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Gothic Childbearing, Monstrous Reproduction, and a Science Fiction Turn: Rosario Ferré's "La muñeca menor" and Pedro Cabiya's "Relato del piloto"

Maternidad gótica, reproducción monstruosa y un giro a la ciencia ficción: "La muñeca menor" de Rosario Ferré y "Relato del piloto" de Pedro Cabiya

Resumen

Entre "La muñeca menor", cuento de Rosario Ferré originalmente publicado en 1972, y "Relato del piloto que dijo adiós con la mano", novella de Pedro Cabiya aparecida en el 2003, media una masiva transformación que, para Rebekah Sheldon, refleja el paso de un "estado regulador" al orden neoliberal globalizado dentro del que se insertan parecidas representaciones contrastantes de la reproducción tanto material como biológica. Partiendo del análisis de su representación de la reproducción "monstruosa," examino en este trabajo la modalización gótica y de ciencia ficción de estos textos como articulación literaria de condiciones locales, así como de elementos de un proceso político, cultural y económico con implicaciones cada vez más críticas y urgentes para Puerto Rico y el mundo.

Palabras claves

Rosario Ferré; "La muñeca menor"; Gótico caribeño; Pedro Cabiya; "Relato del Piloto"; Ciencia ficción.

Abstract

The thirty years between the 1972 publication of Rosario Ferré's short story "La muñeca menor" and Pedro Cabiya's 2003 novella "Relato del piloto que dijo adiós con la mano" span the cultural, political, and economic "shift" from a "regulatory state" to a neoliberal global

order that, per Rebekah Sheldon's analysis, has articulated and contextualized similar contrasting takes on biological and material reproduction. Focusing on their transformed imaginary of "monstrous" reproduction, I explore in this paper how the texts' Gothic and SF modalizations refract local conditions as well as critical elements of that shift, full of increasingly urgent and extreme consequences in Puerto Rico, and even farther afield.

Keywords

Rosario Ferré; "La muñeca menor"; Caribbean Gothic; Pedro Cabiya; "Relato del Piloto"; Science Fiction; Feminism; Puerto Rico.

"[E]l *cuento* es un modo de poner en jaque la violencia de la *cuenta*, el trabajo del remanente invisible, del fantasma....

Rubén Ríos, *La raza cómica*

In discussing two "exemplary representations of reproductive futurism"—Margaret Atwood's celebrated dystopian novels *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003)—Rebekah Sheldon underscores the "extra-diegetic cultural shift" from a "regulatory state" to a "neoliberal global order" that frames their contrasting takes on biological and material reproduction ("Somatic Capitalism").¹ Despite significant differences in context of production and ultimate thematic focus, I want to examine how local conditions as well as critical elements of a similar cultural and historical shift are enacted in two Puerto Rican tales told in related genre modes and also centrally concerned with broadly understood (re)productive questions. The first of these texts is Rosario Ferré's 1972 short story,

¹ "Reproductive futurism," as Sheldon indicates, "[a]s developed by Lee Edelman... names the logic by which the social *good* appears co-terminus with human *futurity*, a futurity emblemized by the figure of the child and vouchsafed through reproduction. In this sense, [it] is one of several disciplinary technologies that links sexuality and domesticity... to the national domestic as the basis for economic vitality" ("Somatic Capitalism"). Within the context of Puerto Rico's mid-twentieth century modernization project, the population management strategies associated with it, and its overall colonial framework, these values become contradictory and, in some ways inverted. Thus, as I will argue in these pages, Ferré's paradoxical representation and repurposing of childbearing and motherhood, especially given her feminist concerns, constitutes a strangely apt figuration, as is Cabiya's peculiar take, many decades later and with very different aims.

"La muñeca menor," a Gothic space of inscription for "maternal" and material issues of great import in Puerto Rican history, society, and literary culture. In the second half of this essay, I will look at the vastly different treatment Pedro Cabiya accords to closely related historical and (re)productive matters in his science fiction *novelita*, "Relato del piloto que dijo adiós con la mano" from 2003, and at what I believe are some important connections between them.²

Merging elements from different theoretical approaches, my more specific aim is to explore how what J. Jack Halberstam has called the "allegorization" of monstrous (re)production, set at the center of these two linked yet generically distinct "textual machines" (33), has expressed not only critical aspects of that historical arc, but new directions of social and literary change in Puerto Rico, and even farther afield.³ Ferré's tale—later located at the head of her influential 1976 collection, *Papeles de Pandora*—has been productively and justifiably read by diverse critics as an indictment of patriarchal domination and stifling gender roles. Its timely yet limited vision of a dynamics of historical transformation was tied to a number of cultural and political renegotiations, especially to a feminist movement then resurgent both locally and abroad. With this background in mind, revisited in more detail below, I want first to consider how Ferré's "textual machine" reframed the foundational images of conception, childbearing, and motherhood within her story by setting them within the domain of Gothic poetics, a modality then unusual within the national literary archives.⁴

² I want to thank the anonymous reviewers of both this and an earlier version of this paper for their careful reading and many invaluable insights and suggestions—especially regarding the work of J. J. Halberstam—, which have improved key aspects of its structure and argument.

³ My discussion of "monstrous" reproduction will comprise not just "unnatural," boundary-violating biological or cybernetic offspring, but also various technologies mobilized to manage population "as a political problem," per Michal Foucault's definition of biopolitics (245). See Chávez (1984) for an early analysis of Ferré's use of allegory as composition method.

⁴ My reading of Ferré's Gothicism in "La muñeca menor" has much profited from Nieblyski's analysis of the story (2006), and from Paravisini-Gebert's chapter on the Postcolonial Caribbean Gothic (2009). More broadly, Edwards' and Guardini's edited volume on the "tropicalization" and transculturation of the Gothic—particularly their points regarding how violence, "submerged" indigenous cultures, and the institution of the plantation (2-3) have left a haunted and haunting history-imprint within Caribbean Gothic—have also informed my approach. María del Pilar

The Gothic, as I will argue following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Manuel Aguirre's respective analyses of the form, afforded Ferré a flexible generic toolkit from which to build a "monstrous" vision of confinement and violent breakthrough riddled with fractal images, traits deeply relevant to her thematic concerns and to the representation of a certain "mechanics" of liberation. Assisted by its striking modalization and bracketed by the peculiar tenets of the country's "symbolic economy of nationhood" (Briggs 6), her tale resignified those foundational tropes, translating them into a horror-*cum*-revenge tale organized around a complex host-parasite relation. Their affective connotations and emphasis on "reproductive futurity" thus displaced from notions of heteronormative romance and childbearing, the story turned, instead, to the uncanny figuration of female/marginalized agents set at the center of a symbolic reorientation of creative and political energies. This "reorientation," part of a revisionary process taking place at other points of the cultural and political fields of the period, would be more fully fleshed in the tale's companion pieces in *Papeles de Pandora*, and further developed and problematized in the work of other writers and critics from Ferré's own generation and beyond. Significantly, given its particular tropology, the story can also be allegorically read as a rare inscription of complex reproductive and population management issues central to the populist project entering a period of crisis at the time of its appearance.⁵ Read as a sort of palimpsest, the blurred chronicle of occluded, ambivalent childbearing at the core of the story's figure of reproductive "monstrosity" forms a ghostly counterpart to that other tale of revolution. My discussion in the first and second sections of this essay aims to track various levels of meaning inscribed in that complex allegorical figure of reproductive

Blanco's view of haunting and literary ghosts as "manifestations of an increasing awareness of simultaneous landscapes and simultaneous others living... unseen" within the complex "networks of hemispheric modernization" (7) has also been an important point of reference. See below for some comments on the relations between the Gothic and the Fantastic with respect to Ferré's fabulation and its broader literary context.

⁵ A number of the story's concerns with reproduction and the medicalization of (female) bodies, though not set within the framework of Gothic maternity and reproduction, have been explored by Bilbija (1994), Lagos (2003), Urrea (1996), and Zee (1994), as shown in my discussion.

"monstrosity" and of the host-parasite relation in connection to the thematic and historical strands that intersect in the story.

What, following Aguirre's proposal, I have called the "fractal" surface of Ferré's tale, a field of "self-similar (not self-identical)" structures (Sánchez 231) that "replicate themselves (approximately) at lower levels of magnification" (Aguirre 11) seems, in retrospect, an apt device to capture various interlocked gender and political conflicts become increasingly salient in literary and political discourse at the time.⁶ Combined with a dynamics of constraint and explosion Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies with the modality's "most characteristic energies" (12), Ferré's parable of "monstrous reproduction" as a form of feminist revolt made for some powerful and paradoxical effects. It is precisely those devices, including its imaginary of descendance and heredity, that were most significantly transformed in Cabiya's later story, a relation I want to examine here, along with its potential legacies. Indeed, at a time of new national crises and under the pressures of emerging "ordenamientos globales" (Rodríguez 1245), Cabiya's reworking of related themes and motifs, framed by his appeal to SF tropes and what Darko Suvin describes as its use of "cognitive estrangement" and "environmental neutrality," suggests interesting recurrences as well as a new focus on different conditions.

