



THE GOTHIC AND THE ETHNIC OTHER

AN INTERVIEW WITH ENRIQUE AJURIA IBARRA

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Anna Marta Marini: I'd like to start by asking you: how did your interest in gothic fiction developed? And so, why do you think it is important to study the Gothic?

Enrique Ajuria Ibarra: Initially, I was more interested in the fantastic—or *le fantastique* in French—, a concept used more frequently to explore Latin American narratives with supernatural events. Tzvetan Todorov's classic definition claims that the fantastic is limited to a "hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). He relies on heavily on the perception of ambiguity. You never know if the supernatural event actually happened or if it was just an element of the imagination. I was interested in trying to figure out what the fantastic is and, eventually, I stumbled upon the Gothic.

I had heard about the Gothic when I was studying United States literature. When I first read Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, I started noticing similarities between the fantastic and the Gothic, such as the presence of ghosts, the feeling of terror, and uncanny settings. Now, I

prefer to use the term fantasy from a psychoanalytical standpoint. Defined by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis as “the stage-setting of desire” (28), fantasy suggests a narrativization of desire impelled by any form of expression that arises from the unconscious, and can thus admit anything supernatural, as an enticing wonder or as a revelatory terror. Fantasy allows me to navigate the Gothic and the fantastic, and additionally, helps me acknowledge magic realism too. What these three keywords specifically refer to in relation to the supernatural is very conflicting.

Magic realism has been the preferred term by Latin American scholars when addressing these specific narratives. Its literary origins can be traced to Latin America, but the term was first used to understand the tensions between reality and the imaginary in Post-Expressionist German painting (Parkinson Zamora and Faris 7). Magic realism is typically associated with the real marvelous, a term coined by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. He claims that faith in the marvelous is already inscribed in the cosmogonies that frame the perception of reality in Latin America (86-87). The American continent is in itself full of wonders that have been assimilated in everyday practices and beliefs. Therefore, any supernatural occurrence that could be perceived as supernatural does not elicit surprise or wonder in a Latin American person. In this sense, magic realism becomes the literary and artistic expression of a cultural sentiment. In her comparative analysis between the Gothic and magical realism, Lucie Armitt argues that Gothic experiences happen mostly at “the personal level,” while magic realism encompasses “a broader cultural or national narrative” (231). In this sense, the former can be easily associated with the anxieties of the individual mind and the latter with the myths that conform the discourse of identity of a community. Nevertheless, Gothic can also be politically and socially engaged. It does not exclusively have to address the terrors of one single subject, but also of bigger social groups. If we incorporate elements of community trauma—which I have already written about on *The Devil’s Backbone* (2001), directed by Guillermo del Toro—then the Gothic becomes an effective tool to address collective memory and social history, with “the insistent permanence of traumatic haunting” (Ajuria Ibarra, “Permanent Hauntings” 69).

In the Latin American cultural and historical context, it is important to establish a distinction between the fantastic and the Gothic. The revision of classic works of Latin American fiction through the Gothic lens can therefore be quite revelatory. For example, Juan Rulfo’s classic Mexican novel *Pedro Páramo* can be perceived as magic realist or fantastic, due to its supernatural elements. When you look at it through a critical perspective focused on the Gothic, it reveals an obsession with the convoluted past of one single man, but that extends itself to a general historical and cultural *malaise* of the Mexican nation. The novel is about the dead speaking in a ghost town called Comala, and recurs to the gothic trope of the insistence of the past—or the past not letting go. The narrative questions the idea of the *caudillo*, an authoritarian man who rules a region or a country, and is sometimes a war veteran. The protagonist, Pedro Páramo, refuses to let go of his own obsessions, even after his death. His spectral

desire rules Comala, turning it into a town of ghosts. Whoever arrives is trapped there, suffocated by the weight of the past. The narrator, Juan Preciado, speaks of the lack of air due to the summer heat, paired with the strange meetings he has had with the townspeople during the night (117). The terror during this scene is derived from the oppressive environment and the pervasive feeling of death that looms over the place. The air feels heavy, and Juan Preciado dies of suffocation. I wonder how much of that heaviness in the air also has to do with the idea the ghost town. The past suffocates any living person who arrives to Comala. With an example like this, I can see how the Gothic has allowed me to think of other ways of understanding issues of identity and of our past history, particularly with Mexican works of fiction, mostly film and literature.

