a kiss and each one went to work.

Deyanira walked with a great deal of effort: she tried to cling on tight with her toes to the wobbling soles of the shoes.

On alighting from the bus, the right shoe came off and landed in the drain. The dirty water soaked the cotton. Now she hobbled as she dragged the shoe so that she didn't lose it.

She breathed a sigh of relief when she arrived at the company's building where she worked. On approaching her office, she found that it was open. It surprised her because only she had the key.

She opened the door, and she found an strange woman at her desk who was typing on the typewriter.

"Excuse me", she said.

"How may I help you?" the woman responded, with excellent manners.

She hesitated. She had never been good at defending her territory.

"Excuse me," she repeated, "Who are you?"

The woman continued, smiling.

"Marta, at your service."

"And what are you doing here?"

"I'm Don Julián's personal secretary," she responded more seriously.

“It’s not possible. Don Julián’s personal secretary is *me*.⁹¹ This is my office, for almost the past six years...”

“What are you talking about? Is this a joke?”, she asked angrily, standing up.

That woman appeared to be serious. She had no other choice than to explain the obvious.

“Look, I have been Don Julián’s secretary for the past six years. I don’t know if you’re pretending, I don’t know if it’s a joke in bad taste, see, this is my desk, my vase, the photograph of my children...”

And Deyanira was dumbstruck on seeing the photograph of an attractive young man in the place where there should have been a photograph of her two children seated on a seesaw.

“It’s Andrés, my boyfriend,” the woman added bluntly.

“But it can’t be! Let’s go and ask Elvira, the soda lady, or Sonia, the receptionist, or Don Julián, to whomever you want!”

“Look, I think that you’re crazy. I’ve worked here for three years, and I’ve never seen you in this office. I don’t know how you know Elvira’s and Sonia’s names, but all this seems to me to be suspicious. Fortunately, Don Julián’s here, I’m going to call him.”

Deyanira looked at the door of Don Julián’s office. He’d explain everything. Or maybe not? And if he didn’t? She sat down in a chair, her eyes fixed on that door. She was like a girl waiting for an examination, or at the dentist.

Don Julián Vallejo, a very tall man, stopped in front of her, looking insolent and curious.

“Don Julián,” murmured Deyanira.

“Good morning, Madam,” he said distantly.

“Don Julián,” Deyanira continued, “this young woman says that she’s your secretary...”

“Indeed, Marta is my secretary.”

“But Don Julián, it’s me, Deyanira, I’ve been your secretary for the past six years. I started to work with you in the old building, before we came over...”

Don Julián’s features softened for a moment as he contemplated the anguish in that face.

“Look, Madam, you’re wrong. I am sure that you’re confusing me with another person. I don’t know you nor can I remember that you have ever worked in this company. Why don’t you go home and rest? Why not go to the doctor?”

She lowered her gaze. She had an incredible urge to cry.

“Pay attention to me, Madam, go and calm down.” Don Julián turned his back on her and became lost in the well-lit office. The secretary looked at her without triumphalism.

Deyanira stood up, dragged the right shoe the most gracefully that she could, and went into the street.

⁹¹ My emphasis.

Hanging on to the rail of the bus, she remained with her gaze fixed on a yellowish stain on the glass. She wasn't thinking of anything, except that it was impossible to think of nothing at all.

She alighted from the bus taking care not to lose either shoe. She'd already walked some five hundred metres when she noticed that she'd passed the bus stop, that her house was far away, and that she'd have to walk more than a kilometre uphill.

She was very tired. With each step slower and wearier, she arrived at the railroad track. There, she stopped for a long time looking at the tracks. Homesickness painfully filled her head, a hard absorbent cotton in the midday sun.

The school minibus arrived at the house at the same time that she did. She saw her oldest son run towards the garden, but she did not see her youngest one.

"What's Pablo done?", she asked him.

The boy turned to look at her.

"Which Pablo?", he answered.

"Your brother. Who else would it be?"

"I don't have brothers or sisters."

The door of the house opened at that moment and the lad lost himself in it like an exhalation.

Deyanira remained immobile facing the young woman who looked at her with distrust.

"What can I do for you?"

Next to her another woman appeared.

"Who is it, Dorita?"

"I don't know," she grumbled, and left.

"Can I help you?", the woman asked, smiling.

Deyanira looked at her separated teeth, her tousled hair, her light eyes. She asked for the sake of asking, out of sheer inertia.

"Who are you?"

"Vera de Martínez."

"Luis Alberto Martínez's wife?"

"That's right."

Deyanira turned slowly around and crossed the small garden, looking at the ground.

A car stopped at that moment in front of the gate and Luis Alberto Martínez got out in a hurry. From the sidewalk, he saw a woman coming out of his house, her eyes engrossed on her blue shoes.

He carefully noticed that, as she kept walking, she became increasingly more pallid and transparent, until she disappeared.

‘Mujer hecha pedazos’ (Woman in Pieces) – Cheri Lewis G.

Permission obtained from the author, Ms Cheri Lewis G., to translate the story into English on 6 December 2023. Thank you very much, Ms Lewis.

Lewis G., Cheri. *Abrir Las Manos*. Ediciones de La Ardilla, Panamá, 2023, pp. 1-5 (Original print 2013, Fuga Editorial, Panamá).

Translated by Lynette Grivell, 4 December 2023.

I met Marta at Cristina’s birthday party. My first impression on seeing her was nothing extraordinary. In fact, she appeared very normal, with a striped sweater and her tight trousers. I saw nothing out of the ordinary in her until her arm fell off. I was taken aback by the hollow sound of the limb hitting the floor, although not as much as the fact that she picked it up with complete calm, inserted it in her shoulder and continued talking. I remembered that I thought: “It must be a prosthesis”, upon not seeing not even a single drop of blood fall. However, it seemed so real, the fingers moved, she held her beer, she adjusted her hair. She talked with Cristina, and they laughed, as if neither of the two thought that what had just happened was anything unusual.

I moved closer to them. As soon as Cristina saw me, she pounced on me and hugged me. “How wonderful that you came, Eduardo, you have to meet Marta”, she said, “you are going to love her”. She introduced us and after left us alone. We immediately hit it off. She was one of those people with the ability to talk about any topic without boring you. I was embarrassed to ask about her arm, and I didn’t. Also, the conversation had become so interesting that I was even forgetting about it.

After a while, we went out on the balcony. The party, the same as every year, was in Cristina’s parents’ house in the mountains: a beautiful glass and wood cabin, surrounded by pines and cedars which at times seemed to me to be very cosy and, and other times, extremely sinister.

I remember that she was talking to me about a text by Jorge Luis Borges when her left hand fell off. In the moment that she bent down to pick it up, she pushed it by accident, and it slipped between the rails and landed in the bushes in the floor below. “Shit!”, she cried in a low voice, and hurried down the stairs. I remained motionless. I didn’t know whether to go with her or stay where I was. I peered over the balcony and saw her hand lying there. She was going to have a hard time finding it, not to mention the danger of the racoons. Cristina’s house is surrounded by them, they’re everywhere. I once counted up to forty. Fortunately, none came too close before Marta appeared by the bush. Poor woman. She was looking where it wasn’t and I had to help her. Everyone realised that her hand had fallen because I had to shout loudly to her due to the music volume. We took a little while to find it, until she finally grabbed it, inserted it into her wrist and turned towards me as if nothing had happened.

The situation seemed very strange to me, and I had to ask her why this was happening to her. Without batting an eyelash, she responded that she didn’t know. That one day, suddenly, she was in the living room of her house and a foot fell off. It wasn’t something that hurt her, simply

“it came out”. She told me that her parents had thousands of tests done on her, surgeries and treatments that only succeeded in traumatising her. “It was years of suffering, until one day I got tired of it”. She said that already she had lived with it and that, with time, she’d come to see it as normal. I asked her if she had ever lost her head and she said yes, but not physically, but for a man, and that had been even worse. “I was left heartbroken, Eduardo. I took me a long time to put my pieces back together, and as you can see, I have vast experience picking up my pieces of my body”, she said. I noticed that she was a bit sad. Then she looked me in the eyes and laughed. Despite her strangeness, she was funny, and I liked her. She told me that once, at the beach, a leg fell off and that, if not having been for a friend of hers who could swim, she never would have found it. She told me these things, laughing out loud. I would have loved to spend more time with her, but the next day she was leaving for Buenos Aires. Marta was an interpreter, and she was going to translate at a medical conference about renal paralysis. She told me that this work was perfect for her because, besides learning a lot, the fact that getting into a booth considerably diminished the risk of frightening someone, or of losing some part of her body.

“People are strange, Eduardo”, she said. “They become scared because one loses one’s hand or foot, but it seems completely normal to open up the breasts and put two gigantic silicone bags in them. In fact, they even proudly tout it around”, she said between laughs, while she adjusted her right leg, which had just fallen off.

We talked until somebody came to pick her up, almost at dawn. We said goodbye with a big hug. I was a bit scared that she might lose something at that moment, but all went well. I liked feeling her close to me. It seemed to be long overdue. After this encounter, we continued to write to each other, and we called each other often. The last time that we talked she told me that she had been drunk at a party and that she had lost an arm. No matter how hard they looked they could not find it. And she even offered a reward in the newspaper. “It’s very strange that it got lost like that”, I said to her, to which she replied with her usual frankness: “Ah, Eduardo, I have lost my keys, my passport, my wallet, I’ve already lost the love of my life, how could I also not lose an arm?”

Authors’ stories in Spanish to obtain from a bookshop or from a library.

Please note that some of these books are no longer in print and may be difficult to locate.

‘Manual de hijo muerto’ (Manual of a Dead Child) – Claudia Hernández

No English translation published. The story in Spanish can be found in:

Hernández, Claudia. *De fronteras*. Primera edición, Editorial Piedra Santa, Guatemala, 2007, pp. 107-109.

‘Paranoica city’ (Paranoid city) – Mildred Hernández

An English translation has published online, but I do not see any copyright approval from the author. I have been unable to locate any copy of Ms Hernández’s book *Paranoica city* where the story would be published.

However, the story in Spanish can be found in:

Méndez, J. Francisco Alejandro, editor. *Tiempo de narrar: Cuentos centroamericanos*. Editorial Piedra Santa, Guatemala, Guatemala, 2007, pp. 101-106.

Torun, Alejandro (Ed.). *Ni hermosa ni maldita*. Alfaguara, Mexico, 2012 (I am unsure of the page numbers).

‘La muñeca menor’ (The Youngest Doll) – Rosario Ferré

English translation is in:

Ferré, Rosario, and Diana Vélez. “The Youngest Doll.” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1986, pp. 243–249. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177967>.

The story in Spanish can be found in:

Ferré, Rosario. *Papeles de Pandora*. Vintage Books, a division of Random House, New York, 2000, pp. 1-8. Also in:

García, Patricia and Teresa López-Pellisa. *Fantastic Short Stories by Women Authors from Spain and Latin America. A Critical Anthology*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2019, pp. 78-86.

