New manifestations from the creation and thought of the fantastic

VICENTE J. PÉREZ VALERO
& FRANCISCO CUÉLLAR SANTIAGO (EDS.)

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NEW MANIFESTATIONS FROM THE CREATION AND THOUGHT OF THE FANTASTIC

THE FANTASTIC AND THE MONSTROUS AS WE'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE

Vicente Javier Pérez Valero & Francisco Cuéllar Santiago
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THE SOPHISTICATION OF THE MONSTER: FROM FANTASY TO REALITY

The figure of the monster is, almost from its very definition, a product of the imagination and the scientific and technological skills of its creator, who is usually described as a prodigious and exceptional individual. Beyond the meanings conveyed by representations of the monstrous, however, the central question of all works of fiction that use this resource in the realm of the fantastic is also that of the role of man and the task he sets himself as creator and, therefore, as a true monster, according to the etymological meaning of the Latin *-monstrum*: something unusual, exceptional or a prodigy contrary to the natural order-. The question manifests itself in different ways in the realms of cinema, comics and, of course, literature. For example, through the purity of our species in Gattaca (Niccol, 1997): *Gattaca* (Niccol, 1997), hybridisation and mutation in *Alien (*Scott, 1979), *The Fly* (Cronenberg, 1986), *The X-Men* (Lee, 1963) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (Wells, 1895), or the scientific possibility of recreating extinct or mechanical life

forms in *Jurassic Park* (Crichton, 1990), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence (*Spielberg, 2001) and *Ex-Machina* (Garland, 2014).

In the current context of social, cultural and philosophical change, the portrayal of the relationship between human beings and technology in fantasy fiction takes on significant relevance. Many literary and cinematic works invite us to contemplate the monsters that we create -and that we are- by exploring the ethical dilemmas, utopian aspirations and dystopian fears associated with the increasing integration of technology into everyday life. In this way, art confronts us with our reflections and poses the question of our postmodern condition as articulated by Jean-François Lyotard in La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir (1979) or by Gilles Deleuze in much of his work.

In his *The Dreams Our Stuff is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World* (2000), Thomas M. Disch proposes the idea that science fiction – including fantasy - is not just a form of entertainment, but also a reflection of our ambitions and concerns as a collective. He argues that it has played a crucial role in shaping our expectations of technology, society and the future and in prompting us to reflect on the ethical, social and philosophical implications of scientific and technological progress. Science fiction generates an unconscious premonition and acts as a revelator of society's collective longings, fears and aspirations, unconsciously anticipating and even triggering future events.

In this way, these fictional narratives provide a space for speculation about the future of humanity, as well as for questioning the limits and implications of technology in the construction of individual and collective identity. It is in this fantastic dimension that the minds of modern demiurges - from the Greek *dēmiourgós*: creator – dwell. They are monsters who are not so outwardly, but who translate into their ideas, projects or products what they have read and seen in their years of learning and openness to the worlds created by others, and which have allowed them to leave their room through their imagination. Some of them are what we call *geeks*, a term that, in a few decades, has gone from being pejorative to merely descriptive and sometimes even prestigious.

These new social actors, who are increasingly influencing industries, markets and cultural trends, have gradually emerged on the global economic stage. They are invariably associated with a passion for technology, fantasy, science fiction and video games, but their influence extends far beyond their traditional interests. With the advent of the digital age, the skills and expertise of geeks have become increasingly valuable in a technology-driven economy. Companies at the forefront of research and development in

artificial intelligence, biotechnology, blockchain and renewable energy, such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook, which were once start-ups founded by visionary geeks, are now among the most powerful entities in the world. Moreover, eight of the ten richest people on the planet are related to new technologies. Geek culture is no longer the exclusive domain of intellectual technology and computer enthusiasts. It fuels entire industries, from consumer electronics – from which our ubiquitous smartphones are derived – to video games, comic books and science fiction films. As a result, government policy and private investment are heavily tilted towards the technology and innovation sectors, in the hope that this investment will stimulate economic growth and create new jobs. Technology companies are celebrated as champions of progress and their leaders, in particular, are revered as visionaries who are shaping the future. These individuals, fuelled by the utopias of science fiction, are shaping our present and our future as consumers.

The demiurges of our age are the figures of success who manifest themselves in a technological and economic opulence that fascinates us, whose seductive face is promoted by the social network. They are the monsters of this technological and ultra-liberal era who, who knows, may be hiding in their hands the progress of the human being through transhumanism or the greatest and most sophisticated slavery that the human history has ever known, in which the individual himself is unaware of his state of subjection. As slaves, *zombies* or technological creatures, we get a glimpse of the future through the minds of the true creators and artists of the fantasy genre, no need to go any further. Come and see!

CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FANTASTIC

In the various chapters of this book, entitled *New Manifestations in the Creation and Thought of the Fantastic*, we look at the wide range of representations of the imaginary, the terrifying and the monstrous, in all their meanings, in film, television and other creative, artistic and audiovisual expressions, such as animation, video clips and video games.

The journey that we propose in these pages will end at the very origin of the fantastic genre: literature.

Firstly, Juan Agustín Mancebo Roca, immerses us in the work of David Cronenberg through his film *Naked Lunch (1991)*, an adaptation of the literary work of the same name by William S. Burroughs (1959). In his text, the author analyses

the depiction of sexuality, in which female characters are highlighted and translated from a homosexual imaginary into a heterosexual one. He also studies the creatures that metaphorically represent the ghosts of addiction, sexuality and control, through psychological stages derived from a body that has ceased to be, in the words of James G. Ballard, a portrait of the interior landscape of the post-war world.

Secondly, researcher Michelle Lucy Copmans presents her text *Game Of Thrones: Between History And Political Science*, in which she analyses the theory of international relations of political realism, popular in the 1990s, within *Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-1998), written by George R.R. Martin, also known for the TV series *Game of Thrones (*Benioff and Weiss, 2011-2019). This theory, similar to those proposed by Henry Kissinger and Samuel Huntington, is reflected in his literary work. Thus, Martin can be considered not only a novelist or historian of the Middle Ages, but also a political scientist who analyses the end of the 20th century according to his own theory.

The third chapter of this volume is written by professor and researcher Manuel Sánchez-Angulo, who reflects on the term 'biotechnology' in fantasy and science fiction, and its negative representation in works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or Modern Prometheus*, which warns of the dangers of playing God. Shelley's novel combines several bioethical themes such as the creation of artificial life and human experimentation, and gave rise to the cultural icon of the *Mad Scientist* losing control of his creation. Later works, such as *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H.G. Wells, continued this legacy. These works are probably at the root of today's public mistrust of biotechnology products, particularly genetically modified foods. Even today's life-saving biomedical applications are not free of this suspicion. Nevertheless, films showing the negative aspects of biotechnology can be used to demonstrate the true impact of this science on society.

The next contribution in this book is Fran Mateu's research work on Demián Rugna's film When Evil Lurks (2023). This film has had a fruitful tour of international festivals, winning the best film award (the highest award) at the Sitges Film Festival, the most important fantastic genre event in the world (Sitges Film Festival, 2023). The film combines several sub-genres, and is part of the new Argentinean horror cinema. Mateu analyses the director's main contributions to folk horror with a very specific vision, and the use of gore, blood and special effects to reach the audience with his proposal.

The work of a follower of Rugna's work, *Pan's Labyrinth* by Guillermo del Toro (2006), is the subject of analysis by researcher Vladimir Couți. In his work, Couți emphasises the value of emotions in film, since they are not sufficiently prioritised in film

studies. The intersection between cinema and psychology has focused on the emotions of the audience, leaving aside the emotionality of the work of art. The author suggests that a combination of psychological definitions and cinematic tools could improve interdisciplinary research. In fact, he suggests using Ekman's (2016) model of emotions and focusing it on the scary scenes of *Pan's Labyrinth*, a film that combines fantasy and horror, ideal for analysing this emotion.

In her chapter, Marta Miquel-Baldellou presents the horror trilogy created by Timon West, an American director and screenwriter. In it, West explores different genres and visual styles. The first film, *X* (2022), is a *slasher* set in 1979, in which a film crew encounters psychopaths on a Texas farm. *Pearl* (2022), the prequel, focuses on Pearl's youth in 1918 and uses Disney's colourful visual style and classic musicals to tell a female gothic story from a grotesque perspective. The trilogy concludes with *MaXXXine* (2024) which follows Maxine in 1985 on her quest for fame in Hollywood. In Miquel-Baldellou's analysis, each film shows a high degree of self-reflexivity about the genres of horror cinema, exploring both the aforementioned conventions of the slasher, and the Female Gothic, as well as folk horror in a Southern and rural American context.

Entering the field of futuristic fantasy, Rita Aloy Ricart and Nathaniel Sola Rubio reflect on the role of space in dystopian narratives, focusing in particular on the OVAs (Original Video Animations) of *Alita: Battle Angel* (Rodriguez, 2019). These animations, based on the 1993 manga *Gunnm* by Yukiyo Kishiro and directed by Hiroshi Fukutomi, explore themes of oppressive societies and ethical degradation through their depiction of two dystopian cities: Scrapyard and Zalem (Tiphares). Situated on the ground, Scrapyard is polluted by the waste of Zalem, a floating city inaccessible to its residents. Scrapyard's inhabitants endure hardship and engage in activities such as gladiator wrestling and Motorball racing. Zalem, on the other hand, remains mysterious and exclusive, strictly forbidding access from Scrapyard. The main protagonist, Alita, a cyborg discovered in Scrapyard by Doctor Daisuke Ido, seeks to uncover her origins and confront the injustices perpetrated by Zalem, particularly in protecting Yugo from illegal organ trade orchestrated by the businessman Vector.

Without leaving the orbit of the fantastical in the East, the Indian researcher Ghita Ait Bensalah presents a text that analyses the representation of Japanese ideology through the fantastic creatures created by Hayao Miyazaki for his animated film *Spirited Away* (2001). The success of his work within Studio Ghibli is attributed to his unique artistry and ability to emotionally resonate with audiences, reflecting Japanese culture

and ideologies through hand-drawn animation. Hayao Miyazaki's films are known for embodying several profound themes rooted in Japanese culture, such as Wabi Sabi and the beauty of transience; harmony between industrialisation and nature; dedication to life and craftsmanship; cultural synthesis. Influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures, his films resonate globally while maintaining a distinct Japanese authenticity. This blend allows his stories to appeal universally while celebrating the cultural richness of his homeland.

In the field of the fantastic, but within the music industry, Julia Sainz Cortés analyses this genre in the period in which it established itself in the Spanish music video scene, between the second and third decade of the 21st century. This period saw a variety of approaches in which fantastic elements were creatively integrated into music videos. Although budgets were smaller and the impact less pronounced than in the rest of the world, Spanish directors and musicians turned to fantasy to enhance the visual narrative and aesthetic appeal. In addition, the evolution of technology and digital platforms has opened up new avenues for artists to experiment with visual effects and storytelling techniques, pushing the boundaries of what can be achieved on smaller budgets.

Marcela Naranjo Velásquez will explore the complexity of the character of Gollum, a central figure in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth saga, who embodies complexity through his dualistic nature and multifaceted roles. Initially driven by the desire to reclaim the One Ring, Gollum serves as a mirror for heroes like Bilbo and Frodo, reflecting their inner struggles and potential paths. His portrayal as the archetype of the Shadow highlights the dark aspects within the heroes' psyches that they struggle to acknowledge and integrate. Furthermore, Gollum can be interpreted as a tragic hero whose actions shape the course of the narrative, balancing personal turmoil with broader conflicts. His unique resistance to the corrupting influence of the Ring underscores his importance in the struggle against evil, positioning him not just as an antagonist but as a central force in the salvation of the Middle-earth.

In the section dedicated to video games, José Manuel Chico Morales presents his text *The Hybrid Identity Of The Monster: Dialectics Of The Possible And Impossible In Video Game Narratives*, whose main objective is to explore hybrid identity, where the boundaries between the human and the monstrous are fluid and subject to change. Three video games are used as modes for different modes of introspective fantasy narratives: *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005), *Undertale* (2015) and *The Dark Pictures*

Anthology: Little Hope (2020). Chico's methodology examines the interplay between the possible and the impossible in video game narratives, adapting theories from the literary studies of Roger Caillois and David Roas. He also uses discourse analysis is employed to explore narrative specificities.

On the other hand, the researcher Kevin Díaz Alché proposes to look at the historical origins of witchcraft in the current aesthetics of the witch, developed in painting and film, and to analyse how contemporary video games, especially *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* (2023), developed by Desconstructeam, incorporate these aesthetics into their environments. Combining deck-building with a strong narrative, this video game stars a group of witches who use various supernatural abilities such as tarot, plant manipulation and the study of the cosmos. While Desconstructeam's previous works focused on science fiction, *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* delves into fantasy and magic, highlighting the archetype of the witch. This shift is significant for its ability to raise questions about individual responsibility and emotional relationships, as well as the implications for the image of women and femininity.

Antonio Castro Balbuena immerses us in the epic fantasy of video games. Due to their hypermediatic characteristics, video games offer a rich platform for the creation and adaption of epic fantasy narratives. Among video game genres, the open-world format is particularly suited to these expansive and imaginative stories, often featuring the archetypal hero who embarks on quests and battles to save the world (Ward, 2011; Underberg, 2005). In this context, Castro explores a more recent depiction of heroes, which has shifted from a clear dichotomy of good versus evil to a more nuanced 'twilight hero' archetype that reflects complex moral landscapes (Castro Balbuena, 2022). This trend raises important questions about the nature of heroism in video games: How do players understand and enact heroism, what actions constitute heroic behaviour, and what kind of heroes can players become?

In one of the longest-running video game series in history, *The Legend of Zelda*, created by Shigeru Miyamoto, researcher David Serra Navarro examines the diversity of creatures, such as the cyclopean Hinox and the oni ogres - in a more mythological sphere- or monsters like the Moldorm and the Moblins, drawing on sources such as Roy Chapman Andrews' 1926 documentation of creatures and the 16th-century Asian novel *Journey to the West*. These mythological roots highlight the cultural hybridity inherent in these creatures. Serra explores the symbolic meaning of "the monstrous" within the game's narrative, which serves as a basis for interpreting how these fantastical

entities enhance the game's interactive narrative. This exploration reveals that these creatures are not mere obstacles, but an integral part of the player's progression and understanding of the game world.

Mario-Paul Martínez, a researcher at the Center for Research in the Arts (CíA), shares with us an analysis of the evolution of the graphic environments of video games, which took a significant leap forward in the 1980s. This period of early video games is notable not only for the rise of the medium, but also for the important evolution of the aesthetic and semiotic models used in game design. Among the various genres, conversational adventure games, especially those made by Sierra On-Line (formerly On-Line Systems), played a crucial role in advancing graphical capabilities. Games such as *Mystery House* and *Wizard and the Princess* (both 1980) pioneered the combination of graphics and text, creating memorable and innovative digital scenographies that would influence the future of video game design.

In the section of fantasy and horror on paper, the researcher María José González Dávila examines the complex use of intertextuality, the dynamic between fiction and reality, and the temporal aspect in Félix J. Palma's work El mapa del tiempo (2008) and his *Victorian Trilogy (*2008-2015), focusing on its mixture with science fiction and fantasy. The study highlights how the creation of texts involves both linguistic exploration and tradition, giving rise to infinite meanings through deconstruction and the relationship between different texts. González also emphasises the subjective nature of interpretation and rejects the idea of a single "correct" reading.

The chapter presented by Miguel Ángel Albújar-Escuredo analyses the novelist Fernanda Trías's depiction of the end of the Anthropocene, through her novel *Mugre rosa (*2020), and the failures of the city's financial systems in the midst of the new pandemic. He explores how the pink fog is triggering massive evolutionary changes and the emergence of a new history in which humanity may no longer have a place. Moreover, the emergence of this fog marks the emergence of an unexpected economy, disconnected from previous financial systems. The protagonist and narrator documents both the collapse of the financial world and her own emotional decline.

In the chapter *Nocturnal Queers In Hong Ling's Vampire Fiction,* researcher Alberto Poza Poyatos explores how the vampire in urban gothic literature serves as a metaphor for *queer* identity and epistemology, reflecting and subverting cultural fears and desires, and offering a unique perspective on gothic horror, modernity and queer theory. The vampire, central to this discourse, represents the only way in which the Heideggerian

'Enlightenment subject' can maintain a positive existence after the 'advent of the subjectivity of the Modern Age' (Žižek, 1991, p. 64). In our contemporary identity-centred paradigm, this nocturnal monster can be considered *queer*. According to Poza, both the *queer* and the vampire share an epistemology: they are entities that we strive to recognise within their concealment. This has led to metaphorical polarities in literature that allow us to conceptualise a mysterious but knowable figure.

Finally, we close this publication with *Spatial Landmarks From Middle-earth In The Lord Of The Rings*, a text by Alba Rozas-Arceo and Inmaculada Pérez-Casal that explores (postcolonial) literary cartography as a viable and enriching analytical tool to aid literary criticism.

The authors have also made a number of contributions to a better understanding of the complex relationship between history, ideology and space. As a case study, they focus on the imaginary geography of Middle-earth described in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), going beyond mere textual analysis and showing the suitability of Geographic Information Systems for revealing the motives and functions underlying the most relevant spatial landmarks.

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ORGAN-MACHINES, MUTANT CENTIPEDES, MUGWUMPS, AND THE UGLY SPIRIT IN WILLIAM BURROUGHS AND DAVID CRONENBERG'S *NACKED LUNCH*

Juan Agustín Mancebo Roca
University of Castilla-La Mancha

> I am a ghost wanting what every ghost wants –a body– after the Long Time moving through odorless alleys of space where no life is only the colorless no smell of death.
>
> (Burroughs, 2022)

INTRODUCTION

When David Cronenberg (b. 1943) took on the adaptation of *Naked Lunch* (1959) by William S. Burroughs (1914-1997), his approach was very different from other projects in his career. The Canadian director considered it impossible to transfer the book as such: "to be faithful to it," he recalls, "I had to abandon all direct adaptation projects, recognizing that such a direction was inappropriate [...] Such fidelity is just impossible" (Rodley, 2020, p. 214). Cronenberg chose to build the plot on the writer's profile and the process of writing the novel, of his torment and ecstasy, so the film would include parts of *Naked Lunch*, biographical fragments and elements taken from the rest of his literary output. In a certain sense, the construction

of the script responded to the American's idea of the totality of his literary project: "everything I write does not form a single book, all my books are no more than a single book" (Di Brizzi, 1995, p. 92).

Cronenberg has argued that bringing a novel to the screen involves the union of narrative –textual– and cinematographic –visual– elements, which is why *Naked Lunch* is, beyond an adaptation per se, the association of the creative universes of the American writer and the Canadian director. To carry out the transfer process Cronenberg had the approval of Burroughs, something that kept him from the usual perks writers have in the filming of their texts (Aresté, 2006, pp. 21-25). Burroughs felt that Cronenberg should work without conditions and the director acknowledged his responsibility to transcribe the novel in "complete freedom" (Rodley, 2020, p. 210).

When they first met, Cronenberg was most concerned with the representation of sexuality, as the book's plot hinged on drugs and desire. Far from the homosexual realm that Burroughs relates in the novel, Cronenberg wanted to give prominence to female characters that responded to his own symbolic conditioning, that is, "the translation of a series of ghosts from a homosexual imaginary and sensibility into a heterosexual universe" (Di Brizzi, 1995, p. 101). In this sense, the nuclear element is built on the accidental death of his second wife Joan Vollmer (1923-1951), an event that freed William Burroughs from all that had gripped him and allowed him to devote himself to writing (García Robles, 2018, pp. 133-137). But the most relevant aspect of *Naked Lunch* is that Burroughs invokes a series of creatures that metaphorically represent the ghosts of the processes of addiction, sexuality and agents of control that will concretize the plot and visual poetics of the film.

This article analyses the creatures that appear in *Naked Lunch*. To do so, it establishes an overview of the links and influences between Burroughs and Cronenberg, and the Canadian director's interest in literature. Subsequently, both the fantastic specimens and the mutations of the real that the writer's distorted psyche provokes are analyzed. *Naked Lunch* is the story of an afterlife from which one returns to bear witness to the passage through Hell, a resurrection that exorcises death and which is made explicit in the chapter "Lazarus Returns", in which the creatures are configured as the psychological stages derived from a body that has ceased to be, elaborating the first serious science-fiction novel or,

in the words of James G. Ballard (1930-2009), "the first portrait of the interior landscape of the post-war world, using its own language and manipulative techniques, its fantasies and nightmares" (2021, p. 154).

AND THE WORDS TAKE ON CODE SIGNIFICANCE

David Cronenberg has acknowledged his fascination with writing and its creative process, as literature has been central to his film career. The paradigm shift that led him from B-series to The Politics of the *auteur* was determined by the adaptation of Stephen King's (b. 1947) novel, *The Dead Zone* (1983) and by *Videodrome* (1983), a manifesto of the "new flesh" that would become a book by Jack Martin (pseudonym of Dennis Etchison, b. 1943) while the film was being shot. Similarly, most of his films are adaptations of books –and even of a graphic novel– and virtually all the screenplays and adapted screenplays he has filmed are his own.

Writing, on the other hand, has been a fundamental part of his education, becoming a constant reference from his childhood to his academic training. His father was a writer and journalist, so Cronenberg constantly alludes both to the metallic sound of the typewriter and to the universe and presence of the book: "There were always books in my house. There were whole walls covered with books: they were stacked high, and they were corridors built entirely of books. There were thousands of them. It is fundamentally that atmosphere in which I grew up" (Canova, 2000, p. 7).

That interest led him to study English Language and Philology at the University of Toronto with the idea of becoming a writer –a desire that came to fruition with the publication of *Consumed* (2016)– having been influenced by Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) and, especially William Burroughs, whose literature he identified with despite their biographical differences,

> When I began to read Burroughs, it was like recognizing someone who had the same sensibility as me, but much more advanced. Burroughs laid my feelings bare. I was also writing stories at the time, but they didn't resemble his. We have different origins: I've never been a drug addict or homosexual; besides, he's American and I'm Canadian. But I still discover

> something of myself in his poems, even if his thoughts are more formed and crystalline than mine. It is as if there is something of Burroughs in my subconscious (Canova, 2000, p. 5).

Cronenberg was interested in adapting *Naked Lunch* since 1981, a possibility that materialized ten years later with the participation of producer Jeremy Thomas (b. 1949). The idea of bringing it to the screen, as well as the process of creating it, was risky, since the act of writing emerges from an inner process determined by static phases that are scarcely relevant on a cinematographic level. Moreover, the infilmability of a novel that had had entire passages that were transcriptions of dreams (Morgan, 2022, p. 398), the possibility of which had seduced experimental filmmakers such as Conrad Rooks (1934-2011) and Anthony Balch (1937-1980) with low-cost filming scripted by painter and, temporarily Burroughs' partner, Brion Gysin (1916-1986), and the allusion to the novel in Howard Brookner's (1954-1989) documentary *Burroughs: The Movie* (1983), was something that seduced the Canadian director, motivated by the challenge of transforming into images something that a priori was considered impossible (Bragagnolo, 2022). In this sense, Cronenberg's artistic determination led him to explore a story about writing that would put the creator at risk "to conceive something that becomes dangerous for the one who does it [...] To transmit the legitimate experience of writing to someone who does not write, it is necessary to exaggerate in a big way. You must turn the inside out and make it physical and external" (Rodley, 2020, p. 218).

VILE ADDICTIONS AND INSECT LUST

Although they are not fantastic entities, insects are some of the creatures that appear in *Naked Lunch*, with a perennial and determining presence throughout the film. As Cronenberg stated, both novelist and director had similar interests in insects, which they identified as beings from another dimension: "I share Burroughs' obsession with insects. If we think about it, it is a being comparable to an extraterrestrial, to a perfectly strange form of existence, which lives next to us, but with which we cannot share some value, some affinity. This being is the insect" (Canova, 2000, p. 7). In turn, Burroughs, determined by the constitution of the

magical universe, considered that "dreams with insects almost always precede a terminal illness" (Burroughs, 2021, p. 46).

The metaliterary approach relates to Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) *Die Verwandlung* (*Metamorphosis*, 1915). In the film's dialogues, William Lee (Peter Weller) and Joan Vollmer/Frost (Judy Davis) refer to the Czech writer's novel by making explicit that their narcotic doses are "literary highs" determined as much by drug addiction as by the act of creation itself. On the other hand, the transformation of Kafka's novel in which Gregor Samsa appears as a gigantic insect is shifted in *Naked Lunch* through the association of insect qualities in humans –an idea Buñuel fantasized about (1900-1983) in his early years in Mexico– whose liquefaction of the flesh symbolizes the bodily crumbling when the latter abandons its condition. Cronenberg's approach to insects is nuanced, as he questions whether their lack of soul is a negative connotation as Burroughs surmises.

Cockroaches appear in the symbolic world of the Lee's, which is Burroughs's as well. The film alludes to his work as a pest exterminator, a job performed by the writer in Chicago taken from the story *Exterminator!* (1973) (Burroughs, 2014, pp. 7-11). Similarly, William Lee is the pseudonym he used in his first novel, *Junkie* (1953). Joan eliminates the cockroaches nesting in her apartment with her narcotic-intoxicated breath. The cockroach, despite the fragility it conveys in the film, is an insect that molecularly acclimates to all kinds of environments: it "represents a deeply archaic, immovable, adaptable elemental power that slips through the walls of our defenses, proliferates in the telluric and the primal, evades our calculated attempts at repression, disappears from one room of our existence, and inexorably reappears in another" (Ronnberg and Martin, 2010, p. 224). It also points to considerations of the magical in Burroughs (Levi-Stevens, 2023, pp. 19-26) since "it is a frequent and familiar visitor to the otherworld of our dreams, often signaling by its ancient presence the activation of an old complex or an impending regression" (Ronnberg and Martin, 2010: 224).

SCARABS – STUMBLE BUM JUNK HEAP

William Lee invents Control's intermediary insects that give him precise instructions that he interprets freely. A macroscopically mutated beetle, whose fleshy abdomen has a speaking sphincter –"if the anus and mouth merge into a

single orifice, language loses its privileged position" (Morgan, 2022, p. 401)–, orders Lee to eliminate his wife because she is an Interzone agent who is not human. The gigantic coleopteran, with which the police want to test the efficacy of pyrethrum, communicates through its anus based on the duality of the sphincter-mouth and insect-flesh. The coleoptera begs Bill to deposit pyrethrum on his labio-anus which, far from affecting him, excites him sexually.

Figure 1: Biomechanical Beetle gives Control instructions to Bill Lee [Peter Weller]. Source: David Cronenberg. *El almuerzo desnudo*, 1991. [DVD] Avalon, 2007.

Mutation, especially the fusion between machine and flesh, is an element that runs transversally through Cronenberg's cinema. In this case, the identity of the beetle anatomically contaminates the mechanism of the machine. The insect transubstantiates itself into an organic device, a renewed agent of Control capable of writing depending on the characteristics of the mark that produces it, which becomes a fundamental instrument in the process of writing. After Joan's death, Bill becomes a writer with his Clark Nova, a reporting machine recommended to him by the Mugwump.

Figure 2: The Mujahideen typewriter after her monstrous sexual transformation. Source: David Cronenberg. *El almuerzo desnudo*, 1991. [DVD] Avalon, 2007.

The machines are elements of Control at the service of Corporations such as the Clark Nova, the Martinelli and the Mujahideen of Paul Frost (Ian Holm), alter ego of Paul Bowles (1910-1999). The Clark Nova and the Martinelli metamorphose into monstrous biomechanical coleoptera, whose heads take the shape of the keyboard and continue to communicate through the sphincter. True to its Corporation, the Clark Nova ends up devouring the Martinelli in a bloody spectacle. The Mujahideen becomes a macabre sexual allegory of Bill and Joan Frost, alter ego of Jane Bowles (1917-1973), as it evolves into a soft machine in which their hands intertwine to penetrate her –after a metaphorical erection–. The machine is transfigured into a torso with arachnid legs and human sex, a creepy mutation between human and insect, expelled by Fadela (Monique Mercure), Joan Frost's lover, which masks another element of Control.

The beetle, in its macroscopic and biological transformation, evokes the meanings that have accompanied it since the origin of time: "immortality, sublimation and transcendence [...] whose image signifies, on the one hand, a defense of the hidden good of authenticity and, on the other hand, the balance and essence required to be 'born' as a link between the finite and infinite dimensions of the self" (2010: 236).

DEAD-END HORROR OF THE CENTIPEDE GOD

The centipede is the most symbolically charged insect in *Naked Lunch*, as it is both a representation of homosexuality and a metaphor for drugs. Chilopods appear as such and in mutations such as the giant centipede, which forms the basis for Black Meat, or in the terrifying predatory metamorphosis at the end of the film.

The figure of the centipede is related to homosexuality through the metal medallion of Kiki (Joseph Scoren) –Burroughs' real lover in Tangier (Chukri, 2017, p. 57)–, a symbol that manifests the dubious reputation of William Lee's sexual universe. The figure carried by his lover is the antechamber of the gay milieu in New York and then in that of the Interzone, a space where all kinds of sexual fantasies are given free rein. The mutation reaches its zenith with the transformation of Yves Cloquet (Julian Sands) into a giant scolopendrium that kills Kiki, the symbol of Lee's desire. The sequence, reminiscent of Cronenberg's origins as the «Baron of Blood», depicts the hunting process of the centipede, which holds its prey from behind with its legs while it digs its mouthparts into the prey to poison them as a preliminary step to predation. The centipede constitutes an allegory of Eros and Thanatos that transposes the death of Kiki, who was murdered in Madrid in 1957 (Morgan, 2022, p. 308) and became an intermittent ghostly presence in the American writer's work.

Another centipede serves to establish the allegory with Jane Vollmer, a duality that is repeated in part of the film. Like Joan, it is now Bill who can poison him with her breath when she finds him in his bathroom at Interzone. The centipede had appeared in New York markets as a spice and Dr Benway (Roy Scheider) had prescribed an antidote for Joan based on black centipede extract.

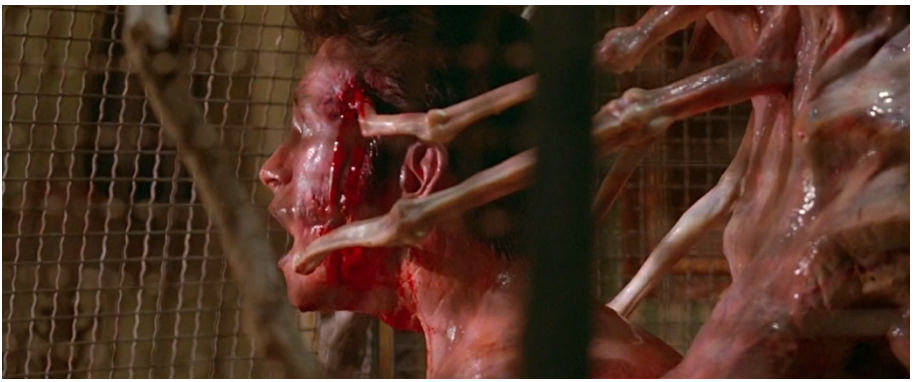

Figure 3: Yves Cloquet [Julian Sands] turned into a giant centipede poisons Kiki [Joseph Scoren] before devouring him.
Source: David Cronenberg, *El almuerzo desnudo*, 1991. [DVD] Avalon, 2007

In the Interzone, giant centipedes are trafficked to turn their flesh into a narcotic: "Traffickers in the Black Meat, flesh of the giant aquatic black centipede –sometimes attaining a length of six feet– found in a lane of black rocks and iridescent, brown lagoons, exhibit paralyzed crustaceans in camouflage pockets of the Plaza visible only to the Meat Eaters" (Burroughs, 2022, p. 215).

The scolopendrium appear in a gigantic slaughterhouse where they are dissected and ground up in meat grinders. As the rest of the creatures, the centipede has the structure of the insect, covering an anatomy of flesh that is made explicit when Fadela cuts up another specimen in the market. The centipede's flesh, as a metaphor for the drug, generates an algebra of need in the addict. The film transforms it into images following the spirit of the story: "The Black Meat is like a tainted cheese, overpoweringly delicious and nauseating so that the eaters eat and vomit and eat again until they fall exhausted" (Burroughs, 2022, p. 216).

Scolopendras were firmly rooted in the psyche of Burroughs, who dreamt of them and of scorpions. Indeed, in the stories of *Exterminator!* a combination of the two appears. In his own words, his entomophobia was determined by his early upbringing, something he carried with him for as long as he could remember,

> Centipedes scare the hell out of me, although it's not a real phobia where people are incapacitated just by the sight of a centipede. I am simply looking for something to fight the creature with. I have a recurring nightmare where a very large venomous centipede, or a scorpion, this long, suddenly lunges at me while I'm looking for something to kill it [...] It's something that you can't assimilate in any way. It's absolutely disgusting. They have absolutely no feeling; the idea of touching fills me with absolute horror... All those legs! (Bockris, 1997, p. 76-77).

He also referred to them in an unpublished conversation with journalist and novelist Duncan Fallowell (b. 1948), and shortly before his death he transcribed a dream of Sunday 22 December 1996 –in which Paul Bowles appeared– about the monstrosity of the centipede,

> To my mind, they are the most abominable of all creatures. What abject misunderstanding gave way to the creation of the centipede? It's horrible!!!! Kill them. With any other [animal] I would say don't do it: snakes, lizards, any living form with a little more decency. But this little mistake of God's is not a decent form (Burroughs, 2021, p. 56).

MUGWUMP EYES BLANK AS OBSIDIAN MIRRORS

During his escape, Bill meets the Mugwump in a gay bar through Kiki. Like the rest of the creatures in the film, the Mugwump is a guardian of the passage to another dimension and signals the fate of the future writer as he recommends a Clark Nova machine for its "mythical resonances" and gives him a ticket to the Interzone, a metaphor for Tangier's International Zone, "free of legal and moral pettiness where things assert their magical aspect. Tangier: the last refuge of the disinherited and the disillusioned; the ultimate colophon" (Mira & Langer, 2001, p. 55). The appearance of the Mugwump is taken literally from the novel: "On stools covered in white satin sit naked Mugwumps sucking translucent, colored syrups through alabaster straws" (Burroughs, 2022, p. 215).

Figure 4: The Mugwump was designed with William Burroughs' physiognomic features.
Source: David Cronenberg, *El almuerzo desnudo*, 1991. [DVD] Avalon, 2007.

Burroughs confessed that he did not choose the term for its political designation –that of Republican activists who opposed corruption in the nineteenth century– but for its sonority, meaning mug and wump which phonetically sounds like ass (Pisón, 1994, p. 16). The Mugwumps are roughly described in the book: "Their thin, purplish-blue lips cover a beak of black bone sharp as a barber's razor" (Burroughs, 2022, p. 215), although in the configuration of the filmic creature, characteristics of The Reptiles are added: "Thin, purple-blue lips cover a razor-sharp beak of black bone […] A fan of green cartilage covered with hollow, erectile hairs through which the Reptil absorb the fluid that sprouts from behind each ear" (Burroughs, 2022, p. 216).

These references are used to recreate a creature whose physiognomy is notable for its grotesque and alien character –of which the director points out its interplanetary appearance– in which the typologies of a junkie and a monster are hybridized. Special effects creator Stephan Dupuis (b. 1959) maintained that the Mugwump's head is reminiscent of a bird with Burroughs' physiognomy –at the director's suggestion, his face, chest and posture were taken as references–; that is, the Mugwump is a deformed reflection of the writer, a tall, hunchbacked and extremely thin specimen, which complicated his animation as there was no space through which to insert the devices for automation. Unlike the novel, the

Mugwump appears devoid of its distorted sexual charge and its appearance was softened as the writer noted in 1992 *Entertainment Weekly*: "They have beautiful blue eyes, they can breathe and smoke. They're different from my concept, bigger and more benevolent" (https://alienexplorations.blogspot.com).

Like the biomechanical beetles, the Mugwump is reintroduced into the plot by the fusion of its head with a typewriter. This is the result of the casting in a rustic forge of a broken machine, which again emphasizes the magical character of the film and the novel. The machine-Mugwump produces a narcotic substance and relates to William Lee as a talking head that occasionally transforms into a formed body. Despite the results of his writing, the type-head becomes an enemy to whom he gives directions that, had he followed them, would have ended his life. This leads to his latest discovery, a farm of Mugwumps run by Fadela "who leaves her female chrysalis to bring forth the disturbing Dr Benway" (Grünberg, 1992, p. 135), where the creatures appear suspended so that The Reptiles –the addicts– can ingest their dose from the protrusions in their heads, another metaphor for viral functioning that extrapolates to anything that parasitizes human life by imposing its control on it.

THE UGLY SPIRIT

The murder of Joan Vollmer was the pivotal event in the life of William Burroughs. In its aftermath, Burroughs freed himself from what had hitherto been a disappointing existence by accepting his sexual condition and devoting himself to writing, as prophesied by Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), who considered him a teacher rather than an artist (Kerouac, 2006). Burroughs was traumatized by the murder of his wife as a monstrous act for which he could not repent. The writer maintained that at the fatal moment of the shooting he was possessed by the Ugly Spirit, which caused the fatal outcome and the resulting cathartic effect: "I live with the constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from it, from Control. So, Joan's death brought me into contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, which led me into a lifelong struggle in which I had no other way out but to write" (Levi-Stevens, 2023, p. 152). Burroughs, in this sense, exorcised his wife's death by writing his escape.

The symbolic element on which Cronenberg's film hinges is articulated in Joan's (double) homicide, which alludes to her non-human condition and that of being part of a species different from man, with different desires and purposes on Earth –perhaps another of the creatures of William Lee's delusional mind?–. In this sense, as Mark Fischer points out, "the re-staging of death is less a new admission of ethical responsibility than an attempt to take charge, to make sense of it. That is the logic of trauma" (Fisher, 2019, p. 157).

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GAME OF THRONES: BETWEEN HISTORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Song of Ice and Fire (Penguin Random House), also known for the TV series Game of Thrones (HBO), is a five-volume high fantasy literary saga that is a worldwide bestseller and remains unfinished to this day. Its TV adaptation has allowed readers to (re)discover the career of George R.R. Martin, an American author who graduated in journalism, became a television scriptwriter and then a science fiction and high fantasy writer. His famous saga, in its various formats, has been analyzed again and again in many academic and popular texts and media, and many authors share the same theory: George R.R. Martin becomes a historian to describe a period of the Middle Ages, mainly based on English history.

However, George R.R. Martin does not necessarily speak of the past, any more than, for example, George Orwell did in *1984*[1] . In fact, analyzing his work from another angle, *A Song of Ice and Fire* speaks of the present, that of the

[1] George Orwell published *1984* in 1949. It is, above all, a metaphor for the fears of his time about the rise of communism and its possible excesses.

author at the time of writing the first volumes of the saga. Moreover, to analyze the present, he uses a theory of international relations that was very much in vogue in the 1990s: political realism. Martin illustrates it perfectly, as did political scientists of the caliber of Henry Kissinger and Samuel Huntington, who reacted to the events published in the media. For this reason, and as will be analyzed from now on, the figure of George R.R. Martin could be considered much more than a novelist or historian, he could also be a political scientist, who carefully analyses a specific period - the end of the 20th century - according to a very precise theory: his own.

HISTORICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The end of the 20th century was marked by the dissolution of the Soviet Union following, among other events, the fall of the Berlin Wall. This collapse triggered numerous crises in the satellite countries beyond the Iron Curtain, such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, which in turn ended up disintegrating in the course of and as a consequence of these conflicts.

With the demise of the Eastern bloc, the bipolar era that had lasted more than half a century came to an end, and the global reconfiguration left a blank page for many political scientists, sociologists and philosophers, who saw the known space mutate dramatically. Historical dualism had disappeared, drifting now towards geopolitical theories that oscillated between utopian universalism and the conflict of civilizations.

On the one hand, as Francis Fukuyama would say[2] (1992), Western capitalist democracy had defeated its communist rival. The world could, according to the political scientist, unify and make the most of a single ideology that had to spread logically to the world as a matter of course[3] . Since communism had failed, the liberal democratic model was the only one capable of imposing itself worldwide and, consequently, no more major conflicts should arise. Profoundly pacifist, Fukuyama's model asserted that no other ideology could replace democratic capitalism, which would eventually become a universal ideology[4] .

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2 Francis Fukuyama is an American political scientist, author of the 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*.

3 The idea of the end of history and cultural conflicts through the manifestation of the "world spirit", the *Weltgeist,* was already established by Hegel in his 1807 work The Phenomenology of Spirit.

4 Francis Fukuyama said that for some countries this transition to liberal democracy could take centuries, but that eventually ideology would prevail everywhere. He has since changed his mind.

In contrast to the Hegelian ideas in Fukuyama's book, other political scientists were more cautious about a unilateral and pacifist outcome of this reshaping of the world. The American author Samuel Huntington (1996), one of the theorists belonging to the realist current of international relations, was one of them. In his book *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996), he analyses the probable future of the world after the collapse of global bilateralism under the following thesis*:* "If one does not hate what one is not, it is not possible to love what one is". From this premise[5], cultural identity becomes for him the determining factor for a civilization to be defined as such (in contrast to barbarism, the term "civilization" was already used at the end of the 18th century[6] to designate a very broad society sharing common cultural, religious, intellectual and political elements). Huntington (1996, p.21) states: "It is these cultural identities that define the structures of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-Cold War world"[7] . The quest for power and wealth remains the leitmotif of every civilization.

The author classifies nine well-defined civilizations[8] - although he contemplates the importance of only seven of them - from which most of the world's conflicts since the end of the Cold War have arisen:

Figure 1: Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations

5 The premise is not his, but Michael Dibdin's, and appears in the 1994 novel *Dead Lagoon*.

6 It was Victor Riqueti, Marquis de Mirabeau, who, in 1756, used the term "civilization" in his book *L'Ami des Hommes*, a term hitherto reserved exclusively for a legal framework.

7 HUNTINGTON, S. (1996). *The clash of civilizations*. Paris, Odile Jacob, pp. 21.

8 The civilizations are: Western, Chinese, Islamic, Japanese, Hindu, African, Latin American, Orthodox and Buddhist.

According to Huntington (1996), the concepts of a "new world order" and "universal civilization" are utopian, since they assume that a liberal and universal democracy is possible. Above all, this universalism would imply that society could no longer be governed by the laws of human nature. For Huntington, as for Thucydides, Hobbes or Machiavelli long before him, this is impossible. These four authors defend the belief perfectly defined by Hans Morgenthau[9] (1952) that "the world, imperfect from a rational point of view, is the result of forces that are inherent in human nature. To improve the world, one has to work with those forces, not against them". Is it possible that George R.R. Martin espouses the same belief in his High Fantasy work?

THE WORK OF GEORGE H.H. MARTIN FROM A HISTORICAL-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Slavoj Zizek[10] (2001; 2011) describes all kinds of cultural work as a "condensed reality that offers more than our everyday experiences. It is a reinterpretation of political history in the light of contemporary issues"[11] (in Flisfeder and Willis, 2014). In this sense, we find it interesting to analyze George H.H. Martin's work not in the usual way, i.e. by looking for historical analogies in the work of High Fantasy[12], but by looking at how events contemporary to his writing have influenced the work and, consequently, how George R.R. Martin's work can be seen in the context of an interpretation of political history in the light of contemporary issues, of which Martin's world is not lacking.