AMM: You have worked on the relationship between the Gothic and travel fiction, and the intrinsic crossing of borders and boundaries. Boundaries that can be both metaphorical and material. So, how is movement—according to you—a key element in the gothic texts that you’ve been analyzing?

EAI: Movement is essential to the Gothic. We often associate the term with entrapment and claustrophobia, expressed in specific settings, such as the haunted house or the medieval castle. Chris Baldick calls it “the Gothic effect,” characterized by “a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space” (xix). Time comes back to creep up on you and it affects your own perception of reality, of your environment, of your own self, of your own identity. The effect is heightened if you feel trapped in an old and run-down building. However, it is worth noting that there is a strong relationship between the gothic romances from the late 18th and early 19th centuries and travel writing. For example, Ann Radcliffe, informs through travel how her characters perceive other environments, other countries, and other people. Her novels, such as *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* feature characters traveling across various regions in Southern Europe, contemplating valleys and mountain ranges and staying at medieval castles and ruined abbeys. Travel is an intrinsic part of the Gothic. Therefore, I see the Gothic as a confrontation between stasis and movement. You either have to get to the haunted castle, or the horrifying or threatening thing will come to get you.

We can also notice this in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Jonathan Harker travels to Transylvania, he gets eventually trapped in Dracula’s castle, and then Dracula travels to Great Britain. Stasis and movement that can be easily associated with life and death, and the past, the present and the future. Travel also involves an activity where you move from one location to another during a specific range of time. Gothic makes use of this action to contrast it with moments of entrapment. Gothic fictions may feature a sense of being watched in an enclosed space, but also the idea of being followed. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the titular character is chasing his own creation across the Arctic Circle in his attempt to destroy it. The novel features several travel sequences, as Frankenstein himself pursues his own personal desires

or is harassed and followed by the creature in order to fulfil his promise to create a partner for him. In *Frankenstein*, movement is associated with paranoia, a persecution that is based on the effects of scientific hubris.

Likewise, there are horror films in which travel and movement feature prominently. Directed by Victor Salva, the film *Jeepers Creepers* (2001) features the road as the main setting. The plot focuses on a brother and sister who are traveling across the country, and are suddenly attacked by a mysterious looking truck. Most of the action happens on the road, where a horrible creature wakes up every twenty-eight years to feed on the humans it hunts down here. The monstrous creeper survives on a repetitive cycle where human lives are being used up for nourishment. The film works with several spatial layers in terms of setting. The creature inhabits the basement of a church. The siblings decide to explore this church because they see the truck that was harassing them on the highway parked there. The brother climbs down to the basement and discovers the mummified past victims of the creeper laid out in a macabre tableau on the wall. The creature itself harks from a very ancient time, possibly a pre-recorded one, so it has no name. It is something unnamable, before our history. It hides underground, among the foundations of a building that symbolizes religion and faith. In this sense, how does the film narrative challenge the idea of faith when this ancient creature is there to consume you and devour you? If they had kept on moving all the time, if they had not stopped at the church to investigate where this creature came from, they would have reached the end of their journey and still been alive. Instead, they made stops along the way to ask for help, prompting the creeper to kill more people. The narrative development is focused on stasis and movement and stasis is clearly associated with the monstrous encounter, horror, and death.

Travel also helps us think about landscapes, how we configure them in fiction and what their purpose is in a narrative. Making a foreign land look exotic enough for the purposes of Gothic and horror is something I have already explored in the film *The Ruins* (2008), directed by Carter Smith. Here, a group of American tourists decide to explore a Mayan ruin off the beaten road, they end up trapped in the pyramid fighting off a flesh-eating plant that starts devouring them one by one. The film contrasts the safety of a beach resort with unexplored territory. While Scott Smith's novel of the same name is located in an abandoned mine, the film chooses to shift location by setting it in an area where the American tourists would feel mostly alienated. The people they come across in the rainforest speak Mayan only, so they are unable to understand each other. The characters end up isolated due to this lack of effective communication. The locals fail to get the message across, and the tourists never fully understand the real horror of the abandoned pyramid until they experience it in the flesh. In this case, the tropical setting, devoid of any inherent gothic characteristics, becomes gothicized through travel, movement and stasis to deliver a horrific experience of isolation, heatstroke, and being eaten alive by a plant (Ajuria Ibarra, "Gothic Re-Constructions" 134).

