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Project Title: The Female Vampire in Hispanic Short Fiction at the Turn of the 20th Century: A Critical Anthology

Institution: Morgan State University

Project Director: Megan DeVigilis

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

**The Female Vampire in Hispanic Short Fiction at the Turn of the 20th Century:
A Critical Anthology**
Dr. Megan DeVirgilis
Morgan State University

Context & Project Description / My plan for the duration of this grant is to produce a critical anthology on the female vampire in 19th- and early 20th-century Hispanic short fiction. Through transatlantic, historical, and feminist interpretive frameworks, my introduction will synthesize and expound upon existing scholarship on the lesser or unknown works of established Spanish and Latin American authors such as Leopoldo Lugones, Clemente Palma, Emilia Pardo Bazán, and Carmen de Burgos. The majority of the project will then be dedicated to translating their Gothic-inspired stories to English, a task that would introduce these stories within the context of a greater Hispanic Gothic tradition into the British and Eurocentric field of Gothic Studies.

Recent feminist studies on Gothic and Romantic expression have explored the growing nineteenth-century interest in powerful and seductive female characters in connection with the rise of the New Woman, a figure that threatened the stability of the public/private divide. Women were lobbying for the right to vote and run for political office, for access to education and equal opportunities in the job market, while some feminists went as far as to call for the elimination of the double standard, for the right to have sexual relationships outside marriage, for the right to divorce and own property, and to be considered legitimate members of society without necessarily conforming to the current male-imposed models of domesticity and motherhood. Growing economies, immigration, the rise of the print economy (in which women were both consumers and producers), feminist movements, and the transition from the model of labor and production to that of supply and demand gave way to fears of mass consumption, the spread of disease and degeneration, and the collapse of gender hierarchy. The public/private divide, bourgeois institutions, and the futures of nations were seen as under attack, and the link between female sexual and economic autonomy was strengthened through dominant medical, state, and literary discourses, which encouraged women to stay inside the comfort and protection of their own homes, to exercise impeccable moral judgment and ethical responsibility to their family and their country, and to manage the household income. Anxieties over this new breed of independent woman were explicitly represented in the blood-sucking and spendthrift *femme fatales* that littered Gothic, Decadent, and Romantic British and European fiction during the mid to late 19th century. The most prevalent examples include John Keat's "The Lamia" (1820), Théophile Gautier's *La Morte Amoureuse et autres nouvelles* (1836), Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

Anxieties related to growing economies and the rise of the New Woman were not particular to Europe, as Spain and the newly-independent nations of Latin America were both dealing with economic change, the consolidation of the bourgeoisie, and a reevaluation of gender roles and the concept of morality within the framework of an evolving public/private divide. Different brands of feminism began to rise in accordance with liberal values, the possibility of social mobility, and the dissemination of information on a regional and transatlantic level as a result of immigration. Like their European counterparts, male authors played with images of female monstrosity, but unlike these earlier models, their representations—written during the peak of Latin American *modernismo*—challenged the established Gothic tradition in various ways. This is an interesting discovery considering that Gothic Studies is a nascent field in Spanish, and most especially Latin American literary and cultural studies, because for decades,

the dominant position was that the Gothic could not exist and thrive outside of Europe; or, in other words, in marginal, underdeveloped areas where the proper dialectics necessary to nourish such a literary and cultural movement did not exist. How could nations that did not experience a “true” Enlightenment, for example, generate cultural products that represent its vulnerabilities (i.e. its dark side)? And how could the familiar Gothic trapping of castles in ruins incite fear in Latin America, a region that lacked a European feudal past? Hispanicists have proven, however, that Spain and Latin America did experience their own Enlightenments, and in my dissertation, I explore how these regions produced Gothic literatures that expressed anxieties related to their own particular historical, political, economic and ideological realities. My project will therefore argue for once-marginalized literary production to be recognized and valued in relation to its European counterparts; not simply as reproductions of European models, but as adaptations that deviated from and questioned the European Gothic tradition, and as a result, established trends and traditions of their own. Most interestingly, Latin American representations explicitly parody the European models and sympathize with the “monstrous” *femme fatales*, which draw significant attention to their external- and self-perceptions as Other.