From this point of view, Martin's work is much more a summary of contemporary geopolitics, inspired by the political science theories of his time, than a history book about the Middle Ages. Like the two leading American political scientists of the 1990s, Fukuyama and Huntington, George Martin began writing the first volume of his saga in 1991, just after the end of the Cold War and in the midst of uncertainty about the world's geopolitical future. His first book was

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9 Hans Joachim Morgenthau is a German political scientist. He defends and defines the realist theory of international relations and is considered the Machiavelli of the 20th century.

10 Slavoj Zizek is a Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic. He is the author of *The Coming Subjectivity: Critical Essays*, in which he analyses the impact of mass culture and modern art on the collective Western imagination.

11 FLISFEDER, M.; WILLIS, L.P. (2014). *Zizek and Media Studies: a reader*. Palgrave-Mac Millan.

12 George R.R. Martin has drawn on many episodes in history, such as the War of the Two Roses between the Lancastrian and York families between 1455 and 1487.

published in 1996, as was Huntington's work. The second volume of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga is titled *Clash of Kings* (1998) when Huntington's book is titled *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), which is no coincidence. Although Martin readily admits that he is inspired by the works of Tolkien, Tad Williams or Maurice Druon, he is much more than a literary writer, he is first and foremost a theorist who adds to the theory of Samuel Huntington with whom his work shares many similarities.

Song of Ice and Fire is, in this sense, a story about fears of the coming new world order and Western political institutions. Chaos and violence prevail in both works: Huntington's predicts it and Martin's illustrates it. The aim of the characters in the saga is identical to that of the contemporary political actors in the play: to end political disorder and bring about a "new world order" by ascending to the "Iron Throne". While the Game of Thrones universe describes the fate of nine houses (or families) on an imaginary continent, Westeros[13] , divided among seven kingdoms, Samuel Huntington theorizes the existence of nine (or seven major) civilizations that will inevitably come into conflict. The fate of the nine families[14] with their clashes to gain the Iron Throne and rule the seven kingdoms is, as can be read, not far from Huntington's theory. For both authors, the method is the same: the end justifies the means.

Figure 2. The families of Games of Thrones

[13] *Westeros* in the original version.

[14] Baratheon, Targaryen, Lannister, Bolton, Tyrell, Greyjoy, Stark, Arryn and Tully.

THE "WINTER THREAT" AND REALIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

According to realist theory, if international civilization can be considered a myth - although it is impossible to deny the globalization of world trade - civilizations will, on the one hand, tend to claim their identities and, on the other, associate - or oppose - each other according to their cultural affinities. Hating, therefore, is a necessity of human survival. Man needs to come into conflict with the "non-native" in order to know what "native" means.

The three main authors and theorists of realist theory are Thucydides, Hobbes and Machiavelli, and their hypotheses can be summarized as follows: politics is power and survival, the state of nature is the state of war. Therefore, the actors in the political system must prepare for war[15] and do everything possible to survive, even if this means ignoring certain scruples. That is practically the motto that runs through all the adventures and conflicts in Martin's saga, the threat of winter[16] (Winter is coming), to refer to this permanent state of survival that the world order - of this alternative world - needs. From it, we can extract different impressions of the realist theory itself, in many passages of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

If we talk about Thucydides, considered the father of the realist theory of international relations, we can also talk about the perpetual global war in the territories imagined by Martin. Thucydides was an Athenian nobleman who fought in the Peloponnesian War. After being banished from Athens for losing a battle, he began writing his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (431 BC - 404 BC), a work that made him not only one of the greatest historians, but also one of the great theorists of political science. In his search for the origins of the conflict between Athens and Sparta, he came to the conclusion that this was the basis of political realism: that it is all about power politics. According to this, history is an eternal restart because human nature is incapable of change. An idea, as noted above, very much present in Martin's pages and in his discourses on the theory of power:

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[15] *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you want peace, prepare for war, a phrase attributed to Jules Caesar but written by the writer Vegetius vers 390.

[16] *Winter is coming* is the Stark family motto

> [Renly] Let us be blunt, my lady, Stannis would make an appaling king. Nor is he like to become one. Men respect Stannis, even fear him, but precious few have ever loved him.
> [Catelyn] He is still your elder brother. If either of you can be said to have a right on the Iron Throne, it must be Lord Stannis.
> [Renly] Tell me, what right did my brother Robert ever have to the Iron Throne?.... Robert won the throne with his warhammer. He swept a hand across the campfires that burned from horizon to horizon. Well, there is my claim, as good as Robert's ever was. If your son supports me as his father supported Robert, he'll not find me ungenerous. I will gladly confirm him in all his hands, titles, and honors. He can rule in Winterfell as he pleases. He can even go on calling himself King in the North if he likes, so long as he bends the knee and does me homage as his overlord. King is only a word, but fealty, loyalty, service... those I must have[17] .

Machiavelli was a 15th century Italian philosopher, famous, among other things, for his book *The Prince* (1513), a work in which he analyses the reasons for the political success of certain rulers despite a hostile environment. For him, morality is secondary when survival is at stake, which inaugurates a modern vision of politics as a technique in its own right, reduced to a struggle to conquer or maintain power. We also see this in Martin's work: once King Robert Baratheon dies, leaving the Iron Throne empty, every character in the saga - all more or less animated by a thirst for power - is likely to claim it.

This idea is also shared by the third important philosopher of the realist current. Thomas Hobbes, the 17th century English philosopher, whose book *Leviathan* (1651) describes the state of nature as an anarchy, a state of permanent war in which man is a wolf to man *-homo homini lupus-*.

George R.R. Martin illustrates this idea in the second volume of his saga:

> The Iron Throne of Aegon the Conqueror was a tangle of nasty barbs and jagged metal teeth waiting for any fool who tried to sit too comfortably[18] ... King Robert's brothers Stannis and Renly had joined the fighting... and

[17] MARTIN, G.R.R. (1998), A clash of Kings. London. Harper Voyager, pp. 319-320.
[18] MARTIN, G.R.R. (1998), A clash of Kings. London. Harper Voyager, pp. 363

> both of them kings now. Realm's got more kings than castle's got rats. Even Lannister men questioned how long Joffrey would hold the Iron Throne. The lad's got no army but them gold cloaks, and he's ruled by a eunuch, a dwarf and a woman[19] .

HOBBES IN A DRAGON COUNTRY

As mentioned above, the *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga is set in Westeros, the continent of the Seven Kingdoms. House Targaryen had ruled the continent for centuries, but after a rebellion, Robert Baratheon defeated the Targaryens with the help of Eddard Stark and became king. Since then, he has tried to maintain an uneasy peace.

Thomas Hobbes wrote that life is dirty, brutish and short. George Martin wrote that war turns us all into monsters. From these aspects, the characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* often have very short lives and their deaths are often violent and/or unexpected. This brutality, especially in the television version, has repeatedly challenged the preconceptions of viewers and critics, but, in many ways, they are nothing more than an illustration of Thomas Hobbes' ideas. On the Iron Throne, as in Hobbes' world, no one can be trusted, everyone is capable of betrayal and murder when their own survival is at stake. In the state of nature, even the strongest are not protected. Every person is a potential murderer and, above all, every person is a potential enemy.

In this context, it is true that George R.R. Martin's work can be read in two ways: the first, the most studied, is that of the slow and violent departure from feudalism towards modernity through the delegation of power by means of a political legitimacy that is no longer familiar. The clan gives way to the state, to the Leviathan. But Martin could equally well analyze the contemporary geopolitical context in the very writing of the first volumes of his saga: that of the exit from a relatively stable world dominated by two strong and powerful blocs and which, after the demise of one of them, enters a phase of uncertainty and future chaos.

Huntington, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, predicted, based on his theory, the 9/11 attacks, the conflict in Sudan, the Rohingya conflict in Burma and,

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[19] MARTIN, G.R.R. (1998), A clash of Kings. London. Harper Voyager, pp. 416

more recently, the conflict in Ukraine. Martin also predicted long years of instability and particularly violent conflicts from his own fiction. His reading of the present - and even of the future - is as much his own work as Huntington's.

Morality, or rather the absence of it when it is useful, is another very important element in realist theorists. For example, Machiavelli wrote in chapter XVIII of *The Prince*: "Promises are binding only on those who believe them. A prince is often forced, in order to maintain his states, to act against his word, against charity, against humanity, against religion. For a Prince, then, to set out to conquer and maintain the State, the means will always be esteemed honorable and praised by all; for the common man judges only by what he sees and what happens.

George R.R. Martin shares, in his pages, this vision of morality: the end justifies the means. For example, when King Robert Baratheon wishes to have the pregnant Daenerys Taergaryen assassinated, Ned Stark opposes this decision, telling the king:

> [Ned Stark] You send hired knives to kill a fourteen-year-old girl and still quibble about honour" Do it yourself Robert. The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword, Look her in the eyes before you kill her. See her tears, hear her last words. You owe her that much at least... I will not be part of murder, Robert. Do as you will, but do not ask me to fix my seal to it.
> [Robert Baratheon] You are the King's hand, Lord Stark. You will do as I command you, or I'll find me a Hand who will.
> [Ned Stark] I wish him every success... I thought you a better man than this, Robert. I thought we had made a noble king.
> [Out, damn you, I'm done with you. And make certain I never look on your face again or, I swear, I'll have your head on a spike![20]
> [...]
> [Robert Baratheon] Like it or not, you are my Hand, damn you. The Targaryen Girl. Seven hells, don't start with her again. That's done. I'll hear no more of it.
> [Ned Stark] Why would you want me as your Hand, if you refuse to listen to my counsel?
> [Robert Baratheon] Why? Why not? Someone has to rule this damnable kingdom...[21]

[20] MARTIN, G.R.R. (1996), *A Game Of Thrones*. London, Harper Voyager, pp. 343-344.
[21] Ibid. pp.414-415

However, Ned Stark will refuse to do the job his King has asked him to do, thus opposing the Machiavellian principles that animate the entire saga. This unquestioning ethic will be the cause of his downfall. Ned Stark consistently refused to learn the lessons offered by Machiavelli, despite the warnings of other characters, such as Cersei Lannister: "when you play the game of thrones, you win or you die. There is no middle ground[22] ".

The death of Robert Baratheon and the inability of the vigilante Ned Stark to maintain order in the Seven Kingdoms, once the throne is vacated, throws Westeros into chaos. Order is disrupted and civil war breaks out. This situation, which is the premise of George R.R. Martin's entire saga, resembles an event that took place at the time of his writing: the particularly bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia after the fall of the Soviet bloc and the death of Tito. Until his death in 1980, Tito managed to maintain unity between the various republics that made up the country, despite their religious and cultural differences, thanks to a very authoritarian policy. Between 1980 and 1991, instability gradually set in and nationalism was exacerbated. In 1991, leaderless for more than ten years and influenced by the independence demanded by other republics of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia disappeared and civil war broke out in one of its republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is plausible that George R.R. Martin was influenced by this episode, a fact he did not find in a history book, but by reading the news.

[22] Ibid, pp. 471

HUNTINGTON AND MARTIN: CONVERGENCES

There are many parallels between Huntington's theory and Martin's work. The most relevant points are worth highlighting:

Samuel Huntington	George R.R. Martin
Year of publication: 1996	Year of publication of volume 1: 1996
The demise of the Soviet Union makes global political stability fragile	The death of King Aegon of Targaryen weakens the political stability of the seven kingdoms.
There are seven major civilizations dividing the world	There are seven kingdoms on the continent called Westeros
The West is no longer the only powerful civilization	King's Landing is the capital of the seven kingdoms, but it is no longer the most important kingdom but shares powers with other kingdoms (Dorne, Arryn's Vale, Winterfell,...).
International politics is multipolar	International politics is no longer centered within the hands of a single king.
Conflicts occur mostly between different ethnic or cultural groups.	The people of the Seven Kingdoms are made up of various ethnic groups and cultures corresponding to each of the kingdoms.
The forces of integration in the world balance the natural tendencies towards cultural affirmation and awareness of being a civilization.	Ethnic groups and cultures were not so important before the claim to the throne by the seven kingdoms. Then it became fashionable.
In the absence of a strong state (or leader), chaos and anarchy reign.	With the death of King Aegon of Targaryen, the absence of a strong and legitimized king plunged the seven kingdoms into civil war and chaos.

THE END OF THE SAGA?

The television series has run for seven seasons. The script for these seasons was not entirely the brainchild of George R.R. Martin, who for more than ten years has not published a sequel to his saga, which now has five books out of seven. The screenwriters of the successful series, unable to wait any longer, decided to continue it with the fifth season, which is partly inspired by volumes 4 and 5 of Martin's novels, but which also includes new elements not present in the literary saga. If George R.R. Martin were to rely exclusively on episodes of the story to describe the misadventures of his characters, he should have no difficulty in publishing the last two chapters of his saga. However, an analysis of the publication dates of his works in the United States shows that the inspiration problem he seems to suffer from is not limited to these last two releases. His first book was published in 1996, the second in 1999, the third in 2000, the fourth in 2005 and the last to date in 2011, i.e. eleven years ago. Perhaps it is not George R.R. Martin, the historian, who suffers from "writer's block", but George R.R. Martin, the political scientist.

Society and democracy are changing. Since the end of the Cold War and the "victory" of capitalist democracy, these two concepts - democracy and capitalism - have been challenged by other systems and ideologies that seem to be more successful. And therein lies the problem: our model of society is still derived from the Enlightenment. It is not - or is no longer - adapted to the world and the problems arising from its multiple interconnections.

It is interesting to note that the only social scientists concerned with cultural studies and the close links between art and politics are systematically situated on the extreme left of the political spectrum. Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Zizer, Pablo Iglesias, Edgar Morin, etc., are or have been convinced Marxists. Called *postmodernists,* they are the only ones who dare to criticize capitalism, today inseparable from democracy. And that is the problem, because perhaps it is not the political model that is in crisis, but the economic model. And on this point, George R.R. Martin and realist theory can do nothing.

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DON'T FEAR THE SCIENCE. LEARNING BIOTECHNOLOGY WITH DINOSAURS, ZOMBIES, MAD DOCTORS AND MONSTERS

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INTRODUCTION

The use of clips from films and TV series for educational issues is a common practice. It helps to engage students to the subject to be tough and improve their attention (Rose, 2003; Sanchez-Angulo, 2023). Entertainment films can also be used to educate the public on complex themes like the applications from biotechnology. Although the term "biotechnology" seems actual, in fact we have been practicing this discipline for millennia, when we first began to domesticate plants and animals for our own benefit. Evidently, this scientific knowledge could also be applied to understand the functioning of human beings.

Unfortunately, a majority of plays depicts the science of biotechnology under a negative light. Few are the ones that accurately depict the advances and its social implications. It is not surprising if we consider that the first written work dealing with the issues of scientific manipulation of living beings did so from a negative perspective, warning of the dangers for human beings of playing God. In 1818, Mary Shelley glimpsed the dilemmas that could arise from

the misapplication of biotechnology in her work *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. Shelley's novel is a perfect combination of various bioethical issues such as the creation of artificial life and human experimentation. This novel also gave birth to one of the icons of our current culture: the Mad Scientist, a character that could be defined as a person who plays at being god thanks to science, and who usually loses control over his own creation. Later works continued her legacy being one of the most famous the writer Herbert George Wells and his infamous Doctor Moreau, an evil vivisectionist that creates hybrids between human and animals.

Probably those works are the origin of the actual public mistrust in biotechnological products, especially regarding the plants and animals that are genetically improved for food production. People see genetically modified food as dangerous without knowing that they are already consuming genetically modified food for centuries, even millennia (FDA, 2023). One notable example is the actual *Star Ruby* grapefruit, a mutant obtained by using gamma irradiation (Ahloowalia, 2004), so, it can be said that the *Star Ruby* is a kind of "Hulk of the fruits". This mutant variety is even considered as "organic" by the European Union food legislation. And as we will see in this article, even today's life-saving biomedical applications are not free from such mistrust. Despite this, even films that show the alleged negative aspects can be used to show the real impact of biotechnology in society. We will discuss here some of those movies.

JURASSIC PARK

The myth of Frankenstein, as an example of losing control over a creation, is a constant in the numerous films that deals with biotechnological issues. *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) is a canonical example. But also, it was the movie that made not only dinosaurs, but animal cloning and DNA sequencing fashionable.

The movie is based in the homonymous book from Michael Crichton. Both plays popularize the idea of recovery ancient DNA from fossils, a scientific field known today as Paleogenetics (Figure 1). Although the DNA from dinosaurs is not feasible due to their existence 65 million years ago and the oldest successfully recovered DNA dates back to 2 million years ago, it is possible

to use the technology to recover DNA from our ancestors like the Neanderthals (Green, 2008). Those discoveries were recognized with the 2022 Nobel Prize award to Svante Pääbo. Regarding animal cloning, three years after *Jurassic Park* movie, it was announced the birth of Dolly, the first mammal to be cloned (Wilmut, 1997).

Figure 1: DNA extraction from a fossil as depicted in the movie *Jurassic Park* (Left image) and in a real laboratory of paleogenetics (Right image). The protective gear is to avoid contamination of the fossil sample with present DNA from the person handling the sample.
Sources: Left image: frame from *Jurassic Park*, Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1993. Right Image. Picture from Heintzman, 2013.

Right now, animal cloning is a profitable biotech business with numerous applications in livestock farming and specially the pet-cloning services (Keefer, 2015). Curiously, there are private companies that emulate Hammond's character and try to resurrect extinct animals such as the woolly mammoth or the Tasmanian tiger through cloning (Newcom, 2023). However, it does not seem that these efforts will be successful for the time being. In 2009, an attempt was made to clone the bucardo, a type of Spanish mountain goat that became extinct in 2000 and from which cryopreserved tissues were stored. Although the animal was born, it died within minutes (Folch, 2009).

BLADE RUNNER

Before *Jurassic Park* the movie *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) already introduced us to biosynthetic living beings such as cloned owls and snakes with serial numbers on their scales. And of course, the replicants with their enhanced physical capabilities but with their very limited life span due to their unstable DNA. Once again, we find the creature-creator confrontation, this time between the "God of biomechanics" Eldon Tyrell and his creation, the charismatic Roy Batty (probably Rutger Hauer's best perfomance), a replicant of the nexus-6 type.

That instability of the DNA shown by the replicants could be explained by a misfunction of the telomerase, a protein involved in maintaining chromosome length in our cells and implicated in the aging process. Actually, the telomerase is the molecular target for the development of different therapies. For example, the Spanish company *Telomere Therapeutics* is developing treatments for diseases such as pulmonary fibrosis and renal fibrosis (CNIO, 2020).

Another prophecy from this movie that is being fulfilled is the existence of semi-synthetic and "serial numbered" living beings. In 2010 Craig Venter announced the creation of the semisynthetic bacterium *Mycoplasma laboratorium*, also known as *Synthia*. The whole DNA of this living being is artificially synthesized. It was then introduced into a cell chassis deprived for DNA from the bacterium *Mycoplasma capricolium*. Within the artificial DNA, Venter and his team introduced four nucleotide sequences encoding a series of messages that acted as watermarks. Among those sequences was a quote from James Joyce that reads. "To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life" (Gibson, 2020).

I AM LEGEND
DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

I Am Legend (Francis Lawrence, 2007) and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Rupert Wyatt, 2011) revolve around the same plot idea: gene therapy is dangerous and can create monsters. In the former, at the very beginning, a doctor announces that she has found a cure for cancer by modifying a measles virus. The bad news is that one of its side effects is to turn patients into zombies. In the second, a biotechnologist designs a virus to treat Alzheimer's disease and to facilitate its inoculation creates an

airborne virus, so he ends up with a super contagious virus that makes intelligent monkeys and melts the human brains. In reality, biotechnologists are not as sloppy as those in the movies and gene therapy using viruses is proving to be a very effective therapeutic tool for treating some kind of cancers. For example, the CAR-T cell therapy consist is a type of treatment in which a patient's T cells (a type of immune cell) are changed in the laboratory by introducing new genetic information using a virus, so they will bind to cancer cells and kill them (NIH, 2020). In the case of neurological disorders some attempts have been made and it is hoped that in the future there may be therapies for its treatment.

SPLICE

The production of therapeutic proteins on large scale is one of the most important, and profitable, biotechnological fields. For example, the insulin used to treat diabetes is produced by transgenic bacteria that contains DNA that codes for a human protein (Baeshen, 2014). Other important lines of biotechnological research that are in full swing and that will have a great future impact are the creation of organs for transplantation (Wang, 2019) and the use of incubator machines capable of completing *ex-utero* fetal development as can be seen in figure 2 (Partridge, 2017). All these topics are dealt with in the film *Splice* (Vicenzo Natali 2009).

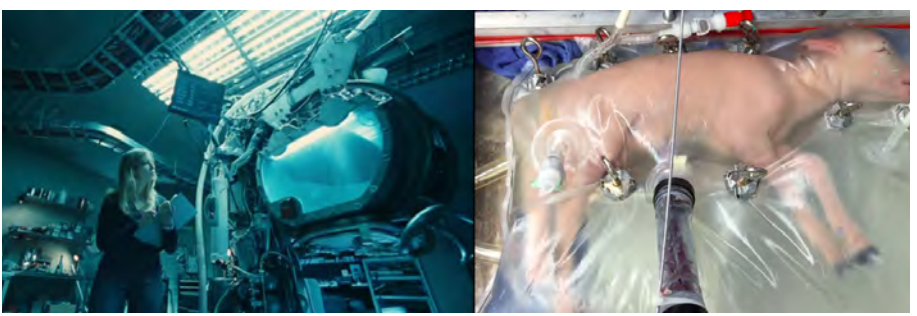

Figure 2: Extra uterine systems for fetal development as depicted in the movie *Splice* (Left image) and in a real laboratory (Right image).
Sources: Left image: frame from *Splice*, Vincenzo Natali, Warner Bros Pictures, 2009. Right Image. Picture from Partridge, 2017.

In this film we have not one, but two doctors Frankenstein, and they are married. This couple of genetic engineers want to create a new life form by hybridizing the genomes of several species, including the human genome. Their goal is to create a transgenic hybrid being that can be used to produce therapeutic proteins on a large scale. As stated before, we are already doing that with bacteria, yeast and even animal cells, in a quite simply and cheap way. There is no need to create a hybrid being as the one depicted, but then we wouldn't have a monster in the movie.

The most original aspect of this movie is that the biotech company, for which the Frankenstein couple works, forbids them to continue with their experiments on ethical, and also economical, grounds. Usually, in the movies, that's not the case. At present, the portrayal of an evil biotech company that stops at nothing to pursue wrongful, yet profitable objectives, is a stereotype found in countless movies such as the *Umbrella Corporation* and the *Weyland-Yutani Corporation* from the *Resident Evil* and *Alien* franchises, respectively.

DERANGED

An example of evil biotech enterprise can be found in the South Korean movie *Deranged* (Park Jung-woo, 2012). The plot of the film is at follows. A group of scientists from the company *ChoA Pharmaceutics* wants to treat Alzheimer's disease with a protein produced by an insect parasite known as the horsehair worm (*Paragordius tricuspidatus*). The larva of the parasite grows inside insects like crickets and grasshoppers. Once they reach the adult size, a worm of 40 cm long with a diameter of 1 millimeter, they take control of the host's brain and force them to drop into the water, where the worm is released by bursting the host.

The scientists have the "brilliant" idea of genetically modifying the worm to parasitize humans and produce an altered protein capable of curing Alzheimer's disease. The bad news is that instead of curing Alzheimer's what happens is that a giant Alien-like worm develops inside the person. So, at the same time they develop a drug to control the worm infection.

But it turns out that the company goes bankrupt, so the scientists devise and evil plan. They decide to release the worm eggs into the drinking water supply,

causing a massive infection of the population. After that, they try to blackmail the South Korean government to buy the secret patent for their antiparasitic drug in order to refloat their company. One detail the screenwriters forgot is that patents are not secret. Patents are public legal documents that describe the scientific procedures in detail and that can be accessed by anyone anywhere in the world. So, the South Korean government should have simply done a Google search instead of being blackmailed. It is true that Biotech companies are very profitable, but they don't do their business trying to kill their clients. Usually, they want to sell drugs that cure them, so they can earn money.

RAMPAGE

Based on a video game, *Rampage* (Brad Peyton, 2018) is the first movie that threats with the use of CRISPR technology for genetic edition of living beings. And again, we have the message that "biotechnology is dangerous" from the start. Just at the beginning of the movie we can read the following phrases: "In 1993, a breakthrough new technology, known as CRISPR, gave scientists a path to treat incurable diseases through genetic editing. In 2016, due to its potential for misuse, the U.S. Intelligence Community designated genetic editing a 'Weapon of Mass Destruction and Proliferation'.".

Of course, once again, a devious biotech company want to use the technology for the development of bioweapons. Although at a certain point of the plot a scientist comments that CRISPR gene editing could be used to cure rare diseases, in the movie this technology is wrongly defined as a technique capable of combining different biological properties such as the speed of a cheetah or the strength of a beetle. And in case it wasn't clear in the introduction how dangerous biotechnology is, the director emphasizes it from the very first sequence. After the threatening words we have read above, we are transported to the inside of a space station because CRISPR experiments are so dangerous that they must be conducted in a laboratory totally isolated from the Earth's biosphere. Once inside the space station we contemplate a whole trail of destruction. Predictably, there is a leak and three small capsules reach Earth. Inside them there is a pathogen which spreads like a typical green aerosol. And coincidentally, the capsules are going to fall in a swamp in Florida where there is

an alligator, in a forest in Wyoming where there is a wolf and in an animal shelter in San Diego where there is an albino gorilla. The three of them are transformed in *Kaiju*-like mutant monsters that destroys everything on their paths.

The fact is that it is true that CRISPR technology is dangerous in the wrong hands. E.g. in the year 2018 a Chinese scientist named He Jiankui was the first to use CRISPR technology for the genetic modification of human beings. By illegal experiments he modified the genome of three newborn babies with the aim of removing a cell-receptor essential for HIV infection. The problem is that the removal was inefficient, so now the babies have some cells with the receptor and other without it. The future consequences on the health of those babies is unknown (Raposo, 2019). On the other hand, CRISPR gene editing have been used to cure successfully patients that suffers for genetic disease such as the falciform anemia. In this case, all the bioethics and correct procedures were followed, and now this new therapy has been approved for its use in humans (Sheridan, 2023).

GATTACA

In a particular sense, *GATTACA* (Andrew Niccol, 1997) represents all the good and all the bad that we can achieve with biotechnology. This film shows a new version of the *Brave New World* imagined by Aldous Huxley, and to which we seem to be getting disturbingly close in some aspects (Jabr, 2013). Shot in a retro-futuristic style, except for the presence of a microscope and a urine analyzer, in GATTACA there is a total absence of the sophisticated biotechnological machinery that does appear in other science fiction productions. In principle, this future world is a utopian society in which parents have had the option of choosing the best genetic combination for their future offspring. They will not suffer from diseases, they will be physically perfect, intellectually valid, etc. Society itself has become eugenically perfect with the best of intentions. But as the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with them. And in that healthy utopia a genetic racism is established towards those who were born before such technology was accessible and who are therefore "not valid". This film serves as a warning that we, as members of society, bear the ultimate responsibility for using this new knowledge wisely or otherwise.

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between cinema and science has not been easy, even though the former owes its existence to the latter in the form of technological advances that made it possible to capture images in motion. While scientists seek to comprehend the "why" of things, filmmakers endeavor to express their vision of the world. According to Professor Christopher Frayling, there exists a perceptible "gap" between the average viewer's understanding of science and the reality of scientific work (Frayling, 2005). Cinema often simplifies this gap by portraying scientific activity as a series of "Eureka!" moments, sophisticated apparatus, dazzling lights, lightning, and explosions. Rarely do we see the everyday or methodological parsimony of laboratory work, or the vulgarity of the challenges associated with securing research funding. An exception to this rarity is found in some episodes of the captivating series *The Big Bang Theory* (Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, 2007).

Frayling theorizes that the representation of scientists in cinema has consistently reflected the predominant concerns of specific historical periods. In the 1930s it was medicine, in the 1950s the focus shifted to the atomic bomb, and from the 1970s onward, environmental issues took center stage. Starting from the 1980s, genetic manipulation and biotechnology became the primary preoccupation. The different films discussed here are a representative sample of the different facets of society's fear on biotechnology: the creation of uncontrollable monsters, unstoppable pathogens or greedy biotech companies. But as we have seen, in the real world, all these negative aspects are actually based on scientific, social and ethical advances that have come about thanks to advances in biotechnology. For the audience it is much more attractive to represent as evil someone who has esoteric knowledge that allows him to do things that are reserved for the gods. It is crucial to remember that biotechnology, while a highly sophisticated tool, remains just that—a tool. It will be our decision whether we use it to make a better world or a "brave new world", or as the toast of Doctor Pretorious in *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935), to be gods or monsters.

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FOLK HORROR, GORE AND SPECIAL EFFECTS WHEN EVIL LURKS

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INTRODUCTION

The film *When Evil Lurks* (Demián Rugna, 2023) had its world premiere at the 48th Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), and was subsequently screened at other events such as the Fantastic Fest in Austin (Texas) or the Cannes Film Festival. This film, which merge several subgenres, has attracted the attention of both audiences and critics, and is currently the highest-grossing horror film produced in Argentina, with a gross that currently exceeds 1.5 million dollars (Box Office Mojo, 2024). The film's director, Rugna, began in the feature film world with *The Last Gateway* (2007), but it was with his psychological thriller *Terrified* (2017) with which he enjoyed a greater repercussion around the world, managing to attract the attention of filmmakers such as Guillermo del Toro (Fleming Jr., 2018).

In the case of *When Evil Lurks*, Rugna's fifth feature film, it has also gone down in History for becoming the first Latin American film to win the best film award (the top award) at the Sitges Film Festival, the world's most important

fantastic genre event (Sitges Film Festival, 2023). This milestone has elevated Latin American fantastic genre cinema worldwide; and the film has achieved an astonishing 97% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes (2024), the demanding film review portal. *When Evil Lurks*, which is influenced by Argentinean writers such as Mariana Enríquez or Samanta Schweblin, is located in the context of the new Argentinean horror cinema, where we find other films such as *Los olvidados* (Luciano Onetti and Nicolás Onetti, 2017) or *Mete miedo* (Néstor Sánchez Sotelo, 2022), offering to the audience high doses of blood, gore and special effects. All this, through a very particular folk horror.

WHEN FOLK HORROR LURKS

One of the subgenres available in *When Evil Lurks* is folk horror. This is a special type of horror and storytelling that reflects the terrifying side of folklore (Jones, 2021, p. 16). Furthermore, although folk horror often uses tropes, ideas and figures from folklore, it always does so in a complex way (Keetley and Heholt, 2023, p. 16). This subgenre was born in the United Kingdom and takes as its basis the so-called *unholy trinity*, consisting of the foundational films *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), *Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971) and *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973); however, although this triumvirate is often cited as milestones where the defining elements of folk horror first coalesced, it was originated in the late nineteenth century as a dark response to modernity, although its roots go back even further (Edgar and Johnson, 2024, p. 1); and today it has reached all parts of the world (Janisse, 2021).

To specify those elements that make up folk horror, we can apply the *Folk Horror Chain* by Adam Scovell (2017), one of the most useful metrics for a subgenre that is not easy to define (Ingham, 2018, p. 10). The first element that is part of this chain, and that differentiates folk horror from other subgenres such as satanism or witchcraft, is the presence of natural spaces or landscapes, where topography can have adverse effects on the social and moral identity of the characters. The landscape represents an inhospitable place as it is different from society as a whole. The second element is isolation. The landscape must isolate a community of characters to some extent, where the power

of nature creates a sense of isolation compounded by the exclusion of the individual from those communities (Marshall, 2023, p. 189). This isolation can also happen when characters are alienated from some social progress, which can create biased beliefs and moralities, which would be another ingredient of folk horror. Thus, the isolation is not only physical, but also psychic. The last element is the result of this distorted social consciousness along with its consequences: the event, usually through supernatural, demonic or violent methods (Scovell, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18).

The film *When Evil Lurks* fulfils all the conditions of the *Folk Horror Chain*, as it is a story with characters who spend most of their time in a rural space, with an oppressive and increasingly violent and uncomfortable atmosphere. The characters are isolated people in a practically isolated area, and are influenced by a set of beliefs, where the conflict is born within the community; and the final event will be the birth of evil personified. In terms of atmosphere, although there are also moments of night and darkness, *When Evil Lurks* is a daylight horror film. This is not a novel aspect, as it has been done in the past in films such as *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), *Duel* (Stephen Spielberg, 1971), *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), *Long Weekend* (Colin Eggleston, 1978), *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?* (Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, 1976), *Christine* (John Carpenter, 1983), *Cujo* (Lewis Teague, 1983), *Midsommar* (Ari Aster, 2019) or *Pearl* (Ti West, 2022), among others. This atmospheric aspect allows the audience to witness the harshness of the images and the gore due to the greater visual detail available to them. In allusion to gore, or splatter cinema, in aesthetic terms is a type of subgenre focused on visceral and extreme graphic violence, thanks to advances in special effects (Kendrick, 2017, p. 466).

WHEN GORE AND SPECIAL EFFECTS LURK

When Evil Lurks is a film that offers the audience high doses of gore images, but in an undefined time and space in a remote village in Argentina. After hearing several gunshots during the night near a country house, brothers Pedro and Jimi, played by Ezequiel Rodríguez and Demián Salomón, decide to explore the landscape the next day, in the sunlight, to find out what has happened. Both

find the corpse of a person cut in half. This person had planned to arrive at a nearby house to end the life of the dying Uriel, a *rotten* who lives there with his mother and little brother. *Rottens* are people who are incubating evil within themselves (demon-infected people). When a *rotten* appears, something that has happened before in the folklore invented for the film, negative events start to unfold around him or her until the *rotten* finally brings out the evil from inside. This inner evil element is complemented and personified through the grotesque and horrible exterior aspect of the *rotten*. Thus, the opening shots showing the *rotten* Uriel are particularly unpleasant to watch, thanks to the special effects work developed by the Marcos Berta Studio team. In addition, the interior of the house has an atmosphere of putrefaction and rottenness in keeping with its gore aesthetics.

Figure 1: The *rotten* Uriel at the beginning of the film.
Source: Rugna (2023).

On the other hand, the character of Ruiz, played by Luis Ziembrowski, is the landowner of the area where the *rotten* is located. When Ruiz is informed of this presence, he wants the *rotten* to be removed as far as possible from his domain. Despite his initial intentions, Ruiz cannot kill the *rotten* because when dealing with one of them, seven rules must be followed: 1) don't use electric light, as this attracts evil; 2) stay away from animals, as they are the first to become infected and react with aggressive behavior; 3) don't use firearms, as evil will cause them to be used against you (this is why there are *cleaners*, people who are experts in dealing with the *rottens*); 4) don't

hurt *rottens*, as evil can never die; 5) don't come into physical contact with them, as this would be a way of becoming infected; 6) don't mention evil by name, as it may feel invoked; and 7) don't be afraid of dying, as evil feeds on people's fear. These rules, introduced as part of the folklore of the story, will be broken little by little.

When Pedro, Jimi and Ruiz drive the *rotten* away in a van, they lose him from the back when they try to avoid a child on the road. From this situation onwards, the evil that has already contaminated the characters will accompany them for the rest of the story. Consequently, the character of Pedro, who is the protagonist, will have to experience how evil spreads around him, materializing in one misfortune after another. These first scenes of the film are warning the audience that later situations will be more unpleasant and disturbing. To this end, an uncompromising script is used with the characters, as ethically it doesn't protect anyone (rich, poor, pregnant women, children, etc.), not even the protagonist. Among the subsequent unpleasant situations, the closest is a scene where a goat appears (along with its satanic symbolism). At that moment, Ruiz kills one of his goats that has been possessed by evil and is behaving strangely. To end the goat's life, Ruiz uses a rifle, that is a firearm, in violation of the third rule. This breach makes everything worse, causing his pregnant wife to murder him with an axe, and immediately kill herself with this sharp object, repeatedly stabbing it into her head, resulting in a completely gore scene in daylight, with masterful special effects that show the audience all the details of the situation.

Figure 2: The consequences of breaking the rules of evil.
Source: Rugna (2023).

Another of the most memorable scenes of the film takes place when Pedro arrives at the house of his ex-wife, Sabrina, played by Virginia Garófalo, to warn of danger and protect his children. In this house, Sabrina lives with Leo, her new husband, with the daughter she has had from this new marriage, called Vicky, and with the two sons she had with Pedro. The eldest of them, called Jair, has an autistic spectrum disorder, which is a key aspect in the development of the story. The house is also inhabited by a pug of Bordeaux; and this dog has been infected by evil for having licked the clothes that Pedro took off (to burn) when he arrived at this house. Suddenly, the dog attacks Vicky, who was close to him. From a gore aesthetic, the scene is not overly explicit because it is the content of the shots that creates an effect in the rhythm of the edition that is particularly violent. Likewise, it is an event that happens suddenly, although the audience suspects it from the detailed shots of the dog licking Pedro's clothes. What the audience understands is that the dog has smashed Vicky's head, but several moments later, the girl reappears without any injuries, as if nothing had happened. This is all part of the game of evil. With this memorable scene, Rugna defies Hitchcock's advice not to film with animals and children. In this case, both share a same scene and shots. Finally, Sabrina's new husband will end the dog's life with a gun, making the situation even worse.

Figure 3: Moments before the dog attack.
Source: Rugna (2023).

Subsequently, Pedro and his brother Jimi take refuge in the house of Mirtha, played by Silvina Sabater, as they try to flee from evil. Mirtha is a character who explains how evil works, as she had to confront it in the past; she also provides more information to the audience (mainly by explaining the seven rules). Mirtha also tells the brothers that evil feeds on people's fear. Therefore, it is Jimi who has to go and look for Pedro's son, and not Pedro, who is afraid of losing him. Mirtha also explains that evil can resurrect people it has already killed to turn them into enemies, as is the case with Sabrina, the ex-wife, evoking an unpleasant scene with Santino, the youngest son.

The last act of *When Evil Lurks* focuses on the search for Uriel, the original *rotten*. This character is in a rural school, under a kind of wooden trapdoor surrounded by corpses, and protected by children who are possessed by evil. It is Mirtha who deduces that he is there, as she tells Pedro that evil likes children, and children like evil. Mirtha also tells him that the original *rotten* must be killed respecting the rules. If this is not done, evil will continue to lurk and spread. The use of children as unsettling and mysterious elements is a classic trope in horror (Maguire, 2023, p. 162), and in the case of this film, the protective children of the third act are introduced into the plot as hostile characters. The use of children as terrifying elements is not a novelty in cinema because it is a trope "that never fails to inspire fear" (Natividad, 2024); and Rugna has at his disposal previous references from films such as *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976), *The Brood* (David Cronenberg, 1979), *Village of the Damned* (John Carpenter, 1995), the previously mentioned *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?*, *Children of the Corn* (Fritz Kiersch, 1984), *Pet Sematary* (Mary Lambert, 1989), *The Children* (Tom Shankland, 2008) or *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008), among others. In addition, there is a connection with the stories of the Argentinean writer Mariana Enríquez, mentioned above, who also often uses the resource of children as terrifying elements.

Then, the children protecting the *rotten* Uriel trick Pedro and lock him in one of the school's rooms; the children then kill Mirtha bloodthirstily, thus preventing her from killing the *rotten*. Finally, Pedro manages to get out of the room and kills the *rotten* by hitting him on the head with a piece of Mirtha's device (a special device used by the *cleaners*). After committing this murder in this bloodbath, evil is born from inside the *rotten*, which is represented by the

character of a child with a body covered in blood. This child begins to walk and goes outside the rural school. In the meantime, the protective children solemnly make way for him and follow him. But before they do so, the boy smears Pedro's forehead with his fingers covered in blood. Pedro will never be able to get rid of this bloodstain, and will be marked by evil forever. In this way, the character will remember that everything he lived through really happened; and everything he lost. These moments of violence through gore aesthetics allow the special effects work to reach its peak.

Figure 4: The birth of evil, represented by a child.
Source: Rugna (2023).

Minutes before the film ends, the *rotten* little brother reappears. The child tells Jimi that he killed the *cleaner* who appeared at the beginning of the story. He also declares him to have ended his mother's life and ate her because evil was ordering it from inside his mind. This event is related to Jair, Pedro's autistic son, who minutes before the audience had watched how he approached his grandmother (being able to speak to her thanks to evil), who has suffered the same fate. Thus, Jair is also possessed by evil. In this sense, this is an aspect that Mirtha suspected from the moment she saw the child. But she also explained that evil takes longer to decipher the mind of an autistic person. These last moments result in Pedro being forced to end his son's life by burning his body. Thus, the story will end with a desolate character stripped of almost all his loved ones. Evil will be the great triumphant of the plot, which will

begin to spread worldwide. In relation to this denouement and its dark connection with Pedro, the protagonist, it should be noted that we are faced with a story where the figure of the hero doesn't exist. In fact, Pedro's ex-wife tells him that he is a murderer. This fact connects with the idea that in the past, Pedro tried to end Jair's life because he was unable to accept his autistic state. It is also suggested that he may have attempted suicide with his two children because he could not stand his life with Sabrina. Thus, this attempted murder may be what attracted the evil around Pedro to finish what he was unable to do in the past.

CONCLUSIONS

The inclusion of folk horror and gore aesthetics through the special effects work turns *When Evil Lurks* into a horror film of special interest within contemporary fantastic cinema. It is a work that, in addition to offering a second reading (the past world pandemic, the recent arrival of the political extreme right in Argentina, the problems with the use of pesticides in the rural areas, etc.), has been able to put Latin American fantastic cinema in the international spotlight (especially after its screening in Sitges). In this sense, it is a film whose phenomenon resembles the Spanish case of *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007), the Cuban case of *Juan of the Dead* (Alejandro Brugués, 2011), the Brazilian case of *As boas maneiras* (Marco Dutra and Juliana Rojas, 2017), or the Guatemalan case of *La llorona* (Jayro Bustamante, 2019), among others.

On the other hand, *When Evil Lurks* is a film that fuses subgenres, apart from folk horror. In this way, a different product with its own personality is created. Thus, we find the presence of subgenres such as hillbilly horror, zombies, dystopias, road movies, etc. All this, together with the influence of filmmakers such as Tobe Hooper, George A. Romero, Wes Craven, John Carpenter or Lucio Fulci, among many others. These aspects enrich the film, which differs from many others by moving away from night-time settings almost all the time, and avoiding the typical *jump scare* produced above all by the sound impacts on the audience. Finally, we can conclude that this milestone will happen again in the future of Latin American fantastic cinema. For this, large doses of horror, gore and special effects will be necessary, but enriched with a story that will engage the increasingly demanding audience.

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FEAR AND FANTASY. ANALYZING EMOTION IN DEL TORO's *PAN's LABYRINTH*

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INTRODUCTION

Emotion has for a long time stood at the center of attention of both art and science, not to mention our very own curiosity as researchers and readers. Despite this centrality, the topic of emotion has not been put to rest as one might imagine at first.