Cabiya's postmodern take on (female) bodies and *ersatz* (re)production linked a parodic view of the "natural" with a corrosive reflection on history and the literary tradition that questioned foundational narratives and what Luis Felipe Díaz calls the "aspirational" politics of *setentistas* such as Ferré. It also pointed to some of the disturbing directions involved in the "extra-diegetic cultural shift" identified by Sheldon, and to peculiar trends within his own writing. Within "Relato del piloto," the dynamics of confinement and apocalyptic/radical breakthrough posited

⁶ For an analysis of some of these dynamics, focused on the growing sense of widespread systemic crisis, see Díaz Quiñones, who notes that "[e]l discurso de la crisis se registra[ba] ya con toda claridad en el año 1970. Numerosos textos literarios e históricos [iban] elaborando las imágenes de la crisis y la impugnación del discurso dominante durante la hegemonía del proyecto 'modernizador'" (18).

by Ferré appear ludicrous or deceptive, while “reproductive monstrosity” is turned, to use Persephone Braham’s term, into a jocular “metanarrative” device (178), still with some significant implications. “Relato del piloto” is a curious kind of “textual machine” where the literary tradition—including not just texts like *Frankenstein* but, I would suggest, Ferré’s own tale—has been satirically broken apart and rewired, the heroic or terrifying valences of “unnatural” reproduction displaced from allegorization of biological, political and artistic potential into a sly commentary on heredity and history stripped of pathos and nostalgia. The Gothic “unspeakable,” which predominantly frames questions of illegitimate genealogies, buried secrets, and “monstrous” reproduction as matters of tragedy or outrage, has been replaced in this SF offspring by automated reproduction through B-movie extraterrestrials, its “vertiginous excess of meaning” (Halberstam 2) the result not of repression, but of sheer informational exuberance. Furthermore, the “organic” materials of Ferré’s 1970s Gothic allegory still evoke what, in a different context, Sheldon called the “regulatory state,” its forms of biopolitical intervention and the resistances against it. Its vision of reproduction and transmission, however “monstrous,” still operates within slow lines of generational descent, biological agents and processes. Thirty years later, these have been replaced in Cabiya’s tale by an imaginary of “alien” cybernetics and fast technohybridity that challenged notions of autochthony and the organic, pointing to a very different affective, literary, and political landscape.

Ferré’s “Textual Machine”: Monstrous Reproduction Swarms the National Canon

The concepts of “allegorization” of monstrous (re)production and of the Gothic “textual machine” invoked earlier are posited in J. J. Halberstam’s study *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, and find prime articulation in one of these stories’ distant but critical precursors, Mary Shelley’s

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (1818). Halberstam, who initially focuses on the nineteenth-century English literary tradition, views Shelley's forging of a durable connection between *popularity* and *population* through the mediating figure of "monstrous" reproduction as an especially fruitful contribution to Gothic poetics (32), and *Frankenstein* itself as the paradigmatic allegory of Gothic production (11). For this critic, the materials of Gothic allegory encompass the genre's powers of attention capture and market penetration, its equivocal positioning along high/low cultural hierarchies and, especially, its thematization of uncontrolled, "deviant" or "impure" reproduction. Such traits are both exploited and performed by narratives that create their own public, collaborating through avid consumption in the creation of monstrosity (12-15). The Victorian monster, "an economic form" that "condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body" (3) operated within the "textual machines" of the era as a kind of "technology" that transformed class, gender and racial tensions into psychosexual battles (33). *Frankenstein's* paradigmatic case embodied the "vertiginous excess of meaning" of those tensions through both the monster *and* the novel; such was the dual "hideous progeny" unleashed by Shelley, as she bid it to "go forth and prosper" (31) in the introduction to her foundational text, thereafter "invoked in narratives of artificial life, hybrid amalgamation and technological ambition" (Wasson and Alder 5).

Shelley's "versión política del mito de la maternidad" (Ferré, *Sitio* 57) constitutes, as I suggested, a mediated but central point of reference in Ferré's and Cabiya's tales, the latter itself an offspring of the novel's "hideous progeny," according to an influential tradition of interpretation that traces the origins of science fiction to that English classic (Wasson and Alder 2-3).⁷ Significantly, as Halberstam indicates, the contemporary operations of the Gothic "textual machine" have been transformed, as horror has been increasingly employed, though not

⁷ See Rieder pp. 16-19 for a nuanced, critical discussion about this argument.

unfailingly, to “[disrupt] dominant culture’s representations of family, heterosexuality, ethnicity, and class politics” (23). The idea of the monster as a “condensed threat” and of “deviant” reproduction as a device disruptive to dominant representation are key, in very different ways, within Ferré’s and Cabiya’s contemporary “textual machines.” In Ferré’s case, the monstrous aunt-cum-niece composite and their horrific offspring evoked both sexual and economic threats under cover of a symbolic revenge against patriarchy tied to reminders of women’s participation in domestic industries. Importantly, this menace was compounded by the story’s breach into a generic field historically viewed in the country as dominated by men. Combined with its powers of “contagion” and “attention capture,” the story also subtly allegorized its dangerous potential to compete in the literary market, and to create other category-disruptive “monsters.”⁸ Cabiya’s tale will again reframe those notions, however, subtly satirizing the epic-revolutionary yearnings of what Néstor Rodríguez calls the “*establishment* cultural que les sirve de marco” (1245), while accentuating the attention capture and market penetration values afforded by its Gothic-SF modalization.⁹

⁸ For an illuminating discussion of the complex question of assignation of genre “value” within the literary market, particularly in the national context, see Sotomayor, *De lengua, razón y cuerpo*, pp. 11-21, and my comments below.

⁹ The first part of Halberstam’s analysis of the Gothic “textual machine” focuses on the operations of the novel and addresses a broad generic corpus, that of the so-called classic age of European Gothic fiction, between the 18th and 19th centuries. Michael Gamer summarizes, however, an alternate mode of approach: “We no longer ... describe gothic exclusively as a genre; recent studies have represented it variously as an aesthetic ..., as a great repressed romanticism ..., as a poetics ..., as a narrative technique ..., or as an expression of changing or ‘extreme’ psychological or socio-political consciousness” (28). Throughout this essay, my reading of Ferré’s appeal to the Gothic—and of Cabiya’s to SF—will be informed by Claudio Guillén’s description of a “modalidad” —what I am referring here to as “modalization”—whose relationship to genre is “adjetiv[a], parcial y no a propósito para abarcar la estructura total de una obra. Son aspectos de esta, cualidades, vertientes principales, vetas que la recorren transversalmente” (Guillén 165). Though both authors’ respective appeals to the Gothic and to SF are clearly identifiable, their texts’ relationship to their respective generic corpuses perhaps can be best described as modalizations nourished by the “alluvial... sedimentary” accumulation Wai-Chee Dimock invokes in speaking of genre as a “field of knowledge” (1380). Likewise, the contemporary “textual machines” that concern me here develop within the framework of the short story and the novella. In the case of Ferré’s “La muñeca menor,” whose Gothic “mechanics” are expressed within the modern short story tradition initiated by Poe, and practiced by authors deeply familiar to her like Quiroga and Cortázar, her compressed “textual machine” weaponizes the “unity of effect” of its final monstrous “delivery” precisely to “[disrupt] dominant culture’s representations.” Cabiya’s *novelita*, in turn, cannibalizes Gothic elements such as the frame

By invoking Halberstam's concept of the "textual machine," I want to highlight not just the stories' refractions of historical context, but what I believe are their interrelations and comparative contributions to new frameworks of understanding at significant periods of national crisis and transformation. Ferré's Gothic "allegorization" in "La muñeca menor" deploys the materials listed by Halberstam, though its procedures also recall Doris Sommer's interpretation of allegory as "a narrative structure in which one line is a trace of the other, in which each helps to write the other" (42-43). My approach to Ferré's modalization combines these elements with Kosofsky Sedgwick's useful linkage of the Gothic's "most characteristic energies" to tropes of violent breakthrough out of confinement and "live burial" (12), expressive, as Halberstam notes, of how "the unspeakable is buried alive within the speakable... [and] one history produces and buries others" (35). Aguirre's consideration of Gothic narratives as fractal surfaces that mimic "turbulence" through endless fragmentation of space and multiplication of thresholds (13) provides, furthermore, a suggestive formal framework for the notion of the "textual machine," helping identify its mechanisms of literary articulation.

These concepts both enrich and complicate the narrative lines of Ferré's Gothic modalization in "La muñeca menor." They include the contrasts between the decaying, superannuated lifeworld of the *hacienda* and the claustrophobic enclosures portrayed at the beginning, and the wild productivity and ferocious new actors manifested through the main character's creative drive and in the threatening, final "delivery" at the tale's end. The overall arc of the story set the stage for extreme outcomes by combining nestled social and physical enclosures—a decaying "aristocracy" slowly strangled by the new colonial economy, a sexually

narrative and the lost manuscript, connecting them to a SF narrative that, through "cognitive estrangement," thematic development, and parody, simultaneously incorporates and defuses the Gothic charge to equally "disruptive" ends. My discussion over the next two sections of this essay further explores these questions.

marginalized woman whose leg acts as womb for an alien creature, a niece “encerrada en su cubo de calor”—, accumulating historical pressures and compulsive productivity, a clash set off by an encounter with what Pennington and Martínez interpret as a “symbol of Originary Presence in Puerto Rico” (44). These conflicts, combined with the story’s growing and progressively uncannier cast of characters—two women, two doctors, nine nieces and 126 dolls expanding into an undetermined number of bristling *chágaras*—suggest possible alternative readings for its apocalyptic ending.