‘El huésped’ (The House guest) – Amparo Dávila

English translation is in:

Dávila, Amparo. *The Houseguest and Other Stories*. Translated by Audrey Harris and Matthew Gleeson, New Directions Publishing, New York, 2018.

The story in Spanish can be found in:

Dávila, Amparo. *Muerte en el bosque*. Primera edición, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México D.F., 1985, pp. 17-23. Also in:

‘--’. *Cuentos Reunidos*. Fondo de Cultura Mexicana, Ciudad de México, 2009, pp. 19-23. And:

García, Patricia and Teresa López-Pellisa. *Fantastic Short Stories by Women Authors from Spain and Latin America. A Critical Anthology*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2019, pp. 56-62.

Appendix B – Anthologies of the Fantastic

Various anthologies of Fantastic stories were located for this project, with stories from both male and female authors. The books are edited by Marjorie Agosín, Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo (probably the most famous anthology of Latin American Fantastic stories), José Ricardo Chaves, Alberto Chimal, Celia Correas de Zapata, Patricia García and Teresa López-Pellisa, Óscar Hahn, Teresa López-Pellisa and Ricardo Ruíz Garzón, José María Martínez, Ana María Morales and José Miguel Sardiñas, Anne Richter, and Ethan Sharp and José María Martínez.

I have included reviews of other anthologies which were not used for this thesis on the final pages, but they are excellent references or starting points, including the one of Latin American women authors by María Cecilia Graña, which is in Italian. I will now briefly review these anthologies (in alphabetic order, by author's surname). All translations from Spanish to English are my own.

Marjorie Agosín: Secret Weavers: Stories of the Fantastic by Women of Argentina and Chile (1992)

Marjorie Agosín's anthology of Fantastic stories written by women of Argentina and Chile is a remarkable compilation of forty-six stories written by eighteen authors, including well-known authors such as Isabel Allende, Silvina Ocampo, Luisa Valenzuela and María Luisa Bombal. The book is written in English and the stories of the "women of the Southern Cone" are translated to reach a wider audience. Agosín states that interest in Fantastic literature can be "found both in its resistance to classification and its break with conventions...[it] offers territories and spaces for subversion, disorder and illegality by using the only code possible: the imaginary...By talking and writing about the forbidden, about zones of silence, Fantastic literature resides in the area of the *always possible*" (Agosín 13; author's emphasis).

Agosín notes that women writers have been considered marginal, underrated, and obliged to self-censor their works. As a result, women had to invent survival strategies and different ways to tell their stories. She suggests that Doña Marina ('La Malinche') was notable for translating and telling stories between both the Aztecs and the Spanish conquistadors, in order to save herself. In the same way, women writers have coded their subversive stories behind a veil of fantasy, and what they write is both a refutation and an acceptance of what is considered to be real (Agosín 14).

Although I was aware of this book from the 1993 thesis of Linda Zee, I did not obtain it until after I had conducted the studies of the stories I had already collated. In addition, I had also narrowed my research to writers from Central America and the Caribbean. However, it will be useful for further research.

Jorge Luis Borges, Silvina Ocampo and Adolfo Bioy Casares: Antología de la literatura fantástica (original print 1940; reprint 1977)

These three authors compiled the first anthology of Fantastic literature in Latin America in 1940, which is considered to be an historical starting point for the genre in Latin America and coincided with the literature "Boom" period. Some of the stories in the anthology are short, often only a few lines of text. This anthology influenced authors of the "Boom" and "Post-Boom" periods.

The anthology is not restricted to Latin American authors, and includes authors from the English-speaking world, such as Lewis Carroll, James Joyce, Rudyard Kipling, and H.G. Wells; Europe, such as Franz Kafka, Guy de Maupassant, Villiers de L'Isle Adam, and Gustavo Weil; Asia, such as Rynōsuke Agutawawa, Chuang Tzu and Chiao Niu; even authors from Classical literature, such as Petronius, and the unnamed authors of *1001 Nights*. There are a few stories written by authors with a pseudonym, such as ones by Saki (Hector Hugh Munro) and George Loring Frost (Jorge Luis Borges) and I.A. Ireland, who is either Borges or Adolfo Bioy Casares, or both. The editors (Borges, Ocampo and Bioy Casares) deliberately did not include stories by a few well-known authors of the Fantastic, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, due to lack of space.

My understanding is that the original 1940 edition only had one story by a female author, Silvina Ocampo, who was often the only female author in many of the original anthologies. This anthology was revised in 1965, and the 1976/77 edition has seventy-five stories, with five stories by four female authors – Silvina Ocampo, Elena Garro, May Sinclair (UK) and Alexandra David-Neel (France – two stories) - although another two other stories were co-written by women.

The prologue written by Adolfo Bioy Casares first states that the Fantastic is as old as fear and it pre-dates writing; that it appears in the *Zendavesta*, the Bible, in Homer and the *1001 Nights*, but that the first specialists were the Chinese. However, he notes that when one looks for rules regarding the Fantastic story, there is no one type, but many; that you would have to investigate general rules for each type of story and special rules for each story. The writer, in turn, “must consider the work as a problem that can be solved, in part, by the general and established laws and in part, by special laws that he or she must discover and comply with” (Borges et al 5).

Bioy Casares provides some two observations about the categories of Fantastic stories: environment and atmosphere and the surprise, and then lists further categories, such as stories with ghosts, time travel, involvement with the Devil, dreams, metamorphosis, parallel actions that work in similarity, the theme of immortality, metaphysical fantasies, vampires, and castles (Borges et al. 5-8). He provides an excellent classification of Fantastic stories:

- (a) “Those that are explained by the agency of a being or by a supernatural event.
- (b) Those that have a Fantastic explanation, but not a supernatural one (‘scientific’).
- (c) Those that are explained by the intervention of a being or a supernatural event, but insinuate, also, the possibility of a natural explanation” (Borges et al. 8).

As this book is the starting point for the Fantastic in Latin America at the beginning of the writing “Boom” period and is therefore so important to the genre, I have included it in this thesis.

José Ricardo Chaves: Voces de la sirena: Antología de literatura fantástica en Costa Rica (2012)

This anthology of Costa Rican Fantastic literature contains twenty-five stories by seventeen authors, of which only four are women; María Ester Amador has two stories included. Many of the stories are from the Modernist period – the end of the nineteenth century, and through to the middle of the twentieth century; the most recent story is from Eunice Odio. Chaves’ object is to be informative, and his work is directed at all types of readers to enjoy a collection of relatively unknown Fantastic texts (Chaves 16).

Chaves notes that the Fantastic implies the reappearance of the suppressed, what has been forgotten or buried, and that it generates a rupture in our notion of reality. He opines that the Fantastic is not a genre, but a mode that “implies a collection of formal and rhetoric processes that are expressed in various genres (poetry, story, novel, etc.) [and] could also be expressed by other means (cinema, opera, paintings, etc.)” (Chaves 12-13).

According to Chaves, Costa Rica does not have a rich history of Fantastic literature, compared to Argentina with its strong ties to Europe and European immigration, and as such, he opines that Costa Rica did not have a Romantic Fantastic. In addition, it did not have the colonial and pre-Hispanic histories of México, Perú and Guatemala, so its literary base is fairly ‘recent’ (Chaves 14-15).

However, even though Chaves has included four women authors linked to Modernism and the vanguard movements, he considered this to not be a bad percentage share of the genre. He states that the modernist women authors used pseudonyms and hence published their texts ‘with a mask’, while those of the vanguard movement used their civil names, “a sign that social conditions of gender were changing” (Chaves 17).

Chaves provides a good biography of each author preceding their story or stories. I did not use any of these stories in this thesis, although I did review most of them (written by both men and women) in the initial work, prior to selecting the stories.

Alberto Chimal: La tienda de los sueños. Un siglo de cuento fantástico mexicano (2016)

Alberto Chimal’s wonderful collection of Mexican Fantastic stories is now only available through Kindle (the printed edition is difficult to locate), but it is well worth the effort. Chimal has twenty Fantastic stories written by Mexican authors over the 110 years of the Fantastic in México. Therefore, he covers authors from the Modernist, “Boom” and “Post-Boom” periods from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In contrast to many other anthologies, the standout of this book is that ten stories are written by women, and five of these written in the twenty-first century. All stories from the women authors were reviewed in my initial study and one is included in this thesis, Carrington’s ‘La debutante’. The thesis is not long enough to include them all and the others may be included in future study.

In his introduction to the anthology, Chimal notes that many people confuse Fantastic literature with fantasy, but that it is more than fantasy, it “is the operation of the mind by which we work out that which does not and *could not exist* in the world” and “writing and reading about the impossible puts to the test what we believe to be real. The Fantastic imagination also helps us to understand the limits of our vision of the world, simply because it makes us ask ourselves if we can believe or not in what we are reading” (Chimal 5).

Chimal suggests that there is a grand tradition of Mexican authors who have written about the impossible, what lies beyond the real, from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in 1692, through to the Romantic authors and those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, and Emiliano González, who dedicated his whole career to the Fantastic (Chimal 7). However, Chimal also states that if one speaks of a tradition of the Fantastic in México it is in itself like an invented Fantastic story. There is no dominant presence, such as in the stories of the Mexican Revolution or in the stories or accounts of the narcotraffickers. The reason for this lies beyond literature and is firmly entrenched in the country’s history of authoritarian governments, dating back to colonial times, that were keen to maintain control

over their citizens. He notes that one way of controlling the population is to impose the government's visions of politics and societal life, in order to justify their actions and maintain their power. This has occurred many times in Mexican history and includes the censorship of ideas that the governments considered to be subversive or inappropriate, that is, a different reality and often the opposite to what is deemed to be appropriate by the authorities (Chimal 8)

Chimal notes that even though Fantastic literature does not always have a political side, it refers to the impossible, to the limits of an idea of, or to question the real, and also makes us question how we are made to understand reality. By questioning the real, the Fantastic is a source of irritation for authoritarian governments as it is inciting non-conformism by peaceful means. He opines that if all of this is true, then the Fantastic is uncomfortable and subversive, but above all, *very necessary* (Chimal 8; my emphasis). Chimal sums up that: "literature alone does not change the world, but it can inspire individuals - and societies - to *imagine* their own possibilities for change" (Chimal 8; author's emphasis).

Chimal provides background information on each author prior to the story and afterwards, details of similar stories by other authors for extra reading or for the reader's enjoyment.

Celia Correas de Zapata: Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real (1990)

Although not all of Celia Correas de Zapata's stories in this anthology are Fantastic stories, it is very useful collection of thirty-one stories, all written by women from fourteen Central and South American countries, including the Caribbean, and all stories are translated from Spanish into English. All stories were written in twentieth century, some by the well-known authors, and I have included one story 'En Familia' by Cuban writer María Elena Llana in this thesis (although it also appears in other anthologies). I also initially chose one other 'IWM 1000' by Alicia Yáñez Cossío but did not include it as it was a cross-over between the Fantastic and science fiction.