In the case of film studies, a domain concerning itself with studying and analyzing an art form whose objective is often eliciting any form of emotion in the eye of the consumer, the topic isn't terribly prioritized, as most references to emotions are often made under a general perception of common sense. Specialists in the field of filmmaking agree that a major limitation here is the fact that tools, such as editing techniques, and implicitly their effectiveness, are often derived from a filmmakers own visions, and that, in this case, the advancements of psychology are a much needed wave that should offer some scientific validity to the topic (Morante, 2017). Hanich (2021) makes the argument that, in referencing emotion, film theorists often neglect entire subcategories of emotions and their underlying nuances. In that sense, many bodies of work,

when referencing one emotion or another, without clearly operationalizing them, will inevitably be prone to error. An author may therefore make the argument for a three-shot montage sequence of a roaring lion symbolizing the anger of the Russian people in Eisenstein's work (Azizah et al., 2019). In doing so, the analysis never explicitly goes into further detail of what exactly is that anger defined as, its intensity, and perhaps manifestations, that could be better understood if framed under a common system of defined emotions. None of this is to say that the current state of the literature on emotion is flawed, far from it, but signs of it being open to improvements are being pointed out by many more researchers who begin asking the same questions.

If, when trying to understand society, we look at sociology for setting the pace, then it is only natural that in any discussion on emotion, it is psychology who should pave the way for such a system for defining emotion. Today, most research made at the intersection of film and psychology (from the views of the psychologists), on the topic of emotion, is mostly limited to analyzing the emotions felt by an audience from experiencing a visual material. This is why most theories focus on artifact emotions versus representational emotions. as felt by the viewer (Plantinga, 2009), or debate whether emotion towards a character is derived from empathizing with them (Coplan, 2004; Neill, 1996) or from sympathizing them directly (Carroll, 1998). We can clearly see the natural reasoning behind it, as measuring an audience's emotional response can provide the necessary statistical confidence in one's study. This however, speaks very little, if at all, about the less researched phenomenon of the emotionality of the work of art.

In spite of this, the intersection of the two major fields of study may provide the key for furthering the understanding of emotion in cinema. Combining the stubborn, yet solid, rigorousness of the psychological definitions of emotions, with the tools that allow the confidence to research topics well outside of what is experimentally measurable, that film studies provide, the theoretical bottleneck, and thus the reluctance of researchers over such a fundamental problematic, could be overcome. Such an interdisciplinary approach may be able to create future bridges for new collaborative work between psychologists, film theorists and film practitioners who are now, more than before, beginning to explore each other's methodologies (Tan, 2018).

In order to accomplish this, the current paper proposes a simple path for an exploratory endeavour that should set the grounds for future research questions on the issue of emotion in cinema. When coming from the psychological side, we will use Ekman's model for emotions (2016), as it provides one of the best, and most experimentally consolidated, taxonomies for the different types and subtypes of emotions. This is further supported by Ekman's field work and system of facial expressions which can be a powerful tool for emotion identification, especially when used in such a visually potent field as film studies.

The analysis will specifically look into fear, particularly applied to scenes belonging to the young protagonist of the 2006 dark fantasy film written, co-produced and directed by Guillermo del Toro, and titled 'Pan's Labyrinth'. The selected movie is a fantasy *par excellence* and is praised by many as a masterpiece, as it manages, through an imaginary - but historically inspired - universe filled with magic, to actually underline, if not enhance, the horrors that have taken place in the period immediately following the Spanish civil war of 1939 (Smith, 2007). The movie, through its careful portrayal of a girl's fantastic adventures through a mystical world overlapped with the real one, succeeds in not making itself a stereotypical children's movie, but in actually creating a very grim, very frightening atmosphere that somehow hasn't lost its sense of wonder. This universe revolves around the notion of fear itself and addresses many questions pertaining to what causes it, what our nature in relation to it can be, and how we cope when faced with it, and so makes for a prime candidate when discussing the emotion of fear for our purposes.

METHODOLOGY

In regards to identifying fear relevant scenes pertaining to the protagonist of the film, Ophelia, we will call upon Ekman's system of facial expression pointers and the defining features that are particular to this type of emotion. According to Ekman's Atlas of Emotion (2016) fear can be of different subtypes depending on intensity, coping ability and timing aspect, ranging from trepidation, all the way to panic, horror, and ultimately, terror. It is also theorized, and experimentally proven, that fear has a strong connection with perceived consequences, even more so than sadness, and so an element

pertaining to both the past (the stimulus or event) and the future (the possible ramifications of removing or failing to remove the danger) is present when individuals feel fear (Ekman, 1989). When it comes to our general response, fear is characterized by behaviours such as avoidance, freezing, screaming, withdrawing, or worrying, as well as sensations of cold or numbness (Ekman, 2016). When speaking of specific responses, these can include raised eyebrows, raised upper eyelid, visible sclera, tensed or stretched lips, higher pitched voice, shortness of breath, trembling or rapid breathing.

While often easily confused with surprise from the facial expression point of view, we will use the contextual narrative to differentiate between scenes made to elicit surprise or fear in the protagonist, as well as suggestions from the model (e.g. surprise has more vertically open mouth, fear has more horizontally stretched lips).

To pursue the second part of the paper, the tools and instruments of film theory, particularly film analysis, will be called upon in order to draw relevant observations. While, to say that the body of work on this topic is vast would be an understatement, or as Stam (2017) puts it: "To paraphrase Godard, one should put whatever one likes in a book on film theory.", we will try to draw from major paradigms in the area. Film analysis approaches can vary, from the semiotic approach to the cultural – historical approach.

For our purposes, we will make use of tools characteristic to the mise-en-scene, symbolic, and narrative methods, which offer the best chance for an exploratory study to draw early palpable connections on the topic. In supporting this perspective, elements of composition, chromatics, script, sound design, visual effects, symbolic relations, narrative aspects and others will be used to analyze the construction of the relevant cinematic universe and if, and how, that connects to the psychological observation of the fear of the protagonist identified by facial and behavioural elements.

RESULTS

In total, over 30 relevant story points where the young protagonist visibly displays fear have been identified. Of those, slightly more than half showcase an element belonging to the fantastic (the fairy, the magic book, the portal etc.). We

can thus observe a balanced distribution of the aspect of fear between the realm of the humans and the realm of magic. This accomplishes two things 1. It goes to show that fear is one of the more important themes of the movie, as is it is equally present throughout, and 2. It reinforces what other authors have pointed out before, that the horrors of war are not overshadowed by the introduction of the element of fantasy, but they are rather enhanced by it. This also, goes to show how the film accomplishes to deliver the insight that reality can be just as cruel and frightening as fantasy. This isn't to say that in the case of 'Pan's Labyrinth' a clear-cut distinction can be made between the two worlds, as they more often than not seamlessly overlap, but an observation of the balanced distribution of fear is no less important.

A similar caution should be made regarding the identification of the emotion of fear in relation to our main character, as current theories point out, no emotion can be completely isolated (Ekman, 1999). The same was the case when analyzing emotion from the young girl's acting and portrayal of her role. Examples where disgust overlapping with fear (e.g. Ophelia's first meeting with captain Vidal) or sadness seamlessly following fear (e.g. Ophelia being scolded by the faun) can be found, but, for now, the focus will no less be on our selected emotion.

Six initial scenes pertaining to the presence of fear involving the fantastic were analyzed, some displaying low levels of fear and some displaying high levels of fear in the acting of our protagonist. Of these, the following two were ultimately selected to be included in the present study as they present an important initial coverage of our findings at these initial stages of the research.

A. Ophelia meets the faun for the first time.

Taking place at night, this scene marks a moment of low intensity fear tied to the element of the fantastic as the little girl is led by the magical fairy to the dark underground section of the labyrinth. Initially, her sense of wonder is perceptible, as she shouts "Echo!" in an attempt to see if anyone is there. The fairy then wakes up the slumbering faun who turns towards the camera while we see Ophelia in the background, and out of focus, being startled by the mystical creature's sudden movement. Next we see the faun in a medium shot directing his

attention at the little girl and welcoming her. The faun's cinematic design choice shows a tall creature covered in signs of the passage of time. Its predominant colours are neutral with a dominating gray complimented by details such as dust and roots. Its inhuman movement, as it tries to unlock his joints, also contributes to creating an atmosphere of uncertainty. The first signs of fear are visible as the female character slowly walks back at the sight of these details, in a full shot, which marks the first distancing behaviours from the potential danger, all the while she keeps him within her sight. From the next shot we can see that Ophelia (soon princess Moanna) is showing other signs of low intensity fear like the slightly open mouth, gently raised eyebrows, and slightly more visible sclera (Figure 1). At the compositional level, the lighting supports the mystical atmosphere with an environment that is moderately lit by the moon, while also sporting a few dark corners which maintain an adequate level of perceived danger. The chromatics are also cold, marked by the dominating blue-gray-black combination, with the faun not being a very vibrantly coloured creature either. The montage is initially more alert as we witness the faster shot switch in the initial interaction between Ophelia and the faun, but this is soon interrupted by a close-up shot of the wooden cassette that the faun was holding, which hosted other fairies that he knew would make Ophelia more at ease. In the dialogue, the thematic of fear is being reintroduced and mentioned explicitly by the faun who asks Ophelia not to be afraid, mirroring Ophelia's first interaction with another main character from the human realm – the captain (another low intensity fear scene) - where she was asked by her mother not to be afraid. As the fairies are set free, they begin flying and dancing towards Ophelia. From the close-up, the camera glides up to another close-up of the faun's now smiling face at the sight of Ophelia easing up and allowing her sense of wonder to take over again as she is distracted by the fairies. Ophelia – Moanna is now feeling safe enough to talk and begins the dialogue with the faun who introduces himself and also reveals her true nature as a princess. At this point in the story we can note that the girl has already shown a pattern of displaying fear towards elements of the fantastic only to show, immediately after, a curiosity towards them as her fear subsides. One such example is when Ophelia is woken up by troublesome sounds around the room only to calm down when she recognizes the creature as being a fairy (then looking like an unappealing insectoid) and showing little to no fear or disgust after. Following this pattern, the interaction between Ophelia and the faun

also takes place in such a manner it seems, as her initial fright is soon replaced by familiarity (likely originating from her true nature as princess of the fantastic world), in spite of the faun's unappealing aesthetic.

Figure 1: Ophelia steps back from the faun with a worried expression.
Source: del Toro, 2006.

In this scene we can see that Ophelia's first interaction with a major agent of the fantastic world - the faun – is also met with some levels of fear, initially made visible by the artistic choice of the full shot which displays the girl making distancing behaviours. This initial tension, at the encounter of a magical creature and continued, albeit lowered, sensation of uncertainty, is illustrated by the elements of composition which moderately support the rather dark, but not horrifying atmosphere. The analyzed film elements all play their roles in supporting both the initial necessary tension and the following dampening of the fear.

B. Escape from the pale man's temple.

In this scene, Ophelia, after completing the assigned task (although having failed to listen to the faun's warnings), finds herself at the end of the long hallway from where she entered via her chalk-made portal, which was now closing on her. We see a close-up of the pale man's hand with the eye in the

centre and the pale man out of focus in the background. This, together with the inhuman noises of the screaming monster and the severe and loud orchestral piece, pinpoint exactly where the danger comes from and what the extent of it is, as it is being fully showcased on screen, both visually and audibly. The colour palette emphasizes the dominating red-yellow combinations. This warm colour scheme, alongside the elegant environment and mise-en-scène (the arches, stained glass, culinary opulence etc.), would initially bring about a feeling of comfort and temptation, but by this moment in the sequence, this red schematic emphasizes the blood details covering the pale man's mouth and veiny eye alluding to the ever-present carnage (the pale man's having been shown to eat numerous children before Ophelia's arrival). This choice in design succeeds in displaying the duality of the colour red, which can thus be associated both with the pleasant (red fruits such as apples and strawberries) and with the unpleasant (if we think about wounds or blood). Immediately after this shot, the camera is switched to a close-up of the girl's reaction to such a display, as we are witness to one of the clearest and most purposefully focused portrayals of fear in the entire film (Figure 2). The sclera is extremely visible, the eyebrows are in their most upright position, the mouth is open and horizontally stretched as we observe pronounced muscle tension at the mouth and cheeks level. This close up allows us to also see the freezing behaviour of the girl being left still holding the chalk upright after her failure to draw another portal. The breathing is panicked and intense as her shoulders lift up with each breath. Cinematically, the shot uses a generous and warm lighting on the girl's face which further emphasizes in detail all of the above. Her clearly defined face and visible expression being brought front and centre, as the camera zooms in, reinforces the gravity of the situation. Her displayed emotion approaches something on the lines of horror - terror, which is one of the highest levels of fear, by intensity, that individuals can experience. This type of fear usually happens at the onset of an inescapable danger that is also quite significant in its impact or perceived consequences – such as death (or a gruesome death). In the next shot we see this made even clearer as the monster is shown again, the same as before, only this time the hand is lowering, and getting out of focus, while the face and body of the monster enter focus in a close-up as he begins to head towards the little girl. This action manages to deliver the significance of incoming danger in a very simple, yet

clear, way – by the shortening proximity to it - which further resonates with the intense levels of fear usually felt when there is no doubt left about the perceived encroaching danger. The next line of shots focus mainly on the action which shows a panicked Moanna try, and succeed, to save herself from this situation by drawing a second portal on the ceiling and making her escape through there. The entire time the inhuman noises of the pale man are present and supported by an intense melodic line. In tune with traditional horror genre techniques, the tension is high all the way through to the end when safety is made clear, both through the narrative elements (the girl gets out of harm's way and closes the door behind her) and compositional elements (the sudden change in chromatics and lighting - from red and bright to blue and dark, the slowing down of shots dynamics, the switch from more close-up shots to medium or full shots – allowing the viewer to see more of the still environment, and less of the dangerous dynamic element, take over the screen), as well as sound design elements (the sudden stop of the tense orchestral music and the quick dimming of the otherworldly sounds made by the monster).

Figure 2: Ophelia's fear at the sight of the pale man approaching.
Source: del Toro, 2006.

The scene perfectly encapsulates a moment of very high intensity fear for the protagonist who has shown some of the clearest signs of this emotion according to theory (paralysis, extremely tense relevant muscles, pronounced

sclera, panicked breathing and shaking). The movie also supports this from a cinematic perspective, adopting simple, classic and effective techniques, that are most recognizable from the horror genre, and which pertain to both the visual and the auditory, as illustrated above.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have observed from the presented analysis on a limited number of scenes, fear in the cinematic universe can be looked at from both the psychological standpoint, and, simultaneously, from a film theory one in what initially seems to be a congruent approach. While far from perfect, this exploration manages to draw several observations essential to future works on the topic: 1. Defining emotion in a rigorous way is actually beneficial and enriching to the endeavours of film analysis from a research perspective. 2. Clear distinctions on the nuances and intensity of the emotion of fear can be made, based on the underlying theory. 3. This distinction appears, at a first glance, to also be very much in tune with supporting elements of composition and narration, as resulted from applying the tools of film analysis on the selected scenes.

While aspects of a more symbolic nature are also present, their support of the emotionality of the scenes tends to be more contextual and requires elements from other paradigms of film analysis in order to provide a more complete picture (e.g. the interpretation of the predominating red palette in the pale man's temple switches its supportive meaning within the same sequence to suggest completely opposing ideas). Elements belonging to a more mise-en-scène analysis tend to be highly in accordance with both the type of emotion elicited, and the intensity of it (as we have observed the varying degrees of light and dark, or the sound design, to be calibrated fairly well with the acting of the protagonist for each scene). From a narrative point of view we have seen examples both supporting, and going against, the initial expectation related to our analyzed emotion (e.g. the natural reaction of relief when escaping the pale man's temple is in tune with the expected emotion, but when faced with the fairies and faun, the girl displays a, perhaps, disproportionate amount of familiarity with them - explained by her true nature as an escaped princess of the underworld).

The above observations are to be considered an initial, but cautious success in providing a new perspective on the fundamental problematic of emotion research in film at an interdisciplinary level. This is based on a limited number of scenes, from a single movie, which in turn expertly represents but one movie genre. Future works need to focus on expanding the literature with a broader selection of examples both in the number of analyses performed and the type of movie/scene/emotion that is being looked at. While on the side of film theory, benefits could come from broader perspectives such as incorporating various paradigms in an attempt to identify which are most suitable for this type of research, on the psychological front, the theoretical limitations could, at least in part, be addressed by delving deeper into the facial expression model proposed by Ekman. Last but not least, future research should ultimately attempt to create a combined model of emotion identification in movies, once sufficient volumes of validating data have been made, which should offer a multifaceted approach that may be instrumental in overcoming this apparent bottleneck of fundamental research for many disciplines.

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A HORROR GENRE APPROACH TO TIMON WEST'S FILMS *X* AND *PEARL*: REVISITING AND UPDATING SLASHER FICTION AND THE FEMALE GOTHIC THROUGH AGING AND GENDER

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INTRODUCTION

The American director and scriptwriter Timon West has recently given rise to a horror cinematic trilogy, stating his intention to envision each film with a different genre and visual style, and disclosing his fondness for genre cinema and the exploration of self-reflexivity through his filmography. Both in terms of aesthetics and genre conventions, the first film of the series, *X* (2022) —through which the director wished to explore how genre film and independent filmmaking contributed to developing cinema— is rooted in slasher fiction. As the plot unfolds in *X*, a young film crew made up of three actors, a director, a cameraman and a sound technician travel to a rural area in Texas in 1979 with the purpose of shooting a pornographic film in an elderly couple's isolated farm, although their plans are thwarted when they find out that their aged hosts, Pearl and Howard, are actually psychopaths. The next film in the saga, *Pearl* (2022), consists in a prequel, since, having introduced the character of Pearl as an elderly woman in the first part, the second part of the trilogy focuses on her youth and the causes of her psychotic disorder. Set in 1918, in

terms of genre and visual approach, *Pearl* differs significantly from *X*, since it is rooted in the tradition of the female Gothic, while it displays the colourfulness of Disney films and the Technicolor style of Hollywood classic musicals, albeit from a grotesque perspective, since the director casts a critical eye on the adverse effects that the Hollywood industry may have on gullible individuals. In *Pearl*, the young heroine lives with her authoritative mother and tetraplegic father in a farm, although she escapes from her oppressive everyday life through her fantasies of becoming a cinema star. In the last film of the trilogy, *MaXXXine*, the plot focuses on Maxine —the only survivor in the first film— as she moves to Hollywood in 1985 to pursue a career in showbusiness.

Given the director's intention to approach each of the films in the trilogy through different aesthetics, both *X* and *Pearl* display a high degree of self-reflexivity that brings attention to the conventions of the genre that each film respectively illustrates. Bearing in mind this premise, this chapter aims to analyse West's films *X* and *Pearl* as cinematic exponents of different horror subgenres, insofar as they comply with the features characterising the respective variants of horror fiction that they represent, although they also contribute to updating them through the discourses of aging and gender. From a genre approach, both films present traits that categorise them within the genre of American Gothic, in addition to Southern Gothic and folk horror, insofar as the films are set in a rural area of the American South. Nonetheless, the dark and sordid atmosphere that characterises the visual style in *X* contrasts with the multicoloured and parodic tone that is exhibited in *Pearl*, which suggests the different horror subgenres that each film epitomises. In particular, *X* displays many conventions pertaining to slasher fiction, insofar as it revolves around a series of murders committed by a psychokiller, and also to the psycho biddy genre, since the psychopath is an elderly woman. Correspondingly, since *Pearl* revolves around the coming of age of a young woman in a claustrophobic setting, it amalgamates features within the tradition of the female Gothic, and in particular, of the postfeminist Gothic, since Pearl alternates the role of Gothic heroine with that of a villainess. Accordingly, this chapter will address the similarities and differences between both films, *X* and *Pearl*, in terms of their genre approach, insofar as it will firstly offer an analysis of the features of the American Gothic that the two films display, it will then focus on *X* as an exponent of slasher films and hag horror, and it will

finally approach *Pearl* as rooted in the tradition of the female Gothic, although it mostly presents features of the postfeminist Gothic.

X AND *PEARL* AS EXPONENTS OF THE AMERICAN GOTHIC

Despite the fact that *X* and *Pearl* respectively epitomise the conventions of the horror subgenres of slasher and the female Gothic, both films present features that theorists like Allan Lloyd-Smith categorise as American Gothic, insofar as they address the notion of the frontier, the legacy of Puritanism, and the ideology of political utopianism (2000: 109), which are deeply rooted in the foundations of the American identity. Similarly, as Charles Crow (2016) explains, Gothic tropes in relation to the colonial experience, the Puritan background and the utopian society grounded in freedom and equality are pervasively addressed in American narratives since the origin of the nation.

The notion of the frontier underscores the latent dread related to the settlement of early colonisers in a threatening land, their encounter with the Other, and their existence on the verge of wilderness. In both *X* and *Pearl*, there are scenes that refer to the frontier, since, in *X*, Howard (Stephen Ure) welcomes his guests —whom he mistakes for intruders— with a rifle when they trespass his private property, and in *Pearl*, the heroine (Mia Goth) must make a long journey from her isolated farm to the town. There are also explicit references to war, insofar as one of the actors from the film crew, Jackson Hole (Scott Mescudi), has participated in the Vietnam War in *X*, whereas Howard is serving his country during the First World War in *Pearl*, which brings to mind historical military conflicts and the violent clash between factions. Besides, in both films, the wilderness of the landscape is evoked through the pervasive presence of wild fauna that contrasts with the domestic animals in the farm. In *X*, while Maxine (Mia Goth) is swimming in the lake, an alligator chases her and a bird of prey flies over her, whereas, as the film crew are on the road, they witness the mutilated body of a cow killed in an accident. In *Pearl*, there is the pervasive image of a bird in a cage, which symbolises Pearl's stifling enclosure in the farm, while it contrasts with the alligator that roams free and that Pearl turns into a pet as a metaphorical embodiment of her latent killer instincts.

The American Gothic is also rooted in the Puritan consciousness, which triggers a deeply ingrained distinction between good and evil. In *X*, religious fanatism is displayed on TV through the sermon of a radical preacher who warns about the dangers of succumbing to sin, while it is eventually revealed that this preacher is Maxine's father. In *Pearl*, when the young heroine auditions for a role as a dancer, the characterisation of the members of the tribunal is highly evocative of the Puritan pastors that tried young girls accused of witchcraft during the Salem trials. Likewise, an atmosphere of strict repression pervades the farm in which Pearl is brought up, while religious observance becomes evident through mealtime prayers and the presence of religious iconography in the house.

As representatives of the genre of American Gothic, both films also address concerns about the utopian vision of prosperity ingrained in the American dream, counteracted by the dangers of submitting the nation to the rule of the masses. From its origins, cinema was perceived as the industry which contributed to endowing the American nation with its own myths, although these two films reveal the exploitative interests of the film industry, particularly in genres like pornography, in which the sexuality of actors is utilised for the sake of profit and appeal to the masses. As a case in point, the pornographic film that is being shot in *X* features the characters of Bobby-Lynne Parker (Britanny Snow) as a blonde bombshell and of Jackson Hole as a sturdy African-American male, whose sexual encounters take place in a farm, thus subtly suggesting their process of commodification and subjugation both in terms of gender and race in showbusiness, which finds its most blatant paradigm of exploitation in the porn industry. Besides, at the audition, the tribunal rejects Pearl on account of the fact she does not look American enough, thus conjuring the spectre of xenophobic prejudice owing to her migrant origins notwithstanding the myth of the American nation as a melting pot.

Additionally, within the genre of American Gothic, critics like Meredith Miller refer to Southern Gothic as comprising narratives articulating a regional identity that focus on the return of repressed historical trauma, the conceptualisation of the South as the abject of the nation, and the portrayal of grotesque bodies that destabilise structures of power (2016, 632-35). Both *X* and *Pearl* comply with many of the conventions of Southern Gothic. In terms of the Freudian uncanny return of the repressed, Maxine escapes from her father's

religious fanatism, while Pearl tries to evade her mother's stern authoritarianism. As regards the Kristevan notion of the abject, both films display the three characteristics that Barbara Creed associates with abjection —involving images of bodily decay, the border, and the symbolic presence of the cadaverous mother (2021, 42-3)— through the graphic portrayal of aging bodies, criminal deeds, and the symbolic decaying mother figure. Concerning grotesque bodies as destabilising agents, in their old age, Pearl and her husband Howard are alternatively depicted as fragile and menacing, while their bodies challenge the unreal standards of beauty prevailing in the film industry.

Besides, both films also comply with features pertaining to folk horror that involve narratives in which, as Catherine Spooner argues, rural traditions and popular festivities are nostalgically revived, while their threatening and sinister aspects remain latent (2016, 506). In these two films, there is a pervasive parallelism between ritual traditions within the community —particularly, ancestral cults of fertility— and the magic ritual of cinema, which appeals to large audiences and ensures financial profit, since Maxine takes part in erotic scenes in the midst of nature, while Pearl imagines herself seducing a scarecrow in a cornfield, as if they were performing fertility rituals through cinematic means. Besides, as Stacey McDowell explains, folk horror often envisions folk people as a cultural Other (2016, 252-3), and as evidence of this, both films reflect the schism between the practical mindset of civilisation and the ancestral beliefs rooted in the land.

REVISITING AND UPDATING SLASHERS IN *X* THROUGH HAG HORROR

The visual aesthetics, plot and characters in *X* give evidence of its homage to slashers. As Glennis Byron puts forward, slasher films were a commercially successful subgenre in horror cinema, which finds its antecedents in pictures like Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), although it truly originated with the release of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), which is widely considered as the film that laid the foundations of this horror subgenre (2016, 627). The slasher formula consists of a series of recurring conventions comprising the traumatic past of the psychopathic killer, his return to stalk a group of teenagers,

and the survival of the final girl —to use Carol Clover's term (1992)— who brings the carnage to a halt until the release of the next sequel. West's film *X* displays these staple features pertaining to classic slasher fiction and retraces its formulaic plot, since, insofar as Pearl suffered a traumatic upbringing, she slays the young film crew hosted at her guest house, whereas Maxine arises as the final girl and survives the massacre. Besides, classic slasher films also present other representative traits, like graphic displays of violence through elaborate special effects, and the presence of the prowling subjective camera that encourages identification with the killer, which West's film *X* also displays. In addition to classic slasher films, though, *X* also bears resemblance with postmodern slashers at the end of the 20th century, particularly taking into account their pervasive self-referentiality and awareness of their formulaic plot.

As Byron claims, slasher fiction was eventually deplored for its repetitive conventions and extreme violence as well as for its reactionary discourse (2016, 628). In contrast, as a contemporary exponent of the slasher subgenre, West's film *X* presents an innovative characterisation of the psychopathic killer, insofar as, even if Pearl is portrayed as an elderly woman who seems abhorrent of sexuality, she becomes sexually active, thus reversing portrayals of the psychotic killer in slasher fiction as eminently young, male, and conservative. Likewise, insofar as the plot revolves around the shooting of a film, the recurring self-reflexive cinematic references in *X* engage in debates about the misogynistic power structures operating in slasher fiction. West's film *X* acknowledges as well as subverts these structures by means of leaving behind the portrayal of the psychopath as a chastising male figure to depict, instead, a sexually-active elderly woman who defies sexist and ageist prejudices. As Ruth Bienstock Anolik claims, from the origins of the Gothic tradition, there was a suggested connection between sex and danger, particularly concerning sexual conducts that were perceived as non-compliant with established sexual standards (2016, 614). In this respect, the character of Pearl in *X* is rooted in the vamp or castrating female in horror films —envisioned as a female monster that drained male potency— whose monstrosity was grounded in sex rather than in the supernatural. Nonetheless, insofar as the character of Pearl in *X* is characterised as overtly older in comparison with the archetypal portrayal of the vamp, her description draws attention to her age and evokes the grotesque older woman in hag horror.

As Timothy Shary and Nancy McVittie claim, the subgenre of hag horror or psycho biddy—also known as Grande Dame Guignol, to use Peter Shelley's term (2009)—portrays elderly females cast as either victims or villains (2016, 85), depending on whether they conform to constraining gender roles ascribed to women, or rather, they challenge their socially assigned roles. Hence, through the character of Pearl, West's film *X* adapts features characterising elderly women in hag horror, but it also complies with Cynthia Miller and A. Bowdoin van Riper's claim (2019) about the ambivalent attitudes toward old age displayed in contemporary horror films. Among the features often ascribed to grotesque older women in hag horror are the display of improper behaviour according to age and gender dictates, conflicts between generations, and the exposure of the aging female body.

Despite her old age, Pearl is portrayed as sexually active in defiance of socially roles assigned to aging women, hence bringing to mind Mary Russo's notion of the scandal of anachronism (1999, 21). As cases in point, Pearl makes erotic advances towards the young cameraman, R.J. Nichols (Owen Campbell), and when she has intercourse with her husband Howard while Maxine is hiding under their bed, it is symbolically suggested that Maxine is made to witness an erotic encounter between two elderly people. Besides, in analogy with hag horror, several scenes in *X* bring to the fore instances of the clash between generations, even if this age gap is eventually subverted. Despite their age difference, Pearl and Maxine arise as doubles, since Maxine looks like Pearl when she was young, and this double effect is emphasised extradiegetically, since, actress Mia Goth is cast as both Maxine and Pearl, thus simultaneously interpreting the part of a young girl and an elderly woman. Moreover, when Pearl gets into Maxine's bed and lies next to her in a symbolic mirror scene, Pearl fantasises about being young again, whereas Maxine is terrified upon contemplating herself as old. Finally, Pearl's aged body is graphically exhibited in its nudity, which alternatively evokes a sense of vulnerability and of imminent danger. As David Fuentefría notes, if in slasher films, displays of young nudity usually precede death, in *X*, it is the appearance of Pearl's naked body that involves an ancestral danger (2023, 44). In a scene, the character of Bobby-Lynne Parker covers Pearl's naked body when she sees her standing by the lake, taking for granted that Pearl needs to be helped, just before Pearl pushes her into the water so that an alligator will massacre her young body.

FROM FEMALE GOTHIC TO POSTFEMINIST GOTHIC IN *PEARL*

As a prequel, the second part of West's trilogy, *Pearl*, focuses on Pearl's youth and portrays her transformation into a psychokiller. Initially, the plot presents many of the conventions pertaining to the tradition of the female Gothic, and particularly, to its first phase according to Ellen Moers's stages of development (1976). As Diana Wallace argues, narratives from the initial stages of the female Gothic usually depict a young heroine who is threatened with imprisonment in a castle and struggles to escape through labyrinthic passages and menacing landscapes in order to find her lost parent and marry the man she loves (2016, 232). Although West's film *Pearl* comprises tenets of the female Gothic, it also transforms them and displays illustrative traits of the postfeminist Gothic.

As Tania Modleski (1990) argues, at the beginning of female gothic narratives, the young heroine's parents die and are replaced by authoritarian figures. In West's film, Pearl grows increasingly detached from her parents —particularly from her authoritarian mother— as they disallow her to fulfil her dream of becoming a star, until their death —for which Pearl is to blame— grants her the freedom to pursue her goals. Subsequently, in female Gothic, the heroine is compelled to leave her home, which revives oedipal conflicts, since, as Modleski argues, the heroine faces the fear of an involuntary return to the past and of a masochistic identification with her mother. Accordingly, in West's film, when Pearl determines to pursue a career in showbusiness, she is concerned about ending up like her mother and being unable to escape the same fate. Lastly, as Modleski notes, the heroine of the female Gothic finds a man as a substitute father figure. In the film, although Pearl believes that the projectionist may be the right candidate, it is eventually her own husband, Howard, who returns from the war to take over his place at home and replace Pearl's late father's role.

West's film *Pearl* thus evokes some tenets of the female Gothic, although it also introduces grotesque elements that have the effect of parodying the genre and alternating from female Gothic to postfeminist Gothic. According to critics like Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (2009), postfeminist Gothic arises as a variant of the female Gothic on the grounds

that, even if postfeminist Gothic narratives aim to reinterpret gender structures, their heroines often find themselves unable to escape from them. In this respect, Pearl's world of fantasy allows her to escape her depressing everyday existence, but, when her aspirations of becoming an actress are shattered, she must conform once more to established gender conventions. Conversely, theorists such as Benjamin Brabon and Stéphanie Genz (2007) argue that postfeminist Gothic rather involves a rupture with the tradition of the female Gothic. Correspondingly, West's film *Pearl* portrays a heroine with determined aspirations who struggles to re-signify oppressive gender structures by means of her boundless ambition and aggressive solipsism even to the point of indulging in criminal acts to fulfil her aspirations.

Besides, the postfeminist Gothic heroine often displays both hyperfeminine and masculine traits, while she illustrates the blurring line between her assigned status as an erotic object and her determination to become a sexual subject, since, as Brabon and Genz claim, the heroine in postfeminist Gothic is compliant with the expectations of the male gaze, while eager to overthrow them (2016, 516). As an inborn actress committed to achieve success, Pearl increasingly displays a traditionally alleged masculine ambition hidden behind her apparently meek femininity, thus engaging in symbolic gender performance —to use Judith Butler's term (1990)— and looking gender-compliant, while remaining gender-subversive. Moreover, drawing on Diane Long Hoeveler's precepts (1998), Pearl also resorts to the dynamics of passivity and aggressiveness, which verge on sadomasochistic practices, insofar as Pearl shifts from expecting chastisement to inflicting plain, hence calling into question the boundaries between victim and aggressor. As is displayed in the film, Pearl initially undergoes a miserable existence in the claustrophobic atmosphere of her parental home, but she also indulges in censorable behaviour that evinces disturbing signs of a mental condition until she ultimately gives full vent to her psychotic personality. In the melodramatic, but also parodic, last scene in the film, as Pearl and her late parents gather round the table in their living room, the camera zooms in to show a close-up of Pearl's face and ends in a fake freeze frame of her as she stares at the camera with a forced smile, while tears fall down from her eyes, thus categorising her as both victim and victimiser.

Furthermore, given the heroine's maniac obsession with performance, a series of scenes underscore the pervasive self-reflexivity and metatextuality characterising the film that also bring to mind traits of the postfeminist Gothic. Given its colourful aesthetics, several scenes in the film are highly suggestive of classic musicals. As a case in point, Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) is evoked through Pearl's encounter with the scarecrow, and her hope that her wishes will come true at the end of her journey. Besides, the film also establishes parallelisms with eerie passages from fairy tales like Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" (1697), since Pearl's red dress is evocative of the girl's red hooded cape, and Pearl's entry into the menacing cornfield is remindful of the girl's entering the threatening woods. The recurring intertextualities in *Pearl* draw attention to the artistic codes in the film, which bring to the fore poststructuralist discourses as indicative of the postfeminist Gothic.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of West's films *X* and *Pearl* gives evidence of the self-reflexive qualities of these two cinematic narratives, which draw attention to their respective genres and visual styles. Both films display traits pertaining to the American Gothic owing to symbolic references to the notion of the frontier, the Puritan legacy, and the ideals of political utopianism. Nonetheless, given the director's intention to resort to differing aesthetics, and by extension, to recreate two different subgenres within horror fiction —mainly slasher films and the female Gothic— West's two films respectively contribute to revisiting as well as updating the conventions pertaining to each genre by means of resorting to hag horror and postfeminist Gothic.

As a contemporary slasher film, *X* conforms to the main formulaic traits of the genre, but, as a major innovation, it characterises the psychopath as female, aged and sexually active as opposed to the standard male, young, and sexually conservative psychopath who usually appears in classic slasher films, thus resorting to hag horror to transform the standard slasher killer. Correspondingly, as a contemporary film rooted in the tradition of the female Gothic, *Pearl* portrays a Gothic heroine who is ambivalently typified

as a victim and a villainess, thus featuring traits pertaining to postfeminist Gothic. As a contemporary horror saga, which displays self-awareness of genre conventions, West's films —*X* and *Pearl*— arise as cinematic exponents of the horror subgenres that they respectively typify, but also as contemporary contributions that transform and update their formula mainly through contemporary discourses of aging and gender.

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THE CONTROLING AND WATCHFUL EYE FROM ABOVE. MEANINGS OF VERTICAL SPACE DIVISION OF THE CITY IN THE OVAs *ALITA: BATTLE ANGEL* (1993)

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The conception of spaces as generators of the aesthetic environment of dystopian projects has often been noted, see the recent monograph *Espacios Contemporáneos de la Utopía y la Distopía: una perspectiva histórica* (2023), where Enrique Meléndez Galán, Ana Clara Rey and Francisco José Martínez Mesa set out their reflections on dystopias through three main approaches: the repercussions of 20th century architecture and postmodernism in the redefinition of the future, the narrative and imaginary discourses of the audiovisual media, and the effect of dystopian worlds on the most immediate reality. Since the middle of the last century, there has been an intersection between the dystopian genre and cyberfuturism, due to the important role that technology has acquired in contemporary society.

Japanese animation has extensively explored these narratives, presenting alternative worlds with oppressive societies, corrupt political systems, and progress that heads to disaster (Liu, 2022, p. 107). The stories exhibit genuine concern for ethical degradation and human disregard for the environment, a theme that has been prevalent since the creation of the *Astroboy* manga by Osamu Tezuka in 1952 (Ratna Sari & Iverstika Gempita,

2020, p. 86). It is in this context where the main topic of this paper is integrated, taking as cases of study the spaces depicted in the OVAs of *Alita: Battle Angel*[1], a work by director Hiroshi Fukutomi made in 1993 and based on the manga by Yukiyo Kishoro titled *Gunnm*, which later had a live-action adaptation under the direction of Roberto Rodriguez and James Cameron in 2019 (Soffa, Daru Kuncara & Sari Lubis, 2021, pp. 303-317). The main objective focuses on discussing the social-artistic link embodied in the dividing conception of spaces through the metropolis of *Alita*, with the aim of establishing certain parallels with architectural ideas from the classical tradition, as well as its relationship with cyberpunk and the dystopias of other cinematic and video ludic creations.

The plot is presented as follows: two cities divide the space and establish the hierarchy of the story. The metropolis of the ground, generally called Scrapyard (*Kuzu Kurogane-machi*), lives under the restrictions of the Factory. It abounds with continuously dumped waste from the city of Zalem –Tiphares in the English version–, an elliptical, floating city that is attached to Scrapyard via metal hooks (Figure 1). The city of the ground is shown to be full of adversities for its inhabitants. Gladiator wrestling, Motorball racing or becoming a warrior hunter are the alternatives the city offers to its citizens. Meanwhile, Zalem is a hermetic city, very little is known about it, and no one can cross its gates; anyone who tries to climb up through the anchors will be instantly destroyed. Found by Doctor Daisuke Ido in the Sacrapyard landfill, Alita is an amnesiac cyborg originally from the floating city. Over time, she will demonstrate her fighting skills and try to stop the cruelty that invades her world. The OVAs focus on her close relationship with the young Yugo, who desperately wants to get access to Zalem, and will try to protect him from Vector, a businessman who undercovers the illegal sale of organs.

[1] From now on, the title of the OVAs will be referred as *Alita*.

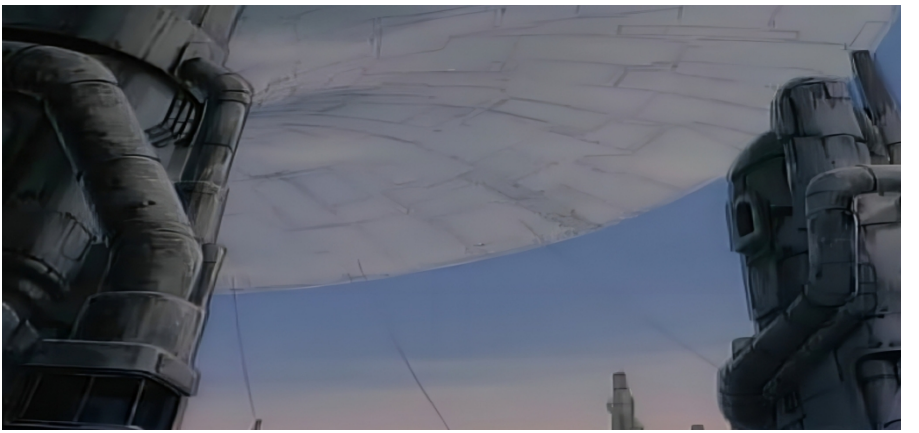

Figure 1: City of Zalem from the OVAs of *Alita: Battle Angel*. Hiroshi Fukutomi, 1993. Source: Screenshot.

Alita genre belongs within the Japanese animation universe to the "mecha" –short from mechanical–, that is, science fiction that bases its plot on machines controlled by other humans or automated robots, called "biological mecha" (Dunn & Erlich, 1981, pp. 47-57). Another aspect of the OVAs is their relatedness to cyberpunk, a sub-genre of science fiction that emerged in the 1980s, characterised by its focus on artificial intelligence and virtual reality as being central to everyday life (Salvador Cabrerizo, 2011, pp. 463-470). Its protagonists are usually anti-heroes who defy the control of institutions, fighting for individual freedom. His aesthetic inspiration is drawn from the dystopian cities illustrated in films such as *Metropolis* (1924), directed by Fritz Lang and written by Thea von Harbou, a piece later illustrated by Tezuka in 1949 and animated in 2009. The graphic content in *Alita*'s work takes references from the so-called "splatterpunk", a sub-genre of horror science fiction that also appeared in the same decade, characterised by its extremely graphic and often visceral depiction of violence, gore or brutality (Kern, 1996, pp. 42-57).

The setting of Alita shows a clear hierarchical division born from "hostile architecture" (Betriu, 2022, pp. 98-118); walls and skyscrapers influenced by brutalism and intricate cities such as Kowloon or the "hive worlds" (Adams

& Ramsden, 2011, p. 746), highly densified environments tending towards verticality, where compact dwellings distributed by levels prevail. The city of Scrapyard is a labyrinth of buildings surrounded by neon signs; most of the humans are technologically modified with the goal of surviving through violence. The dumping site is another space that coexists in a certain harmony with Scrapyard, as it is not unusual to wander through the rubbish spilled by Zalem. The Factory is represented by a huge, compact building. The city above, on the other hand, is depicted as completely neat. Although buildings that follow the logic of brutalism are seen in the distance, the system is completely logical. The mist that characterises Scrapyard, under smoky orange colours, is not visible in the city of Zalem; nothing obscures its landscape.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PLACES

"Anthropological places", a term coined by Marc Augé, are defined as the concretisation of a space that enables people to construct their identities by sharing cultural and social features. These places create their own entities and affect both the collective that inhabits them and the situations that take part in them (Augé, 2000, p. 49-59). Therefore, the city is considered another character in the story, since without it the narrative of the protagonists and the events that surround them would not exist. Following Marc Augé's logic, there are also transitory locations, the so-called "non-places", devastated spaces that are empty of content for the people who wander through them (Augé, 2000, p. 83). This characteristic is readily discernible in the Scrapyard landfill, where Alita is discovered by Dr. Daisuke Ido.

Augé's theory maintains clear affinities with the hierarchical division proposed between Zalem and Scrapyard, as these cities highlight how certain historical and cultural practices have shaped the spaces. Through them, such processes materialise where individuals and their habitat are produced or mutually produce each other (García Cortés, 2004, p. 219). In the case of OVAs, this aspect is fundamental, since a large part of the inhabitants are fabricated and *defabricated*, as in the case of Alita. According to José Miguel García Cortés (2004):

> Space is constrained, arranged in a hierarchy, valued, shifted, and the forms used to do so affect the way in which the urban environment is experienced and how the subject sees others [...]. The city can be considered as the most immediate and concrete space for the production and circulation of power (p. 220).