“La muñeca menor” told of a young woman bitten on the calf by a freshwater prawn or “*chágara viciosa*” while bathing in the river close to her family’s declining sugarcane estate in the early decades of twentieth century. Unresponsive to the family doctor’s deliberately ineffective ministrations, the woman is fated to drag around a monstrously swollen leg become womb to the parasitic *chágara*, redirecting her (re)productive energies instead to raising nine nieces and to obsessively crafting artisanal dolls in their images. The old physician’s son, also a doctor trained “up north,” learns that her curable condition has paid for his education, proceeding then to marry the youngest niece. Gifted by her aunt with the final, most elaborate doll, “la menor” is displayed by her predatory husband as a sign of aristocratic privilege on the balcony of a new house in town, where he tends to the local rich. Intrigued by his wife’s unchanging appearance and hoping to sell the doll’s expensive parts, the doctor leans in to listen to “the gurgling of water” coming from his wife’s immobile chest only to see, at the conclusion of the story, the “furiously waving antennae” of the *chágaras* emerging out of the doll-niece’s empty eye sockets.

As Yvette López has indicated, this tale’s grim climax suggests, among other issues, the fate of “una clase moribunda... el final de la estirpe” (57) in the early decades of the century, even a stealthy fantasy of class revenge on the U.S.-owned *centrales* and its agents by the old “aristocracia cañera.”¹⁰ Read as in a

¹⁰ See López’s observations on the motif the *chágaras* and resurrection on pp. 53 and 59, part of her excellent reading of this as a tale of class apocalypse. On this topic, see also Lagos 177.

double photographic exposure, however, "La muñeca menor" constituted also a sort of phantasmatic chronicle of issues clashing at other points of systemic crisis in the vast national experiment described by Emilio García Pantojas as "[el] proyecto de modernidad desarrollista instaurado por el Estado Libre Asociado como arreglo político y por Operación Manos a la Obra (o industrialización por invitación) como estrategia económica" (*Crónicas* 17). Considered within the broader context of *Papeles de Pandora* and, especially, of the field of cultural production at the time, the furious *chágaras* pointed at emerging vectors of change bursting forth at the edge of the 1970's, progressively "mak[ing] understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise" (Rancière 30). Undoubtedly, key aspects of the tale's "patrician" outlook (Ríos 35), with its restricted racial and class imaginary, limit the reach of this, by now, altogether canonical text.¹¹ As I argue here, those contradictions aptly reflect, however, some of the mutually implicated histories within the national "symbolic economy" registered in this tale. Furthermore, I believe that some of the story's strange energies, inscribed within its complex fractal surface and its imaginary of hybrid production and "environmental distress," remain relevant still today, resignified within newer contexts and texts I will briefly address in my conclusions. It may be useful, for these reasons, to revisit Ferré's old story, reading against the grain of its conservative pulsions to find, through something like a process of "infective heredity," weird traces within a Gothic-SF "hideous progeny" where excess and turbulence have also found expression.

"La muñeca menor" was originally published in the influential journal *Zona. Carga y descarga* co-directed by Ferré, and hailed a singularity of sorts, christened by Carmen Dolores Trelles as the 1970's "Boom" of Puerto Rican women writers. Over the next two decades and beyond, a talented group of poets,

¹¹ These issues are somewhat compounded by the debates around Ferré's later literary production and shifting political positions. For an insightful discussion of these questions, see Negrón-Muntaner (2012).

narrators, and critics—including, besides Ferré, Olga Nolla, Magali García Ramis, Ana Lydia Vega, Carmen Lugo Filippi, Aurea María Sotomayor, Liliana Ramos Collado, Etnairis Rivera, Vanessa Droz, Luz Ivonne Ochart, and Nemir Matos, among others—embarked on a series of creative and critical projects that, to paraphrase Sotomayor, redrew the boundaries of the nation’s cultural territories and reclaimed its old languages (*Hilo* 65-66). As the author recalls in her introductory essay to the anthology *De lengua, razón y cuerpo*, the diverse field of voices and creative output of these *setentistas* stood at the vanguard of the “storming of the gates” of the nation’s old “casa literaria.” A complex dynamic has marked, as Sotomayor explains, the reception accorded to the work in poetry and prose of this female “Boom,” the latter sometimes eclipsing the former. “La muñeca menor,” along with other stories in *Papeles de Pandora*, has particularly tended to garner outsized attention as an early and influential intervention in a genre field viewed—or constructed—as dominated by male authors until this period in Puerto Rico.¹² Though various omissions and assumptions entailed in this summary of literary history have been corrected by scholars like Sotomayor and Juan Gelpí, the critical consensus suggests that before “Rosario Ferré y otras mujeres de su generación, el cuento —género que siempre ha ocupado un lugar importante en Puerto Rico— [había] carecido de voces femeninas; y hasta recientemente, la prosa de fines artísticos seguía siendo dominio exclusivo de los hombres” (Davis 84). Many radical changes have taken place since, however, in a field that until the arrival of this “Boom,” predominantly found women “ausentes del discurso narrativo y la pequeña nómina de escritoras en nuestra historia literaria se [encontraba] en los géneros de la poesía y el ensayo” (López 49).¹³

¹² In addition to the studies on Ferré’s story in the Works Cited section, see Hintz for an extended critical bibliography, and Lagos p. 187 on the story’s popularity in anthologies and course syllabi. On the patriarchal-paternalistic bent of the national imaginary, see Quiñones (1984) and Gelpí (1993), and Oquendo-Villar for a more recent approach to the issue.

¹³ See Chávez p. 64, Davis p. 84, and López p. 49, for testimonies regarding the “traditional” role assigned to women within lyric poetry. In addition to Sotomayor’s analysis and revision of the issue in *De lengua, razón y cuerpo*, see Gelpí pp. 22-23.

My reading aims to take some of these dynamics into account through the notion of the "textual machine," that is, of the story as a matrix that both was constituted by and allegorized this surge, partly by means of its Gothic modalization and even, through the form itself of the short story. Rather than arguing for precedence, it may be interesting to consider what these traits may have contributed to Ferré's text and to its relative position within its broader context. As regards the short story form, Martha Elena Munguía has argued, following Walter Benjamin's theorization, for the centrality of its oral roots, its origins in experience, anecdote, and direct communication, and for the "generic memory" preserved even in its literary incarnations. As a result of that heritage, the author proposes, the short story represents a "liminal moment," a critical point of intersection between cognition and ethics (107), and "puede verse como el único género capaz de fundar el sentido ... en un momento significativo, en un acto ... porque era precisamente ese momento en el que anidaba la duda, la confrontación" (88). Understood in this way, Ferré's tale resembles a resonance chamber, an early setting up of a symbolic stage for those "moments of confrontation." That field of female production, viewed as an integral part of the matter that symbolically fed and was performed by the story, turns into one of the literary and political questions concerning power and the feminine it would directly and indirectly pose by itself and within its liminal space in *Papeles de Pandora*. Feeding into this loop, this context becomes one of the key elements that runs through the story's fractal surface, seeping through the bite of the of the quickening *chágara*—a creature born in the ambient turmoil of the river—, permeating the figure of the hybrid craftsman-like creator and her double, finally erupting in a Gothic delivery that emphasized the unruly, heterogeneous character of the output, its connections, and procedures.¹⁴

¹⁴ Looking forward to the second section of this paper, I would like to add a note regarding the title of Ferré's 1976 collection. Zeitlin Froma has argued, in analyzing Hesiod's influential codification of the classical Pandora's "origin story," that this tale can be read as an elaborate figuration of conception, based on ancient Greek physiological notions. Pandora's box is, strictly speaking, a jar (*pithos*), which the womb was thought to resemble at the time, and "open[ing] the *pithos*" could be considered as "equivalent to breaching her virginity, while to close the jar upon the Elpis that

The mechanics of constraint and explosion peculiar to Ferré's story mapped, among other things, a symbolic assault against the *andron* of the national "casa literaria" by breaching its genre parcellations and through its allegorization of monstrous reproduction as a creative act. Such revolt was, of course, set within more general conditions of oppression, struggles inscribed throughout the political landscape of the time and addressed by Ferré herself in her writings, as discussed below. Ferré was part of what Benigno Trigo has described, more generally, as a "young generation of writers [who] violently broke with an earlier generation by challenging its moral and aesthetic values" (481). These authors—not just the female "Boom," but others from sexual, racial, and geographical points outside the national literary pantheon—satirized the subdivisions, cars, and consumerist habits dear to the imaginary of the "showcase of democracy" in irreverent, often orally-patterned parodies trained on the "the carcenary nature of social relations at the time, when Puerto Rican society and culture can be said to have been held in a veritable state of siege by the effects of the Cold War in the Caribbean" (483).

The form of a Gothic tale that the language of revolt took in "La muñeca menor" highlights crucial elements of the impulse to break out of that "carcenary" state, camouflaged under the cement and aluminum casings of Cold War prosperity. With its Gothic projection of rage and horror over the building blocks of the patriarchal-paternalistic "gran familia puertorriqueña," the story foregrounded the particular confinements I have mentioned, especially of the female/"deviant" body, setting it at its center and adding its dark affective charges to the new stance of irreverence. The story's oral energies, its purported origin in an anecdote told by an aunt (Ferré, *Sitio* 20), richly combined, as well, with its "alien" modalization. Within what Jean Franco has called Ferré's "vernacular voice" ("Foreword" ix-xiv), oral folk materials mixed with the modern literary tradition, recalling what I

remains within marks the beginning of pregnancy" (66). By choosing Pandora as the collection's tutelary figure and in setting "La muñeca menor" at its head, reproductive and body political questions, particularly in the Puerto Rican context, symbolically assume a centrality that, as suggested elsewhere in these pages, Ferré explored more explicitly in her non-fiction writings.

would call a form of Latin American Gothic modalization where the visual emphasis of older "classic" forms combines with a strong aural presence, pointing to various uncanny roles the popular and the political has played within it, as works like Cortázar's "Casa tomada," Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, and even García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* suggest.