The foreword by Isabel Allende is worth reading in itself. Allende notes that until recent times (I believe that she means the second half of last century), Latin American literature was 'a man's game', and that women's entrance to literature was stymied by the patriarchy and machismo. Women have seized their right to write, and are writing about 'real human beings', not just stereotyped mothers and whores, and will no longer remain silent (Correas de Zapata xii). In contrast, Correas de Zapata states that Latin American women have been writing since Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in seventeenth century México, who is also mentioned in other anthologies as the precursor of women's writing in the New World, but that women's writing blossomed in the Romantic period. However, she adds that when she was compiling this anthology in 1973, she was surprised by their omission from literary circles (Correas de Zapata xvi).

Even though Correas de Zapata and others insisted that histories and anthologies should be revised to include women, she laments that women's writing still obtains less critical attention than men's writing. With the production of her anthology, her aim was to raise the profile of Latin American women writers for educators and move away from the image of the shawled, silent Latin American woman (Correas de Zapata xvi).

Patricia García and Teresa López-Pellisa: Fantastic Short Stories by Women Authors from Spain and Latin America. A Critical Anthology (2019)

This recent anthology of Fantastic stories written by women only has five authors and stories, mostly from last century but one from this century (Ana María Shua, Argentina). Two of the authors are from Spain, while the other three are from Latin America (Shua, Rosario Ferré and Amparo Dávila). Both stories by Ferré and Dávila form part of this thesis. The book is written in English, the stories are in Spanish and the book is aimed at students of Spanish, which in no way detracts from its superior quality. García and López-Pellisa provide a biography of each author, an in-depth critique of their story, bibliographies of selected works, and suggested further reading about each author.

The introduction, written by Patricia García, is an excellent summary of the Fantastic, women's writing and the Fantastic from the feminist's perspective. García notes that the etymology of the word 'fantastic' is rooted in the central aspect of the supernatural: it is used to make visible something that is hidden (García 2). But she posits that "a more precise aesthetic understanding of the Fantastic" is that it opposes other forms of the supernatural, that it has a conflictive, supernatural element (García 3). The Fantastic is always depicted as a conflict within the fictional world, a moral violation and impossible, both epistemologically and ontologically, and it challenges rational explanation (García 3). García provides the best explanation of the Fantastic: "the Fantastic is a problematic coexistence between the possible and the impossible in a narrative world that is built to resemble our real world" (García 7).

García provides a concise history of the Fantastic, from its origins in Gothic literature in the age of rationalism, to the current day, and notes that the short story has a "long and respected tradition in Latin America", making the Fantastic a popular and "adequate vehicle to express contemporary fears" (García 14-15). However, the main purpose for García and López-Pellisa's book is to highlight the lack of Hispanic women writers in the Fantastic literary canon, noting that in general, only 10 per cent of the writers in anthologies are women, and that, in general, they are less well-known to readers and even researchers of the Fantastic (García 16).⁹²

García then discusses whether there exists the 'female' or 'feminine' Fantastic, as originally put forward by Anne Richter in 1977 (see discussion on Richter's books below). This topic will be discussed further throughout the thesis from the feminist viewpoint. However, García uses the expression the 'female Fantastic' to refer to texts and authors that take a feminist viewpoint, using the supernatural to subvert expectations and norms (García 17).

Finally, García states that it has only been in the past few decades that scholars and publishers have wanted to reduce the gender imbalance in anthologies of the Fantastic and other close genres like science fiction (García 19).

Óscar Hahn: Antología del cuento fantástico hispanoamericano siglo XX (1990)

Óscar Hahn's anthology is a wonderful collection of Fantastic stories from authors from Latin America from the twentieth century. It would also be useful as a school or university textbook, as the authors range from the famous Latin American authors, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Juan José Arreola, to the not-so-well-known, such as Virgilio Piñera,

⁹² This is also a subject of her journal article, "Spanish and Latin American Women Writers in the Literary Canon: A Paratextual Study of Anthologies of Fantastic Literature (1946–2016)." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, vol. 96, no. 6, 2019, pp. 575-593.

Santiago Dabove and Clemente Palma. Hahn provides a brief background to each author prior to the selection of their work.

Hahn states that the anthology is not limited to just Fantastic stories, that his denomination of the Fantastic has a wider and more comprehensive sense; it also includes a few stories of the marvellous, magical realism and surrealism. His focus is on the “unusual that questions the diverse codes of the real” (Hahn 15). The Fantastic stories range from the Modernist authors, such as Horacio Quiroga, Amado Nervo, and Leopoldo Lugones, through to the “Boom” authors, such as Borges, Cortázar and Arreola, to a few “Post-Boom” authors, such as José Emilio Pacheco.

The anthology has forty-three stories by twenty-nine authors, but includes only three female authors: María Luisa Bombal, Silvina Ocampo and Elena Garro, and one story by each of them, while Hahn includes multiple stories from many of the male authors. Despite this shortcoming, he provides a concise summary of the Fantastic’s origins in Romanticism, through Modernism and to the present day, with the focus on Latin American authors.

Hahn laments that the Fantastic is repeatedly accused of being ‘escapist’, that it flees from reality to take refuge in the safe haven of pure fantasy. He posits that “this is not only an unjust criticism, but also a positivist bias that impedes the critic to understand the profoundly non-conformist motivations of the best Fantastic literature, directed at challenging certain established orders, by subtle and radical means. Apparently unyielding contradictory pairings, of the kind: life/death, dream/wakefulness, madness/sanity, real/unreal, subject/object, are either neutralised or are mixed up in a true dialectic process of transfiguration, destined to reveal that reality is not so immobile, not so level, not so unique” (Hahn 24).

Hahn sums up the Fantastic as being the “king of the contradictory and the uncertain...that there is nothing new and everything new under the sun in Fantastic literature” (Hahn 24-25).

Rogelio Llopis, editor. Cuentos cubanos de lo fantástico y extraordinario (1968)

This anthology of Fantastic, magical realism, macabre, strange and science fiction stories is a superb collection of thirty-two stories written by Cuban authors, including Alejo Carpentier’s most famous story, ‘Viaje a la semilla’, which comes under the magical realism umbrella. There are four stories written by women (all Fantastic stories), three of which I reviewed in my initial study, and while I did not include these actual stories in this thesis despite their high quality, I have included two other stories written by two of these authors, María Elena Llana and Esther Díaz Llanillo. Ángela Martínez and Evora Tamayo are the other female authors included in this book.

While many of the stories do not have an original publishing date, Llopis notes that seven of them were published before the Cuban Revolution in 1959, although the three stories by the women were published between 1959-1968 (Llopis 11). Llopis notes that the Fantastic emerged in Cuba in 1944 because of the concerted anti-creole reaction, represented by the publication of two works: ‘Viaje a la semilla’ by Carpentier and ‘Poesía y prosa’ by Virgilio Piñera. Llopis refers to the anthology by Borges, Ocampo and Bioy Casares, and even includes a short interview with Borges. He then provides some good information on many of the stories that he published written by men, but only briefly on ‘Nosotras’ by María Elena Llana, and even less for ‘Anónimo’ by Esther Díaz Llanillo and ‘Lluvia’ by Ángela Martínez.

Llopis has sorted the stories into seven categories: Magical Realism; playful and dreamlike; loss of identity, satire, fable, and black humour; the macabre; the ‘Tall Story’; and science

fiction. The stories by the women are in the loss of identity and satire categories. Llopis published brief bibliographies of each of the authors at the end of the book.

Teresa López-Pellisa and Ricard Ruíz Garzón: *Insólitas. Narradoras de lo fantástico en Latinoamérica y España* (2019)

This recent anthology of Fantastic stories from women authors from Latin America and Spain has twenty-eight stories either of the Fantastic, the strange, science fiction or horror, due to the book's title of '*Insólitas*'. In all, they have collated eighteen stories from Latin American women (the others are written by Spanish women) and most of stories were written in the twenty-first century. López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón provide information about each author prior to the presentation of their story.

In their introduction, López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón state that women writers are the 'daughters of Metis', a reference to Metis, the first wife of the Greek god Zeus, who was tricked into turning into a fly and eaten whole by Zeus while she was pregnant with his first child, Athena.⁹³ They point out that while most people are aware of Zeus and Athena, they are not aware of Metis, that she has been erased from our collective memory. In the same way, they posit that women writers are often made invisible, or woman is rebadged as Woman, a masculine conceptual construction. These "‘daughters of Metis’ exist, write and publish even though many are no seen...and they have always existed" (López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón xiv).

Using Anne Richter's characteristics of the 'feminine Fantastic' (see sub-section on Anne Richter below), López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón state that the "duality of reason/madness, nature/city, man/woman respond to categories that have generated the patriarchal androcentric and anthropocentric knowledge" (López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón xvii-xviii). Despite this, they note that the 'feminine unusual', implying also the feminine Fantastic', is not written exclusively by women, and that some men also write feminist literature and form part of the feminist movement and remind us that the term 'masculine Fantastic' is never used (López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón xviii 121).

López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón state that in Latin America, the Fantastic has not been pushed to the margin in literary circles; it has formed part of the canon and recognised institutionally, due to its creativity and originality. Within the nineteen Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, each one is characterised by its own history, politics, races, economies and cultures: "the indigenous presence in the Andean countries, the violence of the dictatorships, the consequences of the colonial process, make the Latin American cultural panorama a mestizo melting pot with great variations and differences, both in the commercial editorial processes and in the tradition of the presence of women writers in the literary canon" (López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón xxiv-xxv). However, these editors consider that there is "no one specific theme in the literature written by women, since the characters and themes are defending diversity and are exploring art, since dissidence can be written either by men or women" (López-Pellisa and Ruíz Garzón xxx).

The themes addressed by the authors in this anthology include: "any type of gender-based violence, the Other, sexual diversity, loneliness, misogyny, unnatural bodies, infancy, death, infirmity, family relations, meta-literature, werewolves, job insecurity, the canon of western beauty, violence, class inequality, the monster, ecology, war, love, politics in the era of

⁹³ Athena subsequently burst free in full armour. She never had a mother figure. Source: GreekMythology.com website.

globalisation, the human-machine relationship, education in the era of cyber-culture, immigration, and the indifference of society” (López-Pellisa and Ruiz Garzón xxx).

López-Pellisa and Ruiz Garzón provide an extensive list of Latin American and Spanish women writers of the Fantastic in notes 7 and 10, which is an excellent launching pad for further study.