Travelers can also bring their own fears and their own assumptions about othering. This way, they can exoticize and "other" any place. They can fill it with their own fears and terrors.

It is what happens in *The Shining*, by Stephen King. Jack Torrance brings his own demons into the hotel, and they resurface when exposed to the evil nature of the Overlook Hotel. This is what elicits the horror in the novel. In this sense, the idea of movement represented with travel makes us think critically if a setting is inherently gothic or if characters bring their own gothic concerns into these locations. Furthermore, the gothicizing of a setting also discloses anxieties about the other. In *The Ruins*, the Gothic becomes part of the strategy for othering in this tourist nightmare. Nature is truly monstrous.

AMM: And I think this leads us to another question. Gothic fiction has also been used to delve into—as you were saying—transnational context and relations. So, how borderland—or south of the border—settings have been used to produce the US gothic narratives. How in film in particular there is this border-crossing theme for which the characters cross to danger, to the unknown, then maybe they—or at least some of them—will manage to go back home, to “civilization.” So, how do you think this has been used in general in US gothic narratives?

EAI: There is an obvious relation between travel and borderlands. What you mention about the dangers of the unknown, and the idea of home as civilization, can be identified in certain works of American fiction. In Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, the main character known as the kid travels across the Texas region, New Mexico, and the borderlands with the US Army and later on with the Glanton gang. When the kid arrives with the army in Chihuahua, Northern Mexico, the Captain and his soldiers express very clearly how they view Mexicans. They see them as people who are not civilized, as people who are “behind” socially. The text describes the city of Chihuahua as this desolate place with very little evidence of prosperity. Based on their homeland, the army believes that their actions are rightful: “We are the instruments of liberation in a dark and troubled land,” says Captain White (37). Throughout the narrative, characters cross the US–Mexico border most of the time without realizing it. The idea of othering is not defined by a visible line. Instead, people who travel away from home bring the other to unfamiliar locations.

Ray Bradbury’s “The Next in Line” reveals the fear of being stuck forever in Mexico. An American couple are traveling through Mexico and they arrive to an unnamed town that resembles Guanajuato. Here, they visit the cemetery to see the mummies on display—and the woman is terrified. She is afraid of what would happen to her if she died and was left there, drying up and forgotten. She starts to get anxious about staying in the town while her husband is enjoying the picturesque place. Then, the car breaks down and they cannot leave. While her husband keeps feeling at ease with the locals, she isolates herself in their hotel room, feeling more anxious each day. She finds comfort in reading American magazines that she purchased at a fountain shop. Eventually, she dies of utter fear, but this fear is derived from the expectation and anxiety of being completely forgotten. In the end, she fades into darkness, constantly feeling suffocated. The following scene is just the husband driving alone on the Mexican countryside enjoying himself after the car has been fixed. Again, this short story deals with stasis

and movement: of vitality represented in movement, and the fear of being left behind, of not moving, of dying. It is suggested that she may have been interred in the town's cemetery and if the fees are overdue, she eventually would become a mummy, abandoned and on display.

A clearer example is the film *Borderland* (2007), directed by Zev Berman. The plot is loosely based on true events, the Matamoros killings that were done in the latter half of the 1980s by a drug lord called Adolfo Jesus Constanzo. The documentary on the making of the film provides footage of the border police interviews when they were investigating the murders. This required a cross-border collaboration because a lot of people were disappearing on both sides of the border. Constanzo developed a cult with elements of voodoo, palo mayombe, and some pre-Hispanic motifs as well. They began sacrificing people to obtain good luck and success with their drug trafficking. Many of the bodies were buried close to the border. When they were interrogated by the police, Constanzo's people acted very calmly, confirming without any shock that they had participated in sacrifices that also involved cannibalism and in the burials.

