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The Dionysian Disintegrations of Horacio Castellanos Moya's Tragic Antiheroes

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Hispanic Studies

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Abstract

This dissertation presents analyses of six of Horacio Castellanos Moya's antiheroes. The impetus for this study came from Alberto Moreiras's article "The Question of Cynicism" (2014), which challenges Beatriz Cortez's *estética del cinismo*—a theory that has dominated the academic discourse surrounding Castellanos Moya for the last two decades. Moreiras concludes his article by linking the political perspective of Castellanos Moya's writings to tragedy rather than cynicism. The present study investigates whether Moreiras's idea applies to Castellanos Moya's works characterologically: are Castellanos Moya's antiheroes tragic? This problem is resolved through psychological-affective character analyses.

Chapter One establishes that many of Castellanos Moya's protagonists deviate from the archetypal patterns laid out by the heroes of epic and *testimonio*; therefore, they are *anti*-heroes. This chapter posits, moreover, that Castellanos Moya's antihero narratives are Dionysian, in terms of the Apollo–Dionysus dichotomy presented in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Continuing this Nietzschean line of thought, the "Dionysian disintegrations" of Castellanos Moya's antiheroes are conceptualized as metaphorical deaths that culminate in two possible states: tremendous horror or blissful rapture. The narratological paths to these states are marked by the self-boundary-altering emotions of menace and enchantment (Susan Beth Miller) and by shocking encounters with the dark side of the self, or the "shadow" (Carl Jung and Erich Neumann).

The subsequent chapters illustrate the Dionysian disintegrations of Castellanos Moya's protagonists. Chapter Two examines Erasmo Aragón of *Desmoronamiento* (2006), *El sueño del retorno* (2013), and *Morongá* (2018), as well as José Zeledón of the short story

“Némesis” (1993) and the novels *El arma en el hombre* (2001), *La sirvienta y el luchador* (2011), and *Morongá* (2018). Chapter Three examines Edgardo Vega of *El asco* (1997) and Laura Rivera of *La diabla en el espejo* (2000). Chapter Four examines Eduardo Sosa of *Baile con serpientes* (1996) and the unnamed protagonist of *Insensatez* (2004).

Finally, this dissertation concludes that Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes are tragic because their narratives are centred on metaphorical deaths. This emphasis echoes the self-obliterating Dionysian impulse that Nietzsche views as the essence of tragedy.

Keywords

Horacio Castellanos Moya, antihero, affect, Dionysus, tragedy, Jungian shadow, Susan Beth Miller, El Salvador, Central American literature

Summary for Lay Audience

Horacio Castellanos Moya (1957) is a Honduran-Salvadoran author. He belongs to a disenchanted generation of Central American writers whose early adulthood coincided with the civil wars of Guatemala (1960–1996), Nicaragua (1978–1990), and El Salvador (1979–1992). Castellanos Moya’s antihero narratives have often been contrasted with the epic narratives of Central America’s prewar and wartime *testimonio* literature. In literary criticism, *testimonio* generally refers to first-person testimonies of sociopolitical struggles in Latin American contexts.

Since 2001, the predominant literary theory applied to Castellanos Moya’s fiction has been Beatriz Cortez’s *estética del cinismo* (aesthetic of cynicism), which links the works of Castellanos Moya and other writers of the disenchanted generation to a cynical outlook. Cortez’s theory was challenged, however, in Alberto Moreiras’s 2014 article “The Question of Cynicism.” Moreiras linked the political perspective of Castellanos Moya’s writings to tragedy rather than cynicism, a unique stance that inspired the present study. This dissertation asks: are Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes tragic?

Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of tragedy, as presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), is used to answer this overarching question. Nietzsche posited that tragedy was born in fifth-century BC Greece thanks to the uprising of a frenzied, self-obliterating Dionysian impulse in a culture that was previously dominated by a serene, self-realizing Apollonian impulse. For Nietzsche, death—the obliteration of the self—was essential to the Dionysian impulse and to tragedy. The present study maintains that Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes are tragic because their narratives are centred on metaphorical deaths that manifest as psychological

and emotional breakdowns. These breakdowns, or “Dionysian disintegrations,” are analyzed using Carl Jung and Erich Neumann’s psychological theories in addition to Susan Beth Miller’s theories on emotion.

Chapter One provides an overview of previous literary criticism pertaining to Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes and establishes the theories applied in subsequent chapters. Chapters Two, Three, and Four present analyses of the Dionysian disintegrations of six of Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes: Chapter Two examines Erasmo Aragón and José Zeledón, Chapter Three examines Edgardo Vega and Laura Rivera, and Chapter Four examines Eduardo Sosa and the unnamed protagonist of the novel *Insensatez* (2004).

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Introduction

The Salvadoran author Horacio Castellanos Moya (1957)¹ belongs to the “Generación del Desencanto” (Bezhanova 213), a group of Central American writers born in the 1950s and 1960s whose early adulthood coincided with the civil wars of Guatemala (1960–1996), Nicaragua (1978–1990), and El Salvador (1979–1992). Their disenchantment was due to a loss of faith in utopic, revolutionary projects that were meant to bring about a promised land (Cortez, *Estética* 23–24) but instead gave way to the rule of neoliberalism (Kokotovic, “Neoliberal Noir” 15) and the recycling of political violence into widespread criminal violence (Kokotovic, “Neoliberal Noir” 17; Castellanos Moya, *Breves palabras* 56). Academics have consistently placed Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre within this historical–political context of Central American postwar disenchantment.

Beatriz Cortez is the most influential commentator on Castellanos Moya’s fiction, and her principal theory maintains that the disenchanted generation created an *estética del cinismo* that expresses the zeitgeist of postwar Central America. Cortez has highlighted disenchantment and cynicism in the writings of Castellanos Moya and his milieu from her pioneering 1999 PhD dissertation *The Dark Side of the Subject: Disenchantment in Central American Postwar Fiction* to her 2001 article “Estética del cinismo: la ficción centroamericana de posguerra” to her 2010 book *Estética del cinismo: pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra* to her 2012 article “Memoria del desencanto: el duelo postergado y la pérdida de una subjetividad heroica.” Regarding Cortez’s massive influence, Emiliano Coello Gutiérrez has observed that,

¹ Castellanos Moya was born in Honduras and, from the age of three, raised in El Salvador.

Desde la aparición en 2001 del artículo de Beatriz Cortez «Estética del cinismo: la ficción centroamericana de posguerra», el término «cinismo» se ha venido utilizando, con mayor o menor fortuna, en el discurso crítico centroamericanista para referirse a la narrativa publicada en el Istmo desde el inicio de la posguerra hasta hoy. (“El discurso crítico”)

This trend that has swept across Central American literary studies is pronounced in analyses of Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre, as Tamara Lee Mitchell affirms: “It is almost impossible to find a critical analysis of Castellanos Moya’s work that does not (1) cite Cortez’s text, and (2) begin from the premise that Castellanos Moya’s novels are ‘cynical’” (*Neoliberalism, Post-Nationalism* 21). Beginning in 2014, however, there has been pushback against Cortez’s *estética del cinismo* by Alberto Moreiras and the two aforementioned scholars: Coello Gutiérrez and Mitchell.² Meanwhile, “disenchantment” has justifiably persisted as an unchallenged descriptor of the frame in which Castellanos Moya portrays modern Central American history and its mass migrations. Before examining Moreiras’s criticism of the *estética del cinismo*, which is the most pertinent criticism of the three mentioned, let us consider the relationship between disenchantment and a phenomenon that lies at the heart of the present study—antiheroism.

Antiheroism is a literary manifestation of societal disenchantment. In Western literature, an antihero boom occurred in the nineteenth century when many novelists, Dostoevsky foremost

² The criticisms of Cortez’s theory appear in Moreiras’s “The Question of Cynicism: A Reading of Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *La diáspora* (1989)” (2014), later published as “La cuestión del cinismo. Lectura de *La diáspora*” (2018), Coello Gutiérrez’s “El discurso crítico sobre el cinismo en la novela centroamericana contemporánea: bases para una lectura alternativa” (2015), and Mitchell’s *Neoliberalism Post-Nationalism, and the Ghosts of Lefts Past: Reading Roberto Bolaño and Horacio Castellanos Moya on Politics and the Literary Tradition* (2019).

among them, portrayed the mental disturbances of individuals living amidst the factories and smokestacks of harsh, urban centres that had been spawned by the Industrial Revolution.

Andrew Swensen elucidates the connection between modern cities, malaise, and the erasure of the hero:

The labyrinthine city and its frenzy magnify temptation and vice, and the overcrowding, exploitation, greed, and filth of industrialization consequently create a social norm of cynical indifference and an urban mentality vitiating the very substance of the hero. The notion of “hero” appears to dissolve into the past as the individual becomes increasingly alienated from environment and as, in Georg Simmel’s terms, mental life becomes separate from social life. (267)

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, as society’s newfound discontents and neuroses were dramatized in literature, they were also documented more explicitly by such theorists as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel. Nietzsche famously announced, “God is dead,” which encapsulates the West’s disorienting swing from Christianity and ritualism to science and industrial capitalism—from an enchanted immersion in stories, symbols, and the natural world to a disenchanting confrontation with cold, hard facts and manufactured products. As the historian of religion Mircea Eliade observes, “for the nonreligious men of the modern age, the cosmos has become opaque, inert, mute; it transmits no message, it holds no cipher” (*The Sacred and the Profane* 178).

In the 1990s, the failure of utopic projects in Central America resulted in a microcosmic echo of the West’s nineteenth century disenchantment. Castellanos Moya has observed that the

prewar and wartime enchantment of revolutionaries on the isthmus is attributable, at least in part, to their immersion in a newfangled form of Christianity:

En buena medida en las revoluciones centroamericanas hubo una gran presencia del pensamiento cristiano y de todo esto que llamaban la teología de la liberación. No es extraño eso; hay muchas similitudes en el lenguaje. Concientizar, por ejemplo, es una palabra de bien. Los cristianos concientizaban a los aborígenes, que tenían esos dioses paganos que eran el diablo. En la época donde se ubica *La diáspora* [su primera novela, ubicada en los años ochenta], concientizar era aceptar la idea de la revolución y del cambio social que iba a traer el cielo a la tierra. (“Horacio Castellanos Moya. ‘En América Latina’”)

Central American revolutionaries were enchanted by a grand, religiously inflected narrative that imbued their lives with meaning. It is not uncommon for political movements in modernity to revive the religiosity of the past; twentieth century totalitarian states, for example, made father-gods of such figures as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Hirohito, and Mao. As Susanne Kolb observes, politics lack historical memory:

History resurfaces cyclically, and carries with it ideas, concepts, words. Even those we thought had vanished, uprooted and forever extinct, may return clad in the fashion of modernity, hidden within the deeper folds of the language of advertising, of politics, of the media. This is partly due to the fact that politics has no historical memory, and therefore much of the people do not remember that certain words and expressions had already been used in the past, and are no longer aware of their meaning and echoes. Political scientists describe this phenomenon as *criptomnesia*. (S. Kolb quoted in Portelli 43)

The collapse of Central America's revolutions resulted not only in the evaporation of a new religious faith, but also in the proliferation of Westernizing phenomena that had long since been set in motion on the isthmus but were suddenly kicked into hyperdrive in the 1990s: industrialization, urbanization, free market capitalism, consumerism, materialism, and individualism. This radical shift is perhaps most marked in El Salvador where the right-wing party Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA), who held power from 1994 to 2009, engaged in "the uninterrupted pursuit of neoliberal policies" (Velásquez Carrillo 232). In Central American literature, these changes invalidated the dreamy, shining image of the guerrillero à la Che Guevara—modelled after the epic hero—who lived high up in the mountains and personified purpose, and they instantiated the nightmarish, dark image of the alienated individual who lives among a crowded, urban population and embodies existential angst. Therein lies the literary representation of Central America's microcosmic echo of Western disenchantment.

* * *

The danger of grouping multiple authors under one conceptual umbrella is that it can compel us to overlook elements that make each author unique. Castellanos Moya has regularly been viewed through the prism of Cortez's influential writings which group together members of the disenchanted generation, and so the unique aspects of Castellanos Moya's personal experience of disenchantment have often been ignored. It is noteworthy, for example, that he abandoned the revolutionary movement, to which he had contributed as a journalist, in the early years of the Salvadoran Civil War (1979–1992), and that he did so on moral grounds. He later explained his dissidence:

[D]escubrí que los asesinos estaban también adentro de la izquierda, y no solo afuera; y descubrí otra cosa, que ya la he dicho antes y que no es mía, sino de Juan Carlos Onetti: que los hijos de puta están en todos los bandos; no hay bando bueno, o, en contra de lo que decía Roque Dalton, no hay una organización pura en el mundo de los hombres, no la hay. La pureza es algo que no se da en el mundo de los hombres, la pureza se da en los químicos... seguramente hay un azúcar más pura que otra. Bueno, lo viví con mucha intensidad, pasión, conspiración, intriga. Yo era alguien estrechamente vinculado con la información, la tenía de primera mano. Después de esto fue muy natural decir “con esta gente no quiero trabajar”, y de hecho dejé de trabajar con ellos. (“Horacio Castellanos Moya” [Interview by Rodríguez Freire] 58)

Castellanos Moya’s wartime disenchantment is captured in his debut novella³ *La diáspora* (1989) which excoriates the Salvadoran Left. Among Cortez’s many texts pertaining to Castellanos Moya, *La diáspora* is only ever mentioned in the article “¡Adiós, Horacio!” (2014)⁴ in which she declares that she has always seen this debut work, due to its political stance, as “una mancha” on the author’s oeuvre.⁵

³ The term “novella” is used throughout this study to refer to novels with fewer than 200 pages.

⁴ This polemical article, which is an open goodbye-letter to Castellanos Moya that announces Cortez’s boycott of his literature, was taken down from the *Diario Digital Contrapunto*, the online newspaper in which it was published, in 2021. Élmer Menjívar’s response to the article, also written in 2014, can be found at <https://losblogs.elfaro.net/unhombredebien/2014/10/una-innecesaria-apolog%C3%ADa-de-la-obra-horacio-castellanos-moya.html#more>. Additionally, a brief rebuttal to Cortez’s article appears in Cristina Carrasco’s “De Macondo a San Salvador: la recepción de la narrativa de Horacio Castellanos Moya en España” (2014, p. 60).

⁵ In “The Question of Cynicism,” Moreiras mentions that he does not know whether Cortez has read *La diáspora*, so it is clear that Moreiras had not read “¡Adiós Horacio!” at the time he wrote his own article. Nevertheless, Cortez’s comment on *La diáspora* in “¡Adiós Horacio!” only accentuates Moreiras’s argument which is detailed below.

In Moreiras's "La cuestión del cinismo. Lectura de *La diáspora*" (2018),⁶ he argues that Castellanos Moya is not the writer portrayed in Cortez's analyses which turn a blind eye to *La diáspora* and interpret the author's other novels as exemplars of a failed literary/political project that engendered a new Central American subjectivity—the subaltern slave.⁷ Moreiras observes that Castellanos Moya, because of his renunciation of ideologies and other historical orthodoxies, transcends Cortez's paradigm and exemplifies "una nueva figura" in Central American literature:

Si se entiende que Horacio Castellanos Moya puede ofrecer lo que antes llamé una nueva figura del escritor en América Central –sólo he emprendido el análisis de *La diáspora* en este ensayo, pero quiero postular como válida mi tesis para toda su obra–, es porque esta deja atrás los parámetros presentados por Beatriz Cortez en su libro [*Estética del cinismo*], que de hecho centran la discusión secular de la función de la intelectualidad en América Latina. Castellanos Moya no es ni un escritor de la insurgencia, comprometido con la liberación poscolonial en nombre de una identidad servil que busca redención, ni un escritor conservador que favorece la dominación de un grupo social particular mediante la proyección artística de una ideología de clase . . . Sigue un sendero de

⁶ This is the Spanish version of "The Question of Cynicism: A Reading of Horacio Castellanos Moya's *La diáspora* (1989)" (2014). It is a more polished text, having been published four years later and in an edited book, rather than online.

⁷ Cortez explains the connection between the *estética del cinismo*, subaltern slavery, and the failed project of liberation in this passage: "mi objetivo es mostrar la forma en que esta estética del cinismo dio lugar a la formación de una subjetividad precaria en medio de una sensibilidad de posguerra colmada de desencanto: se trata de una subjetividad constituida como subalterna *a priori*, una subjetividad que depende del reconocimiento de otros, una subjetividad que solamente se posibilita por medio de la esclavitud de ese sujeto que *a priori* se ha constituido como subalterno . . . mi interés es explorar la estética del cinismo como un proyecto fallido, como una trampa que constituye la subjetividad por medio de la destrucción del ser a quien constituye como sujeto" (*Estética* 25–26).

pensamiento, un sendero de escritura, que debe rechazar por adelantado todo tipo de ortodoxia histórica. (“La cuestión” 127–128)

Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre expresses disenchantment through a de-ideologized lens, critiquing the contradictions of the Salvadoran revolutionary movement, the neoliberal excesses of the right-wing ARENA, and other societal ills that span the political spectrum. Among his nonfiction works, the collection of essays centred on El Salvador’s transition into democracy, *Recuento de incertidumbres: cultura y transición en El Salvador* (1993), illuminates his antipathy toward ideological extremism and political polarization.

Moreiras’s rebuttal of Cortez also attempts to free Central American literary criticism from the longstanding idea that Castellanos Moya’s works are cynical, asking rhetorically, “¿No podríamos objetar al argumento de Beatriz Cortez sobre el *cinismo fallido* a partir de que existe una diferencia entre describir el cinismo y adoptarlo?” (“La cuestión” 118).

Castellanos Moya’s cast of characters includes cynics, yes, but this does not mean, as Moreiras implies, that the narratives themselves are cynical. Adding to his exposition of Castellanos Moya’s uniqueness, Moreiras concludes his article with the speculative affirmation that the political perspective of the author’s works is tragic, rather than cynical, and that this is praiseworthy:

Me aventuraría a afirmar que la experiencia de lo político que nos ofrece la literatura de Castellanos Moya es trágica . . . lo que lo hace única en el contexto centroamericano, comparable solamente a la representación de algunos de los más augustos escritores latinoamericanos: José María Arguedas, por ejemplo, o el mismo Roberto Bolaño. El cinismo no está del todo a esa altura. (“La cuestión” 130)

This tentative mooring of Castellanos Moya's oeuvre to tragedy forms the untested platform upon which the present study will analyze Castellanos Moya's antiheroes. Here, it will be asked: are Castellanos Moya's antiheroes tragic?

* * *

In the West, tragedy first appeared in fifth-century BC Greece where it was initiated by Aeschylus. According to legend, Aeschylus was dozing in a vineyard when the god of wine and drama, Dionysus, visited him in his dream and implored him to write the first tragedy (McGilchrist ch. 8). Although this origin story is dubitable, it is certain that Dionysus was at the forefront of the earliest tragedies. Matthew Santirocco enumerates the Dionysian aspects of theatrical performances in ancient Athens: "they took place on the feast day of Dionysus, the god of drama, in a theater dedicated to him, in the presence of his priest, and with plots that focused heavily on religious themes and even, on occasion, on the god himself" (389). Dionysus's influence was also apparent in the new narratives which eschewed heroes' great deeds and apotheoses, previously emphasized in myth and epic, and engendered a new hero—the tragic hero—whose anguish was paramount. Whereas epics highlight the hero's rise and immortalization, tragedies highlight the hero's downfall and death, whether this death be literal or metaphorical. Walter Otto describes how Dionysus brought death to the forefront of ancient Greek storytelling:

All of antiquity extolled Dionysus as the god who gave man wine. However, he was known also as the raving god whose presence makes man mad and incites him to savagery and even to lust for blood . . . Dionysus was the god of the most blessed ecstasy and the most enraptured love. But he was also the persecuted god,

the suffering and dying god, and all whom he loved, all who attended him, had to share his tragic fate. (49)

Sophocles, Aeschylus's successor, is probably the most widely read Greek tragedian today, and the list of characters who commit suicide in his seven extant plays is considerable: Ajax, Deianira, Jocasta, Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice. Nevertheless, Sophocles' most famous tragic hero, Oedipus the King, dies a *metaphorical* death when he ceases to be who he thought he was. The realization that he has killed his father and married his mother results in his horror, self-blinding, loss of the throne of Thebes, and exiled wandering.

Before addressing Castellanos Moya's antiheroes' kinship with tragic heroes, we must note that we are dealing with *anti*-heroes who cannot be called heroes—without the negating prefix—and who therefore differ from tragic *heroes*. Antiheroes lack the grandiosity of tragic heroes. Literary critic Northrop Frye maintains that tragic heroes belong with epic heroes in the “high mimetic mode,” meaning they have “authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours” (34). Antiheroes, on the other hand, belong to Frye's “ironic mode”; they are “inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity” (34). Whereas high mimetic heroes, whom we “look up to,” evoke admiration and compel emulation, ironic heroes (i.e., antiheroes), whom we “look down upon,” show us how *not* to be.⁸ Antiheroes surpass heroes in their immorality; whereas tragic heroes are typically plagued by one tragic flaw, often hubris, antiheroes can be rife with flaws—within Castellanos Moya's antiheroes, we find cocktails of cruelty, fragility, racism, misogyny, lecherousness, snobbishness, etc. Yet moral

⁸ Tragic heroes also have a cautionary aspect when their downfall is brought about by hubris or some other tragic flaw.

status is not the crux of tragedy, as Frye observes: “The particular thing called tragedy that happens to the tragic hero does not depend on his moral status. If it is causally related to something he has done, as it generally is, the tragedy is in the inevitability of the consequences of the act, not in its moral significance as an act” (38). The helplessness of the protagonist as he or she faces an inevitable death, whether literal or metaphorical, is what makes a tragedy tragic.

Ricardo Piglia’s comparison of Greek tragedy to the modern/postmodern novel highlights how only novelistic protagonists suffer the demeaning plight of “bondage, frustration, or absurdity” that occurs in Frye’s ironic mode. Greek tragic heroes are overtly thwarted by the gods, whereas antiheroes, mired in conspiracy and paranoia, are ignorant of their adversaries:

En la novela el complot ha sustituido la noción trágica de destino: ciertas fuerzas ocultas definen el mundo social y el sujeto es un instrumento de esas fuerzas que no comprende. Por ese lado se produce el paso de la tragedia a la novela, una transformación decisiva en las formas del imaginario social. La novela ha hecho entrar la política en la ficción bajo la forma del complot, podría decirse que la diferencia entre tragedia y novela está ligada a un cambio de lugar de la noción de fatalidad, el destino es vivido bajo la forma de un complot. Ya no son los dioses los que deciden la suerte, son fuerzas oscuras que construyen maquinaciones que definen el funcionamiento secreto de lo real. Los oráculos han cambiado de lugar, es la trama múltiple de la información, las versiones y contra versiones de la vida pública, el lugar visible y denso donde el sujeto lee cotidianamente la cifra de un destino que no alcanza a comprender. (Piglia 2)

Consistent with Piglia's description of novels in general, Castellanos Moya's novels remove the superstructure of the gods and the intelligibility of destiny. Yet they also maintain tragedy's emphasis on protagonists' deaths. Like Oedipus the King, Castellanos Moya's protagonists progress toward climaxes of self-annihilation in the form of metaphorical deaths, as opposed to remaining static or being integrated into society like the protagonists of comedies (Frye 43) or progressing toward climaxes of self-realization like epic heroes. Therefore, Castellanos Moya's protagonists are *tragic antiheroes*. They are under the sway of one god who persists in the postmodern atmosphere, one "suffering and dying god" (Otto 49, 78) who hovers over them, imperceptibly, like an ancient spectre—Dionysus.

The present study posits that Castellanos Moya's tragic antiheroes endure metaphorical deaths that can be called "Dionysian disintegrations." This concept will be explicated in Chapter One and then illustrated, using six of Castellanos Moya's protagonists as exemplars, in the three subsequent chapters. Chapter Two examines Erasmo Aragón of *Desmoronamiento* (2006), *El sueño del retorno* (2013), and *Moronga* (2018), as well as José Zeledón of the short story "Némesis" (1993) and the novels *El arma en el hombre* (2001), *La sirvienta y el luchador* (2011), and *Moronga* (2018). Chapter Three examines Edgardo Vega of *El asco* (1997) and Laura Rivera of *La diabla en el espejo* (2000). Chapter Four examines Eduardo Sosa of *Baile con serpientes* (1996) and the unnamed protagonist of *Insensatez* (2004).

Chapter 1

1 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter has three objectives: first, to assess how scholars have analyzed Horacio Castellanos Moya's protagonists in relation to heroism and antiheroism; second, to formulate a theoretical framework that will allow for psychological-affective analyses of these protagonists; and third, to explain why certain protagonists have been selected for this study. The first subchapter demonstrates that critics in the field of Central American literature have collectively established a dichotomy that contrasts the heroes of 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s testimonial narratives, who are epic, ethical, and invincible, with the antiheroes of postwar, fictional narratives, who are alienated, flawed, and often fragile. The present study superimposes the Apollo–Dionysus dichotomy, as expounded in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), onto the established dichotomy between testimonial heroes in the era of enchantment and fictional antiheroes in the era of disenchantment, to highlight the Dionysian disintegrations of Castellanos Moya's tragic antiheroes. The second subchapter explains how three of the four emotions that clinical psychologist Susan Beth Miller analyzes in her *Emotions of Menace and Enchantment: Disgust, Horror, Awe, and Fascination* (2017), namely horror, awe, and fascination, constitute the primary affective elements of Dionysian disintegration. The third subchapter presents psychoanalyst Carl Jung's concept of the "shadow" and, by incorporating various passages and quotations from Castellanos Moya's essays, speeches, and interviews, elucidates the relevance of the Jungian shadow to Castellanos Moya's

literary philosophy and to his protagonists' antiheroism. The final subchapter briefly surveys Castellanos Moya's publications, comparing his novellas with his full-length novels, and affirms that his six novellas and his most recent full-length novel *Morongá* detail the Dionysian disintegrations of tragic antihero-narrators who, because of the primacy of psychological phenomena in their narrations, will be the objects of analysis in this dissertation.

1.1 Antiheroism in Central America's Postwar Era of Disenchantment

Una literatura épica necesita héroes. La mía no es épica. — Horacio Castellanos Moya (“Nos hubiéramos matado” 103)

Disenchantment implies a prior state of enchantment. In the Latin American literary community, the thirty-year period from the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 was enchanted by religiously toned faith in communist utopias and by heightened political engagement (*Roque Dalton* ch. 13). Central American literature, at that time, was dominated by activism in the form of *testimonio*, or testimonial accounts of insurgence and hope in contexts of oppression. The most famed account is *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) which tells the story of a K'iche' Mayan woman's struggle against the tyranny of Guatemala's military regime. For Gary Gossen, Menchú's testimony belongs to the domain of epic literature because it adheres to the pattern of a “struggle for sovereignty and ethnic integrity against formidable external adversaries” which can be found in such epics as the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Cantar del mío Cid* whose Christian heroes face

off against the expanding Islamic Empire (67). Other academics have similarly noted how the protagonists of *testimonio* are often ascribed heroic status. Ignacio Sánchez Prado affirms, for example, that this genre produced “una mitología literaria construida en torno a figuras heroicas como ‘el poeta’, ‘el guerrillero’ o ‘el indígena’” (245). Within the grouping of guerrilleros, Tania Pleitez Vela names two models of heroism that were celebrated in *testimonio*: the first is the “*héroe revolucionario*, el líder valiente de izquierdas, el modelo del ‘hombre nuevo’”⁹ (60), and the second is the “soldado del pueblo—invencible en la batalla, audaz, que no mide riesgos en el enfrentamiento con el enemigo—sería el prototipo a alcanzar para quienes se involucraban en la guerrilla” (Vázquez, Ibáñez, and Murguialday quoted in Pleitez Vela 60). Cortez similarly observes that various testimonial novels, such as Mario Payeras’s *Los días de la selva* (1980), pedestalize “la imagen del héroe guerrillero: su fuerza, su poder, su superioridad masculina, su barba mítica” (*Estética* 71). The aggrandization of such models of heroism manifests what Mitchell calls “the heroic posturing of the Latin American militant Left” (18). The world as presented in *testimonio* is an epic stage for regular people to mimic the heroes of the distant past by battling giants, making sacrifices, and attempting to usher in a golden age.

Because academics view Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre within a context of postwar disenchantment, his protagonists’ deviations from heroism, in other words their “antiheroism,” have been interpreted as deviations from *testimonio*, a genre in which

⁹ “Hombre nuevo” is a reference to the idealized image of the fearless, militant Latin American socialist who Che Guevara both wrote about, in such texts as “Proyecciones sociales del Ejército Rebelde” (1959), and embodied. Castellanos Moya has referred to Guevara as the “arquetipo castrense encarnado” (*Roque Dalton* ch. 16).

protagonists adhere to models found in epic literature. Coello Gutiérrez states, for example, that Castellanos Moya's novels *Donde no estén ustedes* and *Insensatez* “constituyen una parodia del personaje épico de la literatura centroamericana, al que destronan de su podio olímpico” (“El pícaro” 13). Teresa Basile similarly contrasts Castellanos Moya's fiction with both *testimonio* and epic by stating, “Sus textos significan una ruptura tanto de las narraciones románticas del idealismo revolucionario como de la épica heroica y sacrificial del guerrero en el campo de batalla (con la muerte bella y la violencia sublimada)” (23). Additionally, Basile distinguishes four archetypes of antiheroism in Castellanos Moya's short stories, and she describes how these figures embody the misery of the failed revolution:

Estos rostros del [1] prófugo, del [2] apátrida, del [3] melancólico y del [4] indolente sustituyen desde la década de los ochenta a las figuras del militante, del guerrillero y del hombre nuevo acuñadas en los sesenta en torno a la ola de revoluciones latinoamericanas. Son diversas figuras del desencanto que porta el ángel caído del Paraíso revolucionario. Conforman la contracara del proceso de sacralización, de encantamiento, de auratización que vimos arriba, constituyen su desmoronamiento en el contexto de la derrota de la izquierda revolucionaria. (22)

These protagonists have plummeted from the stratospheric splendour of *testimonio* heroes and epic heroes, crashing down into antiheroic squalor.

The heroes of *testimonio* and epic are community leaders who often establish or aspire to establish new states or new social orders. Hegel asserts that epic heroes are “total

individuals who magnificently concentrate within themselves what is otherwise dispersed in the national character, and in this they remain great, free and noble human characters” (quoted in Lukács 206). The populations that these heroes lead are symbolically condensed within them, giving them a monumental aura. Contrarily, antiheroes are psychically¹⁰ fractured, alienated victims who suffer the ills of immutable societies. In reference to works by the disenchanting generation, Coello Gutiérrez asserts, “Los protagonistas de estas narraciones no son ya los héroes de otras épocas, que dedicaron su vida a la transformación de sus sociedades y países,” and he adds, “el sujeto (no sujeto) de la narrativa centroamericana actual (que es en muchas ocasiones el narrador de las historias) asume el papel de espectador de la sociedad que lo rodea, abandonando el rol de héroe que correspondía a los protagonistas de las novelas de otras épocas” (“El discurso crítico”). Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes do not mould societies, nor are they cast from a mould that encapsulates the whole of society; they are small and lost in the world. This is why Méndez Vides refers to them as “los pequeños héroes” when stating, “El aporte de Horacio Castellanos Moya en sus múltiples novelas es la capacidad de enfrentarnos a esas dos grandes condiciones de la vida: el cataclismo social que devora y la caída de los pequeños héroes” (30). Castellanos Moya’s protagonists are both engulfed and infected by the mass violence that has plagued Central America in the latter half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century. Acknowledging this helpless aspect of Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes, Álvaro Rojas Salazar states that the author, “como los clásicos griegos, deja a sus personajes solos en medio de los vientos

¹⁰ The terms “psychic” and “psychically” are used in the present study to mean “pertaining to the psyche,” without any added connotations of extrasensory perception.

del destino, solos en la tragedia que une y destruye sus vidas” (“Novela ‘Moronga’”).

What differentiates the ancient Greek notion of destiny from Castellanos Moya’s, as we have seen, is that the winds of destiny in the former are blown by the gods, whereas the winds of destiny in the latter are more indecipherable, more inducive of paranoia, and often associated with uncontrollable political forces.

Several literary critics have noted how the embodiment/non-embodiment of heroic masculinity differs drastically in *testimonio* and in Castellanos Moya’s fiction. In Kokotovic’s view, the paranoid protagonist of *Insensatez* embodies “a remarkably anxious and fragile postwar masculinity that stands in sharp contrast to the confidently masculine heroics of revolutionary agency during the war” (“Testimonio Once Removed” 550). Tania Pleitez Vela posits that Erasmo Aragón of *El sueño del retorno* wishes to incarnate “la noción de una masculinidad tradicional, la de la heroicidad” (63) but is unable to do so. For Basile, Castellanos Moya’s short story “Percance” (1987),¹¹ through the protagonist’s moment of sexual impotence, presents

una crítica a la imagen de virilidad del guerrillero fundada en un ideario militarista y machista característico de esta comunidad de hombres, que celebra la dureza, el sacrificio, la guerra, la violencia, la muerte, la valentía y la capacidad para soportar las difíciles condiciones de la lucha y de la disciplina militar. (15–16)

¹¹ Although Castellanos Moya published “Percance” in 1987, five years prior to the end of the Salvadoran Civil War, he had already abandoned the revolutionary movement and was publishing fiction of a distinctly disenchanting, postwar flavour.

Whereas *Insensatez*, *El sueño del retorno*, and “Percance” feature men who are more fragile and less virile than their predecessors in *testimonio*, Castellanos Moya’s novel *El arma en el hombre*, as well as others in the genre of “neopoliciaico centroamericano,” emphasize the male protagonist’s capacity for violence while removing his moral aura, thereby revealing the hero’s dark side:

El neopoliciaico centroamericano denuncia, pero de una forma abierta y antidogmática, el cinismo de un sistema metalizado que en su violencia se despojó de la máscara moral que utilizase otrora. De igual modo critica el lado oscuro del héroe milenario, de una u otra tendencia ideológica pero predominantemente masculino. (“El pícaro” 18)

Whether it is due to softness or excessive hardness, Castellanos Moya’s male protagonists stray from the idealized notion of heroic masculinity.

Tania Pleitez Vela describes the “modelo masculino convencional” as “poderoso, fuerte, autosuficiente, un ser ‘integrado’, gloriosamente independiente, que aleja de sí toda ambigüedad, contradicción y conflicto” (62), and her description is reminiscent of the Greek god Apollo as he is portrayed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this book, Nietzsche articulates the differences between the rigid Apollonian and the fluid Dionysian while using this dichotomy to better comprehend ancient Greek civilization, poetry, and drama. As both a sun-god (*Symbols* 1: 164) and a dragon slayer (*Symbols* 1: 216), Apollo manifests the quintessence of heroism.¹² He is big, bold, shining, and indestructible. For

¹² In Jung’s *Symbols of Transformation* (1952), he draws upon the studies of Leo Frobenius and other sources to outline the basic pattern of sun-god myths. According to this pattern, the setting sun is

Nietzsche, Apollo is “the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis*” (21) or “principle of individuation,” which Douglas Smith defines as “the principle which accounts for the existence of individual phenomena in their multiplicity” (137). Apollo is the “ser ‘integrado’, gloriosamente independiente” to whom Pleitez Vela refers, a being with an impenetrable border between self and non-self.