José María Martínez: Cuentos Fantásticos del Romanticismo Hispanoamericano (2011)

This anthology of Hispanic Fantastic stories from the Romantic period has twenty-seven stories by twenty-two authors, but only three stories written by women: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (one story) and Juana Manuela Gorriti (two stories). In his introduction to the book, Martínez provides an enormous amount of background information, from legends and traditions, to the Romantic period, Fantastic literature and the ‘romantic Fantastic’ in Latin America. He provides information on each author at the beginning of their first story.

Even though I did not use any of these stories in this thesis, as they are outside of the time period that I was reviewing, I did include ‘El Buque Negro’ by José María Barrios de los Ríos in my initial list (which included stories written by men), until I decided to restrict the stories to those written by women and from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Ana María Morales and José Miguel Sardiñas, editors: *Relatos Fantásticos Hispanoamericanos. Antología* (2003)

Ana María Morales and José Miguel Sardiñas have collated a large (almost 600-page) anthology of Fantastic stories by Hispanic authors, and many of the well-known ones, and they appear to be catalogued in roughly chronological order. There are thirty-two stories, of which nine are written by women. One of these stories will be studied as part of this thesis, ‘En Familia’ by María Elena Llana, although the ones by Amparo Dávila, Elena Garro, and Esther Díaz Llanillo were studied, but not included. The other women authors are Silvino Ocampo, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Juana Manuela Gorriti, María de Villarino, and Inés Malinow.

Morales and Sardiñas provide a very informative prologue to the anthology, using the landmark anthology by Borges, Ocampo and Bioy Casares (see above) as the starting point for the Fantastic in Latin America. They also provide information on general anthologies of the Fantastic (independent of region or era), such as Ilán Stavans’ *Antología de Cuentos de Misterio y Terror* (1993), which includes stories from Germany, Brazil, Cuba, Japan, Nicaragua, and Portugal, as well as national anthologies from Argentina, Perú, Cuba (the one listed above by Rogelio Llopis), and México. Furthermore, they also included the two Latin American anthologies by Óscar Hahn, one of stories from the nineteenth century and the other of stories from the twentieth century (the latter listed above).

However, as their title suggests, they are publishing stories (‘relatos’), rather than short stories (‘cuentos’), hence the length of this anthology. They do not include texts that belong to Magical Realism, the marvellous, surrealism, the absurd, police or detective stories, and science fiction, and they noted that it limited their selection. They have included authors who they consider to be of high quality, and one story from each of them. Each story is preceded by a brief introduction where the information is recorded and a succinct commentary of a critical nature is added, together with more bibliographical information on the author.

Morales and Sardiñas also provide an excellent bibliography of Fantastic articles and books at the end, and also list a few other anthologies for further study.

Anne Richter: *Le Fantastique Féminin : d'Ann Radcliffe à Nos Jours* (1977) and *Le Fantastique Féminin : d'Ann Radcliffe à Patricia Highsmith* (1995)

Anne Richter was the first compiler of Fantastic stories written solely by women. The first book contains twenty-five stories and authors from sixteen countries - countries as diverse as France, the USA, Sweden, Belgium, Russia, Romania, Yugoslavia, and even Australia. The second book contains thirty-one stories written by twenty-nine authors from sixteen countries (a few additions and deletions from the first book). There are stories written by well-known authors, such as Virginia Woolf, Elsa Morante, Karen Blixen, Daphné du Maurier, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Vernon Lee and Silvina Ocampo, and ones by perhaps authors less-well known, such as Nina Cassian, Marina Tsvétaeva, and Ilse Aichinger. Richter also provides brief background information on each author prior to the story, as well as their influence on canonical male authors and artists (for example, Edith Wharton and Henry James; Elsa Morante with her husband Alberto Moravia, Vernon Lee with Oscar Wilde and H.G. Wells; and Silvina Ocampo with her husband Aldolfo Bioy Casares and friend Jorge Luis Borges).

Although Anne Richter's books are written in French, Richter's introduction is useful as it is referenced as an important work by Patricia García in her 2019 study: "Spanish and Latin American Women Writers in the Literary Canon: A Paratextual Study of Anthologies of Fantastic Literature (1946-2016)." García states that "Richter aligns the concept of the feminine Fantastic with the attributes that she considers feminine: mystery, seduction, darkness, the subconscious, intimacy and introspection, a drive towards nature as the lost paradise and the recurrence of the theme of the metamorphosis in its many (and subversive) variations" (García 590).

Richter opines that women speak differently, that they have the 'privilege' of thinking other than by reason (implied that they do not think like men), "by also using their body, its instincts, its memories, or...the soul" (Richter "Highsmith" 10). She states that this might appear shocking and vague to some people, but that "if the feminine fantastic prevails, at no time or at any price is it explained, because it is located below (or beyond, it remains to be seen) of the world of logical explanations. Not that it is capricious and arbitrary, but because it belongs to a reality of another order other than that of analytical deduction" (Richter "Highsmith" 10). She notes that both the Fantastic and the feminine continue to both fascinate and seduce the reading public. Richter adds that "there is a typically feminine way of living and thinking and that fortunately there are innumerable followers, as there is an irreducible Fantastic universe, born of fear of man in the face of his astonishment and his helplessness" (Richter "Highsmith" 10).

Richter opines that only the modern Fantastic is 'truly feminine' and reveals the eternal woman, while the traditional Fantastic gives a forced or entirely false vision, as it refers to something else, such as a historical anecdote or a moral sentence, and took pleasure in frightening the reader, often with dark and sinister settings (Richter "Highsmith" 11). The modern Fantastic, according to Richter, is fearful in a different way: "Precisely, it is nothing but anguish...its horizons are exclusively psychic, it is immersed in the great depths of 'the space of the inside'...it feeds on obscurity...This indeterminacy constitutes its essential characteristic, it bears on the very nature of the reality which it evokes and whose identification will always remain problematic or precarious" (Richter "Highsmith" 13).

While I applaud the diversity of Richter's stories, I have two main criticisms. The first is that she only includes two Latin American authors in her first book - Silvina Ocampo and Armonia Somers, and include Inés Manilow in the updated edition, but she could have included

more. However, she does note that Angelica Gorodischer, Marie Langer, Norma Vitti, Pilar Lasarreta, Dora Alonso, Elena Garro, and Maria Ines Silva and Armonia Somers require French translations of their works (in 1977) (27). My second criticism is that most of the stories are from the early twentieth century, with the most 'recent' story being from Patricia Highsmith, circa 1975: the 1995 edition of her book could have also included more stories from Latin American writers.

Richter also insists on a 'feminine' Fantastic, and I understand that she was the first person to coin this term. Her 'feminine Fantastic' has characteristics of mythology, madness, maternity, the interior world, the irrational, and the fusion with the natural environment. While feminists have criticised this description as setting up a gender-focussed opposition of male/rational and female/irrational, her opinions and theories, like many others written in the 1970s and including those written by feminists, are a good starting point and can be argued further in this study and by twenty-first century feminists. The introduction to the second book remains unchanged from the first which was written at the start of the feminist movement in 1977.

Ethan Sharp and José María Martínez: Anthology of Latin-American Fantastic Short Stories (1800-1930). (2010)

This anthology of mainly Romantic and Modernist Fantastic stories by Ethan Sharp and José María Martínez is directed at students of Spanish literature, which does not detract from its high quality in any form. The book is written in English and the stories are published in Spanish. This anthology has twenty-one stories from authors from eleven Latin American countries, but only three stories written by women: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Clorinda Matto de Turner, and Juana Manuela Gorriti. The story by Gómez de Avellaneda 'El Aura Blanca' was included in my original list of stories, but in the end, I did not include it as it was written in the nineteenth century and I concentrated on stories written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Sharp and Martínez provide an excellent background to and a brief history of the Fantastic in Latin America. They contrast the Romantic Fantastic stories, such as those by Gómez de Avellaneda and Juana Manuela Gorriti, to one written by José María Roa Barcena, 'Lanchitas', which they consider to be a pivotal text, as it bordered on both the Romantic and contemporary Fantastic discourse (Sharp & Martínez 20-21). They also posit that another key author was Ladislao Eduardo Holmberg, of the generation of 1880, who was influenced by positivism and science, and Holmberg in turn influenced the Latin American Modernist authors such as Rubén Darío and Leopoldo Lugones. The Modernist period corresponds roughly between 1880 and 1920, and the Modernist style of writing was different; the sentences were shorter, and the prose became more formal and stylish, as some of the authors were also journalists. This more formal style of writing allowed the authors to "elaborate better plots, with more rhetorical components, more bookish references and more intense endings" (Sharp & Martínez 21). Modernist Fantastic stories attempted to show the limits of the positivist world view and either focussed on the world denied by positivism, or created an acute criticism of the bourgeois mentality, in order to reveal the fractures in the social system (Sharp & Martínez 22).

They suggest that Fantastic stories always have to provide some type of surprise or unease, which means that happy endings are not permitted. They also state that the Fantastic stories have discontinuity in the chain of causes and consequences, and this discontinuity becomes unsolvable. Fantastic stories offer the possibility of a different type of reality (Sharp & Martínez 11-12).

Each story has English translations of the more unusual words or phrases in the margin of the text to assist the students, and at the end of the book, there is also a glossary of words. The authors have included a very short biography of each author in a footnote at the beginning of each story.

Other anthologies and Fantastic studies

The following anthologies were not used for this project, but I have included them for others to utilise in their studies. They are all excellent references.

José A. Cantalops and Yoss. *Caballería mutante. Literatura fantástica cubana* (2023)

This recent publication has seventeen stories from Cuba written by authors who (at the time of publication) were under 35 years of age, and some had previously been unpublished. Six authors are female: Iris Rosales Valdés, Barbarella D’Acevedo, Malena Salazar Macía, Amelia Martínez Apollinario, Gretchen Kerr Anderson, and Elain Vilar Madruga. Yoss (pseudonym of José Miguel Sánchez Gómez) provides an interesting prologue to the book, including other references to Cuban Fantastic and fantasy literature. The authors have included short biographies of each author. The stories are grouped into seven sections, as they are not all strictly the Fantastic; some stories are fantasy and science fiction. The authors have also included further reading suggestions at the beginning of each section.

Lizzie Harris McCormick, Jennifer Mitchell and Rebecca Soares, editors. *The Female Fantastic: Gendering the Supernatural in the 1890s and the 1920s* (2019)

While not strictly an anthology of Fantastic stories, nor of Latin American authors, this recently edited book is worth noting as it critiques Fantastic stories written by women writers mainly from the United Kingdom and Ireland, with one from the USA. The study limits the scope to the Modernist period between 1890 and the 1920s and mainly concentrates on the authors’ use of the supernatural as a means of subversion.

In the solid introduction by the editors, ‘Toward a Female Fantastic’, they discuss how the women addressed the central feminist concerns of their time using the Fantastic, how it enabled them to blur the lines by obscuring and saying-not-saying things. It allowed them to discuss their concerns related to gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, medicine, science, and colonialism (Harris McCormick et al. 18). It is worth highlighting the excellent analysis of the history women’s writing of the Fantastic during the short period that the editors examined, from the turn of the twentieth century, through the First World War, to the 1920s, and the reasons for and how women’s lives changed during these two or three decades.