Overall, it can be argued that the positioning of the cities in Alita crystallises a spatial dimension of power that conditions the social function of the environment and imbues it with cultural connotations. The city of Zalem consists of mega-structures and highly vertical constructions that accomplish to visually dominate the landscape; it is an aggressive and punitive architecture that denotes the authority under which it has been created. The context speaks of a dystopian world emerging after an environmental collapse, where hostility and violence become the main issues for survival in Scrapyard, all simulated through spatial hierarchisation, where those at the top literally control the lives of those at the bottom.

TRADITION OF SPATIAL VERTICALITY

"The city, paradigm of order and harmony [...] since antiquity has been one of the most widely used rhetorical symbols to represent good government and political life ruled by reason" (Rubial García, 1998, p. 6). The aforementioned discussion on anthropological places is bolstered by this statement, which is especially evident in fictional narratives such as Alita, which emphasises the verticality of spaces, the distinction between above and below, and the consequences exerted on individuals.

These types of constructions are recurring in contemporary dystopian audiovisuals. However, such spatial significances have an extensive visual culture in the artistic manifestations produced over the centuries. Thus, the association between verticality (height) and power can be traced from way back, with the Mayan or Egyptian pyramids being a clear and well-known example. Also, the ziggurats of the Mesopotamian civilisation, monumental temples in the shape of a stepped tower, whose structure inspired the mythical Tower of Babel. The story of this building is told in the biblical Book of Genesis (11: 2-8):

> As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. [...] Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves'. […] But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. […] So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.

Thereby, reference is made to the myth of humankind's conquest of the heavens and the failure in their attempt to ascend. Notwithstanding the moral, the biblical episode has a very particular visuality, which has become part of the collective imaginary, especially since the Modern Age, thanks to the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. In his work he depicts a colossal tower under construction that imposes over the landscape of a 16th century village which, in contrast, appears diminutive. Bruegel emphasised the constructive development of the tower, which almost dominates the skies. However, earlier depictions highlight such celestial symbolism. 11th century miniatures show God, "while men and women eagerly build the tower to reach the majesty of the heavens" (Díaz Saldaña, 2004, p. 78).

In a further religious context, another quintessential of the vertical and/or divine spaces is the Celestial Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was considered,

> The city of Jerusalem was the centre of the world, especially because here stood the temple of Solomon. The power of the symbol of this earthly Jerusalem, a sacred and protective space, went beyond the realm of physical reality when […] the sanctuary was destroyed and plundered, and the city devastated. Christianity then turned the temple into a metaphor for Christ and Jerusalem into a heavenly city (Rubial García, 1998, p. 6).

This ideal, holy and heavenly city is counterposed to other corrupt and earthly cities, the paradigms being Sodom and Gomorrah or Babylon and Rome. Thus, it can be seen that these spatial meanings, the contrast between a superior city and an inferior one, both literally and morally, can be transposed to the narrative of *Alita*: the supremacy of Zalem contrasts with the rottenness of Scrapyard. Moreover, as in the biblical stories, one has full power over the other and can even bring its destruction.

The 18th century was also fraught with utopian scenarios, with monumental projects and ideals that reflected the context of an era. At the end of the century, in the framework of the French Revolution and Enlightenment thinking, idealised architectural designs of colossal size were developed on the basis of pure geometric forms that would emanate a symbolic charge due to the eloquence and sensibility of the buildings. This particular trend, commonly referred as utopian architecture, was represented by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, among others, who drew the interior of the theatre of Besançon mirrored in an eye. This reflection shows the hemicycle in which the audience is seated and, passing through it, a beam of light that goes beyond the eye, giving the impression that the entire theatre is being scrutinized.

In this vein, also at the end of the 18th century, the concept of the panopticon emerged. It was conceived by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who proposed the ideal of prison architecture in which the entire interior space could be observed from a single point. Bentham's system maintains a clear hierarchy of space, in which its circular shape and central watchtower give the feeling of omniscient control over the prisoners, who are placed in cells to be seen, not to see. This was later worked on by Michel Foucault who reflected on social control and urban spaces the stereotype of the "stinking city", which was "pierced by hierarchy, surveillance, inspection, writing, the city immobilised in the functioning of an extensive power exercised differently on all individual bodies, is the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (Foucault, 2002, p. 203).

All of which is relatable to Zalem and Scrapyard. The former maintains omniscient control over the latter; Zalem, by floating above Scrapyard, embodies its watchful eye, its continuously vigilant panopticon, which has different consequences on individuals, affecting Yugo or Alita, for instance, in different ways.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER AUDIOVISUAL CREATIONS

Alita's proposal maintains a similar dynamic to other productions in the audiovisual universe. The argumentative characteristic follows the rhetoric of science fiction films and dystopian literature based on technological hyper development; overpopulation along with crowded spaces, a pan-Asian aesthetic,

and a government controlled by multinationals with a clear and strict capitalist regime, sometimes with dictatorial and tyrannical assumptions or, on the contrary, under anarchic politics.

The genre emerged from the so-called "dystopian trinity", constituted by the books of: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932); George Orwell's *1984* (1949); and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), (Casado Díaz, 2008, p. 4) to all of which Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We* (1920) could be added. Specifically, science fiction in Japan dates back to the Meiji period, when the country began to endure significant changes due to Westernisation (Yoriko, 1999, p. 89) with authors such as Shunro Oshikawa and Juza Unno (Tatsumi, 2000, 105). Meanwhile, the dystopian genre developed from 1960 onwards through the works of *Suna no Onna* (Kōbō Abe, 1962); *Kuroi Ame* (Masuji Ibuse, 1966); and *Nihon Chinbotsu* (Sakyo Komatsu, 1973), which have as their premise: the desolation and claustrophobia of spaces, the consequences of the atomic bomb and natural disasters.

In the world of cinema, it is worth mentioning the films created by Bruce Sterling, Katsuhiro Otomo, William Gibson, with the cult film *Neuromancer* (1984), and Shinya Tsukamoto, director of *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989). The context that saw the birth of these projects emerged between the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time when the two continental forces, the technological and economic monsters of the time, the United States and Japan, came together, forging a new scenario under the mediation of the mega-corporations and the American dream, along with the aesthetic sensibility of a densely populated and technological city like Tokyo (Bolton, Csicsery-Ronay & Tatsumi, 2007, pp. 7-22).

Particularly, architecture becomes the fundamental medium for the basis of these works. The level of acquisitive and economic power follows upon two basic principles that are reflected through the buildings: the control and domination of space through verticality and monumentality, increasing a power struggle by levels (Cabezas Garrido, 2013, p. 136). These representations are clearly portrayed in films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and are inspired by the utopias of the *Archigram group* (1960) (Palomo Beltrán and Reséndiz Vázquez, 2022, 76) or the aforementioned *Metropolis* (1924). The most direct reference comes from the comic book *The Long of Tomorrow* (1976), with designs that

influenced cult anime such as *Akira* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1989), predecessors of *Alita* (Iglesia, 2018, p. 11).

The vertical layout of the spaces (above-below) is a proposal related to noble architecture, which used to have the servants' quarters in the downstairs rooms (Blanco Carrasco, 2016, p. 55). In the audiovisual sphere, the most suggestive aesthetic reference could be found in the representation of Cloud City (Figure 2), the floating city administered by Lando Calrissian in the film *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). The elliptical shape, the verticality of the buildings and the whitish appearance make it inseparable from the city Kishoro devised for *Alita*. Similarly, this stratification is also represented in the film *Elysium* (2013), the name of the space station where the richest people live, while the rest try to survive on a devastated earth. Recent contributions such as the *Arcane* series (2021) recreate this spatial divide; Piltover is the upper urbe, which is shown as an academic, scientific and wealthy city. While Zaun, the underground city, is quite the opposite, with powerless suburbs full of crime and poverty. Verticality is a symbolic element that functions as a means of hierarchisation, manifesting itself in the division of social classes by altitude (Domingo-Soler & Urgellés Molina, 2022, p. 2); control and surveillance; filth, desperation and oppression in the lower systems, where the characters try to fight their way up; and as metaphors for ascent and descent based on rewards and punishments.

Figure 2: Cloud city from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. Irvin Kershner, 1980. Source: Databank of Star Wars online site.

Videogames also play a leading role in contemporary media, whose scenarios and images shape the collective imaginary and, likewise, contribute to the shaping of such a vision of supra- and infra-cities. In 2013, the *BioShock Infinite* depicted the utopian, floating, and celestial city of Columbia, blending the aesthetics of the industrial revolution with neoclassical architecture. In its narrative, Columbia is opposed to the United States, as it floats above said country, which was labelled as "the Sodom below".

The idea of vertical hierarchy is also present in different types of organisations such as centre and periphery. *BioShock Infinite* not only shows a floating city opposed to a lower city, but in the very metropolis of Columbia there is the categorical distinction of centre and periphery. Similarly, in 2018, *Frostpunk* was released, a survival videogame that posits the construction of a city during harsh climatic conditions. The city must develop circularly around the generator, a huge machine that provides the heat needed to survive. The generator is a vertical superstructure, but the idea of growing around it has resulted in the emergence of a city in which the centre –the generator and its immediate surroundings– is more developed than the buildings further away.

Lastly, the indie scene also offers such interesting scenarios as those of the *Little Nightmares* series (2017-2021): the first videogame presents the place called "The Maw", where the player starts the adventure in the depths and gradually ascends until discovering the spatial reality in which he/she finds him/herself. The ascent is extremely difficult and those who attempt it are often doomed to failure. In the second game, the main setting is "The Pale City", characterised by tall, sinister buildings and an even taller central tower that exerts control over the population (Figure 3). Both games reinvent the idea of the panopticon, the omniscient control and the all-seeing eye, literally as well as metaphorically, since the player runs through areas with eye-shaped security cameras and eye patterns on the floor, walls, doors, and other related areas.

Figure 3: The Pale City from *Little Nightmares II*, Tarsier Studios, 2021. Source: Screenshot.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the control or authority of the upper city can be seen through several relevant symbolic aspects: the continuous dumping of rubbish and hazardous material that is wasted through the huge hole that covers the city of Zalem; the noisy tensors embedded in the lower city that cause great discomfort to its inhabitants; and the obvious economic factor. Through the wealth and possessions that are offered to Zalem, the citizen will be able to obtain a higher life quality, even if this is achieved by illicit means.

This upright layout and segregated organisation of space can be traced back to the visual culture of the past. With biblical episodes such as the Tower of Babel, the sharp distinction between those above and those below can already be stated; the colossal and vain effort of the latter to reach the upper realm. Yugo, Alita, and the inhabitants of Scrapyard are relegated to a mundane existence despite their efforts, akin to Sisyphus' plight wherein no matter how hard they strive, they succumb to the inevitable fall, exemplifying Camus' philosophy on the futility of attempting to "ascend the mountain".

Zalem's elliptical shape does not go unnoticed either. It is not surprising that there are parallels with the shape of alien spacecrafts. Omniscient observers, indifferent to the adversities or suffering from inferior citizens. An eye from which one cannot escape or turn for help. In this sense, *Alita*, like all dystopian

productions, proposes a universe constituted by despair and viscerality. Alita's strong, metallic body in the landfill at the end of the series, under the red dawn, becomes a symbol of hope; a waste of Zalem that demands justice.

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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE JAPANESE IDEOLOGY IN HAYAO MIYAZAKI'S FANTASTICAL CREATURES: *SPIRITED AWAY*

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After the massive success of Hayao Miyazaki's manga adaptation to screen *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, Tokuma Shoten (publisher of the *Animage magazine*) decided to invest in a Japanese studio led by Miyazaki and Isao Takahata. Miyazaki- heavily fascinated by Italian aircraft- chose the name Ghibli (Ji-bu-ri) after a famous aircraft model designed by the Italian engineer Giovanni Caproni (Greenberg, 2018). Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and Toshio Suzuki founded Studio Ghibli in 1985 in Tokyo, Japan. Since its inception, Studio Ghibli has received an overwhelmingly positive response from both local and international audiences. It has become one of the most beloved and influential animation studios in the world, producing iconic animated films. Miyazaki, the studio's renowned director, has created some of its most successful films, including *Spirited Away* (2001), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988). Since then, the small studio has become an iconic part of the animation industry, a source of joy and inspiration for millions of people around the world and was even considered a competitor against the giant Disney enterprise. Ghibli movies have been captivating audiences from different ages for decades. The key to their success lies in their art,

which has the power to touch the soul. This is something that Miyazaki, Takahata and Toshio Suzuki had in mind when they created their own studio. The trio wanted to make movies their way, without compromising their artistic vision, telling stories that were meaningful to them, and that would resonate with viewers (Odell, & Le Blanc,2009).

Hayao Miyazaki is considered the beating heart of the studio, his movies brought fame and success, through the engaging narratives about multiple serious and abstract concepts. The representation of Japanese culture and its ideologies through traditionally hand-drawn animation makes the viewer feel familiar with the stories (Newell, 2013). The Japanese mythology, the western quaint buildings and the industrial civilization are constantly reflected in the work of Hayao Miyazaki. Chanmai Li (2021) has broken down these visual, auditory and cultural elements integration into four essential points:

> 1. Persistence to the beauty of things. The concept of *wu sorrow* is a well-known motif in Japanese literature and culture. Originating from the *Tale of Genji*, this concept is used to describe the beauty of things that are fleeting and transient, and that it should be appreciated while it lasts. Also known as "beauty of objects", this idea has influenced Japanese literature for thousands of years. Hayao Miyazaki's films often feature characters who are struggling to come to terms with the beauty of things that are ephemeral.
> 2. The pursuit of the harmonious unity of industrial civilizations and nature. One of the most prominent themes in Miyazaki's works is the importance of balance and coexistence between nature and humans. This is particularly evident in his first movie under the Ghibli production, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, (1984) (the story of a princess living in a post-apocalyptic world where humans and nature are in a constant struggle for survival). The movie focuses on the idea of balance between nature and humans, as the protagonist must find a way to restore harmony between the two forces despite the consequences of the industrial revolution, which has caused the environment to become polluted and dangerous.
> 3. Devotion to life and work. Hard work and dedication are two pillars of the Japanese culture, and Hayao Miyazaki has long been a reflection of these values in his work. Through his strong, selfless young characters, Miyazaki has

demonstrated the importance of these ethics in Japanese society. Additionally, the way he creates his films is a testament to the hard work and dedication that he puts into his art. Miyazaki has always opted for a traditional technique of animation, which requires a lot more time and work force than modern methods.

4. Blending of multiple cultural elements. Japan is a country whose culture has been heavily influenced by both Chinese and Western cultures. This multi-culturalism is apparent in the works of Hayao Miyazaki. he has managed to create a perfect balance between achieving a feeling of relatability towards the foreign audience while still maintaining the Japanese local authenticity.

Studio Ghibli films often explore the ambivalence of things and its acceptance, as seen in *Spirited Away* (2001), where the protagonists must accept the good and bad of a situation and learn to move forward. This theme reflects the traditional Japanese philosophy of accepting the impermanence of life and learning to find joy in the present moment (McDonalds, 2004). Hayao Miyazaki's portrayal of these Japanese ideologies is brilliantly exemplified through his creation of the fantastical creatures. *Spirited Away*, the first academy winning Japanese animation film, is filled with a multitude of imaginary characters that possess unique characteristics and personalities, adding to the film's enchanting atmosphere. One of Miyazaki's primary motivations for creating this film is to serve as a reminder of Japan's rich ethnic space. He aims to showcase the diverse elements that contribute to this heritage, including stories, local lore, festivals, designs, and especially mythical beings and magic. By incorporating traditional designs into a relatable modern story and integrating them seamlessly into the film's world, Miyazaki enhances its persuasiveness and creates a captivating mosaic of Japanese culture. "Our place is the past and in history. People who have no sense of history, or ethnic groups that have forgotten their past, are destinated to disappear like the short-lived mayfly" (Miyazaki, 1999).

The story takes place in an Inn for spirits, Gods and deities where the human protagonist, Chihiro, works as a maid. Throughout the film, Chihiro encounters a vast array of fantastical creatures, each offering a distinct experience. These encounters contribute to the film's rich narrative and showcase the diverse world of spirits in the Japanese culture. One of the most striking and famous characters is No-Face depicted as a long black ghost with a neutral mask wearing a faint smile, and

possessing a visual design that is deceptively simple. However, when combined with its movements and the storytelling, the true depth of its meaning becomes apparent. Interestingly, No-face creation was not intentional. It was during a small meeting between Miyazaki, the producer, the animation director, and the art director that he noticed a weird-looking masked man floating in a drawn bridge scene. Intrigued, Miyazaki decided to incorporate him into the film (Miyazaki, 2001).

Figure 1: "no-face" is huge from devouring people, proposes gold to Chihiro.
Source: *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki, 2001).

The brilliance of the director's reflection of Japanese ideologies is evident in the intricate details and careful execution of this character. In the beginning of the movie, No-Face appears shy and reserved, lacking the ability to speak, and adopting a crouched posture. These traits contribute to his harmless image. Deep Naskar (2017) explains that the character of Kaonashi, also known as No-Face, is enigmatic and multi-faceted. Not only does he embody anonymity, but he also represents greed and lust. With his featureless face and hollow mouth, he lacks any distinct facial expressions. Furthermore, his body is malleable and can shift shape at will. Additionally, Kaonashi is mute, unable to communicate verbally until he consumes an employee and utilizes its voice. However, as the story progresses, we observe that No-Face develops an obsessive desire to have the protagonist, Chihiro, accept his gifts. The little girl's consistent refusal intensifies his desperation. Eventually, No-Face encounters a frog worker at the Inn and offers a chunk of gold, which the frog gladly accepts. In that moment, he swiftly devours the little being and moves on to the

next victim. After a while, Chihiro is summoned by the Inn master to go deal with No-Face and to her surprise, the creature is completely different from the first time she saw him as he became huge, aggressive, and hideous. As seen in figure 1 Chihiro discovers that No-Face has eaten a lot of people and beings, and yet is still desperate to have her.

Figure 2: The river spirit before and after it was washed by Chihiro.
Source: *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki, 2001).

Miyazaki depicts the concept of greed in the fantastical creature, No-Face, through several characteristics. Firstly, No-Face is unable to enter the Inn unless invited, symbolizing that greed is considered unholy by the deities of the Inn. Secondly, No-Face tricks people by offering valuable gifts, only to devour them once they accept, illustrating that greed isn't an innate attitude but a learned one, that consumes and imprisons individuals. Lastly, when No-Face loses his powers, his gifts turn into mud, suggesting that the gains obtained through greed are merely illusions that do not last.

One of the movie's other main themes is the importance of not judging based on appearances: There is a scene where a muddy and smelly spirit attempts to enter the Inn to wash. Yubaba and others refuse to take care of it, assigning the task to Chihiro. The young girl works diligently to wash away the mud and filth, revealing that the spirit is actually an honorable river deity. As a result, he rewards not only Chihiro, but the entire Inn, with a generous amount of gold. The character design of this creature refers to the old Asian depictions of honorable deities, with a long

serpent body referring to the shape of the dragon, which is well respected in East Asian mythologies. Miyazaki attributes to his long white shape an old man's face with exaggerated wrinkles. This visual choice symbolizes his ancient age and wisdom, since it is widely understood in most cultures that knowledge is predominantly associated with old people. As seen in figure 2, The contrast between the initial state of the creature (muddy and smelly) and the final one (white and transparent) show the kind of deception you get from quickly judging a thing on its initial appearance.

The movie consistently portrays the concept of greed. In the opening scene, Chihiro's parents disregard proper etiquette and begin eating from an unattended restaurant. Chihiro, however, advises them to wait for the owner as a respectful gesture. Unfortunately, her parents' impatience gets the better of them, and they indulge in all the food. Consequently, they are transformed into pigs, a universally recognized symbol of greed.

Another character representing greed is Yubaba, the Master of the Inn, exemplifies the concept of imprisoning spirits and people, enslaving them by taking away their identity. She cunningly provides them with new names, causing them to gradually forget their true ones, thus granting her complete control over them. This manipulation of identity allows Yubaba to exert her authority with utmost power and precision. Miyazaki subtly portrays the Inn master's obsession with gold and jewelry, as Chihiro is directed to meet Yubaba at her office, she must ascend to the top floor of the Inn. Along the way, she navigates through a series of doors and corridors adorned in an opulent European palace style. This meticulous attention to detail effectively introduces the audience to Yubaba's extravagant personality.

Miyazaki's representation of society in the architecture design of the Inn is subtle yet impactful. The master's residence on the top floor, away from commotion, symbolizes their elevated status. Below, the pigs, who are mostly workers punished and transformed into animals, reside, representing the lower class. The workers, caught in between the floors, are enslaved. Despite this social hierarchy, the Inn treats visiting spirits with utmost respect, offering comfortable accommodations and excellent service. Even Yubaba bows her head as a sign of reverence, not towards the individuals themselves, but rather in acknowledgement of the wealth they bring back to the establishment. This gesture symbolizes the Inn's appreciation for the financial contributions made by these deities, which play a crucial role in sustaining the inn's operations and ensuring its continued prosperity. Yubaba, the master of the Inn,

stands out in her attire. While other characters' costumes reflect Japanese culture, Yubaba dons a Victorian dress. This choice, along with the western-inspired design of her floor and office, suggests the influence and power of the West on Japanese culture. It implies the attribution of superiority to all things western. Akihiro Ishikawa (2002) details the impact of western influence on Japanese society, emphasizing the goal of combining "western technology" and "Japanese spirit" for modernization.

Following World War II, Japan recognized the importance of westernization for achieving modernization, leading to significant economic growth. Western ideologies played a crucial role in the growth of Japanese capitalism. However, According to Ljubica Juve Jaich (2017) Miyazaki seeks to address the cultural liminality in Japan by navigating the often-conflicting systems. He does not intentionally condemn all aspects of western culture, but rather demonstrates an interest in it. In Miyazaki's works, the incorporation of western themes and elements is evident. For instance, in the movie, Yubaba's twin sister Zeniba shares not only the same features but also the same attire. Furthermore, Zeniba resides in a small country house that is adorned in a European style. It is worth noting that Zeniba is portrayed as a benevolent character who aids Chihiro and guides her on her journey. This suggests that Miyazaki's intention is not to completely condemn the western influence on a Japanese character.

One interesting aspect of the film *Spirited Away* is its character development. Unlike western animation movies, Miyazaki's characters are not portrayed as purely evil, thus blurring the line between good and bad: "*Spirited away* may be a fairy tale, but I don't want to make it a western style one, with lots of easy outs" (Miyazaki, 1999).

For instance, No-face, despite devouring many maids and servants, does not frighten Chihiro. Instead, she is determined to help him, seeing more to his mischievous behavior. She offers him a piece of herb medicine given to her by the river spirit, causing him to regurgitate all the food and beings he consumed, gradually returning to his original form. One interesting thing Chihiro said in No-face defense was: "He's only bad when he's in the bathhouse. He needs to get out of there". The little girl blames the Inn for No-face's condition. In their conversation, the creature expresses feeling lonely, which explains his desire to belong. Therefore, we understand that the Inn's extravagance makes him desperate to be part of a world he cannot afford, leading him to seek mischievousness and trickery in order to find a place for himself.

Yubaba, despite being a greedy harsh Inn owner, is also a mother, and her child is very precious to her. In one scene when Yubaba has lost both her gold and her child, it is shown that despite her immense love for wealth, she was more frightened and furious about the disappearance of her little boy. This allows the viewer to sympathy with the character and understand that maybe, running the Inn in such manner, is the only way she knows, in order to protect her child and provide for him everything he needs. According to Stian Olsen and Frank Johnsen (2012), *Spirited Away's* portrayal of the blurred line between good and evil accurately mirrors the real world. Rather than completely eliminating evil, the film depicts characters making choices that weaken its influence. Chihiro's kind acts have a transformative effect on those she encounters, bringing out their inherent goodness. This nuanced portrayal reflects the complexity of the human experience and offers a thought-provoking perspective on the nature of good and evil. In his movie proposal, Hayao Miyazaki (1999) points out that in this adventure story, the main theme is not a confrontation between good and evil. Instead, it focuses on a young girl who finds herself in a fantastical world, where good and bad are intertwined and coexist. Therefore, the girl returns to her ordinary world not by defeating evil, but by embracing a new way of life.

Based on the points mentioned above, it seems that *Spirited Away* 's aim is to depict the real world (that is confusing and that can devour us) in a clear manner through a fantasy framework. Director Miyazaki wanted to express how today's children are shielded and disconnected from reality through the main character, Chihiro, who reflects this fragility through her skinny appearance and apathetic expression. However, as the movie progresses, she discovers a life force within her that enables her to make bold decisions. The film aimed to depict the everyday lives of 10-year-old girls, both in reality and in their imagination, through demonstrating to young viewers that they have the capability to achieve what Chihiro accomplished. Miyazaki asserts that the ability to survive in this extraordinary realm hinges upon the power of words. Any mention of a "no" or a desire to return home from the young protagonist would have resulted in immediate consumption or transformation. Nevertheless, when confronted with Yubaba, Chihiro's forceful declaration of wanting to work there proved so influential that even the witch herself could not disregard it. "If there is one thing that I want this film to convey, is that words represent our will, words are us, and words are power" (Miyazaki,1999).

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THE FANTASY GENRE IN SPANISH MUSIC VIDEOS

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If we were to take the launch of MTV as the beginning of what we know as music video, we could affirm that the dialogue between this medium and the fantasy genre has been a constant to this day.

The first and most evident case of this synergy was found in 1983 with an experiment driven by CBS to demonstrate the commercial impact of music videos on record sales. In *Billy Jean* (Barron, 1983) and *Thriller* (Landis, 1983), fantasy narrative is presented from two different approaches. Michael Jackson stars in both music videos. The first one provides a social critique of the decadent situation of North American cities during the Reagan era, portraying Jackson as a kind of redeeming magician with transmutation powers and the ability to become invisible. *Thriller* is one of the most famous and high-budget music videos in history. It combines a classic horror story about werewolves with a revision of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Despite initial rejections from the record company, Jackson convinced CBS, which invested nearly a million dollars in the 15-minute short film. The result was an additional 8 million records sold shortly after its broadcast on MTV.

From this turning point, after confirming the commercial benefits of the format, budgets for music videos increased significantly, and, more interestingly, record labels began to trust directors and musical artists, giving them greater creative freedom and reducing project oversight. This marks the beginning of the golden age of the format. The consequences also extended beyond the boundaries of the music industry, as the narrative style of *Thriller* transcended the music video and influenced films like Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996) due to its genre mix and pacing changes (Panera, 2009).

In Spain, the impact of the music video is infinitely smaller, much later, and comes with a lower investment, and therefore, more modest results. Nevertheless, the music video scene starts with two pieces equally permeated by fantasy. In the following paragraphs, we will analyze how fantasy has been related to music videos in our country since its inception, emphasizing a particularly fruitful period that spans part of the second and third decades of the present century.

BOUND TOGETHER IN LACK OF RECOGNITION

In the academic sphere, music videos have historically been disparaged and stripped of autonomy, often disregarding the authorship of the works under the assumption that they are subservient to a higher entity, namely the musical theme. Within artistic circles, the creative value of these pieces is commonly dismissed due to their perceived kinship with commercial advertising and evident commercial intent. The targeted dissemination of music videos towards a young or adolescent audience has posed an additional challenge for their inclusion in academically oriented research treaties. However, evidence suggests these productions significantly influence the identity formation of future adults in this age demographic (Sedeño, 2007).

Anthropologist García Canclini (1992) is among those who view music videos as vampirizing other cultural products, plundering images from various sources without narrative intention, logic, context, citation, or relevance regarding what is new or not. This process unfolds in a whirlwind of extremely short shots, where the editing turns the narrative into a parody that only the specialized viewer can understand and appreciate.

Taking a more favorable perspective toward this audiovisual mode, Saul Austerlitz (2007) positions the music video halfway between art and advertising, bridging avant-garde cinema and television commercials. In a similar vein, emphasizing the artistic foundations of music video creation rather than its commercial inclination, Sánchez-López focuses on the experimental nature of the genre as a discipline "completely open to plastic experimentalism and always ready to opportunistically capture fragments, citations, or suggestions capable of establishing coveted connections, interferences, and feedback with modern and historical art" (2009, p.183).

The conceptualization of the fantasy genre in the cinematic realm is also a subject of intense debate, as it leads to the inclusion of films with diverse themes in a common category. In these films, the unusual, marvelous, or impossible may only be vaguely outlined. As noted by Sánchez-Escalonilla (2009), critics, theorists, philosophers, and researchers often relegate the fantasy genre to a marginal position, directly ignoring it in some classifications such as Buscome's (2003). Commercially, it is commonly associated with children or a freakish inclination. However, Sánchez-Escalonilla (2009) reminds us that this genre is one of the most effective in explaining the real world through metaphors, projections, or warnings:

> Fantasy provides, as material, a specific diegetic universe where two opposing worlds, one ordinary and the other extraordinary, coexist. Secondly, the fantasy genre facilitates the exploration of human mysteries (death, the future, time, identity, freedom...) within the context of the marvelous and admirable. (p.19)

THE FANTASTIC MUSIC VIDEO IN SPAIN

With philosophical inspiration and a backdrop of social criticism, *La estatua del jardín botánico* (Capellas, 1983) is considered by some authors as the first Spanish music video due to its evident role as a transmitter of the group's image and the aim of endowing it with a veneer of maturity and artistic vocation (Viñuela, 2009). Sergi Capellas seeks to emulate the work *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), a music video directed three years earlier by David Mallet for David Bowie's

song. In the case at hand, Santiago Auserón, leader of Radiofutura, portrays a metallic statue that comes to life to witness situations of a surreal nature.

The connection with the fantasy genre is more apparent in *Lobo Hombre en París* (1984) by La Unión, directed by José Luis Lozano. The structure of this music video has narrative elements, although it incorporates fragments of musical performance.

In this sense, it is relevant to note that the lack of linearity in the plot of music videos is supported, as *Vernallis* (2004) points out, by the idea that the reception of these is more akin to listening than seeing. Their primary goal is to create atmospheres and sensations rather than provide specific information. Additionally, since the song serves as the foundation upon which everything else is built, the structure of the music video follows that of the music itself, which tends to be cyclical and episodic rather than sequential.

Therefore, the traditional organization of introduction, development, and conclusion is uncommon in this genre. However, being inspired by Boris Vian's story *Le Loup-Garou*, written in 1947, the video adopts an aesthetic reminiscent of Hollywood cinema from that same decade. After numerous allusions to Vian's work, the fantastic element hovers over the piece as a narrative tension and is finally introduced through diegetic sound, including howls and thunder. These elements serve to contextualize what the images had led us to suspect, revealing the protagonist as a monster.

Throughout the 1990s, the genre in Spain is characterized by a strong display of the artist and a treatment of images that is lacking in originality, although the quality of productions is on the rise, along with the resources invested in them.

In contrast, in the Anglo-Saxon world, there are multiple clear and successful examples of fantastic, supernatural, marvelous, or impossible contexts represented or referenced in music videos of this decade. Figures in this union include directors like Michel Gondry with some famous videos for Daft Punk or Björk, inspired by fantasy and populated by mummies, robots, and other creatures. Dayton and Faris stand out with *Tonight, Tonight* (1996), paying homage to Méliès and his *A Trip to the Moon* (1902). However, the music video director most closely tied to horror and science fiction is Chris Cunningham. The English filmmaker has a parallel career in science fiction film productions.

For several years, he was involved in the special effects of the *Alien* film series (Fincher, 1992 y Jeunet, 1997) and the unfinished project of *Artificial Intelligence* led by Kubrick in 1994. *Come To Daddy* (1997) and *All Is Full of Love* (1999) are two of his key music videos in this regard.

In Spain, several more years are needed to witness a notable qualitative leap in the field of music videos. With the rise of the Internet, especially from 2005 onwards, there has been an increase in both quality and creativity, reaching its peak between 2009 and 2015. The driving force behind this transformation in the Spanish music video landscape could be considered the successors of the aforementioned foreign directors. Their visual perspective is clearly influenced by the admiration they express for the work of these directors.

Although parallelism can be drawn between the two revolutions in the music video, the main difference lies in the fragility and lack of recognition that the format carries in our country. This precariousness seems to be, according to some experts, part of a possible explanation for the phenomenon, as it enjoys the creative freedom offered by a zero-budget, resulting in a character of "favor" rather than a commission. As Susana Blas points out:

> The precariousness with which these audiovisual pieces are produced in our country has favored the creation of free and unique works, which perhaps could not have been developed with the same freedom in contexts with more 'support' and control from the music industry. (2009)

Apart from this lack of resources, it seems that a better predisposition of the audience to the reception of this type of audiovisual product in this decade converges, along with perhaps chance or influence in a small group of filmmakers who stand out with impressive works of astonishing artistic and audiovisual value.

Of course, in these cases, fantasy has its place. These are authors who have grown up under the influence of television, comics, and science fiction literature; pop culture is decisive in their references and obsessions. This is reflected in their style and often manifests through the mythological, magical, or terrifying, albeit in a rather veiled or insinuated way, due to the lack of means that prevent extensive special effects or spectacular characterizations.

CANADA AND THE FANTASTIC GENRE

Despite the constant decrease in traditionally meager budgets, the landscape of Spanish music videos during this period stands out for its quality. Paradoxically, this improvement is not attributed to a decisive commitment by the music industry but rather to the initiative of a new generation of independent artists and the talent of small production companies. These companies, often finding financial support in advertising, reinvest their profits in the creation of music videos. Notable examples include production companies such as Nanouk Films, Struendo Filmmakers, Common Films, Les Nouveaux Auteurs, and Sofa Experience, among others. Particularly noteworthy is the case of the renowned production company CANADA, formed in 2008 by directors Luis Cerveró, Nicolás Méndez, and Lope Serrano, whose international projection was consolidated, especially with the acclaimed work *Bombay*, directed by Nicolás Méndez for El Guincho (2010).

Under the label CANADA, the three directors sign their work, either individually or collaboratively. Luis Cerveró, who is perhaps considered the most talented music video director of recent years in Spain, pays homage to Z-grade horror cinema in *De la monarquía a la criptocracia* (2010), for Triángulo de Amor Bizarro incorporating satanic symbolism, cult rituals, and sacrifices. The piece includes references to films by Jess Franco and gothic horror productions by Hammer Productions. The concept of cryptocracy or shadow government is focused in this case on spiritualism and satanic cults. The director's audiovisual style, specialized in editing, is characterized by frenetic and flickering shot changes, overlays, and an abundance of zooms. Quite distant from cinematic narrativity, all that horror imagery seeps into the viewer's consciousness almost subliminally.

Figure 1: Scene from Espada. Luis Cerveró, 2014.
Source: YouTube.

Although somewhat veiled, the macabre is a constant in his pieces. In *Espada* (2014) for Javiera Mena, multiple cultural references coexist, including a character reminiscent of Japanese anime in the style of *Sailor Moon* (Takeuchi, 1992-1997) a schoolgirl who transforms into a magical heroine) or the singer's eyebrow-less and horrendous-toothed characterization in some shots as a reference to *Nosferatu* by Murnau (1922) (Figure 1). Also present are 1980s science fiction settings reminiscent of *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982) and elements of fairy tales with "knights" and maidens with impossible scales.

Nicolás Méndez, another founder of CANADA who still leads the production company, has in his extensive list of music videos some references to the fantastic genre. While many of them are more famous for alluding to the French New Wave of Godard or the surrealism of Buñuel, others directly address or refer to the supernatural or the monstrous. In this collection is *Invisible Light* (Méndez, 2010) for Scissors Sisters with references to *Belle de Jour* (Buñuel, 1967), *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, 1968), or a version of *Cleopatra* (Mankiewicz, 1963) with shades of psychological horror. *Stay Awhile* (Méndez, 2014), for She & Him, focuses, albeit in a highly choreographic and metaphorical way, on the dance of the protagonist with a ghost. This love story could well allude to the movie *Ghost* (Zucker, 1990).

More explicitly, in *The Less I Know The Better* (2015), for Tame Impala, directed together with Lope Serrano, the aesthetic and location of an American teenage horror film are intertwined with a character reminiscent of King Kong (originally inspired by *Max, mon amour* (Oshima, 1986)). On this occasion, the main theme is a love triangle in which the third party is a gorilla competing with the male protagonist for the attention of the cheerleader. This idea is presented through multiple narrative resources. The most obvious ones are found in scenes where the character is an actor in a costume. However, in others, traditional animation is used in a more suggestive than descriptive way. Finally, the obsessive idea of the man-ape that overwhelms the protagonist takes on dreamlike tones when transmitted through objects: bananas in various formats, the colossal gorilla hands holding the girl, or the texture of the beast's hair appearing in the most unexpected places, as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Scenes from The Less I Know The Better. Nicolás Méndez / Lope Serrano, 2015. Source: YouTube.

Lope Serrano is the third of the founding directors of the production company and also has a particular inclination for fantasy. In 2011, he directed *Brillar* (by Svper, formerly Pegasus), a clip with the essence of a knight's tale that revisits the myth of Excalibur, the mythical magic sword of King Arthur. This element is taken as the main reference for a piece that revolves around the literal concept of brightness. The flashes of the protagonist knight's armor add to those

of the weapon in a brief narration that still includes the two known versions by which the king would have obtained Excalibur. On one hand, the sword stuck in the stone is shown, although the piece culminates with the appearance of the sparkling Nimue, the Lady of the Lake who, according to the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* books (anonymous, 1215-1230), is responsible for delivering the weapon to Arthur. That same year, he directed *All In White* by The Vaccines, loaded with scenes of cults, magical rituals, horror references like *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973), telekinesis, levitation, and other fantastic iconography (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Scene from Brillar. Lope Serrano, 2011.
Source: YouTube

OTHER DIRECTORS

In addition to the members of CANADA, there are other directors in our country devoted to the fantastic cause. Among them, renowned filmmakers such as J.A. Bayona and Kike Maíllo stand out. Their commitment to the genre is more than evident in several of their feature films; let's not forget that Maíllo has been one of the pioneers in Spanish science fiction with *Eva* (2011), a film with astonishing special effects that explores the relationships between humans and robots with a high degree of artificial intelligence. Bayona, on the other hand, has directed films of the caliber of *The Orphanage* (2007) and *A Monster Calls* (2016). Both have a magnificent track record in the world of music videos with forays into horror or dystopia. The most palpable example is *Disconnected*

(2012), a video in which Bayona pays homage to Giallo cinema with all the visual and narrative resources of the Italian subgenre, while also including references to *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) and *The Others* (Amenábar, 2001).

On the other hand, we can talk about directors dedicated exclusively to music videos. Nysu Films, the artistic name of director Jesús Hernández, is another exponent of Spanish music videos who started in this field around 2009. The director has a special attraction for references to the horror subgenre. In *Milana* (2013), for example, we see the woman performing the song transforming into a zombie in an environment that could be described as a Spanish version of the roadside bar from *From Dusk Till Dawn* (Robert Rodriguez, 1996).

Objetos personales (Hernández, 2011), by Havalina, falls within the found footage horror subgenre, similar to *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez, 1999). The entire footage is recorded from a subjective point of view on VHS during the supposed vacation of a group of girls who disappeared 17 years earlier. The travel footage gradually includes unsettling ropes that appear and disappear and eventually end up hanging several them. Hernández has many other productions where influences from films by Hitchcock, Kubrick or David Lynch.

Finally, we want to include in our study the work of Chino Moya, which we consider paradigmatic in the relationship between music videos and the fantastic genre, as well as a clear example of the evolutionary process from this format to feature-length filmmaking.

Although many of his creations have hints of horror or science fiction, we will focus on two videos whose central plot is strongly linked to the fantastic and that also lay the foundations for the themes and aesthetics that the director will develop in his feature film *Undergods* (2020).

The first of them is *Digital Witness* (2014). The main idea of the music video is the existence of an alienated and dehumanized society that acts mechanically and unconsciously in an environment completely devoid of nuances. The narrative is directly influenced by the dystopian Russian novel *We* (1924) by Zamyatin, a precursor to titles like Orwell's 1984 (1949) and Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). In *We*, individuality is annulled through different totalitarian mechanisms. *Digital Witness* outlines similar ideas to those described by Zamyatin, except with colorful aesthetic and choreographic movements closer to the language of music videos. To strip locations of all identity, an impressive digital cleaning is carried out in

post-production, resulting in a strange and claustrophobic urban environment. Similarly, costumes and characterization accompany this idea of uniformity. The characters' performances are entirely expressionless. The interpretation of the protagonist differs slightly to convey a state of perpetual vigilance and lack of humanity as a reflection of screen addiction in today's society.

Supersubmarina (Moya, 2009) is a narrative story that presents three parallel stories that are somehow intertwined. Three main characters lead three plotlines that share a stage. A girl with mental powers acts as a link between the subplots. The narrative takes place in a outskirts area of an industrial-looking city that the director deliberately places somewhere in Eastern Europe, taking advantage of all the iconic elements of the landscape.

The video could be understood as the trailer for a movie with a complex plot. In this context, the analogy proposed by *Vernallis* (2004) is relevant, equating the experience of reading comics with the interpretation of images in music videos. In both cases, the narrative lacks coherence and linear continuity. Information is presented in a fragmented way, leaving the reader/viewer responsible for filling in the spaces between these fragments. Music video viewers determine the temporal duration between two actions, interpret transitions in editing, and establish the reason behind the specific connection between two adjacent shots.

Figure 4: Scene from *Supersubmarina*. Chino Moya, 2009.
Source: YouTube.

For this project, Moya looks at Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979). In a clear homage, as demonstrated by Figure 4, the final scene of the movie is cited, where the girl moves a glass with the power of her mind, a sequence that happens almost literally in Moya's video.

The piece is set in an imprecise and open-to-interpretation temporal space, which could be understood either as a dystopian future or as a parallel present. In this possible future, we find three lonely people in search of some stimulus to fill their existential void and coexist with the presence of UFOs. *Supersubmarina* serves as a laboratory for experiments to prepare for his first feature film, *Undergods*, released in 2020. It is during this project that the idea of making a feature film arises. We find commonalities between the two works. Both unfold in similar settings: semi-deserted and decadent cities, halfway between *Mad Max* (Miller, 1979) and *12 Monkeys* (Gilliam, 1995). Both share the concept of an alternative universe without technological fanfare and with a society representing ultramodern loneliness. Regarding the structure, the music video and the feature film are articulated based on subtly interconnected narratives, particularly in *Undergods*, sometimes almost imperceptibly. If in *Supersubmarina* the guiding thread was the girl, in the movie, it is the human traffickers.

Undergods delves deep into the homage to "The Stalker" and other references, ranging from pop culture to auteur cinema, encompassing horror and science fiction from Stephen King, George A. Romero, or Kubrick. The visual dimension always proves to be a crucial element in Moya's creations, inseparable from the storyline in both his music videos and Undergods. The striking styling and aesthetics of *Digital Witness* (Moya, 2014) are present in the film, through monochromatic treatment and the wardrobe of various scenes. Also, in the casting, we see a continuity with his previous work. Gray characters with mundane attire blend with the abject and grotesque. Extravagant hairdressing and contorted facial expressions accompany the Kafkaesque idea of the absurd and the horror of the everyday. In the works of this director, it is customary to find older individuals with unconventional appearances in advertising and music videos, fields that traditionally focus on young, cheerful, and attractive people.

With this film, Moya asserts the social function of the fantasy genre as a conveyor of messages, in this case, warnings about a pessimistic future to which our society is headed, and that we still have time to avoid.