Nietzsche quotes Schopenhauer to illustrate how the *principium individuationis* operates as a calming force in the human soul:

As a sailor sits in a small boat in a boundless raging sea, surrounded on all sides by heaving mountainous waves, trusting to his frail vessel; so does the individual man sit calmly in the middle of the world of torment, trusting to the *principium individuationis*. (Schopenhauer quoted in Nietzsche 21)

The Apollonian hero, like the calm sailor described by Schopenhauer, does not succumb to horror when confronted by apparently overwhelming threats, whether these be mountainous waves, the gaping maws of a monsters, or oppressive military regimes; the serenity of such a hero comes from an unshakable faith in his or her personal integrity, agency, and ability. For Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes, on the other hand, the horrors of the external world have become too great, the violence too widespread and too relentless,

swallowed by a sea monster in the west, undergoes a “night sea-journey,” and then breaks free of the monster as the rising sun in the east (210). The innumerable sun-gods of world mythology provide a blueprint for epic heroes by vanquishing antagonists and projecting luminosity and grandiosity. Epic heroes, in turn, provide a blueprint for historical heroes. In Neumann’s words, “the dragon-slaying hero who represents the sun on its ‘night sea journey,’ or in other cultures the moon, is the archetypal exemplar and guiding figure of all historical heroes” (*The Origins* 337). As both a sun-god and a dragon slayer, Apollo’s associations with archetypal heroism are irrefutable.

and so their Apollonian armour is breached, leading to Dionysian disintegration. According to Greek myth, the Titans dismembered Dionysus when he was a child (Nietzsche 59; Otto 107).¹³ Citing this narrative, Nietzsche posits that the Dionysian outlook is to “regard the state of individuation as the source and original cause of suffering, as something objectionable in itself” (59). Nietzsche maintains, moreover, that this god of wine and drama represents the “mysterious original Unity,” an unindividuated state that human beings can enter through either horror or rapture:

[T]remendous *horror* . . . grips man when he suddenly loses his way among the cognitive forms of the phenomenal world, as the principle of reason in any of its forms appears to break down. When we add to this horror the blissful rapture which rises up from the innermost depths of man, even of nature, as a result of the very same collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the *Dionysian*. (22)

Dionysus, then, represents the extremes of “tremendous horror” and “blissful rapture” which, apparently opposite in their concentrations of either negative or positive emotion, exist on trajectories that finally come full circle and meet in the egoless state of “complete self-oblivion” (Nietzsche 22). The narrative arcs of Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes follow disintegrating paths toward *tremendous horror* and *blissful rapture*, culminating in climactic ego-obliteration. This dissertation, while accepting the established dichotomy between the epic heroism of *testimonio* and the antiheroism of Castellanos Moya’s fiction, will overlay onto it the Apollo–Dionysus dichotomy, which

¹³ Dionysus was subsequently reborn.

is essentially the divide between individuation and disintegration, to examine the emotional breakdowns of Castellanos Moya's antiheroes.

1.2 Emotions of Dionysian Disintegration

Camille Paglia states the symbolic difference between Dionysus and Apollo succinctly: "Melting and union are Dionysian; separation and individuation, Apollonian" (*Sexual Personae* 30). In terms of the psyche, Dionysus represents the self's *fusion with* the non-self, whereas Apollo represents the self's *separation from* the non-self. Susan Beth Miller's *Emotions of Menace and Enchantment: Disgust, Horror, Awe, and Fascination* (2017) is germane to the present study because she examines how these four emotions "impact the experience of self-boundary," affirming, "All four feelings speak to the boundary around the self, to whether we stiffen that boundary, relax it or worry about its fraying" (i). According to her schema, the emotions of menace are those imbued with a desire to close the self-boundary, namely disgust and horror. On the other hand, the emotions of enchantment, namely fascination and awe, are imbued with a desire to open that same boundary. Disgust is the only "Apollonian emotion" because it does not involve the penetration of the self-boundary by an external stimulus; the other three are "Dionysian emotions" for the opposite reason.¹⁴ "Horror," in Miller's analysis, is an expansive term that overlaps with Nietzsche's *tremendous horror* at its extreme, whereas "fascination" and "awe" signify muted tones of Nietzsche's *blissful rapture*; fascination is strongly muted, and awe less so.

¹⁴ "Apollonian emotions" and "Dionysian emotions" pertain to the present study. Miller does not apply this dichotomy.

A disgusting object of perception remains entirely *other* to the one who feels disgust. According to Miller, “Disgust is an emotion that stiffens the experience of boundary around the self and it associates expulsive energy with that boundary” (27). Paglia, for her part, brings disgust into the context of the Nietzschean dichotomy when she states, “Dionysus is the all-embracing totality of mother-cult. Nothing disgusts him, since he contains everything that is. Disgust is an Apollonian response, an aesthetic judgment,” and she adds that “[a]estheticism insists on the Apollonian line, separating objects from each other and from nature. Disgust is Apollonian fear at a melting borderline” (*Sexual Personae* 93). Paglia’s words, in addition to affirming that disgust is Apollonian, indicate that the glorified self-sufficiency Pleitez Vela and other scholars have associated with conventional models of heroic masculinity falls decisively to the Apollonian side, away from the Dionysian “all-embracing totality of mother-cult.”

Castellanos Moya’s *El asco* abounds with the emotion after which it is named. The English translation of this novella is *Revulsion* (2007), a word which is synonymous with disgust. Despite its affective theme, *El asco* has consistently been examined in academia through sociopolitical lenses, rather than through psychologically or affectively toned lenses. The most notable exception to this trend is Nanci Buiza’s article “On Aesthetic Experience and Trauma in Postwar Central America: The Case of Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *El asco* and Claudia Hernández’s *De fronteras*” (2018). This text, however, is centred on the emotional response of trauma while eschewing that of disgust. In subchapter 3.1 of the present study, disgust and horror will be examined as central features of Vega’s experience in *El asco*. In subchapter 3.2, the closely related, self-

boundary-fortifying emotion of contempt will be incorporated into the analysis of Laura Rivera's experience in *La diabla en el espejo*.

Contrary to disgust, the remaining three emotions in Miller's study can be characterized as Dionysian because they signify an absorption rather than an expulsion of stimuli. The first of these, horror, differs from disgust in that the negatively toned object of perception implicates the self. In Miller's words, "horror means that what is inside the border – fully or partially – is now awful due to an invasion or overtaking. Like someone whose meal is hard to digest, I am laboring to absorb what is now within me. Disgust, in contrast, refuses integration and insists that what is bad remains outside the self-border" (7).

Elsewhere, she explains the difference between horror and disgust by stating that "[i]f something is experienced as fully entering and overtaking the self, horror is a likely response. If the being or thing is conceived as containable and as threatening the self from outside, so that I can label and reject it as bad, disgust is likely" (75). Horror, which Nietzsche sees as offering a glimpse into the Dionysian, is the most noteworthy emotion in Castellanos Moya's oeuvre, appearing ubiquitously and rising to a fever pitch in the climaxes of several works.¹⁵

Miller notes that horror can be elicited by the uncanny, a phenomenon that Freud examines in his celebrated essay "Das Unheimliche" (1919). For Freud, the uncanny denotes a disturbing manifestation of something that was once familiar but has become unfamiliar through repression ("The Uncanny" 74, 79). He addresses its causal

¹⁵ We have seen that disenchantment is also essential to Castellanos Moya's oeuvre, so it is worth noting that the term "disenchantment" denotes the author's historical-political perspective more than it reflects his characters' emotions.

relationship to horror when he states that it is “undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror” (“The Uncanny” 59). Multiple scholars have detected the presence of the uncanny, and cited Freud’s conceptualization of it, in Castellanos Moya’s fiction. For Celina Manzoni, Castellanos Moya’s four short stories under the subtitle “Cuatro textos procaces” in the collection *Con la congoja de la pasada tormenta* (1995) are uncanny in their tendency to “sacar a la luz aquello que sería deseable o preferible mantener escondido” (“Una narrativa” 457). Carlos Abreu Mendoza asserts that the uncanny is present in *El asco* and *Insensatez* because this pair of texts, similarly, “saca a la superficie las heridas no resueltas de la opresión y la violencia” (172), referring to the violence and oppression of wartime Central America. Tiffany D. Creegan Miller perceives the uncanny in a more specific instance: the moment in *Insensatez* when the protagonist fails to recognize himself in the mirror. Edmundo Paz Soldán, for his part, links the uncanny to all of Castellanos Moya’s fiction when he refers to the author as “nuestro gran narrador de lo siniestro [the uncanny], del trauma latente que espera, agazapado, su momento para cobrarse una nueva víctima” (“El imposible retorno”). The present study’s exploration of horror in Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre will form new links between his antiheroes and the uncanny.

The uncanny is not the only motif in Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre with a cause-and-effect relationship to horror; trauma is the other. The uncanny is one of the causes of horror, and horror is one of the causes of trauma. Susan Beth Miller elucidates these relationships:

The cruelty, the heartlessness, the deformation of the human being leads to days of horror and their abiding effect, trauma. Trauma can occur without horror. Simple terror may precipitate it, as may experiences bathed in numb

emotions, but horror is a common antecedent of trauma. When horror has traumatized, it often persists in troubling memory or spawns new horrors that belong to the unsafe world in which one now abides. (80)

This notion of an *unsafe world* is essential to Castellanos Moya's many horrified, traumatized antiheroes who live in constant fear of violence.

Multiple scholars have analyzed the trauma that arises in Castellanos Moya's narratives, especially in *Insensatez* which incorporates accounts of the Guatemalan genocide. Buiza, for example, has published the article "Trauma and the Poetics of Affect in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez*" (2013), and Valeria Grinberg Pla has published "Memoria, trauma y escritura en la posguerra centroamericana: Una lectura de *Insensatez* de Horacio Castellanos Moya" (2007). Looking beyond *Insensatez*, this study will demonstrate that trauma can be found, with horror as its antecedent, in the lives of Erasmo Aragón, José Zeledón, Laura Rivera, and Edgardo Vega. These Salvadoran antiheroes, who do not live through the Guatemalan genocide, are traumatized by political and criminal violence in El Salvador.

Awe and fascination, the two emotions of enchantment, constitute willing openings of the self-boundary. They can be thought of as examples of what Jung calls "Dionysian expansion" (*Psychological Types* 132) because they connect the ego with the outer world, but they are simultaneously Dionysian disintegrations insofar as they involve an unbinding of the bound ego. For Miller,¹⁶ awe is the "imbibing emotion" (109) through

¹⁶ Throughout this dissertation, the lone surname "Miller" is used to refer to Susan Beth Miller, not Tiffany D. Creegan Miller.

which a person “becomes, simply, the act of receiving what is there. One is ‘in’ awe. While feeling awe, one absorbs something of the world and is concurrently absorbed or ‘in’ one’s receptive state” (110). Miller asserts that awe approaches the “oceanic feeling” described by Freud (*Civilization* 11), although awe is not as complete in its erasure of the boundary between self and non-self (111–112). According to Freud,

originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it (*Civilization* 15).¹⁷

This all-embracing feeling is lost as the embryonic ego gains consciousness and “detaches itself from the external world” (*Civilization* 15), an individuation process which, as Erich Neumann¹⁸ outlines in *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1954), was undertaken by humankind’s primitive ancestors and is repeated in the development of every infant.¹⁹ For Neumann, the universal hero myth is an allegory for this process: “The story of the hero, as set forth in the myths, is the history of this self-emancipation of

¹⁷ Freud’s writings and those of such subsequent scholars as Hartmann (1958), and Mahler et al. (1975) have observed, moreover, that the infant’s unformed identity partakes in a mother–child dyad before full individuation. These observations, whether drawn from verifiable science or folk psychology, shed light on the ancient Greeks’ associating Dionysus with both “the mysterious original Unity” (Nietzsche 23) and with mother–cult (*Sexual Personae* 93, *The Origins* 90). Dionysus, in a sense, remains in the embrace of the mother–child dyad, which also explains Paglia’s interpretation of the Apollonian attitude, contrary to the Dionysian, as a patriarchal overthrow of matriarchy (*Sexual Personae* 12).

¹⁸ Erich Neumann was Carl Jung’s student and “anointed intellectual heir” (“Erich Neumann: Theorist” 3).

¹⁹ Roberts Avens explains the infant’s individuation as follows: “We begin life in a state of undifferentiated wholeness and nondistinction. Then, just as a seed grows into a plant, the individual develops into a fully differentiated and unified personality” (199).

the ego, struggling to free itself from the power of the unconscious” (*The Origins* 127).²⁰ Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes invert this archetypally heroic blueprint in that they become overwhelmed by horror (in the cases of Aragón, Zeledón, Vega, and Rivera), by awe (in Eduardo Sosa’s case), or by a combination of horror and awe (in the case of the unnamed protagonist of *Insensatez*), as the colossal forces of the external world swamp their relatively feeble minds.

According to Miller, “Fascination is the wish to take in through the comprehending mind, often aided by the senses. To see, to study, to learn, to master . . . The power of the object – the other – commands my interest. I want to know its every secret so that I and it are united, as gambler and cards, tattoo artist and ink” (135). Fascination does not open the self-boundary as widely as awe, in Miller’s view; she refers to fascination as pertaining to the “comprehending mind” whereas the experience of awe can “blow one’s mind” and surpass comprehension. Awe comes closer to opening the self-boundary as widely as it is opened in *blissful rapture*. Nevertheless, all these emotions, namely fascination, awe, and blissful rapture, constitute segments along the positively toned track toward Dionysian self-oblivion. At the same time, horror, and such related phenomena as the uncanny and trauma, mark the negatively toned track toward the same destination. For Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes, these two tracks, positive and negative, reverse the process of assembly line conveyor belts whereon incomplete entities are made whole; the tracks of Dionysian disintegration are conveyor belts on which intact entities are destroyed. In this

²⁰ Neumann’s reference to the ego freeing itself “from the power of the unconscious” and Freud’s reference to the ego detaching itself “from the external world” are descriptions of the same process insofar as the mental state that precedes individuation is an unconscious unity with the external world.

dissertation, these characters' emotional breakdowns will be analyzed, in part, by maintaining a dialogue between Susan Beth Miller's book and Horacio Castellanos Moya's oeuvre.

1.3 The Jungian Shadow

Esas categorías, que nos ubican en un bando y nos dan sentido de pertenencia en la vida, son la fachada de la casa que es cada ser humano, la fachada que nos impide ver lo que está dentro, lo que se tiene en las habitaciones y en los rincones poco iluminados, lo que se esconde en los armarios. La literatura, aquella que se arriesga y se asume como una aventura del conocimiento, lo que hace es entrar a la casa que es cada ser humano, rebasar esa fachada de las identidades definidas, contar lo que se encuentra adentro de las habitaciones, contar lo que se descubre en los armarios, bajo los sofás y las camas. La literatura intenta iluminar las motivaciones ocultas, secretas, a veces para el mismo personaje. — Horacio Castellanos Moya (*Roque Dalton* ch. 13)²¹

Miller's analysis of emotions neatly explains alterations in one's self-boundary due to the ego's response to external stimuli, but it cannot adequately explain why the generally stable perimeter of an adult ego has been demarcated as it has, nor does it elaborate on the unconscious psychic contents that lie just beyond the self-boundary and nevertheless

²¹ This electronic book, *Roque Dalton: Correspondencia clandestina y otros ensayos* (2021), has no page numbers and no chapter numbers. The four parts of the introductory essay are read, in this study, as four separate chapters; therefore, chapter 13 is "El asesinato político y sus derivaciones."

influence an individual's behaviour. Only obliquely does Miller reveal the dark corners and crevices of the psyche that are so vital to Castellanos Moya's fiction. For a more direct view of the dark sides of individuals and of humanity, especially the violent contents of these unilluminated sides, the present study will examine Castellanos Moya's antiheroes in relation to Jung's concept of the "shadow."

Violence is pervasive and multifaceted in Castellanos Moya's oeuvre. It is expressed in its most gruesome forms by guerrilla fighters, army combatants, political police officers, drug enforcement agents, gang members, and even by everyday people who have no associations with violent groups. Castellanos Moya shows violence to have such underlying causes as governmental corruption, political animosity, oppression, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism, but his writing also plumbs the depths of the problem even deeper, to its very core, and it is there that we find the mark of Cain which denotes humankind's innate propensity toward violence. In his essay "Violencia y ficción en Latinoamérica: ¿círculo vicioso o marca de Caín?" Castellanos Moya answers this titular question by characterizing violence in Latin America as both a vicious circle and as an expression of the mark of Cain. His concluding statement praises the capacity of literature to plunge below the sociopolitical plane of analysis and below the artifices of civilization, down into the primordial essence of humankind which contains ineradicable violence.

[L]a ficción siempre tratará de ir más a fondo —eso es lo suyo—, de hacer esas incisiones verticales que con tanta maestría hizo Rulfo, a fin de detectar y reflejar esas otras violencias que se esconden en el corazón del hombre, que se parapetan en la máscara de la respetabilidad, que se refrenan bajo el rictus

tolerante del ciudadano civilizado, pero que una vez los controles colapsan salen a la superficie abruptamente, contundentes, como ha sucedido tantas veces en la historia y seguirá sucediendo. Es ahí donde está la llamada marca de Caín, en el corazón de la especie, y si el escritor trata de bajar por esas pendientes escabrosas, a veces abismales, donde se esconden los nidos de esas otras violencias, su obra será también un reflejo de ello. (*Roque Dalton* ch. 11)

This “máscara de la respetabilidad” and the unacceptable impulses, such as violence, that hide behind it are analogous to what Jung calls the “persona” and the “shadow.” The persona is “a mask of the collective psyche, a mask that feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks . . . it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be” (*Two Essays* 157–158). In terms of the Nietzschean dichotomy, the persona is an attempt to display one’s successful Apollonian individuation and belonging to the “world of Apollo [which] is made up of distinct moral individuals” (Smith xvi) while concealing the uncivilized contents of one’s Dionysian nature. For Jung, one’s uncivilized attributes are expelled by the ego beyond the self-boundary (to use Miller’s term) and into the unconscious where they form the shadow, “a sinister and frightful brother, our own flesh-and-blood counterpart, who holds and maliciously hoards everything that we would so willingly hide under the table” (*Two*

Essays 39).²² Jung insists that “the ‘other’ in us is indeed ‘another,’ a real [hu]man, who actually thinks, does, feels, and desires all the things that are despicable and odious” (*Two Essays* 35). He was especially attuned to the demonic impulses masked by civilized façades and abetted by ideologies because, in addition to being a psychoanalyst, he lived in Central Europe throughout the rise and fall of Nazism, observing the horrors in Germany and Austria from the safe vantagepoint of his native Switzerland. Castellanos Moya similarly kept a close eye on the atrocities of the Salvadoran Civil War from the well-informed Latin American hub that is Mexico City, where he lived and worked as a journalist and author from 1981 to 1991, initially supporting and then dissenting from the revolutionary movement.²³

The concept of the shadow is essential to Castellanos Moya’s worldview, a parallel with Jung that does not appear to be derived from any direct influence.²⁴ When Castellanos Moya received the Manuel Rojas literary prize in Chile in 2014, he declared, “El ser humano sigue siendo lo mismo: enraizado en la mentira, empeinado en negarse sus lados oscuros, en achacar al otro la culpa de lo que no vemos ni asumimos en nosotros mismos” (“Palabras de aceptación” 205–206), which echoes Jung’s observation that, in

²² Neumann interprets Cain, the sinister brother of Abel, as a personification of the shadow (*Depth Psychology* 138).

²³ The Jungian shadow is at the heart of the aphorism “the road to hell is paved with good intentions”; our egos tell us we are doing the right thing without accessing all the necessary information. Having observed the paradoxical murderousness of utopianism in El Salvador and around the world, Castellanos Moya is aware of such disconnects between consciously asserted, benevolent objectives and harsh realities: “Toda utopía trae una carnicería, una tendencia asesina. Eso es muy extraño; en toda utopía, en todo esfuerzo por imponer una utopía sobre la tierra, siempre hay unos crímenes feos de por medio. Hay una tendencia a matar a aquel que disiente de esa utopía” (“Los crímenes”).

²⁴ It is apparently impossible to find a single, direct reference to Jung in any of Castellanos Moya’s fiction, non-fiction, speeches, or interviews.

the modern world, “we still attribute to ‘the other fellow’ all the evil and inferior qualities that we do not like to recognize in ourselves. That is why we have to criticize and attack him” (*Modern Man* 142). In an interview with Laura Sillero, Castellanos Moya asserted that “todos arrastramos nuestra parte oscura, nuestra parte no dicha, nuestra parte a veces no conocida por nosotros mismos” (“Entrevista”); in another interview, he said “para cada uno de nosotros, como ser humano, hay una parte oscura de nosotros que no reconocemos y no nos gusta” (“Horacio Castellanos Moya. Rentrée Littéraire” 00:07:05 – 00:07:15). He views the creation of certain literary characters, moreover, as a confrontation with these unrecognized, unliked aspects of oneself:

Para escribir ciertos personajes necesita uno tener cierto sabor de la emoción que sienten, ¿no? Y es muy importante porque tienes que interiorizar, tienes que tener un fomento de meditación como ser humano y ver esas emociones oscuras que están dentro de ti mismo y que no sacas porque eres una persona civilizada, porque eres una persona educada. Tú sabes que adentro de ti en ciertas circunstancias habría una crueldad. (“La Sirvienta” 00:05:01 – 00:05:23)

Castellanos Moya’s literary meditations give rise to antiheroes who struggle against their shadows and who sometimes, through states of possession, undergo the unmasking of their personae as they enact the wiles of the sinister brothers and sisters they harbour within.

We have seen that the Apollonian impulse is the drive toward individuation and that the Dionysian impulse is the contrary pull away from individuation. Bearing this in mind

while reading Roberts Avens' summary of how the shadow is repressed, the Dionysian character of the shadow becomes evident:

This striving for self-fulfillment (or "consummate selfhood," according to C. H. Hall and V. J. Nordby) is called by Jung "individuation." It is an archetypal, viz., an inborn, process requiring no external stimulation. We are destined to individuate just as surely as the body is destined to grow. But as the body can become deformed and sickly because of inadequate diet or lack of exercise, so the personality can be deformed as a result of deficiencies in its experiences and education. For example, modern civilization provides inadequate opportunities for the shadow archetype to become individuated because in childhood our animal instincts are usually punished by parents. This leads to repression: the shadow returns to the unconscious layer of personality, where it remains in a primitive, undifferentiated state. When it occasionally breaks through the barrier of repression, the shadow manifests itself in pathological ways, for example, in the sadism of warfare and the crude obscenities of pornography. (199)

The shadow is Dionysian in its primitiveness and undifferentiation. It is an instinctual, animalistic part of the personality that recedes toward the unindividuated swamp of original unity.²⁵

²⁵ Modern, popular notions of the Dionysian might overlook its aspect of atavistic violence. Paglia argues that the term "Dionysian" has become "contaminated with vulgar pleasantries" (*Sexual Personae* 5), and, according to Otto, "No single Greek god even approaches Dionysus in the horror of his epithets, which bear witness to a savagery that is absolutely without mercy. In fact, one must evoke the memory of the monstrous horror of eternal darkness to find anything at all comparable. He is called the 'render of men'"

Jung dug more deeply into the concept of individuation than Nietzsche; it is a fundamental tenet of the former's psychoanalytic theory. "Individuation," for Jung, "means becoming an 'in-dividual,' and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization'" (*Two Essays* 173). His definition of the "self" is "a psychic totality and at the same time a centre, neither of which coincides with the ego but includes it, just as a larger circle encloses a smaller one" (*The Archetypes* 142). This "psychic totality" includes the shadow, and Jung therefore views the integration of ego and shadow as a key element of individuation. In one text, he describes individuation as "a 'mysterium coniunctionis,' the self being experienced as a nuptial union of opposite halves" (*Aion* 64). Archetypal heroes whose stories end in the universal motif of apotheosis, which literally means "to become a god," have symbolically confronted and conquered, tamed, befriended, or otherwise managed their dark sides; they are therefore self-realized. Castellanos Moya's antiheroes, contrarily, are antagonized by their shadows; Ricardo Roque Baldovinos observes that these characters are regularly compromised "por una serie de motivaciones oscuras y a menudo inconfesadas que lleva a los personajes a traicionarse ellos mismos" ("Un duelo" 49). Individuation is an "Apollonian integration" that makes the individual increasingly solid, grand, and enduring. Castellanos Moya's antiheroes' self-betrayals,

. . . 'the eater of raw flesh' . . . 'who delights in the sword and bloodshed'. Correspondingly we hear not only of human sacrifice in his cult but also of the ghastly ritual in which a man is torn to pieces" (Otto 113).

committed under the influence of the shadow, contribute to the contrary process of Dionysian disintegration.

1.4 Psychological Novellas and *Morong*

As psychological criticism with a focus on affect, this dissertation will emphasize the emotional breakdowns of Castellanos Moya's antiheroes. Nevertheless, both psychological and societal phenomena are omnipresent and interrelated in Castellanos Moya's oeuvre, and so they must be considered in tandem. The theoretical framework to be applied throughout the study, which is parameterized by the Nietzschean Apollo–Dionysus dichotomy and filled in with Miller's schema of emotions and Jung's concept of the shadow, will foster a thorough examination of Castellanos Moya's antiheroes' psyches. Castellanos Moya's novellas and his most recent full-length novel *Morong* feature antihero-narrators who will be the objects of analysis.²⁶ Namely, these antihero-narrators are Erasmo Aragón of *El sueño del retorno* and *Morong* who will be paired with José Zeledón of *Morong*²⁷ in Chapter Two, Edgardo Vega of *El asco* who will be paired with Laura Rivera of *La diabla en el espejo* in Chapter Three, and Eduardo Sosa of *Baile con serpientes* who will be paired with the unnamed protagonist of *Insensatez* in Chapter Four.

²⁶ The antihero-narrator Robocop of the novella *El arma en el hombre* will not be included as a primary object of analysis for reasons explained below. The novella *La diáspora* features various (mostly non-narrating) antiheroes whose analyses will be incorporated into subchapter 2.1.1.

²⁷ This list of antihero-narrators matches each antihero with the book(s) in which they narrate. Many of Castellanos Moya's antiheroes, however, appear in other texts in non-narrational roles. José Zeledón, for example, is featured in the short story "Némesis," the novella *El arma en el hombre*, and the novel *La sirvienta y el luchador*. Such non-narrational roles will be mentioned when applicable to the character analyses.

Multiple scholars have divided Castellanos Moya's oeuvre into two main cycles of novels.²⁸ In 1996, Castellanos Moya began a nine-year streak of punchy, postwar novellas with antihero-narrators: *Baile con serpientes* (1996), *El asco* (1997), *La diabla en el espejo* (2000), *El arma en el hombre* (2001) and *Insensatez* (2004). Andrés Pau refers to this grouping as Castellanos Moya's "novelas furiosas" ("La mirada furiosa"), which evokes their intensity and emotionality.²⁹ These narratives take place in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1990s, roughly at the time they were written, in the aftermath of those countries' civil wars and amidst the criminal violence that continued to ravage the region in the absence of political violence. The feelings Castellanos Moya expresses in these works are raw because his narrators, like himself, are trapped in the hell of recent history. The second cycle, composed of primarily full-length novels, tells the saga of the Aragón family of El Salvador: *Donde no estén ustedes* (2003), *Desmoronamiento* (2006),³⁰ *Tirana memoria* (2008), *La sirvienta y el luchador* (2011), *El sueño del retorno* (2013), and *Morongá* (2018). With these novels, Castellanos Moya begins to look further back into Central American history and his own family history, acquiring tones of reflectiveness, subtlety, and melancholy that are not present in the "novelas furiosas." These texts have a greater sense of spaciousness through both the

²⁸ This division is outlined in such articles as Andrés Pau's "La mirada furiosa de Horacio Castellanos Moya" (fourteenth paragraph), Vinodh Venkatesh's "'Yo no estoy completo de la mente': Ethics and Madness in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez*" (p. 228), and Misha Kokotovic's "El tiempo malo: guerra y posguerra en *La sirvienta y el luchador* de Castellanos Moya" (p. 135). In sorting Castellanos Moya's books, these scholars do not mention the five collections of short stories, the formerly obscure novel *La diáspora*, or, excepting Venkatesh, the somewhat obscure early novella *Baile con serpientes*.

²⁹ Pau presumably would have included *Baile con serpientes* in this grouping, but he only mentions Castellanos Moya's books that had been published in Spain as of 2009. *Baile* was published by Tusquets Barcelona in 2012.

³⁰ *Desmoronamiento* is different in that it focuses heavily on the married couple Lena Mira Brossa and Erasmo Mira Brossa of Honduras, whose daughter Teti marries into the Aragón family.

author's temporal distance from the action and the much longer timeframes of the narratives. *Tirana memoria*, for example, spans from 1944 to 1973 and incorporates anecdotes that go as far back as 1890 (325). The two most recent works, *El sueño del retorno* and *Morongá*, nevertheless, can be considered hybrids of the two cycles insofar as they continue the Aragón saga while bringing back the furious, antiheroic narration of the early novellas.³¹

In Castellanos Moya's essay "Variaciones sobre la novela corta," he confirms that he sees novellas, not full-length novels, as the ideal literary format for psychological exploration. "En la novela corta," he affirms, "el tema está más asociado al desarrollo psicológico del personaje y no tanto a la gran esfera social. El vasto fresco de la época es, entonces, ajeno a la novela corta; lo que importa es cómo vive el personaje, su desarrollo psíquico y emocional, dentro de esa época" (*Roque Dalton* ch. 12).³² The scope of the novella, then, is narrowed down from a society's historical situation to an individual's experience of that situation. He adds that "la novela corta es perfecta para concentrarse en una idea y sus implicaciones en el mundo, que la homogeneidad en la concepción y la intensidad narrativa posibilitan que en estas obras breves se exploren grandes preguntas sobre la identidad y la conciencia" (*Roque Dalton* ch. 12). Castellanos Moya uses this format to "get inside the head" of his characters and thereby adopt their view of life through the lenses of their temperaments and their historical, sociopolitical, and economic circumstances. It is therefore unsurprising that his novellas all feature a single first-

³¹ *El sueño del retorno*, at 178 pages, also marked a return to the novella format after a nine-year hiatus.

³² The twelfth chapter in *Roque Dalton* is the essay "Variaciones sobre la novela corta."

person narrator.³³ The full-length novel *Morongá* resembles Castellanos Moya's novellas because it is narrated by José Zeledón in part one and Erasmo Aragón in part two; it is constructed like two novellas stitched together.

In addition to being more psychological in their content, Castellanos Moya's novellas also differ in the way they are created. When Stephen Henighan asked Castellanos Moya how he creates the narrative voices found in such "novelas furiosas" as *El asco*, *La diabla en el espejo*, and *El arma en el hombre*, Castellanos Moya responded, "the voice has to ring in my head in an autonomous way, without connections to my ego and my vision of the world. It's as though I'd ceased to be myself and become the voice that is narrating, in the mind from which it emerges" ("An Interview"). This process is Dionysian insofar as Dionysus is the god who "enables you for a short time to *stop being yourself*" (Dodds 76). Dionysus is, moreover, the god of drama, and Castellanos Moya's writing process, as he describes it in his non-fiction *Envejece un perro tras los cristales*, acquires elements of a theatrical performance; speaking to himself in the second person, he says, "Si te vieras el rostro cuando escribes, las maromas de tu mente convertidas en gestos, muecas, poses, no escribirías lo que escribes" (ch. 1). Castellanos Moya's ego-diminishing fusion with the *other* is most pronounced in his novellas because they can be written in as little as two and a half weeks, a timespan which permits a perpetual state of fascination; such was the case for *Baile con serpientes* which Castellanos Moya claims to have written while "poseído" ("Nos hubiéramos matado" 101). He similarly claims to have written *El asco* while "intoxicated" by the spellbinding cadences of the Austrian writer Thomas

³³ *Baile con serpientes* also features a third-person narrator in parts two and three of its four parts.

Bernhard which are imitated by the antihero Edgardo Vega (“Horacio Castellanos Moya and Rory O’Bryen” 00:58:18 – 00:59:18). At the opposite creative pole of such texts is *Tirana memora*, a 358-page historical novel which took Castellanos Moya nearly three years and a great deal of research to write.³⁴ Such a work is not executed through *possession or intoxication*; it is crafted by a detached, sober creator who resembles an “Almighty God” more than a dancing, Dionysian demon. Castellanos Moya has described *Tirana memoria* as “un esfuerzo muy cerebral de cómo construir una novela” (“Conversaciones” 00:02:44 – 00:02:49), and this egoic element of cerebral effort is distinctly Apollonian, not Dionysian.

The variations in Castellanos Moya’s writing process are noteworthy because they are reflected in the heroism and antiheroism of his characters. When the author becomes possessed or intoxicated by the work, his protagonists inevitably get sucked into vortices of chaotic emotion; Castellanos Moya’s own Dionysian disintegrations of an artistic sort are echoed in his antiheroes’ Dionysian disintegrations of an existential sort. Contrarily, when Castellanos Moya enters a more distant, contemplative, Apollonian mode, his protagonists become sounder of mind. “Quizás sólo en *Tirana memoria*,” the author observes, “no aparece ningún personaje con una alteración nerviosa extrema” (“Nos hubiéramos matado” 107). In the first four novels of the Aragón saga, his protagonists even acquire glimmers of greatness that are nonexistent among his earlier antiheroes. Lena Mira Brossa of *Desmoronamiento*, El Vikingo of *La sirvienta y el luchador*, Pericles Aragón of *Tirana memoria*, and Alberto Aragón of *Donde no estén ustedes* all, at

³⁴ The large scope of this literary project is fleshed out by the “Nota del autor” on pages 357 and 358 of *Tirana memoria*.

one time, possessed grandiosity that has been diminished through falls from grace. Prior to their respective downfalls, Lena Mira Brossa was “una mujer importante, periodista y poeta, abanderada de la causa nacionalista” in Honduras (*Desmoronamiento* 182), El Vikingo was a beloved *lucha libre* star in El Salvador, and Pericles and Alberto Aragón were well-connected and influential figures in Salvadoran politics. Haydée Baldoni of *Tirana memoria*, for her part, is the only Castellanos Moya protagonist who could unreservedly be called heroic; she becomes an unlikely community leader who helps to overthrow the Salvadoran dictator Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in 1944. The present study will eschew analyses of the heroic Haydée and Castellanos Moya’s more ambiguously heroic/antiheroic protagonists in favour of his full-fledged antiheroes.