However, the editors insist that there is no female Fantastic, noting that both the gender and the genre are slippery or “fuzzy” for different reasons. Indeed, the Fantastic can express experiences across genders and to subvert conventions. They note that “objects, people, places, time, and beings are constantly shifting, in ways subtle or overt. Readers, too, are destabilised,” as they are integrated into the story (Harris McCormick et al. 19).

The book is divided into four sections: supernatural objects, Fantastic and transformative spaces, Fantastic people, and Fantastic creatures. Each section is introduced by a separate scholar who provides background to the aspect of the Fantastic mode and places their chapters into context. It covers a wide range of topics, including ghosts, fairies, devils, werewolves,

time travel, race, gender, queerness, madness, incest, monstrosity, psychology, and science (Harris McCormick et al. 42)

The book focuses on the analysis of little-known texts, some by well-known authors, such as Agatha Christie, Virginia Woolf, Daphne du Maurier, Vernon Lee, and Marie Corelli, but also those written by lesser-known authors such as Katharine Burdekin, Margery Lawrence, and suffragist Clemence Housman. However, while the actual Fantastic stories are not included in this book, it is a worthwhile addition to women's Fantastic studies. I did not include any of the stories in this thesis as they are mainly from the Romantic period, but the authors' works have contributed to the shaping of ideas, and trends in women's writing and in Fantastic literature.

Jessie Amanda Salmonson: What did Miss Darrington See? An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction (1989)

This book is an anthology of supernatural fiction written by women, with a fabulous introduction by Rosemary Jackson. There are twenty-four entertaining and haunting stories from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (between 1850 to 1988), written by authors from the USA, Britain, and Latin America. All stories are in English or translated into English. The stories employ horror, magic realism, allegory, and surrealism to reimagine the clichés of supernatural fiction and they focus on female characters and explore traditional themes in inventive and provocative ways. Salmonson provides a biography of each author preceding the story. There are only three Latin American authors in the collection: Luisa Valenzuela, Leonora Carrington, and Armonía Somers. The other authors are Ellen Glasgow, Olivia Howard Dunbar, Ada Trevanion, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Emma Cobb, Anna Maria Hall, Lisa Tuttle, Phyllis Eisenstein, Barbara Burford, Ines Haynes Irwin, Vita Sackville-West, Lady Eleanor Smith, Alice Brown, Georgia Wood Panghorn, Anne Sexton, Olive Schreiner, Jules Faye, Vernon Lee, Mary Austin, Helen Hall, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Joanna Russ. Salmonson

This anthology provides a new perspective on supernatural storytelling, emphasising feminist viewpoints and challenging conventions. Salmonson notes that even in the USA, it was difficult to find more than two women in anthologies (256), and she provides a good list of recommended reading at the end (256-261).

Antonio Molina Foix: La Eva fantástica: de Mary Shelley a Patricia Highsmith (1996)

This anthology of women's supernatural fiction has twenty authors from the nineteenth century, with only one from Latin America – Leonora Carrington – and Emilia Pardo Bazán and Rosa Chacel from Spain. The collection does include some of the well-known Gothic and horror authors such as Mary Shelley, Vernon Lee, Patricia Highsmith, and Shirley Jackson.

Molina Foix has translated the stories from their native languages into Spanish. He provides a brief biography of each author prior to the story.

María Cecelia Graña: Tra due specchi: 18 Racconti fantastici di scrittrici latinoamericane (2004)

This anthology is written in Italian. It has stories from eighteen women authors of Fantastic fiction from Latin America: Cristina Peri Rossi, Guadalupe Dueñas, Amparo Dávila, Pía Barros, Aida Bahn, María Elena Llana, Marvel Moreno, Silvina Ocampo, Rosario Ferré, Luisa Valenzuela, Ana María Shua, Ángela Martínez, Rosalba Campa, Alejandra Basualto, Martha Cerda, Noemí Ulla, and Elena Garro. Each story has a footnote with the name of the story in

Spanish and the publication information on the first page. There are biographies of the authors at the back of the book. A very useful book.

Alberto Manguel: Other Fires: Short Fiction by Latin American Women (1986)

This anthology has nineteen authors, and while some stories may not be exactly Fantastic fiction, many of them are. All stories have been translated into English. The book has a foreword written by Isabel Allende and it has a brief biography of each author at the back of the book. The authors are: Armonía Somers, Rachel de Queiroz, Marta Lynch, Clarice Lispector, Dinah Silveira de Queiroz, Alejandra Pizarnik, Angélica Gorodischer, Vlady Kociancich, Silvina Ocampo, Liliana Hecker, Albalucía Angel, Lydia Cabrera, Elena Garro, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Beatrice Guido, Rosario Castellanos, Inés Irredondo, Amparo Dávila, and Elena Poniatowska.

Ann and Jeff VanderMeer: Sisters of the Revolution. A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology (2015)

This anthology is a great collection of feminist speculative fiction, mainly science fiction, but also horror, the unusual, and the Fantastic. It is written in English and the stories span from the 1970s to the early 2010s. The anthology features stories from both established genre stalwarts, such as Ursula K. LeGuin and Angela Carter, and relative newcomers, like Nnedi Okorafor. The stories touch on a wide range of issues, including surveillance, misogyny, marriage, queerness, family dynamics, and gender fluidity. There are twenty-nine authors, mainly from the USA, with only two from Latin America: Leonora Carrington and Angélica Gorodischer, but both Fantastic stories. Nalo Hopkinson from Jamaica/USA is also included. The VanderMeers provide a short biography of each author prior to the story. The other authors are L. Timmel Duchamp, Kit Reed, Eleanor Aranson, Kelley Eskridge, Leena Krohn, James Tiptree Jr. (real name Alice Bradley Sheldon), Rose Lemberg, Octavia E. Butler, Anne Richter, Kelly Barnhill, Hiromi Goto, Pat Murphy, Joanna Russ, Vandana Singh, Susan Palwick, Carol Emshwiller, Eileen Gunn, Tanith Lee, Karin Tidbeck, Pamela Sargeant, Rachel Swirsky, Catherynne Valente, and Élisabeth Vonarburg.

David Roas. Historia de lo fantástico en las narrativas latinoamericanas I (1830-1940) (2023)

While not an anthology of authors of the Fantastic *per se*, this book is a very useful reference for locating writers of Fantastic fiction. Each chapter provides the history and author names of the writers in the period for each country, with the exception of the Central American countries which are grouped together in one chapter, and Cuba and the Dominican Republic are also grouped together. There are chapters on other countries such as Venezuela and Paraguay whose authors often do not make it to anthologies. I eagerly await the next edition.

José Miguel Sardiñas: El cuento fantástico en Cuba y otros estudios (2010)

Like Roas's book above, it is not an anthology of stories, but a very useful reference for the Fantastic and magical realism in Cuba and Latin America. The book is divided into three parts: the first part is about Cuban authors, including María Elena Llana and Alejo Carpentier. The second part concerns authors from Latin America, such as Amparo Dávila, Rubén Darío and Horacio Quiroga. The third part is Italo Calvino's vision for the Fantastic, as well as a theoretical view on Fantastic literature from 1940 to 2008. Sardiñas's references at the end are extremely useful for anyone studying Fantastic literature, particularly from a Cuban point of view.

Consuelo Meza Márquez, editor. *Penélope. Setenta y cinco cuentistas centroamericanas* (2017).

This electronic book is not a book of Fantastic stories *per se*, but it does include stories by some of the authors in this study. There are seventy-five authors selected from Central America across different generations, showcasing their unique perspectives and breaking away from traditional gender norms. Meza Márquez provides background information to women's writing in the region, and descriptions of some of the authors and their stories. An excellent reference for women's writing in Central America. Biographies of the authors are also included in this anthology.

Conclusion

This is not an exhaustive list of anthologies of the Fantastic and I apologise to authors of anthologies that are not included. The more recent anthologies of Fantastic stories often mix them together with stories of the *insólito* (the unusual), science fiction, and more recent genres such as weird fiction. However, this small list is a starting point for future researchers of the Fantastic.

Appendix C - The list of all stories examined for this thesis

Alphabetical by surname; short description provided

Arévalo Martínez, Rafael **‘El hombre que parecía un caballo’** **1920** **Guatemala**

A man has the friendship of a man ‘the man from Aretal’, who has the characteristics of a horse. These features become more prominent during their friendship.

Argüello Mora, Manuel **‘La poza de la sirena’** **1900** **Costa Rica**

A man wants more in his life, even though he seems happy. He begs to a mermaid for good things, and he receives them. But his daughter becomes sick, and he begs again for his daughter’s life to be saved.

Arias, Arturo **‘Toward Patzún’** **1994** **Guatemala**

A man follows behind a woman and her children on a path in the mountains. In the end, soldiers kill the woman and her children.

Arredondo, Inés **‘La señal’** **1965** **México**

A man, almost defeated, enters a cathedral. Inside this disproportionate building, he feels the presence of a person who comes close to him. When this man sits next to him, he asks the man a very strange and unnerving question.

Arredondo, Inés **‘Orfandad’** **1979** **México**

A young girl is in an orphanage with her limbs amputated, due to an accident in which her parents died. She is an orphan. The family come to see her, but they don’t want to take her to their homes because she is imperfect with grave injuries. The employees at the orphanage abuse her. No one treats her as a human being.

Barrios de los Ríos, José María **‘El buque negro’** **1908** **México**

A strange black ship appears on the coast, without rigging and sails. While the crew are African, a white man disembarks, who appears to be from a noble family from Navarra. The Jesuits of the village are suspicious. The ship departs. The man becomes very wealthy in the region at the expense of the people, and some men, including a priest, die in strange circumstances.

Bermúdez, Ricardo J. **‘The horse in the glassware shop’** **1975** **Panamá**

A horse, that normally is tied outside a glassware shop, one day, is inside the shop. The people accept this absurd situation. No one knows how the horse entered the shop, and no one ever thinks how to get the horse out of the shop.

Berrón, Linda **‘El eterno transparente’** **1996** **Costa Rica**

A woman arrives at her house. Her key does not open the door. Her family pay her no attention. The next day, all of her shoes do not fit. In her work office, she finds another woman in her position. Nobody recognises her and no-one knows anything about her. She returns home and finds another woman in the home, as the wife. She leaves the house and disappears.

Britton, Rosa María **‘Love is spelled with a ‘G’** **1987** **Panamá**

A young woman yearns to be free of poverty with a US soldier, a ‘gringo’. This isn’t a fantastic story, but it is a story about poverty.

Britton, Rosa María ‘¿Quién inventó el mambo?’ 1987 Panamá

A strange man appears at a woman's door. He says he is the King of Mambo. This isn't a fantastic story, it's a story about the inventor of mambo.