The Gothic chronotope of the story's invaded and decaying house, its spaces overtaken by "uncanny" presences, also represented a great allegorical fit for the more heterogeneous and translocal vision of the Puerto Rican "imaginary community" that turned the idea of the "gran familia puertorriqueña" into something far stranger, richer, and more inclusive in the 70s. The text's focus on the organic-biological and the anachronistic tenor its figuration, reveling in descriptions of a leg encrusted in a "substancia pétre y limosa," of a "vejiga abotagada que manaba una esperma perfumada" and of "cerebros algodanosos" set within a world of wood and porcelain later turned to cement, responded to its historical setting and thematic demands. It highlighted also, however, the story's perspectives about the body, sexuality and reproduction as historical questions, and about the unexpected effects that accumulated pressures can have on system transformations. The violence visited upon the story's lifeworld reflected one facet of what Raymond Williams called the "structure of feeling" of that transitional time, the tale identified, from early on, as registering "el inicio de un 'estancamiento del crecimiento económico, crisis del 'modelo puertorriqueño'" (Ramos Rosado 211). Curiously, its logic carried to the extreme, it seemed to also pre-figure its own fate, its eventual turning into a brand, an "institution" to be broken with and through by future generations.

Thematic and historical strands intersect in Ferré's text in ways that recall Kosofsky Sedgwick's description of those histories that actively "produce and bury" others, taken as principle of composition. Written by an author well

acquainted with the Gothic's capacity to express "environmental distress,"¹⁵ Ferré's genre choice encoded the period's unsettled affects through a tale of parasitism/confinement and multiplication culminating in explosive release, an "excess of meaning" both incorporated and produced by her "textual machine." In speaking of her novel *Maldito amor*, Ferré alluded to Puerto Rico's colonial status as a "convex mirror" that reflected women's subordinate conditions under patriarchy, arguing that "el colonialismo de estado se encuentra emparentado a lo que podría llamarse el colonialismo de la mujer, que vive fragmentada y dependiente del orden patriarcal" (*Coloquio* 75). The above formulation, though somewhat mechanistic, set the terms for the broad historical framework and the binary, mutually entailed "parasitic" relationships that the story's double structure and motifs recast through the figure of "monstrous" reproduction. Broken down and multiplied, driven by an unruly productive drive, these seemingly binary conflicts were then examined "at lower levels of magnification" through the story's fractal structures, whose "degree of irregularity or fragmentation, not the irregular form itself... is replicated across the levels" (Sánchez 321). It is in this dynamic, between binary conflict and "irregularity or fragmentation," I believe, where the text's true and more relevant energies accumulate.

Relations between the various dyadic story elements—a creole "aristocracia cañera" and the foreign colonial order of the *centrales*; the old aunt and the young niece; the two doctors, father and son; the old mansion and the new house in town—came together and intersected through the story's central conceit of unnatural impregnation and childbearing, framed by its Gothic chronotope. Set in motion by the bite of the mysterious *chágara* amidst sensuous surroundings—"un día en que la lluvia había recrecido la corriente en cola de dragón había sentido en el tuétano de los huesos una mullida sensación de nieve.... En ese preciso momento sintió una mordida terrible en la pantorrilla" (9)—the "natural" sexual-romantic encounter

¹⁵ See in this regard, for example, her essay collection *Sitio a Eros* (1980), especially her essay devoted to Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

was turned into a scene of monstrous impregnation, heteronormative conception replaced by a tale of body horror:

La sacaron del agua gritando y se la llevaron a la casa en parihuelas retorciéndose de dolor.... Al cabo de un mes el médico había llegado a la conclusión de que la chágara se había introducido dentro de la carne blanda de la pantorrilla, donde había evidentemente comenzado a engordar.... [L]a llaga se había abultado aún más, recubriéndose de una substancia pétrea y limosa. (9)

Despite the placidity with which the woman apparently accepts “vivir para siempre con la chágara enroscada dentro de la gruta de su pantorrilla,” an undercurrent of violence traverses the story, as Ángela Martín has suggested: “the description of the ‘shiny green skulls’ [casts] a doubt in the reader’s mind about the aunt’s sanity and repressed violence. There are many more examples of these uncanny contrasts” (48). With this “monstrous” scenario of seduction, impregnation, and conception, key items in the “symbolic economy of nationhood,” for so long partly predicated upon the various “invers[iones] ideológica[s] que sufre el tropo de la mujer—con su cuerpo siempre latente—en el imaginario literario puertorriqueño” (Urrea 285-6), were wrenched out of their patterns. Viewed through a Gothic lens that replaced the foundational images of sexual contact and conception with an attack by uncanny nature and a host-parasite relation, the sacral, sentimental, and political valences these images usually carry were turned into a paradoxical horror tale, underpinned by a story of divergent production.¹⁶

¹⁶ A suggestive point of comparison with Ferré’s treatment of these themes is afforded by the 1979 film *The Brood*, written and directed by the Canadian master of “body horror,” David Cronenberg. Barbara Creed has devoted a chapter of her book *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* to the film, in support of her theory regarding the connection of all representations of female monstrosity to women’s “mothering and reproductive functions” (“Introduction”), and her examination of the trope of the “monstrous womb.” It would fall outside the scope of this paper to consider in detail the parallels and contrasts between these two texts, beyond pointing to the differences in aim and tone between the film—conceived by a male director—and Ferré’s tale.

The host-parasite relation becomes, within the story, the template for other mutually implicated dynamics of domination and breakthrough, in other words, the field of “fractal” structures I have mentioned. The (female) body whose “natural” functions are hijacked by a foreign entity recalled the declining—and, in its own ways, parasitic—order of the “aristocracia cañera,” devastated by the new U.S. commercial interests. A second metaphorical turn remits to the colonial-metropolitan relation—a view of both the “body” of the nation invaded by the foreign “other,” and of the colony itself framed as an “alien” formation, “foreign in a domestic sense,” within the “body” of the colonial power. The aunt, member of that dying class and excluded from the patriarchal circuits of social and sexual (re)production, appeared condemned to a dependent and “superfluous” activity, echoing the parasitic yet productive activity of the *chágara* within her calf. This pattern is both repeated and inverted in the case of the niece, even more severely restricted to a “decorative” and marginalized existence within her “cubo de calor,” and engaged in a mutually parasitic relation with her husband—he marrying her for prestige, she forced to act as “decoration”—but arguably also turned into a “vessel” for the uncanny brood through her aunt’s gift. The two doctors, allies of the new colonial power, are involved in this mutually implicated dynamic as well, their actions/inactions fostering the female figures’ confinement as they exploit the aunt’s “pregnancy.” In this way, the mutually-entailed, nested character of these conflicts was dramatized, the story’s “liberatory” dynamics reaching their expected apocalyptic conclusion. The irregular, replicating character of its representation and

The “brood” the film takes its title from alludes to the external manifestation of the female protagonist’s rage as a pack of murderous, monstrous children born directly out of her body, an embodied expression of what Creed describes as “*illegitimate*” desires transmitted matrilineally. In Creed’s words, “The idea that woman should give physical expression to her anger is represented as an inherently destructive process... But the film makes no attempt to explore the origins of the woman’s desire to harm her daughter” (Ch. 4). Ferré’s emphasis on the parasitic abuse of the doctors and, by extension, of the patriarchal and colonial system that marginalizes and exploits at least two generations of women, presents a clear contrast to the film. The *chágaras*’ avenging fury—arguably born partly also out of the turbulent environment itself—represent, if anything, the irrepresible outcome of the story’s exploration of the causes and means of the women’s suffering and rage. I am thankful to the anonymous reviewer for calling my attention to Creed’s text.

its wild hybrid effects hinted, however, at an irrecoverable excess, resistant to teleology, where the disruptive and creative character of "monstruosity" resides.

With its compulsive doublings, the text reproduced, at larger and smaller scales, those overarching mirrored relations while pointing at the surprising intersections and unexpected forms of hybridization that can take place between these agents, a question picked up and flamboyantly developed in Cabiya's tale. Perpetually host to a monstrous "pregnancy" abetted by the agents of the colonial order, the aunt sublimated, compulsively "giving birth" to yearly handcrafted dolls for each of her nine nieces: "El nacimiento de una muñeca era siempre motivo de regocijo sagrado" (10) [my emphasis]. As Ksenija Bilbija has remarked, this number, "referring to the number of nieces, could be seen as a metaphoric reflection of the nine formative months needed for the full development of the fetus in the womb" (888). The forward-moving drive of the narrative, rushing toward the aunt-niece's final delivery of both her brood and of the story's "effect," echoes the regular trajectory of gestation and labor. The colonial-patriarchal space contained the houses that contained the bodies that contained the "monstrous" offspring that, through "violence or magic, and both of a singularly threatening kind" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 12-13) break out to arguably achieve "something to which it ought normally to have access... something intensely relevant going on impossibly out of reach" (12).