Pepe Pindonga, who narrates the second part of *Donde no estén ustedes*,³⁵ and Robocop, the narrator of *El arma en el hombre*, are full-fledged antiheroes, but they are not subjects of Dionysian disintegration. Pindonga is overwhelmed emotionally at the beginning and end of his narrative journey, first when he is abandoned by his girlfriend Rita Mena and second when he is abandoned by his new love interest Margot Highmont, but his distress is characterized by feelings of sadness and anger which do not obliterate the self-boundary; these feelings only manifest a heightening of desires and fears that are already harboured within the ego. Pindonga is a static character in that, despite emoting a great deal, he never transforms. In *El arma en el hombre*, the Salvadoran army and its US instructors and financiers have somehow transformed the narrator-protagonist, formerly known as Juan Alberto García, into the efficient, cyborg-like assassin known as Robocop.

³⁵ Pepe Pindonga also appears, as a secondary character, in *La diablo en el espejo* and the short stories “Una pequeña libreta de apuntes” and “Con la congoja de la pasada tormenta.”

This transformation, however, precedes the main plot, and so Robocop appears to the reader as an unfeeling, unreflective, unchanging, killing machine whose conflict with society is foremost in the narrative. Any inner conflict he might have endured is over and done with.³⁶

Castellanos Moya's antiheroes have antecedents dating back to the origins of the modern novel. Europe's first modern novels belong to the Spanish picaresque genre which produced two models of antiheroism: the standard picaro and Don Quixote. The standard picaro is a born outsider, often a street urchin or buffoon, who seems to be descended, metaphorically speaking, from the mythological trickster. Pepe Pindonga, whose very name smacks of buffoonery, adheres to this first model of antiheroism. Robocop, for his part, manifests the standard picaro's combination of outsider status in society with centrality in the narrative, and he adds archetypally villainous traits as well as characteristics of the cyborg, a figure popularized in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and later science-fiction. As misfits and static characters, standard picaros and their successors in Western literature are more in conflict with mainstream society than with themselves. The second model of antiheroism is a shift from the static to the dynamic, and from external to internal conflict. Don Quixote, despite resembling other Spanish Golden Age antiheroes as an outsider to society, and despite his countless buffoonish moments, is not a *born* outsider; he revolutionized antiheroism by becoming an outsider through a process of primarily internal conflict. The mild-mannered Alonso Quijano is fascinated by chivalric romances and in awe of the archetypal hero as personified by

³⁶ The Dionysian disintegration of Juan Alberto García (not Robocop), which is alluded to obliquely in *El arma*, will be examined in subchapter 3.2.4.

Amadís de Gaula and other knights in shining armour; in his enchantment, he becomes possessed by his outlandish, anachronistic alter ego Don Quixote de la Mancha. The self-boundary-defying relationship between Quijano and Quixote, between ego and alter ego, which engenders a divide between perception and reality, is a prototype of Dionysian disintegration. *Don Quixote* presaged the antihero's psychic fragmentation that came to the fore with the nineteenth century proliferation of such split-personality protagonists as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dorian Gray, Wagner the werewolf, and Dostoevsky's underground man, Raskolnikov, and Golyadkin. The protagonists of Castellanos Moya's novellas (except *El arma en el hombre*) and of his novel *Morongá* adhere to this second model of antiheroism. Whereas standard picares like Lazarillo de Tormes and Guzmán de Alfarache illustrate struggles in the sociological realm, Castellanos Moya's antihero-narrators, like Cervantes's ingenious hidalgo, take readers into the human psyche which is fraught with mysteries and contradictions.

Chapter 2

2 Diasporic Orphans: Erasmo Aragón and José Zeledón

Erasmo Aragón and José Zeledón, the two antihero-narrators of *Morongá*, live in a heroless world of gloom and paranoia. They hail from El Salvador, a country that has seen the assassinations of such exalted figures as Roque Dalton (1935–1975), Archbishop Óscar Romero (1917–1980), and Ana María Mérida Anaya Montes (1929–1983), better known as Comandante Ana María. The deaths of these great figures in a mere eight-year timespan made orphans of the left-leaning masses, including Aragón and Zeledón. In the two antiheroes' intertextual narratives, however, they are also orphaned in other ways: Aragón's father is shot dead by political rivals when Aragón is just eleven years old; Zeledón, for his part, grows up with no knowledge of his father, raised by a single mother whom he accidentally kills while performing a mission for the guerrilla organization Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (FPL) in the beginnings of the civil war. The theme of orphanhood in their narratives gives rise to an air of helplessness and hopelessness. They fit a description of Castellanos Moya's characters given by Kokotovic: "son arrastrados por el torbellino de los acontecimientos históricos, como si estuvieran predestinados a desempeñar el papel que les tocó en la tragedia nacional y familiar" ("El tiempo malo" 137). The forces of tragedy are too great for them to overcome.

Aragón and Zeledón's residence in the United States in 2010 represents the Salvadoran diaspora that began during the civil war and continues up to the present day. This mass

exodus is partly due to a societal phenomenon that Castellanos Moya calls “el reciclamiento de la violencia” whereby the political violence of the war was recycled into criminal violence in the postwar era because the national government did not create viable routes of reintegration into civil society for the countless ex-combatants (*Breves palabras* 56). In terms of citizens’ safety, El Salvador has not improved much since the end of the civil war; it is currently overrun with such gangs as the Mara Salvatrucha. Countless Salvadorans view migration to the United States as the only means to escape violence and economic hardships. One of Castellanos Moya’s criticisms of El Salvador likens its citizens to orphaned or disowned children:

Un país cuya patología principal es expulsar a su propia gente semeja a un padre o madre cruel que echa a sus hijos a la calle, para que se conviertan en eso, en «niños de la calle», que sólo puedan sobrevivir víctimas de la explotación en trabajos ingratos, o de la limosna, o del hurto. (*Roque Dalton* ch. 6)

Moronga reiterates the uprootedness of the protagonists of *La diáspora* which was written three decades earlier. Boix affirms that “entre *La diáspora* y *Moronga* parece trazarse un arco: ambas historias hablan de salvadoreños que debieron abandonar su país” (“Horacio Castellanos Moya. ‘En América Latina’”).³⁷ This intertextual arc underscores the prolongation of El Salvador’s collective struggles since the civil war, struggles that are personified by Aragón and Zeledón.

³⁷ In the bibliography, Boix’s text is cited under the name of her interviewee: Castellanos Moya.

The two antiheroes of *Morongá* belong to the age cohort of Castellanos Moya and the writers of the disenchanted generation. Aragón self-exiles in Mexico in 1980 as a young adult of roughly twenty years of age; he avoids the physical violence but not the psychological damage of the civil war. Zeledón joins the FPL in 1979 as an adolescent, and he remains a guerrillero until the end of the conflict in 1992; he too manages to get through the war years without any severe physical injuries, but his psyche is also permanently scarred. In *Morongá*, the two men coincidentally live in the same fictional Wisconsin college town, Merlow City, as they approach their fiftieth birthdays. Despite their geographical and temporal distance from the Salvadoran Civil War, they remain haunted by the memory of it. Ronald Sáenz Leandro has observed how they have contrary ways of dealing with these haunting memories: “Zeledón y Aragón representan las dos caras de una misma moneda. Mientras que el primero prefiere huir, olvidar y pasar desapercibido en lo que parece ser su nueva vida de ‘fugitivo por vocación’, Aragón es un personaje anclado al pasado” (348). Aragón explores memory, whereas Zeledón evades it, but this does not mean that the former enjoys digging into the past; he is frequently horrified by what he disinters during his masochistic excavations. He even states at one point: “la curiosidad es engendradora de todos los males” (*Morongá* 288). Indeed, both protagonists are unravelled by horror. For Aragón, Dionysian disintegration culminates in a nervous collapse; for Zeledón, it culminates in an anxiety attack.

2.1 Erasmo Aragón

Aragón is an intertextual character who appears in three of Castellanos Moya’s works. First, he emerges in the novel *Desmoronamiento* which, as it tells the story of his mother

and maternal grandparents, mentions aspects of his infancy in Honduras, his childhood in El Salvador, and his epoch as a young journalist living in Mexico City—biographical details that match those of the author Horacio Castellanos Moya. In effect, Aragón is a fictional alter ego of Castellanos Moya (Abreu Mendoza 178; Brignole 183; Zavala 329). Aragón's second appearance comes as the antihero of the novella *El sueño del retorno* in which he plans his return to El Salvador from Mexico in 1991, following a decade of living abroad as a journalist, as the Salvadoran government and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)³⁸ negotiate peace accords. Finally, nineteen years later in *Moronga*, Aragón is a professor of Spanish at Merlow College in Wisconsin, which mirrors Castellanos Moya's ongoing professorship at the University of Iowa, also in the American Midwest, where he teaches creative writing in Spanish. In both *El sueño* and *Moronga*, Aragón is a “hot” or “heated” narrator who resembles Edgardo Vega, Laura Rivera, and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*, with his volcanic eruptions of emotion that sizzle down the page like lava in long, unstoppable paragraphs. His intertextual journey is a rollercoaster of anxiety and paranoia that finally goes off the rails with his nervous collapse.

The present subchapter on Erasmo Aragón responds to four questions related to this tragic antihero. First, who are the prototypes of Aragón in *La diáspora*, and how are they affected by the death of Roque Dalton? Second, how is Aragón's Jungian shadow represented in *El sueño del retorno*? Third, what role does Aragón's doctor Don Chente

³⁸ The FMLN was formed on 10 October 1980 through the conglomeration of five left-wing organizations, two of which were the FPL and the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP).

play in his antiheroism in *El sueño del retorno*? Fourth, what are the psychological effects of El Salvador's democratic transition of the early 1990s on Aragón?

2.1.1 *La diáspora* and the Death of Roque Dalton

Mi generación es una generación que con el asesinato del poeta [Roque Dalton] tuvo la sensación de quedarse huérfana. Era el escritor que había llegado más lejos, en términos literarios. Y de pronto muere de esa manera. Un nicaragüense tiene a Rubén Darío; siguen existiendo esos símbolos de identidad. Pero cuando a tu padre literario lo mataron tus compañeros de lucha hay una sensación de desamparo. — Horacio Castellanos Moya (“Horacio Castellanos Moya. ‘En América Latina’”)

Roque Dalton was a Salvadoran poet and communist who was beloved in the country's overlapping literary and revolutionary communities for his “resistance literature” (Buiza, “Trauma and the Poetics” 153). In Castellanos Moya's opinion, Dalton is El Salvador's most important poet (“Meet the Author” 00:28:07 – 00:28:11). According to Cortez, “Roque Dalton ha sido mitificado, se ha convertido en el héroe revolucionario” (*Estética* 113). Dalton clandestinely joined the guerrilla organization *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP) in December of 1973 (Castellanos Moya, *Roque Dalton* ch. 1), but, on 10 May 1975, was murdered by his own comrades under the false accusation of being a spy for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States. Death is one of the principal causes of horror in Castellanos Moya's oeuvre; the deaths of Olga María de Trabanino and Albertico Aragón, for example, ripple through various books with horrifying effects. Death can leave a void for those who go on living in landscapes that

suddenly seem desolate and in bodies that suddenly seem hollow. Such was the case for the writers and revolutionaries who were Dalton's orphans. Miller explains the link between death and horror:

Death of a deeply loved individual is a form of exposure to an unsustaining environment. After such a loss, the remaining world is so depleted of life's essentials that it becomes a place of horror. The person feels, I am living where I cannot bear to live . . . Such grief is the psychic equivalent of subsisting in a village blasted by a typhoon or a house with no food. (85)

Dalton's assassination is an early example of the putrefaction within the Salvadoran revolutionary movement, and it is a central motif in Castellanos Moya's debut novella *La diáspora* (1989). Three of the novella's four protagonists, namely Juan Carlos, Gabriel, and El Turco,³⁹ have abandoned the movement and self-exiled in Mexico. These dissenters are precursors to Erasmo Aragón who revisits the theme of revolutionary putrefaction as an antihero-narrator in *El sueño del retorno* and *Morongá*. Aragón, like these protagonists of *La diáspora*, was allied to the FMLN at the beginning of the civil war, at a time when everybody had to take a side, and then he, like Gabriel, Juan Carlos, and El Turco, became horrified by the FMLN leaders' betrayals of their values and of their brothers and sisters in arms. These characters all meditate on Dalton's assassination, and Gabriel's meditations are particularly poignant. Gabriel is a middle-aged professor who has been working on a doctoral thesis based on the betrayal against Dalton (23).

³⁹ The other protagonist in *La diáspora* is Quique López. A brief examination of his narrative will be incorporated into subchapter 2.2.1.

En varias ocasiones, Gabriel trató de imaginarse lo que el poeta sintió al saber que sus propios camaradas, aquellos a quienes les había entregado su vida, se disponían a asesinarlo como a cualquier perro traidor. Entonces Gabriel experimentaba escalofríos y lo asaltaba la idea de que todo era una broma macabra, el colmo de lo grotesco, una tragedia de trascendencia universal.

(La diáspora 126)

According to Miller, “Often horror ensues from *seeing anew* what we thought we understood but now reconceive” (85). Pondering Dalton’s assassination, Gabriel undergoes a drastic reconceptualization of not only the revolutionary movement but the entire world; he comes to see everything as “una broma macabra.” A metaphysical rug has been pulled out from under him. Castellanos Moya does not write epics and he does not produce fictional heroes, but his rendering of the consequences of Dalton’s assassination has a certain grandiosity, and, as Basile observes, it emits Biblical overtones:

[El asesinato de Dalton c]onstituye una traición caínica al pacto que anuda a la comunidad revolucionaria, una “caída” del paraíso de la militancia, y una culpa (mancha) que dará lugar a la “diáspora” dentro de la izquierda armada. El tinte religioso del término “diáspora” —que ocupa el título— apunta, a partir del exilio del pueblo judío de Israel, a las diásporas de grupos religiosos o étnicos por el mundo luego de haber abandonado la Tierra Prometida. En esta línea, Castellanos Moya recupera la lengua sacra y el imaginario bíblico para expresar la profundidad y gravedad de este quiebre que provoca el desencanto y la pérdida del aura revolucionaria. (7)

The assassination, which came four years prior to the outbreak of civil war,⁴⁰ is given the weight of an original sin that portends the later proliferation of violence, of socialist infighting, and, as Basile notes, of migration. The desire to kill Dalton superseded fraternal bonds, just like Cain's desire to kill Abel in Genesis. Both fratricides are presented as what Miller calls a "category-bursting" phenomenon wherein "something new is formed by destroying an existing structure" (85). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Cain introduces human violence into the world, thereby nullifying the categorization of humans as nonviolent beings and stamping them with the irremovable mark of Cain. In *La diáspora*, the assassinations of Dalton and Comandante Ana María denote the end of revolutionary purity.

Castellanos Moya's debut novella conceptually groups the death of Dalton with the later deaths of Comandante Ana María and of Salvador Cayetano Carpio who was known as Comandante Marcial. These two commanders were the foremost leaders of the Salvadoran guerrilla when they died within a week of each other in 1983. According to the official story, Marcial arranged the murder of his second-in-command, Ana María, who was stabbed eighty-two times with an icepick by a guerrillero in Managua, Nicaragua on 6 April 1983; Marcial then committed suicide a week later, on 6 April

⁴⁰ The timing of Dalton's assassination, before the civil war, might prompt one to ask why Castellanos Moya, many of his characters, and others who objected to the assassination (whether in real life or in fiction) would support the guerrilla forces at the beginning of the war. Castellanos Moya addressed this question in an interview when he said, "El ejercicio de reflexión sobre el asesinato de Roque Dalton no era suficiente para desmontar el mecanismo emocional de que esos tipos [del ejército] que estaban enfrente eran los que estaban matando [...] a la gente que estaba en la calle" ("Conversaciones" 00:12:15 – 00:12:30). Objections to Dalton's assassination were overridden by powerful emotions, such as fear. Also, prior to the conglomeration of five distinct organizations into the FMLN, the ERP in which Dalton participated was singled out by some detractors as a uniquely corrupt left-wing organization.

1983, after his scheming had been discovered (*Roque Dalton* ch. 13). These events, often referred to as the “sucesos de abril,” are a sinister echo of the Dalton tragedy, and Gabriel attempts to enter the headspace of these historical figures as well:

Por una especie de vicio emocional, el profesor [Gabriel] trataba de imaginarse lo que habría sentido Ana María al descubrir que cada uno de los ochenta y dos picahielazos se los propinaba uno de sus compañeros; o lo que pasó por la mente de Marcial antes de pegarse el tiro en el corazón. Pero ya era inmune a esa clase de escalofríos. (*La diáspora* 128)

Gabriel has come to be immune to the chilling effects of such thoughts. We have seen that this character “experimentaba escalofríos” (126) when he used to ponder Dalton’s assassination, but his mental categorization of *heroic guerrilla forces* has burst and been replaced by the new category of *guerrilla forces that are capable of the worst treachery*.

For Juan Carlos, who is much younger than Gabriel and who participated in the guerrilla forces, the deaths of Ana María and Marcial flip his worldview upside-down. His reflections on the “sucesos de abril” exemplify the religious imagery of *La diáspora* and the horrifying notion that evil was lurking where he and other revolutionaries had perceived only goodness:

[C]uando comprendió que Marcial y Ana María estaban irreversiblemente muertos, Juan Carlos experimentó una desoladora sensación de orfandad, de desamparo, también fue víctima de un sentimiento de culpa, de pecado (porque los caínes estaban en sus propias filas). Se trataba de una enorme conspiración metafísica, que había movido fuerzas incontrolables,

insospechadas, y de pronto los había transformado de immaculados ángeles revolucionarios en vulgares seres humanos, tan criminales como sus adversarios. (107)

The immorality that proliferated in Juan Carlos's midst during the early years of the civil war continues to trouble his mind, though he has travelled far away, and it infects him with guilt. He cannot apply the mechanism of disgust by labelling the evil and banishing it beyond his self-boundary in a manner that is "muscular, expulsive, and quick" (S.B. Miller 73), as though spitting it out; instead, as one who is horrified, he must digest what he has experienced in a manner that is "absorptive and slow" (S.B. Miller 73). *La diáspora* dramatizes this arduous and incomplete digestion of the FMLN's moral downfall.

Horror is an agent of Dionysian disintegration, and formerly solid structures that held up Gabriel and Juan Carlos's self-identities as good revolutionaries have been dynamited by the category-bursting betrayals of the FMLN. El Turco also provides a prototype for the disintegrations undergone by Erasmo Aragón and other protagonists who appear in Castellanos Moya's later works. As a musician, El Turco travelled the world and performed propagandistic songs in support of the Salvadoran revolution prior to dissenting. His band "se convirtió en el representante artístico de la revolución salvadoreña" (152), and so his dissent is entangled in horror; he was one of the faces of the movement and cannot, therefore, push its insidious developments beyond his self-boundary. In the novella's concluding lines, he lies down to sleep following a bout of overdrinking and vomiting:

Quisiera dormirse de inmediato. Se acomoda, de lado, encogido, en posición fetal . . . lástima que le haya tocado de jefe el cerote de Fausto, tan parecidito al Jute, detesta a ese tipo de poetastros, el único que valía la pena en El Salvador [Roque Dalton] se murió, lo mataron, revolución de mierda, sólo asesinos le quedan . . . Y ahora los ronquidos, la placidez. (156)

This final passage is an inversion of archetypal heroism that encapsulates the mood of the entire book. The epic hero moves toward apotheosis, a state of self-perfection or self-realization, undergoing an “Apollonian integration” that is opposite to Dionysian disintegration. In the physical world, apotheosis is often symbolized by an imperishable, bronze statue, high over a city square, featuring a hero who stands tall, arms akimbo, chin up. El Turco contrasts with this heroic image by curling into a fetal position and yearning for sleep, a temporary extinguishment of the self and of the world, bringing *La diáspora* to a hero-less close. His Dionysian disintegration, like those of Gabriel and Juan Carlos, is wrought by horror; the revolutionary movement, *his* movement, that once soared on the poetry of Roque Dalton, is now “mierda,” infested with murderers. His horror drives him to alcoholism, sleep, and anything that will close the “Apollonian eye of contemplation” (*Sexual Personae* 6).

Dalton’s death is mentioned throughout Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre, but it only retakes its position as a central theme in *Moronga* which was published some twenty-nine years after *La diáspora*. Erasmo Aragón, like Gabriel, is a middle-aged Salvadoran professor and émigré who is studying the poet’s life and death. Aragón lives in a small town in Wisconsin and travels to Washington DC to read the CIA’s declassified files pertaining to Dalton. Unlike the deadened Gabriel whose meditations on the horrors of the

Salvadoran revolution have numbed him emotionally, Aragón suffers from an acute paranoia that only worsens as he goes deeper into his research. Castellanos Moya has said that Aragón's research "le devuelve algo que Aragón ya tiene como parte de su personalidad, que es la paranoia. El hecho de que Dalton haya sido asesinado por sus propios camaradas es un factor tremendo, porque ¿en quién se puede confiar? Le desata una crisis paranoica profunda" ("Horacio Castellanos Moya: 'La literatura penetra'"). Aragón's paranoia is a consequence of the trauma caused by Dalton's assassination. As Miller affirms, "Trauma often involves rethinking the human world. Faith in the decency of others is shattered and cannot be reconstituted. Human beings have become monsters" (80). Earlier examples of Aragón's paranoia arise in *El sueño del retorno* when he imagines that his uncle's girlfriend Iris is a Mexican spy (110) and when he states that he views all American reporters as potential CIA informants (130). Aragón is loath to trust anyone, and, in *Moronga*, the deviousness of humankind that manifests in his research begins to manifest and intensify in his social life as well. Studying the CIA documents, he learns that his old friend Fabián, who had once been a companion to Dalton and had presented himself as an advocate of the Salvadoran revolution, was really a double agent, a "Judas" (222) who had worked for the CIA for decades (223). This sinister discovery coincides with Aragón's rising concerns that the two women he has befriended in Washington DC, Molly and Mina, are also CIA agents responsible for keeping tabs on him while he digs into the hidden secrets of American-Salvadoran history. When his paranoia becomes unbearable, he turns to alcohol, like El Turco, repeating the drive toward self-annihilation that inverts the epic hero's drive toward self-realization. "Me dije que debía salir de inmediato a tomar una copa," he says, "si me quedaba en la

habitación me enloquecería, necesitaba anestesiarme” (251). The more the supportive structures of the world appear to decompose, the more he desires to be sucked into oblivion.

Although Dalton was murdered nearly fifty years ago, the horror is still palpable in Castellanos Moya’s most recent fiction. The perpetual impunity surrounding the crime indicates that El Salvador remains swamped in corruption. Miller asserts that a “morally disordered world” is a site of horror (88), and Castellanos Moya portrays such a world through the thoughts and emotions of Gabriel, Juan Carlos, El Turco, and Erasmo Aragón. In a 2018 interview, the author outlined how the Dalton case is emblematic of moral disorder in El Salvador:

Resolver el crimen de Roque Dalton implicaría . . . una muestra de que el sistema salvadoreño realmente está peleando contra la impunidad . . . La familia de Roque Dalton tiene un juicio levantado ante la corte interamericana de derechos humanos sobre el caso porque los asesinos de Roque Dalton están vivos, claro . . . El Estado salvadoreño amnistió, a finales de la guerra, todos esos crímenes. Creo que no ha cambiado su posición, el Estado, desde entonces, aunque los hijos han reabierto causas, aunque ha habido testigos que ante cámaras y en documentales cuentan que ellos estuvieron en la casa donde fue asesinado como encargados de seguridad, y dicen quien entró al cuarto a matarlo . . . Pese a eso, la justicia no ha operado. (“El asesinato de Roque Dalton” 00:00:18 – 00:01:33)

In summary, two horrifying, paranoia-inducing questions are raised by the death of Dalton. Firstly, if bullets are not only fired across enemy lines, but also between brothers and sisters in arms, who can be trusted? Secondly, if an overarching system of justice cannot be relied upon to step in and set matters right, who is safe? These queries, when brought to the fore without answers, eliminate feelings of security from the world, allowing order to crumble into chaos. Gabriel, Juan Carlos, El Turco, and Aragón are diasporic orphans of the Salvadoran revolutionary movement who lack faith in humanity, the comfort of a homeland, the guidance of a hero, and the reassuring belief that justice will be served when injustices are committed.

2.1.2 Aragón's Violent Shadow

El sueño del retorno takes place in Mexico City in 1991, as the peace accords between the FMLN and the ARENA are being arranged and Aragón is dreaming of his imminent return to El Salvador. The novella focuses on the disinterment of Aragón's buried psychic contents—both old memories and dark impulses—a process that is initiated by his new doctor, Chente Alvarado, who determines that hypnosis is the best method to liberate the repressed memories he believes are damaging Aragón psychosomatically. “Usted no quiere recordar casi nada,” Don Chente tells Aragón, “ése es el problema, pero eso que usted no quiere recordar lo corroe por debajo de su personalidad” (33). The doctor's objective is to illuminate the dark parts of his patient's psyche, and this dichotomy of psychological light and darkness arises throughout the text (32, 82, 94, 95). As Don Chente begins to succeed in his task, Aragón gains access to the unconscious, thereby reviving repressed memories and becoming aware of his shadow. Miller posits that the

horror in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is partly derived "from the moments in which Dorian must move the screen from his portrait and confront the grotesque image of himself" (83). Aragón undergoes a similar process to Dorian, gradually coming to see the unsightly aspects of himself in what Castellanos Moya has called an "emotional striptease" ("The Writer's Block"). At one point, Aragón reflects, "sin quererlo me confronté con partes repugnantes de mi ser que me negaba a aceptar" (65). The plot progression also resembles *Oedipus the King* in which the title character, little by little, comes to see himself as a patricidal, incestuous monster.

Aragón has remained in exile in Mexico City throughout the Salvadoran Civil War. Early in the war, he supported the FMLN through his work as a journalist,⁴¹ but he was never a guerrillero. He both perceives and presents himself as nonviolent; his *persona* is nonviolent, but the persona is not the whole of the personality, and his clinging to a nonviolent self-image only augments the potency of the violence he harbours within his shadow. According to Jung,

Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is . . . But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected, and is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness. At all events, it forms an unconscious snag, blocking the most well-meant attempts. (*Psychology and Religion* 76)

⁴¹ These biographical details are alluded to in *Desmoronamiento*.

Aragón is constantly at odds with himself; his thoughts, words, and deeds are frequently misaligned due to the subversive machinations of his shadow. This internal struggle is encapsulated by the novella's epigraph, a quotation from Paul the Apostle: "Porque lo que hago, no lo entiendo; ni lo que quiero, hago; antes lo que aborrezco, aquello hago" (7). Following his first hypnosis session with Don Chente, Aragón senses "el crecimiento de una sombra" (53) within him, and this growing shadow appears to be none other than the Jungian shadow, a composite of repressed urges that soon overtakes him. As he finds himself "bebiendo vodka tonic con la compulsión del poseído" (55) in an "estado de bestialidad" (55), he decides that he is going to murder Antolín, a theatre actor who slept with Aragón's girlfriend Eva a few months earlier. The Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz explains that people come to such rash decisions when under the sway of the shadow: "Before one has time to think, the evil remark pops out, the plot is hatched, the wrong decision made, and one is confronted with the results that were never intended or consciously wanted" (169). That Aragón does not really want to kill Antolín becomes apparent when Aragón's friend Mister Rábit, a former guerrillero, lies to Aragón that he has completed the task on Aragón's behalf, sending the reluctant co-conspirator into a tailspin of guilt and fear. "[Y]o estaba quebrado," Aragón narrates, "con las irrefrenables ganas de confesar atascadas en la garganta, el remordimiento carcomiendo el pecho, arrepentido y dispuesto al castigo" (64). Aragón is of two minds: he wants to kill, and he wants to comply with society's rules.

In a 2015 interview, Castellanos Moya articulated how violence is absent from Aragón's persona but nonetheless dwells within him:

Yo estoy seguro que si tú le preguntas al personaje . . . si él es violento, te va a decir que no, que no es violento. Te va a decir que él ha sido víctima de la violencia. Te va a decir que él ha sido testigo de la violencia. Pero nunca va a asumir que tiene la violencia adentro. Lo que hace el proceso de hipnosis es hacerlo ver de pronto que él es violento, que la violencia la tiene adentro.

(“Horacio Castellanos Moya. Rentrée Littéraire 2015” 00:10:46 – 00:11:34)

Violence is an unignorable element of Aragón’s outer life and an ineradicable element of his inner life. His buried memories of violence are brought to the fore through both hypnosis and Don Chente’s advice to write an autobiography for therapeutic purposes. His earliest childhood memory is of the night when his maternal grandfather’s political enemies detonated a bomb at his family’s house in Honduras; the explosion awakened his consciousness to the world, in all its traumatizing danger, and was immediately followed by wailing sirens and his own wails of dismay as his grandmother carried him away to safety (*El sueño* 69–73).⁴² According to Edmundo Paz Soldán, Castellanos Moya speaks of “nuestro imposible deseo de volver al momento antes del trauma” (“El imposible retorno”), which is especially meaningful in regard to Aragón whose life story literally begins with trauma. Aragón also recalls an episode in kindergarten in which he bashed in the head of a classmate with a wooden block, bloodying his screaming victim who was soon whisked away to an emergency clinic (74). *El sueño* emphasizes the pervasiveness of violence both for Aragón personally and for humankind generally. In reference to the latter, Aragón narrates, “la violencia está enraizada en el primer momento de la vida de

⁴² This anecdote is based on the author’s own experience as a toddler (*Breves palabras* 32).

todos y cada uno, por algo se entra a este mundo llorando y haciendo gemir de dolor a la madre” (70). In this novella as in the rest of Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre, violence is presented as a universal horror that can creep from the non-self into the self, from the warzone into the sanctuary, from the unconscious into the conscious, from the dormant state into the active state.

Following the abandoned plan to murder Antolín, Aragón is haunted by feelings of guilt, worrying that he really is a murderer without knowing it. This worry first comes to him in the form of a nightmare in which he suffers “la angustia producida por la culpa y el miedo de haber matado a alguien sin recordar el hecho ni a la víctima” (77). The recurring memory of this nightmare horrifies him and sets him on the path of Dionysian disintegration toward self-oblivion: “me producía una especie de vértigo, como si estuviese en el borde de un hoyo negro, cuya fuerza desconocida podría arrebatarme violentamente y llevarme a una realidad que yo no podía imaginar y cuya sola posibilidad me causaba el peor de los terrores” (77–78). Aragón fears that he is about to plummet into a dark void in which his self-image, as he has produced and maintained it, will be obliterated. Miller asserts, “Being nothing and of no account in the face of merciless forces is a common horror scenario” (84), and this metaphorical “hoyo negro” with “fuerza desconocida” into which Aragón stares represents his powerlessness and his potential nothingness as his sense of self is called into question.

One of Aragón’s many self-betrayals occurs when he visits his uncle Alberto who is also exiled in Mexico City. Alberto’s Salvadoran, communist friend Mario Varela is present at the gathering. Despite Aragón’s plan to leave early, he decides to pour himself another drink and stay longer: “me puse de pie y me dirigí a la mesa a servirme otro brandy,” he

narrates, “olvidando por completo mi propósito anterior de emprender la retirada” (111). He makes this imprudent decision as his drunkenness and his exchanges with Varela about Salvadoran politics are intensifying. The result is that Aragón ends up accusing Varela, without any evidence, of being complicit in the death of Aragón’s cousin Albertico—son of Alberto—who was murdered in 1980 by an *escuadrón de la muerte* and who, according to Aragón, could have been rescued by the FMLN. Aragón harms himself with these baseless accusations insofar as he embarrasses himself in front of his uncle and must escape the wrath of Varela who chases him out of the house.

Aragón’s hungover reflections following the fiasco at his uncle’s house epitomize his Dionysian disintegration. Like El Turco at the end of *La diáspora*, he curls into a fetal position (*El sueño* 121, 128) as memories of the previous night of blackout drunkenness surface from the depths of a “pozo oscuro” (122) and the trauma caused by his cousin’s death, which happened eleven years earlier, suddenly waves over him: “yo no había valorado en su justa dimensión las consecuencias que el asesinato de Albertico había tenido en mi psiquis . . . había permanecido agazapado sin que yo percibiera cuán profundo había calado en mi psiquis” (125). Albertico was killed in 1980, two months after his return to El Salvador from Costa Rica, and it motivated a traumatized Aragón to speedily go into exile (130). Remembering this, Aragón begins to fear that his own, imminent return to their country will have the same result; he is cast once again into the horrifying chaos that surrounded his cousin’s death. His smallness and vulnerability amidst overwhelming forces is exemplified by his bodily contraction and his nakedness as he lies down on the bed after showering:

Me hice aún más chiquito en la cama, en esa posición fetal, constriñéndome hasta convertirme en un nudo, aferrando con todas mis fuerzas un borde de la toalla entre mis manos, como si esta toalla fuera mi última posibilidad de salvación, la soga que se le tira al náufrago en medio del mar tempestuoso cuando se carece de salvavidas. (131)

Schopenhauer asserts that the individual, though situated in a “world of torment,” can remain calm by trusting to the *principium individuationis*, as a sailor in a raging sea trusts to his or her vessel. While Aragón remembers Albertico’s death and worries about the political violence in El Salvador claiming his own life, he fails to find the Apollonian serenity to which Schopenhauer refers, descending instead into a state of “autoconmiseración cercano al sollozo, como si el universo se hubiera confabulado en [su] contra” (124). He cannot trust the universe, nor can he trust himself because he continues to be antagonized by his own shadow. The dream of his return to El Salvador suddenly seems like another self-betrayal, and he curses his enthusiasm to leave Mexico as “ingenuo y hasta suicida” (128). The horrors of insecurity, of others’ untrustworthiness, and of his own untrustworthiness are so immense that he compresses himself into a small, hard knot, fists clenched around an imaginary lifesaver, attempting to stave off his disintegration.