CONCLUSION

The fantasy genre emerges as a prominent influence in music videos, serving as a primary source of inspiration for directors. Numerous creators explore the fantastical, especially within the subgenres of horror and science fiction, as an experimental process that often becomes a gateway to the cinematic sector.

The nature of genre music videos involves the reconfiguration of quotes and references from various artistic and cultural disciplines, giving rise to innovative products that, in turn, exert influence on various aspects of the audiovisual field.

Although to a lesser extent than in the Anglo-Saxon world, several Spanish directors export their talent, achieving international recognition that sometimes surpasses their notoriety in our country. In the second decade of this century, music videos experience a notable boom in terms of volume, quality, new digital formats, and possibilities for evolution. In Spain, this phenomenon is occasionally linked to the fantasy genre as a resource for surprise and innovation.

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EVEN THE VERY WISE CANNOT SEE ALL ENDS: GOLLUM ALTER EGO OF HEROES

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Gollum is one of the most controversial characters in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. The duality of the creature's personality between good and evil has been a starting point for debating his role within the story and the fate of Middle-Earth. Although his role as hero, villain, and even a reverse Frodo has been discussed, we consider that he has a much more complex function: to be the mirror in which the heroes are reflected. Through his own personality, history, and behaviour, Gollum reveals to the hero a part of who he really is and what he could be if he does not make the right decisions in his heroic journey; his presence, along with a prolonged contact in time, transforms and deepens the hero's personality, becoming his *alter ego*. Considering the two key moments in which the creature confronts each one of the heroes in Tolkien's work, the first with Bilbo at the lake of the Misty Mountains and the second in the journey with Frodo through the lands of Mordor, we will proceed to analyse how Gollum shows a reciprocal behaviour towards the hero, where his choices and actions are not decided by him, but a reflection of the hero's own. Moreover, we will examine how his presence becomes a warning of the hero's future if he fails; thus, his presence serves as a mirror in which the hero can reflect, confront, and know himself, while helping him discover the answers to what he must do.

From the first moment of his appearance, Gollum's obvious function is to retrieve the One Ring of Power and thus stop Frodo's mission to destroy it, and yet his character does not quite fit the classic description of a villain. Because of this dissatisfaction with their role in the story, there have been many ways in which the creature has been the subject of analysis. Initially, he can be construed as an incarnation of the Shadow archetype—a repulsive and reprehensible facet that lurks in the hero's unconscious and that he tries to hide (Campbell, 1959, p. 26). Although the shadow, which cannot be rejected or avoided, tends to integrate itself into the individual to help him understand who he is, Bilbo and Frodo see Gollum as an unacceptable end; they reject and avoid fully integrating that part into their destinies. While it is the shadow that transforms the character, in this case it is the hero who transforms and, to some extent, eliminates the shadow. However, he has also been interpreted from a positive perspective: a hero, albeit with some exceptions (Elizabeth Arthur, 1991, p. 19). He might seem a misunderstood hero whose actions mark and define the most important milestones of the work by constructing a peculiar hero's pathway. Moreover, his resistance to the evil influence of the Ring, greater than that of any other character, is the key to the salvation of Middle-Earth (Callaway, 1984, p. 14). Within this interpretation, he has been classified as a tragic hero in a hybridized tragedy itself, which oscillates between the classical misfortunes of the creature's actions and his struggle with the world, and the modern tragedy which delves into his own inner struggle against covetous yearning and the recovery of his own original self (Tadayoni, 2023, p. 156-158, Robertson, 2009, p. 93). Some even claim to see the creature as the mentor archetype kind—a guide somewhere between pious and evil—whose experience in Mordor compensates for the lack of more predictable and kinder elements of the mentor (Nelson, 2002, p. 50). It has also been argued that he is a patient character, the mere instrument of a broader scheme, whether manipulated by the power of the Ring itself, by Sauron or by Ilúvatar, god and creator of Middle-Earth (Gottlieb, 1971 p. 50, Callaway, 1984, p. 16).

We understand that these interpretations are not incorrect, but Gollum plays a more complex role: to become a character in which the hero can see his current actions, thoughts, and choices reflected in order to understand himself. At the same time, Gollum becomes a warning of what the hero will become if he

does not make the right choice. We do not see the creature Gollum acting freely or actively in the story's action, except when he tries to recover the Ring¸ but in that instance, he is acting under the Ring's influence. Even when he is more prominent, whether in his encounter with Bilbo or Frodo, his actions do not seem to be his own, but are influenced by those of the hero.

First of all, to understand how Gollum becomes a mirror of Frodo and Bilbo's actions, we must consider that these three characters share a common origin: they belong to Hobbit race, they are born in the Shire, they come from wealthy and respectable families with an inclination to curiosity and at some point, for different reasons, they became bearers of the One Ring of Power. These elements help us to put the characters in a similar starting position and to see them as related characters, because when they start the adventure with the Ring, they have the same advantages and disadvantages in facing the power that the Ring possesses. Even as ring-bearers, there does not seem to be much difference in their behaviour; despite the burden of keeping the Ring, all three exhibit a selfish desire for it once it comes to them and refuse to let it go, each one showing this desire more intensely than the other, but none of them go so far as to use it for evil or domination.

Gollum makes actions and choices by mirroring those the hero has made before. During his encounter with Bilbo in the underground lake, we see that they act on a similar curiosity. They Agree to play the riddle and both try to find out who the other is and what the other wants. Gollum, whose attitude is usually understood as hostile, is replaced by Bilbo's curiosity. The riddle game shows how Gollum becomes a metaphorical mirror in which Bilbo sees himself: the riddles they both know are not only ancient, which makes it easier for them to know the answers, but they mostly revolve around everyday elements and evoke memories of distant times and a by gone past. As the game progresses, the difficulty increases, with Bilbo posing more difficult questions and Gollum, in a mirror-like procedure, similarly proposes more complex puzzles. The first promise is yet to be kept: If Gollum does not know the answer, he will help Bilbo out of the cave; if Bilbo does not know, Gollum will eat him; the promise is only broken when Bilbo inadvertently cheats the game: On arrival at the cave he finds a ring, the One Ring of Power, which had so far belonged to Gollum, and placing itself in his pocket, he forgets about it. In the middle of the game, he touches his

pockets and wonders aloud "What have I got in my pocket?" (Tolkien, 2002, p. 125); Gollum thinks it's a riddle and tries to solve it, Bilbo takes advantage of the situation and wins the game because Gollum can't possibly know what abides in his pockets. Gollum will not only discover the trap but also the theft, and thus decides not to keep his part of the bargain.

However, it also reflects good actions. Later in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Gandalf tells Frodo about Gollum's story, and Frodo asks why Bilbo did not kill him in this chance encounter, Gandalf warns him that "the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many" (Tolkien 1954a, p. 78). Not killing Gollum means that Bilbo did not kill himself; if he had, he would have condemned himself and others to death, for in the end, thanks to Gollum, the Ring gets destroyed. Bilbo's act of mercy towards the creature is returned to the hobbit himself—and to the inhabitants of Middle-Earth—as an echo in posterity. Treachery reflects treachery, but pity also similarly reflects pity itself. The outcome of the encounter, whether it leads to good or evil, depends on the attitude that the hero adopts when confronting the creature.

This same mirror function is developed with Frodo from the first moment they meet. The paths of both come together in the deserted mountains of Emyn Muil. Gollum begins to pursue the Hobbits until he falls off a cliff, at which point Frodo and Sam take advantage of the distraction and attack him. Gollum responds to the attack, but only because Sam and Frodo have done so first, and from this confrontation with Frodo he acts in the same manner as the hero treats him: he promises to be good to them only if they are good to him in exchange.

A little further into the story's progress, Gollum swears to serve Frodo. Sam observes the scene of loyalty as an intruder and realises that there is something that makes them equal:

> It appeared to Sam that his master had grown and Gollum had shrunk: a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in grey cloud, and at his feet a little whining dog. Yet the two were in some way akin and not alien: they could reach one another's minds (Tolkien, 1954b, p. 807).

They both stand in front of each other, as if looking into a mirror glass of their own selves, and although they are nothing alike, deep down, they share the same ambition: Gollum wants to possess the ring so much as Frodo cannot possibly get rid of it. In addition, a second function of Gollum becomes apparent: his presence will be a reminder of the Ring's effects, its power, and Frodo's future if he fails his duty.

On the other hand, although from this moment on the Ring begins to consume Frodo's will and he begins a slow journey to become another Gollum, his courage, his kindness and his Hobbit attitude still dominate him. The latter will be the image he reflects in Gollum and, as we have said, since the creature is a mirror, it begins to reflect and reinforces a "chink in the dark: light out of the past" (Tolkien, 1954a, p. 72) that Gandalf believed could save the creature and keep it from becoming a totally malevolent being. From the moment they meet, the difference between Gollum and Sméagol, the Hobbit personality that still underlies the creature, the light of the past, is accentuated not only in his attitude but also in his physique:

> From that moment a change, which lasted for some time, came over him. He spoke with less hissing and whining, and he spoke to his companions direct, not to his precious self. He would cringe and flinch, if they stepped near him or made any sudden movement, and he avoided the touch of their elven-cloaks; but he was friendly, and indeed pitifully anxious to please. He would cackle with laughter and caper, if any jest was made, or even if Frodo spoke kindly to him, and weep if Frodo rebuked him (Tolkien, 1954b, p. 808).

The same sweetness and familiarity Frodo treats him is shown by Gollum at several points afterwards: namely, when he hunts for them because they are hungry, when he stands guard while they stop to rest, and even when he tries to wake Frodo up: "slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee – but almost the touch was a caress" (Ibid., p. 935).

Even though Gollum has been stripped of the Ring, when Frodo feels its weight, the creature seems to feel it as well: "in fact with every step towards the gates of Mordor Frodo felt the Ring on its chain about his neck grow more

burdensome. […] Gollum probably felt something of the same sort" (Ibid., p. 824). There is a shared desire to keep the Ring away from its creator and, although, we certainly don't know what Frodo could have done with the Ring, but we do not think he would have wanted to do much more than what Gollum did with it: forage for food, do little evils, and wander the wilderness. In fact, although Frodo does begin to have a vile attitude, it is only so when they try to take the Ring away from him—which he solely uses to protect others, much as the Gollum did. Neither does he become a deeply evil creature, Frodo's desire to keep the Ring seems to be motivated by the same aspirations as the Gollum's: "he doesn't want to wield power; he only wants, in fact needs, to have his Ring" (Levitin, 1966, p. 3).

The creature, originally a warning, begins to project Frodo's present. In addition to being a mirror, Gollum is a reflection of what Frodo is becoming for not doing his duty; in fact, Sam begins to describe Frodo as an old, thin, wasted face that reminds him more and more of the creature who accompanies him. Even his consciousness seems to split into two different people, just as Gollum's mind was fragmented.

Next to the Cracks of Doom, Frodo, driven by the same ambition as Gollum, decides not to destroy the Ring. There, each transformed into seeming reciprocal selves, they face each other. Gollum, who is shown as the ultimate consequence of being swept away by the power of the Ring, the supposed villain, reappears at the very end when all seems to be lost in order to fight Frodo, the supposed hero, whose attitude no longer fits the description of hero. The creature rips off Frodo's finger off and falls into the fire with the Ring. Frodo, maimed and scarred by the burden, is rescued by an unexpected hero who, in addition to taking away his hope, is a reminder of his impending doom. By an unfortunate event, Gollum destroys the Ring, saves Middle-Earth, and dies because that is what the hero, Frodo, should do, but cannot; as his reflection and alternative ending, as his *alter ego*, the responsibility falls on his shoulders.

Robert A. Hall (1984) has discussed the possibility that Frodo ordered Gollum to throw the Ring; we know that he had already threatened to throw it into the fire, and since the creature had sworn allegiance to the master of the Ring, he may have obeyed. Still, as the author rightly reminds us, seeing

everything from Sam's perspective, we are unsure of the implied or non-existent conversation that may have taken place. If we allow for this possibility, we might affirm that Gollum is a mirror, simply reflecting the hero's actions.

Finally, it is evident that Gollum's actions are reciprocal to those of the hero; the creature reflects the image, behaviour and values of the character he looks up to: Whether negative actions, such as Bilbo's riddle game or Frodo and Sam's attack on Emyn Muil, or positive attitudes, such as Bilbo's pity or Frodo's humanity, Gollum does not distinguish between good and evil, but merely returns the image that the hero give him at the time. Also, as a reflection, it has the ability to anticipate the hero's decisions and show him an alternative ending if he shirks his responsibilities. Gollum is a character with a complex role: on the one hand, he is an individual being in his own way of moving through the world, yet universal in his ability to adapt to the actions and behaviour of others to show the hero who he is and what he can become.

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THE HYBRID IDENTITY OF THE MONSTER: DIALECTICS OF THE POSSIBLE AND IMPOSSIBLE IN VIDEO GAME NARRATIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Under the multiple and numerous forms that the imaginary of the fantastic has taken since the 19th century, and in its passage through different expressive media, the introspective aspect has brought us before the representation of monstrous creatures that, instead of coming from an external reality, emerge from the human being himself, from his inner self. Some fictional worlds belonging to the videoludic sphere take up, on the one hand, this heritage of the fantastic genre and, on the other, reconfigure this subject matter based on an autonomous language, which implies the use of an approach aimed at the ludonarrative and aesthetic particularities that characterise the videogame, as well as the role played by its mechanics.

Within the framework of this passage from the fantastic to videoludic expression, the aim of our study is to analyse, from its ludonarrative dimension, the phenomenon of introspection[1] within the particularities of videoludic language,

[1] While this notion has many parallels with Freud's concept of the Uncanny, we have chosen to use a broader term, that of fantastic introspection, which does not necessarily reproduce the same attributes and

especially those related to the genre of the fantastic. Starting from the dialectic formed between the categories of the possible and the impossible, we will focus in a particular way on the fictional representation of the figure of the monster as a hybrid identity. Under this purpose, we will rely more particularly on three titles that, from different aesthetic and narrative configurations, respond to our theoretical proposal: *Shadow of the Colossus* (Team Ico, 2005), *Undertale* (Toby Fox, 2015) and *The Dark Pictures Anthology: Little Hope* (Supermassive Games, 2020). The ludonarrative dimensions of these three video games will serve as archetypal models of three different modes of discourse in narratives of the introspective fantastic. At the same time, we must emphasize that this analysis is part of a line of research already explored in a previous study (Chico Morales, 2023), dedicated to the analysis of the ludonarrative dimension of *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment, 2010) as a videoludic representation of the fantastic genre.

We base our study on two hypotheses that will mark the development of the dialectic proposed:

> a) The discourses that emerge from the three video games analysed share the same common denominator: the dialectic between the identity of the character controlled by the player (the sphere of the possible) and the appearance of a monstrous creature (the sphere of the impossible) does not establish fixed categories but are open to a process of transformation.
> b) This rethinking of the opposition between the human figure and the monstrous figure leads us to introduce the category of hybrid identity.

In view of the objectives of our study and the hypotheses, we will employ a methodology based on two central pillars: firstly, the dialectical method, which will support the two fundamental axes of the analysis, the possible and the impossible. In this sense, we adapt the approaches of Roger Caillois (1966) and David Roas (2019), from literary studies to the languages and formal aspects of the video game. In this process of adaptation to the dynamics of signification specific to video game expression, we find in the

aesthetic implications of Freud's concept.

"theory of *ludofictional worlds*", proposed by Antonio J. Planells (2022), a solid methodological system from which to access the analysis of the fictional frameworks of the video game. On the other hand, we will employ a discourse analysis methodology to identify the narrative particularities of the monstrous figures in the fictional worlds proposed.

As for the construction of our theoretical framework, we have a number of previous studies that have analysed the incorporation of the fantastic - or themes and concepts related to the genre, such as the category of the Uncanny[2] or horror[3] - in the video game: from a social semiotics perspective of the Uncanny (Maté, 2019; 2020), from a formal analysis of the Uncanny in the video game (García Catalán & Navarro Remesal, 2016), from an aesthetic dimension (Lozano Muñoz, 2015) or from its narrative implications (Campos Méndez, 2021; Fernández Ruiz & Puente Bienvenido, 2015). It is necessary to highlight, in this sense, the monograph coordinated by Susana Tosca in 2015, dedicated to the points of intersection between the video game and the fantastic.

One of the first more serious delimitations of the fantastic genre within the academic sphere is made by Roger Caillois (1966). He establishes his characterisation and definition of the genre based on its differentiation from the enchanted (or *féerique*) universe. While the former harbours "a scandal, a rupture, an unusual irruption" (p. 8) of a supernatural element in a real world, the enchanted universe does not present this dialectical interplay between the supernatural and the ordinary reality, because the first level constitutes the

[2] We adopt Freud's conceptual delimitation of the term Uncanny in his 1919 essay Das Unheimliche (translated into English from German as The Uncanny) based on the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann and revising the conceptualization previously made by the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch. From an aesthetic approach, Freud (2003) defines the Uncanny as: "one such is the 'uncanny'. There is no doubt that this belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (p.123). Along the same lines as Jentsch, he establishes a dialectic between the term heimlich, which, in German, would refer us to the concept of home, familiar, while unheimlich would be presented as the antagonistic term (unfamiliar, strange and unknown). Therefore, for Freud, the concept of Uncanny refers us to that which is hidden in our own identity, in a veiled way and which, nevertheless, can come to light at a given moment transcending its state of repression. This vision, in relation to our study, helps us especially when it comes to unraveling the fantastic genre from the introspective way.

[3] Even though the fantastic genre moves in neighbouring terrain with other genres with which it shares certain stylistic, formal and thematic features, it is necessary to delimit the definitions and boundaries of each one. To this end, we have followed the references cited in this theoretical framework. In addition, in more particular aesthetic and narrative aspects, we highlight the work of Juan Herrero Cecilia (2000).

starting point and the global setting of the fictional framework of the story. This same dialectic survives in other later narratological theories of the fantastic, such as that of Tzvetan Todorov (1970). Today, the work of David Roas constitutes one of the most complete approaches to the narrative forms of the fantasy genre. The same delimitation of the fantastic genre established by Caillois, based on the irruption of the unusual element in a universe close to the reader's codes of reality, is employed by Roas (2019) and situates the particularity of the fantastic tale in "the problematic confrontation between the real and the impossible" (pp.13-14). The fantastic imaginary, under this perspective, would be defined by a coexistence between the possible and the impossible that triggers a rupture within the story.

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS: THE MONSTER AS ENEMY

In the introspective dimension of the fantastic, the advent of the extraordinary element does not emanate from the outside, but from the character's inner world. *Shadow of the Colossus*, defined by Óliver Pérez Latorre (2012) as a model of "mythopoesis" (p.282), suggests, in our case, a vision of the malleable monster identity. In relation to our study, the configuration of this ludofictional world is based on a proposal that is closer to the sphere of the enchanted universe than the fantastic: neither the environment nor the characters reproduce codes of reality that are close to the player. However, within this framework of impossibility, we can glimpse a questioning of the frontiers between the human and the monstrous.

Shadow of the Colossus is a third-person action-adventure game focused on a quest to defeat a series of colossi. The main goal presented to us at the beginning of the game is to revive Mono, a female character who dies because of a sacrifice. Her body is transported to a shrine by Wander, the main character of the story, whom the player controls to defeat sixteen giants. These colossal monsters are presented as the main enemy of the game that we must extinguish and that, in case of success, would provide us with the resurrection of Mono, as the voice of Dormin, a dark and sombre presence capable of revitalising the deceased character, tells us in an opening cinematic. In this sense, in the presentation of the challenges and obstacles, the experience focuses on the figure of the colossus as the representative image of the monster.

Each colossus involves a different strategy and interaction with the environment. We have only a bow and a sword as weapons for combat -although the latter is also used for orientation-, together with the skill of climbing to defeat the enemies. Therefore, the game's ludic dimension, configured in an austere and elemental way, privileges the figure of the colossi as a challenge and we do not find other enemies, obstacles or secondary missions that expand the main story. However, its aesthetic and narrative proposals, harmonised with the simplicity of its mechanics, manage to create a complex discourse, full of significant elements open to interpretation.

Dormin's character was divided into sixteen parts. Each of them was sealed inside the body of each colossus. As the player kills each of them, he can observe how this essence is progressively integrated into Wander's body. We can thus corroborate that we witness a progressive transformation of the character with each success. Its fictional framework makes use of the interesting dialogue between the objective set at the beginning and the development of the story itself. The game leads us, at the end of the history, to become part of the essence we have defeated, the shadowy identity of Dormin, which invites us, as players, to think about whether our own actions are the trigger for the monstrosity. It is necessary to remember that we are making use of Dormin's evil power to resurrect the deceased character, which, in a way, inserts us into a situation that is not without a certain ambivalence in our character's identity. Overcoming the challenges in the game gives us a double interpretation: on the one hand, each victory over a colossus translates into a gradual physical deterioration of Wander's character and, at the same time, an improvement in Mono's character. In this case, it can be understood that the progress leads to the triumph of the antagonist figure and transforms us into a monstrous character. Or, on the other hand, this final situation allows us to question whether the previously defeated giants, invaded by Dormin's evil essence, are but victims within the experience.

This idea leads us to the two types of ethical game design proposed by Miguel Sicart (2009): "open ethical design" and "closed ethical design" (pp.207-223). In the first type, the player's value system can be implemented in the game world, so that his ethical decisions influence its dynamics. In the second type, the player's ethical decisions cannot be implemented due to the constraints of the design boundaries, therefore the player's ethical value system cannot alter the

narrative and dynamics of the game. However, this impossibility of intervention does not prevent him from creating a critical judgement or attitude towards the story that surrounds his experience, according to his personal ethical coordinates. In the case of *Shadow of the Colossus*, the adventure forces us to eliminate the monsters to progress, thereby obstructing any other possibility in accordance with the player's ethics, but, by virtue of the complexity of its discourse, it does allow us to maintain a critical or even emotional attitude.

UNDERTALE AND PLAYER ETHICS

The video game created by Toby Fox and released for the first time in 2015 shows us, under a different aesthetic and very different mechanics to the previous title analysed, an alternative vision of the monster that leads us to think about the identity of the character we control and how this is intimately related to the dynamics of the game itself.

The game tells us at the beginning of the experience that, in a remote time, monsters and humans lived together on the surface, but one day, the humans, endowed with souls, bury the monsters underground after defeating them in a battle. The player controls Frisk, a boy who has accidentally fallen into the monsters' habitat and who, by virtue of different strategies and decisions, will have to find a way to return to the humans' space. Along the way, the player, from the control of Frisk, will learn about the history of the monsters, as well as the different causes that have intervened during events.

During his experience, the player, depending on his choices, has the possibility to kill the monsters or opt for a peaceful option. This approach, which moves between destruction and friendship and offers us three different endings depending on our decisions, opens new possibilities within the ludic experience and, at the same time, makes us rethink, as players, the ties that unite the monstrous figures with humans. Using the nomenclature of Víctor Navarro Remesal (2016), within the elements that make up the "central system" of the video game (pp. 58-97), obstacles constitute one of its fundamental components, as "an element of the central system that interposes itself between the player and the objective" (p. 80). In this case, the monster appears as an obstacle, but, by virtue of the player's decisions, its status as an enemy can

become more malleable. By virtue, therefore, of the ludonarrative dynamics, *Undertale* manifests an idea of a more flexible enemy and allows us to question the figure of the monster and its identity, which does not necessarily have to be hostile. The death of the enemy is not the only method that enables us to overcome obstacles. Once again, we can find through this example the typology established by Sicart between an open ethical design and a closed ethical design: *Undertale*, unlike *Shadow of the Colossus*, reproduces this category of "open ethical design", since its values can intervene in the story, depending on its decisions to maintain a warlike or peaceful attitude towards the monsters.

MONSTER UNVEILED IN *LITLLE HOPE*

Little Hope is a narrative horror adventure and the second title in *The Dark Pictures Anthology* series. While its approach and design are very similar to the previous title in the saga in all its facets, there is, however, a notable peculiarity in relation to its predecessor title, *Man of Medan* (Supermassive Games, 2019), and the subsequent video games: the exploration of the introspective sphere as one of the possible causes of the appearance of the extraordinary phenomenon within a universe familiar or close to the player.

The narrative structure of the video game is divided into two closely related timelines: on the one hand, a present time, starring four students and a teacher who will be controlled by the same player or several players, depending on the chosen mode. On the other hand, the player is sometimes placed in a remote past that serves as a fictional frame of reference to explain certain fantastic phenomena of the present.

We are faced with a realistic scenario, both in the presentation of the characters and in the representation of space, by virtue of an aesthetic that seeks an attention to detail and the representation of situations that are common or familiar to the player. The appearance of extraordinary elements is conceived as a fundamental element within the fantastic story, since, following Roger Caillois' thesis, there cannot be a fantastic story where there is no rupture between the extraordinary element and the ordinary environment, between what is possible or impossible from the reader's, spectator's, or player's codes of reality. In this fictional framework, we are faced with the particularity of the

introspective, of that which emanates from the psyche or the imagination of one of the characters.

In the end, faced with the possible ghostly and monstrous forms that can be found throughout the story, the player discovers that everything he has played, that he has experienced through various situations, is nothing more than the projection of a single character, who, from a narrative point of view, is the one who shares the most attributes with the figure of the monster. If we define the fantastic as the collision that results from the advent of an extraordinary event in an ordinary environment close to the player's codes of reality, *Little Hope*'s ludofictional world is an archetypal representation of the fantastic in videoludic narratives. While in *Mad of Medan* we could also identify the fantastic substratum in the dialectic of the possible and the impossible, *Little Hope* accentuates the exploration of the introspective sphere within the treatment of the fantastic. The supernatural, extraordinary element, which is introduced within a universe empirically close to the player, does not emanate from outside, but from within, and would serve as one of the most plausible resources when it comes to logically or rationally explaining a series of extraordinary phenomena.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the most significant conclusions we can draw is that the fantastic substratum that characterises the three video games analysed maintains a fundamental introspective component within the composition of their ludofictional worlds. Through this introspective route, which privileges the psychological function, we find three very heterogeneous models, in their aesthetics, narrative and mechanics, which, nevertheless, invite us to rethink the boundaries that separate the human identity from the identity of the monster. In this sense, the player, who controls a character or a group of characters - as might be the case in *Little Hope* - is the direct participant in the experience.

On the other hand, this introspective sphere, channelled through the particularities of the video game, takes on a new dimension by virtue of the player's agency. If, in cases such as *Undertale*, the player's decisions can shape the relationship between humans and monstrous figures, in *Shadow of the Colossus*, the design allows us no other path than to kill the colossi to advance. However,

in both cases, the ending allows us to question the role we have played in the experience. *Little Hoppe* is another example where the player's decision leads us down different paths within the game. In this case, however, in any of the possible endings, we arrive at the same starting point, which is the explanation of the extraordinary, supernatural, or paranormal phenomenon through the psychology of one of the characters. Particularised within the logics and dynamics of video games, these dialectics show us the passage from the observation of the (im)possible to the player's ludic experience within fantastic ludofictional worlds, by virtue of their proactive and transformative capacity[4] .

[4] PLANELLS, A.J., *op. cit*., p. 98.

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FROM EXOTIC BEING TO *SISTER*. THE IMAGE OF THE WITCH IN CONTEMPORARY VIDEO GAMES AND HER HUMANIZATION IN *THE COSMIC WHEEL SISTERHOOD*

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INTRODUCTION

In an interview given to Devolver Digital, the publisher asked Jordi de Paco —member of the studio Desconstructeam— about the origins of *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* (2023), their last title so far. He answered that a lot of people they love were "really into tarot and magic", so, in an act of curiosity and empathy, they started "reading about it and exploring it" until they "fell in love with it too"[1]. The result of this process was a deck-building genre video game with a strong narrative component, starring a group of witches. Some, like the protagonist, use tarot to read the future. Others, however, manipulate plants, formulate spells, use weapons, or study the cosmos, among other fields traditionally attributed to women with supernatural abilities.

Since the studio's early steps with *Gods Will be Watching* (2014), they have been developing an interest in though-provoking plots and the creative design. In 2018, from blending several small projects, they published *The Red Strings*

[1] The entire interview, part of the game's promotional campaign, is available at https://youtu.be/RBBrbEO8jW8?si=PZhUvqk91dQVvgcb.

Club (2018), delving into moral dilemmas derived from transhumanism and biotechnology. A cyberpunk narrative adventure game that challenges players' convictions by presenting dilemmas about the limits of humanity and non-normative identities. In 2021 they revealed *Essays on Empathy*, a set of short experiences that explores topics such as depression, anxiety, gender violence, or the representation of the LGBTQ+ community (Díaz & Fernández, 2022).

Many of their works include, within a detailed pixel art style, science fiction topics, whether space exploration, futuristic technology, supernatural phenomena or contact with extra-terrestrial life. However, *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* has replaced that iteration by the fantasy genre, magic and an interesting approach to the archetype of the witch. Topics, all of them, considered of paramount relevance due to, on the one hand, their role in raising questions about individual responsibility and emotional ties and, on the other hand, the implications about the image of women and femininity. Taking this into consideration, the present text will first offer a broad vision of the historical origins of witchcraft as a source of inspiration for the current aesthetic of the witch —mainly developed by painting and cinema— and, then, explore some of the strategies used by contemporary video games in order to add that aesthetic into their own settings, especially in the case of the title developed by Deconstructeam.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE WITCH

While the main objective of this work is not to analyse the historical figure of the witch, it is considered necessary to understand the roots of this archetype and its later development in cultural media. Considering the witch as a label and a historical concept, insofar as it is changeable and adaptive, this approach is crucial for any deep comprehension of that process.

The origins of the European witch are vague and scattered, associated with the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, some female figures from the Greco-Roman tradition can also be considered as inspiration for their re-imagination in art (Stratton, 2007; Roma, 2008; Sánchez, 2013; Morales, 2017). Since some of them are demi-goddesses like Circe or Medea —beautiful sorceresses who use ointments to cause harm for their own benefit—, some others are perverse

mortals like the *witches* of Thessaly —Canidia, Ericto, Dipsas, Pamphila, etc., blamed for practicing magic later associated with the medieval witch, such as anthropophagy, nocturnality, or the power to transform into animals using ointments (López-Narváez, 2021, pp. 83-87).

However, as Lara Alberola points out, "para que se pueda desarrollar tal personaje, […] serán necesarias unas determinadas circunstancias históricas" (2010: 43). It was during the economic and sociopolitical crisis of the late Middle Ages, particularly the 14th century, and the split of Christendom between Catholics and Protestants at the beginnings of the Early Modern Period, when those conditions arose. Furthermore, the proto-capitalist society brought the symbolic and real punishment of women framed outside its rigid gender roles (Breuer, 2023, p. 137), especially in rural areas. There, knowledge about treating diseases with plants and ointments (Hufton, 2018, p. 55) could be easily associated with remnants of pagan traditions, such as the cult of the Roman Diana or the Germanic Perchta (Sallman, 2018, pp. 517-520). The protagonists were under suspicion of practicing witchcraft by coercing the divine, using demonic forces and for the sake of individual goals (Stratton, 2023, pp. 32-33), such as promoting libertinism, spreading venereal diseases, corrupting men and ruining families (Matthews Grieco, 2018, p. 86). Even literature absorbed it into its topics, with a progressive association between female magic and evil and the establishment of the witch-demon axiom (Breuer, 2023, p. 137).

Magic was something dangerous in which people believed. Judicial texts from this period also documented real accusations of transformation, anthropophagy, infanticide, Satanism, and cursing people and crops (López-Narváez, 2021, p. 88-90). Some data, such as those provided by Sallman (2018, p. 504), also make clear the gender biased in these blames, always exceeding 70% of women among those accused of witchcraft.

THE RE-CREATION OF THE WITCH IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

With the arrival of Enlightenment in the 18th Century, nevertheless, the witch became an allegory and a stereotyped figure. Only its memory remained, as in the 17th-century engravings with scenes of a witches' Sabbath under the moon (*The influence of the moon on the heads of women*), women drawn as

an angel-demon chimera (*The True Woman*), or prosecutions of witches (*The Discovery of the Witches*), that were compiled by François Borin (2018, pp. 257-275). The image of an ancient world in which, as Bécquer said in *Desde mi celda*, "las brujas andaban todavía por el mundo" (1999). Romanticism and Neo-Gothic further solidified this image in their eagerness to promote the aesthetics favoured by the new bourgeoisie and, as a result, as Caro Baroja already pointed out, in many cases it is not possible to hear the voice of those witches, but rather the voice of those who censured them in their time or imagined them afterwards (1993, p. 300).

Since then, the aesthetics, attributes, and actions associated in cultural media to the witch —literature, painting and, later, in cinema and video games— have been those that endanger basic elements in capitalist society such as the heteropatriarchal family. In literature, the legacy of the work of the Grimm brothers and their *Children's and Household Tales* (2014) is undeniable, as is the work of pre-Raphaelites like John William Waterhouse (*The Magic Circle*, 1886; *Circe Invidiosa*, 1892; *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses*, 1891; *Jason and Medea*, 1907, etc.), whose paintings associated these mythical sorceresses with the archetype of the *femme fatale*. Similarly, is essential to consider Francisco de Goya's legacy. Those dark witches appear in *Los Caprichos* (1797-1798) and some of his *Black Paintings* (1819-1823), the same that later made the leap to cinema from *Häxan* (Christensen, 1922) to *The Witch* (Eggers, 2015) —both films that Roberto Morales (2017) connects with the influence of the Spanish painter—. The result of this construction is a conglomerate of visual attributes that the Disney factory has helped to popularize in feature films like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Hocus Pocus* (1993), *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000), or, under co-production, *Into the Woods* (2014).

Moreover, the persistence of a discourse in which the witch is still a symbol of anti-motherhood seems logical if we consider that single women are "still ghettoized anomalies, creatures to be explained and suspected" (Breuer, 2023, p. 145). Even television series like *Bewitched* (Saks, 1964-1972) or *Charmed* (Burge, 1998-2006), in which the main characters are witches, show a constant friction between magic and the domestic and family sphere. In almost all cases, the witch is, beyond her evilness, an irrational creature, expert in plants —mainly for the

preparation of poisons and other potions—, tempting and nocturnal. A recognizable character by his wand and by the presence of domestic utensils that have inverted their original function of caring and feeding, since now are used for the preparation of potions and ointments —cauldron— or to take flight —broom or vacuum cleaner—.

Figure 1: The Evil Queen, example of a wicked witch.
Source: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Walt Disney Productions, 1937).

THE WITCH IN VIDEO GAMES

In video games, this imagery is also perceived, engulfed, and simplified to focus attention on a specific aspect: the body of the witch. So far, there are two main approaches in which it is exposed.

The first, that of an old woman, is characterized by her wrinkled face of sunken lips and eyes, having her body covered in robes, and being completely alien to both her fertile biological stage and any conventional physical attractiveness. This category includes characters like the sisters Kotake and Koume from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo, 1996) and *Super Smash Bros. 4* (Bandai Namco Studios, 2014), Grutilda from *Banjo-Kazooie* (Rare, 1998), Kammy Koopa from *Paper Mario* (Intelligent Systems, 2000) and the witch from *Stardew Valley* (ConcernedApe, 2016) —always accompanied by a broom—, among others. There are others who, far from being actual witches,

are accused of being so during the gameplay, as happens to Ottilia Kemperyn, a character from *Pentiment* (Obsidian Entertainment, 2022). She is and elderly widow who lives in the forest, far from the main village, and who, like some of those historical witches from the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, not only accumulates empirical knowledge about plants and natural substances, but also pagan or syncretic beliefs.

The counterpart to this image is, as was introduced above, that of an attractive woman in an adaptation of the *femme fatale* or the sexualized *Lolita*. An exaggerated and dangerous beauty that is incompatible as well with the traditional role of wife, and so she is an anti-maternal figure. The main difference is, then, that she is now associated with the role of being a kind of "mero accesorio o recompensa para el personaje masculino protagonista y, por extensión, para el jugador " (Boris, 2018, p. 193). As part of the dynamics of sexualisation of female characters in the medium (Pérez, 2018), this scheme includes Alicia Claus, from *Bullet Witch* (Cavia Inc., 2007); Vanessa, from *Luminous Arc* (Image Epoch, 2007) —an infantilized character dressed in lingerie—; Sorceress, from *Dragon's Crown* (Vanillaware, 2013) —whose physics focus on the exaggerated movement of her breasts—; or Cereza, from *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames, 2009-2023), a cult saga whose protagonist, designed with a visual style that appeals to male audience, fights demons on heels. Even Kotake and Koume transform and merge in a specific moment to form a huge and exuberant witch, named Briova, although they still maintain their green skin and a monstrous size.

It's not the only example where the archetype is taken to the extreme. In *Left 4 Dead* (Valve Corporation, 2008), there are some infected female characters of slim build who are dressed in the remains of a top and panties who that are called "witches". They are presented as fragile creatures who cry until the player disturb them, a point when they respond using their sharp claws. This character with both sexualized and unpleasant aesthetics reaches its peak with the "bride wandering witch", an exclusive character from the DLC *The Passing* for *Left 4 Dead 2* (Valve Software, 2009). She is equivalent to the original witch but dressed in the remains of a wedding dress, and is also an example o a duality, that of dangerous beauty and the monstrosity it hides. It is, indeed, a reminiscent of that 17th-century French engraving, sublimely synthesized in the cinematic trailer of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt RED, 2015), in which the

main character, a monster-hunter known as "witcher", faces a dangerous and sensual witch who soon shows her true and terrifying form and who end up being dismembered[2].

Figure 2: A witch based on the hyper-sexualised archetype.
Source: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt RED, 2015).

THE COSMIC WHEEL SISTERHOOD

While some video games, like *Witchwood* (Alientrap, 2021) and *Little Witch in the Woods* (Sunny Side Up, 2022), have presented a more nuanced image of the witch, none have fully explored the concept of witches as active agents driving the narrative. This is where *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* stands out.

At the start of the game, we find Fortuna, a witch who has been exiled for two hundred years on an asteroid for having foretold the fall of her own coven. As her sentence extends for eight hundred more years, she invokes a behemoth with the goal of freeing herself from her prison. From a purely epistemological perspective, this title introduces the treatment of witches as a journey of self-discovery and reflection in line with Breuer's thesis on contemporary witchcraft. She argues that their "practices, like Wicca, feminist witchcraft, Gaians, Goddess-worshipers, and so on, often focus energy on self-transformation" (2023, p.

2 The entire trailer is available at https://youtu.be/1-l29HlKkXU?si=lu0EXeZqfv9QSrGK.

159), which, in a similar way, occurs in various moments throughout the game. During Fortuna's story, which is unfolded through flashbacks and interactions with other characters, not only those who surround her are affected, but her own self-awareness. One of the most significance topics is the true nature of her power, firstly unknown and believed to be reading the future, and which points directly to the question of individual responsibility and our role in society. But self-transformation and self-awareness is also important to other characters, such as the Peppermancer. After being elevated as a witch, now far from the censorship of cis-heteronormative mortal society, she manages to openly express her identity as a woman and build healthy bonds, which is, in turn, the goal of contemporary and feminist spirituality witchcraft.

Moreover, aware of the witch archetype in audiovisual products, *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* also appears in line with feminist witchcraft, developed around the 1960s with the goal of transforming structures like the pre-existing patriarchal religious (Greenwood, 2003, p. 109). Indeed, the title subverts the dominant image using characters, situations, and objects related to witchcraft. Jasmine, a witch of the coven and one of the Fortuna's best friends, possesses an advanced knowledge about botany which she applies, however, for caring her sisters and not for elaborating of poisons. Linked with nature, animalism is also present, both by the presence of mammals, birds, and reptiles that act as pets that anticipate the visit of some of the witches and by the design of some of these. Wunn, with the appearance of an owl, Yu-ënia, a Deerfolk Witch, or Cupressa, who is directly presented as a tree, are veteran witches of ancient origin dating back thousands of years. Even the case of Grethe is shown, who throughout the game undergoes a physical and spiritual union with a behemoth. There is also an assimilation of the inversion of domestic objects, although there are disconnected from the patriarchal discourse. Hence, for instance, there is always a large cauldron in Fortuna's main room and some witches use a broom for transport, although this function is shared with other gadgets such as carpets, daggers, skulls, or even blocks of jade, while other witches can directly fly. All of them part of different covens that the game portrays not as stereotypical Satanic cults, but rather as families that transcend traditional limitations. These covens function as both political institutions and havens for their members.

Figure 3: Fortuna decides what to do to kill time.
Source: *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* (Deconstructeam, 2023).

Thirdly, we can appreciate a process of humanization of the witch. The game builds situations and mechanics that add narrative complexity and deepen the psyche of the portrayed characters. Far from being mere malevolent creatures, they are shown as people with concerns, objectives, dilemmas, and insecurities. From understanding the true nature of the cosmos —as happens with Menaka, the Mathematician— to prevailing what they consider the best option for the survival of the coven —as do Aedana, Junreisha, Cupressa, and Yu-ënia—, to much more earthly matters with which any person could identify, witches in *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* pursue varied goals. Thus, the coven acquires relevant value in this humanization. It is not a mere group of witches, but the space where they, mortals who were elevated and live their new immortality in the cosmos, decide to inhabit. There, bonds of friendship and sisterhood develop, but also of obedience and respect, rebellion and even hostility. Under a rigid oligarchic structure, the coven also acquires a strong political and pseudo-democratic component when its leadership is needed to renew. At that moment, there are debates about a possible public revelation of the coven, the boundaries of the relationship between witches and the mortal world, the punishments imposed on those who break the rules, or the degree of decentralization in the governance of the coven. In this way,

gaming experience turns, as the coven itself, into a place "for women to seize discursive power and use it to change the stories told about women by changing the stories women tell about themselves" (Breuer, 2023, p. 160).

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of the witch encompasses multiple layers conditioned by the perspective from which it is observed. As a literary archetype, its construction is inspired by the traditional historical figure definitively defined during the 14th to 16th centuries. It is a changing and adaptive figure that, as various pieces of research point out, has been used to explain some of the fears and dangers of social and political structures of each era, as well as to facilitate the pigeonholing of certain groups —especially women— as scapegoats in the face of collective misfortunes.

Regarding the way in which video games represent this archetype, it draws inspiration from other traditional media, from painting to cinema or TV series. Noteworthy, as pointed out, is the work of Pre-Raphaelite artists, Romanticism, and Neo-Gothic, movements that revisit the medieval period from a perspective of nostalgia and emotions, subjectively and individually and that gave an aesthetic definition to the witch, the objects that accompany her, and her physical context. From painting to literature, through cinema and TV series, it has been incorporated into video games as an aesthetic addition, with little weight in narrative development. Characters of little depth, designed from a male gaze that have reinforced an anti-maternal image through either a denial of sexuality in cases where the witch is represented as an old wicked woman or a repulsive creature, or through a hyper-sexualisation that reduces her to a mere pseudo-erotic reward for the heterosexual male player.

As an exception to this rule, we find *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood*. In line with postmodern trends that challenge societal norms and democratize cultural production, this title develops a profound transformation of the archetype of the witch. First, witches become a critical part of the narrative, through a story that delves into individual responsibility and likewise into self-awareness. Similarly, it calls into question the heteronormative perspective by twisting the traditional attributes ascribed to the witch, like animalism, being part of a coven or using

some domestic utensils. And, finally, there is an effort to humanize the characters. By making them coexist and interact under rigid structures, *The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood* makes its witches —and the players— to stand on topics like the limits of oligarchic political structures, sorority, priorities in life and empathy.