The documentary reveals this idea of demarcation that geographically points to the United States as the civilized and safe place. Here, there are rules that need to be followed. The fictional narrative acts as a warning: be aware of the country south of the border where there are no rules. The plot focuses on a group of American friends who decide to cross the border to Mexico in order to engage in activities they would not dare do in their home country, like drinking and having sex. The film displays a stark contrast between American and Mexican landscapes. The Mexican town they visit lacks effective law enforcement. Even though there is a police corps, officers are rarely seen on the streets and the characters notice no one does anything at the police department when they report one of their friends is missing. This friend has been kidnapped by the drug cartel, and his fate is to be sacrificed and to be consumed by the members of the cult. The main protagonist finds his friend's mutilated body and recurs to violence to survive. Everything happens in Mexico. The narrative suggests that, once you cross the border, you are not only in the land of the other, but you can other yourself too. The protagonist asks himself if he would be able to kill another human being, but, given the circumstances, he must kill to stay alive. The geographical demarcation—which is completely symbolic and political—does not distinguish one country from the other, but it does have an impact on our sense of national identity.

Borderland chooses to represent Mexico very specifically in terms of the production design. The shots are edited and tinted with very warm and rich colors, like gold and sepia, giving off a harsher and hotter climate. This is enhanced by high contrast illumination, suggesting a consistent dry, desert landscape across the land that ignores the various ecosystems within Mexico. A similar setting can be seen in previous horror films, such as Robert Rodríguez's vampire splatter-gore film *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996). In this film, two American serial killers kidnap a family and cross the border into Mexico. They spend the night at an (in)famous bar managed by blood thirsty vampires, and they struggle to come out alive. At

the very end of the film, there is a panoramic shot of what lies behind the bar: it appears to be a Mayan pyramid. This ancient structure delivers a gothic element to the film. Even though the two American serial killers are violent men who do atrocious things, there is something more violent, more ancient, and more horrific on the other side of the border. The characters become prey to this supernatural evil. As the characters are killed off by the vampires, they turn into vampires too, threatening their own kin and their own families. This horror does not happen in the United States.

AMM: I absolutely agree, I see there is a pattern for which the American character crosses the border... there they can be violent, they can be uncivilized, but then they eventually go back to their home, and they go back to righteousness and order. And sometimes it's also a crossing with some White savior trope, the American protagonists are going to save Mexican characters, and then they go back to their land of freedom and "civilization."

EAI: It is this idea of the American male character having the higher moral ground, yet he is tempted on the other side of the border to resort to violence to survive, just like it happens in *Borderland* and *From Dusk till Dawn*. The foreign land is portrayed as morally different, something that happens commonly in the gothic romance. For example, Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* is about a Catholic monk who becomes corrupt, and lives in Madrid, where the hot weather partly instills his moral downfall. The gothic romance establishes a certain geographical standing that justifies the actions and choices of the other, whether they are monstrous because of their own proclivity to perform questionable deeds or because they are supernatural monsters and exceed the laws of man and nature.

AMM: Changing topic, definitely Guillermo del Toro is one of the most known Mexican directors in the United States. His extensive work can be taken as an example of how gothic modes can infiltrate different genres, how they can really be pervasive and the versatile, transnational, cross-genre, cross-media qualities the Gothic can have. Can you explain a bit how the Gothic is present in his work?

EAI: Guillermo del Toro has always confessed his interest for anything related with pop culture, the supernatural, and monsters. He has also been concerned with the process of othering. Del Toro is really well versed in horror and speculative fiction, from many sources, mainly literature, comics, graphic novels, and film itself. I think he is one of the few film directors that has managed to incorporate aesthetic elements and formal aspects from across different narrative and media forms, and this is one of the reasons he is so popular.