2.1.3 Don Chente: The Wise Old Man

In hero mythology, there is a recurring archetype that Jung calls the “wise old man,” a mentor who guides the young hero along the path to self-realization, perhaps best exemplified by Merlin of the Arthurian legends. According to Jung, “The old man always

appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation” (*The Archetypes* 217), and such is the case in *El sueño* when Aragón, struggling with alcoholism, intense stomach pains, mutual infidelities in his relationship with his girlfriend Eva, and the unexpected departure of his longtime doctor to Catalonia, meets Don Chente, a liaison which soon comes to resemble a parodical hero–mentor relationship. It is parodical because of Aragón’s antiheroism (Don Chente has the attributes of a true mentor—as opposed to those of an “anti-mentor”). Jung asserts that the “old man . . . represents knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness, and intuition on the one hand, and, on the other, moral qualities such as goodwill and readiness to help” (*The Archetypes* 222), qualities which are evident in Aragón’s new doctor. Aragón marvels at the breadth of the Don Chente’s knowledge (108),⁴³ he alludes to the old man’s intuition when saying that he acts “como si hubiera tenido antenas” (24), and he accepts Don Chente’s goodwill through pro bono consultations. During these consultations, when Aragón is not hypnotized, Don Chente asks him tactful yet probing questions, which constitutes part of the archetypal mentor’s role: “Often the old man,” affirms Jung, “asks questions like who? why? whence? and whither? for the purpose of inducing self-reflection and mobilizing the moral forces” (*The Archetypes* 220). The antiheroic Aragón, however, does not allow his moral forces to mobilize, and he withholds from his doctor that he is planning to abandon his girlfriend Eva and daughter Evita forever when he makes his imminent return to El Salvador. Still, it remains unknown what Aragón says to his doctor while hypnotized, and this becomes a source of distress: “a nadie le gusta que otro sepa

⁴³ Chente Alvarado appears as a young man in *Tirana memoria*. The narrator Haydée Aragón describes him as “un muchacho bajito, serio, aplicado y muy curioso” (154).

más sobre uno que uno mismo, y eso era exactamente lo que estaba sucediendo” (52).

Don Chente holds the keys to the most intimate details of Aragón’s life; in addition to the doctor’s ability to communicate directly with his patient’s unconscious, he was also once a friend of Aragón’s grandparents in El Salvador, and so he likely possesses knowledge about Aragón’s family history and childhood that are mysteries to Aragón.

The symbolism of darkness and light⁴⁴ appears throughout *El sueño*. Aragón characterizes Don Chente as a bringer of light: “sólo él,” says Aragón, “conocía las sinuosidades del lado oscuro de mi ser y me podía dar las pistas para alumbrarlo, que de eso se trataba, de alumbrar el lado oscuro” (171). When Aragón slips into a hypnotized state for the first time, he describes the doctor’s voice as “una especie de pequeña luz parpadeando en una habitación oscura y vacía” (50). The dark room evokes Aragón’s unconscious, and Don Chente is the spirit capable of illuminating this mysterious space. The “*wise old man*,” affirms Jung, is “the superior master and teacher, the archetype of the spirit, who symbolizes the pre-existent meaning hidden in the chaos of life” (*The Archetypes* 35). Aragón becomes extremely dependent on his doctor as the latter comes to embody the meaning hidden in the chaos that permeates Aragón’s life.

Don Chente’s unexpected trip to El Salvador for a funeral provokes consternation in Aragón, and this feeling turns to downright horror when Aragón hears that his doctor has gone missing upon arrival in the Central American country that has yet to officially end its civil war: “Me quedé de una pieza . . . preguntándome hasta dónde y por qué había

⁴⁴ Jung interprets darkness and light in hero myths as symbols of the unconscious and consciousness, respectively (*The Archetypes* 167).

atado mi equilibrio psíquico y emocional a don Chente, cómo era posible que luego de apenas media docena de consultas yo dependiera tanto de un medico” (145). According to Miller, “To be horrified is to be transformed, perhaps transfixed, by a dark force so that all natural, fluid expression may fall from one’s face” (76). When Aragón hears the troubling news about his doctor over the phone, he is transfixed in this manner:

expressionless, motionless. He fears that Don Chente’s fate is going to befall him too; the awful situation has crossed his self-boundary and paralyzed him from within:

Permanecí sentado en el borde de la cama, desnudo, con la toalla sobre las piernas, demudado, ausente, como si acabase de recibir una bofetada ante la que no pudiese reaccionar, la mente en blanco, incapaz de hacer la mínima asociación, en una especie de limbo, que quizá la cantidad de alcohol que aún circulaba en mi sangre y el impacto de la noticia de la desaparición de mi médico habían producido un cortocircuito que hizo colapsar mi cerebro, una masacre de neuronas que me tuvo sumido en un estado cataléptico quién sabe cuántos minutos, que en esas circunstancias el tiempo se estira y se encoge a su antojo, hasta que por fin el rollo en mi mente logró destacarse, y entonces comencé a reaccionar, pasando del aturdimiento a un estado de extrema angustia, no sólo por lo que pudiera estar padeciendo don Chente en manos de los torturadores del ejército, sino porque comprendí que ése era el destino que a mí también me esperaba. (127)

When Aragón learns that Don Chente has not really disappeared, his horror subsides, and his inner chaos is replaced with a sense of order (163). He feels, briefly, as though he is on the hero’s road toward self-realization, but his guide remains elusive, arriving back in

Mexico just as Aragón is departing to El Salvador at the novella's conclusion (177–178). Aragón is never really on the archetypal hero's path of Apollonian integration.

2.1.4 Democratic Dreams and Recycled Violence

Aragón interweaves his optimism regarding El Salvador's transition into democracy with his optimism regarding his own transition into an ideal self. Tania Pleitez Vela characterizes Aragón's goal to cofound a cultural newspaper in El Salvador as “una conquista pública” and “un acto heroico e histórico” (72). Christina Soto van der Plas states that Aragón's homecoming is “un retorno cuyo deseo es entrar en la historia, la militancia y la praxis que el narrador nunca logra consolidar de manera concreta” (303). Aragón wants to be heroic, to be perfect, to cease to have any weaknesses. He tells himself that, in his new life in El Salvador, he will abstain from alcohol, exercise regularly, enjoy professional success, and eventually commence a relationship with the ideal woman for whom he has always longed (30, 167). The utopic delusions of his thinking are apparent when he says, “un Edén de culos me esperaba en mi destino” (172). Of course, the paradox of Aragón's plan to become perfect by flying away to El Salvador is that the abandonment of his daughter Evita is arguably the greatest failure of his life, and his narration in *Moronga*, two decades later, reveals that the impossibility of a positive connection with his estranged “hija mexicana” (174) is a constant source of guilt for him (276). There is also the irony that the journalistic project and democratic transition about which Aragón is so enthusiastic turn out, in hindsight, to be disastrous. The newspaper Aragón plans to cofound is a fictionalization of *Primera Plana*, Castellanos Moya's centrist newspaper that went bankrupt in July of 1994 because it

failed to gain a following (“An Interview”). Meanwhile, the democratic transition failed to bring peace and justice to the nation. In *El sueño*, Castellanos Moya is taking an ironic look back at his own starry-eyed optimism that coincided with the end of the civil war.

Because Castellanos Moya belongs to the *Generación del Desencanto* whose disenchantment is associated with the undoing of revolutionary projects, it is often overlooked that his personal biography is marked by two disenchanting catastrophes in the political domain, the second of which is the failure of El Salvador’s democratic transition. For Castellanos Moya, the project of democracy was initially galvanizing: “Pese a que la transición democrática puede parecer gris, si se compara con la épica de los triunfos revolucionarios, yo la recuerdo como una época de entusiasmos, de apuestas, de confianza en el país y en el futuro” (*Roque Dalton* ch. 6). He remembers 16 January 1992, the day on which the Salvadoran government and the FMLN signed the peace accords in Chapultepec, Mexico, as the climax of his enchantment, when he celebrated with the masses in San Salvador:

Nunca he vivido un día con tal intensidad colectiva, con semejante espíritu gregario, con tanta ilusión como ese. Y lo afirma un escéptico, alguien que desconfía profundamente del ser humano y sus espejismos. Un día especial, única en la historia salvadoreña del siglo XX, quizá sólo comparable al 8 de mayo de 1944, cuando una huelga de brazos caídos acabó con la dictadura del general Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. (*Roque Dalton* ch. 6)

Castellanos Moya must travel back in time to 8 May 1944, long before the revolutionary movement, to find a day in Salvadoran history that he considers as hopeful as 16 January 1992—the day of democracy.

The democratic transition in El Salvador was not a resounding success because the political violence of the civil war simply mutated into criminal violence without a reduction in the country's exorbitant murder rate (Castellanos Moya, *Breves palabras* 56). In *Moronga*, Aragón alludes to this problem when he says that “quienes antes eran enemigos a muerte, entonces hicieron mancuerna para el saqueo y el crimen, de tal manera que el país siguió siendo la misma cloaca emporcada de sangre” (276). His observation implies that the ideologies of the former opponents, whether right-wing or left-wing, were always façades that covered up a more intrinsic, common desire for power and wealth.

Another explanation for the perpetual crime and violence that plagues El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and many parts of Latin America is the culture of machismo that Castellanos Moya has called “cultura moronga.” In his most recent novel, this culture is personified by a Guatemalan drug baron who, despite being a secondary character, shares his nickname with the book's title—*Moronga*—a word that signifies “blood sausage” and therefore has phallic connotations. Castellanos Moya has explained in an interview how this character represents a harmful, macho subculture that pervades Latin America:

Moronga como personaje representa un tipo de latinoamericano, una cultura latinoamericana que no se rige por el estado derecho, que no se rige por la ley, que sube por la fuerza, por la violencia, y que considera que la legalidad

es una estupidez, ¿verdad? Entonces, Moronga es la expresión de eso. Es la cultura moronga . . . Tiene una relación con la cultura macha, ¿verdad? Es el más fuerte el que se impone. Esto de andar subiendo la escalera social por lo que nos dicen no tiene ningún sentido y por eso nos explicábamos corrupciones, narcos, *gangs* o lo que hay. (“El asesinato de Roque Dalton” 00:06:56 – 00:07:40)

Curiously, it is a fourteen-year-old girl, Amanda Packer, who appears as the most thoroughly indoctrinated product of “cultura moronga” in the novel. While Aragón is in Washington DC to study declassified CIA files, he rents a room in the basement of an American couple who have adopted Amanda from Guatemala. Amanda’s adoptive parents, George and Merry, are completely ignorant of her childhood prior to coming to the United States,⁴⁵ and so they cannot comprehend her extremely sexualized and violent behaviour which, though shocking, can be traced back to her upbringing. She was raised in a brothel by a single mother who was the favourite prostitute of the fisherman-turned-criminal Moronga. When Amanda was ten years old, just prior to her adoption, gangsters murdered her mother to send a message of intimidation to Moronga, their rival (270). Growing up in this environment, around Moronga himself, Amanda absorbed sex, violence, and the “cultura moronga” into her character. George Packer warns Aragón that his adoptive daughter has “el diablo adentro” (152, 255), and this devil within is a composite of the ills of her historical, geographical, cultural, and familial circumstances.

⁴⁵ George and Merry Packer are also under the false impression that Amanda is ten, not fourteen, years old.

Aragón's initial meeting with Amanda is uncanny because the girl really does seem to be possessed by a demon. For Freud, the uncanny is the frightening manifestation of the repressed, and he posits that this definition applies to ancient, animistic phenomena,⁴⁶ of which states of possession are examples. Aragón is frightened when Amanda enters his basement suite and acts in a manner that is incongruent with her appearance: "ni sus palabras ni sus gestos correspondían con su presencia, como si no estuviese ante una niña en pijama sino ante una vieja zafia y grosera" (253). He begins to think about an iconic image of the uncanny in a 1973 horror film: "se me vino a la cabeza . . . la imagen de Linda Blair cuando está a punto de ser poseída por Satanás en *El exorcista*, y sentí en el espinazo el mismo escalofrío que había tenido unos treinta y tantos años atrás" (254). Amanda adds to Aragón's horror when she reveals that she somehow spied on him while he was having sex with Mina in the basement suite. Aragón cannot understand how the girl is able to see in from outside, whether it is through video cameras or a crack in the wall, and he fearfully spends the remainder of his stay in the suite with the knowledge that the demoniac girl might be watching him. In Miller's view, such a plot element evokes horror:

[B]eing watched by a malign presence . . . is a common horror trope. To be surveilled by something that has not openly declared its presence, its nature,

⁴⁶ Freud writes, "Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe . . . It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression" ("The Uncanny" 74).

or its intentions is a theme found in a number of [horror] narratives. Great power inheres in the gaze, which is the expression of your deep interest in me and my activities, and perhaps your power to harm me. (3)

Olga Bezhanova affirms that “Aragón cannot shed the sensation that Amanda will find a way to penetrate into the space he occupies” (291). He wants to keep her out of his physical space, to avoid hassles, and he wants to keep her out of his headspace, to overcome his feelings of horror.

Amanda has an eighteen-year-old brother, Calín, who belongs to the international gang known as the Mara Salvatrucha. Such gangs are the new face of Central America’s recycled violence in the twenty-first century. When 38,000 combatants were demobilized in El Salvador in 1992, and when 27,600 combatants were demobilized in Guatemala in 1996 (Kingma 2), the governments of those countries failed to rise to the challenge of integrating ex-combatants into civil society. Castellanos Moya has said that the recycling of violence, in “términos humanos,” is “la imposibilidad que tienen los jóvenes educados como feroces máquinas de guerra para reincorporarse a la vida civil, no solo por la falta de una política y de incentivos para su reinserción, sino por la profunda deformación síquica y emocional a la que han sido sometidos” (*Breves palabras* 56). When countless ex-combatants turned to criminal violence, manifesting “cultura moronga” in the absence of viable, conventional avenues, they paved the way for the growth of criminal gangs. In Central America, these gangs attract boys in droves with their promises of initiation, fraternity, and adventure. Calín is a fictional example of early recruitment: he dropped out of elementary school to join the Mara Salvatrucha (269). In the summer of 2010, Calín is living illegally in New York where he remains an active gang member.

Aragón is haunted by Central America's recycled violence; it destroyed El Salvador's democratic transition, prompting his second self-exile, and it has spread as far as the United States, his current home, where it confronts him in the forms of Amanda and Calín. On the day Aragón leaves Washington DC, Amanda flees the Packers' house in the company of her older brother. The two siblings call Aragón on his cell phone, and, amidst a barrage of obscenities, they threaten to falsely accuse him of sexually assaulting Amanda if he does not give them 25,000 dollars, in Chicago, within two days. The long epilogue of *Moronga*, which is a police report, tells that the Chicago police supplied Aragón with the money and monitored the transaction with Calín while hidden. The report says that Aragón "[e]staba muy nervioso, hacía chistes incomprensibles" (325) prior to the transaction, which indicates the imminence of the antihero's nervous collapse. Aragón's incomprehensible jokes are apparently a defense mechanism to cope with the recycled violence that he is unexpectedly facing in the United States; Castellanos Moya has said that Central America is the "producto de una carnicería. Por eso a veces reímos tanto o nos ponemos chistositos, para atajar la locura" (*Breves palabras* 34). Aragón manages to give Calín the money and walk away to safety, but Amanda still lies to the authorities about Aragón; as a result, the professor-émigré is charged with sexual assault of the minor, suffers a nervous collapse, loses his job at Merlow College, and is interned in a psychiatric clinic. He has been touched by the "mad god," Dionysus, "whose appearance sends mankind into madness" (Otto 65). Amanda and Calín have horrified Aragón by threatening him with the recycled Central American violence that he fled many years earlier, but it is the horror of being cast into the pitiless apparatus of the United States penal system that is the *coup de grâce* of his Dionysian disintegration.

2.2 José Zeledón

Like Aragón, Zeledón undergoes a long intertextual journey through Castellanos Moya's oeuvre, appearing in *La sirvienta y el luchador*, the short story "Némesis," *El arma en el hombre*, and *Morongá*. He appears in *La sirvienta*, set in 1980, as an adolescent who joined the FPL guerrilla organization the previous year as a sort of part-time guerrillero. While completing a mission recounted in part three of that novel, he ends up shooting at a police SUV in which his mother Belka is a passenger, due to a series of unfortunate coincidences, and he later learns that he has killed her.⁴⁷ In "Némesis," Zeledón plays a background role as a guerrillero living in the mountains with the alias "Lieutenant Pedro," a name that sticks with him in *El arma en el hombre* which takes place after the civil war and features Lieutenant Pedro as the leader of a security platoon of a drug cartel in the Guatemalan highlands. In *Morongá*, it is explained that José Zeledón acquired this last name of his by stealing the identity of a combatant who died in the civil war (69). He then emigrated to the United States with a "Temporary Protected Status" (TPS) attained through this false identity. Zeledón's many name changes reflect his psychic fragmentation and the loss of vitality that make him an *alma en pena*. He is a "cold" narrator whose terse sentences and short paragraphs contrast with Aragón's volcanic eruptions. In his dialogues with others, he often narrates that he responds to them by simply shrugging his shoulders (17, 77, 91, 120). Castellanos Moya has said that Zeledón speaks a language of silence ("Meet the Author" 00:18:18 – 00:18:30), and Bezhanova

⁴⁷ In *La sirvienta*, it is ambiguous whether Belka has been killed and whether Zeledón has found out that he shot at her. In *Morongá*, Zeledón narrates that he learned of his accidental matricide at an unspecified point during the civil war.

has affirmed that this protagonist speaks in “short, unadorned sentences that reflect the extreme degree of control Zeledón attempts to exercise over his emotional states and communications with others in order to conceal the truth about his past” (213). His intertextual trajectory is a fall from the heights of his youthful enthusiasm, as Joselito, down to his sombre middle-aged years in which he attempts to conceal his past from others and to shut his own mind off to the memories of past horrors. For Emily Wilson, “tragic overliving is associated with blindness and the desire to hide, with repetition, and with living death” (18), and these elements of tragic overliving all arise in Zeledón’s later years.

This subchapter responds to four questions. First, what does the death of Archbishop Óscar Romero symbolize in relation to the life of Zeledón? Second, what role does awe play in Joselito’s life as an adolescent guerrillero? Third, how is Zeledón horrified by memory? Fourth, how does the uncanny manifest when Zeledón returns to the criminal world in *Moronga*?

2.2.1 The Death of Archbishop Óscar Romero

Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes sometimes have the ghost of a murdered national hero haunting their every move. For Gabriel, El Turco, and Erasmo Aragón, this hero is Roque Dalton. For Juan Carlos, it is Comandante Ana María. In the case of Joselito (i.e., Zeledón), his fall from a beaming teenager to a shady adult is overarched by the assassination of the Salvadoran archbishop Óscar Romero on 24 March 1980, a month after Joselito’s accidental matricide on 27 February 1980 (*Moronga* 105). The deaths of Romero and Belka coincide with Joselito’s *katabasis*, or descent into the underworld,

whereby he enters a clandestine guerrilla life and becomes Lieutenant Pedro. Romero's absence and Lieutenant Pedro's clandestine life form a significant parallel; in Castellanos Moya's fictional world, antiheroes occupy the dark and chaotic spaces left by absent heroes. This lack of heroism evokes a verse from Roque Dalton's "Taberna": "NO HAY HÉROES POSIBLES / CUANDO LA TEMPESTAD OCURRE / EN UN OSCURO MAR DE MIERDA" (139).

Out of all the figures of twentieth century Salvadoran history, Archbishop Romero most closely resembles the archetypal hero. Castellanos Moya has described him as "an honest man" who "did his job with passion" and was "very brave," adding, "he was not looking for anything . . . He was just looking for *doing good*. He was not an ideologist. He was not part of the 'theology of liberation'" ("Meet the Author" 00:33:08 – 00:33:57, emphasis added). Romero, though he might have always been well-intentioned, did not always come across as passionate or brave. His journey of self-realization, during which he integrated the vast potential of his being into his character, is heroic. At the time he was appointed archbishop in 1977, he was, according to Michael Campbell-Johnston, "[t]imid, retiring, hesitant, conservative in thought and action" ("Romero"). Valentine Iheanacho similarly describes Romero as "shy and diffident" (3) before rising to heroism. The biographical turning point came when the Salvadoran army assassinated his friend, the priest Rutilio Grande, motivating Romero to embark on a fearless quest. As Rutilio had done, Romero began to lead the nation's poor population in their struggle against the oppressive army regime, and the army would eventually kill Romero as they had killed his friend. Romero once said, "When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead, I thought: if they killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path" (quoted in

Campbell-Johnston). In Joseph Campbell's synthesis of hero mythology, Rutilio's death, from Romero's perspective, would fit under the heading of the "call to adventure" which "signifies that destiny has summoned the hero" (48). Romero arranged a funeral service for Rutilio that was attended by over 100,000 people, with many more listening on the radio. There he seems to have enacted yet more heroic tropes, crossing a threshold into a new life and apotheosizing into an awe-inducing orator, "a roaring lion at the pulpit" (Iheanacho 3). One witness describes this stunning transformation:

As the Mass began, I noticed that Monseñor Romero was sweating, pale and nervous. And when he began the homily, it seemed slow to me, without his usual eloquence, as if he was reluctant to go through the door of history that God was opening up for him. But after about five minutes, I felt the Holy Spirit descend upon him . . . Thousands of people were applauding him, and something rose within him. It was then that he crossed the threshold. He went through the door. (Inocencio Alas quoted in López Vigil 118)

Miller views heroes as a source of awe, asserting that they "are our ideal selves, ideal parents, or both. They speak to us of what we can become, or cannot possibly become. They talk to us of what can *be* in the world, and thus they awe us" (139). She cites the work of the psychologists Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt who maintain that the origins of this emotion can be found in the hierarchical relationships between subordinates and leaders: "the primordial form of awe is the feeling a low status individual feels toward a powerful other. This feeling is likely to involve reverence, devotion, and the inclination to subordinate one's own interests and goals in deference to those of the powerful leader" (S.B. Miller 307). Romero became an idol and shepherd to

many followers as the political situation worsened and the civil war began. Miller observes that awe is an antidote to horror (109), stating that this emotion is crucial to “perseverance through adversity” (110), and many Salvadorans, to endure the overwhelming, quotidian violence, allowed themselves to be awed by the greatness of Romero. In *La sirvienta*, Joselito’s grandmother, María Elena, is presented as one such follower who listens to the archbishop’s homilies on the radio (176).

We have seen that Dalton’s death made orphans of Castellanos Moya and other members of the literary community known as the *Generación del Desencanto*. For the left-leaning population of the country at large, especially those of the poor, oppressed community, Romero’s death was also the loss of a paternal figure. The book *Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic* (2000)⁴⁸ is an anthology of remembrances by various Salvadorans about the archbishop. In one anecdote, a woman named Regina García recounts that she once saw a man cleaning Romero’s tomb prior to daybreak. When García asked the man what he was doing, his answer revealed the fatherliness that he and others perceived in Romero:

I’m just a poor man, you know? Sometimes I make some money carrying things for people in the market in a little cart. Other times I beg for alms. And sometimes I spend it all on liquor and end up lying hungover in the streets . . . But I never get too discouraged. I had a father! I did! He made me feel like a person. Because he loved people like me, and he didn’t act like we made him

⁴⁸ This is an English translation of María López Vigil’s book *Monseñor Romero: Piezas de un retrato* (1993).

sick. He talked to us, he touched us, he asked us questions. He had confidence in us. You could see in his eyes that he cared about me. Like parents love their children. That's why I clean off his tomb, because that's what children do. (quoted in López Vigil 423)

This man, through his interactions with Romero, was given a feeling similar to awe that Haidt and Keltner call “elevation” and define as “an emotional response to ‘moral beauty’ or human goodness; it usually includes a warm and pleasant feeling in the chest and a desire to become a better person, or to lead a better life” (305). Romero was a spiritual figure with the ability to elevate others, and so his death left a squalid wasteland—the “unsustaining environment” that Miller speaks of (84).

At the conclusion of Castellanos Moya's short story “Variaciones sobre el asesinato de Francisco Olmedo” (1993), he highlights the horrors of March of 1980. The character Raquel, who has paid a hitman to murder her ex-boyfriend because the latter has left her for a younger woman, claims that her decision was somehow linked to the archbishop's death: “Después, cuando me llegó el remordimiento, me dije que había sido el diablo, el maléfico, quien se había apoderado de esta ciudad, porque ese mismo mes mataron a monseñor Romero, y todos formábamos parte de la carnicería” (111). From Raquel's perspective, the causal agent of her ex-boyfriend's death is “el diablo, el maléfico,” the evil spirit that permeates the atmosphere of San Salvador in March of 1980, the month of Romero's death. Raquel also mentions the “carnicería” of that time, which Miller names among the tropes of horror; for Miller, “carnage” conjures “apprehension of an unbalanced and baleful world” (87). Prior to the archbishop's death, his followers were

able to counterbalance their dread by immersing themselves in awe of Romero or elevating themselves toward this shepherding figure.

In *Moronga*, narrating in his language of silence, José Zeledón mentions that he has just heard a special radio broadcast about Romero on the thirtieth anniversary of the archbishop's death. Uncharacteristically, Zeledón attempts to draw upon his memory: "Traté de recordar lo que hacía esa noche en San Salvador, cómo recibí la noticia; pero nada vino a mi memoria" (99–100). The unreachable memory is immediately juxtaposed with the unpreventable memory of his mother's death and his guerrilla leader Chato's order that he go into hiding (100), a state from which he has never fully emerged in three decades as a "fugitivo por vocación" (Sáenz Leandro 348). In this scene that subtly announces the anniversary of Romero's death, El Salvador's spiritual guide remains distant, beyond reach, silently casting a long, dark shadow over the life of Zeledón. Just as Aragón cannot ultimately access the wisdom of his would-be mentor, Don Chente, in *El sueño*, Zeledón cannot be awed or elevated by his homeland's long-lost holy man, Archbishop Óscar Romero.

2.2.2 Joselito: The Adolescent Guerrillero

A esa edad la ideología no es tan importante, lo que es importante son las energías fuertes que uno tiene como adolescente, como joven, en busca de la aventura, de la acción. — Horacio Castellanos Moya ("Entrevista" [Interview by Sillero])

In *La sirvienta y el luchador*, Joselito has recently begun studying at university in San Salvador, a path that he soon abandons due to his country's erupting violence and his

own desire to be a heroic guerrillero. His stage in life, late adolescence, is essential to his character; his diminutive nickname and long, curly hair (137, 180) express a youthful buoyancy. He is eager to seek adventure, to soak up experiences, to show off, and to rebel against his conservative mother—desires that have led him to become a part-time member of the FPL. When participating in clandestine missions, he enjoys the adrenaline rush of dangerous encounters and of firing guns. He sees full initiation into the guerrilla forces as an opportunity to be heroic, but it results in the disintegration of his personality.

Adolescence is a time of sensorial excitement and personal expansion. Castellanos Moya has observed that, during this life stage, one has “una capacidad de captar impresiones fuertísima” (“Horacio Castellanos: Hay libros” 00:05:03 – 00:05:07). The attitude that Miller describes as conducive to awe, to an imbibing of the outer world, reflects the adolescent desire to break free of the parental home and lose oneself in novel impressions: “when we feel grounded and safe, we [...] seek to shed structure and familiarity, even the all-important architecture of self . . . We soften our self-organization through sleep, drugs, and immersive experiences including movies, fantasy, nature, and infatuation” (112). To this list of immersive experiences, we might add music; most people are forever enchanted by the songs that marked their late adolescence. In Joselito’s case, he listens engrossedly to such British rock groups as Genesis, Pink Floyd, and Led Zeppelin, on his Walkman. As for immersion in movies, he has an analogous experience on missions with the FPL: “se siente como si estuviese en una película” (*La sirvienta* 137). Joselito, moreover, sinks into infatuation in relation to his comrade Irma who is a few years older than he and whose guerrilla experience and capability with an Uzi machinegun he admires (228). The rub of her arm against his arm excites him (133),

and the touching of his face with her hand electrifies him (226). His hypersensitivity in encounters with Irma contrasts sharply with José Zeledón's impromptu sexual encounter with his neighbour Nikki three decades later, which he describes as "rápido, animal, silencioso" (*Morongá* 58), and the unemotional liaison that Zeledón maintains with Nikki afterwards. The vivacity of Joselito in *La sirvienta* highlights, by contrast, the deadness of Zeledón in *Morongá*.

Quique López, the young guerrillero who appears in *La diáspora*, is a precursor to Joselito. Both characters join the guerrilla in 1979 as adolescents, for reasons that are more emotional than ideological, while living with single mothers as only children. According to Sophie Esch, "A Quique le interesaba más el aspecto bélico que el aspecto ideológico [de la guerra civil...] Su militancia de izquierda se presenta como una casualidad. Muy bien hubiera podido terminar en el otro bando" (198), and Basile describes Quique as "el guerrillero, el hombre de armas, para quien la lucha en el monte lo es todo" (10). Quique does not engage in political discussions with his comrades, and Joselito is similarly disinterested in politics. Joselito expresses boredom, for example, with a protest song by Víctor Jara, playing in the university cafeteria speakers, before slotting a Led Zeppelin tape into his Walkman (147–148). This preference for hard rock over Jara expresses his valuation of sensorial pleasures over political ideas. He has not joined the FPL because he reads Roque Dalton's poetry or Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, but because of the adventure. He daydreams about his gun (149) in the manner that Quique, while off duty in Mexico, daydreams about both his uniform and gun: "se imagina como guerrillero, con su uniforme de fatiga y un fusil M-16" (*La diáspora* 65). Joselito and Quique do not philosophize like Erasmo Aragón or Gabriel; they dream, and they act.

Adolescents often feel a sort of “self-awe” which, contrary to the Dionysian awe that involves imbibing the *other*, is an Apollonian aggrandization of oneself. According to Miller, “*I can do that – I’m awesome* is a common feeling as the teen recognizes qualities of self with excitement, delight, and remodeling of the self-concept” (129). Joselito undergoes this process through his involvement with the guerrilla; Castellanos Moya affirms that the character’s goal is “demostrarse que es capaz de hacer las cosas” (“Entrevista” [Interview by Sillero]). Joselito takes pride in such abilities as his marksmanship, but he also has the fluctuating self-esteem and the need for social approval of an adolescent (S.B. Miller 129). When Joselito shoots a police officer from a distance while the officer is driving a car, he admires his own skill, but his partner Dimas exclaims “¡Qué chiripa!” (137), meaning “What luck!” and this slight remains ringing in Joselito’s ears. Like his self-awe, his defensiveness is an Apollonian bolstering of the ego.

At the root of Joselito’s self-imposed challenges and self-awe is the ancient blueprint of the archetypal hero. Joselito has seen this figure portrayed in action films, and, when he goes on guerrilla missions, he puts himself in the hero’s place. When Aragón hatches his plan to murder Antolín in *El sueño*, he similarly envisions himself becoming a masculine warrior-hero in a rant with ironic overtones:

[El homicidio] se trataba de algo más, de algo serio, iniciático, como si por fin fuera a ser capaz de realizar un acto que consolidara mi hombría en todos los órdenes, como si liquidando a ese tipo que se había atrevido a ofenderme de la peor manera yo cumpliera un destino manifiesto que me permitiría acceder a otro nivel de conciencia y de realización personal. (57)

Aragón seeks self-realization—the Apollonian apotheosis of the archetypal hero—through the killing of an “actorzuelo,” which does not happen in the end. Aragón never fought in the guerrilla like Joselito, or his friend Míster Rábit, and so he feels that he missed out on the heroic quest in which Joselito is engaged in *La sirvienta*.

It is noteworthy that Aragón refers to the would-be murder of Antolín as “iniciático” because the concept of initiation is essential to archetypal heroism and is also sought out by Joselito. We have seen how Archbishop Romero “crossed the threshold” when he “walked through the door of history” and into his heroic role, initiated by the multitude that heard him speak at Rutilio’s funeral. Joseph Campbell refers to initiation as the second of the three steps of the mythological hero’s journey: departure, initiation, and return. Mircea Eliade, for his part, demonstrates the link between hero mythology and rites of initiation; he asserts that “myths and sagas have an initiatory structure; to descend into Hell alive, confront its monsters and demons, is to undergo an initiatory ordeal” (*Rites and Symbols* 62). Eliade documents initiation rites in various cultures that imitate the universal sun-god myth;⁴⁹ these involve the neophytes’ enclosure in a dark space that resembles the belly of a monster, from which they eventually emerge, born anew, like the sun at daybreak (*Rites and Symbols* 36, 56). Eliade characterizes initiation, in its most general, symbolic form, as a death and rebirth. Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes, however, remain in the darkness, battling inner demons without the salvation of rebirth.

⁴⁹ See footnote 12.

Joselito evades even the reader of *La sirvienta* when he slips underground at the end of the novel; this event is not recounted until *Morongá* (100). Castellanos Moya has observed the initiatory aspect of such a passage into a clandestine guerrilla life:

Para un revolucionario el paso a la clandestinidad tiene matices de iniciación, tanto por la renuncia a la vieja vida como por la aventura desconocida en la que se sumerge. Se trata de convertirse en otra persona, de desprenderse del pasado, de aquello que lo pueda hacer reconocible a los ojos del enemigo: debe cambiar de nombre, apariencia, costumbres, rutinas y en especial la forma de asumirse a sí mismo. Ya no es quien antes era sino uno nuevo, inventado. (*Roque Dalton* ch. 1)

This radical change is true in the case of Joselito who shares biographical details with his later selves Lieutenant Pedro and José Zeledón, but not attitudes or even mannerisms. In addition to the typical guerrillero's metamorphosis, Joselito undergoes an emotional overhaul when he learns about his mother's death, lives through other tragedies, and commits atrocities. His self-awe is replaced with inexorable horror.

2.2.3 Pursued by the Furies

Zeledón's narration in *Morongá* is preceded by an excerpt from Euripides' *Orestes*:

Menelao: ¿Qué cosa sufres? ¿Qué enfermedad te aqueja?

Orestes: La conciencia, porque sin lugar a dudas que he cometido delitos terribles. (*Morongá* 11)

In Greek mythology, Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra and is subsequently pursued by the Furies, three female deities of retribution. Zeledón also suffers pangs of conscience for having committed matricide, and his movements from El Salvador to Guatemala to Texas to Wisconsin seem to be unsuccessful attempts to flee the memories that haunt him in flashbacks. His life story has overtones of Greek tragedy, mostly due to the sinister discoveries he makes, atrocities he commits, and hardships he suffers while living as a guerrillero with the name Lieutenant Pedro.

Lieutenant Pedro learns the story behind his mother's death from Lieutenant Coronel Fabricio Villacorta of the Salvadoran army, after the guerrilla forces have captured Villacorta and Pedro is tasked with bringing the prisoner food and water every other day (*Moronga* 103–105). Like the gradual, excruciating revelation of the truth behind Oedipus's patricide and marriage to his mother in *Oedipus the King*, Lieutenant Pedro slowly comes to learn about his matricide. Villacorta divulges information about the afternoon of 27 February 1980 when he rode in an SUV with a nurse who, unbeknownst to him, was Lieutenant Pedro's mother Belka. Listening to this, Lieutenant Pedro experiences the horror of an altered self. According to Miller,

Horror often follows from the idea that something has happened to my self so that I am severely altered in a way that makes me unable to live in comfort, competence, and human relatedness . . . [H]orror over what deforms the self is a category-bursting experience, with the relevant class being self. (82)

Lieutenant Pedro can no longer see himself as he previously had. He has been an unwitting self-betrayer whose actions had far graver consequences than the self-betrayals of Aragón, and so he descends into a self-questioning chaos:

Severe depression and anxiety, as well as psychosis, all involve changes in the core self-experience that suggest the self overtaken by forces the person cannot regulate, so that he or she feels, *I am not myself*. One becomes a monster to one's own eyes and simultaneously feels the horror of inability to stop painful, decompensatory processes such as rampant anxiety, ferocious depression, obsessive rumination, cognitive disarray, or wavering discernment of reality. (83)

Lieutenant Pedro's abandonment of his former self, Joselito, through initiation into the clandestine guerrilla life is enhanced by the knowledge that Joselito killed his mother and therefore must be mentally erased in the extreme. This leads to the suppression of memories and their reappearance in sinister flashbacks (*Moronga* 80, 94). Miller posits that "in many tales of horror, the margin most at issue is that between the surviving self and the destroyed self" (91). In Lieutenant Pedro's case, this margin has been pushed to such an extreme that his surviving self is a mere husk that covers a destroyed, ignored mass.