Cardona, Jenaro ‘La caja del doctor (cuento macabro)’ 1929 Costa Rica

A strange doctor comes to a city to work at the National Museum, in the anthropology section. He carries a large case, but no one can open it or see what is inside of it. The reality is that he has the skeleton of his wife in the case, whom he killed.

Carrington, Leonora ‘A man in love’ 1937 México

A woman robs a melon from a greengrocer. The owner wants to tell her his love story instead of turning her over to the police. He takes her to the back of the shop where there is the body of a woman, that has lied there for 40 years. He waters her every day and she is used to incubate eggs.

Carrington, Leonora ‘La debutante’ 1939 México

A young girl does not want to go to her debutante ball. She hates these balls. Her friend, a hyena from the zoo, accepts her offer to change its appearance and appear like her, and go to the ball in her place. The girl dresses the hyena in her clothes, but her face (that of the hyena) causes other problems.

Carrington, Leonora ‘Et in bellicus lunarum medicalis’ 1960 México

Due to a doctors' strike, Russia donates a team of rats trained in surgery and medical practices. The government, the doctors, bankers and priests don't like the idea, and decide to donate the rats to the USA. But the priest does not want them to donate a gift as a gift, and instead, donates the rates to the psychiatric association. The psychiatrists instead kidnap the doctor in the original group, Dr Monopus, to return the rats to him. Dr Monopus wants to escape.

Carrington, Leonora ‘How to start a pharmaceutical business’ 1960 México

The protagonist prepares a picnic for the Mexican aristocracy in a cemetery. A unknown person approaches the group and advises the protagonist that she has won the lottery, and gives her a packet with a strange prize inside.

Carrington, Leonora ‘The royal summons’ 1988 México

The protagonist receives a summons to visit the Queen of the country. Upon arriving, she is advised that the Queen is crazy. The Queen doesn't want to see her right now and tells her to see the government. The government wants to assassinate the Queen due to her madness, and all the government members want to kill her. Then, to select the person to assassinate the Queen, they have to play checkers.

Carrington, Leonora ‘Uncle Sam Carrington’ 1988 México

Uncle Sam Carrington and Auntie Edgworth live in the house of the protagonist (an 8-year old girl) and her mother. The Uncle and Auntie cause a lot of shame for her mother, so that the protagonist wants to look for a solution. A horse in the forest knows that the Misses Cunningham-Jones can resolve these problems.

Carrington, Leonora ‘Los conejos blancos’ 1992 México

A young woman sees her neighbour, who lives in the building facing hers, throw out a bag of bones and putrid meat in the street for the crows. The lady invites the young woman to give her the remains of her rotten meat. The young woman does so and goes to the woman's apartment with the decomposing meat. The woman and her husband have carnivorous rabbits that eat the meat. But there is something more

Castillo, Roberto ‘El hombre que se comieron los papeles’ 1984 Honduras

A man works in his office with increasing stress levels and the amount of work that changes quickly during the day. The papers accumulate on his desk until the man is overcome by his work and the papers.

Castillo, Roberto **Anita, la cazadora de insectos** **1984** **Honduras**

A young girl, Anita, beautiful and intelligent, from a humble family, is pampered by her father. The father works hard so that she can go to a good school. But the girl starts to catch insects, with strange behaviour that increases during the story.

Colanzi, Liliana **‘Alfredo’** **2014** **Bolivia**

Alfredo, the good friend of the young female protagonist, dies from asthma. The friends attend his funeral.

Couto Castillo, Bernardo **‘Rayo de luna’** **1997** **México**

A man sees a woman at the end of his bed, under the light of the moon. He does not believe that she is mad.

Dávila, Amparo **‘El Espejo’** **1959** **México**

A young woman is worried that her mother, who resides in an old people’s home, is frightened by something in her room. It is because there are no reflections in the mirror, it is dark.

Dávila, Amparo **‘El huésped’** **1959** **México**

A man invites a stranger to come and stay in his house. His wife, his children, the maid and her son are all scared of this man. In the end, the women kill the man, but there is no explanation for their anxieties.

Dávila, Amparo **‘Moisés y Gaspar’** **1959** **México**

The protagonist’s brother, Leónides, dies. The protagonist goes to his apartment and in which he finds its inhabitants, Moisés and Gaspar. Leónides used to care for them. When the protagonist goes to work, Moisés and Gaspar cause problems and noise that makes the neighbours complain. The protagonist finds himself in an unbearable situation.

Dávila, Amparo **‘Matilde Espejo’** **2002** **México**

A couple rent a room from a very elegant and refined lady, Matilde Espejo (Mirror). Over time, bad secrets are revealed about Matilde, but the couple think that the secrets are just gossip against the lady.

De Castro, Claudio **‘The Chameleon’** **1991** **Panamá**

A man can change his form into anything. He and his friend, Octavio, earn money for their shapes, almost like a circus. Until one day, after changing his form into grass, a man grabs a handful of grass.

Del Valle, Pompeyo **‘La calle prohibida’** **1981** **Honduras**

A man yearns to return to his home country and city. He returns, but he has forgotten that a dictator has taken control of the city, with a curfew each Friday in the forbidden street. The man finds himself in this street during the curfew, with horrible and frightening consequences.

Denevi, Marco **‘Mariposa’** **1960** **Argentina**

The ants invent artificial food and close the doors to their ant nest to protect their invention. After many generations, the ants forget what life is like on the surface, their language, their emotions, because their life is very mechanical, but safe. One day, an ant ventures to the surface and discovers its magnificence. But when she returns, something strange happens.

Díaz Llanillo, Esther **Anónimo** **1968** **Cuba**

A man receives anonymous letters with increasing frequency. The threats to the man increase with each letter.

Díaz Llanillo, Esther **‘El día que los ácaros tomaron la biblioteca’** **1999** **Cuba**

A prestigious library has hidden beings in the shadows: the book lice. The book lice have also accumulated immense knowledge from reading the books. The lice learn that the humans want to exterminate them, so they

convene a meeting on the top floor of the library where the most valuable books are kept. They plan to get rid of the humans from the library so they can have the books to themselves.

Díaz Llanillo, Esther **‘Cambio de vida’** **2003** **Cuba**

A young man is in hospital, recovering from broncho-pneumonia. In the bed next to him lies an old man, who looks like Quijote, almost dead. A doctor wants the young man to sleep more, and when he sleeps, the doctor changes his soul for the soul of the old man. The young man dies and the old man lives. The old man returns again to the hospital after a few years, to change his soul again.

Díaz Llanillo, Esther **‘El vendedor de cabezas’** **2009** **Cuba**

There is a shop that sells heads in the village. One can change his or her head for another more desired one. A young woman visits the store with increasing frequency and wants the head trader to change his own head.

Dueñas, Guadalupe **‘Yo vendí mi nombre’** **1976** **México**

The protagonist sells his name, but after the name reaches the heights, it falls until it disappears and nobody remembers his name.

Elizondo, Salvador **‘Historia según de Pao Cheng’** **1974** **México**

A story about the philosopher, Pao Cheng, who lived 3,000 years ago, and who commenced to deduce the history of the world. His imagination is so powerful that he is walking through the streets of the cities that he is imagining. In a house, Cheng sees a man who is writing the ‘history according to Pao Cheng’.

Endara, Ernesto **‘Family photograph’** **1977** **Panamá**

A family with estranged relationships decide to have a photograph taken of them all together. They decided that a blind photographer would take the photo. The photo of the family is blank.

Enríquez, Anabel **‘Nada que declarar’** **2005** **Cuba**

Some children want to escape from Io, one of Jupiter’s moons, for a new life on Earth, the planet of their dreams, the yearning of their great-grandfather. They are stowaways in a rocket. It is not a Fantastic story, it is science fiction.

Enríquez, Mariana **‘My sad dead’** **2023** **Argentina**

A woman (a doctor) lives in a house with her mother. Her mother is dead, but the protagonist can see her or feel her in the house. She can see other ghosts, especially if they died violently. The neighbours start to see ghosts too, and visit the protagonist in secret to talk about it. The ghosts do too.

Escudos, Jacinta **‘Yo, cocodrilo’** **2008** **El Salvador**

It is about a girl who can metamorphosise into a crocodile. The girl must suffer the ritual (of female genital mutilation), but the ritual is violent, and some girls die. But the girl flees to her friends, the crocodiles. They return to the village to destroy it.

Eudave, Cecilia **‘El oculista’** **2000** **México**

A man, B, visits the optician. He has problems with his left eye that doesn’t seem to behave as normal.

Eudave, Cecilia **‘Sin reclamo’** **2014** **México**

The macho protagonist is in a departure room at an airport. He cannot move, because he is paralysed. He hates everything and everybody, including his family and especially his wife, and wants to kill everyone. He is macho, a misogynist, racist, and hates poor people (aporophobia). However, the airport workers (the cleaners) offer him help.

Ferré, Rosario **‘La casa invisible’** **1972** **Puerto Rico**

A girl can see a house, but the old man cannot see it.

Ferré, Rosario **‘La muñeca menor’** **1976** **Puerto Rico**

An auntie makes dolls for her nieces. This auntie has suffered from a vicious bit of a river shrimp since she was a girl. She lives all the time with the shrimp still inside her. She always lives inside the house and dedicates her life to her nieces and family. The house is full of dolls. The nieces start to marry but the last niece marries with the son of the doctor who could have cured the auntie, and the auntie seeks her revenge with a special doll for this niece.

Garro, Elena **‘Un hogar sólido’** **1958** **México**

A theatre play, which breaks Todorov’s restrictions. All the family are dead, and are in different stages of decomposition. The family has members who died very young (Catalina was only five years old and continues to behave as a young child), and a grandmother who is ashamed of being buried in her nightgown. In the end, they talk about the options that opened for them since they died.

Garro, Elena **‘La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas’** **1964** **México**

Laura leaves her house to secretly meet at a bridge a man who is injured from the indigenous tribes from 500 years ago. She becomes another woman, a young woman, in this crack in time. Her indigenous maid, Nacha, helps her in secret. Laura thinks that her other self is a traitor, like the tlaxcaltecas.

Gómez de Avellaneda, Gertrudis **‘El aura blanca’** **1870** **Cuba**

A benevolent friar helps the village people. When a plague causes the death of the villagers, the vultures eat the dead bodies. When the friar dies, a white vulture appears.

Gorodischer, Angélica **‘La perfecta casada (also called Una Mujer Notable)’** **1983** **Argentina**

This perfect wife is dangerous, even though she perfectly maintains the house and all necessities. However, doors have always been a nuisance for her, and when she opens them, they lead her to other places. She finds she can murder people through the doors and come back as though nothing has happened.

Harris, Érika **‘El acantilado’** **2003** **Panamá**

A man is in his house, terrorised by the sound of steps on the stairs. He escapes to the ledge to protect himself. He has memories of his childhood, but they appear like a nightmare. I think it is a nightmare within a nightmare.