His film *Crimson Peak* (2015) explores the narrative structure of the gothic romance, and showcases his in-depth knowledge into this popular form of fiction. *Crimson Peak* is primarily inspired by classic gothic novels, such as *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, and *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë, and by *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe. I can also identify a few nods to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." The list of references is longer, but

this is Del Toro's film homage to the Gothic. Ideas related to sanity, faith, illness, and death stand out in *Crimson Peak*, and these are themes that we can also find throughout the rest of his work. Del Toro claims that he is a lapsed Catholic, which means that he was raised in a devoted family environment. As he grew up, he started to question religious doctrines, and has projected his own concerns about them in most of his work. For example, in his first feature-length film, *Cronos* (1993), protagonist Jesús Gris symbolizes messianic resurrection. With the aid of the *cronos* device, he achieves immortality: he dies and then he comes back from the dead, but only as a ravenous, vampiric creature that must drink the blood of other humans. Ultimately, reason rules over his more intuitive cravings, and sacrifices himself to save his family. He gives up his immortality and perishes with daylight. A final white fade-out suggests this body and spiritual cleansing for the sake of his wife and his granddaughter.

In *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), the orphanage has a chapel, but the people who run the orphanage are republicans. Both Carmen and Casares speak strongly against Roman Catholicism. They keep all religious figures and statues down, but every time someone decides to visit them, they have to keep up appearances and have the boys uncover and clean the figures for display in the chapel. In one scene, the children carry a big Christ on a cross and explain to the newcomers that they have to set it up again, so any supporter of Franco that shows up does not believe they are heretics or communists. Del Toro is particularly interested in questioning Roman Catholicism and its longstanding influence on identities, both individual and social.

Likewise, Del Toro also enjoys exploring the haunting return of the past, as we can see in *The Devil's Backbone* and in *Crimson Peak*. It features prominently in other films, such as *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and *Hellboy* (2004) too. In this latter film, the eponymous protagonist is haunted by his own origin and upbringing. The narrative focuses on a personal issue: is Hellboy going to become that monstrous creature who is going to bring about the apocalypse and the end of humanity? This is a very good example of del Toro's own notion and understanding of monstrosity. When monsters are involved, he presents us with well-rounded, complex supernatural creatures. He shows us a different side of the monster, one that is more human and vulnerable. Conversely, his films disclose the cruelty of men, and this proves to be more horrifying. In *The Shape of Water* (2017), antagonist Strickland is the one who sees the creature as something completely other; it is not from this world since it goes beyond our notions of reason and science. The story is set during the Cold War, and Strickland's strict upbringing reflects a very heteronormative and modern thinking that results in hideous violence. Through his behavior, Strickland ends up being the monster. Del Toro had worked on a similar character development before, with Captain Vidal in *Pan's Labyrinth*. Vidal is obsessed with time and death, and his military training has reinforced a sense of masculinity bound by strict obedience and demonstrations of strength. He feels entitled to do atrocious things because of his rank, like when he crushes a peasant's face with a bottle of wine, leaving the boy unable to breathe and choking with his own blood. This sequence is a form of horror that reveals the

other side of human nature, a monstrous one that stands in stark contrast with the supernatural creatures that feature prominently in this film and in the rest of his work.

In *The Shape of Water*, the creature appeals to the characters that are othered. Elisa cannot speak, and is thus other. Her neighbor Giles is gay, and he is shunned at work and at the ice-cream shop when he attempts to flirt with the bar tender. Giles is also othered and marginalized. This film summarizes many ideas that del Toro has been developing about monstrosity and that we can notice since the beginning of his filmography. With *Cronos*, it is the anxiety of being other with the gift of immortality. In *The Devil's Backbone*, it is gothic haunting. Ghosts, remnants of a traumatic event that happened in the past that keeps affecting the present, inhabit the orphanage. The bomb in the courtyard could be considered a ghost too. It did not explode and remained as something that could have happened but did not. It looms in the center of the courtyard to remind everyone of the civil war that is being fought outside the orphanage walls. From a Roman Catholic upbringing to his concerns about monstrosity, del Toro proves with every film that Gothic, horror, and the supernatural are powerful devices to speak about human nature and otherness.