Ferré and Olga Nolla, *Zona's* co-director, declared in a 1973 editorial manifesto that "La violencia implícita en el lenguaje, o explícita en el asunto, es una de las constantes definitorias que aparece en todos los escritos... publicados en *Zona*. Esta violencia de denuncia y rebeldía... es el primer paso de una revolución." (Ferré, "Zona" 2-3) This symbolic violence is figured in what I have called the story's dynamics of constrain and explosion, comprising the arc from the women's progressive immobilization to the apocalyptic ending, mediated by the promise of "rebirth" that prefaces the gift of the final doll to the nieces on their wedding day: "Aquí tienes tu Pascua de Resurrección." The oppression and "live burials"

conveyed in the text, allegorized in the host-parasite relation, are finally broken through by “violence or magic” aiming to achieve those “intensely relevant things” that should be at hand, be it political liberation, gender equality, or space within the patriarchal “casa literaria.” The story’s energies echo those described in this manifesto, the violence that would give, as expressed at the time, “testimonio de la revolución que estamos viviendo.” Rather than a simple question of symmetrical mirroring, however, at the time of the explosion, “monstrous” reproduction led to “convex” multiplication, a generative frenzy that complicated simple binary calculus. Recalling Shelley’s words, the aunt-niece transgenerational combo, as a joint author/creator figure, bodied forth a “hideous progeny” of *chágaras* and stories that propagated in unpredictable ways.

Gothic Childbearing Meets Biopolitics: Storytelling, Reproduction and the ELA

I have looked at some of the operations of “monstrous” reproduction within Ferré’s Gothic “textual machine,” and at the ways the story refracts various aspects of its historical context. Comprising, in some views, a virtual “theory of history” (Ellis 11), the Gothic’s staging of questions concerning the “reach of the imprisoning past” (Nichols and Clute, “Gothic SF”), inscribed in its imaginary of crumbling mansions, ghosts, legitimacy and heredity, provided an apt instrument to explore not just the dynamics of breaching I explored above, but those histories that “bury and produce” others and constitute the building blocks of its represented world. As I suggested earlier, given its particular tropology and thematics, I believe Ferré’s tale can also be read as an oblique, incomplete yet rare literary inscription of some singular pressures bearing across Puerto Rican history on the female and the social body. I refer with this, specifically, to the conflictive population management strategies linked to the “proyecto de modernidad desarrollista” entering, in the early 1970’s, a period of crisis. These matters were very much at

the forefront of public and critical discourse at the time, and I would like to look at Ferré's representation of compulsive yet occluded (re)production as a phantasmatic record of broader conditions, set within a narrative space uniquely positioned to register them.

An alleged overpopulation problem and the question of women's integration into the industrial work force were key factors in the social and economic calculations intended to turn the island, from around 1947 on, into a modern, industrialized society, apt for promotion as Latin America's "showcase of democracy," especially during the Cold War era. Juan Ángel Silén invokes another important context in noting that "una de las críticas que hacía el independentismo al proceso de industrialización era que creaba empleos para mujeres rompiendo la unidad familiar y limitando al hombre en su papel histórico" (12). As Silén indicates, women participating in modern labor activities were often regarded, within certain formulations of nationalist discourse, as "víctimas del proceso de americanización al permitir que 'ideas extranjeras' contaminaran la cultura puertorriqueña" (12). These questions have been more recently revisited by Elizabeth Crespo Kebler from the perspective of women's rights organizations of the period. Crespo observes that, from this angle, women's bodies were fundamentally considered as "instrumentos de un plan imperialista que elimina[ba] su capacidad de reproducir... fundamental para la existencia física de la nación. Esta visión chocaba con muchas de las principales iniciativas de las organizaciones políticas de los años setenta... componentes centrales de sus luchas por la ciudadanía plena: el derecho de las mujeres al control de sus propios cuerpos" (65).¹⁷ Critical to this discussion are, equally, Briggs' arguments regarding the role played by notions of racialized sexuality and reproduction in Puerto Rico's neocolonial transaction, making it "possible and necessary" from the "mainland"

¹⁷ See Azize-Vargas, pp. 9-25, for an overview of the early history of feminism in Puerto Rico prior to its 1970's resurgence. For the importance of the textile industry and women's role in it, see Baerga in the same volume, pp. 89-112.

perspective (4). As she points out, “From the exotic, tropical prostitute ... to the impoverished, overlarge family ... to overpopulation, to the notion of the ‘culture of poverty’ ... the island as a whole has been defined by its sexuality” (4).

A key aspect of the figuration in “La muñeca menor” has to do with how closely material production is symbolically tied to reproduction. Though explicitly referencing pre-capitalist forms and the crafting of luxury items (Ramos 213), the aunt’s “personal industry,” her methods for creating her nieces’ *doppelgänger* dolls—meticulous artisanal craft applied to a growing number of nearly-identical items—, and the heterogeneous geographical provenance of her materials (Nieblylski 38), evoke varying features of trades, such as the textile and needlework industries, that had been central to women’s labor experience at other points of the country’s class spectrum in past decades, reminders of a history of social and economic forms at another point of change in the early seventies. Furthermore, the connections established in the story between material production and sexual reproduction through the dolls and the *chágaras* call attention to the nexus between pregnancy, its control, and participation in the labor force that characterized the country’s modernization process. The doctors’ professional interventions in the story also metaphorically recall, on the other hand, the connections between medical science and population control initiatives that, as Ana María García’s 1982 documentary *La operación* and other sources have shown, played a critical role in the push toward the integration of women into the new industrial workforce.¹⁸ Reproduction, however, considered in both symbolic and biological terms, is set in Ferré’s story within a specific upper-class context and, thus, bears its peculiar determinations. Furthermore, given the author’s feminist commitments, the

¹⁸ Crespo’s analysis of García’s documentary, which investigates the circumstances around the sterilization procedure (“la operación”) undergone by many Puerto Rican women during this time frame, considers both its strong anti-colonialist message and its implicit, unilateral view of sterilized women as “victims of an imperialist strategy” (70). Keeping this tension in mind, the documentary’s introductory words, a sort of litany, suggests one eerie counterpoint to Ferré’s tale: “Tengo una hermana que se llama Felícita que está operada, tengo una hermana que se llama Antonia que está operada, tengo otra hermana que se llama Francisca que está operada... [T]oditas están operadas... Así que se acabará la familia” (reproduced in Crespo 67).

question of reproductive freedom and the denunciation of constraining sexual roles—central concerns of hers, as indicated by her essays in *Sitio a Eros*, and her emphasis on the figure of the “emancimatriz”—intersect with these matters, complicating the nature of the aunt’s monstrous “pregnancy” and the elder doctor’s interventions.

Linda Gordon has observed that “Even in the textbook case of sterilization abuse that occurred in Puerto Rico, it is not always easy to distinguish voluntary from forced sterilization” (343). As her and Bonnie Mass’ 1977 investigations indicate, the choice for sterilization had frequently been constrained by deliberately limited options, public policies of population control, and exploitative economic calculations that would sometimes mask their intentions behind “a concern for ‘women’s rights’” (Mass 77). Briggs notes that, in this literature, “Puerto Rico emerged ... as an exemplary case study of how birth control could be used for capitalist social engineering with racist ends,” noting that sterilization rates, up to the 1980s “were among the highest in the world at that time” (123). Crucially, however, as this author also emphasizes, the intersection of these forces “has often rendered Puerto Rican feminism as... nonexistent or always already co-opted” (16), complicating the necessary demands “for freedom *from* reproduction to encompass freedom to reproduce without state or social intervention” (144).

As I have been arguing, “La muñeca menor” could be read, from these perspectives, as a field of metaphorical inscription for some of the long, contradictory, and bitter struggles waged in the country around and about women’s bodies, their sexuality and reproductive rights. At a secondary allegorical level, Ferré’s tale about the aunt, the dolls, the niece, and their “progeny” becomes a sort of partial chronicle of an intensely conflictive field of experience manifested through forms of occlusion, invention, splitting and multiplication. It is possible to glean, faintly inscribed in this text, traces of clashing biological and sociopolitical forces considered within the wider political and economic context I have sketched. Such is, for example, the young aunt’s discovery of desire, marked by her sensuous

dip in the river, immediately interrupted by the bite of the *chágara*, possible symbol both of sexual activity and of its “punishment.” This is swiftly followed by the doctor’s interventions: his mustard plasters are useless for “curing” the *chágara*’s bite, but as a deliberate, financially-motivated maneuver, they also effectively bar her from sex and reproduction, ambivalently encoding contraceptive measures considered in the context of labor participation.

Elaine Hoffman has suggested that “The reason that so many feminist utopias envision modes of reproduction outside the natural ... is the precarious control women have over their own bodies in reality” (xiii-xiv). Though too compact to articulate a full utopian or even, dystopian vision, the pervasive motifs of disturbed reproduction and childbearing in the story point to those forms of “precarious control.” Considered in a broader sense, they also recall more generally certain aspects of the modernization program that would deploy biopolitical interventions, from migration to sterilization campaigns, hoping to set the country on a new path of “progress.” The effects of such contradictions, of the accumulated pressures bearing on women’s bodies and reproduction can be appreciated in the juxtaposition of story elements, ranging from the generations of dolls and their tender treatment by the aunt—“la tía ... echaba el pestillo a la puerta e iba levantando amorosamente cada una de las muñecas canturreándoles mientras las mecía” (Ferré, “Muñeca” 11), to the images of the “vejiga abotagada” tended by the predatory doctor, to the furious offspring finally emerging from the niece’s hollowed, inanimate shell.