Lieutenant Pedro spends over a decade living outside of civil society, first as a guerrillero and then as a criminal. While operating outside the law during this period, he only accumulates more disturbing memories by losing companions in battle and committing

further murders and other crimes. Francisco Brignole enumerates the following wrongdoings of the FMLN, to which Lieutenant Pedro belonged, during the civil war:

ejecuciones de alcaldes considerados “insurgentes,” ataques a objetivos estadounidenses no involucrados en la guerra, homicidios de exmilitantes y guerrilleros sospechados de ser informantes de la Guardia Nacional, asesinatos de trabajadores de organizaciones civiles no gubernamentales, secuestros de familiares de políticos, asesinatos de profesores universitarios y periodistas, y homicidios de fiscales federales, jueces y hasta de un expresidente de la Corte Suprema de Justicia. (197)⁵⁰

The civil war, whose name is oxymoronic, involved a collapsing of civil structures—an *absence* of civility—which allowed tribalism and the mark of Cain to rise to the surface. In Italy, the Second World War created a similar state of chaos; the guerrillero Mario Filipponi of the Italian Resistance once described the savage state of mind of those who go to live in the wilderness as warriors, a biographical detail he shares with Lieutenant Pedro:

After you’ve been six, eight months, a year, in the mountains, when you come down, you’re a half animal. No two ways about it. I was no longer a human being. Today, I say: I was an animal. I realise that in those times I was out of my mind. You’ve come down the mountain, with all that hate, all that fighting, the guns ...all the time, you expected a shot in the back, so you

⁵⁰ Brignole draws this information from *De la locura a la esperanza: la guerra de 12 años en El Salvador* (1993, pp. 174–183).

brought yourself up to such a frenzy that (when it was over) it wasn't easy, it wasn't easy. (Filipponi quoted in Portelli 47)

While living outside the law, guerrilleros can give freer rein to the sadism of their Jungian shadows without the normal societal pressures to maintain an inoffensive persona. Filipponi speaks of only *one* year of fighting in the mountains; Lieutenant Pedro spent several years in that kind of environment, and so it is especially difficult for him to adjust afterwards to something resembling a normal life in his adoptive country, the United States.

Lieutenant Pedro's period working in the Guatemalan highlands ends when the American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) attacks his security platoon and bring about a new tragedy in his life. While he is trying to escape the attack with Catarina, his German girlfriend, the DEA release a missile that kills her. When Lieutenant Pedro locates the body, he finds "sólo pedazos de carne, chamuscados, irreconocibles" (*Moronga* 97) which evoke the dehumanizing horror of carnage. His relationship with Catarina, symbolically, is his last significant anchor to the world and to humanity, which is obliterated along with her body. His later relationship with his neighbour Nikki in Merlow City is the husk of an interpersonal connection, much like Zeledón (i.e., Lieutenant Pedro) is the husk of a person. Nikki soon discovers that Zeledón is seeking sex without being open to communication (*Moronga* 95). For Zeledón, the sensorial pleasures of sex are a means to drown out memory, whereas communication and its requisite contemplation would be an unwelcome stimulus of memory.

In Merlow, Zeledón reunites with Esteban, his ex-comrade from the guerrilla forces and the security platoon who was formerly known as “Rudy.” Esteban is a counterexample to Zeledón, able to adapt to a new life without being haunted by the past; he establishes a career, family, and community of Latin American friends in Merlow. Zeledón is taken aback by the way Esteban uses the word “compas” in conversation, referring to their old guerrilla comrades: “dijo así, «compas», con cierto entusiasmo, como en los viejos tiempos. Hacía mucho tiempo que yo no pronunciaba esa palabra” (17). Paradoxically, Esteban’s life is neatly fragmented into a before and after, his guerrillero/criminal epoch and his family-man epoch, though his psyche has not struggled to draw such a dividing line, whereas Zeledón continues to live like a fugitive despite unrelenting efforts to enclose his past in a box and stow it away forever. Zeledón’s suppressiveness only enhances the uncanny aspect of his memories; as Alessandro Portelli observes, “The memories stowed away in the ‘cellar’ of oblivion resurface as frightful spectres” (46).

The dissociation in Zeledón’s psyche often makes him unaware of what he is clinging to, what he is doing, and why he is doing it. While working as a bus driver for an elementary school, he develops a fixation with a schoolteacher named Estella. The intensity of this fixation becomes clear when Estella provokes a flashback of Belka that implies a resemblance between the two women (80). Zeledón narrates scenes in which he stalks Estella (48, 54–55), seemingly unaware of the creepiness of his own actions, as though possessed by unconscious drives. Eventually, the teacher issues a formal complaint that gets Zeledón fired from his job (101).

The tremendous amount of energy that Zeledón dedicates to suppressing memory results in lapses in health—a physiological disintegration that coincides with his psychological

disintegration. Miller observes that “[o]ld age and physical decline are strongly associated with horror” (99), and the rapidity of their onset in Zeledón is indeed horrifying. “No recuerdo con precisión cuándo comenzó a sucederme,” he narrates at one point, “Cerraba la laptop y me tiraba en la cama, exhausto, embotado, como si hubiese consumido todas mis energías” (26). This motif repeats when he says, “el cuerpo no me respondió; estaba sin energía. Permanecí tirado de espalda en la cama, inerme, como si un bicho estuviese succionando mi espina dorsal, alimentándose con mis fluidos” (38). At other times, he suffers “un malestar impreciso” (44) and he feels as though his body has ceased to belong to his mind, “como si con el paso de los años hubiese tomado otra ruta” (76). He also notes that his vision is faltering, an affliction with many parallels in Greek mythology and tragedy,⁵¹ most notably Oedipus’s self-blinding when he cannot bear to “see” the truth, saying, “Light of my days, go dark. I want to gaze no more” (Sophocles 253). Zeledón’s loss of eyesight seems to have the same yearning for blindness at its root. His descent into the underworld as a young initiate—as Joselito—initiates a continual fall into deepening darkness, without the heroic re-emergence seen in traditional initiation rites and in the universal sun-god myth.

2.2.4 Living among Ghosts

As José Zeledón is living in the United States in 2009 and 2010, he perceives his new environment through a traumatized lens. The very first paragraph in *Moronga*, narrated by Zeledón, reveals that he is haunted by phantasmagoric figures of the past: “Lo

⁵¹ Ariadni Tatti-Gartziou’s essay “Blindness as Punishment” (2010) enumerates many examples of punitive blinding in ancient Greek storytelling.

descubrí rondándome de nuevo. El día anterior había sido cerca de las cajas registradoras en el Walmart; ahora, en el centro del pueblo, a la salida de una taquería. El rostro se me hacía familiar, de la época de la guerra, pero no lograba ubicarlo” (13). The situation is ambiguous. Does he really see a familiar face from the past? Or a face that resembles a familiar face from the past? Or the mere projection of a familiar face that has arisen from the depths of his memory? The dubiousness of his perceptions is heightened later in the narrative when he admits that he sometimes sees people who are “como dobles, de un conocido o amigo muerto” (116). Seeing deceased friends indicates that, at least some of the time, he projects buried memories into the world. The climax of Zeledón’s narrative comes with the uncanny vision of Robocop whom Zeledón believes died seventeen years earlier when the DEA raided their base in Guatemala.

Despite his desire to be free of the horror of his past, Zeledón follows familiar tracks back into the world of outlaws. For Portelli, the erasure of memory can result in the repetition of undesirable actions because individuals (or groups) fail to learn from their mistakes. He asserts that, in the case of the Italian army’s oppression of Libyans in the early years of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “it was oblivion, not memory, which prompted the repetition of the past” (44). Zeledón is similarly unable to learn due to suppression of, rather than reflection on, the past. He meets up with his former comrade, El Viejo, whose name takes on new meaning as he now represents what is old—*viejo*—in Zeledón’s life. El Viejo is more sinister than Esteban insofar as he has remained unchanged and therefore jars Zeledón’s memory (71). He gives Zeledón a pistol, and he asks Zeledón to act as his bodyguard during his upcoming negotiations with the Guatemalan drug baron Moronga in Chicago; both the weapon and the job offer

are accepted. Zeledón values the opportunity to make some cash amidst his economic instability. In an interview with Castellanos Moya, Fernando Chaves Espinach observed that Zeledón's cooperation with El Viejo, though it may be somewhat lucrative, runs counter to the protagonist's desire for liberation from the past. The author replied that Zeledón's actions are indeed a manifestation of inner contradictions:

Es un personaje que busca una cosa, pero para sobrevivir busca otra. Son aquellas viejas lealtades que vienen de la guerra, con otros perdedores que vienen de su grupo, las que le permiten encontrar el mínimo camino hacia adelante . . . Pero quienes le abren esas puertas son aquellos precisamente que pertenecen a su pasado, del cual quiere huir. La paradoja. La paradoja humana. (“Horacio Castellanos Moya: ‘La literatura penetra’”)

Inner contradictions are universal, but they are especially pronounced in Zeledón due to mental dissociation. El Viejo and Esteban demonstrate that, without such suppression of the past, it is easier to continue one's old lifestyle—like El Viejo—or move on to a new lifestyle—like Esteban—with peace of mind. Zeledón can neither stay behind nor forge ahead without suffering.

When Zeledón drives from Merlow to Chicago to fulfill his role as El Viejo's bodyguard, he is possessed by an uncanny compulsion to repeat phrases he heard in the distant past. “Mientras conducía,” he narrates, “ciertas frases aparecían de la nada y se me quedaban en la mente. «El hábito hace al monje», me repetía una y otra vez con mis manos apoyadas en el volante y mi atención puesta en los autos que corrían a mi alrededor. Era una frase favorita de mi abuela. Y ahí seguía conmigo” (115). Freud posits that “it is

possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a ‘compulsion to repeat’ proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts” (72), and he adds that “whatever reminds us of this inner ‘compulsion to repeat’ is perceived as uncanny” (73). Zeledón is a disquieted witness to the whims of his own unconscious. The refrain he most constantly repeats, “el hábito hace al monje,” refers to a correlation between clothing and character, but, in Zeledón’s case, it seems to refer to his “hábitos,” or “habits,” in the sense of repeated actions; his backsliding into the world of outlaws, as though pulled by a magnet, makes him the lost soul that he is.

Soon after arriving in Chicago and seating himself in a downtown Starbucks, Zeledón suffers an anxiety attack caused by the appearance (or apparition) of Robocop. Zeledón is unaware that, during the DEA raid in the Guatemalan highlands, Robocop was whisked away by the Americans and made a member of their administration (*El arma* 130–131), and so Robocop’s strolling through town in broad daylight, when Zeledón believes he is dead, is uncanny. Freud affirms that the uncanny is experienced “in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (75). Of course, it is ambiguous whether Zeledón really sees his former associate because, though Robocop did survive the DEA attack, Zeledón’s perceptions are questionable. He narrates the episode as follows:

Entonces, por la acera pasó una figura que se me hizo conocida. Fueron unos pocos segundos antes de que saliera de mi ángulo de visión. No alcancé a distinguir su rostro, pero el perfil y la forma de balancear la mole de su cuerpo eran inconfundibles. Era Robocop, un exsargento del ejército salvadoreño que se había sumado a nuestras fuerzas en el altiplano

guatemalteco. Quedé desconcertado. Robocop había muerto diecisiete años atrás, cuando las tropas de la DEA asaltaron nuestro campamento.

Un zumbido se disparó dentro de mi oído derecho.

Sentí una especie de vértigo. (*Morongá* 115–116)

Vertigo, in an existential sense, is the dizzying sensation of not knowing where one stands in the world, a crisis that destabilizes outer realities and self-identities. We have seen that Aragón experiences vertigo when his self-identity is called into question by the recurring idea that he might be a murderer. For Zeledón, the presence of Robocop is the presence of the past, which resurrects memories of his lives as Lieutenant Pedro and as Joselito. This induces vertigo because he becomes unsure of what epoch he is in, where he is, and who he is. He begins to scan his surroundings anxiously, as though he were back in a warzone. The buzzing that he hears in his right ear is apparently the memory of a police officer's bullet that "pasó silbando por la oreja derecha" (*La sirvienta* 133) when he was on one of his early missions with the FPL, thirty years earlier, before erasing his identity as Joselito. While consumed with horror, he feverishly paces the city streets and the subway stations like a sort of Raskolnikov, the crazed murderer-antihero of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Robocop is a Pandora's Box that has set loose this horrific cacophony of memory and emotion—the climax of Zeledón's Dionysian disintegration.

Chapter 3

3 Self-Protective Snobs: Edgardo Vega and Laura Rivera

Edgardo Vega is the antihero-narrator of *El asco: Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador* (1997), and Laura Rivera is the antihero-narrator of *La diabla en el espejo* (2000). These books form a triptych with *El arma en el hombre* (2001), constituting the core of the so-called *novelas furiosas* (Pau). Having completed *Baile con serpientes* in a creative burst in September and October of 1995 (*Baile* 169), Castellanos Moya was already devising all three novellas of this triptych simultaneously in December of 1995 (“The Horacio”), finding himself in an agitated and hyper-productive state following the bankruptcy of his newspaper *Primera Plana* in July of that same year (“An Interview”). All three novellas incorporate the widely publicized homicide of Olga María de Trabanino,⁵² a Salvadoran woman of high society whose murder is based on that of an acquaintance of the author (Paredes 175–176). This unpunished crime⁵³ and the corresponding reality of criminals at large adds to the insecurity that pervades Castellanos Moya’s fiction. In *El asco* and *La diabla*, Vega and Rivera are unravelled, at least in part, by the horror of an *unsafe world*.

Vega and Rivera attempt to protect themselves from the ego-annihilation of *tremendous horror* by relying on the three ego-fortifying emotions of anger, disgust, and contempt, which can be thought of collectively as “a triad of hostile and other-condemning moral

⁵² Matthew Richey examines the intertextuality of the murder of Olga María in his article “La señora de Trabanino, intertextualidad y angustia en la posguerra” (2016).

⁵³ The real-life homicide was still in impunity when César Paredes interviewed Castellanos Moya on 16 May 2015 (Paredes 176).

emotions” (Salinas 658). Miller observes that contempt and disgust are affective strategies for enhancing one’s stature and acquiring power in relation to the *other* (18, 73), and the same might be said of anger. Although these three emotions overlap a great deal, the narrations of Vega and Rivera tend strongly toward the manifestation of one particular emotion: disgust, in the case of Vega, and contempt, in the case of Rivera. Disgust has a stronger physical component than contempt, and Vega’s narrative features innumerable physical displeasures and an absence of physical pleasure. Regarding the Salvadoran dish *cóctel de conchas*, for example, he says, “una sola vez probé esos bichos hace más de veinte años, una sola vez bastó para constatar que esos inmundos bichos saben a excremento” (*El asco* 59). Rivera, on the other hand, regularly indulges in physical pleasures, such as the savouring of “ostras gigantes, riquísimas” (*La diabla* 67). In terms of morals, disgust arises through violations of divinity (the pure, the sacred, and the spiritual), whereas contempt arises through violations of community (hierarchical roles and communal obligations) (Rozin et al. 575). Vega tries to maintain his soul’s sanctity by shunning degrading experiences and environs that evoke disgust, whereas Rivera tries to maintain her elevated status in the social hierarchy by shunning her supposed inferiors who evoke contempt. Both protagonists condemn their native El Salvador, their fellow Salvadorans, and *salvadoreñidad*, which has contributed to Castellanos Moya’s reputation as a writer of antipatriotic literature (Castany Prado) and post-nationalist literature (Mitchell).

The psychologists Shweder et al. lay out sixteen moral themes, drawn from their analysis of subjects in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India, two of which are of vital importance to the worldviews of Vega and Rivera, respectively. The first theme, “Virtue and Merit,” refers

to “[a]cts that elevate and acts that degrade one’s status as a human being” and to the “development of a virtuous (elevated) nature” (136); this describes the focus of Vega who is forever attempting to elevate his spirit through contact with high art and separation from society’s more earthly fixations. Rivera’s outlook, on the other hand, is centred on “Hierarchy” which Shweder et al. define as “[r]espect for relative status within the family, in society or in the cosmic order . . . Patterns of behavior that signal acknowledgement of status differences” (136). Despite the relentlessness of Vega’s disgust and Rivera’s contempt, both protagonists eventually transition into horror which denotes the disintegration of the egos they have struggled so hard to fortify.

El asco and *La diabla* are both dialogic monologues. There is only one speaker in each text, but this speaker is always communicating with one silent listener. In Vega’s case, he communicates with his old schoolfriend, the author surrogate “Moya,” who meets him on a bar patio in San Salvador and later transcribes Vega’s monologue onto paper. In Rivera’s case, she communicates with the titular she-devil in the mirror—*la diabla en el espejo*—who is her imaginary friend. Vega and Rivera, like Erasmo Aragón, are “hot” narrators whose incensed and incendiary opinions burn without respite. Vega’s dialogic monologue in *El asco* is one unbroken paragraph of 85 pages, delivered over the course of his meeting with Moya. *La diabla* also lacks paragraph breaks, but it is divided into nine chapters because the delivery of Rivera’s dialogic monologue jumps forward in time on eight occasions. Vega’s speech, with its lengthy sentences composed of innumerable subordinate phrases, consolidated a prose style that Castellanos Moya has since revisited with other narrators (“Entrevista” [Interview by Chávez]) 00:04:27 – 00:04:40), such as Erasmo Aragón and the unnamed narrator of *Insensatez*. Rivera speaks in shorter

sentences and peppers her monologue with one-word sentences that underscore her indignation, such as “Desgraciado” (7), “Imaginate” (19), “Increíble” (37), “Estúpida” (81), “Tremendo” (100), “Estúpido” (105), and what is perhaps her favourite insult: “Imbécil” (133). As orators of disgust and contempt, Vega and Rivera speak in forceful words that aim to condemn others, push back against them, and keep them from trespassing beyond self-boundaries.

3.1 Edgardo Vega

Edgardo Vega is a thirty-eight-year-old art history professor at McGill University who was born in San Salvador. He left his home country at the age of twenty when the civil war was near on the horizon but had not yet begun, and so he is slightly older than Erasmo Aragón and José Zeledón but within the same generation—the disenchanted generation. It was his disgust at his homeland and his compatriots, however, not civil unrest, that drove him northward where he has acquired Canadian citizenship. His Canadian passport, which is his most prized possession, bears his new legal name: Thomas Bernhard. He took this name from an Austrian author⁵⁴ whom he admires (*El asco* 99–100) and whose writing his monologue imitates in both style and content. In terms of style, Vega speaks in a manner reminiscent of Bernhard’s *rollenprosa* which “hammers away at the reader’s nerves with endless repetition and elaboration of a few basic themes” (Kuehn 551). In terms of content, Vega’s diatribe against San Salvador was intended by Castellanos Moya to imitate Bernhard’s cultural demolition of Salzburg

⁵⁴ Thomas Bernhard (1931–1989) was a prolific novelist and playwright.

(*El asco* 104); scandalously, Vega's antipatriotic attack resulted in Castellanos Moya receiving death threats from angered compatriots (*El asco* 103). The simple plot of *El asco* was also inspired by Bernhard, specifically by the 1986 novel *Auslöschung* (*Extinction* in English).⁵⁵ In *El asco*, Vega's mother has recently died, and he has travelled to San Salvador for the first time in eighteen years to ensure that his brother Ivo does not swindle him out of his half of the money that will come from selling their mother's house. After two weeks of nonstop disgust in San Salvador, Vega meets with his old schoolfriend Moya, the author surrogate whose main contribution to the text is the occasional inclusion of the three words "me dijo Vega" and the cheeky "Advertencia" at the novella's beginning which informs readers that Moya attempted to "suavizar" Vega's opinions to make them more palatable to the public (11). The events of Vega's homecoming trip are recounted un-chronologically in his dialogic monologue, and their emotional intensity builds up to the scene in which he believes he has lost his Canadian passport, a climactic moment of Dionysian disintegration through *tremendous horror*.

This subchapter responds to five questions. First, how does Vega express disgust at *salvadoreñidad*? Second, what is the role of physical (as opposed to moral) disgust in Vega's narration? Third, what is the role of aestheticism in Vega's worldview and how does this relate to the Apollo–Dionysus dichotomy? Fourth, how does Vega's brother Ivo embody Vega's Jungian shadow? Fifth, how does Vega's predominant emotion shift from disgust to horror at the novella's climax?

⁵⁵ In *Auslöschung*, the protagonist-narrator Franz-Josef Murau travels from Rome to his native Wolfsegg, Austria, which he loathes, to attend his parents' funeral and claim their estate.

3.1.1 Disgust at *Salvadoreñidad*

Disgust initially evolved as a mechanism to aid our distant ancestors in keeping contaminants out of their mouths (Schnall et al. 1097). It has since broadened into an emotion of negative reactions to any phenomena that one does not want to enter one's self-boundary. Disgust occurs in both the material realm and the moral realm (S.B. Miller 29). Miller defines disgust as "an emotion of self-protection. The feeling represents both the wish to get rid of something and the *effort* to be rid of that thing. The feeling is muscular; it is energetic; it is a command to 'go away now'" (28). Vega's diatribe against El Salvador manifests his desire and his effort to be rid of his ties to his homeland; Megan Thornton describes it as "an oral purgation of his experiences" (213), like an interminable, projectile vomiting of everything he wants to get out of his system. Akin to the spectacle of someone vomiting, Vega's monologue manifests the disgust-*ed* and disgust-*ing*; he expresses his own disgust, and, through the countless references to excrement, odours, greed, corruption, and other agents of disgust, he manages to disgust the reader.

Vega's emotional distancing from El Salvador protects him from horror. Unlike Gabriel of *La diáspora* and Erasmo Aragón, for example, he refuses to feel orphaned or paranoid in the aftermath of the assassination of Roque Dalton. Instead, he focuses on the ideological divide between himself and the famed poet whom he describes acerbically:

[P]arece un fanático comunista cuyo mayor atributo fue haber sido asesinado por sus propios camaradas, un fanático comunista que escribió alguna poesía decente pero que en su obcecación ideológica redactó los más vergonzosos y

horripilantes poemas filocomunistas, un fanático y cruzado del comunismo cuya vida y obra estuvieron postradas con el mayor entusiasmo a los pies del castrismo. (69)

Regarding Archbishop Romero, Vega makes no mention of his heroism, but instead emphasizes the psychopathy and criminality that he perceives in the right-wing wartime president José Napoleón Duarte⁵⁶ whom he blames for the archbishop's assassination (*El asco* 31). He expresses disgust, moreover, at many Salvadorans' pedestalization of Duarte as an object of awe: "la estatua a la que rinde culto buena parte de la población" (31). Vega views Duarte and other Salvadoran politicians as lacking morals, which supports Miller's claim that disgust is how we react to unethical behaviour (29). Miller outlines three protective functions of disgust: the first, "reducing vulnerability to powerful, destructive others that could infect and damage us" (59), encapsulates Vega's attitude toward Salvadoran politicians; the second self-protective function, "limiting our guilt, anxiety, or shame about impulses and actions" (59), is somewhat less prominent in *El asco*, but the third function is essential to Vega's ordeal in returning to his homeland, namely "distancing ourselves from people or things that represent imagery of an unacceptably damaged, weak, abnormal, or destroyed self" (59). Vega was born and raised in El Salvador, and yet he attempts to remove himself from the category of "Salvadoran."

⁵⁶ Duarte is not named in the text, but references to the Salvadoran presidency, cancer, and other biographical details point to him.

Prior to Vega's homecoming, he has spent eighteen years living in Montreal where he has acquired Canadian citizenship. In his own words, he has not *acquired citizenship*, but rather *changed nationalities* from Salvadoran to Canadian: "hice bien," he says, "en cambiar de nacionalidad" (22). Adriana Sara Jastrzębska observes that "la identidad de Vega adulto se construye a partir de un rechazo, una negación de sus raíces y un distanciamiento ostentoso de los salvadoreños" (157). Other critics concur that Vega negates his *salvadoreñidad*; Cortez, for example, writes that Vega's nationality-negating strategy is to "colocar al resto de salvadoreños en la periferia y diferenciarse de ellos en base a cualquier detalle posible, y de la manera más frecuente posible" (*The Dark Side* 47). Daniel Quirós observes that Vega's disgust in relation to his national origins is futile: "El asco y la angustia [...] representan la conciencia del personaje de no poder desprenderse de su 'salvadoreñidad'; de no poder ser ese sujeto occidental, distanciado e intelectual: el profesor de historia de arte de McGill. Aunque sea ciudadano, nunca podrá ser canadiense" (40). Although it is arguable to what extent Vega can *be* Canadian or *be* the social role that he plays in Montreal, Quirós ascertains that there are ineradicable Salvadoran elements in the depths of the protagonist's being. Vega's childhood, adolescence, familial ties, linguistic patterns,⁵⁷ and memory resist the erasure of *salvadoreñidad* from his identity.

Despite Vega's eighteen-year absence from El Salvador, he comes into contact with his compatriots due to the Salvadoran diaspora that was set in motion at the onset of the civil war. Miller stresses that "life uncontained" can cause disgust (44), and this is how Vega

⁵⁷ Vega refers to his interlocutor Moya exclusively in the *vos* form, as opposed to the *tú* or *usted* forms, a particularity of Salvadoran Spanish not used in most countries.

views the spread of Salvadorans beyond their national borders, across the North American continent, and into Montreal: “me parecían una peste,” he says, “con sus comités de solidaridad y todas esas estupideces” (20). He has made every effort to avoid Salvadorans, manifesting Sherman and Haidt’s notion that “disgust follows the law of contagion—contact with disgusting material renders one disgusting” (247). Miller elaborates on the conceptual relationship between “life uncontained” and disgust by stating, “What is alive and not kept in place by a container – whether physical or conceptual – can come my way, push up against my boundaries, try to enter and become me” (44). The last thing that Vega wants is to feel that he has become Salvadoran anew, and he is therefore panicked when he arrives at the Comalapa Airport outside of San Salvador and is swallowed up by a sea of “masas furibundas” (76) in an “agobiante caos” (77) that threatens his Apollonian individuality, his separateness from his homeland’s population.

Vega describes the Salvadoran civil war refugees in Montreal as “tipos siniestros y estúpidos” (20), two adjectives that are repeated throughout his monologue as descriptors of Salvadorans. “Siniestro” is the typical Spanish translation of “unheimlich,” or “uncanny,” and there is a correlation between Vega’s usage of this term and the Freudian concept. We have seen that Freud conceptualizes the uncanny as a disturbing manifestation of something that was once familiar but has become unfamiliar through repression. For Vega, Salvadorans once constituted his entire social environment, but they have become unfamiliar, though not so much through repression as through

avoidance and suppression.⁵⁸ As for the stupidity that Vega relentlessly ascribes to Salvadorans (*El asco* 20, 23, 30, 37, 47, 65, 68, 80, 85), whether they be specific persons or the population as a whole, this can be viewed as the inverse of “mentalizing” which refers to the processes by which we perceive an agent as having a mind (Frith & Frith). When one views another person as disgusting, one simultaneously *de*-mentalizes that person (Sherman & Haidt 247), and Vega, who is disgusted by Salvadorans, accordingly sees them as having minimal brainpower. Miller recognizes that the self can be divided temporally, into such categories as today’s self and tomorrow’s self (28), and Vega even dementalizes his past, Salvadoran self when, referring to the years of his youth, he declares: “únicamente cometí estupideces” (39). All things Salvadoran are stupid and vile in his opinion, including himself prior to relocating to Montreal.

Sherman and Haidt view dementalization as a steppingstone to dehumanization, and they assert that the “[f]ailure to attribute uniquely human traits to an agent (or group) leads to *animalistic* dehumanization in which the target is perceived as crude, savage, and similar to nonhuman animals. This form of dehumanization has clear ties to disgust” (247). As Miller affirms, “Disgust often renders the human inhuman” (41). In *El asco*, Vega demotes Salvadorans to the subhuman realm on several occasions: he claims their famed Pilsener is “para animales” (15); he calls greedy ex-guerrilleros “ratas” (29–30); he refers to Salvadoran university students as “una manada de reses” (51); he calls the pushy taxi drivers outside the Comalapa Airport “aves de rapiña” (79); he says that his brother Ivo

⁵⁸ Psychologically speaking, *suppression* is a conscious effort to block mental contents from consciousness, whereas *repression* signifies an unconscious process whereby mental contents “lose their connection with the conscious system and become unconscious or forgotten” (*Depth Psychology* 34–35). Vega makes a conscious effort to distance himself from Salvadorans and *salvadoreñidad*.

and his friend act like “primates” (83); and he describes the national culture as “una «cultura-moscardón», su único horizonte es el presente, lo inmediato, una cultura con la memoria del moscardón” (68). He combines disgust at uncontained life with dehumanizing name-calling when he observes the urban sprawl that has taken place in San Salvador in his absence, referring to his compatriots as voracious termites: “Horrible cómo ha crecido esta ciudad, Moya, ya se comió casi la mitad del volcán, ya se comió casi todas las zonas verdes que la circundaban, una tremenda vocación de termita tiene esta raza, se lo come todo” (42). His dehumanization of Salvadorans permits him to be exceedingly vicious in his verbal attacks because, on a metaphorical level, he is criticizing beasts and insects, rather than fellow humans who share his own sensibilities.

3.1.2 Physical Disgust

Disgust, as we have seen, is a primordial form of oral displeasure which has evolved as a negative emotion that encompasses other non-gustatory senses and the moral domain. In *El asco*, Vega’s disgust similarly begins at the mouth with his opening critique of El Salvador’s national pilsener—“una cerveza cochina” (15)—and expands outward. In modern human beings, there is evidence of a “causal relationship between feelings of physical disgust and moral condemnation” (Schnall et al. 1105) whereby one’s exposure to disgusting sensations can heighten or provoke one’s negative judgment of others. In *El asco*, we see this interplay between physical and moral forms of disgust; Vega’s physical displeasures intensify his self-distancing from *salvadoreñidad* in a feedback loop. Much like Aragón gets caught in a tailspin of paranoia in *Morongá*, Vega gets caught in a tailspin of disgust in *El asco*. As Vega denigrates his compatriots, he also returns to the

oral origins of disgust with his criticisms of the national dish *pupusas* (54–55), the famed *cóctel de conchas* (59–60), and the national pilsener (59).

To lose oneself in physical sensations is Dionysian. Jung describes “Dionysian expansion” as “something instinctive and blindly compelling, that finds specific expression in an affection of the bodily sphere” (*Psychological Types* 133). Disgust, contrarily, is an Apollonian distancing from the sensations of the bodily sphere. The Dionysian is corporeal, whereas the Apollonian is cerebral. Bodily pleasures, such as scents, tastes, or tactile sensations, are absent from Vega’s monologue, though he does experience cerebral pleasures; Vega attains joy by elevating himself via mentally stimulating literature, classical music, and other works of art. In San Salvador, his pleasures are limited to the time between 5pm and 7pm every afternoon on the patio of the bar La Lumbre, his one oasis in the city which he likes because it allows him to distance himself from others, avoid the midday heat in the shade of the avocado trees, listen to Tchaikovsky, and leave before the nighttime drinkers arrive and immerse themselves in a live rock concert.

Vega hates the heat. His disgust-prone temperament is suited to frozen, sterile Quebec winters under white blankets of snow, as opposed to sweltering, fecund, tropical climes. His reaction to the weather upon his arrival in El Salvador exemplifies “animal nature disgust” in which “actions and events that remind us that we are animals are repressed, hidden, or condemned” (Rozin et al. 575). Vega condemns his own sweating in the heat as a nasty reminder that he is an animal:

El trópico es espantoso, Moya, el trópico convierte a los hombres en seres pútridos y de instintos primarios . . . Ninguna impresión resulta más aborrecible que salir del Aeropuerto de Comalapa. Ninguna impresión me ha hecho aborrecer el trópico con tanta intensidad como mi salida de la terminal aérea de Comalapa: no se trata sólo de las multitudes, sino del shock que significa pasar de un clima soportable en el interior del aeropuerto a ese infierno achicharrante y embrutecedor de la costa tropical, de la fulminante bocanada de calor que me transformó en un animal sudoroso. (79)

He views the heat as “embrutecedor,” meaning that it turns him into a brute, or a beast, and puts him in touch with the “invincible creatureliness of man” (*Depth Psychology* 143) that he and others generally resist through disgust (Rozin et al. 575) and projection onto the *other* (*Depth Psychology* 143).

Vega differs from other Castellanos Moya antiheroes, even fellow intellectuals like Erasmo Aragón, in that he expresses no lust and makes no reference to past, present, or future sexual relations. He is an asexual being. When his brother drags him into a San Salvador brothel, this predictably results in Vega’s revulsion, his distancing from the prostitutes, and his description of carnal commerce as the enemy of spiritual elevation: “nada me produce tanta repugnancia como el comercio carnal, algo de por sí viscoso y propenso a los malentendidos como es el sexo alcanza profundidades abominables con su comercio, una práctica que te carcome las facultades espirituales” (93–94). Paglia maintains that “the Dionysian is liquid nature” (*Sexual Personae* 12) and describes sex as the “probings, plumbing, secretions, gushings” (*Sexual Personae* 56) of this liquid nature. In his Apollonian chastity, Vega views the brothel as a disgusting overload of bodily

secretions, referring to the prostitutes as “mujeres sebosas” and “mujeres purulentas” who have been “inoculadas de semen y sudor” (94).

Vega’s disgust at human secretions reaches a fever pitch during his flight to Comalapa Airport which, unsurprisingly but much to his chagrin, is boarded mostly by Salvadorans, two of whom seat themselves on either side of him. Paglia asserts that “Dionysus, god of fluids, rules a murky no man’s land of matter half-turned to liquid” (*Sexual Personae* 93), and Vega stresses the abundance of liquids in his recounting of this airplane scene. He has entered a murky, Dionysian realm that challenges his Apollonian integrity. The woman next to him perspires profusely and brandishes a sweat-soaked towel; the man on his other side wipes his mucus on the surrounding surfaces; both neighbours drench him in their saliva when they turn to speak to him and to each other. The airplane washrooms have become “compartimentos asquerosos por las escupidas, los restos de vómitos, orines y demás excrecias” (75). These fluids that fill Vega’s environment and penetrate his mental space signify that he has left his clear-cut Apollonian world in which his individual identity was sharply defined and neatly separated from his fellow Salvadorans. He is flying into a conceptual swamp that blends present and past, near and far, me and them, Canadian and Salvadoran, Thomas Bernhard and Edgardo Vega. He must assert his persona fiercely, protecting it with disgust, for fear that it will be abolished.