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ROLES OF THE HEROIC PLAYER IN THE EPIC FANTASY OPEN-WORLD VIDEO GAME

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EPIC FANTASY AND OPEN-WORLD VIDEO GAMES: A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP

Contemporary epic fantasy owes much of its popularity to the adaptation of some of its most relevant literary sagas. The paradigmatic example is *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003), a film trilogy by Peter Jackson, who adapted J.R.R. Tolkien's homonymous work. However, film is not the only medium in which epic fantasy has flourished. Due to its hypermedial characteristics[1], video games emerge as the most interesting platform for the adaptation and creation of fantastic-epic works. Specifically, as we will see shortly, one of its genres, the open-world video game, is the most suitable for developing stories that unfold in imaginary and colossal worlds rich in legends, tales, and magic, stories starring a well-known figure: the hero. The hero is the protagonist whose main mission is to save the world (Ward, 2011, p. 35-36), facing "a series of adventures, quests, and/or tests during which he may slay monsters or search

[1] I refer to the hypermedial as a medium whose works have elements of a heterogeneous nature, be it visual, sonorous, photographic, or a combination of several of them (Moreno, 2008, p. 111).

for something of value" (Underberg, 2005, p. 10). Recently, the morality of the epic fantasy hero has moved away from the traditional dichotomy between Good and Evil to evolve toward an intermediate position, closer to Miller's tragic hero (2000), an archetype called the *twilight hero* (Castro Balbuena, 2022).

But what happens with the hero in the video game, in which the player also has to be the protagonist? The open-world video game focuses on the complexity of the fictional world, as is in literary epic fantasy, and its exploration (García Moreno, 2021, p. 113). But this genre is also known because of the possibility for players to choose their own objectives (Alexander & Martens, 2017). This freedom arises when the player is born into the fictional work through his/her avatar (Vella, 2015, p. 2019), which can vary in its representation (Navarro Remesal, 2012, p. 287). The avatar determines how the player interacts with the video game, i.e., the *player agency* Bódi speaks of (2023, p. 22). Following these ideas, in the moment that the open-world video game is also considered epic fantasy due to its compatibility with the generic signals[2] of these stories, the protagonist of the video game should not only be the hero, but also the player. Nevertheless, how does the player know *how to be a hero* inside the (virtual) fictional world? And what type of hero? Doesn't it matter what actions he or she can take to be a heroic character?

The aim of this work is to answer such questions. In this way, we can think about the behaviour of the human within the virtual world and how he or she approaches an idealized (or not) hero. To do so, I will start from the principles of ludonarrativism, an intermediate approach that aims to respect the systematic but also fictional nature of the video game (Sánchez-Mesa Martínez, 2007, p. 18). Thus, taking into account the interactivity and narrativity of this medium, along with specific examples, I will propose three roles that the player—in pursuit of heroism—adopts in the open-world epic fantasy video game. These roles are not mutually exclusive during gameplay—in fact, they complement each other. After the argumentation, I will discuss some final ideas about the heroic player to clarify whether he or she can be considered a hero.

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2 The generic signals of epic fantasy are, according to Castro Balbuena (2023), the myth, the hero, and the fictional world. A story can be considered epic fantasy if it is close to the specific configuration of those signals, regardless of the artistic medium in which it takes shape.

ROLES OF THE PLAYER: HEROIC AND PROSUMER

The heroic player assumes three roles: the first, based on her/his "birth" and his behavior in the game (*actantial role*); the second, related to her/his interaction with other players (*social role*); and the third, which consists mainly of his creative intentionality (*narrative role*). I will now delve into each of them.

2.1. When the Player turns into Character: Actantial Role

Within the (virtual) fictional world, the player has a clear objective: to be the protagonist of the video game, drive the action, and reach its conclusion through a series of obstacles. Thus, related to the narrative, the player could be considered an *actant*, an entity that assumes a specific function (Valles Calatrava, 2008, p. 162). The first step for the heroic player is to identify himself or herself as a fictional character. In this, a crucial role—similar to literature—is played by the *name*, which serves as a core that attracts all physical or psychological characteristics of the character—a "magnet", as Pimentel defines it (2001, p. 37).

If the literary characterization process entails two stages[3], the same occurs in open-world video games. Firstly, the player creates his/her character from a predefined model, assigning it a name and a set of physical characteristics. And secondly, during gameplay, characterization involves character's appearance or equipment, plus other traits as *strength, intelligence* or *agility*, although those ones are mainly dedicated to systematic purposes, like calibrating how powerful this character is. Figure 1 shows the *World of Warcraft* (2023) character creation screen, which displays some of the characteristics the player can modify, such as race, name, sex, skin color, face type, hairstyle, or eye color.

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3 "Characterization may be direct, as when a trait is ascribed explicitly to a character, or indirect, when it is the result of inferences drawn from the text based partly on world knowledge and especially the different forms of character knowledge mentioned above" (Jannidis, 2009, p. 16).

Figure 1: Initial character customization in *World of Warcraft*.
Source: Blizzard Entertainment, 2023.

This customization depends on several factors. The most important ones are the modifications suggested by the video game itself as possibilities for the player. In this regard, it is possible to distinguish two types of video games:

a) Video games whose character creation is *predefined*. In these systems, the narrative protagonist is a character with a predetermined name and appearance, which the player will use—as a vehicle or a mask—within the story and the obstacles presented throughout the (virtual) fictional world. This is the case in *The Witcher trilogy* (CDProjektRED, 2007-2015), an adaptation of Andrzej Sapkowski's homonymous literary saga (1993-2013), whose protagonist is Geralt of Rivia, an albino witcher who protects society from threatening monsters. Therefore, identification (name and physical description) is fixed, while accessories[4]—such as equipment upgrades—can modify his appearance during the gameplay. In these video games, player-character bond is established through empathy—an emotion evoked by the character in the player because of its circumstances, losses, etc. In addition to that, players can influence the character's life when the video game allows it—i.e., with dialogues or optional quests.

[4] The virtual items that the player uses inside the (virtual) fictional world can be considered essential when the bond between them and the character becomes permanent, "making character and equipment/vehicle essentially indivisible" (Backe, 2022, p. 243).

b) Video games whose character creation is *not predefined*. In these games, players find a character creation screen *ab initio*, where they can configure the appearance of their character according to the options of the system's creators. For this task, players can extend their own identity (Ducheneaut et al., 2009: 1151), although they may opt for a more systematic choice when certain traits affect gameplay and allow for an easier achievement of goals (Trepte & Reinecke, 2010, p. 172). An example of a video game whose character creation is not predefined, in addition to *World of Warcraft* (2023), is the *Dark Souls saga* (FromSoftware, 2011-2018). As in other open-world games based on how classic role-playing games functioned, the player must choose the character's class: warrior, hunter, sorcerer, etc. This class affects gameplay—i.e. it restricts available skills—but cannot be changed during the course of the game unless the player creates another character. In addition to the choice of class, players will have to customize other physical aspects, as said before. All of them conform the visual description of the systematic and fictional entity that will represent the player in the (virtual) fictional world.

Figure 2: Classes available for the player to choose in *Dark Souls* (2011) creation character's screen.
Source: FromSoftware, 2011.

2.2. When the Player communicates with His/Her Surrounding: Social Role

Within the player's agency, that is, the ability of real people to control their avatar, according to Willumsen (2018, p. 7-8), lies the possibility of interacting with the fictional environment. In this virtual space, it is possible to distinguish two types of inhabitants: the artificial ones, called *non-player characters* (NPC), whose reaction—which must be believable[5]—is predefined by the system; and the natural ones, only if the video game has an Internet connection, the avatars of other players. Players will necessarily interact with NPCs to progress in the (virtual) fictional world using elements inherent to their avatar nature, such as dialogue—sometimes with the possibility of a multiple-choice response—, the interface, or sensory perception (Navarro Remesal, 2012, p. 260-281). These interactions provide knowledge of the fictional world, but also the items and experience that players need to advance in their adventure. When NPCs are too strong, it will be mandatory that players collaborate between them to triumph in their run for victory. This way, to accomplish the heroic feat that defines them as heroes, players will need to form groups and face either the enemy controlled by the machine or raids of other avatars-players.

The video game provides specific systems for players—despite the belief that gamers are antisocial or solitary (Kocurek, 2023, p. 450)—to chat while in the game world. In this way, they can form robust communities that will influence the identity of the own player (Martey, 2023, p. 477). To build those communities, in MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft* (2023) and *The Elder Scrolls Online* (Zenimax Online Studios, 2014), there are different communication channels, which can be considered extra or intranarrative depending on the influence of the actantial role and the narrative role—this last one I will discuss shortly. Extranarrative channels (an example of these can be seen in Figure 3) are private chats that allow direct communication between two or more players for purely systematic purposes: exchanging information about the game, contacting each other to overcome specific obstacles, or simply having a conversation as

[5] Believability in NPCs requires some factors, so "not only the thematic elements (like visual appearance) must be met but also the interactive qualities of self-awareness, self-impelled actions, expression of emotions and ability to use languages" (Lankoski & Björk, 2007, p. 418).

they could do in a physical space. On the contrary, intranarrative channels—usually optional—allow players to speak as their character in the fictional world. In other words, players using these channels will be embodying their fictional characters: speaking as them, reacting as them, and adopting their personality. At this point, they take on a narrative role.

Figure 3: Contacts window in *Guild Wars 2* (2012). Thanks to this function, players can find other people, friends, even enemies if it is needed. In addition, they can know if a player is online or offline.
Source: ArenaNet, 2012

2.3. When the Player creates His/Her Own Story: Narrative Role

The video game becomes a medium through which players can construct their own heroic story from their decisions, movements, and interactions within and with the (virtual) fictional world. In doing so, players act as *prosumers*[6]. Based on the product they receive, they create an internal mode narrative, one that does not "involve textualization: we can tell ourselves stories in the privacy of our minds" (Ryan, 2006, p. 13). With this doing, players tell themselves the actions of their avatar as a story in which they are the protagonist. Each of the players forms the audience of this narrative, a story that will only reach other

[6] In the 1970s, McLuhan and Nevitt brought forward a theory of prosumption, which was developed after some time by Alvin Toffler (Islas, 2009, p. 27). This theory is based on the nonexistence of pure production or pure consumption, because "production and consumption are sub-types of prosumption; it is prosumption that is the more general process that subsumes the other two" (Ritzer, 2013: 8). This way, *prosumer* can be defined as a receptor who alter the artistic product (in a new form) with his/her own modifications (Scolari, 2013: 223).

people—as happens typically in prosumption—if players adapt that narrative to an external mode. In other words, the new story will remain in the player's mind unless that same player chooses another method to expose it. Role-playing is one of these methods. This practice means acting as the fictional character that is the player's avatar, a behavior also inherited from table-top role-playing games. Outside of video game virtuality, role-playing corresponds to one of the more common practices of gamer participatory culture: cosplay (Guajardo, 2023, p. 408).

As a story about himself or herself, about his or her avatar, this narration can also be understood as *autofiction*, a narrative form that points to the initial ideas of the narrative concept of author. This type of author—due to his individuality—is not the same as the usual collective author of contemporary audiovisual content (Casas, 2017, p. 40). In fact, be it collective or not, an author is equally responsible for the text, as stated by Valles Calatrava (2008, p. 243). In text form, autofiction can be distinguished because of the first person, as well as an internal (and digressive) expression and the use of a chain of adventures to organize the story (Casas, 2022, p. 11). In addition to all of these concepts, we may add *autobiography*, which Lejeune (1975) defined as a prose narrative where the author recounts his/her experiences and own life.

While playing an open-world video game, players narrate a story to themselves about a character they have created, or at least a character whose personality they have co-elaborated with their own decisions and actions in the (virtual) fictional world. It is the player—impersonated in the game as avatar—who has lived certain experiences, so this virtual life can be captured in a narrative form: an internal autobiography that the players tell themselves. In order to make certain decisions about their character within the video game, players are limited by the predefined content, as well as their own ideas and previous encounters with heroic characters, whether literary or not. Therefore, they are influenced by their horizon of experience, a sum of preconceived ideas, as defined by Broitman (2015, p. 46) based on Jauss's theories. The narrative plots in which they become involved transform them into the heroes of that fictional world, a world they (usually) must save and protect. And players, who are at the same time witnesses and actors in the adventures of their avatar, tell themselves their own story, which they may later transform to share with a major

Figure 4: Undead warrior in *World of Warcraft* (2023), level 60, waiting to join a weekly raid. Or Tilanor, whose memories of a former life, a former love, and a former (but always present) pain accompany him while waiting to save Azeroth one more time. Source: Blizzard Entertainment, 2023. Screenshot and text by the author.

SOME FINAL IDEAS ABOUT (VIRTUAL) HEROISM

In order to create a story about their experience in the video game, players must first *be born* in the fictional world. For this, they assume an actantial role, constructing a virtual representation of themselves, a representation that is similar to other narrative elements that compose the system. Between the virtuality of the video game and player reality, they create an intermediary who may be preconfigured or be a model for customization. At the same time, it is a character with its own place within the ludonarrative, connected to other actants around the (virtual) fictional world. Once players have established their virtual connection, they will be able to—in a social role—interact with other entities, whether controlled by the machine or other players, in their way to overcome obstacles and to progress towards more complex feats that can take them closer to heroism. In this process, players decide how much they get involved: on the one hand, they can just limit themselves to the systematization proposed by the video game (defeat X to win Y) or, by the other hand, they could develop a more complex experience creating dialogues and behavior for their character. A character which is their arms, their eyes, and, finally, themselves in the fictional world.

By going further in the fiction, players will adopt a narrative role, which consists in a self-narrated account of their feats throughout the (virtual) fictional world, an autobiographical story that can take different forms and be shared as the player/prosumer wishes. In this narration of themselves, players draw upon their own ideas, knowledge, morality, and ideology to decide their heroic behavior inside the video game, always within the limits proposed by the system but with the freedom provided by their own creativity. It is through the combination of the limited and the limitless, their decisions and movements, that players can approach heroism—a heroism proposed by the video game but ultimately defined by players themselves. In this way, the hero of the open-world epic fantasy video game can be considered a free archetype, a structure upon which the player, through his/her decisions and actions, and inspired by his/her readings and previous experiences as a person or as an avatar, constructs the hero that he or she wants to be.

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"THE MONSTROUS" IN *THE LEGEND OF ZELDA* BOTW/TOTK

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INTRODUCTION

The Legend of Zelda, created by the Japanese Shigeru Miyamoto, is inevitably related to the work of J.R. R. Tolkien, but in this case the interactive medium in which the story flows opens up a more multifaceted perspective to address the symbolic framework of its actors, and especially the new meaning that is acquired by the notion of "the monstrous". In the long 35-year franchise of the Zelda series, the popular video game for Nintendo Switch, which has famous titles such as *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017) and its latest installment *Tears of the Kingdom* (2023), has had commercial success, but beyond that the games represent a benchmark of the open-world genre; a proposal that responds to a meticulous design in the gaming experience that encourages exploration in a narrative that the player will experience in first person within the virtual environment.

In this context of experiential immersion, the initial story will consist of saving the world through the figure of Link, the hero, without forgetting Zelda the princess and Ganondorf the King of Darkness (Aonuma, 2013). In Hyrule, a postmodern (Arnott, 2015) medieval (Cirilla & Rone, 2020) fantasy world, corrupted by

technology and industrialization, we will encounter different monsters, enemies and creatures with which we will write a narrative based on the decisions we make.

These monsters and demons are essentially a collection of different cultures and influences, whether for example the figure of the Hinox, voluminous beings with a single eye that directly remind us of the cyclops (Hilliard, 2017) and/or the Japanese Oni[1] ogres (Pippin, 2014). Along the same lines we can cite other figures such as the Moldorm that is related to the creature documented for the first time in 1926 by the explorer Roy Chapman Andrew. We can also identify the sandworms of *Dune*[2] (1984) with the Moldugas; monsters like Moblins connect us directly to Zhu Bajie, one of the disciples of the monk Tang Sanzang, described in the 16th century Asian novel *Journey to the West*. Thus, myth and folklore are inherent in the very character of these beasts that will appear to us throughout our relational journeys. In this way, in the experiential development itself, a wide repertoire of beings will be revealed to us, such as: Lynels, Wizzrobes, Moblins, Moldugas, Bokoblins, Talus, Lizalfos, Dragons, Octoroks, Flying Gargoyles, Chuchus, Keeses...

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1 "In Japanese folklore, oni are malevolent spirits or demons often depicted as large, ogre-like creatures with horns and wild hair. Sometimes, stories feature oni-human hybrids, typically resulting from unions between an oni and a human. These hybrids may inherit some of the oni's physical traits, such as horns or strength, as well as their mischievous or malicious nature" (Smarandache , 2024, p. 63).

2 "In David Lynch's *Dune* (1984) gender relations become a means for exploring controversialsocio-cultural issues -such as the threat of homosexuality or the plea for gender equality-as well as for understanding the 80s attitude towards them" (Carrasco, 2005, p. 43).

Figure 1: From top to bottom and from left to right. Link about to shoot a Frox[3] in the Hyrule underground; Bubbul Gems[4]; Link talking to Kotlin[5] in the monster shop. Source: Personal collection of the author, 2023

However, in this rich imaginary where we can link each of these creatures as a cultural hybridization of civilizations and societies through fantastic and mysterious bodies, we must ask ourselves: What is behind these apparent symbolic devils?

Specifically, this article takes the monster encyclopedia of this video game, with its mythological nods to the multiple creatures, as a preamble to the interpretation of "the monstrous" within the narrative plot of *Zelda (BOTW/TOTK)*, and how this fantastic concept becomes an interactive object with its

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[3] Froxes are gigantic, frog-like Monsters with large tusks that dwell in the Depths. They attack with powerful leaps and by sucking everything in front of them into their gaping maws. Throwing Bomb Flowers into their open mouths will stun them. Their weak points are their singular large Eye and the many Zonaite Deposits on their backs. <https://zeldawiki.wiki/wiki/Frox> [Accessed on: 01/11/2023.]

[4] Bubbul Gems are mysterious new Key Items in *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. They appear to be strange, snowflake-like light-blue crystals that drop after defeating an equally mysterious Bubbulfrog. Backgroung image: Blupee. Blupees are mysterious, luminescent blue beings with a face resembling a barn owl's and golden wreaths in the place of ears. They flee when noticing Link, eventually disappearing in a flash of light. They drop Rupees when struck by an Arrow, a Remote Bomb, a thrown Boomerang, or any melee weapon; though they cannot be killed.

[5] Koltin is Kilton's younger brother in *Tears of the Kingdom*. His dream is to become a Satori (a strange and noble creature known as the Lord of the Mountain), and he believes that he can become one by eating Bubbul Gems, obtained by defeating Bubbul Frogs.

own entity that seduces us on an intersubjective level and allows us to advance in the game in action and thought. Although Zelda's approach can be understood as a metaphor for European colonialism (Quintana Vallejo, 2017), and the monsters as those uncivilized "others", we can also discover how thanks to this otherness we will be able to advance and expand our inventory to transform ourselves a little more into one of them. So, who really is Link? "the monstrous" possibly becomes the meaning of this character's existence, and ultimately of a prolonged permanence and interest of the player. We again.

REFLECTIONS AND FEARS

Monsters are the reflection of those fears and sociocultural realities that worry and persecute humans. They are representations of otherness, and an x-ray of the fears of each era. Let's look for example at the character of Frankenstein or the idea of zombies that Marta Miquel-Baldellou (2022) points out to us:

> Frankenstein's creature, who is given birth as a result of its creator's Promethean ambitions, zombies also rise to life as a result of scientific aberration, but, if Frankenstein's monster triggers our sympathy as a disaffected victim of the Industrial Revolution who ponders about his own condition, zombies are bereft of self-awareness and individuality, as they resemble homogenised masses of workers exiting from high-tech companies and acting as clogs in a manufactured conglomerate machinery. (p. 28)

Monsters embody those forces that come out of regularity and emerge from the human, confronting disciplinary limits and the notion of power; these creatures represent a transgression of law and nature (Foucault, 2000), or they transport us to the utopia of a world without genders (Haraway, 2005), hybrids with new corporalities. Other authors see them as a container where society fills with a metaphor, a symptom (Hutchings, 2002) or an anxiety (Carrol, 1990). The monstrous pushes us towards the limits of identity and manifests itself as a tool for the construction of the Other. The creatures of Hyrule are not simple enemies.

Through Link, the androgynous character who allows the player to choose his actions, we enter to the open world of *The Legend of Zelda* (*TLOZ*). As Sarah Stang points out: "According to the lore of *TLOZ* series, in every age a hero arises to combat evil. This hero is always named Link because, according to *TLOZ* creator Shigeru Miyamoto (2013), the character serves as a 'link' to connect the player with the game world" (2019, p. 370). As we advance through the landscape we will find, in the depths, on dry land or in the sky, a series of Others that inhabit the spaces. These gather in caves, watch their food, sleep on the hills, have fun in the fields or simply seem to walk around like a *flâneur* without leaving the limits of their land. We see Boss Bokoblin, in a tender scene, and how his little ones follow him, all of them armed to protect their lives and possessions; the Hinox, always distracted or spinning in circles, with all their riches on them; the Gleeoks, three-headed dragons that do not move from their small throne; the Molduga that becomes agitated if its sonorous calm is disturbed, even though it prefers to hide docilely under the sand; the Pebblits, stones that in the face of a threat are not willing to give us their precious hearts; the Lizalfos that swim like dolphins, and that in their movements hide some type of communication from us that we cannot understand; or the wolves, which always flee from our presence if they are cornered. So, in the long list of Others that come our way, we must ask ourselves what their role is in "the symbolic experience of confrontation of the subject with the environment" (Pérez, 2010, p. 34).

Figure 2: From left to right. Link stealthily observing the Boss Bokoblin walking in the rain accompanied by three little ones; Link contemplating the appearance of the Blood Moon[6]; Link in front of a Black[7] Hinox.
Source: Personal collection of the author, 2023

Link[8], our other virtual self, seems to have no obligation to kill anyone in this community, apart from defeating Ganon, an incarnation of evil that politically diverges from Zelda's family. Let's not forget that in *BOTW* monsters are associated with all those who did not want to subordinate themselves to technological oppression. Thus, we can sense, in the crossed views of this civil war, a parallel reading in the key of colonial narrative:

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6 Transcription of the audio that appears in the Blood Moon scene: "Link... Link... Be on your guard. Ganon's power grows...it rises to its peak under the hour of the blood moon. By its glow, the aimless spirits of monsters that were slain in the name of the light return to flesh. Link...please be careful."

7 Black Hinox are the strongest versions of Hinox found in *Breath of the Wild*. They wear greaves on their legs, similar to Blue Hinox, but their metal composition makes Black Hinox vulnerable to electric attacks. Like all other Hinox, their eyes are weak to attacks. When defeated, they drop Hinox Toenails, Hinox Teeth, Hinox Guts, and a range of cooked meats. <https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/Black_Hinox> [Accessed on: 17/12/2023.]

8 As Katie Seaborn (2023) points out to us: Game characters may also act as role models: representations of ideal selves that we aspire to be. Link has been iconic in this regard. Even as a masculine character partaking in violent acts, Link also frequently engages in feminine-coded acts of kindness and helpfulness, and is heralded for his bravery, perhaps a gender-neutral value. Coupled with his ambiguous appearance, this liminal characterization has provided room for gender-diverse folks to see themselves in Link and experience gender euphoria. These orientations point to a boundary, albeit a porous one, between 'being' the character and 'being' with the character. (p. 2)

> This story can be read as a tale of colonial allegory, with the so-called 'civilization' of Hyrule versus the imagined 'barbarism' of the monster enemies, but observant play shows that the monsters are not so barbaric, and the kingdom perhaps not so civilized. […] The fact that the anti-colonial ideology remains somewhat hidden speaks to the tendency towards analogy, allegory and self-censorship in the Japanese arts (Hutchinson, 2013), and the conservative nature of Nintendo as a development company. (Hutchinson, 2019, p. 2)

The video game medium allows us to create a space where different layers of meaning can be superimposed, and in Zelda we will observe how its narrative is designed to awaken a critical background in its players through its symbolism. This characteristic of the medium makes monsters key elements, since they are part of a complex plot in which an intersection of religion, popular culture, ritual and game occurs (Pearson, 2019). A world that argues under a logic of dialogue with an apocalyptic threat, common in many video game structures (Wagner, 2011), and with religious allusions that range from references to the Crusades (Aonuma, 2013), the Triforce[9], or even the Link's own resurrection to prevent the destruction of Hyrule. In this context, the monsters that flow in the imaginary[10] of Hyrule are the object of multiple interpretations and considerations, such as the reflections of Lawrence May (2012), where these beings are conceived as a contemporary representation of sociopolitical anxieties about ecological disasters:

> *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* and *The Last of Us Part II* confront players with an ecological form of monstrosity, which is deeply recursive

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[9] As Geoffrey Pippin (2014) describes to us: In Zelda mythology, the Triforce is a sacred relic composed of three triangles embodying the virtues of Courage, Wisdom, and Power. It was left behind at the node from which the three Golden Goddesses—Farore, the Goddess of Courage; Nayru, the Goddess of Wisdom; and Din, the Goddess of Power—ascended to the heavens, in a connected dimension known as the Sacred Realm after creating the lands of Hyrule and Lorule. The Triforce has the power to grant the true desire of whomever touches its completed form, molding the Sacred Realm to reflect the person's heart. Its constituent pieces take up residence in the hands of whomever most epitomizes each virtue—in most cases, Link (courage), Zelda (wisdom), and Ganon (power). (p. 33)

[10] See the video essay: "Cruces semánticos entre imaginarios: Luis Buñuel y Zelda BOTW", (Serra, 2023). <https://youtu.be/r7vuMv5es5A> [Accessed on: 12/01/2024.]

> in its nature. Players encounter monsters that stand in for socio-political anxieties about ecological disaster as well as those that reflect humanity's own monstrously destructive hubris. Attention is further drawn to the player's own, lived role as a contributor to climate crisis, a consequence of not only the material characteristics of digital games, but also their broader participation in the unsustainable economics of the post-industrial age. (p. 6)

Another complementary perspective is in the hauntological[11] analysis of Dom Ford (2021), which considers that the ghosts in BOTW haunt the player in the present, through modalities of threat, nostalgia, futures and lost destinies. Like the ghosts that revive after the Blood Moon[12], that make the human (avatar) uncomfortable and remind him that he must recover the future: "The appearance of the ghost in hauntological thinking mean that past, present and future cannot be neatly compartmentalized. Each act on each other constantly, they are always-already-there". (Derrida, 1998, p. 66)

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Anne Allison "The Legend of Zelda, offer a connection to what has been lost in the breakneck pace, materialism, and industrialization of globalized culture: a sensitivity to the immaterial, the supernatural, and interpersonal relationships that characterize this premodern past" (2006, p. 345). In all these positions our relationship with the monstrous is built in a dialogue-action that will not end given the open nature of the video game and its intrinsic power that goes beyond entertainment. As Skott & Skott (2022) indicate, video games can be studied as cultural texts, relevant for the interpretation and understanding of the public imagination relating to crime.

[11] "Haunting is not limited to objects which we might expect to have some sort of ghostly effect -- such as remains and ruins -- rather, everything haunts. In the original French, *hantologie* (hauntology) and *ontologie* (ontology) are near-homophones, reflecting this fundamental haunting. Every sign contains within it traces of the absent other and so those signs 'haunt' the present signs". (Ford, 2021, p. 3)

[12] "Hemmann (2019) examines the cultural background of the Zelda franchise. She relates the cycle of rebirth that continually renews Hyrule to Buddhist eschatology, suggesting that the franchise follows not a Judeo-Christian 'Western configuration of time as linear and progressive', but rather a Buddhist-informed cyclical temporality". (Herfs, 2020, p. 10)

And in this sense, which works specifically on the video game *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* for the exploration of themes related to carcerality, they point out to us in their introduction that this medium has the capacity to:

> Transmit, reflect, distort, and even disturb social conditions and public consciousness. (Steinmetz, 2018). Examining the Other and the societal construction of the monstrous in both 'real' and 'reel' worlds, Gothic criminology seeks to prompt a critical response to public imaginaries surrounding crime and justice (Picart & Greek, 2007, p. 593)

Figure 3: Link hidden behind Majora's mask[13].
Source: Personal collection of the author, 2023

In a unique way, we see how the *BOTW* proposal means that the player comes into contact with underlying identity politics and develops among cultural frictions. On this last point, as Laurence Herfs (2020) emphasizes:

> *BOTW* inherits the discourses pertaining to Japan's specific ambivalent historical position as both a colonizer and a colonized nation, marked by anxieties of inferiority and desires to be both alike and different to both the

[13] This mask, according to the *TLOZ* imaginary, has a powerful and evil demon locked inside; He can control whoever puts on the mask and give him great evil powers. Following the analysis of Skott & Skott, in the text 'You've met with a terrible fate, haven't you?': A Hauntological Analysis of Carceral Violence in Majora's Mask', three main themes related to prison violence are identified: bodily entrapment, surveillance and control, and temporary confinement.

> 'West' and other Asian countries. *Breath of the Wild* conjures dreams and nightmares of the Japanese social imagery through its Occidental, Oriental and Self-Oriental representation, and as such, emerges as a fractured cultural dream of unsettled ambivalence and resistance, a site where unresolved cultural, social and political frictions are being negotiated. (p. 10)

And this idea leads us to approach the notion of *monster* as a tool that allows us to make our way into otherness, "that other capable of crossing borders, disobeying prohibitions and breaking taboos, who wants to mix, hybridize, and, in doing so, threatens to dissolve the distinctions that we believed and wanted to be clear" (Izaola & Zubero, 2015, p. 123).

Therefore, "the monstrous" in *TLOZ* refers to a process of contemporary negotiation that is activated in-world. A constant dialogue between Link and his surroundings[14], Link and his identity, Link and his beliefs; in short, a way of understanding the real world through movement within a landscape of signs and representations of Others found in the medium of the video game, and in the structural design of *TLOZ*, a form of intersubjective amplification. *The Breath of the Wild* is perhaps a nod "to the savage and the monster who were characterized by leading a life of intemperance and excess, without rules or limits, and who were associated with the Greek term *hybris*" (Droit, 2009, pp. 50-51).

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[14] "…time is to be understood in relation to a gamified form of subjectivity […] fluctuations in the landscape of Hyrule and its monsters have much to do with perceived changes" (Verran, 2023, p. 45). Monsters are more than non-player characters (NPCs).

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FANTASTIC AND DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: PICTORIAL MODALITIES AND INTERPRETATIONS IN EARLY *ADVENTURE GAME* ENVIRONMENTS

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Anyone who has enjoyed or revisited the old video games, those born in the 70s and that in the 80s hatched with the success of arcade machines and the rise of consoles and microcomputers, will remember how -with few exceptions[1]- their landscapes were in the background; if not simply around a handful of pixels on a black background.

Games of the 1970s such as *Computer Space* (Nutting Associates, 1971), *Basketball* (Taito, 1974), *Death Race* (Exidy, 1975) (Fig.1), *Shark Jaws* (Atari, 1975), *Gun Fight* (Midway, Taito, 1975), *Breakout* (Atari, 1976), *Sea Wolf* (Midway, 1976), or *Space Invaders* (Taito, 1978), were designed on dark screens or neutral colored backgrounds, expertly transfiguring the limitations of their technology[2], and their

[1] Some of them were very well known, such as *Dragons's Lair* (Cinematronics, 1983), which took advantage of laserdisc technology to replace pixel graphics with hand-drawn animations. Others were more anecdotal, such as those arcade machines that painted their scenery by hand on acetate or on cardboard backgrounds placed behind the game screen; for example, *Killer Shark* (Sega, 1972) or *Qwak!*(Atari, 1974).

[2] Despite this and with rudimentary computer programming, storage was scarce at around 100K. The 3½-inch floppy diskettes were marketed with 720 k of memory; the 5¼-inch ones with 1.2 MB; and computers such as Spectrum or Commodore 64 that used cassette tapes, could not run more than figures close to the previous ones.

sparse pixel or vector "topography", into believable environments for the player. Whether it was under the development of environments of abstract conception, or under environments developed to try to represent a veristic or naturalistic landscape.

From this perspective, the 80's would represent a qualitative leap in scenographic issues, when thanks to the success of the game market and the impulse of technological investment in the medium, an exponential increase in these findings could be appreciated and, in particular, in the conception of perspectives, structures, colors, wefts, etc. and other fundamental scenographic factors in the game experience. Games like *Battlezone* (1980), *Red Baron* (1980), *Zaxxon* (Sega, 1982), or *Star Wars* (Atari, 1983), for example, revolutionized the scenographic perspective systems with their new proposals of three-dimensional or isometric vision. Others like *Green Beret*, (Konami, 1985), *Paper Boy* (Atari, 1984), or *YieAr Kung-Fu* (Imagine Entertainment and Konami, 1985), began to include in these same landscapes the stereotypes, idioms, clichés and, in short, commonplaces that came from other *mass culture media*, such as cinema, comics, etc. and which, deliberately or not, pointed to visions of the world, in this case the world perceived in the 1980s, which must also be understood as "texts" filtered through the ideological lens of the moment.

We speak, therefore, of an early period of video games in which, apart from delimiting a moment of boom of the medium, we will also find a period of great interest for the configuration of its spaces and its aesthetic and semiotic models in its diversity of platforms and game genres.

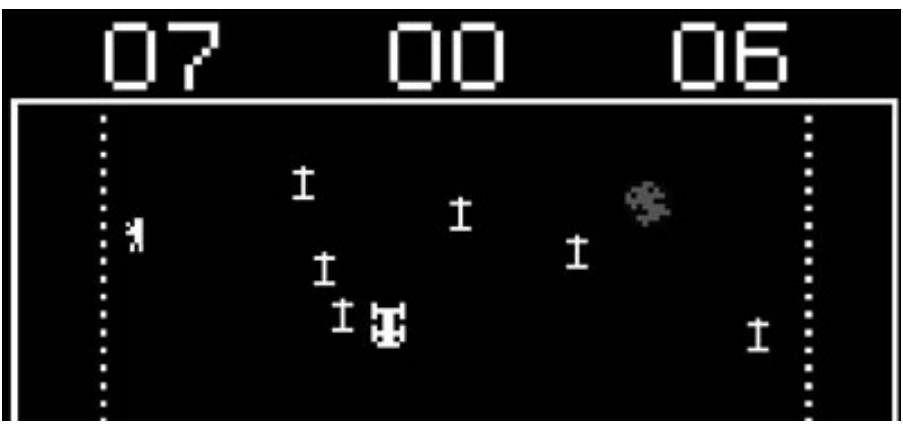

Fig. 1. Frame from the videogame *Death Race* (Exidy, 1975).

Among all of them, however, certain types of platforms established a greater push in terms of graphic advances on the screen and, specifically and as the title of this chapter indicates, in what has come to define the relationship between the pictorial and the design of digital-playful environments. This is the genre of *conversational adventures* that, in these early years of the video game, opened a field of technical and visual experimentation essential to understand the evolution of the medium, and to establish a particular conception of the design and composition of the elements on the screen. As well as to open a field of inventiveness that, still subordinated to technological progression, was able to reverse its limitations to create memorable scenographies, both from the games that sought to approach or imitate the known reality, and from the developers who sought to move away from the real, to create worlds never seen of fiction.

It is in fact in those games dedicated to the fantastic and, specifically to High Fantasy[3], where we will find the greatest contributions to the medium in its relationship with painting and its transfer to digital scenographic design. And it is, precisely, the company On-Line Systems, later known as Sierra Online, which would be a pioneer in this field with the publication, in 1980, of the first two successful *conversational adventures* that included graphics accompanying their text: *Mystery House* and *Wizard and the Princess*.

ON-LINE SYSTEMS, FIRST DIGITAL-PLAYFUL FANTASY LANDSCAPES

Until then, conversational adventures were based on a very specific game format: the player was confronted only with a text screen, in which -like an interactive novel- he/she immersed in the game by reading and solving problems through written commands. Platforms such as *Colossal Cave* (William Crowther and Don Woods, 1977) or *Zork* (Infocom, 1977) successfully brought this type of game proposals to a wide range of public

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3 The stories of *High Fantasy*, apart from their universes of wizards, orcs, princesses, dragons, etc., have been governed fundamentally by offering a series of proposals whose portal to entertainment and whose mythology have never strayed far from easily accessible epic functions such as the confrontations between "the forces of good and evil".

thanks, in part, to the incipient online communication networks (such as ARPAnet). But the company On-Line Systems applied a decisive gesture on these game modes by including, in its own productions, descriptive images of each game scene.

First with the successful release of *Mystery House* (Fig.2)[4], a mystery adventure (in the style of Agatha Christie's novels), with white lines on a black background syncretically drawing the crime scenes. And a few months later with *Wizard and the Princess*, a "sword and sorcery" game whose drawings, this time accompanied by layers of color, made it one of the first samples of home computer video games colored by professional graphic artists. These games already presented images that, despite their roughness and still strokes (without animations), exploited the CGA[5] graphics standard to approximate as much as possible a sense of verisimilitude or reality (always within their own fiction), under the ideas of three-dimensional representation akin to human sight.

Fig.2 Frame from the videogame *Mystery House* (On-Line Systems, 1980)

[4] A game of the same year as *Mission Asteroid,* released practically at the same time, did not have the recognition among the public and the specialized citrus as *Mystery House*.

[5] Prior to 1984, the CGA (Color GraphicsAdaptor) standard allowed image resolutions of 320 x 200 pixels with a 4-color palette (or 620 by 200 with a 2-color palette). These graphic restrictions made it difficult to render images, "and it was not until the 1984 appearance of the EGA (EnhancedGraphicsAdapter) standard, which allowed image resolutions of 640 x 350 with 16 colors supported out of a 64-color palette, that images began to dominate the screen in what were still primarily text-based graphic adventures" (Wolf, 2021, p. 19).

In this sense, we witness in On-Line Systems' platforms a particular concern for framing and the use of conical perspective, similar to the *first-person view*. Even an attempt, in the case of *Wizard and the Princess,* to employ a strategy of color and dithering to achieve a more extensive palette of textures and tonalities. An aesthetic exercise, between the descriptive and the pictorial, fundamental to understand, as in the previous cases, the beginning of a genre and a mode of digital representation increasingly interested in graphic discourse. Not in vain, these works and other later ones made with the same technique by the company, such as *Time Zone* (1982) or *The Dark Crystal* (1983), were labeled at the time as *Hi-Res Adventures*: whose wide and spectacular images defined the future of the genre, and its subsequent evolution to the adventure games typology[6].

These *Hi-Res Adventures* were followed by equally defining works in terms of graphics and playful-digital scenography, such as *The Hobbit* (Beam Software, 1982) and *DéjàVu: A Nightmare Comes True* (Mindscape, 1985). Curiously, and again, a conversational adventure about crime and mystery, and another dedicated to *High Fantasy*, whose graphic conception, although opposite, would reflect the advances in technology and the treatments of form and composition of the image of the time[7]. *In DéjàVu: A Nightmare Comes True*, graphic advances offered a conventional print, in search of an image that pays homage to cinema and the *noir novel*, and under a representation of the real, mostly based on photography. In the adaptation of Tolkien's work of the same name (published in 1937)[8], we would witness a deployment of the chromatic stain in the manner of an impressionist or symbolist painter who, following the trail of analysis of this text, would propose a new paradigm in the way of pictorially representing the game space.

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6 Puzzle and narrative games, where graphics play an important role for the immersion in the story and the environment. They can have different types of command input (by the player) from text parsers to touch screen interfaces.

7 We analyzed these works in their version for PC computers, where they could display their best graphic version..

8 By agreement with the book publishers, a copy of the book was included with each game sold.

THE HOBBIT, A STEP TOWARDS THE PICTORIAL

The Hobbit was originally published for the ZX Spectrum home computer by the Australian company Beam Software, but its sales success soon allowed it to be adapted to numerous platforms such as Commodore 64, BBC Micro, Amstrad CPC or Apple II. It stood out among critics and players for its use of a very advanced text parser for the time, capable of offering more complex linguistic constructions than other conversational games[9]. But also for its impressive graphic display, capable of recreating, in only 4 kilobytes of memory per image, the representative landscapes of Middle-earth imagined by Tolkien.

The person in charge of the design of these images was the graphic designer Ken Rees[10], who made more than thirty illustrations for the eighty sequences of the game[11]. At first and due to storage and technology issues of the Spectrum computer, these images had to use the "flood filling technique" to be recreated on screen in front of the player: first the contour lines of the drawing were drawn, and then, in an interval of about two or three seconds, the spaces created by these were filled with color (and also line by line).

These technological and memory saving issues would cause notable divergences between the images of *The Hobbit* themselves, depending on the capabilities of the computers and their game format on cassette or disk, giving rise to different color and raster versions, as well as different models of image loading on screen, depending on the publication for Amstrad, Apple, Commodore, etc. The disk-based versions of the game, for example, used higher quality pre-rendered images, where the graphics created by Rees could be better enjoyed.

On the one hand, these compositions play at defining spaces and planes of light, while on the other hand; they sometimes take advantage of

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9 In the early 1980s, most conversational adventures used simple verb-noun parsers. The Hobbit parser, on the other hand, made it possible to write sentences in a complex and intuitive way, introducing pronouns, adverbs, punctuation marks or prepositions, and thus allowing greater interaction with the game universe.

10 Graphic designer of which only this game is known. [Information consulted in the international database Moby Games. May 20th 2024].

11 https://worldofspectrum.org/archive/magazines/zx-computing/6#76 [Information consulted in WorldofSpectrum. May 20th 2024].

these same dissonances to break the laws of perception and articulate kind of pictorial effects with an evident expressive and narrative intentionality. In a scene of the "misty mountains" (Fig.3), we observe a steep path rising towards the entrance of a *grotto*.

Fig. 3. Frame from the videogame *The Hobbit* (Beam Software, 1982).

But, depending on the distance and the perception of the image acquired by the player, this path could well be perceived as the dry branch of a tree, or as a crack in the mountain itself. Something that could occur in another sequence of the game such as the "misty valley", where the combinations of colors and shapes, in addition to a landscape, insinuate a monstrous face or the effigy of the arachnid being that will later appear in the game (as can be seen in the composition of the green spheres/trees in its center, the mounds/jaws under them, or the paths/legs on its sides) (Fig. 4).

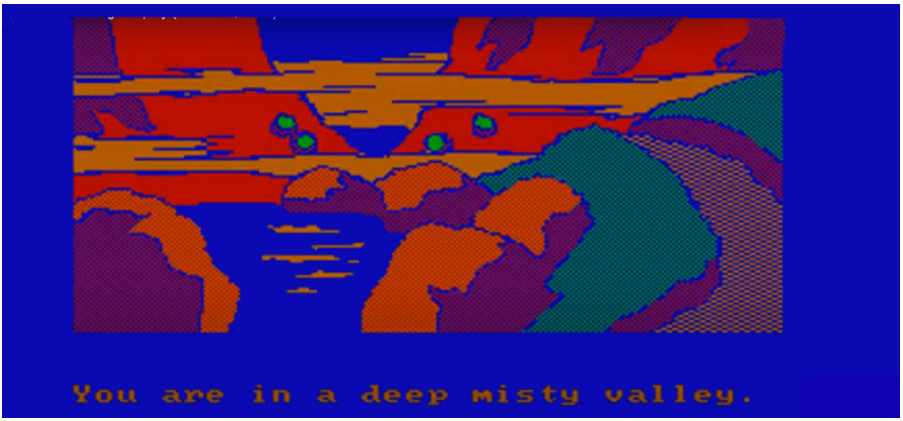

Fig 4. Frame from the videogame *The Hobbit* (Beam Software, 1982).