An article published by *New York Times* on November 4, 1974 blazoned in its headline that “Puerto Rico Aims to Cut Birthrate,” its subheadline adding the “Free Sterilization Program is Endorsed by 83% on Island, Study Shows.” The same article noted that the previous week, “pro-independence leaders ... [had] asked the United National Committee on Colonialism to condemn what they called an imperialist ‘plan of genocide,’” observing that “this had led to sterilization of 35 percent of women ... and promotion of migration away from the island” (“Puerto Rico”). Governor Luis A. Ferré, Rosario Ferré’s father, “made birth control a major

issue in his 1968 campaign," calling in 1971 "for an expansion of the existing birth control services in his State of the Commonwealth Message by offering the existing health centers as birth control centers" (Mass 74). These are but some examples of the political forces at play in the environment in which "La muñeca menor" appeared, a context clearly close to home, in many ways, for the author. Rather than reading Ferré's tale as an unmediated reflection of these questions, so close to her own feminist concerns, I have rather tried to show the ways her story's "political unconscious," as Fredric Jameson called it (1981), may have conflictingly registered them, a perhaps inevitable outcome in the work of an author so singularly positioned within the national social-political field and through a form so well suited to this task.

Darko Suvin has remarked, in analyzing the differences between science fiction and the Gothic, on what he calls the latter's recourse to "paralyzing horror," the "interposition of anti-cognitive laws" and "reduction of all possible horizons to Death" (Suvin 375-376) as evidence of its innate conservatism. My reading, supported by Ferré's declarations and *Zona's* manifesto, has emphasized the revelatory, regenerative aspects of the *chágaras'* apocalyptic embodiment. Pennington and Martínez's interpretation, referenced earlier, identified in the creatures the expression of a specifically political energy, the combined environmental and historical forces of "the abused land," the "indigenous" and the "authentic" raising to "[decimate] the former colonialists first and then [devastate] the rising *nouveau riche*" (44). Reflecting the "aspirational" politics described by Díaz, these dynamics of transformation appear central to Ferré's story, as I have argued. At the same time, absent the more specific imaginary of a transformed "beyond," and especially given the lack of other social, racial or class actors—present mainly through reference to the "peones" running the aunt's errands like "alegres mensajeros incas" (11)—, the narrative remains partially captive within the "horizon of Death" of its crumbling world, a limitation somewhat breached in other stories from Ferré's 1976 collection.

Inside its Gothic framework, so apt at depicting the “imprisoning past” as well as the gender conflicts that constitute the story’s most open concern, the *chágaras*’ rage remains an unfocused force, a longing for new sociopolitical and subject formations not fully articulated within the original apocalyptic site. The splitting, merging, more heterogeneous subjects that populate the rest of *Papeles de Pandora*—in a sense, the most direct “offspring” of its opening tale—suggest a broader field of action for those energies, though Ferré’s frequent return to the locus of the family mansion in her later work perhaps lessens their impact through repetition, unruly as Gelpí showed it originally to be.¹⁹ Still, if as Wai-Chee Dimock has argued, “[s]witching genres is one of the most eloquent signs of political agency” (1384), Ferré’s story hints at the contextual value of certain forms of generic “deviation” especially, in this case, given its emphasis on “monstrous” reproduction as sign of a creative, politicized form of “futuraity,” its imaginary of “environmental distress,” and its affective charges.²⁰

¹⁹ See, especially, pp. 192-209 for Gelpí’s reading of Ferré’s “transposition” of the canon and the metaphor of the house.

²⁰ I have focused throughout these pages on what I believe is the undeniable and key Gothic filiation of Ferré’s story. A complementary angle of approach would entail also looking at how the elements of the fantastic specifically overlap with its Gothic figuration. As I have argued, the latter’s emphasis on forms of situated history through its focus on themes of heredity, family-dynastic dynamics, geographical enclosures and similar motifs is critical to the effectiveness of Ferré’s story. Ricardo Gutiérrez-Mouat (2004) and Pablo Brescia (2008) have both identified in the *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, first published in 1940 and edited by Jorge Luis Borges, Silvina Ocampo, and A. Bioy Casares, the starting point for what could be called the momentous reclassification of the Gothic and some forms of SF under the arguably more capacious and cosmopolitan label of the fantastic, a move of significant consequences in Latin American literary and cultural history. This is an additional important consideration in gauging Ferré’s fabulation and the “reorientation” in progress within the national literary field in the 1970s. The question of the fantastic vis-à-vis the Gothic is critically invoked by Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno and Inés Ortiz in their introduction to their edited volume, *Latin American Gothic in Literature and Culture*, which has also informed my reading. As I have mentioned, for various complex historical reasons, fiction within the Gothic, fantastic, and SF molds was not, for a good part of the twentieth century, viewed as a significant or perhaps even relevant province of the national literary canon, despite some interesting contributions in these forms. In this sense, Ferré’s appeal to this modality is especially suggestive, as I have argued. The literary landscape has, of course, rapidly and radically altered in the last fifty years and especially since the turn of the century as regards these narrative practices, as my discussion in the next section suggests.

"Monstrous Reproduction" Redux: Cabiya's Aliens in a Postmodern Arcadia

What Fredric Jameson, like Darko Suvin before, has described as SF's radical historicizing tendencies (*Archeologies* 58-60) seizes on, foregrounds and animates many of the "dead zones" that limit the reach of Ferré's Gothic figuration. This is not to suggest, of course, that any genre modalization in itself commands privileged access to these questions, as witness, just to name one instance, Ana Lydia Vega's incisive Gothic investigations in *Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión*, or even Cabiya's own Gothic-SF work, with its wayward relations to politics and history. Still, through deployment of devices Suvin identified as "cognitive estrangement" and the "novum," SF is often able to "[enact] and [enable] a structurally unique 'method' for apprehending the present as history.... [I]ts multiple mock futures serve the... function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come." (Jameson, "Progress" 152). Cabiya's estrangement of certain telluric, "organic" values, and of the "tropo de la mujer... en el imaginario literario puertorriqueño," particularly through the "alien" *novum* of an extraterrestrial invasion, constitutes an interesting if contradictory example of this, part of a growing body of SF literature emerging on the island since around the beginning of this century.

Cabiya's *novelita* points most insistently to a parodic use of pulp SF tropes, or rather, as Rafael Bernabé and César J. Ayala suggest, to Jameson's own definition of *pastiche* as parody lacking its satiric charge, an exemplar of what they characterize as a postmodern "vanguard without a mission" (331). Comparing Ferré's feminist classic with "Relato del piloto" may appear, in this context, counterintuitive, not to mention the implicit assignation of the weighty ideological tasks linked to SF by Jameson and Suvin. As Jameson himself suggests, however, SF's work happens "irrespective of the 'pessimism' or 'optimism' of the imaginary future world which is the pretext for that defamiliarization" (*Progress* 152). Despite the author's many disclaimers and unarguable postmodern levity, various themes

and devices within his tale provide some unexpected historicist-SF ballast. Furthermore, a number of suggestive connections and a species of legacy warrant my comparison between these texts. Perhaps more significantly, their contrasts illuminate key elements in the “extradiegetic shift” mentioned by Sheldon, and its interactions with their local context.

Where Ferré’s text weaved an imaginary of hidden secrets, uncanny biological processes, and fulminating rage, “Relato del piloto” rips those valences out, parodying the notion of buried histories, “originary” lineages, and dramatic historical revelations. The stages of “monstrous” reproduction in “La muñeca menor” entail extended and intimate biological processes, as years separate the moment of the creature’s bite and the emergence of the monstrous offspring. The story’s allegorical work is equally cryptic: the final *chágaras* may have been conjured by the aunt, by the niece, by both, or by the environment itself; the story works as an allegory of patriarchal and/or colonial oppression, and/or as the revenge tale of a dying social order, among other possibilities. In contrast, despite its many labyrinthine turns, its “discovery” of lost archives and its “explosive” revelations, key narrative events—especially including the evoked mechanical-reproductive procedures—are emphatically visible in Cabiya’s tale. Though records are slowly and haphazardly reconstructed in the narrative and reproductive “monstrosity” takes place at night in a secret location, the glee with which the author conjures improbable academic papers and military logs is only rivaled by the voyeuristic detail with which all aspects of the process of “monstrous” reproduction are described. Rather than retardatory, self-similar fractal structures, cross-references and plot points in Cabiya’s text are tied together and projected over a sort of cinematographic or hyperlinked plane, where events accumulate, “pierde[n] toda carga pulsional y se convierte[n] en puro percance,” as Juan Duchesne Winter has suggested (*Ciudadano* 37). The Gothic “unspeakable,” as I mentioned earlier, has been turned here into a “spectacular” device; against the backdrop of the nation’s abiding historical trauma—the 1898 invasion by the United States—, its archives are ransacked apparently in support of a decidedly non-foundational romance.

Formerly agonistic questions regarding identity and autochthony animate here a B-movie SF plot that culminates, almost literally, not with a bang but a whimper.