Although Dionysus was identified with several liquids in ancient Greece (*Sexual Personae* 30), he is most associated with wine, and, in terms of mental states, he is most associated with wine’s resultant intoxication. Of course, one must drink in excess to get drunk, and Dionysus is also a god of excess, whereas Apollo is a god of moderation (Nietzsche 32). Vega never exceeds his two-whiskey limit and never permits himself to

lower his guard by abandoning his carefully constructed persona. On the airplane, he is appalled by passengers throughout the aircraft indulging in alcohol and turning the seven-hour flight from Washington DC to Comalapa into a Dionysian revelry: “siete horas entre sujetos babeantes que gritaban y lloraban de algarabía porque estaban a punto de regresar a esta mugre, siete horas entre sujetos enloquecidos por el alcohol y la inminente llegada a su así llamada patria” (75). His physical disgust at the ubiquitous bodily fluids heightens his moral disgust at this excessive drinking and uncontained sentimentality of the Salvadoran passengers, exemplifying the feedback loop between his physical and moral disgust.

3.1.3 The Apollonian Aesthete

Edgardo Vega did not emigrate to Montreal because of the Salvadoran Civil War. He left before the war began because he could no longer stand to be immersed in what he considers a philistine national culture that is irrelevant on the international artistic stage. Jastrzębska observes that Vega did not leave “por razones políticas o económicas, sino que es un exiliado estético” (156). Vega’s physical and psychological distancing from El Salvador permitted him to transform an existential problem into an aesthetic one; the uncomfortable situation of living in a homeland whose values are not aligned with his own has become the comfortable, perhaps even satisfying, situation of being able to form aesthetic judgments from abroad. According to Jung,

the aesthetic approach immediately converts the problem into a picture which the spectator can contemplate at his ease, admiring both its beauty and its ugliness, merely re-experiencing its passions at a safe distance, with no

danger of becoming involved in them. The aesthetic attitude guards against any real participation, prevents one from being personally implicated.

(Psychological Types 130–131)

We have seen that the key difference between disgust and horror is personal implication (S.B. Miller 7), and Vega's aesthetic distancing, prior to his climactic panic attack, protects him from the horrifying recognition that he is indeed Salvadoran. Schnall et al. observe that "moral judgment is generally a result of quick gut feelings, much like aesthetic judgment," and that both forms of judgment are generally followed by lines of reasoning to support the intuitive responses (1096–1097). Vega has an intuitive distaste for El Salvador. He could easily disparage the corrupt politicians and philistinism found in all four corners of the world, but he focuses on his homeland because it irks him in the way that it stubbornly sticks to his sense of self. His monologue is an unbroken string of rationalizations for an anti-patriotism that begins at the gut level.

Human beings share a religious impulse.⁵⁹ This implies a desire to seek experiences of awe which entail being drawn into an entity that is greater than oneself. In the absence of religions, people are sometimes subsumed by political ideologies, such as the Salvadoran revolutionaries whose group lexicon was oddly reminiscent of the lexicon of Christian theology ("Horacio Castellanos Moya. 'En América Latina'"). Right-wing nationalists, for their part, are awed by their respective nations which fill them with feelings of patriotism. Vega, however, is not attracted to communist revolutions and especially not

⁵⁹ This is evidenced by the universality of ritual and mythology in pre-industrial societies, which has been documented by such scholars as James Frazer, Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell. Industrial societies, for their part, apparently maintain ritual and mythology in altered forms.

attracted to patriotism. His rejection of the latter reflects the sentiments of Castellanos Moya's alter ego Erasmo Aragón⁶⁰ and of the author himself, who said the following in an interview: "El patriotismo es una estupidez generalizada en todo el planeta, no sólo en América Latina. Creo que el ser humano, entre más diminuto es espiritualmente y más miserable es su cotidianidad, busca aferrarse a valores que lo exalten" ("Horacio Castellanos Moya: 'El patriotismo'"). Vega finds no sustenance in group identities. Instead, his religion is art, and aesthetic awe is his point of access to the divine. As a professor of art history at McGill University, he considers himself a high priest of this religion. Cortez states that "el 'buen gusto' solamente puede ser definido desde la perspectiva de un Centro que se auto-adjudique la autoridad para distinguir lo bello, lo artístico, lo estético" (253) and observes that "[u]na de las estrategias que Vega utiliza para posicionarse en el Centro es recalcar su nivel educativo" (*Estética* 252). Like the guerrillero belongs to the guerilla and the revolution, or the nationalist soldier belongs to the army and the fatherland, Vega owes his societal role and his existential meaning to the professional study of art history and to art itself.

Vega's disgust at material existence makes him hyperbolically value the "espíritu" which, he believes, is nourished through exposure to high art. He laments that Salvadoran universities have ceased to offer degrees in the humanities while doling out countless degrees in business administration (25–26). He claims that El Salvador does not exist,

⁶⁰ Aragón says, "nada hay de qué enorgullecerse por ser originario de un sitio semejante [a El Salvador], ni de sitio alguno, como si el orgullo fuera una virtud y no un pecado propio de acomplejados" (*Moronga* 139).

evoking Roque Dalton's opening line "País mío no existes" from the poem "El gran despecho," because it does not get noticed in the art world:

Este país no existe, te lo puedo asegurar yo que nací aquí, regularmente recibo las principales publicaciones periódicas del mundo sobre arte, leo con detenimiento las secciones sobre cultura y arte de los principales periódicos y revistas del mundo, por eso te puedo asegurar que este país no existe, al menos artísticamente, nadie sabe nada de él, a nadie le interesa, ningún individuo nacido en este territorio existe en el mundo del arte como no sea por la política o los crímenes. (67)

Vega, moreover, describes El Salvador as "un hoyo, un pozo profundísimo" (67), an image that provides a horrifying glimpse into non-existence and is reminiscent of the metaphorical "hoyo negro" that Erasmo Aragón peers into in *El sueño del retorno* (77). Vega reprimands his interlocutor, Moya, who has literary aspirations, for staying in a country that, for Vega, is a literary black hole. As an Apollonian figure, Vega abhors annihilation. As an Apollonian *aesthete*, he especially abhors annihilation that is due to a lack of recognition in the art world.

The Apollonian impulse, which is a drive toward self-realization, affects one's inner and outer lives. Internally, it promotes contemplation—the habit of the "Apollonian artist" (Nietzsche 118). Externally, it promotes the striving toward greatness, like that of Apollo as sun-god or dragon slayer. In *El asco*, Vega critiques capitalist greed, materialism, and the admiration of elites as manifestations of an overemphasis on outward striving at the expense of inward contemplation. When paired with the interminable blaring of

televisions and other devices, such striving leaves human beings starved of what Vega calls “alimento espiritual” (58). Social media was essentially non-existent when Castellanos Moya published *El asco* in 1997, but, in a 2016 interview, the author stated that platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter contribute to the increasing dominance of outward posing over inward pensiveness:

[L]a tecnología tiene un aspecto macabro, porque promueve la desaparición del ‘hombre interior’. Quizás el gran cambio de nuestra época es la muerte del ‘hombre interior’. Hoy nos queda sólo el culto a la apariencia. Todos tenemos vanidad, ambición y ganas de figurar y ser reconocidos, pero nunca se habían creado las condiciones para que sólo nos dedicáramos a eso. Este proceso anula la capacidad de reflexión interna, es enemiga del silencio y de toda interiorización. (“Horacio Castellanos Moya: ‘El mundo’”)

The psychologist Ernest Becker, in *The Denial of Death* (1973), claims that humankind suffers from a universal fear of death that is also the root of the universal phenomenon of heroic striving. Archetypal heroes are immortalized in images and stories that are too glorious to be set aside, and the widespread desire to imitate this heroic blueprint, to permanently stamp our own images and stories on the world, is now aided by technology. Castellanos Moya observes that the emphasis on one’s outer representation, however, when taken to the extreme, can bring about the death of one’s inner self, a paradoxical self-annihilation through an attempt at Apollonian self-enhancement.

3.1.4 Ivo: The Shadow Brother

The mythological motif of the hostile brothers, for Erich Neumann, consists of the tension between one brother who personifies the ego and a second brother who personifies the Jungian shadow. This struggle is represented by such pairings as Osiris–Set, Balder–Loki, Abel–Cain, Jacob–Esau, Siegfried–Hagen, Faust–Mephisto, and Dr. Jekyll–Mr. Hyde (*Depth Psychology* 138). “[T]he shadow is the unknown side of the personality,” writes Neumann, “it normally encounters the ego, the centre and representative of the light side and of consciousness, in the form of a dark, uncanny figure of evil – to confront whom is always a fateful experience for the individual” (*Depth Psychology* 137). The tension between Edgardo Vega and his brother Ivo is a parody of the motif of the hostile brothers. Vega has suppressed an enormous amount of himself, and Ivo embodies these buried contents which Vega characterizes as vile.

Jastrzębska explains:

Para Vega, Ivo encarna, ética y estéticamente, todo lo más odiable de la clase media salvadoreña. El protagonista arma su identidad en oposición al estilo de vida de su hermano y su familia, despreciando a su esposa y sus hijos, burlándose de sus aspiraciones, diversiones y otras actividades. De hecho, podemos percibir a Ivo como la contracara de Edgardo, o una versión alternativa de la vida de éste: ¿cómo viviría ahora si no se hubiera ido a Canadá? (Jastrzębska 160)

Reading between the lines of Vega’s unreliable monologue, one gets the sense that Ivo is the more reasonable brother, nothing like the monstrous Set, Mephisto, or Mr. Hyde. Ivo

personifies Vega's shadow, but this shadow is so vast that it includes positive attributes like empathy, the sense of community, and the sense of fun. Vega, for his part, does not personify the entirety of the ego so much as the persona—the social mask constructed by the ego.

Neumann views the motif of the hostile brothers as a manifestation of the more fundamental mythological paradigm of the “principle of opposites” (*Jacob and Esau* 77–78). In the struggle between Vega and Ivo, this principle is evident:

Mi hermano y yo somos las personas más distintas que podrás imaginar, Moya, no nos parecemos absolutamente en nada, no tenemos ninguna cosa en común, nadie creería que somos hijos de la misma madre, somos tan distintos que nunca llegamos a ser amigos, apenas un par de conocidos que compartíamos padres, apellidos y la misma casa, me dijo Vega. Teníamos dieciocho años de no vernos, nunca nos escribimos, apenas intercambiamos saludos y lugares comunes una media docena de veces cuando mi madre me telefoneaba y él estaba con ella, Moya, nunca nos llamamos porque nunca teníamos nada de que hablar, porque cada quien ha podido hacer su vida sin siquiera tener que recordar al otro, porque somos completamente extraños, somos las antípodas. (35)

Neumann defines the persona as “the cloak and the shell, the armour and the uniform, behind which and within which the individual conceals himself – from himself, often enough, as well as from the world” (*Depth Psychology* 37–38). Vega lives within such a crusty shell, reinforced by prodigious disgust. Nanci Buiza affirms that “brutality and

callousness [are] a shell into which Vega retreats and takes refuge . . . a self-defensive strategy, whereby solipsism, self-assertion, and egotism take the place of openness, understanding, and engagement with the world” (“On Aesthetic Experience” 107). The persona worries about what others might think or say, and so it prefers the role of judge over the role of actor because the latter role might make one an object of ridicule. Cortez observes that “Vega tiene que someterse a ciertas normas, muchas de ellas autoimpuestas, para mantenerse en ese espacio de poder. Es por esta razón que Vega no puede arriesgarse a hacer el ridículo ante los demás. Tiene que preocuparse constantemente del qué dirán” (258). Vega criticizes the “defachatez” of others (46, 61), which refers to their lack of a “fachada,” or façade. He refuses to borrow a pair of Ivo’s swim trunks and spend the afternoon enjoying the beach with Ivo’s family because he thinks it would require a dropping of his façade: “sólo tipos con la mayor defachatez pueden sentir algún placer al revolcarse en la mugrosa arena de esas abominables playas” (61). Ivo, contrarily, is always seeking fun.

Ivo is a Dionysian figure. In addition to inviting Vega to play in the sand and waves, he asks Vega to participate in other activities that are conducive to physical exhilaration. For example, he asks Vega to eat *cóctel de conchas*, a dish prepared with raw clams; curiously, Paglia has referred specifically to raw clams as inducers of “ecstasy and revulsion . . . The primitive shapelessness of raw clams offers sensuous access to some archaic swamp-experience” (*Sexual Personae* 91–92). Unsurprisingly, Vega refuses to partake in this experience. When Ivo suggests that they go to watch a soccer game at the stadium, Vega turns his brother down; “detesto las aglomeraciones,” he later explains to Moya, “las concentraciones humanas me producen una aflicción indescriptible” (37).

This is a key difference between the hostile brothers: Vega cannot bear to lose himself in any communal ecstasies, whereas Ivo wants to immerse himself in the emotional cheering and chanting of the multitudes in the stadium.

Ivo manages to take Vega, who cannot bear another second around his sister-in-law and nephews, on a night out to a bar, a nightclub, and a brothel. Ivo's party-animal friend, Juancho, accompanies them. For Vega, the nightclub is the infernal opposite to his paradisiacal patio at La Lumbre: "Era un galerón oscuro, con luces cegadoras que súbitamente golpeteaban desde el techo y donde el aire enrarecido apenas circulaba, un galerón que retumbaba con un ruido infernal y en cuyo centro había una pista de baile" (86). The deafening music, darkness, blinding laser-lights, drunkenness, heat of human bodies packed together, and rhythmic movement allow Ivo and Juancho to dissolve into Dionysian ecstasy on the dancefloor while Vega becomes a more tightly wound and prickly ball of disgust, seated at the bar.

In tales of the archetypal hero, the contingencies of the hero's birth are of the utmost importance. The psychologist Otto Rank wrote on this topic in his book *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909). Rank observes that many mythological, epic, and religious heroes from around the globe are the children of deities or royalty who are born into grave danger and therefore whisked away to a safe place and raised by a foster parent or parents. Because of their family origins, birthrights, and innate gifts, these heroes achieve greatness that was predestined for them. The antihero Vega, on the other hand, views his origins as a cesspool of squalor that nevertheless can be transcended because they bear no relation to his adult self. "Nunca acepté la broma macabra del destino," says Vega, "que me hizo nacer en estas tierras" (20). He describes being born in El Salvador in the same

way that Gabriel, in *La diáspora*, describes the assassination of Roque Dalton: “una broma macabra.” But the key difference is that Vega does not accept the joke, expelling it with his disgust, whereas Gabriel is horrified to his very core by Dalton’s death.

For archetypal heroes, the familial blood that runs through their veins is often the reason underlying their quests, but for Vega “la sangre es un azar, algo perfectamente prescindible” (35) and “la familia constitu(ye) una casualidad sin ninguna importancia” (38). In his hyper-valuation of the cultivation of his individual spirit, he reduces the value of communal, quasi-material concepts like *the homeland* and *blood ties* to zero. From Vega’s perspective, his brother Ivo is a sinister reflection of everything he has blocked out of his adult life. Whereas many archetypal heroes pursue self-realization in the destiny with which they were born, Vega, like Alonso Quijano, invents a new identity, a new name, and an unconventional destiny for himself. As a result, Edgardo Vega is psychically torn between his invented persona, which manifests as the Canadian intellectual Thomas Bernhard, and his ineradicable Jungian shadow, which is personified by his brother Ivo.

3.1.5 From Disgust to Horror

Edgardo Vega’s crash landing from his self-ascribed superiority over his compatriots into the horrifying recognition that he too is Salvadoran constitutes the climax and the most significant moment in the novella. This scene is placed at the end of the unchronological narrative, but there are hints at horror that lead up to it. Vega’s description of his compatriots as “siniestros” throughout the monologue suggests that he is frightened by them, but he initially directs his attacks at their supposed stupidity more than their

supposed capacity for evil. For example, when he recalls the story of Francisco Olmedo, a former classmate of his who—like Roque Dalton—was shot dead by his own guerrilla comrades,⁶¹ he emphasizes Olmedo’s stupidity without addressing the horror of the fratricidal murder: “lo fusilaron por traidor, al cretino de Olmedo, el único de nuestra clase que murió en la guerrilla, por imbécil” (30).

The threat of violence creeps deeper into Vega’s mind as the plot progresses. When he goes to the bar with Ivo and Juancho, he is scared by four men seated nearby whose sinister appearances suggest untold evils: “los sujetos más siniestros que he visto en mi vida, Moya, cuatro sicópatas con el crimen y la tortura estampados en la jeta” (85). He narrates that each one has “un rictus tenebroso” (85) as they glare at Juancho, and this disturbing smirk indicates that their social masks are ready to fall and reveal the monsters and Mr. Hydes that were given free rein during the civil war. He refers to the crisis of recycled violence, which is personified in *El arma en el hombre* by Robocop and Lieutenant Pedro (i.e., Zeledón), certain that the four men at the nearby table are ex-combatants with grenades at the ready: “No hay día en que uno de esos así llamados «desmovilizados» no lance una granada de fragmentación contra un grupo de personas que le incomoda” (86). Vega genuinely fears that he is in harm’s way, and this fear soon spirals out of control.

Vega is seated alone in Ivo’s Toyoto Corolla, downtown, late at night, when the national atmosphere he had derided as being permeated with imbecility (51) comes to seem as

⁶¹ This recollection reiterates the backstory to Castellanos Moya’s short story “Variaciones sobre el asesinato de Francisco Olmedo” (1993).

though it were permeated with inescapable violence. He fears that he will be killed by passersby who aim to rob the car, and he recalls the news story of the murder of Olga María de Trabanino, a memory which serves to “paranoizar[le] con la criminalidad extrema que asola a este país” (90–91). His panic attack in the car is an anticlimax that prefigures his full transition from disgust to horror:

[E]sos últimos tres minutos en que el pánico hizo presa de mí fueron horriblos, una experiencia desgastante, algo que no le deseo a nadie, permanecer encerrado en un Toyota Corolla a la espera de que un grupo de maleantes te asesine para robar el carro, porque no pueden robar sin matar, seguramente porque matar es lo que les produce su verdadero placer y no tanto robar, como lo demuestra el caso de la señora de Trabanino. (91)

The emblematic case of Olga María reminds Vega that he is in an *unsafe world*. Miller maintains that horror can result from “an omnipresent, menacing, though aimless disintegration of social security” (85), which reflects how Vega views the abundant postwar violence in El Salvador.

Vega’s climactic horror finally comes when he is in the brothel and believes he has lost his Canadian passport which, unbeknownst to him, fell out of his pocket in Ivo’s car during his panic attack. Matthew Richey notes a connection between the news story about Olga María, which represents omnipresent violence, and Vega’s temporary loss of his passport, asserting that the news story “es el acontecimiento principal que confirma y amplifica la ansiedad de Edgardo Vega y que desencadena su colapso nervioso durante el

cual pierde su pasaporte” (82). When Vega detects the passport’s absence, his persona is momentarily shattered, and he sees himself once again as a Salvadoran:

El terror se apoderó de mí, Moya, el terror puro y estremecedor: me vi atrapado en esta ciudad para siempre, sin poder regresar a Montreal; me vi de nuevo convertido en un salvadoreño que no tiene otra opción que vegetar en esta inmundicia . . . Era horrible, Moya, una pesadilla siniestra. (96)

Without his passport, he can no longer cling to his carefully crafted adult self, reverting instead to a broader self that encompasses all the contingencies with which he was born. He enters “una espiral delirante” (96) which takes him all the way to “el vórtice del delirio” (98), reminiscent of the vertigo that Aragón experiences when he fears he has murdered someone (*El sueño* 77–78) and the vertigo Zeledón experiences when he sees Robocop alive in front of him (*Moronga* 116). These chaotic moments involve the breaking of protective artifices that the protagonists have set up in their psyches and the concomitant collapses of their personae. “Estaba fuera de mí” (97), Vega reports to Moya.

Vega’s horror does not wipe out his persona with finality because his passport is soon recovered. Relieved, he flees Ivo and Juancho, entering a taxi in which he flips through the pages of the travel document and stares at his photo as if to convince himself that he is indeed the Canadian intellectual Thomas Bernhard, a persona that requires the most relentless of self-boundary protection to remain intact, especially when travelling to El Salvador where people know him as Edgardo Vega and where his oldest memories come to life. The taxi takes him to Ivo’s house where he goes straight to bed with the passport

under his pillow, a risibly pathetic image. Vega's self-aggrandizing diatribe eviscerates and excoriates El Salvador, but this verbal conquest of his homeland does not make him a hero. Rather, Vega is a gutless eviscerator, a heartless excoriator, and an antihero who makes an antiheroic return to a hero-less land.

3.2 Laura Rivera

La diabla en el espejo, which features Laura Rivera as its narrator and protagonist, focuses on the aftermath of the murder of Rivera's best friend Olga María de Trabanino by Robocop. In fact, French translations of the novella published by Les Allusif in 2004 and by Domaine Étranger in 2006 are titled *La mort d'Olga María* (i.e., The Death of Olga María). Rivera is already psychically fragmented at the outset of the narrative due to the recent loss of her best friend. She directs her dialogic monologue at the titular she-devil in the mirror who reflects her stream of consciousness, which is devilish in its cruelty, back at her. The imaginary she-devil is a replacement for Olga María whose death has left a void in Rivera's life as a young divorcée and wealthy, nonworking socialite. Rivera has always viewed Olga María as the perfect woman and a wonderful friend. When Rivera discovers that her ex-husband Alberto and Olga María had an affair while Rivera and Alberto were still married, however, her emotional world, which typically throngs with contempt, is suddenly infused with horror. Her horror then compounds when Robocop escapes from prison. The feeling that she has been cast into an *unsafe world* of deception and violence eventually leads to a climactic attack of paranoia.

This subchapter responds to four questions. First, how does Rivera express contempt for *salvadoreñidad* and indigenusness? Second, how does the primacy of the social hierarchy in Rivera's worldview shape her narrative and her narration? Third, why does Rivera pedestalize the personae of Olga María and El Yuca, and how does Olga María's betrayal of Rivera induce horror? Fourth, how does Robocop embody the Jungian shadow of El Salvador's ruling class, and how does he contribute to Rivera's Dionysian disintegration?

3.2.1 Contempt for *Salvadoreñidad* and Indigenusness

Rivera ranks the cultures of the world according to a steep hierarchy with origins in colonialism. She considers Europe to be superior to El Salvador, and she considers Salvadorans of European ancestry to be superior to those of indigenous ancestry. The United States, like El Salvador, forms part of the Americas—the “New World”—but El Salvador is nonetheless akin to a colony of the northern superpower; Rivera was educated at the “Escuela Americana” in her youth, for example, an experience which brings *colonizing* US content and conventions into a *colonized* Central American context. The political and cultural exchange between the United States and El Salvador is largely unidirectional, with the giant, wealthy nation exercising power over the smaller, poorer one. Rivera, through her colonial attitude, self-identifies with the United States and metaphorically raises it aloft, above her homeland, often singing the praises of New York and Miami while criticizing San Salvador. Her attitude, as Castellanos Moya has observed, is representative of that of Central American elites in general: “nuestras clases dominantes no han tenido ningún sentido de nación, han tratado a nuestros países como si

fueran fincas y a la población como si fueran peones . . . Su sentido de identidad está en Nueva York o Miami y ven a sus países con un poco de repugnancia” (quoted in Paredes 177).

Rivera envies Olga María’s sister Diana for her residency in Miami. The first commendation of Miami in Rivera’s dialogue comes when, like Edgardo Vega, she curses the intense heat in El Salvador. Whereas Vega highlights his “animal nature disgust” at sweating and feeling bestial, Rivera highlights El Salvador’s supposed inferiority to more accommodating climates: “El clima de Miami le ha sentado muy bien [a Diana]. Un bronceado así quisiera tener yo. Pero este sol de aquí es bien bruto: quema, la pone a una como camarón y el bronceado no dura nada” (33). Rivera also likes how Miami has significant geographical separation between the rich and the poor. She and Diana lament how, in San Salvador, “las colonias de la gente decente están prácticamente rodeadas por zonas marginales, por el pobrerío de donde sale la delincuencia” (35). Rivera is enchanted by anglicisms such as “affair,” “hobby,” “suspense,” and “high school” (Rojas Carranza 152), and she views their usage and correct pronunciation as exclusive to the upper class. When Deputy Commissioner Handal, whom Rivera sees as lower class, uses the word “affair,” this results in a contemptuous outburst: “¡Qué bruto! Vieras la manera como pronunció «affair», el muy bestia” (50). English is the predominant language of the United States and the Global North, a section of the world with which Rivera identifies and from which she excludes her poorer compatriots. When asked about Mexican travel, she responds that she would prefer to go to New York or Miami, and she echoes an opinion inherited from her father: “los mexicanos son rateros y tramposos . . . los aztecas eran unos criminales bárbaros” (100). This reconjures the

colonial hierarchy; it is Mexico's indigenous heritage (the Aztecs), not its Spanish heritage, that deters Rivera. Mexico, moreover, forms part of the Global South alongside El Salvador, and so Rivera emphasizes her separation from it. New York and Miami are major centres of consumerism with opportunities to buy items that cannot be found in the Global South or even in the small towns of the Global North. As Paredes notes, exclusivity is precious to Rivera; she wants to “exhibir una diferenciación del *yo* y revelarnos la potencialidad de su *ego* o la condición más exclusiva de su carácter” (179).

In addition to her approbation of New York and Miami, Rivera often praises Europe. When seated on the balcony of a restaurant owned by a friend who has lived in Madrid, she states, “Lo que me gusta es este ambiente europeo, una se siente como si no estuviera en San Salvador” (59). When seated at a church and looking at the sculptures, she says, “Fijate en esos santos. Qué horribles. ¿Quién los vestirá de esa manera? Qué mal gusto. Nada que ver con esas esculturas que una encuentra en las iglesias de Europa” (81). Whereas Vega presents distasteful art as El Salvador's violation of the human spirit, Rivera presents the same thing as El Salvador's confirmation of the world's cultural hierarchy. Her preference for Europe also extends into the social realm and into sexual attraction. She and Olga María apply the nickname Julio Iglesias (the name of a famous Spanish singer) to an acquaintance from Madrid whom they see as “un tipazo, guapísimo, alto” (12) and with whom Olga María has one of her many extramarital affairs. Rivera also expresses an attraction to another popular Spanish singer, the “Papacito” Miguel Bosé (32). She pedestalizes Iglesias and Bosé because they combine physical attractiveness and talent with the cultural capital of being stars *in Europe* and *from Europe*.

Rivera is contemptuous of physical traits that are indigenous to Central America, especially of skin tones that are darker than those native to Europe. In reference to Olga María's widower Marito, she says, "no le hallo ningún atractivo: un trigueñito cualquiera" (84). When in a heated argument over the phone, her racism manifests as she projects physiognomic traits into the woman with whom she is quarrelling but has never seen: "Seguro que es una prieta, chaparra, trompuda" (116). At Olga María's funeral, she says, "ya ves cómo son los indios, ni se les nota lo que sienten, con ese rostro como si fuese máscara" (25), a dehumanizing remark. Rivera, moreover, consistently employs the derogatorily connotated "indios" instead of the neutral "indígenas." Her cruel outlook toward indigenous people is unmistakable when she comments on the lack of the death penalty in El Salvador: "Lástima que no haya pena de muerte . . . como en Guatemala, ¿viste en la tele el fusilamiento del último indio? Ahí no se andan con contemplaciones: indio criminal al paredón. Así debe ser" (51). Her mercilessness makes her monologue both contempt-*uous* and contempt-*ible*, similar to the manner in which Vega's monologue is both disgust-*ed* and disgust-*ing*. Her argument about the death penalty also incorporates her pedestalization of the Global North: "Si en los países más civilizados como Estados Unidos aplican la pena de muerte, ¿por qué aquí no?" (51). This comment implies that El Salvador is an *un*-civilized nation and is therefore unworthy of forming part of Rivera's self-identity. Though she is a Salvadoran citizen, she identifies with the Global North.

3.2.2 The Social Hierarchy

Much like Rivera ranks the cultures of the world according to a steep colonial hierarchy, she ranks individuals according to the social classes to which they belong. She is markedly *social* in her thinking, as opposed to philosophical, artistic, scientific, religious, political, etc. She constantly employs the word “gente” as she evaluates interpersonal relationships, mentions family backgrounds, and assesses where people are positioned on the social hierarchy. She has three main categories for Salvadoran people which exist on a vertical scale: the “gente decente” (33, 35) are the uppermost class with whom Rivera identifies, the “gente cualquiera” (82) lack the prestige of the wealthiest and most famous families in the country, and the “gentuza” (24, 70) are the lower classes which include the nation’s many servants. Rivera maintains that servants are “putas o rateras, o las dos cosas” (25), but she praises them if she believes they have accepted their position at the bottom of the hierarchy and are committed to supporting the “gente decente,” which is the case of Olga María’s devoted servant, Julia (24–25). Hutcherson and Gross theorize that “[c]ontempt may function to diminish interaction with individuals who cannot contribute in a meaningful way to the group” (721). Consistent with this notion, Rivera embraces Julia for her contributions to Olga María’s family but generally expresses contempt toward servants who, she claims, bring more complications than contributions to the lives of elites.

Rivera finds political discourse boring (51) and does not think deeply about politics, but she nevertheless has a strong preference for conservatism over socialism. Her father is über-conservative, and he acts as the voice of her political conscience. She believes that

her father “siempre termina teniendo razón” (106). Despite the deradicalization of the FMLN in the postwar era, Rivera continues referring disparagingly to members of this left-wing party as “comunistas” (19, 26, 27, 34, 45, 51, 83). Her abhorrence of communism is consistent with her hierarchization of world cultures and of El Salvador’s citizenry because communism aims, in theory, at a total flattening of all hierarchies. The conservatism with which Rivera is comfortable, on the other hand, promotes the maintenance or steepening of hierarchies. When speaking of the civil war years, she refers to the FMLN fighters not as “guerrilleros” but as “terroristas” (23, 32, 93), as though there had not been dire social injustices that provoked their insurgence. She parrots her father’s opinion that priests are responsible for motivating the nation’s poor people to rise and fight (77). Archbishop Óscar Romero, however, is notably absent from Rivera’s monologue. Romero was conservative by nature and yet he challenged the nation’s army and ruling class through homilies that “denunciaban la situación de los derechos humanos y se volvieron incómodas para la ultraderecha” (Paredes 173). Romero’s compassion and his loyalty to the truth fly in the face of Rivera and her father’s contention that the clergy were reckless inciters of violence, and so Rivera omits Romero. She maintains that a good priest is one who ignores societal problems: “Ese cura me gusta: sólo habla de cosas espirituales; no tiene nada de comunista, como ese tal Ramírez que a veces da misa ahí en esa iglesia” (45). In Rivera’s mind, the social hierarchy *should* be very steep, and this removes any potential concerns about social injustice; she sees the “gente decente” as deserving significant advantages and the “gentuza” as deserving whatever afflictions might befall them.

Rivera is merciless to those who must cling to the bottom rungs of society's ladder. We have seen that she is in favour of the death penalty and spectated the “fusilamiento del último indio” with relish. The following passage elaborates on her endorsement of capital punishment:

Dice mi papá que por culpa de los curas es que no hay pena de muerte. En eso estoy de acuerdo con él: te aseguro que después de fusilar a una docena de canallas como [Robocop] se la pensarían antes de cometer fechorías contra las personas decentes. Las bestias no entienden de razones. Con esa mirada de criminal, ¿vos creés que se regeneraría? Deberían fusilarlo, sin juicio ni nada.

(51)

Rivera dehumanizes people who commit crimes against the ruling class, calling them “bestias” and adding “no entienden de razones.” According to Miller, “If we aim to assert superiority over a person, or license to aggress toward him, we may need to render him inhuman” (151). Rivera justifies the killing of certain humans by conceptualizing it as the slaying of beasts. Of course, she is not personally involved in any physical violence; nevertheless, as Castellanos Moya points out, Rivera represents a “ruling class that was so frivolous and so criminal . . . They were not doing any killing, in the sense that they had the army to do that, but it was inside them” (“Horacio Castellanos Moya and Rory O’Bryen” 00:37:48 – 00:38:03). The will to kill was inside the ruling class, as it is inside Rivera, and their will was done by the Salvadoran army.

The biggest source of class-based friction in *La diabla* is the relationship between Rivera and Deputy Commissioner Handal. Rivera views police officers generally as “necios”

(8), not to mention “groseros, morbosos y sucios” (10), but Handal is the most frequent target of Rivera’s name-calling; he is a “canalla” (9), “cerdo” (9), “sinvergüenza” (10), “patán” (10), “malnacido” (34), “payaso” (48), and “bestia” (50). Handal is tasked with leading the investigation of Olga María’s death, yet Rivera does not think he is worthy of hearing the secret details of Olga María’s life, saying at one point, “cómo se le ocurría [a Handal] que yo le iba a contra la vida privada de mi amiga a un cualquiera como él” (10). She has a similarly disparaging view of journalists, whom she describes as “una raza inmunda, cuervos, zopilotes tras la carroña” (94) because they too ask questions about and even criticize members of the ruling class without themselves belonging to that exclusive sector of the population. Rivera screams at Handal that Olga María was too virtuous for anyone to have planned out or even desired her murder (10), but, when Olga María’s sister Diana poses questions to Rivera about Olga María’s murder that closely resemble Handal’s earlier questions, Rivera quietly responds that “todo es muy confuso” (36). Rivera therefore demonstrates that her indignation at Handal is class-based, and that her best friend’s beautiful, Miami-based younger sister is non-contemptible. Melnick and Nevis highlight that contempt requires a lack of empathy (220), and empathy eclipses contempt in Rivera’s interactions with Olga María’s sister, as well as with Olga María’s mother and daughters, but certainly not in her interactions with Handal.

Rivera’s contempt for Handal manifests in multiple ways. She begins projecting her prejudices into him, for example, speculating that he must be a former “terrorista” with

connections to the FMLN (34) or that he must be a “turco,”⁶² a minority group for whom her father has a visceral hatred (42). Melnick and Nevis posit that contempt is sometimes expressed as “a refusal to acknowledge the presence of another” (221), and, although Rivera cannot fully ignore the presence of Handal and his accompanying officers when they come to question her at her house, she does diminish their presence as much as possible. She chooses not to have a lawyer present, for example, because that would “concederles mucha importancia y darles la impresión de que una se puede intimidar ante gente tan rastrera” (47). Furthermore, she intentionally makes them wait half an hour and does not shake their hands upon her late arrival, “para que tuvieran conciencia de que no so[n] iguales” (47). Her confrontations with Handal resemble those between Edgardo Vega and his brother Ivo insofar as the incensed narrators Rivera and Vega, despite narrating their sides of the story, appear to the reader to be the unreasonable ones.