Hernández, Claudia **‘En la noche de miércoles’** **2001** **El Salvador**

A story about the night for a poor woman who is actually dead.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Viva’** **n.d.** **El Salvador**

A woman works in an office. The other employees want her to leave, because she is dead. The protagonist helps her in her fight against the conspirators, including offering her a place to live, because her neighbours don’t want her either. Finally, the protagonist wants to get rid of her. But after resigning from the office, the woman partially recuperates.

Hernández, Claudia **‘La invitación’** **2002** **El Salvador**

A woman sees a person in the street – it is her childhood self. Afterwards she encounters herself again, as an old woman. The woman follows her child self through the city, but she loses her, and finally returns to the house of her childhood, but her other selves will not let her enter.

Hernández, Claudia **‘La mía era una puerta fácil de abrir’** **2005** **El Salvador**

A woman rents an apartment, but the door doesn’t offer much privacy. Then, the neighbours in the other Apartments use her apartment as a corridor, but they are like friends for her. The caretaker will not fix the door. One day, a girl enters her apartment and starts to break things.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Lázaro el buitre’** **2007** **El Salvador**

Lazarus is a vulture, but all the people accept him how he is. No one excludes him for being a vulture as he is nice, even though he smells a bit. Lazarus likes funerals for obvious reasons. One day Lazarus snatched and ate the protagonist's wife's dog, and they didn't mind, but when their daughter injured her arm, Lazarus took a sinister interest towards their daughter, with fatal consequences.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Hechos de un buen ciudadano (Parte 1)’** **2007** **El Salvador**

The protagonist finds a dead body of an unknown woman in his kitchen. To be a good citizen, he puts a notice in the newspaper. He receives a few phone calls, but no one claims the body. He calls the first caller, even though the man was looking for a man's cadaver, not a woman's.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Hechos de un buen ciudadano (Parte 2)’** **2007** **El Salvador**

The continuation of the first part. The people bring more bodies so that the protagonist can care for them. The man receives all cadavers, even though some families reclaim a few. The protagonist has a very surprising solution for the unclaimed cadavers.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Carretera sin buey’** **2007** **El Salvador**

A couple are in a car when they see an ox on the side of the road. But, it isn't an ox, it is a man with the silhouette of an ox, which he wants the people to believe that it is an ox. They advise the man to dress more like an ox, with horns, without clothes and more.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Manual de hijo muerto’** **2007** **El Salvador**

This story is about the instruction manual to reconstruct the pieces of a dead child. Including to make sure that all parts have been received. There are warning boxes in the instructions. A brilliant satirical Fantastic story.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Trueque’** **2007** **El Salvador**

A man wants to change his lion for the 'useless' daughter of the protagonist (this man has twin daughters). When the protagonist hesitates and laments that she has small breasts, the man increases the offer.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Molestias de tener un rinoceronte’** **2007** **El Salvador**

A young man has a small and playful rhinoceros, but the man didn't buy it and it doesn't belong to him. The man only has one arm. The people of his town are enamoured with the rhinoceros, but they aren't bothered that the man doesn't have an arm and they don't help the man with anything.

Hernández, Claudia **‘Mediodía de frontera’** **2007** **El Salvador**

A woman is dying in a public toilet on the border. She wants to hang herself and has cut out her tongue. A motley dog enters the toilet. First, the dog fears for its own life, but afterwards, it stays with the woman until she dies. The dog is hungry, and the woman helps it, in a horrible way.

Hernández, Mildred **‘Paranoica City’** **2003** **Guatemala**

A couple hear strange noises around their house and think that it could be a thief. The man goes to look for the intruder and kills him. The pair want to dispose of the body. They put it in the boot of their car and drive to a ravine to get rid of the body. Nobody sees them. But when they return to the car, there is another surprise.

Jaramillo Levi, Enrique **‘Duplications’** **1982** **Panamá**

A young woman is in a car watching the movements of a man, Li Peng. It seems that he is a spy. Suddenly, a man appears at the car window; his appearance is very similar to Li Peng, and he enters the car. Suddenly, the real Li Peng leaves the building in front of them.

Lazo, Norma **‘El que camina al lado’** **2014** **México**

A man sees himself, his double, who is and lives in his house. The heat and humidity add to his confusion and almost craziness. He wants to free himself from his double. He talks to a psychologist friend who tells him that

it's the fault of the right hemisphere of his brain, which is identified as the feminine side. Moreover, doubles are polyglots. The protagonist wants to rid himself of the double.

Lewis G., Cheri **'Mujer hecha Pedazos'** **2013** **Panamá**

A man meets a woman at a party. She seems normal until one of her arms falls to the floor, and she picks it up and puts it back without fuss, but after, a hand falls off. The man asks the woman why this happens, but she doesn't know. Perhaps caused by the stress of a failed relationship.

Lewis G., Cheri **'Lágrimas'** **2013** **Panamá**

Mariana always cries when she has sex with a man. She decides to busy herself with other things, until she meets Emilio. But she doesn't want to sleep with him, until she can no longer stand it. They sleep together, Emilio falls in love with her, but does she?

Lewis G., Cheri **'Episodio de la cantina en dos actos'** **2013** **Panamá**

Two men drink in a cantina. They talk to each other about sex with a woman. The other man wants to have sex with this woman.

Lewis G., Cheri **'Gabi Emotiva'** **2022** **Panamá**

A girl receives a doll, Emotional Gabi, as a present, in which one can put drops in her mouth, one type to make her cry, and others to make her laugh. The girl tries the drops in her mother's drink, with positive results. Her friends learn about the drops, with unexpected consequences.

Lewis G., Cheri **'La despedida de Ludovico'** **2022** **Panamá**

Ludovico works in an office, but he isn't a nice person: he doesn't like anyone nor himself. After being visited by Death who confused him with his father, he knows he's going to die that night at midnight. The people in the office prepare a party to say goodbye to Ludovico.

Lewis G., Cheri **'El Verglander XLIII'** **2022** **Panamá**

A woman has Verglander XLIII, a vibrator, after seeing a female shaman. She prefers the Verglander to an man. She meets Ignacio who wants to watch her and the Verglander.

Lewis G., Cheri **'Por los Ciclos de los Siglos'** **2022** **Panamá**

A vampire is elected as mayor of a village. Instead of scaring the people, he is the model citizen. But he has a condition for accepting the position as mayor, that makes the village safer.

Lewis G., Cheri **'Abrir las manos'** **2013** **Panamá**

Some babies start to appear inside a family home. One, two, and more until there are forty babies in the house. Noone sees them enter. One day the babies decide to leave, but with a member of the family.

Lewis G., Cheri **'El delantal rojo'** **2013** **Panamá**

Camilo is sick. His mother arrives at his house to care for him. The doctor tells them that it is a virus, but the mother's remedies do not make him better. Afterwards, an auntie arrives, but her remedies don't work either. Camilo hallucinates about a red apron, until they take him to the hospital.

Lewis G., Cheri **'Muertos de risa'** **2022** **Panamá**

A girl's father cannot stop laughing. He laughs every day, almost without stopping. The girl doesn't show happiness, in case she starts to laugh. Finally, the father dies laughing and the family prepares the funeral.

Lindo, Ricardo **'Cards'** **1973** **El Salvador**

A fisherman yearns for a mermaid. A young sailor always is the lover of the mermaid.

Llana, María Elena **‘Nosotras’** **1968** **Cuba**

A woman receives a new telephone. She casually dials her own number and another woman answers. But the other woman is her.

Llana, María Elena **‘En familia’** **1983** **Cuba**

A family has a mirror inhabited by ghosts, but they accept the situation. The mirror reflects the dead family members. The dead family copy the movements of the living family. Things change when cousin Clara arrives at the house, who wants to move the mirror.

Martínez Tolentino, Jaime **‘El amuleto’** **2013** **Puerto Rico**

A man discovers an amulet in a house. Afterwards, good things happen for the rest of his life. But his daughter falls sick, and no one can save her.

Martínez, Ángela **‘Lluvia’** **1968** **Cuba**

The rain does not stop in a village. The people adapt to their new existence, but when the rain stops, they die.

Méndez, José María **‘The circle’** **1977** **El Salvador**

A group of men talk about the dead after the demonstrations and/or the imprisonments and disappearances. The narrator realises that these meetings are dreams, and each time they dream of these groups of friends and their family members. In reality, they are all dead.

Molina, Silvia **‘Amira y los monstruos de San Cosme’** **1984** **México**

The parents of a naughty girl enrol her in a good girls’ school, San Cosme. The girl wants to learn the piano, but she failed her studies due to her behaviour. She goes to the basement of the school to learn the piano. The teacher is very strict, and the girl thinks she is a monster and says so to the others. She is expelled from the college but from time to time a girl disappears without a trace from the San Cosme college.

Molina, Silvia **‘La casa nueva’** **1985** **México**

A father takes his daughter to a big house, with beautiful bedrooms, clean and modern things. He says to his daughter that this is the new house, but the girl’s dreams are shattered when the father tells her that the new house is theirs only when they win the lottery.

Murguía, Verónica **‘El ángel de Nicolás’** **2003** **México**

A historical story from the sixth century AD, based on the events of the wars between the Greeks and the Bulgarians. It’s a history of an monk that was a soldier in the wars, and who killed lots of men. In one of the war expeditions, he encounters a fleeing woman, but she is not who she seems. The protagonist is injured, but an ángel appears.

Naranjo, Carmen **‘Floral caper’** **1972** **Costa Rica**

A man continually receives a multitude of flowers. This story is not the fantastic, it is a story about loneliness.

Naranjo, Carmen **‘Y vendimos la lluvia’** **1989** **Costa Rica**

A country (without doubt, a Central American one) has a lot of rainfall each year. A king from a far away country begs this country to sell its water so that the people of his country can have water. The country sells it, but after a while, they no longer have water and beg to buy water.

Nervo, Amado **‘El de espejo’** **1906** **México**

A man only talks with his reflection in the mirror, which could be his alter ego. In the end, the reflection has the same gestures as the man, and has its own life. The man becomes angry and the reflection does too, which leads to fatal consequences.

Nervo, Amado **‘El ángel caído’** **1921** **México**

An ángel falls to Earth and is found by two children. They care for the angel until he/she recuperates. The angel takes the family to Heaven when he returns.

Núñez Miró, Isidoro **‘El extraño caso de Baker Street’** **1968** **Cuba**

A man, who appears to be Sherlock Holmes, is in his house, doing normal things in the lounge room. Suddenly, something strange happens.

Ocampo, Silvina **‘El vestido de terciopelo’** **1940** **Argentina**

A girl accompanies a dressmaker to the house of a rich woman, to make and adjust a velvet dress for this woman. The appliqué of the dragon consumes the rich woman in the end.