Cabiya's "Relato del piloto" opens his 2003 collection *Historias atroces*, recalling the liminal position of Ferré's tale within her 1976 work. Díaz, who has classified his work as postmodernist fiction, points to a paradigm shift within it towards an ethos dominated by "la tecnocultura mediática de la postmodernidad," peculiar to the work of some members of Cabiya and other writers of his generation (*Escritura*). Representing forms of writing that no longer answer to "los llamados del mundo moderno (el de la patria y la esperanza en lo nacional, por ejemplo) y sí a las voces mediáticas, comerciales, globalizadas, que responden a un mundo transnacional más allá de ... Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico mismos" (*Escritura*), many significant political, economic, and cultural developments on both the international and national fronts have mediated such authorial responses. Some are especially relevant in considering the growing body of work in the SF modality within the country, particularly in its cyberpunk variant, with its motifs of "disintegrating technology" (Wasson 4), thematization of capitalist breakdown, marginality, and alliance with "antirealist postmodernist sources" (Den Tandt 97-8).²¹

Within the national context, a range of transformations in Puerto Rico's industrialization model, which from the mid-1970's on favored the growth of electronic, pharmaceutical, chemical, and scientific instrument industries (Irizarry Mora), constitute something of a symbolic expression of these developments. Above all they include those factors that, per García Pantojas' analysis, have led to an even more severe contraction of the island's economy, starting around the year 2006. Culminating in a 2017 bankruptcy declaration and an ongoing financial crisis, this process, partly due to the country's displacement "from its position of privilege

²¹ The recent spike in Puerto Rican literary production in an SF modality, with origins traceable to the publication of Rafael Acevedo's *Exquisito cadáver* (2001), has been the focus of increased scholarly interest in recent years. For an overview of the genre's history on the island, see Acevedo (2014) and Rivera (2019).

in global value chains” around the mid-1990s (“Is Puerto Rico...?” 58-9), is ultimately tied to what the author describes as “the collapse of a colonial, protectionist politico-economic system in a post-colonial world, that is, the world of globalization” (68). My condensed references to these immensely complex processes are intended to highlight local inflections of those vaster transformations that, since the 1970’s, marked the emergence of the new global order and the postmodern “condition,” as authors such as Harvey (1990) and Jameson (1991) have argued.

The above is especially relevant with respect to Cabiya’s work, which Braham has described as “more an act of embodiment than a text: a marketing phenomenon, the corporealization of discourses of consumption, a metanarrative of monstrosity” (178). More generally, as Néstor Rodríguez suggests, his writings,

exhiben una postura abiertamente iconoclasta con respecto al *establishment* cultural que les sirve de marco, y cuyo rasgo de filiación consiste precisamente en poner en evidencia ciertas transformaciones fundamentales en el ethos caribeño, en particular aquellas derivadas de los efectos de un ordenamiento global sobre la cultura política y las prácticas cotidianas de convivencia social. (1245)

In the case of “Relato del piloto,” such iconoclasm manifests, especially, through a sardonic reframing of significant aspects of what I have referred to, borrowing Briggs’ phrase, as the country’s “symbolic economy of nationhood.” Once associated with certain forms of cultural nationalism conjured, to very different ends, by both local state agencies and the political opposition, its “telluric” values, spiritual association with the land, the *jibaro* peasant, and what Urrea called the “invers[iones] ideológica[s] [d]el tropo de la mujer” in the national imaginary, are targeted in Cabiya’s text.

Despite a writing project that appears to have, in many respects, little in common with Ferré’s, “Relato del piloto” features certain themes and motifs that

suggestively recall "La muñeca menor." First, Cabiya's is also a narrative of "artificial life" and "hybrid amalgamation," "technological ambition" representing a differentiating factor from Ferré's story, whose "technologies" belong to a different era. These two descendants of Shelley's "hideous progeny" focus their narratives on forms of somatic manipulation, "monstrous" reproduction, and the creation of "hybrid life," though by different means and to vastly different ends. As indicated earlier, Ferré's creation combines a furious indictment of colonial patriarchy with a figure of reproductive "monstrosity" endowed with avenging/redemptive values. For Cabiya, reproductive "monstrosity"—understood as the result of "unnatural" alien technologies and procedures leading to the creation of uncanny doubles—is more of a gag than a threat, a device in support of still another of his "historias atroces." The political and gender concerns peculiar to Ferré's text are missing from Cabiya's, or rather, have been radically displaced and repurposed.²²

Within "Relato del piloto," other specific motifs also recall that prior narrative; these include references to an abandoned hand-made doll found near a river, and the narrator's fixation on the ablutions of his romantic interest, especially of her calf, site of the aunt's original injury in Ferré's tale.²³ Other, more oblique but perhaps even more relevant links can be established through the peculiar intellectual and biological lineages insinuated in the story, connected to mysterious visitations and alarming experiments conducted by an all-female, scientifically advanced race of aliens in one of the island's rural areas in the first decade after

²² I would like to mention here, as another extremely suggestive take on matters of "unnatural reproduction," weird heredity, and "hybrid life," José "Pepe" Liboy's 2009 novel *El informe Cabrera*, which touches on these questions in an entirely idiosyncratic and non-Euclidean way. Emily Maguire's article "Deformaciones literarias: Embriología, genealogía, y ciencia ficción en *El informe Cabrera* de José 'Pepe' Liboy" insightfully traces and analyzes the many threads of this complex text, curiously connected to various angles of my present discussion.

²³ "Sobre las almohadas había una muñeca que me estremeció bastante. La cabeza era un nudo de alcornoque tallado con implacable escrupulosidad"; "[Y]o percibí la similitud entre la muñeca y ella" (Cabiya, "Relato"). Inés, the pilot's love interest, received the doll from her uncle, who obtained it, in turn, from his father, who had found it "a orillas de un riachuelo."

1898's U.S. invasion. In Cabiya's account, an African-American meteorologist-pilot from the U.S. infantry conveys, through a series of complex framing devices, a sensational tale of crashing-landing in the country and encountering, after a frustrated erotic pursuit, these extraterrestrials, bent on producing bioengineered doubles of willing peasant female volunteers seemingly eager to decamp to other planets.

Cabiya's tale has been justifiably read as a critical vision of the Puerto Rican subject as a "sujeto clonado, detrito antiséptico que deambula ... por un ámbito indefectiblemente colonial" (Rodríguez 1249), its SF elements a reworking of the metaphor of the "imperial laboratory" and of the country's history of biopolitical manipulations, especially in connection to the reproductive issues mentioned earlier (Rodríguez 1248, Morales-Boscio 154-5). Though these "archives" are unarguably present in the story, Duchesne Winter's reading of Cabiya's work in terms of the evaporation of any "talante terapéutico o reivindicativo" (*Ciudadano* 35) seems to me to reflect more precisely, however, the main thrust of the author's approach to these themes. His tale contains, still, various important critical payloads, perhaps not least among them, having "landed" the SF modality, with all its genre and historical associations, right in the middle of the national autochthonous/telluric imaginary.

As I mentioned, the pilot's adventures take place in a bucolic, remote location near the town of San Lorenzo. Read comparatively, as a kind of parodic mirror, Cabiya's story inverts the valences of class, gender, race, and location associated with Ferré's story. Here, the protagonist is a black American male who interacts with a poor peasant family and is harrowed by feminine forces, though he remains the primary agent of violence. The motifs of the doll and the river hover in the background of the SF narrative focused, instead, on alien female beings and their "unnatural," cybernetic reproduction of what I believe are the jocular equivalents of Ferré's *chágara*-dolls. Cabiya is not primarily interested, as I indicated earlier, in matters related to reproductive rights or female empowerment, rather treating the question of the alien experiments and "reproductive futurism" as

somewhat prurient devices to weave into his yarn. Set on a very different wavelength, some problematic sexual politics, in fact, enter the story, as is sometimes the case with his other narratives. In this case, besides the "neutralization" of the affective and political charges of the issues connected to Ferré's feminist classic, the detailed, voyeuristic descriptions of the scientific procedures carried out on the local women turns them into sexualized objects of the gaze. Díaz has, I should add, suggestively interpreted some aspects of Cabiya's sexual politics in terms of a "post-oedipal crossdressing" dynamics with respect to *setentista* writers (*La na(rra)ción* 229-30), that female "Boom" now become so central and influential in Puerto Rican literature.

The story's framing devices, involving a series of incomplete records and fake references, hint at fantastic lines of heredity and relation uniting the pilot's story, the aliens, and not just the national "casa literaria," but the genetic makeup of the country's population itself. Examples of these fantastic linkages include purported evidence of the events uncovered in "lost" military archives, cryptic allusions by Evaristo Rivera Chevremont and José de Diego Padró, and suspicions connections with the Madeira School for Girls and the *Colegio Puertorriqueño de Niñas*, whose educational philosophies recall, in this context, a virtual peroration by a female Dr. Spock. These connections also extend to an alleged 1971 article by scholar Margot Arce de Vázquez on "La invasión norteamericana y la nueva heráldica puertorriqueña," documenting the many U.S. officers and soldiers who purportedly established "los puntos de arranque de un nuevo ingrediente en el linaje mestizo de la isla" after the 1898 invasion. The tale's most interesting connections to and inversions of the issues that informed and structured Ferré's story, its reproductive concerns and the imaginary of historical crisis have actually to do, I believe, with what appears to be Cabiya's cryptic joke: that some Puerto Rican women—and, following Díaz's lead, perhaps some members of that generation of influential writers and intellectuals?—could be descendants from that powerful alien lineage. Viewed from this perspective, Cabiya's *novelita* could be read as a

sort of sneaky “prehistory” to Ferré’s history, a kind of framing device planted around the older narrative, both as an homage and a parody, though with some other implications as well.