In addition to Handal, Rivera must also interact with the private detective Pepe Pindonga who treats her “como si . . . fuera de su clase” (85). At the novella’s end, the detective tells Laura his hypothesis that Major Linares⁶³ was the intellectual author of Olga María’s murder, which is proved true in *El arma en el hombre*. Blinded by her contempt, however, Rivera tells herself that Pindonga is an imbecile (133) and continues going down the delirious rabbit holes of her own hypotheses.

⁶² In El Salvador, the term “turcos” is commonly used to refer to Palestinian immigrants and their descendants.

⁶³ The full name “Major Linares” does not appear until *El arma en el hombre*. Rivera refers to him, in *La diabla*, as “ese mayor no sé qué” (133).

3.2.3 Olga María and El Yuca: Pedestalized Personae

Rivera's Dionysian disintegration is brought about by two horrifying phenomena: the crumbling of personae in her social circle and the *unsafe world* in which violent figures like Robocop are on the prowl. The former will be examined here, in subchapter 3.2.3, and the latter will be examined subsequently in subchapter 3.2.4. Vilmar Rojas Carranza observes that Rivera is a sort of "Celestina" to Olga María, insofar as Rivera abets her friend's numerous extramarital affairs. Rojas Carranza adds that Rivera's discourse, which showers praise on Olga María, is "protector y auto-protector" (150); Rivera insists on the perfection of her best friend, "una persona tan honesta, tan recta, tan entregada a su familia y a su trabajo" (10), and this pedestalization is a means of elevating herself by association and protecting herself from any guilt about her own involvement in Olga María's deceptions. Rivera similarly pedestalizes the wealthy businessman and presidential hopeful Don Gastón Berrenechea, known as "El Yuca,"⁶⁴ despite having to confront unsightly aspects of his character that exist behind his charismatic persona. Whereas Rivera never fully acknowledges how much the realities of El Yuca differ from his persona, she is forced to accept that Olga María's deceptiveness in life ran much deeper than previously imagined; Rivera stands among the people who were deceived by her best friend. When Olga María is totally "desenmascarada de sus apariencias" (Ortiz Wallner 90), this sets in motion Rivera's slow, digestive process of horror.

⁶⁴ Rolando Aguilera maintains that Berrenechea is loosely based on the Salvadoran politician Roberto D'Aubuisson (40–42).

Prior to her death, Olga María filled Rivera's life as both the social centrepiece and the embodiment of the ideal woman. Even though Rivera knows about some of her friend's dirty secrets, she blocks these from consciousness, focusing on Olga María's public persona as though it encapsulates the entirety of her character: "Olga María fue siempre tan discreta, tan modosita, reservada, ajena a los numeritos histéricos, preservadora de su hogar, entregada totalmente a su esposo y a sus hijas" (23), not to mention "sobria, correcta, mesurada, recatada" (60). Rivera presents Olga María as an Apollonian heroine, a fully integrated figure who personifies perfection, precision, and moderation. She comes to acknowledge, however, that her friend was also moved by an abundance of Dionysian wildness, fluidity, and multiplicity. "Yo creí que la conocía," Rivera says at a later stage in the narrative, "pero ahora me doy cuenta que tenía varias personalidades" (112). One of these various personalities is a "yo escondido" (60) that Rivera witnessed when Olga María, not long before her death, was drunk on wine. Olga María's Jungian shadow, filled with "energía inconsciente que la llevaba a tener affairs con los hombres" (97), took possession of her and urged her to proposition Rivera to a sexual threesome between the two of them and a restaurant waiter (60).

Rivera's changing opinion about Olga María's character coincides with changing ideas about the roles her friend might have played in the lives of others. She passes from thinking that no acquaintance of theirs could possibly have wished Olga María any harm to forming various hypotheses about potential culprits within their shared social circle. The veil of morality is lifted from her elite milieu, and horror is the result. "[H]orror responds to a perceived immoral world," affirms Miller, "by establishing, I am unsafe here, and by asserting, this is painful for me to experience" (87). As Olga María's social

mask falls out of place, it takes with it the social mask of the entire ruling class, and Rivera's formerly well-ordered world is rendered chaotic.

Betrayal is essential to Rivera's experience of horror. When she discovers that her best friend slept with her ex-husband Alberto before she had divorced him, her devastation is akin to that of Gabriel in *La diáspora* and Erasmo Aragón in *Morongá* when these characters ponder Roque Dalton's assassination at the hands of his own comrades. A rug is pulled out from under Rivera; her most trusted confidante was a traitor. "[Y]o ya no puedo creer nada a nadie," she says (101). Dante's *Inferno* outlines the nine descending circles of hell, the first of which is limbo and the rest of which are reserved for sinners of increasingly malevolent kinds; notably, the ninth and lowest realm of hell is designated for traitors (179), which expresses, as do the stories of Gabriel, Aragón, and Rivera, that betrayal has consequences that are nothing less than earth-shattering. Miller observes that horror arises when loved ones defy the images that have been ascribed to them: "The older child," for example, "might be horrified if Mom shoplifts a piece of jewelry because he then questions, who is this mom? Is she the nice person I thought she was or has she changed or been hiding her true self?" (99). Rivera comes to see that Olga María's true self, or part of it, was hidden from her. Whereas Rivera typically reacts quickly to bad news with contempt or with the other hostile, condemnatory emotions of anger or disgust, she reacts slowly to the news of Olga María and Alberto's affair. "[N]o termino de digerirlo" (98), she says, evoking Miller's analogy between horror and digestion. Rivera is free of hostility and refrains from hurling insults at Olga María in the way she so freely hurls them at others, reporting that she feels "tristeza, desazón, como si de pronto nada tuviera sentido," and adding, "siempre le fui leal a Olga María y ahora

resulta que aquella no me tuvo ninguna consideración” (97). The posthumous rupture of her most meaningful relationship casts her into a new reality in which previously unimagined horrors are now possible and no one can be trusted.

El Yuca is another character in *La diabla* with a marked divide between persona and shadow. Castellanos Moya has stated that Denis Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master* (1796) is one of his ten favourite books,⁶⁵ and El Yuca resembles Diderot’s character Father Hudson with his combination of a faultless public image and a depraved private life. In the political sphere, El Yuca is a charismatic presidential hopeful (26), but behind closed doors he is a cocaine addict and heavy drinker who is unfaithful to his wife, abusive toward women, involved in narcotrafficking, and prone to emotional outbursts. Nevertheless, Rivera remains attached to El Yuca’s persona, the same way she did with Olga María’s, never holding him in contempt as she would a member of the “gentuza.” When she observes El Yuca’s cocaine problem, she becomes fearful rather than contemptuous: “comprendí lo que le estaba pasando. Y me dio miedo, para qué te lo voy a negar. Un hombre de ese calibre en semejante situación es para asustar a cualquiera” (38). There is an element of horror in Rivera’s reaction; she is scared that people who share her elevated position in the ruling class can fall apart psychologically, and her fears are realized when she ends up in a clinic, diagnosed with schizophrenic and paranoid tendencies. Rojas Carranza observes that “[e]l discurso de Laura señala a El Yuca como integrante, en los tiempos de guerra, de un grupo comisionado en la labor de

⁶⁵ The list of Castellanos Moya’s ten favourite books is posted on Eterna Cadencia’s website at this address: www.eter nacencia.com.ar/blog/libreria/imprescindibles/item/los-10-libros-favoritos-de-horacio-castellanos-moya.html.

persecución o ‘limpieza’ contra los comunistas” (156), but this cruelty does not bother Rivera who is cruel in her own right. As for El Yuca’s involvement in narco-trafficking, Rivera insists that no such involvement exists, that it is the fabrication of a smear campaign promulgated by his political enemies (75). In *El arma en el hombre*, nevertheless, El Yuca is presented with a second nickname, El Tío Pepe, which refers to his underground identity as a drug baron. His participation in narco-trafficking, in fact, is apparently the reason Olga María, his lover, was murdered; the order for her death came from Tío Pepe’s narco-trafficking rival Don Toño, down the chain of command to Major Linares, and finally down to Robocop (*El arma* 89–90). Olga María’s betrayal of Rivera forces the latter to acknowledge the shadow behind her best friend’s façade, but Rivera continues to glorify El Yuca’s persona without acknowledging his dark side; Rivera’s brief appearance in *El arma* implies that she has entered a relationship with El Yuca following her discharge from the clinic (109–110). Like Zeledón, who backslides into the criminal world, Rivera also ends her intertextual narrative by backsliding; she returns to her habit of pedestalizing the shiniest of personae, even though they may cast the darkest of shadows.

3.2.4 Robocop: The Shadow of the Ruling Class

Rivera and Robocop are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin. Rivera represents the glamorous, frivolous *persona* of the Salvadoran ruling class, and Robocop represents the brutal *shadow* which is inseparable from the same group. El Salvador’s ruling class employed the national army to suppress the lower classes and thereby maintain the status quo of a steep economic hierarchy which secured the opulent lifestyle of elites. Robocop,

as the personification of the army's ruthless violence, is the hidden face of those Salvadoran elites who created him through an unholy union with the US government. During the Salvadoran Civil War, the United States supercharged the Salvadoran army's killing capacity with training, weapons, and financing. Unlike most of their compatriots, Rivera and Robocop were shaped by a US education—Rivera at the “Escuela Americana” in San Salvador, and Robocop at the “School of the Americas” military bases in Fort Benning, Georgia and in the US-controlled Panama Canal Zone (*El arma* 9). These respective educational milieus moulded Rivera into a contemptuous, consumerist snob and moulded Robocop into an unfeeling, killing machine. In the minds of both characters, guerrilleros are “terroristas” and indigenous people are second-class citizens.

The inhumaneness of the US and Salvadoran governments is reflected in Robocop's nonhuman qualities; he is a monster who was fabricated by geopolitical Dr. Frankensteins in the context of the Cold War. The United States sought to stamp out communism by wielding Robocop and other men as weapons, utilizing “the weapon in the man”—*el arma en el hombre*. The Salvadoran government, eager to enact counterinsurgency, opened the door to the Americans. Robocop's status as a pawn in someone else's game is conveyed through his own comment: “yo no acostumbraba discutir una orden sino cumplirla” (*El arma* 109). His combination of muscular powerfulness and political powerlessness prompts Richey to refer to him as “el prototipo de una violencia sobre la cual no tiene dominio” (73). Robocop enlisted in the army as Juan Alberto García, but he was forged into a destructive human/nonhuman entity, an “arma humana” (Esch 202) and an “instrumento de guerra” (Richey 75), that bears the

army nickname “Robocop” which alludes to his robotic gait (*La diabla* 9) and evokes his lack of heart and soul. According to Jung, “The act of naming is, like baptism, extremely important as regards the creation of personality, for a magical power has been attributed to the name since time immemorial” (187). This magical power of naming is apparent in Adam’s naming of the animals in Genesis and in Alonso Quijano’s renaming of himself and his horse in *Don Quixote*. In *El arma*, Juan Alberto García’s renaming as Robocop expresses that his army training “borr[ó] su ser anterior” (Esch 201); it has turned him into a cyborg who kills efficiently and without remorse. He has learned to dehumanize victims, and so he feels no horror regarding his murders which nonetheless generate waves of horror that course through the nation’s populace. Miller states that “[t]o feel no horror over one’s brutality toward others is to dehumanize, so that identification with the victims as other human beings is absent within the moment of action” (100). Robocop is unsusceptible to empathic pain, much like Rivera who complains that the postwar years “son otros tiempos y no se le puede presionar [viz. torturar a un preso] porque saltan esos comunistas de los derechos humanos” (*La diabla* 83). The loss of humanity in Juan Alberto and his fellow soldiers places Salvadoran society in jeopardy. “Human relations are at the core of our safety and security,” writes Miller, “For a person to lose humanity is horrible and for a dangerous non-person to invade our concept of humanity is horrible as well” (75). Juan Alberto is de-humanized (made nonhuman) by his Dr. Frankensteins, and he, in turn, dehumanizes (treats as nonhuman) his victims. In the postwar era, he invades public consciousness and elicits horror as a “dangerous non-person” through his highly publicized murder of Olga María.

Robocop's indoctrination by the army raises the question of why he would allow himself to be sucked into this organization which treats him as a pawn—the answer is awe. When Robocop, in what is the most reflective and emotionally toned moment of his narration in *El arma*, remembers being discharged from the army, he says, “supe que mi vida estaba a punto de cambiar, como si de pronto fuese a quedar huérfano: las Fuerzas Armadas habían sido mi padre y el batallón Acahuapa mi madre” (12). Juan Alberto's rebirth as Robocop is thanks to these progenitors: the armed forces and his battalion. These bodies, which overwhelm him with their grandness and protect him with their embrace, are awe-inspiring like parents in the eyes of a newborn child. According to Miller, “Awe alters the person's broader conception of the universe or earthly life and remains with him or her well beyond the moment, perhaps permanently” (120). In Robocop's case, he imbibed a martial worldview that stays with him permanently, beyond the conclusion of the civil war. Miller also states that, in the experience of awe, we “will chance losing ourselves in appreciation for what is grander than we are and vaster than we had imagined” (153). Juan Alberto thusly disappears into a vast war machine and metamorphoses into Robocop, a cog in that machine. Following the peace accords, he is removed from the context of war, but he has nonetheless been programmed to kill for a living. Since economic opportunities are scarce in the postwar environment, he becomes a hitman.

Little is learned about Robocop's interior world in *El arma* that could not already be conjectured from the brief sketching of him in *La diabla* (Esch 205), even though Robocop narrates the entirety of *El arma*. Like Zeledón, Robocop speaks a language of silence. He produces the narration of a non-self. This narration, moreover, horrifies the

reader through its inexpressiveness in describing his cold-blooded murders. According to Miller's inquiries into experiences of horror,

Several research narratives featured an abnormally *blank* human face as a component in a horror scene. The blank face signifies one of two things: either the human empathy on which we depend, or the facial legibility we require, is absent. We find ourselves with an unreliable, possibly dangerous creature, with whom we cannot identify and whom we cannot trust. (76)

Robocop's inexpressive voice is the narratological equivalent of such a blank face.

Rivera's Dionysian disintegration is catalyzed by the horrific mystique of Robocop. She loses faith in humanity as Robocop begins to appear in newspapers and on television screens while Olga María's pedestalized persona simultaneously crumbles. According to Kokotovic "[Rivera] goes to pieces and loses control of her life in a frustrated attempt to understand a confusing and opaque society lacking any discernible rules of conduct, much less the rule of law, one in which nothing and no one can be trusted" ("Neoliberal Noir" 26). In this confused state, Rivera hallucinates that Robocop is tracking her down, which culminates in *tremendous horror*. She projects Robocop's image onto a reporter standing outside her apartment, and she phones the police for help (122–123). When Deputy Commissioner Handal arrives and begins conversing with the harmless reporter, Rivera sees this as evidence that Handal is in cahoots with Robocop and that the world really is as insecure as she has come to imagine. She believes the two men will storm into her apartment and kill her. Up to this point, her dialogic monologue has been interspersed with occasional references to her invisible interlocutor—the titular she-devil in the mirror

whom Rivera calls “niña” and who is a reflection of Rivera herself. In this climactic moment of ego-obliterating horror, Rivera’s dependence on her imaginary friend reaches its apex. Although she is alone, she strategizes as part of a team, employing the *nosotras* form more than the *yo* form because the weight of the world has finally crushed her Apollonian integrity as an individual:

¡¿Qué hacemos?! ¡Van a tirar la puerta! ¡Ya no aguanto, niña! ¡No tenemos salida! ¡Ese turco Handal es un traidor! ¡No permitamos que nos maten aquí adentro! ¡Nuestra única posibilidad es llegar a la calle, que los vecinos nos vean, que sepan que hemos sido capturadas con vida! ¡Voy a abrir la puerta y salimos en carrera, a los gritos! ¡¿Estás lista?! ¡Ahora! ¡¡Handal traidor!!
¡¡Socorro!! ¡¡No nos maten!! ¡¡Criminales!! (125)

When Rivera screams “¡¡No *nos* maten!!” in front of what the reader assumes are flabbergasted onlookers, her private she-devil in the mirror enters public discourse for the first and only time in the novella. At the same time, Rivera announces her withdrawal from the public sphere as her paranoid raving fades into unconsciousness and she is interned in a clinic (128). Like Erasmo Aragón, she is taken to a clinic because she has been touched by the god of madness, Dionysus, and the final words of her monologue, spoken into the metaphorical mirror, affirm that her soundness of mind was bound to the false idol to whom she once clung: “Si sólo Olga María estuviera...” (135).

Chapter 4

4 Enchanted Imbibers: Eduardo Sosa and the Editor

Eduardo Sosa and the editor form the final antihero pairing in this study. In the four-part novella *Baile con serpientes* (1996), the antihero-narrator of parts one and four is Eduardo Sosa,⁶⁶ an unemployed sociology graduate living in San Salvador.⁶⁷ In *Insensatez* (2004), the unnamed antihero-narrator is a Salvadoran man who edits testimonies and other documents pertaining to the Guatemalan genocide while temporarily working at the archiepiscopal palace in Guatemala City.⁶⁸ These protagonists differ from the ones previously examined in that they are strongly affected by what Miller calls the “emotions of enchantment”: fascination and awe. Eduardo Sosa is fascinated and awed by his newfound father figure—an anarchic, alcoholic vagrant named Jacinto Bustillo—and by Bustillo’s four pet snakes. Sosa propels himself toward *blissful rapture* as he enacts a cathartic killing spree throughout San Salvador, with the snakes as his accomplices. He provokes disgust and horror in others, but he himself becomes immune to these negative emotions. In *Insensatez*, the positive conveyor belt of enchantment *and* the negative conveyor belt of horror both take the fragmenting protagonist toward ego-

⁶⁶ Parts two and three of *Baile* feature a third-person narrator and shift the focus away from Sosa to other protagonists who react to Sosa’s crimes. Part two follows Deputy Commissioner Handal (who also appears in *La diabla*), and part three follows the news reporter Rita Mena.

⁶⁷ San Salvador is never named in *Baile*, but there are enough allusions to it to conclude that it is the novella’s setting (Roque Baldovinos, “La ciudad” 220; Venkatesh, “Towards a Poetics” 64).

⁶⁸ El Salvador and Guatemala are never named in *Insensatez*, but there are sufficient indicators to deduce that the protagonist is “a Salvadoran exiled writer” and that “the action takes place in Guatemala” (Buiza, “Trauma and the Poetics” 157).

annihilation, as the testimonies of genocide simultaneously enchant him with their poetry and horrify him with their brutality.

Eduardo Sosa and the editor are enchanted *imbibers* partly because awe is the “imbibing emotion” (S.B. Miller 109), but also because they are literally heavy drinkers of alcohol. Aguardiente fuels Sosa’s killing spree; Bustillo’s enchanting influence compels Sosa to imitate the vagrant’s alcoholism, and, whenever Sosa’s enchantment flags, he mentions the need to obtain another drink (*Baile* 34, 146, 160). He combines the intoxication of aguardiente, moreover, with that of beer, marijuana, and cocaine—mind-bending substances that contribute to his diffusion into ecstasy. The editor, for his part, accepts the temporary job in Guatemala when the idea is pitched to him by his friend Erick, “mientras apurab[an] un Rioja” (*Insensatez* 17), and he later rues this decision that he made while tipsy, under the sway of the god of wine. In a passage that turns out to be prophetic, his other friend, Toto, warns him about a possible metaphorical intoxication related to the testimonies: “dijo que yo debía tomármela con calma, corregir mil cien cuartillas con historias de indígenas obsesionados con el terror y la muerte podía quebrantar al espíritu más férreo, *intoxicarme* con una morbosidad malsana” (*Insensatez* 31, emphasis added). The Apollo–Dionysus dichotomy is apparent in Toto’s admonition which pits the Apollonian, iron spirit against Dionysian intoxication.

4.1 Eduardo Sosa

Eduardo Sosa is the antihero-narrator of parts one and four of the four-part magical-realist⁶⁹ novella *Baile con serpientes*. He is an unemployed sociology graduate who lives in his younger sister and brother-in-law's apartment in postwar San Salvador. He has been disenfranchised by the terms of the 1992 Salvadoran peace accords which allowed the conservative party ARENA to take power and implement neoliberal policies (Van der Borgh; Velásquez Carrillo). These policies fomented a shift toward free market capitalism and the corresponding ideologies of consumerism and individualism. Sosa finds himself at odds with the “nuevos tiempos”:

Desempleado, sin posibilidades reales de conseguir un trabajo decente en estos nuevos tiempos . . . mis estudios de sociología (una carrera que a esas alturas ya había sido borrada en varias universidades) no me servían para nada en lo relativo a la consecución de un empleo, pues había una sobreoferta de profesores, las empresas no necesitaban sociólogos. (12)

Sosa's desperation lifts when a vagrant named Jacinto Bustillo who lives in an old, yellow Chevrolet mysteriously appears in the neighbourhood. Sosa attaches himself to the older man, becoming an apprentice in the art of carelessness. Not long into this apprenticeship, Sosa surprisingly murders Bustillo and steals his car keys. After entering the yellow Chevrolet for the first time, late at night, Sosa encounters Bustillo's four pet

⁶⁹ Many scholars have referred to *Baile con serpientes* as a work of fantasy, but Mitchell argues convincingly that it should be categorized as a work of magical realism because of the realist narration in parts two and three (229–234).

snakes, whose existence was unbeknownst to him. This meeting is magical: it transmutes Sosa into a Sosa-Bustillo hybrid whose photo, when appearing in the newspaper two days later, is described by the protagonist as “una mezcla del rostro de don Jacinto y del mío” (48). Sosa acquires Bustillo’s filthiness, stench, limp, alcoholism, and ability to communicate verbally with the snakes who become his companions in crime and whom he names Beti, Loli, Carmela, and Valentina. He and the four “muchachas” rampage across San Salvador in the Chevrolet, terrifying crowds and leaving dozens of envenomed corpses in their wake. Amidst the mounting carnage, Sosa remains immune to horror, yet he nears ever closer to *blissful rapture* through his spiritual fusion with Bustillo and his impassioned relationship with the snakes, a relationship which is even consummated sexually. Eventually, the military destroys the Chevrolet with bombs and flamethrowers, but Sosa is not in the vehicle at that time. As a result, he must slink back to his sister’s apartment with the magic spell of his metamorphosis into Bustillo broken and the talking snakes nowhere to be found.

Castellanos Moya has divulged that his idea for a story about snakes living in an old car came from a nightmare he had in which he was enwrapped by a snake (“Horacio Castellanos Moya: Baile” 00:02:15 – 00:02:50). This frightening encounter, though imagined, was a profound, primordial experience.⁷⁰ Upon waking, Castellanos Moya became the conduit for a bizarre yet archetypally based story that seemed to surge from an unknown source and pass through him:

⁷⁰ According to biologist Lynne Isbell, humans’ “fear of snakes has an even longer evolutionary history than 60 million years” (5).

[*Baile*] es una novela que sólo pude escribir en un estado muy excepcional. No he vuelto escribir una novela de esta naturaleza ni creo que la vuelva escribir. No responde a nada. La escribí como en dos semanas y media. Me la dictaron prácticamente. Estaba como poseído escribiéndola . . . Es una novela que me sucedió. Es la única vez que tengo la sensación de que ya estaba algo en el disco duro dentro de uno y de pronto uno está ahí para oír lo que dice y pasarla en papel. Fue muy extraña, una experiencia insólita. Yo no he vuelto a tener una experiencia así. (“Nos hubiéramos matado” 101)

Just as Castellanos Moya’s Apollonian experience of crafting *Tirana memoria* over a period of nearly three years resulted in an array of characters who are mentally sound, his Dionysian experience of punching *Baile con serpientes* into the keyboard over a span of two and a half weeks brought to the fore a madman, Eduardo Sosa, who, like the author himself during this writing process, becomes utterly possessed. When composing *Baile*, Castellanos Moya engaged in what Jung calls the “visionary mode of artistic creation” (*Spirit in Man* 90), which the psychoanalyst describes as follows:

The experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression is no longer familiar. It is something strange that derives its existence from the hinterland of man’s mind, as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience which surpasses man’s understanding and to which in his weakness he may easily succumb. The very enormity of the experience gives it its value and its shattering impact. Sublime, pregnant with meaning, yet chilling the blood with its strangeness, it arises from the timeless depths;

glamorous, daemonic, and grotesque, it bursts asunder our human standards of value and aesthetic form, a terrifying tangle of chaos. (*Spirit in Man* 90)

Jung equates this visionary mode with “Nietzsche’s Dionysian experience” (*Spirit in Man* 91) because natural forces beyond the artist’s ego have absorbed, possessed, or intoxicated that ego. In Nietzsche’s words, “a Dionysian artist become[s] entirely fused with the original Unity, with its pain and contradiction, and produce[s] the copy of this original Unity” (35). As a result of his Dionysian experience, Castellanos Moya unintentionally wrote a work with stunning parallels to ancient mythology.⁷¹ At the same time, he dressed the narrative in contemporary garb, except for the fantastical, talking snakes. Vinodh Venkatesh has observed that *Baile* adheres to the basic principles of “neoliberal noir” (“Towards a Poetics” 62), a designation coined by Misha Kokotovic who ascribes it to Central American postwar novels that “share a noir sensibility characterized by a pervasive sense of corruption, decay, and disillusionment, in which the social order itself, and particularly the state, is the ultimate source of criminality, rather than of justice” (“Neoliberal Noir” 15). Artists are products of their times, and Castellanos Moya channeled his primordial inspiration into a work that represents and critiques neoliberal, postwar, 1990s El Salvador. For Jung, this process of channeling timeless archetypes into temporally contingent images is synonymous with artistic creation:

⁷¹ Castellanos Moya has said that, in *Baile*, “[n]o hay ninguna alusión simbólica, no hay ningún mito, y si lo hubiera no era yo consciente de él” (“Nos hubiéramos matado” 101). Therefore, the parallels with myth were unintentional.

The creative process, so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking. (*Spirit in Man* 82)

Whereas storytellers from what Hegel calls the “heroic age” (188) regularly outlined the golden path of heroism, Castellanos Moya demonstrates how contemporary societal failings can cause individuals to wander down a dark path of antiheroism.

This subchapter responds to four questions. First, how does *Baile* present a struggle between Apollonian order and Dionysian chaos? Second, what connections can be drawn between *Baile* and Joseph Campbell’s monomyth? Third, what is the significance of the relationship between Sosa and Bustillo? Fourth, what do the four snakes in the novella symbolize?

4.1.1 The Dissemination of Dionysian Chaos

Many ancient myths, especially those related to the origins of the world or to the protection of societies from calamitous threats, feature a cosmic battle between chaos and order. *Chaoskampf* (literally “Chaos struggle” in German) is a ubiquitous mythological motif featuring the vanquishment of a sea monster, who represents chaos, by a sky god who represents order. *Baile* is an archetypal narrative that brings this eternal struggle back into the foreground, pitting the chaos-inciting Sosa-Bustillo and his snakes against

the government, military, and police who try to impose neoliberal order. Chaos has the upper hand throughout most of the text; the word “caos” appears no less than nine times, not to mention the appearance of “pánico” six times. The novella’s very title, *Baile con serpientes*, evokes chaos through an image of writhing, slithering, and sliding that makes it impossible “to make heads or tails of” what is happening—“a terrifying tangle of chaos” (*Spirit in Man* 90). In the wake of Sosa-Bustillo’s attacks, the news reporter Rita Mena reflects on the rapid crumbling of order into chaos: “en veinticuatro horas la vida puede adquirir de súbito un sentido totalmente nuevo, y lo que antes se consideraba firme y sólido enseguida muestra una tremenda vulnerabilidad” (128). Sosa-Bustillo has destabilized society, shaking the State apparatus from the physical foundations of its infrastructure right up to its symbolic head, the president. The pandemonium throughout the city is a reminder of “los aciagos días de la guerra” (167) when civilizing structures collapsed.

Sosa-Bustillo’s rampage is a triumph of Dionysian fluidity over Apollonian rigidity. Yansi Pérez characterizes the Chevrolet that takes Sosa-Bustillo to all parts of the city as “un espacio en movimiento y en constante cambio donde las fronteras entre lo propio y lo ajeno, lo puro y lo impuro, lo sagrado y lo abyecto, el afecto y la aberración, lo lícito y el crimen, y lo animal y lo humano, están en constante proceso de transformación y redefinición” (167). Sosa-Bustillo’s life is in flux during the two days of his hybrid existence. Is he Sosa or Bustillo? Human or animal? Cunning or delirious? The answers are unclear because Apollonian clarity has temporarily receded from his ontological experience. He is under the sway of Dionysus, a metamorphosing god who rejects fixed identities. Pérez aptly defines metamorphosis with an oxymoron, juxtaposing

contradictory terms to highlight the incongruence of the metamorphosed subject: “es la *forma* de lo *amorfo*, de lo que carece de forma o de lo monstruoso, de lo que tiene múltiples formas incongruentes entre sí. La forma de lo que carece de nombre, de identidad, de un perfil fijo y reconocible” (166, emphasis added). Sosa’s metamorphosis into Bustillo casts him into a chaotic world of incongruencies. Roque Baldovinos observes, for example, that “la *fantasía* de Eduardo es *apocalíptica*” (“La ciudad” 222, emphasis added). The protagonist approaches rapture as he promulgates the opposite emotion: horror. Sosa-Bustillo attributes his own wild actions to “el *azar* y la *lógica* que [l]e permite profundizar [su] *mutación*” (*Baile* 129, emphasis added). As the distinction between Sosa and Bustillo is erased, so is the distinction between *randomness* and *reason*, between the *chances* and the *choices* that compel the protagonist’s actions.

In the next section, subchapter 4.2.2, we will examine how Sosa is an antiheroic parody of the mythological hero. For now, let us look at two archetypal figures who try to thwart the mythological hero: the Terrible Mother, who tests the hero with an excess of chaos, and the Terrible Father who tests the hero with tyranny, which is an excess of order. For Neumann, who took Jung’s archetypal framework and put it in more explicit terms, the Terrible Mother is the brutality of nature which contrasts with the *Good* Mother, the bountiful nourishment of nature. The Terrible Father, for its part, is the crushing hand of civilization which contrasts with the *Good* Father, the protective, helpful hand of civilization.⁷² Mythological heroes vanquish the Terrible Mother, represented by monsters like the Gorgons, and they also vanquish the Terrible Father, represented by

⁷² The schema of these archetypes is alluded to throughout Neumann’s *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1954) and *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (1955).

tyrants like Cronus or Set. In *Baile*, the antihero Sosa does not vanquish but rather *unites with* the Terrible Mother, which is represented by the female snakes who collectively form a sort of four-headed dragon, and he dedicates himself to the destruction of the Terrible Father which manifests as the corruptly governed, over-industrialized, neoliberal, postwar, Salvadoran patriarchy.

To Sosa's chagrin, the nation's attention in the "nuevos tiempos" is fixed on competing in the global marketplace. As Edgardo Vega complains in *El asco*, it has become a culture that worships commerce at the expense of the humanities and social sciences. Sosa-Bustillo takes revenge on this society that failed to initiate his former self, Sosa, into the working world. Lacking this initiation that would have cultivated his Apollonian striving toward an ideal self, or his "heroic striving" in other words, Sosa becomes the antihero. His partners, the snakes, seek revenge because the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the same society has decimated nature. Symbolically speaking, the snakes enact the aggression of the Terrible Mother because the Good Mother has been laid low.

Baile presents a neoliberal ugliness in San Salvador that is explicitly critiqued by Edgardo Vega in Castellanos Moya's subsequent novella *El asco*. The fantastic-apocalyptic vision of *Baile* is also a neoliberal dystopia with numerous locations that exemplify an intractable drive toward the growth and flow of capital, such as the industrial district (19), sweatshops (19), "calles atestadas de comercios" (20), hamburger restaurant chains like McDonald's and Biggest (100), pizzerias (128), and corporations like Esso (88). Vega decries many of these features of San Salvador in *El asco*, taking them as evidence that the Central American city is "una version estúpida y enana de Los Ángeles" (*El asco* 42). Regarding San Salvador's historic centre, Sosa-Bustillo also

voices a critique, blaming the deterioration and disorderliness of the once beautiful and hallowed cultural core on politicians: “Me dije que no era posible que lo que había sido el centro histórico de la ciudad estuviera sumido en semejante caos, producto únicamente de la indolencia de las autoridades” (36). In one of his many paradoxical moves, Sosa eases his disappointment in this chaos by unleashing his snakes on the downtown crowds, allowing the “muchachas” to indulge in “una especie de orgía” (36) that generates indescribable chaos. In addition to real-world names with capitalist overtones like McDonald’s and Esso, *Baile* features “Macrópolis” as Sosa’s urban neighbourhood, a name with a ring of generic grandeur, as though it were a worldwide corporation.

Sosa-Bustillo and the snakes’ rampage takes them to various sites that Roque Baldovinos calls “templo[s] de la mercancía” (“La ciudad” 220), where they assault the neoliberal order of the “nuevos tiempos.” Their first attack occurs at a shopping complex. Vinodh Venkatesh explains how, in Latin America, the construction of such complexes has marked a swift divergence away from the traditional city model:

[The shopping complex is] a commercial center representative of capitalist economies of centralized amassment and employment. The shopping center,⁷³ furthermore, represents an acute shift in the Latin American city towards nodal development, that is, it mimics the North American model of town centers and localized hubs of residential and commercial locales. (“Towards a Poetics” 66)

⁷³ Venkatesh uses “shopping complex” interchangeably with “shopping center.”

This move toward “nodal development” helps to explain the loss of relevance and the deterioration of San Salvador’s historic centre.

Within the typical shopping complex, the supermarket is the most symbolic section of a new world order, an order that is both neoliberal and Apollonian in its heightened individualization of things. If the shopping complex is the church of neoliberalism, then the supermarket is the altar, the most exalted space. Paglia elucidates the interrelatedness between capitalism, Western aesthetics, and the Apollonian idolization of what Nietzsche calls “individual phenomena in their multiplicity” (137) which fill the Westerner’s daily perceptions but are most eminently displayed at the supermarket:

Capitalism, gaudy and greedy, has been inherent in western aesthetics from ancient Egypt on. It is the mysticism and glamour of *things*, which take on a personality of their own . . . Homer’s gleaming bronze-clad warriors are the Apollonian soup cans that crowd the sunny temples of our supermarkets and compete for our attention on television. The west objectifies persons and personalizes objects. The teeming multiplicity of capitalist products is an Apollonian correction of nature. Brand names are territorial cells of western identity. Our shiny chrome automobiles, like our armies of grocery boxes and cans, are extrapolations of hard, impermeable western personality . . .