AMM: Mexican identity in the United States and its cultural production are characterized by a few recurrent uncanny aspects and archetypes, which are often drawing on Mexican folktales and cultural heritage, on the Catholic upbringing, that seems to be so fascinating for Americans. What do you think are just a few of these stereotypes and tropes, and which are the most exploited according to you?

EAI: One of the key concepts that you mentioned is heritage. How do you define your own heritage? How do you shape your own identity in terms of your upbringing, where are you from, but also where your family comes from? I would suggest that Hispanic Americans are working through their own identity as being aware of their Hispanic heritage—whether it is from Mexico, Central America, or any other Spanish speaking country— and how they see themselves in the national dynamics of the United States. Notions of territory, history, and social dynamics typically render certain groups as others, Hispanics included. The idea of identity seems to be associated with the concept of origins. An acquaintance of mine came to a conference in Mexico and she was very excited to meet her relatives for the first time. She is from California and studies in Florida. She was excited because she felt that she would understand herself and her parents better when she traveled to Mexico to discover this other part of her family's history.

Additionally, folklore and tradition, which help forge a sense of social identity, must not be seen as things that are plainly passed on or inherited. It is also important that we understand how they are interpreted and adapted by younger generations. One prime example is La Llorona. She is the screaming woman, the banshee, a universal trope whose main characteristic is this idea of the lament. Octavio Paz has written about her in his influential book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. I believe she is the most represented ghost or monster in Mexican

cinema, and has appeared in several films from the 1930s to the present day. The legend also exists in Central American countries, like Guatemala. La Llorona is the ghost of a woman rejected by her Spaniard lover. Out of grief, she drowned her children in a river and now her spirit is haunting every nook and corner in Mexico, wailing for her lost children. I have explored La Llorona and her portrayal in Mexican and Hispanic American popular culture before, while trying to understand what she represents in Gothic terms. The ideas of the lament and of the foretelling—in themselves associated with loss—are combined with the anxiety about identity. This is further articulated with the notion of mobility because La Llorona is associated with bodies of water and water that moves, such as rivers. Typically, you would encounter La Llorona close to water. If this water moves, then the ghost can easily travel beyond specific locations and be found in other regions and countries (Ajuria Ibarra, “Ghosting the Nation” 132). Therefore, La Llorona could be associated with migration and carrying a certain haunted cultural heritage to new places. Crossing the Mexico–US border on the Rio Grande, a dangerous body of flowing water, can help boost this idea of cultural ghostly motility and how it is inherited and interpreted by the Hispanic community. Migrants and ghosts must bear the dangers of the river to make it to the other country.

In my analysis of La Llorona, I have noticed that she has crossed over to American mainstream media too. The pilot from the TV series *Supernatural* revolves around La Llorona. In the setting, a river and a bridge feature prominently as the original sites of death and trauma. A woman has killed her children, and then she decides to throw herself off the bridge. The TV series *Grimm* also features an episode about the legend of La Llorona. In this episode, the ghost appears, once again, by the river that crosses Portland, Oregon. A few Mexican horror films about La Llorona also associate La Llorona with bodies of water, such as *Kilometer 31* (2007). Set in contemporary Mexico City, the film notices that many of the rivers that existed in the Valley of Mexico have now become part of the complex urban sewer system. Therefore, La Llorona haunts the city underground, coming out through the drains to haunt and terrify to death.

La Llorona is a gothic figure in the sense that it forces us to reconsider our heritage and identity by means of a haunted *mestizaje* or hybridity. Her legend depicts a history of violence and rejection. The Spaniard man rejects the children because they were born out of wedlock and are not fully Spanish. La Llorona attests to a conflicting view of what *mestizaje* is. We tend to celebrate it as the encounter of two cultures, but again it also speaks about the anxiety about the circumstances that led to that *mestizaje*. If these circumstances are violence and death, which are intrinsically related to the conquest of Mexico, then Mexican identity is perennially haunted by this: the affirmation of a thriving hybrid culture that needs to acknowledge the pain of its formation (Ajuria Ibarra, “Ghosting the Nation” 148). How can this be passed on and reflected again in Hispanic American identity in the United States? We can speak of a celebration of heritage, of being Mexican American or Guatemalan American; still, at the same

time, there is an implicit fear about miscegenation that the Gothic and La Llorona constantly remind us of. It is an origin that is conflicting, and that we never really let go of.