This transdisciplinary critical anthology will compare European, North American, Spanish, and Latin American Gothic production, focusing primarily on the vampiric *femme fatale* through historical and feminist interpretive frameworks. It will therefore be a revision of my dissertation, “Blood Disorders: A Transatlantic Study of the Vampire as an Expression of Ideological, Political, and Economic Tensions in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Hispanic Short Fiction,” which focused on both the male and female vampires. While feminist scholarship has dedicated space to the connection between burgeoning feminist movements, the print economy, and representations of monstrous and wicked women in the poetry and fiction of Gothic and Romantic male authors, my dissertation was the first study to explore this trend and its implications in Hispanic literature authored by both men and women. As such, it was the first comprehensive, transatlantic study of the vampire figure in 19th and early 20th century Hispanic short fiction, establishing authors previously appreciated for their modernist or fantastic contributions to the Hispanic literary canon as authors that also, and successfully, experimented with the Gothic mode. My analysis of Leopoldo Lugones’ short story “La vampira” (1899), is the first-ever critical study on the story, and a revision of the section was later published in Liverpool University Press’s *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*. The purpose of my critical anthology is two-fold: First, to synthesize and further contribute to the existing scholarship on these stories (in the cases where there is scholarship), and second, to make the five stories I have selected, ranging from ten to thirty pages in length, accessible to Gothic scholars across the globe, as only one of them has been previously published in English, and none with accompanying analysis.

Contributions / A critical anthology of these short stories by Spanish and Latin American authors will contribute to literary and cultural studies in two significant ways. While most of the authors are well known in their respective countries, and even beyond, these works tend to go unnoticed. There has been a recent upswing in Hispanic Gothic studies, but most of these critical texts focus on contemporary contributions to the field, and not on the early stories that speak to the origin and evolutions of the mode, incredibly important aspects to consider in terms of both history and literature. Many critics have stated bluntly that there is no Gothic tradition in Spain or Latin America, as there is no Gothic novel to speak of, but these stories prove otherwise. This project will also be of great value to scholars outside of Hispanic Studies. The idea of a Spanish and Latin American Gothic is still completely neglected in North American and European

scholarship on the Gothic. All of the major studies on the Gothic, the vampire, and the female vampire—Fred Botting’s *Gothic*, Erik Butler’s *Metamorphosis of the Vampire in Literature and Film*, Heidi Crawford’s *The Origins of the Literary Vampire*, Bram Dijkstra’s *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*—completely ignore Hispanic contributions. If not for Abigail Lee Six’s 2019 study, *Spanish Vampire Fiction Since 1900: Blood Relations*, it would be as if the vampire never existed in Hispanic letters, and this is most likely due to inaccessibility. Whereas Lee Six, however, provides plot details and analysis for mostly-contemporary stories focused on both the male and female vampires, my project centers on the female vampire at the turn of the century and provides English translations that will prove especially useful in the college classroom, where Gothic fiction is taught almost exclusively in English. The selected corpus highlights how these acclaimed authors experimented with “lowbrow” forms by weaving different literary styles to represent collective anxieties of their times, and in the case of Latin America in particular, how this aesthetic and thematic experimentation contributed to the development of literature typically associated with the region, such as the fantastic and magical realism.

Plans & Goals / This full-time, year-long fellowship will allow me to complete three main tasks. First, I will draft the critical introduction by collapsing two chapters of my dissertation and complete the bibliography. During months three to ten, I will translate the five stories I have selected for the anthology: Leopoldo Lugones’ “La vampira” (1899), Emilia Pardo Bazán’s “La exángüe” (1899), Clemente Palma’s “Vampiras” (1906), Carmen de Burgos’ “La mujer fría” (1922), and Horacio Quiroga’s “El vampiro” (1927). This is not an exhaustive list of Hispanic, female vampire fiction, but these stories best represent the unique trend in parodic, sympathetic, and complex female vampires I mentioned above: They embrace female agency, consider genre and gender disruption, and question the sanctity of marriage and the moral compass of society. Important to note is that all of these works are no longer in copyright. In the last two months, I will send out proposals to publishers, including Routledge, which has an on-going Gothic literature series, and Cambridge, which is an enthusiastic publisher of Gothic critical studies. The main factors in determining a publisher are access and visibility. Given Britain and Europe’s longstanding interest in Gothic Studies, a publisher from either of these regions will allow for more visibility and access among scholars, and as a result, a broader understanding of Hispanic historical processes, literary tendencies, and contributions throughout history.

Competencies / I have both the linguistic and translation skills to successfully see this project to fruition. As a heritage speaker of Spanish who grew up in a Spanish-dominant household, and then having completed a doctorate in Spanish, I feel very confident reading, interpreting, and translating these works into English. Moreover, I have served as a translator in both official and unofficial capacities for over a decade. As a graduate student, (b) (6), one of my mentors and professors, hired me to translate an article of (b) (6) that would be included in a critical companion to Spanish horror film, *Tracing the Borders of Spanish Horror Cinema and Television*, published by Routledge in 2017. Since then, I have taught two college-level courses on Spanish-English translation, and currently serve as a volunteer translator for the non-profit, VIP Philadelphia, where I translate contracts and legal documents for Spanish-speaking clients.

Statement of Eligibility / Morgan State University is an accredited, historically black research university located in Baltimore, Maryland.