Ferré’s and Cabiya’s genre appeals and their respective approaches to their motifs reflect, I believe, important aspects of the “shift” discussed at the beginning. As I mentioned, the rhythms of its represented world, the links to the *chágaras*’ “natural” source of body horror, and the doctors’ personalized manipulations still evoke forms of gender and social interaction, a relation to history, and even to forms of official and disciplinary intervention that recall the “regulatory state” of Sheldon’s formulation. In contrast, military interventions and cultural institutions, though present in the tale, serve primarily as a framework for Cabiya’s literary scopophilia and his passion for gadgets, “reproductive futurism” become a hi-tech gag that, more than to the specifics of its gendered history, points at the crumbling forms of a neocolonial state simultaneously confined and adrift within the global order. Cabiya deploys biopolitical motifs as part of the “unbearable lightness” of a postmodern and, in some ways, postnational inclination, the tale’s turning away from the “pulsión ideológica que históricamente ha signado la literatura puertorriqueña” (Rodríguez 1244) suggesting a frustrated leaving behind of the broken paraphernalia of a failed experiment rich, however, in unexpected consequences. Furthermore, returning to the reframing of “monstrous” reproduction within his story, Cabiya’s vision of the women’s artificially reproduced bodies recalls Donna Haraway’s arguments concerning the cyborg’s skipping “the step of original unity, of identification with nature,” part of “a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature” (292). Ferré’s “organic” imaginary is here turned technohybrid, evoking “[components that] can be interfaced with many others” (302), an openness of “objects, spaces, or bodies” with potential for both new liberatory combinations and for new forms of subjection born of a global, neoliberal interconnectedness and “liquidity.”²⁴

²⁴ See Bilbija’s suggestive reading of Ferré’s story in light of Haraway’s arguments, which has influenced my own.

The abrasion of the historical sense characteristic of the postmodern, as Jameson has argued, can alter the specific weight and entailments of the Gothic's "imprisoning past," its intensities marshalled as something resembling special effects. This, I believe, most often matches Cabiya's practice when, here and elsewhere in his work, he dips into its tropes, inserting them into SF narratives that incorporate a range of historical references and bits and pieces of other cultural archives. The radical nature of SFs "historicism" seems, however, to contribute some historical density to Cabiya's story, as I suggested earlier. The pieces of the nation's "symbolic economy" that once oriented it, including the driving scientific and military interests so often camouflaged under its "canopy," are estranged and thus made newly visible in his text. Next to the pilot's wrecked plane, the weird aliens and their gleaming machinery appear as strangely evocative figures of an imperial adventure begun on the island at the turn of the twentieth century, later become a vast sociopolitical experiment where the autochthonous and the folkloric intersected with Cold War containment and development longings.

Cabiya's SF tropes warp the spatiotemporal continuum of the national cultural and historical narratives. As Rodríguez suggests, the tale "ejercita una reinterpretación del proceso de traspaso imperial de Puerto Rico a los Estados Unidos en 1898, poniendo de relieve el cariz militar y sobre todo científico de esta segunda conquista" (1245). These materials are specifically defamiliarized, however, not just through juxtaposition with the pastoral imaginary of the countryside, but by inserting them within a salacious narrative. Shortcircuiting, in this case, the affective, representational, and political charges associated with the autochthonous and telluric, the pilot is ambivalently characterized—an African-American romantic figure who also represents, however, the invading army—who uncovers "deceit" at the "pure" center of the national imaginary, the female body and the land. Through SF's characteristic forms of "cognitive estrangement" and "environmental neutrality," these symbolic materials are now set within an open narrative space that accentuates foreign influences and the unfamiliar far away from

any tragic or heroic patterns, revolutionary breakthroughs, apocalypse or rebirth. The space of nostalgia, the ancestral, of unproblematic filiation are voided here, everything ultimately pointing to the interventions and dissolutions peculiar to the new “ordenamientos globales.”

With his facetious yarns about secret lines of filiation juxtaposed with the tale of the alien visitors, Cabiya is clearly performing one of those acts of provocation described by Díaz, rewriting or rewiring the genealogical tree of the national “casa literaria,” very possibly including those now canonical female precursors. Ferré’s story represents, I believe, an important portion of those cannibalized materials. Cabiya’s curious version of a “foundational romance” reframes the question of the biopolitical, setting it within a wider “fantastic” political framework, making overt its character not just as an entry within a specific period in the historical archives, but as constitutive of the total politico-economic formation itself. At the end of the tale, the pilot abandons the island; his former love interest, now cloned, turns back without waving goodbye. Left behind is the denuded military presence that represented the “shadow double” of a national narrative that so complexly intertwined the drive for “progress” with the mythologies of autochthonous, the land and the peasant, and the ersatz female bodies conjured from distant technologies and materials. In other words, this is a vision of a space that approximates a “neoliberal global order that has shucked off the carapace of nation,” connected to and traversed by alien forces, both constituted by and estranged from them.

Cabiya has listed Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler among his literary influences (Morales-Boscio 44). Such names are striking, especially in view of one of his story’s most notable elements, the non-violent, communitarian reaction evoked by the pilot’s murder of one of the aliens. Cabiya, on the one hand, systematically defuses the rage charge of Ferré’s tale, merrily resetting the idea of “monstrous” reproduction, somatic manipulation, and “escape” within a satiric postmodern environment. Despite its problematic representation of gender issues and its dalliance with the “corporealization of discourses of consumption,” in

bringing to the forefront the SF archives somehow latent in Ferré's tale, Cabiya perhaps also unintentionally reframes important aspects of associated mechanisms, bringing to light unexpected though non-linear legacies. As Robin Silbergleid points out in discussing the parallel emergence of marriage and romance-driven novelistic plots, industrial capitalism, and liberal citizenship during the eighteenth century (156), feminist utopian narratives written at the time of second-wave feminism "envisage a new relationship between women and the nations of which they are members, calling into question the overdetermination of the bourgeois family and replacing traditional governments and nation-states with social structures based on community and harmony with the natural world" (157-8). From this perspective, gender politics and "monstrous" reproduction re-emerge as interesting valences within Cabiya's text, though recent fateful developments on the island bear down on lighthearted imaginaries of history and reproduction.

Cabiya has expressed his rejection of the "larga trayectoria de la literatura idílica/trágica/romántica/realista que busca la homogeneidad de lo nacional" (Díaz, "Escritura"), cautioning his readers, in the notable paratextual performance that opens his collection, that his intent "no fue nunca pergeñar razonamientos muy difíciles, abstrusos o accidentados; antes fue confeccionar pasajes de amena lectura..." ("Advertencia"), a task in which he fully succeeds. I believe the author's words should be temperately heeded, as this useful warning is set right next to a story where, unusually for him, he has "entra[do] a saco con el tema de la identidad cultural puertorriqueña" (Rodríguez 1245). As I mentioned at the beginning, in approaching his text I wanted to consider also the questions posed by the appeal to SF modalization, understood as part of a growing field of literary production. In that sense, it may be especially important to approach the text strategically, as part of a collective body of work comprised of female voices as well. Reading these stories in tandem, as I have attempted to do, Cabiya's repurposing of certain gender and body political motifs skirts an edge, given the continued relevance of these questions on Puerto Rican society. At the edge of what would eventually become

an even more severe national crisis, Cabiya's text, like others in this modality, ultimately called attention, however, to the matter of broken machinery and failed experiments, harnessing SF's strategies for "apprehending the present as history" and maybe, "transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come" (Jameson *Progress* 152). Most importantly, perhaps, read against the grain of their parodic charge, the story's fragmented archives, the damaged plane, the lost doll, and the extraterrestrial contraptions glance off what Jameson calls SF's capacity to "for[ce] us to think the break itself" (*Archeologies* 232).

Turbulence, Politics, (Re)Production: Concluding Observations

As these lines were originally written, Puerto Rico, still struggling in the grip of a catastrophic economic crisis and the aftermaths of Hurricane María, saw the largest public protests ever in the country remove from office key members of a corrupt administration. In the aftermath of twin disasters, new ways of thinking historical breaks, questions about body politics, environmental matters, and the future are being reframed in forms awaiting new literary emplotments. Some aspects of what could now be called Ferré's "environmental" imaginary in "La muñeca menor," with its cryptic reproductive figurations, fractal surfaces, and insurgent energies, may resonate with contemporary conditions, so tied to violent politic, economic and environmental upheavals. Even some elements of Cabiya's postmodern SF pastiche, with its emphasis on broken machinery and its healthy skepticism toward foundational narratives, may contribute to a quickly changing social imaginary and a reflection on historical "breaks." More recent texts and collective practices, however, revisit these questions in even more pertinent ways.

Gretchen López's 2014 SF story collection, *Otsukimi y otros relatos*, has strikingly explored some of the issues addressed in these texts as well as new urgent ones, including environmental degradation, technohybridity, food insecurity and cybernetic motherhood. López's titular "Otsukimi" investigates, for instance, the

question of environmental, economic, and social catastrophe with a denuded, somber narrative of buildings and streets wrecked by humidity, neglect, and extractive pursuits unfolding under a half-destroyed moon. With a phrase like "Esta isla ya no es prioridad" (11), the story evokes the sense of simultaneous unmooring from and devastation caused by the new "ordenamientos globales" compounded by the island's colonial condition, a sense shared by other key texts within this new SF corpus.²⁵ At a time when economic and environmental disasters have clearly displayed their many forms of intimate, lethal intertwining, such stories highlight critical inflexion points, as well as the many forms of what Rob Nixon called "slow violence." The precarious landscapes López and other young authors have conjured serve as background to forms of action and imagination represented in those multitudes recently gathered on the streets of the country's capital, expressing explosive energies, looking at estranged systems, thinking of breaks and "mak[ing] understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise" in unprecedented ways.

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²⁵ Rafael Acevedo's seminal *Exquisito cadaver* (2001) remains the most influential and best-known expression of this. Many of these concerns are being explored within the growing body of local SF, as Acevedo and Rivera suggest in their overviews.

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