Odio, Eunice **‘Había una vez un hombre’** **1970** **Costa Rica**

Pedro is poor and works in a rubbish dump. His body changes a little, a little thinner every day. In the end, he changes into a butterfly (I think) or dies.

Oviedo, Jorge Luis **‘The final flight of the mischievous bird’** **1988** **Honduras**

Cesaría dreams that he is going to fly with wings above his village. After various attempts to do it, with almost fatal consequences, he prepares for his last flight, with feathered wings.

Pacheco, José Emilio **‘Parque de diversiones’** **1972** **México**

A collection of seven short satirical Fantastic stories.

Pérez Cuadra, María del Carmen **‘El retrato de la mujer sombra’** **2014** **Nicaragua**

The protagonist and her partner arrive at a party of their Central American friends. It seems strange that the abstract painting draws their attention. The party continues, but it is interrupted by a woman writer. The hosts are strange. The protagonist thinks that the female host is a witch, her cat as well, and she follows her secretly towards her bedroom.

Pérez Cuadra, María del Carmen **‘Muñeca rota’** **2014** **Nicaragua**

The protagonist has no arms, legs, or breasts. She is fed up with being a woman. Her sister takes her to the pier to see the sea. The protagonist tells her sister a horror story about a mermaid and a fisherman. When the sister has her eyes closed to breathe and imagine the end of the story, the protagonist jumps into the sea.

Peri Rossi, Cristina **‘El ángel caído’** **1984** **Uruguay**

An ángel falls to Earth at the same time that two spy satellites collide and fall. The people are under the oppression of military rule. They obey orders to survive. But a woman does not want to stay inside the home and goes to the street. She meets the ángel and is worried about its wellbeing. She recounts things of human life to the ángel until soldiers arrive and drag her away.

Pinilla, Germán **‘Las montañas, los barcos y los ríos del cielo’** **1967** **Cuba**

An eleven-year-old boy see strange things in the sky. His mother believes him, but his father does not. He wants to take him to the country because he thinks the boy is lying. One day, the boy sees a strange ball that can talk with him and has supernatural powers.

Quesada, Uriel **‘Behind the door’** **1988** **Costa Rica**

A man is confused where he is. He remembers an almost normal day. He hears strange sounds, possibly shots. He opens the door and walks into the street, looking for something normal. It takes a while for him to realize that he has been shot and is dying.

Ramírez, Sergio **‘On the stench of corpses’** **1972** **Nicaragua**

The mother of a dictator dies. The dictator demands that the cadaver of his mother accompanies him to all of the functions.

Ramos, María Eugenia **‘Cuando se llevaron la noche’** **2000** **Honduras**

A woman is in her house when she hears it start to rain and hail. Her partner returns from his walk, annoyed. The sound of the hail becomes stronger, and the sun is obscured. But there is no rain or hail outside. The woman doesn't see anyone outside, and she says so to her partner, but he doesn't believe her. He opens the window and makes her put out her hand to touch the rain. But she feels a type of elastic and there is no air, rain, or night.

Ramos, María Eugenia **‘Para elegir la muerte’** **2000** **Honduras**

A man enters a store in which one can choose one's own death. His friend has just died in this way. The young woman offers him a selection of deaths, but he cannot decide and he realises that he has never loved anyone. In the last room, he sees the special tapestries.

Rodríguez Pappé, Solange **‘Pequeñas mujercitas’** **2016** **Ecuador**

The protagonist sees some very small women in her house. They behave badly in the house, and the protagonist wants to remove them, before her brother Joaquin arrives. This brother is macho and spoiled by their mother, but he is also very handsome. After dinner, the protagonist leaves him on the sofa and the little women find him to carry out their desires.

Rossi, Anacristina **‘Abel’** **2013** **Costa Rica**

It is set in an apocalyptic world. The climate changes and there is less water, the seasons have changed. The animals, birds and insects die, and afterwards, the people. The protagonist is possibly alone in the world. After walking alone through many deserted villages, she arrives at the city, where, near a hotel, she finds her brother, Abel.

Schweblin, Samanta **‘Mariposas’** **2002** **Argentina**

Calderón and Gorriti are fathers and are standing outside the school, waiting for their children at the end of the school day. The bell is late ringing, but a butterfly leaves and rests on Calderón's arm. Calderón traps it and opens its wings, but he injures one of the wings of the butterfly; the butterfly cannot fly so Calderón kills it. But all the parents are surprised when the school doors open.

Schweblin, Samanta **‘Irman’** **2009** **Argentina**

A young couple arrives at a hotel. The woman is very thirsty. The receptionist, Irman, does not serve them and does not allow them to enter the kitchen, because the dead body of his wife is in there.

Schweblin, Samanta **‘La pesada valija de Benavides’** **2009** **Argentina**

Benavides has a heavy suitcase. He is very nervous and worried and wants to confess to his doctor that he has the dead body of his wife in the suitcase. When the doctor and his friend see the contents of the suitcase, their reactions are unexpected.

Schweblin, Samanta **‘Mujeres desesperadas’** **2009** **Argentina**

A woman is left in a gas station by her partner. This place seems to be a 'rubbish dump' of women in the same position.

Schweblin, Samanta **‘Hacia la alegre civilización’** **2009** **Argentina**

Gruner has lost his ticket for the train, and the agent at the station refuses to sell him another one and he now has no money. When the train arrives, the agent signals to the train driver that there are no passengers that want to board the train at this station. Gruner realises that the station has other people that have not left the station, and are prisoners of Fi and Pe.

Schweblin, Samanta **‘Pájaros en la boca’** **2009** **Argentina**

Sara, a young adolescent, eats birds. Her parents are separated, but both are desperate because of Sara’s behaviour. Her mother is sick and cannot bring birds to Sara and Sara becomes pale. Her father buys her a bird.

Sierra, Justo **‘La fiebre amarilla’** **1896** **México**

A man who has yellow fever recounts the story of a beautiful young woman that he knew. It has a mixture of myths and the profane (the Devil).

Turcios, Froylán **‘La mejor limosna’** **1930** **Honduras**

A micro-story about lepers, poverty, misery, violence against these unfortunate people.

Tynälä, Tanya **‘La coleccionista’** **2017** **Perú**

The protagonist, Julian, encounters the woman of his dreams, Diana. However, Diana imposes a lot of conditions on their relationship, including that he cannot tell anyone about the relationship, nor will she spend the night with him. Julian agrees to these conditions. She wants to meet him in a specific café and afterwards, she will spend the next week with Julian. When Julian arrives at the café, the old waitress tells him “Don’t forget to try the tart!”. Of course, he drinks a coffee and eats a piece of tart.

Urbano, Victoria **‘The face’** **1978** **Costa Rica**

A woman sees a man’s face in various places, inside and outside the house. She cannot see her own face in the mirror. The clocks do not have numbers. She is imprisoned inside invisible walls. There are no sounds. The clouds do not move. The streets are abandoned. Her mother cannot see or hear her.

Valenzuela, Luisa **‘Los censores’** **1976** **Argentina**

Juan wants to look for work as a censor in the Department of the Ministry of Communications Censorship to ensure that his letter to his girlfriend in Paris is not intercepted by them. Juan becomes a very skilled censor.

Valenzuela, Luisa **‘Los mejor calzados’** **1984** **Argentina**

The beggars look for shoes from the dead bodies of the rich people in the streets because the shoes haven’t been used. They have a big selection of shoes to choose from.

Vargas, Iliana **‘Styx y Umene’** **2015** **México**

A moth (called Styx) looks for shelter in a house during a sleet blizzard. A young man, Umene, is troubled by the lack of heating in the house when he goes to the bathroom during the night. He sees the moth and wants to capture it, but Styx has other ideas.

Velasco, Magali **‘Mientras la Maga duerme’** **2009** **México**

A couple eats at a restaurant. The man is infatuated with the owner’s daughter and has fantasies about her. The man’s wife (of the couple) has nightmares.

Yáñez Cossío, Alicia **‘IWM1000’** **1975** **Ecuador**

Teachers are replaced with a machine, the IWM 1000, that contains all human knowledge. The people become totally dependent on the machine, and they forget how to read and write. When then humans try to live without the machine, they can’t. Then, they try to understand the things of the past, including the writing symbols, and then they start to relearn again. They find a place called Takandia and try to travel there.

Appendix D – Full list of themes

English	Español
Modernism	Modernismo
The Boom	El boom
Post-boom	Pos-boom
Allegory	Alegoría
Satire	Sátira
Moral	Moral
Sickness	Enfermedad
The Senses (smell, sight)	Sentidos (oler, vista)
The Body	Cuerpo
Leprosy	Lepras
Religion and the occult	Religión y oculto
Salvation	Salvación
Poverty	Pobreza
Gap between rich and poor	Brecha ricos/pobres
The Double	Doble
The false double	Doble falso
The Other	El otro
Madness	Locura
Dream	Sueño
Silences	Silencios
Desire and sex	Deseo y sexo
Death	Muerte
Angel	Ángel
Demon	Demonio
Witchcraft	Brujería
Myths	Mitos
Surrealism	Surrealismo
Colonialisation	Colonialización
Wars	Guerras
Machoism	Machismo
Violence	Violencia
Domestic violence	Violencia doméstica
Inequality men/women	Desigualdad hom/muj
Mirror	Espejo
Time	Tiempo
Space	Espacio
Apocalypse	Apocalíptico
Horror	Horror
Loss of identity	Pérdida identidad
Bestiary and Darwinism	Bestiario y Darwinismo
Ignorance	Ignorancia
Human behaviour	Comportamiento humano

English	Español
Dehumanisation	(Des)human-ización
Oppression	Opresión
Curfew	Toque de queda
Dictatorship	Dictadura
Corruption	Corrupción
Impossible journey	Viaje imposible
Traveller	Viajero
Industrialisation	Industrialización
Modernisation and urbanisation	Modernización y urbanización
Bourgeoisie Society	Sociedad burguesa
Imperialism and capitalism	Imperialismo capitalism

Notes:	Notas:
Body: Includes: the corporal parts of the body, the senses, social classes, poverty, identity, memory, trauma, madness.	Cuerpo: Incluso: los partes corporales del cuerpo, sentidos, clases sociales, pobreza, identidad, memoria, trauma, locura.
The double and false double: Includes: mirrors, the Other, identity.	Doble y doble falso: Incluso: espejos, el otro, la identidad.
The impossible journey: Includes: the impossible journey (or end of the impossible journey), identity and memory.	Viaje imposible: Incluso: viaje imposible (o fin de viaje imposible), la identidad y la memoria.
Violence: Includes: violence, domestic violence, apocalypse, horror, dehumanisation, oppression, dictatorship, wars, machoism, inequality men/women, curfew, corruption.	Violencia: Incluso: violencia, violencia doméstica, apocalíptico, horror, deshumanización, opresión, dictadura, guerras, machismo, desigualdad hombres/mujeres, toque de queda, corrupción.