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An excerpt from Carmen de Burgos' short novel *La mujer fría* (1922)

Había sido para él una sorpresa el contacto frío de aquella mujer. De no estar tan enamorado, hubiese huído de ella. La miraba a veces con miedo, con terror. Hoy por vez primera sentía una impresión de asco. No podía dudar que del fondo de aquella boca, de tan débil aliento, salía un olor de entrañas descompuestas. No era ese mal olor vulgar de las personas de aliento impuro, era algo más pavoroso, más repugnante.

Ahora, reconstruyendo la escena en su imaginación, temía que Blanca se hubiera dado cuenta de todo. Acaso no era la primera vez que causaba esa impresión en un enamorado y ya sabía lo que había de suceder. Por eso sin duda su virtud era tan austera, tan vigilante, virtud de fea, a pesar de su belleza. Le mordían los celos. Pensaba que quizás aquella mujer había vivido muchos idilios semejantes, y por eso se negaba a ser suya, queriendo dejarle un ansia y una ilusión insaciada [*sic*], quizás como venganza de todos los demás que la habían abandonado.

¿Habría sido siempre así, en sus matrimonios y en su maternidad?

--Es que mucha gente no se da cuenta de tu amor, Blanca. No olvides que te llaman la "Mujer fría". Creen que esa cosa que hay en tu tipo de augusto, de sereno, que llega a ser helado, se comunica al alma.

Ella guardó silencio.

--Yo mismo—siguió él—no podía esperar que me amases. Te aseguro que de no decírmelo tú, no hubiera sido capaz de confesarte mi amor. Tan alta y tan superior a todas las mujeres te veía.

--¡Oh, no me trates como a una diosa! Es preferible ser mujer. Si me vieras como a una divinidad, estaría perdida.

--Si te he de ser sincero, sentí una especie de dolor al verme amado. Es una confesión que tal vez no debiera hacerte; pero la "Mujer fría", inabordable, me daba la seguridad de que era incapaz de...haber...amado a nadie.

--Y así era... Tú eres mi amor primero y único, Fernando.

--¿Por qué me desesperas entonces?

--No quiero ser tu amante.

--Sé mi esposa.

--No.

--¿Por qué?

--Tengo la seguridad de que el amor se extinguirá al realizarse. Prefiero alejarme llevándolo en mi alma y dejándolo en la tuya.

--Pero eso es una crueldad.

--Menor que la de matar a un sentimiento que tanta felicidad nos proporciona.

--¿Pero no comprendes que he puesto en ti toda mi vida?

En el arrebató de su pasión, Fernando se apoderó de las manos de Blanca y las estrechó entre las suyas.

Aquellas manos estaban heladas, yertas; no era la frialdad del mármol ni de la nieve, era la frialdad de la carne helada, la frialdad de la muerte.

Her cold touch had surprised him. Were he not so in love with her, he would have fled. At times, he looked at her with fear, with terror. Today, for the first time, he felt disgust. He could not question that from the depths of that mouth, from such a soft breath, emanated an odor of decomposing insides. It was not the common foul odor found in people with bad breath; it was something more dreadful, more repugnant.

Now, replaying the scene in his head, he feared that Blanca realized what was going on. Perhaps it was not the first time that she had caused such an impression on a lover, and she knew how it would end. Without a doubt, this was the reason her virtue was so severe, so guarded, as if she were ugly, despite her beauty. His jealousy ravaged him. He thought that she had perhaps lived through many similar romances, and for that reason she refused to be his, wishing instead to leave him with a yearning and an insatiable dream. Maybe it was an act of revenge against all those who had abandoned her.

Had it always been that way in her marriages and her motherhood?

--It's just that a lot of people don't recognize your love, Blanca. Don't forget that they call you the "Cold Woman." They believe that your dignified, serene, almost cold manner, is a reflection of your soul.

She remained silent.

--Even I—he continued—could never hope that you would love me. I can assure you that if you had not said it first, I would not have been able to confess my love for you. You seemed so out of reach, so superior to every other woman.

--Oh, please don't treat me like a goddess! It's preferable to be a woman. If you saw me as a goddess, I would be lost.

--In all honesty, it was painful to see myself loved. That may be something I shouldn't confess, but I was convinced that the unapproachable "Cold Woman" was incapable of... ever having...loved anyone.

--And so it is...You are my first and only love, Fernando.

--Then why do you fill me with despair?

--I don't want to be your lover.

--Then be my wife.

--No.

--Why?

--I'm sure that our love would burn out as soon as it were ignited. I prefer to leave with it intact, in my soul and yours.

--But that is cruel.

--It's better than killing a feeling that provides us so much happiness.

--But don't you understand that I've given you every part of me?

In his passionate outburst, Fernando managed to grab Blanca's hands and squeezed them between his own.

Those hands were frozen stiff. It was not the coldness of marble nor of snow, but that of frozen flesh. The cold hand of death itself.