We highlight, in this sense, a very innovative use of color and shapes and patterns for the game screens of the early 80s. When most of the productions, and in particular the *conversational adventures*, hardly went beyond the descriptive image formulated under conventional pictorial representation approaches: with blacks or grays for the shadows, white tones (without shades) for the lights, greens for the vegetation, browns for the wood and, in short, colors defined by an "eye as unconcerned" by the chromatic expressiveness, as by the formal one.

If the On-Line Systems games announced the scenographic capacity of the pixel to represent the advanced universe of hyper-realistic tendency that we are witnessing today in a good number of genres and videogames; as shown by the gradual career of graphic adventures such as *Chichen Itza* (AD Adventures, 1992), *Myst* (Cyan, 1993), *The Journeyman Project* (Presto Studios, 1993) or *Riven* (Cyan, 1997). *The Hobbit* is the prelude -perhaps less crowded, but equally interesting- to the playful medium in productions increasingly interested in the pictorial and its various strategies of expression such as *Proteus* (Ed Key and David Kanaga, 2013), *Panoramical* (Fernando Ramallo and David Kanaga, 2015), *Gris* (Nomada Studio, 2018) or *11:11 Memories Retold* (Digixart and Aardman Animations, 2018), among others.

Both types of games "suffered" the limitations of their technology and, from this aspect, the brake of their graphic and narrative possibilities. But, at

the same time and paradoxically, these restrictive aspects freed them from having to reduce themselves to the realistic standard to which many games must resort today, in favor of a greater inventiveness and a greater capacity for synthesis, as their particular scenarios still demonstrate today.

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THE WORLD FRAGMENTED INTO ALTERNATIVE DIMENSIONS: INTERTEXTUALITY, VERISIMILITUDE, AND FICTION IN FÉLIX J. PALMA'S *VICTORIAN TRILOGY*[1]

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1. INTRODUCTION

The deployment of intertextuality within *El Mapa del Tiempo* and the broader *Trilogía Victoriana* by Félix J. Palma serves as a narrative enhancer, affording readers the opportunity to navigate the intricate relationship between fiction and reality. This literary engagement invites an exploration of layered meanings as diverse elements from literature and culture coalesce. Literature, on this context, emerges as a dynamic space where the dichotomy between reality and the imaginary is blurred, thereby prompting readers to interrogate their epistemological frameworks. Fundamental inquiries pertaining to the nature of truth, perception, and the construction of reality are thereby engendered.

This scrutinizes the multifaceted layers of meaning engendered by intertextuality in Palma's oeuvre. Additionally, the interplay between fiction-

[1] I want to express my gratitude to Professor Pepe Jurado (Universidad de Cádiz) for introducing me to the author of the *Victorian Trilogy*, Félix J. Palma, who kindly answered to my emails regarding the topic of this paper.

reality dynamics and temporal travel, manifesting in the superimposition of narrative layers, will be a focal point of examination. Given spacial constraints, the paper will focus on a two narrative threads, with a more exhaustive exploration of other narratives within *El mapa del tiempo* reserved for other forthcoming papers.

2. GENERAL APPROACH TO THE TREATMENT OF TIME IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE

The conceptualization of time within narrative discourse has been a subject of profound consideration in literary theory, evolving across diverse theoretical paradigms. Aristotelian principles, expounded in *Poetics* (2013), advocate for three dramatic unities, including temporal unity, dictating that the action of a literary work unfolds within a delimited and coherent temporal framework to maintain narrative verisimilitude. While adherence to Aristotelian norms persisted in Spanish narrative until the verge of the contemporary era, deviations from these conventions, especially in science fiction and works featuring variable chronotopes, emerged gradually in the early 20th century.

Gerard Genette's seminal contributions to narrative theory introduced the disruption of linear temporality through flashbacks (*analepsis*) and flashforwards (*prolepsis*). An array of temporal strategies, including strategic employment of analepsis and prolepsis, serve to confer intricacy and depth to the narrative structure. Contemporary luminaries such as Julio Cortázar, evident in *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*), have undertaken more radical experiments in temporal manipulation.

The theoretical concepts of *ordo naturalis* and *ordo artificialis*, deeply rooted in the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition, constitute pivotal elements in contemporary narrative discourse. *Ordo naturalis* pertains to the chronological sequence of events as transpiring. In rhetorical tradition, this order is deemed apt for the objective transmission of historical facts, eschewing narrative manipulation. Conversely, *ordo artificialis* entails the intentional manipulation of event sequence for stylistic or rhetorical objectives. This contrived order serves to accentuate specific narrative elements, generate suspense, or structure

the narrative more impactfully, thereby affording authors the capacity to strategically manipulate temporal dimensions for desired effects. These theoretical constructs wield considerable influence over contemporary creative writing and literary theory, exemplified by authors such as Gabriel García Márquez in *One hundred years of solitude* (*Cien años de soledad,* 1967), where *ordo artificialis* is employed to craft intricate and multidimensional narratives.

El mapa del tiempo, as the inaugural work in the *Victorian Trilogy*, initially eschews a strict adherence to chronological order or *ordo naturalis*. Despite its alignment with the realistic tradition pervasive in Spanish literature, the work features overlapping stories among characters. A heterodiegetic omniscient narrator facilitates the revelation of diverse facets of individual characters' lives, converging within the intricate tapestry of the narrative. Notably, all these narratives coalesce around a central motif, the interrelationship with H.G. Wells, acknowledged as the "father of time travel" following the resounding success of his magnum opus, *The Time Machine* (1895).

2.1. Time Travel: The Ever-Changing Landscape of Narrative Focalization

Temporal displacement, a ubiquitous motif in science fiction, has perennially captivated the creative faculties of literary luminaries, filmmakers, and discerning audiences. The prospect of traversing epochs, whether backward or forward, elicits a tapestry of intriguing and, oftentimes, confounding inquiries into the ontological essence of time, causality, and the ethical quandaries attendant upon such hypothetical journeys.

Within the annals of science fiction, the conceptualization of time travel has manifested in diverse iterations across the genre's evolutionary trajectory. From the epochal narratives of H.G. Wells —notably exemplified by the protagonist in *El mapa del tiempo*—, and the seminal work *The Time Machine* itself, to the intricate tapestries woven by contemporaneous literary authors such as Philip K. Dick, the thematic exploration of temporal paradoxes, alternate realities, and dystopian futures has persistently constituted a thematic locus. These narratives, in turn, proffer inquiries into the agency of

the individual within the historical continuum, the transformative potential inherent in altering the past, and the ethical ramifications concomitant with such actions.

A preeminent ethical trope within temporal traversals in science fiction is the 'butterfly effect' (Dooley, 2009), wherein seemingly inconspicuous actions in the past engender consequential and often unforeseen repercussions in the future. Such narratives compel contemplation on the moral imperatives borne by temporal sojourners and the unpredictable ethical reverberations attendant upon their interventions.

An additional ethical quandary of paramount import is encapsulated in the grandfather paradox, wherein the ethical conundrum arises as to whether temporal pilgrimages to the past, with the intent of modifying events to preclude one's own existence, can be deemed ethically permissible. This ethical conundrum finds resonance in works like *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985), scrutinizing the morality of retroactive alterations for personal gain. Furthermore, the prospect of venturing into the future engenders epistemic and ethical considerations — should one possess foreknowledge of one's impending future, and is intervention in future events to avert tragedies ethically justifiable? These ethical quandaries find cogent expression in literary oeuvres such as Stephen King's *The Outsider* (2018) and the *Victorian Trilogy*, wherein the protagonist, Andrew Harrington, seeks to employ a time machine to traverse to the moment of Jack the Ripper's heinous act against his beloved Marie Kelly. As underscored by Ruiz Prieto (2021, p. 41), narratives integrating temporal transits imbue their structures with a plethora of variables, engendering permutations across diegetic time, extradiegetic temporal dimensions, narrative chronology, and the locus of narrative perspective.

The introductory assertion in the First Part of *El mapa del tiempo* encapsulates this thematic discourse:

> If, akin to any sagacious individual, one postulates that time constitutes a swift current inexorably propelling all progeny towards the murkiest shore, herein lies the revelation that the past can be retraced, and man can retrace his own steps courtesy of a temporal conveyance mechanism[2].

[2] All the translated quotation of the original text are made by the author of this paper.

This critical examination of illustrative instances accentuates the inadequacies inherent in conventional hierarchies and nomenclatures when confronted with narratives delineating temporal excursions, particularly those featuring paradoxical temporal constructions. The temporal dislocation of one or more narrative elements challenges entrenched categorizations of temporal configurations in cinematic discourse, including but not limited to flashback, flashforward, parallel, or alternate montage, and disrupts established notions of causality and triggers (Ruiz Prieto, 2021, p. 347).

2.1.2. Andrew Harrington's Journey

The love story of Andrew Harrington and Marie Kelly, murdered in 1888 by the infamous Jack the Ripper, is directly inspired by Alan Moore's work, *From Hell*. Serialized in 1989 in the *Taboo* magazine and later compiled into a single volume, *From Hell* is described by its author as "the autopsy of a historical event" and as "the terrifying story of the fateful patterns that exist in time, human endeavors, and even in the stones of cities." Both *From Hell* and Félix J. Palma's *El mapa del tiempo* unfold through a complex narrative structure that intertwines historical inquiry with fictional elements. Moore employs the character of Scotland Yard inspector Frederick Abberline as the protagonist, while Palma opts for Harrington. Moore's panels are replete with symbolism and references, enriching the plot with depth and complexity. As *From Hell* progresses, readers become enmeshed in a web of intrigues transcending the murders, delving into broader issues of power, corruption, and human nature. As *El mapa del tiempo* unfolds, readers witness, from the wings, the passage of time and its capacity to stretch and contract. Eventually, the characters demonstrate their ability to traverse time as the story progresses. In terms of narrative, *From Hell* serves as a framing narrative for Andrew and Marie's story.

Their tale commences with a gift from Andrew's cousin, Charles, to his father: a portrait of a distinguished lady, none other than Marie Kelly, a prostitute depicted as a courtesan, a gift celebrated with laughter by Charles. Conversely, Andrew experiences a profound disquiet upon beholding the painting, feeling observed, entranced, bewildered, and perhaps slightly enamored: a clear allusion to courtly love (love at first sight, love at first hearing). Consequently, Andrew

decides to journey to White Chapel in search of the desired prostitute, knowing the tavern where she rests between tasks. Upon finding her, he pays for a night with her, gradually becoming captivated each night, compelling her with passion and ardor. Marie eventually feels her robust armor, constructed to safeguard her soul, cracking under the intensity of their connection. However, as Jack the Ripper begins his splurge, Marie distances herself, succumbing to nightly inebriation in that "embassy of hell" (*From Hell*), as if anticipating Jack's approach. On the night Andrew decides to confront his father and declare his love for Marie, she is murdered by the Ripper in her quarters. When Andrew discovers her lifeless body, the narrator beseeches the reader:

> [...] I need you to consider the flexibility of time, its ability to stretch or shrink like an accordion behind the backs of clocks. I am sure it is something you have experienced frequently in your own lives, depending on which side of the bathroom door you have found yourself. In the case at hand, time stretched in Andrew's mind, fabricating an eternity with just a handful of seconds (p. 76).

In this narrative recounting Andrew and Marie's story, intertextuality with *From Hell* merges with the passage of time and subsequently, time travel. When Andrew and Charles visit Murray's Time Travel Agency to request a journey to the past, Mr. Murray asserts the impossibility of arbitrary time movement —he can only transport clients to the year 2000. However, he suggests that H.G. Wells might possess a time machine, planting the seed of inspiration for his famous novel. The two youths then visit Wells, coercing him at gunpoint to send Andrew to 1888 to thwart the Ripper and save Marie. Although successful, upon returning to the future, nothing has changed. Wells, matter-of-factly, informs him that he has created a parallel reality, "a fork in time [...]. And in that world, Mary Kelly is alive and happy alongside her other self." Wells thus introduces the concept of alternate universes, echoing *Back to the Future II* (Robert Zemeckis, 1989) ("Imagine this line represents time [...]. Somewhere in the past, the timeline veered off at a tangent, creating an alternate 1985. Alternate for me, for you, and for Einstein, but real for everyone else").

The resolution, aligned with the pervasive realism permeating the entire text, proves anticipated: Wells's machine is nothing more than a collector's item;

the time travel has been a charade orchestrated by Charles with Murray and Wells' assistance. Andrew remains oblivious to this fact, enabling him to rest peacefully and disentangle himself from that moment in the past.

3. TEMPORAL JOURNEYS SANS APPARATUS: THE PECULIAR GENOME OF H.G. WELLS IN *LA MÁQUINA DEL TIEMPO*

Explorations of time travel within the realm of science fiction, absent mechanical contrivances, provide a compelling avenue for the examination of philosophical and existential concepts. By eschewing conventional mechanical frameworks, these narratives beckon viewers, and readers to delve into the intricacies of the human psyche and its intricate relationship with temporality. Whether through introspection, non-linear perceptual constructs, or fluid identity delineations, these chronicles confront temporal norms, proposing the prospect that time travel may constitute a more internally intrinsic experience than an externally facilitated one, a mental, rather than mechanical, undertaking. Furthermore, the machine-independent approach to time underscores the pivotal role of the human psyche in the conceptualization and manipulation of temporal dimensions. The protagonists utilize introspective faculties, expanded consciousness, and an enhanced comprehension of reality as tools for their temporal odysseys, sparking fundamental inquiries into reality's nature. Through their temporal journeys, the protagonists prompt profound reflections on reality and the human ability to surpass perceived temporal limitations.

The thematic motif of time travel has perennially enthralled audiences across diverse artistic mediums, spanning from novels to cinematic productions. While conventional time machines, exemplified prominently in the *Terminator* series, are commonplace in the portrayal of temporal sojourns, select works have probed the phenomenon sans recourse to mechanical temporal engineering. This more abstract exploration of time travel becomes a fertile terrain for philosophical contemplation and inquiry into the essence of existence.

A salient instance of this machine-independent exploration is evident in the film *The Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bress, 2004) and its literary counterpart. In this oeuvre, the protagonist, portrayed by Ashton Kutcher onscreen, discerns the ability to retrogress through his own life, effecting alterations to events and discerning the

colossal consequences of these minute modifications in his present and future. Lacking a tangible time machine, the central character accesses his own temporal antecedents through introspection and cognitive focus. This representation accentuates the proposition that time travel may be more aptly characterized as a mental or spiritual phenomenon than a mechanistic endeavor. The sheer potency of the human mind, or conceivably an expanded consciousness, emerges as the propellant behind temporal manipulations.

Another work delving into this machine-independent exploration is Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The narrative traces the life of the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, whose temporal experiences deviate from linearity due to encounters with extraterrestrial entities termed Tralfamadorians. These entities instruct Billy in perceiving time simultaneously, envisaging his life as a series of discrete snapshots rather than a linear progression. This departure from conventional temporal conventions suggests that human comprehension of reality is circumscribed by its linear temporal experience. Here, time travel transcends mere physicality, metamorphosing into a transformation of perception and understanding.

The science fiction genre, in embracing the notion of the human mind as the conduit for temporal voyages, finds exemplification in Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity* (1955). Within this narrative, an organization named Eternity operates beyond the confines of time, endowed with the capability to effect 'adjustments' in the temporal continuum to optimize the future (which strongly resembles the Spanish series *El Ministerio del Tiempo,* created by Javier and Pablo Olivares in 2015*,* although there the characters travel through doors). Despite the absence of conventional time-manipulating machinery, characters within the novel traverse temporal epochs mentally, engendering alterations to historical events. This narrative trajectory propels philosophical interrogations pertaining to the role of the human mind in temporal manipulation and the ethical considerations attendant to such interventions.

Agent Clayton, who has developed certain special abilities throughout the course of his profession, discloses to Wells what he is:

> —You are... a time traveler —Clayton announced solemnly. Wells looked at him bewildered, then burst into laughter.

> —Why on earth would you think that? Because I wrote *The Time Machine*? I think you're overly obsessed with my novels, Agent.
> Clayton smiled coldly.
> —As I've already mentioned, I've dealt with the impossible in my line of work —he responded.
> —Have you encountered individuals who come from the future in machines like the one I invented? —Wells laughed.
> —Yes and no —mysterious Clayton said—. I've come across some time travelers, yes. Although I'm afraid they prefer to travel in a different way (*El mapa del Cielo*, p. 501).

This "different way" involves activating a gene in their heads, which, as Wells later discovers, activates when they are afraid or extremely unsettled. Clayton points out that he is "the oldest time traveler I've known", and that "in the future, a government program will be created to teach time travelers how to use their talent", reminiscent of Asimov's novel and the Spanish series by the Olivares brothers. Wells's journey through time is traumatic, as it could not be otherwise, since time travel—or in space, as in *Harry Potter*—can cause dizziness and various ailments:

> Wells felt how he was being reconstructed step by step by an invisible hand, which in an instant screwed his scattered bones into the framework of the skeleton, to which it tied the circulatory system and the garlands of nerves, then distributed a handful of organs along the improvised framework, and finally packaged everything with the brown paper of flesh. With the final varnish of skin, the writer suddenly felt struck by cold, fatigue, nausea, and other ailments inherent to the body he had always carried, anchoring him to reality like an anchor (p. 678).

In the past to which he arrives, Wells manages to kill The Envoy, who is a mysterious character who appears in the this second novel of the trilogy. The Envoy is an extraterrestrial being who arrives on Earth with a specific purpose, but his identity and motivations are enigmatic and revealed

gradually throughout the story. He is a crucial character in the novel's plot, and his presence triggers a series of events that affect the protagonists and the course of history.

When Wells, disguised as the sailor Griffin in Antarctica, destroyed the Envoy, and in doing so he saves the lives of Reynolds and the sailor Allan, who is none other than the great writer Edgar Allan Poe. In fact, he never goes to the secret crypt of the Natural History Museum, so he never offers his blood to The Envoy, and thus, The Envoy does not survive. Therefore, he manages to change the past, present, and future with respect to his timeline: the Martian invasion never occurred, extraterrestrials never enslaved souls, and the tragic death of Charles in the labor camp he shares with other broken souls, like Captain Shackleton, will never happen.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that Wells cannot refrain from approaching his young self, nor his adult self, this time as a friend of Murray, not his mortal enemy. In the first case, he seeks out his younger self and "gifts" him with some arguments to inspire novel writing; in the second case, he works as Murray's coachman, allowing him to be close to Wells whenever Monty and Emma visit. The coachman Wells initiates conversations that seem peculiar to the parallel universe Wells: firstly, when the latter gazes at the former, he feels dizzy and sad; and secondly, he is overcome by a deep melancholy: "that strange melancholy which lately assailed him suddenly had returned, confirming his suspicions that the presence of the coachman had something to do with it" (*El mapa del caos,* p. 260).

On the other hand, the coachman Wells, the time traveler, realizes that not all Wells are alike:

> That was what didn't fit: the suit, the checkered suit worn by his twin! With a shudder, Wells recalled seeing that suit in the display window of the tailor shop where he usually made his purchases. After much contemplation, trying to determine whether that bold pattern was elegant or ridiculous, he had decided to play it safe and acquire a similar dark brown suit to the ones he typically wore (*El mapa del Cielo*, p. 728).

Thus, the time traveler wonders how many twins he has, how many universes have been saved: "How many of his twins had witnessed the annihilation of mankind?" he asked himself with a shudder. "In how many worlds would the clumsiness or inefficiency of the writer H.G. Wells be to blame for the extinction of humanity?" (*El mapa del Cielo*, p. 737).

It is important to emphasize the brilliant use of the *doppelgänger* concept and the intricacies related to identity, akin to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), masterfully interwoven into the intricate plot threads shaping *El mapa del tiempo*, adding layers of both complexity and narrative depth. As evidenced, Félix J. Palma's work demonstrates rich intertextuality with other literary and cinematic works exploring the theme of time travel. Due to constraints, a comprehensive exploration of these references is deferred to subsequent publications.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The *Victorian Trilogy* by Félix J. Palma artfully engages with the notion that H.G. Wells transcends the role of a mere chronicler of time travel, evolving into an active participant in temporal narratives. This amalgamation of reality and fiction within the persona of Wells introduces nuanced layers of contemplation concerning the fundamental nature of literary creation and its profound capacity to shape perception and experience.

The complex portrayal of H.G. Wells in Félix J. Palma's *Victorian Trilogy* not only serves as a reverential gesture towards the author and his enduring impact on the science fiction genre but also operates as a sophisticated vehicle for the exploration of overarching themes encompassing literature, ethical considerations, ontological realities, and the pervasive influence of intellectual constructs on societal paradigms. Wells assumes a pivotal role within the intricate tapestry of the narrative, significantly enhancing the complexity and profundity of Palma's scrutiny into the realms of temporal displacement and the interconnected dimensions of reality and fiction.

Regrettably, within the confines of this chapter, it proves unfeasible to fully encapsulate the expansive realm of intertextuality and the nuanced

significance embedded within Palma's oeuvre. Consequently, readers are urged to anticipate forthcoming scholarly inquiries that extend beyond the current scope. These prospective studies might encompass not only the intricate web of intertextual references but also the intricate interplay between reality and fiction and the strategic deployment of the multiverse as a structural framework. Among other dimensions, a meticulous examination of the deployment of steampunk in this narrative should be mandatory to be explored. It is noteworthy that the steampunk aesthetic, a retrofuturistic genre not commonly found in Spanish literary traditions, continues to exude a profound realism, an aspect warranting further scholarly exploration.

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PANDEMIC AND SCARCITY IN FERNANDA TRÍAS' *MUGRE ROSA*

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INTRODUCTION

Fernanda Trias' novel *Mugre rosa* (2020) has achieved international recognition, portraying a city stormed by a mysterious pink fog that rots everything it touches, including human beings. In this alternative present, reading is back in fashion, since it is one of the few normal things left one can still do indoors. The paradox is that what could be a return to a more civilized society from postmodernist superficiality, is indeed our species' defeat. As human life retreats inland, farther away from water bodies, forms of mutant life thrive, announcing the end of the Anthropocene.

The narrator, an abandoned (literally and figuratively) woman, battles with a lonely existence where she takes care, among other individuals, of a child with a rare disease whose parents seem to perceive him as a sort of faulty product. Mauro, the child, is an obese subject who only exists for ingesting food, which is the gist of this mysterious genetic illness. This character conflicts with the general scarcity of the city since the production of food has been severely impacted by the sinister pink fog, which kills all

non-mutated living things, acting, therefore, as an agent of evolutionary imposition.

As the exodus of people afraid of the disease grows and the progressive more dysfunctional city gets worse, the narrator circulates through the deserted metropolis, diving into a sort of nostalgia that seems to soak everything, as the pink fog keeps pervading everyone's existence. The beginning of the pink fog blowing starts what in the novel is called a new "official history". In the newly arrived times, an unexpected economy emerges that does not answer the previous monetary paradigm. The finance world has been dispossessed of its pervasive commanding power, and the narrator makes her goal to narrate its demise, as well as her emotional and personal shipwreck.

Thus, this paper aims to analyze the representation in Trias' work of the ending of the Anthropocene, as well as the inefficiencies of the city's financial structure, which is incapable of dealing with the arrival of this new pandemic. I will reflect on how the pink fog acts as an agent of massive evolutionary changes that, in turn, renders another "official history" where humankind seems not to have a place anymore. And finally, I will provide my own interpretations of the text and the overall message to the reader.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

In 2020 Fernanda Trías was awarded with the "Premio Residencia SEGIB-Eñe - Casa de Velázquez para escritores iberoamericanos" that was conducive to the publication of *Mugre Rosa* in 2021 (*Casa de Velázquez*, 2017). She was the first awardee of such a literary prize and received the "Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" for *Mugre Rosa* (Vázquez, 2022), and the Uruguayan "Bartolomé Hidalgo Prize" in the same year (Jorge Gil, 2021). Therefore, it seems warranted that this paper is covering one of the most prominent fictional works of our current Latin-American literary scene.

Trías defines her literary style as a poetic sensitivity translated into narrative prose (Vázquez, 2022); critics of her work have highlighted that the "deliberadas incertidumbres y vacilaciones de la narración" (Amaro, p. 28) produce a sense of vivid sensations on the reader understood as a "vibrancy" that participates in an "ethical statement" (Vázquez-Medina, pp. 5-7); the ideological commitment of the novel as well as the Uruguayan author's feminism abide by a non-anthropocenic dogma,

such as the ones sermonized by ideologues as Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway or Rosi Braidotti (Pérez Gras, p. 292). The link between ecocriticism and feminism, as a literary category focused on representing novel multispecies ethics, is a common trait in recent Latin-American literary works (Mackey, pp. 251-252). *Mugre Rosa* is a notorious example of this genus. Some critics, for instance, the aforementioned Allison Mackey (2022), unravel an optimistic conjecture at the end of the novel, forecasting the coming of a new reality based on non-anthropocenic ideologies (p. 253); taking into account feminism as one of these ideologies, the same author, Fernanda Trías, advocates for the foreclosure of the privileged ones, even though this favored community could retaliate violently (Efe, 2022). The stylistic "vibrancy" of the novel, thus, correlates with the ethical feminist dogma of recreating a collapsing world by a narrator that, contrastingly, sets a personal example of acting according to a new ethical code.

The female narrator rejects to flee the city taken by a mysterious pandemic, contrarily to almost everyone with the means to do it; instead, she stands before the collapse, an illustration that reminds Lina Barrero Bernal of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" (p. 21). Barrero Bernal understands this episode as an example of a dystopic trope, the dehumanization of the subject, by existential paralysis, before the collapsing present (p. 23). Whether the ending of the novel introduces a sliver of hope, or a resolution of fatality is a point to be debated, one could say, indefinitely, since one of the main points of the author is to reach with her writing a sense of ambiguity (Soto, 2021). Trías considers that literary works lack a distinction between autobiography and fiction, that is so because literature is produced by snippets of memories (El espectador, 2022). Therefore, ambiguity is a necessary element of fiction, and consequently, there is a fabric of the idealization of the past as it is remembered in the form of disjointed memories; it is this idealization that bonds memory and dystopia (Barrero Bernal, p. 19).

The dystopic nature of the novel is also underscored in the relationship between the narrator and Mauro: a child with a disease that makes him always starve. The narrator stays in the city, in part taken by an existential paralysis (Barrero Bernal, p 23), but could as well be due to a motherly commitment to Mauro, to whom she seems to have taken the role of a mother (Pérez Gras, pp. 291-292) since his biological mother is overwhelmed by the boy's needs. Hence, the narrator experiences a sense of solidarity concerning the almost orphan boy. María Laura Pérez Gras, appealing

Braidotti's precepts, perceives the character of Mauro as a sort of allegory born out of the waste of capitalism (p. 292), the same judgment is expressed by Olivia Vázquez-Medina (p. 4); Mauro becomes a different subject, a non-human monster, a new creature in that sense, that demands from the narrator a different commitment (Mackey, p. 258), one not based on financial grounds, but on unconditional care and that symbolically mirrors the non-anthropocenic ethics (p. 258). It is on those grounds that the narrator perceives her own childhood in Mauro's, and by symbolic contiguity, she becomes a monster as well (Amaro, p. 26), embedding this vital newness imposed by the dystopic future to come. Together, the narrator does not have an easy relationship with her mom, neither in her childhood nor in her adult life does she get along with her; these maternal feelings are unlike the ones she enjoyed when she was a young child with her babysitter, Delfa. There is, thus, a similar game at play between her mom's role and Mauro's mother (who periodically leaves him with the narrator for long periods of time), taking that the narrator by her own choice engages in Delfa's role (Chafyrtth, 2021) with Mauro, a servant's role, even though she does not need the babysitting money anymore: "En los bolsillos no me cabían los billetes, pero no podía comprar ni un paquete de arroz" (Trías, p. 231). According to some critics, the narrator is looking to return to her idealized childhood by way of taking care of Mauro (Amaro, p. 26); she intends to go back to a nostalgia framed as the time of *Aion (*p. 33) returning to her childhood emotions and memories.

Trías considers that the novel covers as much of the climate crisis of nowadays as the nuances of interpersonal dynamics of our present (Efe, 2022). That statement gives way to interpreting the novel as a collection of illustrations that unveil to the reader the urgency of an emotional adaptation that our anthropocenic today imposes on us (Pérez Gras, p. 290). It is reasonable, then, to conclude that according to the novel's ideology, to be able to survive humans, along with other animals, will have to be able to adapt to a dystopian scenario, and the adaptation will have to be forceful of a non-anthropocenic nature, following the dictates of a sort of ecofeminist philosophy as the aforementioned philosophical theories I referred to in previous paragraphs. The adaptation, figured by Pérez Gras as biological and emotional (p. 290), is a threat to the privileged ones that, having financial means to flee to inland areas away from the pandemic expansion and ill people, aim for this route, such a situation takes Barrero Bernal to read it as a

symbolical exclusion of poor people (p. 19). What is left, then, is the permanence of a sort of safe space: the narrator's house.

The house is in itself an ambiguous *topos*, one that provides cover and safety before the outside world is taken by the pandemic (Barrero Bernal, p. 19), by the same token is also a sinister confine that mirrors the city (Mackey, p. 276). Both the city and the house get stormed regularly by a mist of toxicity that halts the normal passing of time (Pérez Gras, p. 289), setting the novel systematically but unpredictably in the above-mentioned time of *Aion*. The toxicity of the narrator's physical surroundings correlates to her human interactions with other characters: her mom, her ex-husband, and Mauro, the ill boy she takes care of (p. 290); Lorena Amaro connects *Mugre Rosa*'s problematic representation of motherhood with Trías' previous novel *La Azotea* (2001), basing her reasoning on a similar suffocating atmosphere between parent and child (pp. 23-24); in fact, the dynamic concerning narrator and her mother is portrayed as dysfunctional (Pérez Gras, p. 290), albeit the reader only is allowed to know the narrator's point of view, which portraits her resentments toward her mom's self-supporting and independent behavior of the past and makes the narration feel sometimes as a long petty complaint regarding the preterit mother's libertine existence.

The narrator, now as an adult, takes care of her ancient mother, but the relationship continues being frayed by the incompatibility of their mindsets, for example: "Me mostró los nuevos brotes de plantas, […] Yo le conté que en Chernóbil había más animales que nunca, […] Mi madre no lo interpretó como una ironía" (Trías, p. 23). The same situation follows in her interactions with the ex-husband, Pérez Gras assumes the narrator is somewhat of a tragic figure victimized and taken advantage by (p. 290), akin in my opinion to a female saint depiction that trails the non-anthropocenic ethical dogma pursued by the author's novel. At the opposite animus for her mother's behavior we locate Delfa, a sort of substitute mother but also her servant; a character portrayed with tenderness by the narrator: "Por esa época, yo había empezado a llamar a Delfa 'mamá'. Lo hacía a espaldas de mi madre, sin inocencia infantil, sabiendo que se trataba de la peor de las traiciones." (Trías, p. 67). The narrator confesses her affection for Delfa because in part she was "predictable": "Ahora pienso: las manos de Delfa eran otra certeza, […] y no había nada que yo ansiara más que eso, lo predecible de las cosas" (p. 66). Stability is what her current existence lacks, and it is correlated to the government's useless efforts to

control the pandemic (Pérez Gras, pp. 291), one of those public efforts is translated as the new "historia oficial" (Trías, p. 204) that it is indeed a euphemism for forced displacement of people to other areas inland. Unlike the government seeking to remove the population from the coastal city encircled by the pandemic (p. 265), the narrator lingers in the city in her search for food for Mauro and herself, staging two contrasting wills: a centripetal tendency and a centrifuge one (Pérez Gras, pp. 291-292) that conflict eventually will be resolved when the narrator discovers herself abandoned by everyone she cared about and gets ready to ultimately leave the city.

In the end, the narrator accepts the external world even if it is observed from the beginning of the novel as a threat; Trías has stated that her literature aims at portraying the fear of the otherness: "Yo vengo hablando del encierro desde el siglo pasado. […] el tema profundo, verdadero, es el miedo al otro, […] de cómo el mundo hostil se presenta como amenaza y cuáles son las estrategias posibles de supervivencia (Soto, 2021). For the author, fear is not a constructive emotion (Efe, 2022), and through its exposé, she conveys environmental worries of our times (Mackey, pp. 251) and by the same token the novel gets categorized as an EcoGothic fiction (p. 256). It is not the only generic tag employed to frame the novel, Claudia Aboaf catalogs *Mugre Rosa* in the genres of Clifi and Crimate, as a form of narrative that denounces the "policrisis" of our recent past and present times (p. 303). These are byproducts of the genre of dystopia: the background of the plot pretends to show a present-day existence with apocalyptic characteristics (Amaro, p. 27), that intersect environmental crimes (Vázquez-Medina, p. 3) and social injustices (Mackey, p. 255), and focus at the same time on the effect the situation has on human relationships (Jorge Gil, 2021).

All the aforementioned theorization stems from a non-anthropocenic ambition that underpins the posthuman notions summarized in anti-Speciesism thought, Aboaf mentions Haraway's dogmas (p. 306); monstrosity as a form of political subversion as is understood by Braidotti's principles (Pérez Gras, pp. 292-293), Mackey explicitly signals *Mugre Rosa* as an example of this ideology within a Latin American frame (p. 252). Generally, this genre of literature, as Trías' novel does, denounces capitalism as a pathology and its symptom as never-ending consumerism that causes an excess of waste (Barrero

Bernal, p. 17), and exposes that the "human agency is now no more than an illusion" (Vázquez-Medina, p. 7).

In the novel, the representation of the disease, usurping our human agency, becomes nuanced when we consider Mauro's illness, which promotes the narrator to the role of mother. It is the same with the pandemic unleashed upon the city, which gives her the opportunity of becoming the caretaker of her loved ones; the narrator exemplifies the non-anthropocenic adaptation to the new present. By the same token, the pink fog, seen by some readers as caused by industrial waste (Barrero Bernal, p. 17), demonstrates the misconduct of humankind regarding nature (p. 16); showing Trías' concerns about the consequences of climate change and negationist blindness attitudes, on her opinion due to fear (Efe, 2022). In a way, it can be understood that the city and the characters that the city contains are symbols of wasteful consumerism and examples of anthropocenic societies about to collapse, and as such *Mugre Rosa* portrays creatures of excess adapting to a future of shortage. Some critics have alluded that this duality not only refers to material objects, such as food, one of the main scarcities the city dwellers need to confront; but also, the emotional scarcity that anthropocenic societies impose on their members (Barrero Bernal, p. 22). Vázquez-Medina, additionally, considers that the novel generates playfully an opposition between the emotional excess of the narrator towards her loved ones, even if these do not reciprocate; and the aesthetic excess mastered by the author in her writing (p. 27). The narrator giving herself to others as a non-anthropocenic saintly figure is contrasted with Mauro's vampiric conduct due to his illness, personifying may be a consumerism ideology (Barrero Bernal, p. 24). If Mauro/anthropocenic societies have no future; the narrator's vital philosophy, that "vibrancy" observed by Vázquez-Medina (pp. 5-7), seems to be the correct adaptation to the non-anthropocenic environment by way of changing biological understandings but also by shifting emotional patterns. Finally, the reader is offered a new posthumanistic paradigm.

CONTRIBUTION

I believe fair to state that the novel portraits a regression from a modern industrialized society to a premodern one: "Los altos mandos del Estado construyeron sus casas en las laderas de alguna diminuta colina del campo chato y eterno, y desde

allá comenzaron a dar órdenes. Así fue que empezó la nueva historia oficial" (Trías, p. 204); unlike the posthumanist[1] views earlier exposed, I would like to cast a more pessimistic view of the non-anthropocenic future centering on the concept of solidarity, as the one expressed by the narrator taking care of her loved ones in distraught situations.

For this purpose, I raise Mariano Martín Rodríguez's idea discussing "horizontal totalitarianism" as "a totalitarianism exercised by the majority (or a dominant minority able to sway and manipulate a majority) of a given community by oppressing other members of that community who do not adhere to its unwritten rules" (Martín Rodríguez, p. 27); the author conjoins this exercise to Durkeim's "mechanical solidarity" (p. 27) indicating the alienation that the subject suffers under preliberal organizations such as the tribe or the congregation[2]. According to Durkheim, "mechanical solidarity" is "typical of premodern, less complex societies" (Sangiovanni & Viehoff, p. 16), whereas "organic solidarity" emerges within "modern industrialized societies" and "is characterized by difference" (p. 16). "Mechanical solidarity" comes from "collective consciousness" (p. 17), but in individualistic liberal societies this bond tends to be lessened therefore creating a vacuum that can only be filled by "corporations (modeled on the feudal corporation)" (pp. 17-18). Durkheim seems to have in mind a labor relationship akin to the medieval "compagnia" (Le Goff, p. 21) and "guild" (Oexle, pp. 451-452); therefore "organic solidarity" highlights "the bonds of mutual sacrifice and attraction that develop when each citizen realizes how the contribution they make to the overall functioning of the society […] depends on a tightly knit, interdependent web of more particular associations" (Sangiovanni & Viehoff, p. 18).

Hence, in *Mugre Rosa*'s ending there is no "organic solidarity" to remain because the industrialized world is collapsing, putting an end to the modern liberal community: "En las noticias hablaban del único tema posible: el incendio de la procesadora, la muerte de los animales y la destrucción de las máquinas. La pérdida millonaria de los inversionistas extranjeros, de los ganaderos, del agrónomo" (Trías, p. 240); paradoxically, Trías states that we need "community" instead of continuing in a movement of "separation" (Efe, 2022). Barrero Bernal as well as other reviewers

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1 I understand ecocriticism and feminism as interpreted by the previously referenced critics as forms of posthumanist thinking, as well as by the works of Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti.

2 Martín Rodríguez resorts to Durkheim's *De la division du travail social* (1893).

see in the novel a denunciation of "la ilusión del proyecto de progreso" and approves of the characters, as the narrator, that stay in the ruined city instead of fleeing to "retener el sueño del capital" (p. 25). The community that Trías' novel promotes in *Mugre Rosa*, as well as the one proposed by posthumanist non-anthropocenic ideologies, in my opinion, has more to do with Durkheim's "mechanical solidarity" than with its "organic other". Accordingly, *Mugre Rosa*'s society could easily fall into the unintended consequences of premodern communities, as argues Martín Rodríguez:

> […] the modern and postmodern idealization of all manner of closed societies, from primitive tribes to rural villages, has inspired numerous texts precisely condemning that one place where the individual may, to an extent, escape horizontal totalitarianism. That is, the great modern city in which economic and political freedom prevail, as well as freedom to practice traditional customs (p. 28).

In the novel's culmination, the city is depopulated and destroyed, annihilating the only space where "the individual is sovereign and is no longer a mere component of a mechanical social body that nullifies free will, creativity or, indeed, individuality" (p. 28). In *Mugre rosa*, the dystopian world of the narrator that mirrors "[…] estos días posnucleares, posindustriales, posmodernos y poshumanos" (Braidotti, 2015, as cited in Pérez Gras, p. 292), indeed illustrates the beginning of a dystopian premodern present, thus bringing back the "horizontal totalitarianism" that societies based on "mechanical solidarity" enforce with neither hope nor room for individual freedom.

CONCLUSION

Mugre Rosa is a novel that takes the form of a political dialogue in support of a feminist and ecocritical action towards achieving a utopian future with neither capitalism nor injustices left to be amended. In the novel, though, the presence of the pandemic and the scarcity it causes, instead of a posthuman paradise, gives birth to totalitarianism. All of these occurs not as an evolutionary imposition for a new and better society based on non-anthropocenic ethics as some critics seem to interpret, but as a regression to "official histories" of preindustrial and preliberal

communities, where the individual freedom of the city is forsaken in favor of a diversity of totalitarianism. Consequently, the novel is not a dystopia with a hopeful message for the reader at the end, contrary to it, its finale foresees a very pessimistic and nihilistic aftermath.

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NOCTURNAL QUEERS IN HONG LING'S VAMPIRE FICTION

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Urban Gothic literature in general, and vampire stories in particular, have been used as a cultural form to express contemporary desires for overcoming a backward past (Byron, 2007; Punter, 2014; Senf, 2002; Lucendo, 2009) and sublimate the fears that the social, sexual, and racial transgressions of modernity would bring about (Butler, 2001, 12; Byron, 2007; Arata, 1990; Craft, 1984; Dümling, 2016). It is in this ambiguous intermingle of horror and pleasure that science and technology's promise to control and transgress that the Gothic has developed its semiotic discourse.

The vampire monster is one of the recurrent protagonists of this discourse, and the one this chapter takes as its focus. In this chapter I take the vampire as the only characterization in which the Heideggerian "subject of the Enlightenment" can have a positive existence after "the advent of Modern-Age-subjectivity": an epoch when the subject is starting to be understood as the remnant void after the substantial has been removed; a void that the monster can fill (Žižek, 1991. 64). I will argue that such a nocturnal monster, in our contemporary post-Enlightment and identity-based societal paradigm can be thought of as queer.

Apart from the playful intermingle of horror and pleasure, the queer and the vampire also share a similar epistemology: both represent that which we aim to recognize even from within its own concealment. In its literary representation, this has developed into a set of metaphoric polarities that allow us to imagine and represent a mysterious figure that can nonetheless be known.

Some authors claim that the metaphoric polarities of day and night are key in this representation. They argue that the literary elaborations focusing on the contrast between these two poles would be responsible for supporting a strict interpretation of light as good and progress, and of darkness as evil and backward in vampire fiction (Bailey, 1992; Ridenhour, 2013). This is a phenomenon with a correlation in the development of Taiwanese queer literature. The acclaimed, and allegedly first, Taiwanese gay novel *Crystal Boys* (1983) by Pai Hsien-yung illustrates it accurately when it depicts queer lives as inscribed in night and concealment: "In our kingdom, there is only dark night, there is no bright day. With the first light of dawn, our kingdom falls into darkness." (Pai Hsien-Yung, 1992, 3).

The kick off scene of *Crystal Boys* exemplifies how the playful use of secrecy and visibility is at the core of the development of queer literature, and as Fran Martin (2003) suggests via Yengning Chao (1997), the representation of homosexuality in Taiwan does make use of the poles of the hidden and the shown to render the queer visible, alternating states of concealment during the day with moments of disclosure at night (Martin, 2003. 189).

This construction of queer identities as forms of secrecy is not alien to the Angloamerican understanding of sexuality. Sedgwick argues in Epistemology of the Closet (1990) that homosexuality has a strict relationship with the structuring of the public and the private in European discourses since the nineteenth century. In the Taiwanese context, a second layer of complexity is added to local queer representations. Wen Liu and Yi Zhang (2022) aptly summarize it in saying that Sinophone societies:

On the one hand, are pressured to take a "culturally essentialist approach" that denies the cross-border circuit of Western sexual discourses, replicating the reductive narrative that Sinophone societies are and should be exterior to sexual modernity; on the other, they have to wrestle with a "queer vanguardist approach" that views social recognition via a liberalist lens as not only unnecessary but also

pernicious to queer subjects and the radical potential of queer movements. (Liu and Zhang, 2022. 33)

In both cases, they argue, this perspective serves to reinforce dichotomous frameworks of East vs. West, straight vs. homosexual as the only way towards recognition. Frameworks that are superposed onto the aforementioned demands for visibility even from within concealment.