Open Q&A session

Sofía Martincorena: I just wanted to go back to the idea of nationalism and the Gothic in relation to the borderlands. I was thinking about how the Gothic is used often in dominant US culture as a way of dealing with the colonial guilt that results from a very destructive past of land appropriation. Obviously one of the most evident examples of this is the idea of the Indian as a revenant that is haunting White people to take revenge, and the obsession with Native burial grounds which is a very gothic trope, which you see in lots of films. I was wondering if there are like analogous examples in the southwestern border of the US, where there's obviously also a violent history of fight for the land. Are there gothic narratives or gothic tropes in borderland US fiction that arise from this idea of colonial guilt?

EAI: The first example I can think of is McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, which I have mentioned before. Part of the novel's premise is that the gang the kid joins thinks in terms of the discourse of Manifest Destiny that existed during the exploration and appropriation of the Western United States. In film, the idea of tensions across the Southwestern border with Mexico can also be seen in John Carpenter's *Vampires* (1998). The setting in these narratives is an idealized desert-like landscape, which is closely associated with the border along Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Mexican film *Belzebuth* (2017) also deals with illegal border crossings in a city that resembles Tijuana, which is on the border with California. The plot focuses on the second coming of the messiah and a cult of satanists who are trying to kill the child. Mass killings occur all over the city, an allegory to the pervasive violence associated with drug cartels in Mexico. The protagonist, a police detective who lost his newborn child during one mass killing at the hospital, ends up helping an excommunicated American priest get the child safely across the border. They use one of the underground drug trafficking tunnels that they have built to get him across to the United States. Halfway through the tunnel, the characters find a room filled with both Catholic and pagan artifacts, where the final confrontation with the Devil takes place. The film discloses a relationship between the demonic and the monstrous with illegal actions that gravely affect cross border relationships, as well as communities on the Mexican side. Ideas of illegality and moral corruption are always happening south of the border, while safety and protection is what characterizes the country north of the border. It's not Southwestern per se, but the film explicitly addresses border tensions related with politics, society and economy. The dynamics of this liminal geographical area are exposed in a story framed by holy revelations and the act of saving a child from vicious adult harm. It may not be explicitly about the Southwest, but there is a hint about similar concerns all along the border between the United States and Mexico.

Mónica Fernández Jiménez: The Enlightenment is central in the origins of the 18th century Gothic, but also in postcolonial narratives. You mentioned Latin America and the Caribbeans, characterized by a different way of dealing with the landscape, of understanding the environment, and this has also been applied to politics by Carpentier himself and José Martí who—discussing theories of development—stressed that these populations want to abide by their own epistemology and not by imposed models, because they are not for “here.” So, in terms of turning all this conversation to the Gothic, you’ve been mentioning some authors that—like all McCarthy—that clearly come from a more Western Anglo tradition, and some other authors that would identify more with Indigenous forms of knowledge, Chicana tradition etc. I was wondering if there is some critique toward more Europeanized or Western forms of gothic. Guillermo del Toro’s films, you said, draw on the Brontës and similar authors. The Gothic in the 18th century was a rejection against the Enlightenment but it’s still a product of it. Is there any critique to the European Gothic and its relation to the Enlightenment, in the same way that post-colonial and Indigenous narratives critique European epistemology?