Queer studies as a whole is trapped in this symbolic framework, oscillating between the "culturally essentialist approach" and the "queer vanguardist approach" (Liu and Zhang, 2022. 33), where the first serves a "merely documentary" purpose of queer history, and the second becomes the only path for queer relations to become theoretical and to "become political –in the sense of being seen as pregnant with the shape of a utopian future to come" (Amin, 2017. 36). In both cases, representation as opposed to concealment is required to obtain the political benefit of an identity.

WHICH BACKWARD NIGHTS? WHOSE PROGRESSIVE FUTURES?

Although the reading and reproduction of Gothic tropes and conventions is now considered a global phenomenon disconnected from its Western tradition (Byron 2013), what makes this literature global yet also contingent to a specific cultural space is not its geographical source, but the reference it makes to the boundary that separates beauty from disgust (Žižek 1991. 68). This means that the once rigid metaphoric polarities of day and night have shifted and are now being understood as polyvalent:

The traditional duality of science and archaism, progress and barbarism is misleading. Dracula is thus not only a "child of the night", rather he is a truly polyvalent creature, who can both illuminate and obscure and who oscillates between the apparently antagonistic realms of light and reason, and darkness and archaism. (Peker, 2015. 54)

But, what does "polyvalent" mean here? As the quote above argues, Urban Gothic vampires like Dracula cannot be unequivocally associated with the night and the dark primitive past they were said to symbolize, neither are they hidden. Urban Gothic Vampires are starting to be read as creatures that alternate between concealment and disclosure. Following Žižek, I suggest they cannot only be interpreted as polyvalent, but they should actually be considered a representation

of the void itself that allows the previously assumed oscillation between the metaphoric polarities.

This way, I understand that what the vampire signals with their presence is not the possibility to multiply the allegories of the metaphoric polarities as its "polyvalent" reading argues (Peker, 2015). Rather, I argue vampires don't only show an alternation between the modern Enlightenment and the backward past, they now allow readers to be aware of the artificial nature of this polarization and in the process, they bring to the forefront "the 'raw substance' structured by the symbolic" (Žižek & Scott-Railton, 2014. 58). Read this way, vampires provoke in their readers a "grimace of the real" (Žižek 1991) that allows them to see the night beyond its symbolic meaning, as the real in Lacanian terms:

> The Real is the starting point, the foundation of the process of symbolization (in this sense, we can talk about the "symbolization of the Real"). In a way, it precedes the symbolic, it is the "raw substance" structured by the symbolic, which has caught it in its net. Symbolization mortifies, "empties", separates the Real from the living body. But the Real is also the waste product of the process itself of symbolization. It is the surplus, the remainder that eludes symbolization and as such is produced by it. (Žižek & Scott-Railton, 2014. 58)

This read of night and darkness as the "starting point" that both limits and structures the symbolic discourse is inspired by Hong Ling vampire stories and allows to think of both vampires and queers, not in a vis-à-vis symbolic manner dependent on light and visibility, but as in revolt to the rules of representation altogether.

NOCTURNAL QUEERS IN HONG LING'S VAMPIRE STORIES

In Hong Ling's futuristic vampire stories, the balance between light and darkness, once a natural and allegorical phenomenon, is complicated. In her stories, the night, instead of serving as a metaphor that allows the modern human to sublimate and conquer his fears through science and technology, functions as a limit to what modernity allows to imagine. In the two texts that are discussed in this chapter, night is hardly subject to symbolization in the way vampire stories are usually read, because it's neither up for humans to control, nor for them to transgress.

The nocturnal context of the texts selected for this chapter[1] –all extracted from her 1995 book Yìduān xīxuèguǐ lièzhuàn (異端吸血鬼列傳) [Biographies of Heretic Vampires]– although illuminated by modern neon lamps, is the result of a human-caused disaster and it doesn't give way to another day. In them, technology does not serve as a hopeful argument for better future, nor as a frightening transgressive device like in classic Gothic Literature, because the very idea of a future in a fictional world where the night is going to last forever renders this interpretation obsolete. An interesting question that arises from the fact that Hong Ling characters are mostly lesbian is whether, as queer vampires, the lack of future leaves their queer politics void like some scholars such as Kadji Amin would argue claiming that contemporary queer politics is obsessed with a utopian, future-bound way of existence (Amin, 2017).

In "Fever" fāshāo (發燒) (1995. 26-31) the night is caused by the destruction of the ozone layer at the end of the 20th century, an event that forced humans to cover the Earth in order to protect their skin from the sun. Day and night happen artificially and the story takes places in the vampire protagonist's awaiting of a tomorrow that wouldn't come:

> In the last year of the 20th Century, when the ozone layer was effectively depleted, the Earth had already been covered by an opaque shield for 50 years in order to protect the skin of the Planet population from the light. Now, day and night are manually adjusted… (1995. 31)

In "The Suffering Beast" Shòu Nán (獸難) (1995. 56-87) female vampires, werewolves and the scant number of humans that are left alive dwell in an urban eternal night caused by a nuclear war that took place in 2019:

> Ever since in 2019 the last armed conflict on a planetary scale took place, the world had been plunged into an eternal night. Radioactive particles of dust float in the air, leaking through every crack, dancing joyously like little demons that just freed themselves.
> The sun is dead, and the redeemer is yet to be seen.

[1] All translations mine.

> Right now, it is the night of December the 24th. Shinjuku, Japan. (1995. 57, 58)

No matter how playful one tries to be, it is hard to use the accustomed traditional dual antagonistic framework to symbolize the night and the scientific enlightenment in the form of the polyvalent clash academics like Peker or Byron have defended so far. Once the very structure that supports the natural balance between day and night, light and darkness has already collapsed, the approach to the future can hardly be hopeful or optimistic by means of resorting to a more nuanced oscillation between these two once antagonistic polarities. This new reality of the night, I suggest, affects the understanding of any identity-based queer approach to the future, or the lack thereof.

For being a queer literary project, as it can be inferred from the editorial attention it has attracted (Fran Martin, 2003), Hong Ling stories counter the optimistic utopianism Western readers expect from the queer genre. The well-known "it gets better" motto is foreclosed in her works with the actual realization of the ever more plausible ecological disaster. In contrast with other queer authors of her generation like Chi Ta-wei, hers is a world where queer utopianism cannot be understood as an utter confidence in a better future favored by Queer Studies in the West:

> Under a sky covered in clouds, I can only run endlessly, chased by the flashes. On a Scottish rainy night, in the post-nuclear landscape of Tokyo, in the beginning, through ancient times, to the end of time, I ran. All these moments and places welcome my shadowless, aching body, offering it brief moments of passion and dreams that cause me even more grief. Forever gaseous, just wisps of ashes will be my remains, I feel like a prey about to die, like a mortal lover. (1995. 67)

IT GETS BETTER?: NOCTURNAL QUEER THEORY

Vampires' popularity rocketed in the West after the revolutions of the 18th century (Butler, 2001. 25), coinciding with the Enlightenment, in both metaphorical and literal terms, of the Victorian era. It may seem contradictory then that, while

the urban settings where vampires hunt were increasingly illuminated with electric lighting, the fictional depiction that conforms to the semiotics of Urban Gothic, still relied on the gloom and darkness of previous gas-lit historical moments (Peker, 2015. 37).

The use of night and light in Urban Gothic novels understood as an allegory of the clash of the past and the present as two antagonistic worlds (Ridenhour 2013) resonates with the future-bound utopian desires of queer theory and the blind eye it sometimes pays to the actually not so optimistic living conditions of queers (Amin, 2023).

Queer theory is often mystified as a bearer of progress in Western liberal terms (Valentine 2007), and this is certainly the case in the way LGBTQAI+ advancements have been portrayed in Taiwan, where "the legalization of same-sex marriage in May 2019 foisted Taiwan into the global limelight as the symbol of queer liberalism in Asia." (Liu & Zhang, 2022. 37) Here, I argue, the portrayal of Queer theory has points in common with the interpretation of Gothic Urban literature, inasmuch it also has an approach to writing that benefits narratives in which the clash between epochs serves not only to portray concerns about the future, but also to imagine and hope for a brighter tomorrow when the concerns of the dark backward past are overcome by progress in liberal terms. There is an existing body of scholarship that allows for a critique of the excessive voluntarism in contemporary queer theory (Copjec, 1994), understanding as such what stems from post-structuralist accounts of sexual difference of which Butler's Gender Trouble (1990) is the core example. In the Taiwanese case, the backward sexual past has often been symbolized by PRC's China, making a requisite for a modern and independent Taiwan to embrace a liberal understanding of sexuality:

> Sexuality, because of its spotlighted position in recent international human rights politics, becomes an effective tool of representation to build a liberal imagery highlighting the core values of Taiwan. By showing its commitments and accomplishments in terms of sexual rights, the Taiwanese state can also distinguish the country from authoritarian China. (Liu & Zhang, 2022. 37)

While futuristic Urban Gothic fiction may rely on science and technology to bring about the bettering of the present moment, Queer theory acts in these

fictional texts as that very technology. The utopian promises made by Queer theory tend to be by means of its ability to function as a bearer of novelty, where novelty is equated with progress and sameness while homogeneity is linked to backwardness:

> Queer theoretical writing tends to rely on positions in which it poses values like heterogeneity, variety, multiplicity and change in opposition to a prevailing order that is imagined as seeking sameness in the forms of homogeneity, fixity, mainstreaming and conformity. (Nichols, 2020. 3)

It is therefore expected that the most widespread literatures combining the futuristic Urban Gothic and the queer, following the norms set by the global technologies of recognition (Shih 2004), align to a certain extent with this project of contesting temporalities in favor of a utopian future that is always imagined as able to overcome both the present and the past by proposing always newer –better– alternatives forms of being.

Ben Nichols (2020) is very critical with this mystification of a better tomorrow stemming from novelty that queer theory seems to promise and that, as he argues, affects the cultural production that gets attention under the label of the queer condemning repetitive, fixed stories rooted in the past like those of 'coming out' experiences to be uninteresting for the contemporary queer audience.

This is not exclusive of Western LGBTIQ movements, in the Taiwanese case that occupies this chapter, as the editorial of the second issue of the lesbian publication À*i Bào* (愛報) [Love Papers] shows in one of the first references made to queer theory in the island in 1994, queer is also linked to a utopia from its inception: "Queer Nation here is a politics, a strategy, a utopia, and a substantial existence whereby the guaitai yizu takes form." (1994. Vol. 2: 6).

It is interesting to highlight the future-bound concepts used to describe the Taiwanese utopian queer nation as the time and place to come where the queer would finally take form. This understanding of the queer as the filler of the constitutive lack in the signification of past and present, as Nichols exposes in his reading of Lacan and Edelman (2020. 83-90), invests it with the responsibility of functioning as a "mediator of the signifier" that makes the utopian future

desirable as the place where the queer will finally have a whole meaning, a desire that for Edelman (2004) takes shape in the figure of the child and serves to the (re)production of the current status quo.

The utopian queer, as a (re)producer of novelties and alternatives, and as a promise of a future where queerness has a whole meaning, have actually come to satisfy the demand for constant productivity of our current world (Amin, 2016. 104, 105). And, except from some critical understandings of queer utopia like those of Jose Esteban Muñoz, truth is that the reproductive, ever flexible futurism is what grants cultural capital to much of our current queer theory in spite of acting against the interests of queers themselves (Dinshaw et al., 2007).

Queer becomes ontologized as whatever is capable of producing novelty, eluding power, and generating alternatives. The equation works both to secure the infinite productivity of queerness and futurity of Queer Studies and to stabilize the political value that new queer scholarly objects can be expected to generate:

> To be clear, the problem, as I see it, is not that Queer Studies has provided an academic home for utopian sensibilities [...] but rather that, in the process, queer has become ontologized as the name of whatever object seems to realize these aspirations. Paradoxically, this occurs precisely at the moment when ordinary gays and lesbians seem less and less likely to secure the political ambitions of Queer Studies. (Amin, 2016. 105)

In the context of Gothic literature, in which fiction uses in a symbolic way "real" phenomena like the alternation between day and night and aims to overcome them resorting to a mimetic or imitative technological reproduction of that reality, namely electric lighting, does not account for the fact that this enlightening progress is motivated by darkness and night itself. In Lacanian terms, it could be said that understanding day and night as symbolic representations of reality, takes out of consideration the Lacanian real to focus only on the imagined characteristics of the symbolic order. Recuperating the Lacanian concept of the real allows one to conceive the night, not as a symbolic representation of a backward past humans need to overcome, but as the source of the necessary limits and contingencies to any utopian promise made in the symbolic.

The kind of castrating limits that the eternal nature of the night brings to the fore in Hong Ling's texts are traditional enemies to a field so imbued with optimism for the future as Queer Studies which, "as a field, remains driven to a set of temporal values that orient it, almost triumphally, toward modernity." (Amin, 2017. 47). For Queer studies, investing in futurity has always equated to being political, to being in for goodness and striving to leave behind the past dark times of homophobia. But is this queer future that relies on a utopia formed by ever growing novelties and diversities politically useful for queers? Ben Nichols (2020) argues to the contrary:

The simple continuation of the lives of those who are already alive – the investment in a future that is not for children, but for us – has no logical relation to any particular sexual formation. We may want some futures, many futures, not to bring change, but to keep things the same – and surely there is nothing intrinsically politically pernicious in recognizing this. (Nichols, 2020. 82-83)

This chapter has showed that Hong Ling's queer vampire fiction tackles with the hopelessness in lack of a (better) future and does so in an appealing radical way for those who –queers, vampires or both– would rather stay in the shade, outside the well-meaning liberal identitarian political framework.

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SPATIAL LANDMARKS FROM MIDDLE-EARTH IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

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Our goal in writing these pages is the exploration of (postcolonial) literary cartography as a feasible and enriching analytical tool that helps literary criticism gain a better understanding of the complex interrelationship between story, ideology and space. To do so, we will focus on the imaginary geography of Middle-earth as described in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), transcending the mere textual analysis and showing the suitability of Geographical Information Systems to expose the motives and functions underneath its most relevant spatial landmarks.

This chapter begins with an overview of literary cartography and its main features, presenting it as a valuable subdiscipline at the service of literary analysis. This is followed by the spatial study of Middle-earth, building on previous systematic investigations that study the connections and correspondences between the fictional spaces and the real geography. To conclude, the final section discusses the key role that space plays in the construction of the imagined world, owing to the (re)creation of specific ideologies by means of the cultural, social and power relations connecting fictional and real locations.

1. FROM LITERARY GEOGRAPHY TO LITERARY CARTOGRAPHY

The terms "Literaturgeographie", "géographie littéraire" and "Literary Geography" were coined in the early twentieth century in German, French and English-speaking territories, respectively, to designate the integration of a geographical methodology into literary theory studies. Initially, the adoption of this new methodology served the purpose of contrasting anthropological or psychoanalytic concepts applied to literary analysis,[1] but literary geography soon established itself as a key element in the systematic analysis of literary history. It did so thanks to the two strands it divided itself into: on the one hand, the one that attempts to infer the regional characteristics of a given literary production, departing from the birthplace, workplace and/or residency of the writers; and, on the other hand, the strand whose goal is to study the real territories transferred into literature and the literary fictional spaces, i.e. authorial creations without a specific or real counterpart. That being said, the writers' spatial experiences often impact the fictional spaces they create in their works, so that it becomes nearly impossible to completely separate the abovementioned strands.

A further aspect that must be mentioned is the broadness of the term "literary geography". It refers not only to academic analyses, but also to didactic, touristic and educational ones — e.g. travel guides, monographs on literary landscapes — which may sometimes offer remarkable information about the relationship between literary works and their geographical context.

All in all, this heterogeneous situation complicates the clear-cut delimitation of a given research line and the rules designed to guarantee a high qualitative and methodological analysis — even though it is precisely this heterogeneity what prompts critical reflections on these approaches.

1.1. Literary cartography

Within literary geography, literary cartography is "looked upon as a subdiscipline or an ancillary science" in charge of producing statistical, quantitative, and qualitative analyses based on the mapping of content or specific information

[1] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an overview of the early days of literary geography, hence our very brief explanation, following Piatti's (2008).

from a text or group of interrelated texts (Piatti and Hurni, 2011, p. 218). These studies seek to contribute to a better understanding of fiction, broadly speaking, and of literary space, in particular. In other words, literary cartography allows the possibility to analyse various aspects related to fictional works and space, such as the place of publication of one or more literary works, or the sites that have left a mark on the writer's life.

The analysis of Middle-earth presented here, however, owes to an understanding of literary cartography as the discipline that enables the mapping of fictional worlds and their particularities. As Piatti et al. (2009) have pointed out, maps come into play in the study of fictional space and the rules that govern it, insofar as they can help us represent and examine literary geography in accordance with the dialectical relationship between fiction and reality. The mapping of spatial data gathered from a given literary work is therefore conceived as a tool that opens up new interpretative avenues and results in original conclusions regarding the production, construction, transformation and function of literary spaces. Literary cartography, in short, offers scholars the opportunity to study fictional spaces from a different perspective.

1.2. Illustrative maps and analytical maps

Two different types of maps can be used in the study of works of literature, a differentiation based on their main function: illustrative maps and analytical maps.

On the one hand, illustrative maps are either already present in the literary work, or have been elaborated from it, irrespective of specific correspondence between the literary space and the real world. These maps display a fictional space conceived of by the author or the publisher, even the scientist, for as Stockhammer (2007) has acutely observed, the distinction between pictorial and cartographic signs emerged at the beginning of the 18th century.

Illustrative maps are the result of an attempt at verisimilitude, despite not being the product of any critical or specialized textual analysis. They offer readers a clear picture of the fictional topography and help guide them through the literary universe. These cartographies are usually elaborated to clarify some sort of fictional information and complement readers' spatial experience. Illustrative maps also foster readers' entrance into the literary space by providing them with a (un)real

geographical referent that matches the geographical organisation presented in the text, thus facilitating the placing of all or some of the fictional locations in it. It is for this reason that illustrative maps are often considered a pictographic representation — with various levels of thoroughness — of the geographical landforms and/or buildings in the story. Thanks to the inclusion of these syntheses or analytical details from the literary setting, illustrative maps act as a reading guide that enhances readers' understanding of the text, laying the foundations for the cognitive cartographical configuration that each reader elaborates when navigating the narration and organizing its spatial structures (Martos, 2007).

This form of cartographic representation is developed in the text, and the boundaries imposed in the text or the map itself are the only information available (Martos, 2007). Insofar as illustrative maps depend on the author or publisher, they cannot produce autonomous conclusions about the inner workings of the text that can be related to other studies on works of literature, or on specific literary aspects. In this regard, illustrative maps are meaningless when unaccompanied by their literary work, and they are not essential for the understanding of the text. Similarly, illustrative maps are subordinated to the aesthetic purpose of the literary work, because they are originally conceived as constituents of or complements to it. The maps of Middle-earth included by J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) are a good case in point.

Analytical maps, on the other hand, are the tool used in literary cartography to study the correspondence between real space and fictional space. To do so, fictional spaces must be geographically situated in a map, or else the structural similarities and divergences between real and fictional spaces cannot be properly explored. Analytical maps are extrinsic and independent from the literary work; they are more than just the basis for establishing the spatial names from the text, in accordance with it. Quite the contrary: the configuration and development of this kind of maps aims at uncovering new information about the geographical patterns present in literary works, by means of topographical representation.

The fictional text must be studied prior to the elaboration of the analytical map. The resulting cognitive display of geographical referents is significantly more distorted than in illustrative maps, owing to the fact that analytical maps are explicitly designed to transcend the written text and offer new insights on

the authorial spatial conception of fiction. In no way are analytical maps to be used as guiding tools directing the researcher through the fictional space, nor as complements to academic statements. Let us stress this point: analytical maps are analytical tools that reveal the spatial information hidden beneath the literary work, just as Franco Moretti's maps did in his pioneering study *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (1997).

2. A SPATIAL STUDY OF MIDDLE-EARTH FROM LITERARY CARTOGRAPHY

The relationship between analytical maps and literature relies on the possibility to represent the production of spatial imagination. Countless properties, activities and even progresses can be cartographically depicted. It must be noted, though, that the depiction of the latter entails a series of problems linked to geolocation; namely, the transposition of extracted and organised spatial information to a maps' coordinates. This problematic, according to Piatti (2017), stems from the semiotic specificity of textual spaces, for several discursive techniques can be deployed in the design and construction of a given setting to either underscore or blur its connections with an existing geographical space. By the same token, locations in literature do not necessarily constitute a realistic or exact representation of empirical space. Even though they are often and somehow established as a counterpart to them, some locations may dispense with any ties to real geography (Piatti et al., 2009). Consequently, there exist fictional spaces whose characteristics, those typical of writing and of literature, impede their geolocation. This leads to the separation between unmappable and mappable literary spaces. Analytical maps use mappable spaces only, and they only show a handful of selected locations, so as to emphasise the relevance of the information included (Ungern-Sternberg, 2009).

In the present study, our analysis of Middle-earth's locations by means of an analytical map intends to shed light on the ways in which imaginary geographies sustain power and knowledge relationships closely linked to social reality. In the context of crisis that defined Europe in the aftermath of World War I, Tolkien's literary efforts were directed at the creation of a mythology for England through fantasy. This inclination, Fernández (2002) argues, had its roots

in the absence of some kind of pre-Christian mythical narration that expressed the British imperial character and ideals, but mostly, in the understanding of mythical and/or heroic stories as the cornerstone of the future).

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope", put forward in his essay "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel" (1937), supports this starting hypothesis. By "chronotope" Bakhtin refers to those meaningful spaces in our social and cultural memory, places where powerful historical forces operate, locations of experience whose typology depends on every culture. Following this definition, we can establish nine mappable chronotopes in Middle-earth, that is, spatial landmarks that in the story encapsulate various relevant experiences — battles, shelters, acts of treason or alliances — for which they are subsequently invested with historical, social and cultural significance. These landmarks are: the Shire, Fangorn Forest, Isengard, Lórien, Moria, Rivendell, Gondor, Mordor and Rohan.

At this point, we choose to introduce Geographic Information Systems. GIS are complex computer tools that store, process, organise, represent and analyse geographically indexed data attending to their components. Their *raison d'être* is to make the data accessible to users, and even facilitate the interaction between user and data. GIS enable the development of different types of cartographies or graphs, in both fixed and dynamic formats. In order to study the particularities of Middle-earth through its cartographic representation with GIS, we must first extract the spatial information provided by the text. The second step in the process concerns the demarcation and inventory of these spatial data. Lastly, we study these relationships and their main characteristics attending to their potential connections with empirical geography.

To begin with, we propose a typology of spatial elements that allows us to establish an initial classification of selected locations from Middle-earth. This typology is partly inspired by Kevin Lynch's categorization of empirical spatial elements in *The Image of the City* (1960). Our typology also draws from both the classification of fictional spaces created by the Institute of Cartography and Geoinformation ETH Zurich in the interdisciplinary project *Ein Literarischer Atlas Europas*, and from the research carried out in relation to the project *The Projection of Place: Compostela in its Geoliterary Imaginary (1844-1926). Geographical Information Systems and Spatial Humanities (FFI2013-41361-P)*.

Our typology takes into account the variables of dimension and relationship in order to establish two types of spatial units in literature: settings and zones. The term "setting" designates those landmarks that in the text correspond to specific geographic longitude (X) and latitude (Y) coordinates. They constitute the minimal spatial unit and are therefore indivisible; that is to say, settings do not contain other settings, but represent the primary element from which the other unit in this typology is made. "Zones", in turn, are those spatial references that in the fictional text contain one or more settings. In light of the abovementioned chronotopes, and in accordance with our typology, the Shire, Fangorn Forest, Isengard, Lórien, Moria and Rivendell are examples of settings. In contrast, Gondor, Mordor and Rohan are best understood as zones.

When it comes to studying the connection between these places and empirical geography, we build on John Garth's *The Worlds of J. R. R. Tolkien: The Places that Inspired Middle-Earth* (2020), as this is so far the only complete and systematic work concerned with the spaces that inspired the fictional locations from Middle-earth. Garth (2020) equates the setting of the Shire with the Sarehole area in England; Fangorn with Wiltshire, one of the English counties; Isengard is seemingly based on Faringdon Folly, a tower built by Lord Berners in Oxfordshire in 1935; Lórien reminisces the English town of Warwick, built on the banks of the River Avon. Beyond England's borders, Garth finds links between Moria and one of the deadliest battles in World War I, when British and French forces fought the German army in the forty-kilometres-long front north and south of the river Somme (Northern France); Rivendell, for its part, is associated with Lauterbrunnen, a village in the canton of Bern in Switzerland.

As far as zones are concerned, Gondor evokes Rome, capital city of the Lazio region and Italy, which came to dominate not only the Mediterranean Basin but also a large part of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (Garth, 2020). The land of Mordor refers back to the Battle of the Somme and the English Black Country, a diffused area in the West Midlands (northwest of Birmingham and south of Wolverhampton), historically known for its carbon mining and heavy industry in the 19th century (Garth, 2020). Finally, Rohan corresponds to Mercia, one of the kingdoms in the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy and situated in the centre of England, in what are now called the Midlands (Garth, 2020).

To help readers explore these correspondences by means of analytical maps, we have produced an Esri Story Map, which allows us to capture and edit these data and display the results via interactive satellite maps. The link to the map is: https://arcg.is/1TaOv.

3. CONCLUSIONS: READING THE ANALYTICAL MAPS

Middle-earth's fantastic geography and its cartographic representation combine a religious foundation with old pre-Christian beliefs and the imagination of the classical tradition, with the intention of spatially and symbolically project a utopian religious-political moral order: the longing for the restoration of the British Empire.

The way Tolkien decided to create his own English mythology and contribute, in fantasy form, to a model of social regeneration of the empirical world was through the construction of a secondary world, and within it, a true story in line with reality (Fernández, 2002). The choice of the fantasy genre is justified because it "enables a recreation of reality, [and] opens new worlds to understand the one we live in", at the same time it "supplies moral, ethical and even aesthetic lessons in the transmission of history or story" (Domínguez, 2009, pp. 804-05; our translation). The story Tolkien crafted in *The Lord of the Rings* would achieve this goal of explaining its immediate reality, that of a devastated Europe who has fought two world wars in order to defeat totalitarianism. The book's strength of conviction originates in the decentring of fantastic time and space, which allows the writer and the readers to appraise the world and gear their actions by removing their own contemporaneity.

At heart, the Western conceptualization of the fantastic space in Middle-earth ostensibly hints at the role colonialist processes played in its construction. Postcolonial geographical studies have their roots in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and the contention this author makes about the way in which the West formed an image of the East. In Said's view, a myriad of texts exploring the West predated those that explored Asia. As a result, the Western cultural construction of the East evinces asymmetrical power relationships, to the point that orientalist thinking "*is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or

alternative and novel) world" (Said, 1979, p. 12; italics in the original). Said (1979, p. 63) alludes to the imaginary geographies that express the relationship between the power and knowledge of the East, emphasizing their political significance and the fact that they produced "a prodigious cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world: … settings, in some cases names only, half-imagined, half-known; monsters, devils, heroes; terrors, pleasures, desires". Said (1979, p. 73) clearly ascribes emotional content — in the shape of "dreams, images and vocabularies" — to those places that appear distant, in a way that the West's spatial otherness comes to be represented by reason and democratic governments, whereas the East is represented by absolutist regimes (Zusman, 2013).

Said's theorisation of geographical imaginaries paved the way for the development of various research lines within historical geography. These lines have investigated the "representations, fantasies and dreams" of spaces other than European or North American ones, "conveyed through travel writing, photographies, paintings and cartographies" (Zusman, 2013, p. 57; our translation). The similarities between colonial domination processes manifested through overseas imaginaries, and the stories taking place in Middle-earth — particularly *The Lord of the Rings* —, characterised by the defeat and establishment of imperial powers in one single space, are liable to be analysed through this lens. In doing so, we can see how Tolkien's cultural construction is grounded in unbalanced power relationships that the author weaves into the structure of the alternative, narrated world.

Postcolonial theories can clarify the ways in which geographical imagination at the service of literary creativity can be used to promote or resist certain ideologies. Furthermore, by linking geographical imagination with domination processes, they can help define the social function — imbued with individual and collective values — of this and other literary works in the epic fantasy subgenre, as well as all the literary works where a geographical allegory is used to interrogate notions of power and justice.

Still, the mythical nature of these geographical representations must not be forgotten, since this is just another form of establishing literary imaginaries that seek to shape both society and the individual. Indeed, the story gives coherence to the ties existing between subject, place and imaginaries, including the construction of space, the individual, and the various ways of thinking and creating the world. However, the mediation of geographical imaginaries

in the literary text shows the reciprocity between individuals and space in the construction of the imaginary. To put it simply, for the mythical story to effectively configurate society and the individual — as Tolkien does to restore the ideals of the British Empire —, space is a *condicio sine qua non* that imaginary would not exist. It acts as a mediator, because the design and creation of a society inevitably entails the creation of its space.

We would like to end this chapter by emphasizing the importance of considering the relationship between visual expressions, imagination and domination processes that characterises postcolonial geographical research, given the valuable contribution it offers to the study of the construction of imaginary worlds in literature. Postcolonial geographical research undertakes the spatial analysis of historical experience and reveals geographical conflicts derived from cultural forms of imperial power, hence its relevance.

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tradition of the image of power in video games. She has contributed to book chapters, conferences and journal articles on the subject matter of the survival of the image in video ludic language.

Nathaniel Sola Rubio
Jaume I University

Graduate in Art History from the Universitat de València (2015-2019). He obtained the extraordinary prize in the MA Degree in Art History and Visual Culture from the Universitat de València and the Universitat Jaume I (2019-2020), as well as a runner-up within the project Cultural heritage as a tool for educational innovation (2017). PhD student in the inter-university programme in Art History at the Universitat Jaume I whit a pre-doctoral contract by the Ministerio de España (FPU). Member of IHA (Iconografía e Historia del Arte) research group and of the working team of the R+D+i project: La recepción artística de la realeza visigoda en la Monarquía Hispánica (siglos XVI a XIX). He has completed a research stay of three months at the Warburg Institute in London (2023). Previously, he served as secretary for the Asociación de Jóvenes Investigadores in the Facultad de Geografía e Historia of the Universitat de València (2020-2022) and was part of the exhibition department as a cultural management technician of the Consorci de Museus of the Generalitat Valenciana (2022).

Ghita Abens
School of Communication, World University of Design Sonipat, Haryana, India

My name is Ghita Ait Bensalah, and I am a Moroccan PhD student currently studying at the World University of Design in India. My research focuses on developing a visual model for Moroccan animated folktales, with a specific emphasis on animation, folktales, and visual identity. Given the nascent stage of the Moroccan animation industry, my goal is to establish a framework that will assist future Moroccan animation directors in achieving cultural authenticity and representation.In In addition to my studies, I have also gained experience as

an associated professor/visiting faculty at various universities and schools in both Morocco and India. I have covered courses such as history of graphic design, history of animation, experimental illustration, and communication design, totaling over four years of teaching experience.

Julia Sainz Cortés
Complutense University of Madrid

PhD in Fine Arts from the Complutense University of Madrid, she also holds an Official Postgraduate Master's Degree in Art, Creation and Research from the same university. She has developed her career as an illustrator and graphic designer in advertising agencies, while at the same time delving into the audiovisual world by directing music videos. She has also participated in numerous collective exhibitions; she has been selected in the Injuve awards for Young Creation in the Illustration category, and she has also obtained an Honourable Mention in the XIV Contemporary Engraving Award of the General Directorate of Women of the Community of Madrid.

She currently teaches in the fashion department of UDIT, University of Design, Innovation and Technology, in Madrid. As a researcher, she develops her work within the research group "Design, Visual Culture and Gender" belonging to the same institution, attending conferences and publishing articles and book chapters, as well as various research activities related to teaching.

Profile in Google Scholar: https://bit.ly/3L5fsId
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Marcela Naranjo Velásquez
University of Huelva

Marcela Naranjo Velásquez has a degree in Hispanic Philology from the University of Huelva (2020); additionally, she holds a Master's degree in European Medieval Identity (2021) from the University of Lleida. She is currently a PhD student in Literary Theory and Discourse Analysis at the University of Huelva, where she is focusing on the analysis of the heroes in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.

She is a member of the Asociación de Semiótica Andaluza (AASe) and the Centro de Patrimonio Histórico, Cultural y Natural of the University of Huelva.

José Manuel Chico Morales
University of Granada

He holds a degree in Philosophy from the University of Salamanca and a degree in French Studies from the University of Granada. He currently works as a lecturer in the Department of French Philology at the University of Granada and continues his research work in the PhD Programa de Doctorado en Lenguas, Textos y Contextos (University of Granada) with the completion of his doctoral thesis. Her line of research is mainly focused on the study of the convergence spaces between videoludic expression and Imaginary Studies, as well as on the ecocritical approach within videogame narratives. In this sense, he has published several articles focused especially on the study of the representation of natural spaces and non-human animal figures in video game designs. He is a member of the group Observatorio de Prospectiva Cultural (HUM-584) and of the international associations MITEMA and Asteria.

ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jose-Chico-Morales

Kevin Díaz Alché
University of Alicante

Kevin Díaz Alché is a PhD student in Modern History at the University of Alicante focusing on the narrative and aesthetic discourses present in video games that are contextualised and inspired by the Modern Age. He is also, since 2018, a teacher of Secondary Education and Baccalaureate in a centre of the capital of Alicante.

In 2015 he obtained a Bachelor's Degree in History from the University of Alicante and, in the following two years, a Master's Degree in History and Identities in the Western Mediterranean (15th-19th centuries) and a Master's Degree in Teaching Compulsory Secondary Education and Baccalaureate from the same university. His main interest is in the representation of different social groups, the construction of identities, everyday life and spirituality, with

publications in academic journals such as Quaderns de Cine (2017) -of which he was also the coordinator of issue 13-, from the University of Alicante, or Cuadernos Del Centro de Estudios de Diseño y Comunicación (2023), from the University of Palermo; and collective publications, such as Comunicación política, tecnologías y fact checking (2022) or PLAYING CULTURE. El videojuego como objeto cultural (2022), as well as international congresses, conferences and colloquiums at national level, such as the I and VI International Congress of Fantastic Genre, Audiovisual and New Technologies (2018; 2023) or the XIX Jornadas de Redes de Investigación en Docencia Universitaria and IV Workshop Internacional de Innovación en Enseñanza Superior y TIC (2021); as well as international, such as the International Conference on Communication and Applied Technologies ICOMTA'21 (2021) of the Colombian Association of Journalism and Science Communication (Colombia) and the Peruvian University of Applied Sciences (Peru), the Leeds Medieval Congress (2021) or the VIII International Colloquium of Design Researchers (2023) of the University of Palermo.

Antonio Castro Balbuena
University of Almería

Dr. Antonio Castro Balbuena (1992) studies epic fantasy in all its narrative extension: from its literary sagas to contemporary expressions in folk metal and video games. Rooted in literary theory and comparative literature, his studies contribute to a broad vision of narratology, a necessary tool for delving into all forms of stories, be they published as a book, a film, a video game, a song or a paint. All of these ideas are presented in his recent work, Visiones contemporáneas de la fantasía épica: mitología, multimodalidad y transmedialidad (Editorial Universidad de Almería, 2024). At the present time, he teaches at University of Almería and keeps analyzing how epic fantasy works, what its heroic elements are, and where it is headed.

All of his works are listed in his Google Scholar profile: Link

David Serra Navarro
University of Girona

PhD, visual artist and researcher in the Department of Communication of the University of Girona. His interest in interactive communication, social innovation and virtual worlds has led him to publish different articles in national and international journals, carry out collaborative workshops in institutions and a large number of academic communications in congresses. In parallel, through his alter ego Kenneth Russo, his artistic production is on the edge of irony, and seeks a critical interaction of the viewer through formats such as painting, video, installations, mobile applications or collaborative actions. His work has been exhibited at Arts Santa Mònica, Godia Foundation, Loop Festival, CCCB, laCapella (Barcelona), Bòlit Centre d'Art Contemporani (Girona), FIB Art (Benicàssim), Off-Arco (Madrid), University of Lapland (Rovaniemi), Espacio Enter (Canarias/Berlin), DAHJ Gallery (CA), or Digital Graffiti Festival (Florida).

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Mario Paul Martínez-Fabre
Miguel Hernánez University of Elche

Mario-Paul Martínez Fabre is a member of the Center for Research in the Arts (CíA) of the Miguel Hernández University of Elche, and professor in the Audiovisual Communication Degree and the MUECA and MUPIA Masters of the same University. He also holds a PhD in Film and Video Games and is the director of the Massiva Research Group, which studies the interrelation between audiovisual arts and mass culture.

He is the author and editor of several books such as Territorios de Alta Fantasía (Tirant, 2023), Crimen y Fantástico (Cinestesia, 2021), or El Videojuego en el cine. He has also participated in several specialized events such as Technarte (Bilbao), La Noche en Blanco (Madrid), Inclusiva-Media Lab Prado (Madrid), the International Seminar on Post-production and Digital Art (Elche), or the International Fantastic Film Festival of Elche-FANTAELX.

In his creative facet he works as an illustrator, and as director, among others, of Arcadeología (2021), or Guerrero, la cabeza entre las manos (2022). The Accademia di Belle Arti de Venezia, the BilbaoArte Foundation, the Telefónica Foundation, the Sinaloa Science Center, the Institute of Modern Valencian Art (IVAM), the Sabadell Cam Foundation, or the Museum of the University of Alicante (MUA), among others, have exhibited his work.

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María José González Dávila
Francisco de Vitoria University

María José González Dávila is a lecturer at the Universidad Francisco de Vitoria and collaborates with the UNIR and the UAX. With a PhD in Philology and Letters from the University of Ghent (Belgium), she has an extensive academic career, characterised both by her contributions to teaching and by her flourishing research career. Her research covers a wide range of areas: primarily, she is dedicated to the exploration of 19th and 20th century Spanish literature and conducts in-depth cultural studies of the respective periods. At the same time, her research extends to the field of English literature, an area in which she has been actively involved and which she continues to pursue. Finally, she has a keen interest in the pedagogy of language acquisition and general didactics.

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Miguel Ángel Albújar-Escuredo
The University of Kansas

Miguel Ángel Albújar-Escuredo possesses a B.A. in Journalism from University Ramon Llull, a B.A. in Literature from the University of Barcelona, an M.A. in Literature from the University of Salamanca, and an M.S. in Education from the University of Barcelona. Furthermore, he obtained a Ph.D. in Spanish Literature from the University of Nebraska-

Lincoln. Currently, he is engaged in research within the domain of science fiction.

His scholarly contributions include numerous articles published in esteemed journals such as Alambique: Revista Académica de Ciencia Ficción y Fantasía, Anales Cervantinos, and the Journal of Franco-Iberian Studies, among others. Additionally, he has contributed to various media outlets, including the newspaper Avui, radio stations Rac1 and OndaCero, cultural magazines such as Culturamas, and international relations publications such as Observatorio de Actualidad Mundial Blanquerna.

His volunteer efforts encompass providing translation services for NET (PBS & NPR Stations) and assisting Lincoln Literacy in transitioning all educational activities to online learning management systems. Dr. Albújar-Escuredo is affiliated with the J. Wayne and Elsie M. Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies.

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Alberto Poza Poyatos
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Alberto holds a MA in Sinology from SOAS (University of London) and a MA in Gender Studies from Central European University. Currently, he is a FPI predoctoral researcher at Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and teaches Queer Sinophone Literatures at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. In 2024 published his first book-length translation from Chinese into Spanish: Membranas (Egales, 2024).

Perfil institucional: https://talent.uoc.edu/es/alberto-poza-poyatos.html

Alba Rozas-Arceo
University of Santiago de Compostela

Alba Rozas-Arceo holds a Degree in Galician Philology and Hispanic Philology from the University of Santiago de Compostela, and a PhD from

the same university in Literature and Culture Studies with the thesis titled "Fragments of Apocalypse as Spatial Fiction: The Counterfactual Condition of Villasanta de la Estrella. An Analysis from Literary Cartography». Rozas-Arceo has published numerous research articles on literary theory, and she has been exploring Tolkien's world and imagination in works such as "The Hobbit desde a xeografía literaria crítica. Perspectivas de análise" (2015), "El Hobbit: una aventura cartográfica" (2014), "De la colina a la montaña: una visión del espacio en El Hobbit" (2015), "As cidades replicantes de Tolkien. Minas Tirith e Minas Morgul, desde a xeografía imaxinaria" (2018).

Inmaculada Pérez-Casal
University of Vigo

Inmaculada Pérez-Casal is an assistant lecturer in English language and literature at the University of Vigo. She received her PhD from the University of Santiago de Compostela, and her dissertation, funded by the Regional Government of Galicia (Spain), investigated romantic genre fiction in English in relation to feminism and the fight for gender equality. Broadly speaking, Pérez-Casal's research centers on genre studies and popular culture from a feminist and postcolonial perspective. She has published several articles and book chapters on these topics in prestigious journals and edited books, and she is one of the organizers of the Cultural Studies seminars, an annual academic event hosted by the University of Vigo to consolidate and disseminate cultural studies in Spain.

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PhD, lecturer and researcher in the Department of Art and the Arts Research Centre of the Miguel Hernández University of Elche and member of the Massiva Research Group, which studies the interrelation between audiovisual arts and mass culture. He is also a guest researcher at the Groupe Interdisciplinaire de Recherche sur les Cultures et Arts en Mouvement (GIRCAM) of the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL). He is currently developing his research activity in various audiovisual and artistic projects. He is President of the Editorial

Committee and member of the Scientific Committee of the International Congress of Fantastic Genre, Audiovisuals and New Technologies. He teaches on the Bachelor's Degree in Audiovisual Communication and the Master's Degree in Art Project and Research.

Francisco Cuéllar Santiago
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Is a researcher and lecturer in the Department of Aesthetics and Theory of the Arts in the Department of Art at the Miguel Hernández University. He received his PhD in Fine Arts from the University of Granada in 2019. He has taught audiovisual teaching at different educational levels, at the secondary school stage through the extracurricular enrichment workshops for students with high abilities in the region of Murcia (Consejería de Educación), as well as to primary and secondary school teachers through the Centro de Profesorado de las regiones de Madrid and Murcia. He has also taught audiovisual teaching at the Centro de Investigación Matemática (Mexico) belonging to the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (National Council of Science and Technology). He has published articles and scientific texts in high impact indexed journals such as Revista Comunicar, Revista ASRI (Arte y Sociedad) of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Revista VIVAT attached to the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares or the Revista Comunicación of the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica, and subsequently to the cultural associations Historia de los Sistemas Informativos and Fórum Internacional de Comunicación y Relaciones Públicas (Forum XXI).

The figure of the monster is, almost from its very definition, a product of the imagination and the scientific and technological skills of its creator, who is usually described as a prodigious and exceptional individual. Beyond the meanings conveyed by representations of the monstrous, however, the central question of all works of fiction that use this resource in the realm of the fantastic is also that of the role of man and the task he sets himself as creator and, therefore, as a true monster, according to the etymological meaning of the Latin -monstrum: something unusual, exceptional or a prodigy contrary to the natural order-. The question manifests itself in different ways in the realms of cinema, comics and, of course, literature.

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