EAI: You are right in pointing out that the Gothic can be understood as a reaction to the Enlightenment. Concepts associated with the Enlightenment, such as reason, law, light, face a dark side, or what Fred Botting defines as a “negative aesthetics” that “informs” the Gothic (1). Perhaps, more recently, we can think these terms laid out with the Mexican project of the modern nation that developed throughout the 20th century. After the Mexican revolution, the country went through a period of rapid modernization and industrial development, particularly between the 1940s and the 1960s. This was paired with an idealization of *mestizaje* as the core of Mexican identity. In *Mestizo Modernity*, David S. Dalton claims that the pairing of the project of the modern Mexican nation is associated knowledge of/and technology. For him “the transformation of Amerindian individuals into mestizos ... used technology to modernize the indigenous body” (2). Therefore, the encounter of different cultures aims to modernize the nation, incurring the marginalization and erasure of indigenous identities. This is where the Gothic comes in again. Dalton’s pairing of modernity, technology, and *mestizaje* reminds me of the role of photography in *Rito terminal* (2000), directed by Óscar Urrutia Lazo. I have previously analyzed this Mexican film with a focus on “visually mediated spectralities” (Ajuría Ibarra, “Media, Shadows...” 198), but a focus on technology and identity also discloses tensions about the subject, the body, and the nation that Dalton suggests. The plot focuses on a photographer based in Mexico City who is sent to film the festivities of an indigenous community in the state of Oaxaca. During his stay, the protagonist experiences a series of ghostly encounters and his shadow is eventually stolen. He decides to go back to search for his shadow, and discovers that the community is haunted by the ghost of a young woman who decided to embrace *mestizaje* and the modern world and was murdered for her choice. The film revolves around what photography unravels, but also about the failure of *mestizaje* itself. The film depicts an isolated Indigenous community that is wary of people coming to see them as something exotic and outdated, as something from the past that needs to be recorded and

saved with film and photography. The technology of photography reveals the spirit of the murdered young woman. The town's elders—her mother being one of them— decide what must be kept in the collective memory of the community, and they decide to forget her. Her own mother decides to raise her little girl in their own traditions in an attempt to erase her *mestizaje*. The film acknowledges other voices and discourses that shape Mexican identity, our own origin, and our own past. The intrusion of technology by means of photography and film discloses the tense encounters between tradition and modernity. Even though the community may try to keep their own traditions alive and to shy away from modernity, modern technology sparks the return of the ghost of the murder victim they have decided to forget. This film makes use of certain gothic tropes to reveal the other side of Mexican identity: the project of modernity based on reason, on technology, on moving forward, has points that crack, points that haunt, points that make us question the discourse of the modern Mexican nation.

Laura Álvarez Trigo: I was wondering about Caribbean Gothic in terms of its recent evolution. How we see the origins and how is it being developed these days? If you see there's been certain changes and how I was thinking about contemporary authors, such as Mónica Ojeda which has been sold or publicized as Andean Gothic—an *andino* Gothic—and how that also works in relation to the US market, because you were mentioning before also magical realism and this is something that's what the market expects from Latin American authors. Is there something to that in how this Caribbean Gothic is being maybe developed, or sold, or published these days?

EAI: First, European writers have written about the Caribbean and have portrayed it as a strange land. Then, there are writers from the Caribbean who resort to haunting and the supernatural to express that the past is still an issue in terms of defining identities and nationalities in the Caribbean. For example, Puerto Rico has a rich Hispanic culture inherited from colonialism, but now they are a dependency of the United States. They are not quite a state, so they are still being bound by a remnant of colonialism. In what ways Puerto Rican writers recur to the Gothic to address the political and social—and even economic—inequities that have affected their own island in terms of how they can identify themselves? We can also think about the Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican communities that have migrated to the United States. Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* deals second-generation Caribbean teenagers assimilate American pop culture. At the same time, it explores feelings of estrangement when they take young men back to the Caribbean countries their parents grew up in. This is what happens with Oscar. He feels inadequate, he feels out of place and out of bounds because of his body. He does not conform to the idea of what a Latin lover should look like. When he goes to the Dominican Republic on vacation, he cannot fulfil the idea of masculinity that is culturally dominant in this nation. Through the Gothic, the novel deals with the crisis of identity that the protagonist experiences. The narrative features a Dominican curse, and Oscar believes that his family has been cursed and so he is too. Transgenerational

mistakes and wrongdoings befall on Oscar, and he is unable to fit anywhere because he has no stable ground. He does not feel like he belongs in the United States, but, whenever he goes back to the Dominican Republic, he does not belong there either. The insistent haunting curse affects his own perception of himself and his own reality. The idea of belonging and of the past that keeps creeping in when defining who the nation states in the Caribbean are could be one of the elements that I personally see is a current topic for Caribbean Gothic.

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