Western culture is animated by a visionary materialism. Apollonian formalism has stolen from nature to make a romance of *things*, hard, shiny, crass, and willful. (*Sexual Personae* 37)

When Sosa enters the shiny, orderly space of the supermarket, he takes what he wants as his bloodthirsty snakes instigate mayhem by pursuing frightened customers (31–32). The wild, Dionysian forces of nature have penetrated the neoliberal church and are now desecrating its altar.

The chaos disseminated by the snakes takes control of people's bodies throughout the novella, causing either fearful paralysis, crazed running, or (after snakebites) convulsions and spasms. Paglia characterizes the loss of control over one's own body as a Dionysian phenomenon: "When the body's chthonian spasms take over, we are invaded by Dionysus . . . Invitation to Dionysian dance is a binding contract of enslavement to nature" (*Sexual Personae* 95). *Baile* is filled with biological demands that can interfere with one's rational thinking and with the execution of one's carefully crafted plans. There are allusions to the need, often the *urgent* need, to quell one's hunger, to quench one's thirst, to express one's lust, to fall asleep, to defecate, to urinate. Deputy Commissioner Handal and Rita Mena have irrepressible tics: the police officer cannot stop digging his pinky finger into his ear, and the journalist cannot stop biting her nails. The novella's characters are indeed enslaved by nature.

Baile features many convulsions and spasms. These mostly happen to snake-bitten victims (31, 50, 67), but they also overtake Sosa-Bustillo at the end of the climactic "danza de serpientes" (159) that the snakes perform on his naked body, in a scene that evokes the "baile con serpientes" of the title. The protagonist's spasms are related to a rapturous annihilation of self: "ellas realizaban su festín de lubricidad entre mi pubis y mi entrepierna, una danza de serpientes que me condujo velozmente a los espasmos, al clímax, al aullido, al esperma borboteante" (159). The many victims of the snakes' fury

enter spasmodically into death, and Sosa-Bustillo, the target of their eroticism, enters spasmodically into the “little death” of his orgasm.

Paralysis is another frequent motif in *Baile*. When the snakes first appear in the darkness of the Chevrolet, Sosa himself is paralyzed by them: “El terror *me paralizó*. No cabía ninguna duda: eran culebras, serpientes” (25, emphasis added). Then paralysis continues to reappear, manifesting itself in others: Sofia Bustillo’s servant is paralyzed by the sight of Sosa holding his pocketknife while splattered in blood (35); a young woman is paralyzed by the sight of Beti in her bedroom (51); from the government’s perspective, the widespread chaos “amenaza con *paralizar* el país” (124, emphasis added); and, in Rita Mena’s newsroom, “[l]a redacción *se paraliza*” (131, emphasis added) because the phone rings and the employees believe Bustillo is on the line. The snakes’ paralyzing effect evokes Medusa, the serpent-haired, mythological incarnation of the Terrible Mother who petrifies those who gaze upon her into stone. Like Medusa, the snakes embody the terrifying, deathly capacity of Mother Nature; their beholders rigidify as if they were already dead.

4.1.2 The Antihero’s Journey

Much like Sosa’s conceptualization of his mutation as a mix of *azar* and *lógica*, Castellanos Moya’s writing of *Baile* involved a strange combination of randomness and logic. While possessed by the muses, Castellanos Moya quickly wrote down whatever he heard, yet the story turned out to have a comprehensible structure, as the author recognizes:

No hice ningún plan. No hay un solo cuaderno donde haya un plan de esa novela y está impresionantemente bien tejida. Parece que en esta novela ha habido mucha planeación, pero no, ni siquiera hay planes, sino que la fui escribiendo rápido, rápido y la terminé y la guardé. (“Nos hubiéramos matado” 101)

The breakneck pace of Castellanos Moya’s writing might lead one who has not yet read *Baile* to imagine that the story’s structure is somehow frenzied or jumbled, but it is not. Its clarity can be attributed, at least in part, to an underlying logic, or pattern, that guided the author’s thoughts and set out familiar markers along Eduardo Sosa’s narrative path. This pattern is the monomyth. Joseph Campbell, like his predecessor Carl Jung and his contemporary Erich Neumann, recognized that the hero myth is a universal narrative pertaining to all cultures and epochs. Campbell called his famous schema, which links together the hero myth’s most common motifs, the “monomyth,” though it is popularly known today as “the hero’s journey.” In Sosa’s case, this pattern becomes the *anti*-hero’s journey because, though he does pass through several ancient motifs, he subverts motifs that involve the hero’s ascent toward a higher consciousness, instead descending deeper into unconsciousness. Ironically, he refers to this unconsciousness as “el despertar absoluto” (26).

Campbell divides the monomyth into three stages: departure, initiation, and return. These stages demonstrate that the hero’s journey is a circular journey that begins and ends in the same place, a circularity that Castellanos Moya has observed in *Baile*:

[E]s como un viaje. Eduardo Sosa está en su casa, se transmuta en otra persona, en un monstruo, y regresa a ser lo que era. Es casi como Ulises yendo a la guerra y volviendo a Itaca [sic], o como en *El asno de oro*, en el que Lucio se convierte en burro, realiza todo el viaje y finalmente regresa como Lucio. (“*Baile con serpientes* refleja”)

Sosa does not only return to his original form as Sosa, after being Bustillo, he also returns to his geographical starting point at his younger sister’s apartment in Macrópolis. Juan José Reyes has suggested that “el desenlace de la novela parecería representar la figura de un uroboros” (“El otro reposo”), referring to the ancient image of the snake biting its tail. This symbol, in addition to evoking the circularity of Sosa’s journey and the serpentine companions who join him, possesses deeper meanings that are also present in the novella:

[T]he uroboros, the circular snake biting its tail, is the symbol of the psychic state of the beginning, of the original situation, in which man’s consciousness and ego were still undeveloped. As symbol of the origin and of the opposites contained in it, the uroboros is the ‘Great Round,’ in which positive and negative, male and female, elements of consciousness, elements hostile to consciousness, and unconscious elements are intermingled. In this sense the uroboros is also a symbol of a state in which chaos, the unconscious, and the psyche as a whole were undifferentiated—and which is experienced by the ego as a borderline state. (Neumann, *The Great Mother* 18)

Baile, as we have seen, welcomes the intermingling of opposites that is found in the uroboros. Sosa, in the temporary form of Sosa-Bustillo, sinks from the differentiated world toward the undifferentiated Great Round.

The first motif in Campbell's monomyth is the "call to adventure" which alerts dormant heroes that the time has come to wake up and leave their familiar surroundings. For Sosa, this call comes with the arrival of Bustillo and his yellow Chevrolet. "Typical of the circumstances of the call [to adventure]," writes Campbell, "are the dark forest, the great tree, the babbling spring, and the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny" (43). Of course, natural features such as trees and springs are absent from Sosa's urban neighborhood—Castellanos Moya transposes ancient mythology into the trappings of neoliberal noir—but Bustillo nevertheless fits the description of "the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny." Sosa describes the lure of Bustillo as sitting somewhere on the fringes of consciousness: "había una curiosidad aún inexplicable, ganas de ver el mundo de otra manera, nada de sociología de campo, más bien como un presentimiento, una advertencia, la temida premonición, o lo que fuera, de que mi vida algo tendría que ver con su vagabundeo" (20). Enchanted by the vagrant in this way, admiring him like a father figure, Sosa insists on accompanying Bustillo as he embarks on his daily routine of scavenging for trash in the industrial district and later skulking around the red-light district.

Guided by Bustillo, Sosa leaves his neighbourhood and enters the industrial district: "un sector que me era desconocido" (19). This is "the crossing of the first threshold" (Campbell 64–73) that takes the hero from the familiar world into an unknown world. Bustillo and Sosa's rambling eventually leads them to an alley in the red-light district

where they swig aguardiente alongside a lascivious, bald, trickster-like “enano” named Coco, an acquaintance of Bustillo. At this moment, Sosa senses that he is “en el vértigo, en las sinuosidades nocturnas” (23), which is not a monomyth motif, but it is a *Castellanos Moya* motif that indicates that his protagonist is at a critical, disoriented breaking point—the point of *vertigo*—which we have also seen in the narratives of Erasmo Aragón, José Zeledón, and Edgardo Vega. The plot turns violent when Coco, while fellating Bustillo, suddenly bites the vagrant’s penis, as a prank, and then rolls around in a fit of laughter. Bustillo responds by slashing Coco to death with a broken glass bottle. Sosa, who has observed all of this, slits Bustillo’s throat and steals his car keys, even though the vagrant had seated himself with no apparent intention of attacking Sosa. Once again, randomness and reason have clashed. Why would Sosa kill his newfound father figure? There is an archetypal basis for this action; in myth, the father often serves the son as a guide into the wide world beyond the home, but he then becomes a *rival* in that world:

When the child outgrows the popular idyl of the mother breast and turns to face the world of specialized adult action, it passes, spiritually, into the sphere of the father—who becomes, for his son, the sign of the future task . . .

Whether he knows it or not, and no matter what his position in society, the father is the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world. And just as, formerly, the mother presented the ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ so now does he, but with this complication—that there is a new element of rivalry in the picture: the son against the father for the mastery of the universe. (Campbell 115)

To become master of the universe, or at least master of San Salvador, Sosa feels that he must have the keys to the Chevrolet, the vehicle that will allow him to fully embody Bustillo by adopting his nomadism.

In terms of the monomyth, Sosa's first time entering the Chevrolet is an enactment of the "belly of the whale" wherein the hero is swallowed by a great beast, appears to have died, and then, through escaping, is symbolically born anew. When Sosa unlocks the car, it takes the form of a beast: "abrí la portezuela y me metí de golpe a la boca oscura. El tufo rancio casi me noqueó" (24). Castellanos Moya uses figurative language to have Sosa enter a "boca oscura" and be overwhelmed by a "tufo rancio," as though he has been swallowed whole by some animal. The car's interior, moreover, is atypical of a car; it has no seats, aside from a small stool for the driver. With the windows completely boarded up with cardboard, it is pitch black inside, simultaneously evoking the tomb of initiatory death and the womb of initiatory rebirth.⁷⁴ As Sosa begins to doze off, four snakes slowly envelop him in the darkness. At this moment, Sosa is like the Egyptian sun-god Ra whose barge is entwined in the underworld by the giant serpent Apophis each night before breaking free at sunrise (*Symbols* 1: 242). According to Jung, in the symbolism of hero mythology, "To be 'entwined' or embraced is the same as to be 'devoured'" (*Symbols* 2: 280), and therefore the snakes' embrace of Sosa inside the beast-like vehicle is a doubling of the belly-of-the-whale motif. Sosa's paralysis within the enveloping snakes, within the dark Chevrolet, constitutes a symbolic death from which the reader can expect a symbolic rebirth; this rebirth happens, but with a twist. "By hacking his way out of the

⁷⁴ In subchapter 2.2.2, we saw the links between initiation rites, symbolic death, symbolic rebirth, and the universal hero myth, which have been documented by Mircea Eliade.

darkness,” Neumann writes of the archetypal hero, “he is reborn as the hero in the image of God” (*The Origins* 165). Sosa subverts this motif by surrendering to the darkness, rather than “hacking his way out,” and he is reborn as the antihero in the image of Jacinto Bustillo:

Si lograba controlarme un par de minutos más, si me concentraba profundamente para que ellas sintieran mis vibraciones y comprendieran que yo era el nuevo don Jacinto, entonces estaría salvado, y el susto de mi vida se transformaría apenas en el gesto de saludo que un grupo de mascotas rendían a su nuevo amo. Y así fue. Estuve como cinco minutos inmóvil, sintiéndome don Jacinto, pensando que la navaja cachea color hueso que portaba en mi bolsillo había sido una especie de escalpelo gracias al cual había abierto tremenda hendidura para penetrar al mundo en el que quería vivir. Poco a poco, las serpientes fueron abandonando mi cuerpo. (25)

Once Sosa has adopted Bustillo’s identity and joined forces with the snakes, he enacts “the road of trials,” “atonement with the father,” and “the crossing of the return threshold.” During the first of these three motifs, “the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (Campbell 81). In *Baile*, this motif encompasses Sosa-Bustillo and the snakes’ city-spanning travels, their massacres, and their close brushes with the police, a period of time in which the protagonist and his posse find themselves “en una zona donde la distinción entre lo animal y lo humano, entre la humanidad y la inhumanidad del hombre queda suspendida y se vive en un constante devenir, en un ir y venir entre ambos polos” (Pérez 170). Atonement with the father can be conceptualized as an “at-one-ment,” or unity,

with the father (Campbell 107); in Neumann's words, "the hero proves his godlike descent and experiences the fulfillment of the primary condition on which he entered into battle, and which is expressed in the mythological formula 'I and the Father are one'" (*The Origins* 360). Sosa's growing oneness with his dead father figure peaks when, while speaking to Rita Mena over the phone, he declares that he is indeed Bustillo: "Yo no soy un loco, ni un delincuente, sino alguien que tras un intenso esfuerzo, en un acto de voluntad suprema, se convirtió en lo que soy, en Jacinto Bustillo, el hombre de las serpientes" (147–148). Sosa has reached a point where he believes he is Bustillo as sure as Don Quixote believes he is a heroic knight. His total fusion with Bustillo is a rapturous, religious experience that he recounts to Mena "inspirado" (148), with Bustillo's *spirit* in him. Finally, Sosa crosses the return threshold back into the familiar world when he enters his sister's apartment at the novella's end. He announces his presence with the laconic phrase "Soy yo" (168), a "yo" that is no longer infused with Bustillo. Like Ulysses, Lucius, and other ancient heroes, Sosa has come full circle.

4.1.3 Jacinto Bustillo: A Menacing and Enchanting Shadow

Much like Erasmo Aragón when he visits the doctor and wise old man, Don Chente, for the first time at the beginning of *El sueño del retorno*, Eduardo Sosa is amidst a crisis and in need of a spiritual guide at the outset of his own narrative. The postwar, neoliberal job market has rendered his expertise in sociology redundant, resulting in his unemployment and his humbling, perhaps humiliating, need to live in his younger sister's apartment while he receives financial aid from his older sister who lives in the United States (12). Tamara Lee Mitchell refers to Sosa as "utterly emasculated" (248), and Jennifer Foster

stresses that the protagonist is “unproductive and impotent” (191). In his woeful circumstances, he endures vague feelings of “*hastío*” (18–19), akin to the *weltschmerz* or “world-weariness” described by Neumann (*The Origins* 122), and these feelings are like tinder for the world-burning of his apocalyptic fantasy. Sosa’s life is limited to the small stretch of road from his sister’s apartment to Niña Beatriz’s corner store where he buys cigarettes (13). He has nowhere to go, no means to get there, and no example to follow. His libido, in the Jungian sense of a totality of psychic energy,⁷⁵ has been stymied by unemployment. Yet there are signs that he is itching to act; his smoking, for example, suggests a need to *do* something. Jung observes how the smothered libido can cry out by compelling physical movements:

The libido that is forced into regression by the obstacle always reverts to the possibilities lying dormant in the individual. A dog, finding the door shut, scratches at it until it is opened, and a man unable to find the answer to a problem rubs his nose, pulls his lower lip, scratches his ear, and so on. If he gets impatient all sort of other rhythms appear: he starts drumming with his fingers, shuffles his feet about. (*Symbols* 1: 153)

Sosa is Castellanos Moya’s only antihero with a smoking habit, and this habit seems to be the consequence of a frustrated libido.

Bustillo introduces Sosa to a drifter's lifestyle that eschews the need for jobhunting, and he presents a vehicle that, for Sosa, would eliminate the need to stay in Macrópolis, in his

⁷⁵ Jung diverged from Freud’s conceptualization of the libido as exclusively sexual energy (*Symbols* 1: 132–137).

little sister's apartment. The Chevrolet, eye-catchingly yellow against a dull backdrop, is the forbidden fruit of the story. Sosa *must* have it. Bustillo, as its owner, is viewed by Sosa as a father figure to be both emulated and overthrown. From the reader's perspective, however, Bustillo is an incarnation of Sosa's Jungian shadow, an unsightly personification of all the buried bitterness, resentment, and anger that the younger man experiences only vaguely in his *hastío*.

According to Neumann, the shadow often appears in dreams "in such guises as the beggar or cripple, the outcast or bad man, the fool or ne'er-do-well, the despised or the insulted" (*Depth Psychology* 79) and several of these guises are embodied by Bustillo. He is beggarly in his appearance and in his homelessness; he is a cripple insofar as he walks with a limp (which is later acquired by Sosa); he is an outcast, having lost his job, his social status, and his family; he is a fool and ne'er-do-well in his drunkenness; and he is despised and insulted by Sosa's neighbours. For these neighbours, Bustillo is an archetypal Stranger who must be ejected from their shared space in order to maintain the sanctity of that space. Their expulsive reaction to the foul-smelling "intruder" is a manifestation of disgust. Miller states that, in disgust, "I am trying to end the contact by pushing away the thing, person, or idea. I want to label as bad, and thus condemn, what I experience and to create concrete or imagined boundaries" (27). Bustillo, from the group's perspective, belongs outside the neighbourhood boundary. Even Sosa expresses disgust when he tells Niña Beatriz, "Debemos llamar a las autoridades para que se lleven esa mugre" (15). But Sosa's disgust is contradictorily blended with fascination. He has been awakened from his doldrums by "a highly interesting encounter that captivates [his]

attention” (S.B. Miller 135). He continually approaches the reeking newcomer and fawns over him, as though Bustillo smelled of roses.

In fascination, Miller posits, “one must intend to learn all about a subject” (146), and we see this studious aspect of Sosa’s clinging to Bustillo in the beginnings of the narrative. Like an apprentice, Sosa observes Bustillo, “sin perder detalle” (21), as the vagrant scavenges through junk and pawns his findings. Sosa admiringly calls Bustillo “un maestro de negocios” (21), which hints at a shift toward the deifying awe that later consumes Sosa. He wishes to emulate the countercultural freedom that he perceives in Bustillo’s life:

[Bustillo] ya no tenía nada que perder, nada le importaba, ni siquiera el Chevrolet amarillo, ese cacharro que compró en el preciso momento en que decidía tirar todo por la borda y dedicarse a la mera subsistencia, con el auto como sola pertenencia, durmiendo por temporadas en distintas zonas de la ciudad, lejos de la mugre que los demás llamábamos familia, prestigio, trabajo. (20)

This flipped worldview, which Kayla Watson calls “el escape individual del control del mercado” (124), is later emphasized by the name of the bar in the red-light district where Bustillo takes Sosa. Despite the grime of its surfaces and the sordidness of its clientele, the establishment is known as “La Prosperidad” (21).

Sosa’s transmutation into Bustillo, in Jungian terms, is the shadow taking possession of him. His persona, “which hides what is uncontrolled and uncontrollable” (*Depth Psychology* 38), ceases to function as the shadow’s cover. For Jung, a person with no

persona is “blind to the world, which for him has merely the value of an amusing or fantastic playground” (*Two Essays* 199), and this explains Sosa’s sociopathic, horror-free pleasures as he massacres the society that had left him to stew in his *hastío*. From Sosa’s perspective, his transmutation has given him access to what Neumann calls the archetypal hero’s “inner voice,” which is “the command of the transpersonal father or father archetype who wants the world to change” (*The Origins* 174). He is on a mission to turn Bustillo’s flipped worldview into a new world order by tearing down the existing neoliberal order, while also resolving Bustillo’s personal vendettas by killing his estranged wife Sofía Bustillo and his deceased lover’s widower Raúl Pineda. While under the spell of shadow possession, enchanted by Bustillo, Sosa resembles a son-god who becomes the avenger of the defeated father-god, a relationship found at the heart of Egyptian mythology in the pairing of Horus and Osiris (*The Origins* 247).

Sosa-Bustillo provokes a wide range of emotions among the San Salvador population, but disgust, horror, and awe are the foremost reactions. Sosa has acquired Bustillo’s filthiness and stench, and so he is often met with disgust. When he enters the parking lot of the shopping complex, for example, the security guards try to expel him from the premises: “me espetaron que yo no estaba en condiciones de pasarme por los pasillos, ¿Qué diría la gente decente?, ¿no me había visto la facha?, ¿no olía el miasma?” (30). In other locales, he attracts looks of “asco” (146, 161). As for horror and awe, these result from the apparent omnipresence and omnipotence of Sosa-Bustillo whose prolific exploits take the front pages of newspapers and the fill the news programming on television and radio. Miller affirms that horror and awe are “[e]motions that appreciate magnitude” (113), and Sosa-Bustillo’s story is big enough to consume the country. Rita Mena is eager to

document the story, but she is also horrified and paranoid that the madman and his snakes could emerge anywhere in the city. She imagines that she sees Bustillo's yellow Chevrolet outside the *Casa Presidencial*, heightening government officials' fear of the snake-charmer/terrorist (117). On the flipside of the horror that Mena, government officials, and many others feel, there is the awe of those who raise Sosa aloft as an elitist-destroying, government-defying Robin Hood. Christian Kroll-Bryce notes that "los actos que cometen las serpientes bajo su mando [viz. el mando de Sosa-Bustillo] hacen de él una especie de héroe popular entre la población marginada y subalterna que ve en él un redentor de los pobres" (616). One man, for example, tells Sosa-Bustillo, "Si usted fuera el tipo que ha puesto de culo a estos ricos y a este Gobierno de mierda, aquí mismo me lo echaría de hombros" (163). Miller states that "[a]we focuses on the heroic [...] on what is superhuman and stirs our astonishment" (152), and Sosa-Bustillo is a hero to those who are awestruck by him and who know him as "Jacinto Bustillo de las serpientes" (162). Heroes are models for emulation, and one San Salvador man is arrested, with his own snakes in tow, as an obvious imitator of Sosa-Bustillo (162). The nation's disenfranchised people harbour a desperate desire for heroic leadership while living in the absence of Óscar Romero and under the thumb of corrupt politicians. Jung notes that this desire for heroes, even under normal circumstances, is integral to human nature:

[People] have such an urge to find a tangible hero somewhere, or a superior wise man, a leader and father, some undisputed authority, that they build temples to little tin gods with the greatest promptitude and burn incense upon the altars. This is not just the lamentable stupidity of idolaters incapable of judging for themselves, but a natural psychological law. (*Two Essays* 233)

As human beings, we seek idols, and the neoliberal dystopia of *Baile* is so bleak that this search has become dire, permitting a figure as blatantly antiheroic as Sosa-Bustillo to become the object of idolization—the hero.

4.1.4 Snake Symbolism

The snake is a potent and multifaceted symbol used widely across the globe. For Neumann, the snake is “the representative of a greater and more uncanny reality than we are able to bear” (“Creative Man” 191). The snake is sometimes associated with evil; in the Book of Revelation, for example, the devil is referred to as “the serpent of old” (12:9, 20:2). Because the snake sheds its skin, it is sometimes employed as a symbol of renewal or transformation. “[P]ara poder convivir con serpientes,” writes Yansi Pérez, “hay que saber, al igual que ellas, cambiar de piel” (168), and Sosa’s snakes transmit to him the magic of metamorphosis during their initial contact. Snake symbolism, like the novella *Baile*, is full of contradictions, many of which have been documented by Jung:

In actual fact the snake is a cold-blooded creature, unconscious and unrelated. It is both toxic and prophylactic, equally a symbol of the good and bad daemon (the Agathodaemon), of Christ and the devil. Among the Gnostics it was regarded as an emblem of the brain-stem and spinal cord, as is consistent with its predominantly reflex psyche. It is an excellent symbol for the unconscious, perfectly expressing the latter’s sudden and unexpected manifestations, its painful and dangerous intervention in our affairs, and its frightening effects. (*Symbols* 2: 374)

In addition to symbolizing transformation and the contradictory pairs of healing and dying, of good and evil, snakes symbolize the unconscious and, more specifically, the instincts and reflexes harboured by the unconscious. This latter symbolism is particularly relevant to Sosa-Bustillo whose adventure with the snakes is marked by the disappearance of his consciously constructed persona and by the ascendancy of his animalistic drives.

Another of the myriad phenomena that snakes can symbolize is what Jung calls the “anima.” For Jung, the psyche is hermaphroditic, and conscious identification with maleness or femaleness leads to the repression of the opposite principle. As a result, the unconscious of an individual features an entity, deeper and vaster than the shadow, that is of the opposite sex to ego-consciousness. For individuals who identify as women, this entity is the “animus”; for those who identify as men, it is the “anima.” Jung states that “the feminine belongs to man as his own unconscious femininity . . . She is often found in patients in the form of a snake” (*Symbols* 2: 437). When Sosa transmutes into Bustillo and unites with Beti, Loli, Carmela, and Valentina, he falls under the sway of both the shadow and the anima; he is swamped by unconsciousness. The presence of the anima in his journey is evident in the odd pairing of *azar* and *lógica* that moves him. The anima is “the chaotic urge to life, [yet] something strangely meaningful clings to her, a secret knowledge or hidden wisdom” (Jung, *The Archetypes* 30). Moreover, “behind all her cruel sporting with human fate there lies something like a hidden purpose which seems to reflect a superior knowledge of life’s laws. It is just the most unexpected, the most terrifyingly chaotic things which reveal a deeper meaning” (Jung, *The Archetypes* 31). Sosa-Bustillo’s rampage, at the surface level, looks like a horrifying mess of cruelty and

carnage, but critiques of neoliberalism and social injustice, as well as rootedness in mythological motifs, are revealed at a deeper level. While possessed by the anima, an individual's "[l]ife is crazy and meaningful at once" (Jung, *The Archetypes* 31), and Sosa's life, normally dull and meaningless, takes on these anima-bestowed qualities over the brief duration of his circular journey.

In terms of affect, Sosa's relation to the snakes is characterized primarily by the emotions of enchantment: fascination and awe. Serpents are linked to the etymology of "fascinate," a verb that was "[e]arliest used of witches and serpents, who were said to be able to cast a spell by a look that rendered one unable to move or resist" (*Webster's Third New International* dictionary quoted in S.B. Miller 136), and Sosa is accordingly charmed, or *bewitched*, by his accomplices. We have seen that awe is a reaction to heroism, and, as Castellanos Moya has articulated in an interview, Sosa comes to see the snakes as heroes: "El personaje les pone nombres femeninos y se enamora de ellas y le parecen estupendas y las convierte en sus héroes" ("Nos hubiéramos matado" 102). Sosa's initial meeting with the snakes, nevertheless, provokes the contrary feeling of disgust. When the unfamiliar creatures envelop him in the darkness of the Chevrolet, in the "belly of the whale," he yearns for separation from them: "sentí aquellas viscosidades untándose a mi cuerpo, deslizándose lenta, *asquerosamente*" (25, emphasis added). Once this disgust has been overcome, his relation to the snakes shifts increasingly toward awe, culminating in Dionysian disintegration through the *blissful rapture* of his orgasm.

Sosa's sex scene with the snakes is perhaps the most outlandish event in Castellanos Moya's oeuvre. It is as savage, frenzied, and lustful as the rites attributed to Dionysus and his female followers, the maenads. The strange ceremony begins when Sosa cuts open the

deceased Valentina and uses her meat, mixed with marijuana, to make a soup that he and the other snakes eat. Neumann notes that myth and ritual often use the consumption of food and drink to represent psychological transformations, stating that “contents that we would call ‘psychic’—like life, immortality and death—take on material form in myth and ritual and appear as water, bread, fruit, etc.” (*The Origins* 30), and adding, “assimilation and ingestion of the ‘content,’ the eaten food, produces an inner change” (*The Origins* 31). For Sosa, Valentina’s meat is an aphrodisiac. He does not only consume her body, but also her lust: “Vaya manera de disfrutar a Valentina: era como si toda su voluptuosidad se hubiese concentrado en cada trozo de carne, como si me transmitiera su extrema capacidad de furia y de placer en cada bocado, como si su espíritu lujoso hubiera sido destilado en ese líquido espeso” (145). Sosa wavers momentarily before plunging into an ecstatic union with the snakes. His inhibitions re-emerge momentarily from the abyss, but he soon squashes them by deciding to “desechar mi imagen de cordero en sacrificio y transformarla en la de un efebo embriagado en el deleite y la lascivia” (150). This juxtaposition of the sacrificial lamb and the drunken ephēbus⁷⁶ expresses the tension between a Christian and a Dionysian attitude toward pleasure-seeking,⁷⁷ which also appears in *Insensatez* with the conflict between the prim Pilar and the prurient protagonist. Sosa sides with the latter, libertine attitude. The Chevrolet’s radio is tuned to a station called “la Nueva Era” (150), which evokes the fantasy era of Sosa’s post-neoliberal supremacy over El Salvador, and it churns out

⁷⁶ In ancient Athens, “ephebus” referred to a person who was eighteen or nineteen years old (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ephebus>).

⁷⁷ In the prologue to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche asserts that “the Dionysian” is “the true name of the Antichrist” (10).

psychedelic rock-and-roll from such groups as The Beatles and The Doors as Sosa snorts cocaine, strips nude, and dances with snakes, losing himself in an elated trance.

4.2 The Editor

The editor in *Insensatez* joins a fictionalized version of the late-1990s *Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (REMHI) project that was spearheaded by the human rights defender Bishop Juan Gerardi in Guatemala. The project was devoted to documenting the atrocities of the Guatemalan genocide that were perpetrated by the army against the indigenous populations, which occurred contemporaneously with the nation's civil war (1960–1996). On 24 April 1998, the REMHI's texts were published in four tomes titled *Guatemala: Nunca más*. The army opposed this publication, and, just two days later, on 26 April 1998, Bishop Gerardi was bludgeoned to death with a concrete block, an assassination which is mentioned in the concluding lines of *Insensatez*. This final passage, which is quoted from a brief email sent to the editor by his friend Toto, leaves lingering feelings of horror: “Ayer a mediodía monseñor presentó el informe en la catedral con bombo y platillo; en la noche lo asesinaron en la casa parroquial, le destruyeron la cabeza con un ladrillo. Todo el mundo está cagado. Da gracias que te fuiste” (155). Gerardi's tragic assassination rivals those of Roque Dalton, Comandante Ana María, and Archbishop Óscar Romero in its symbolic power and its consequence of widespread insecurity. It contributes to the hero-lessness that extends beyond El Salvador and into other parts of the Central American isthmus.

The narrator of *Insensatez* normally works as a journalist in his homeland El Salvador, but he accepts the short-term editing job in Guatemala because, in addition to being

convinced to do so while under the influence of wine, he has recently been involved in a scandal that has made him a public enemy in his own country. He published comments that were interpreted as racist by a large swathe of his compatriots, and this back-story is consistent with the inconsiderateness on full display in his narration and in his interactions with others. Despite his interpersonal insensitivity, the narrator is extremely sensitive to poetic beauty, and the testimonies of the genocide survivors are, for him, an unexpected source of the most transcendental poetry. Nevertheless, as his relation to the testimonies progresses from fascination to awe, along the path toward Nietzsche's *blissful rapture*, he also sinks deeper into the horror of their subject matter, which is real-life cruelty, carnage, and suffering. Akin to Erasmo Aragón in *Morongá* and Laura Rivera in *La diabla*, the narrator's intensifying horror is paired with escalating paranoia, and he eventually flees to Germany out of fear of being the Guatemalan military's next victim. While in Germany, he remains plagued by paranoia, madness, and the obsessive rereading of his favourite quotations from the testimonies, which he carries with him in his personal notebook.

Susan Beth Miller has researched the Rwandan genocide. Curiously, her research resulted in an experience that resembles the central plotline of *Insensatez*; when reading firsthand accounts of the genocide, Miller simultaneously felt enchantment in relation to the words and horror in relation to the events:

In reading testimony of both perpetrators and survivors of the Rwandan genocide, I was struck at times by the eloquence of the testimony (Hatzfeld,

2006, 2008),⁷⁸ the beauty of the language itself. Was it just a matter of selection, on the part of the book's author, of the most evocative of phrases, or did something in the experience itself promote a reach for articulacy. [sic] I noticed in myself an odd and somewhat disturbing love of the language, of its force and sensitivity. To describe horror beautifully is a peculiar yoking, so why did I value the words so? Just because poetry is precious? Perhaps the words were beautifying the horror, humanizing the blasted landscape for me, turning black coal into diamond? (92–93)

These are compelling questions, and Nietzsche, though he may not have the answers, has some valuable insights regarding this overlap of beauty and horror. He observes that the pairing of beautiful language and brutish horror is essential in Sophocles; amidst the anguish of Sophoclean tragedies, “the language of the Sophoclean heroes surprises us by its Apollonian certainty and brightness” (53). In Nietzsche's estimation, beauty can serve as a remedy to horror; it does so in the elegant, image-projecting language of the Sophoclean tragic hero:

If, after a powerful attempt to stare at the sun, we turn away blinded with dark spots before our eyes, as a remedy so to speak, then the projected images of the Sophoclean hero are the opposite of this—in short, the Apollonian qualities of the mask are the necessary results of a glance into the terrifying inner world of nature, bright spots so to speak to heal the eyes which have been damaged by the sight of the terrible darkness. (53)

⁷⁸ Miller read these testimonies in Jean Hatzfeld's *Life Laid Bare* (2006) and *A Time for Machetes* (2008).

The editor in *Insensatez* attempts to cling to the dazzling beauty he finds in the testimonies, but he is gradually consumed by their terrible darkness.

This subchapter responds to four questions. First, how does the enchantment of the editor in *Insensatez* compare to that of Alonso Quijano in *Don Quixote*? Second, how does the editor manifest Dionysian libertinism, and how does this clash with Apollonian limitation? Third, what connections can be drawn between *Insensatez* and the Dionysian rite of *sparagmos*? Fourth, how does the character Octavio Pérez Mena embody the devil—the archetype of the collective shadow?

4.2.1 Quixotic Enchantment

Like Alonso Quijano in *Don Quixote*, the editor in *Insensatez* is enchanted through reading. This enchantment begins as an academic fascination; the editor is intellectually excited by the odd syntax used by the indigenous victims of the Guatemalan genocide who speak Spanish as a second language, who have a non-Western conception of time (“Horacio Castellanos Moya en Universidad” 00:02:07 – 00:02:27), and whose phrases, in the editor’s opinion, resemble the verses of César Vallejo (*Insensatez* 32), a Peruvian poet who was steeped in both Spanish and Quechuan language and culture. Gradually, the analytical distance that the editor maintains in relation to the testimonies is lost as his fascination intensifies into awe and the boundary between his quotidian life and the stories recounted in the texts is blurred. This allows ghostly inhabitants of the stories to enter his previously stable world via his imagination, like the dead crossing over to the world of the living on Halloween or on the *Día de Muertos*. At the same time, this boundary-crossing can be viewed as the editor entering the textual world of the genocide

testimonies. His fusion with the texts is an ego-destroying, tragic destiny. After his first contact with the testimonies, he explains to his friend Toto that he feels “una sensación . . . escalofriante, como si estuviera a punto de empezar a vivir un destino en el que mi voluntad apenas contaba y cuyo principal rasgo era el peligro” (26). Whereas Alonso Quijano is submerged deep into chivalric romances and then emerges anew, sanctified, at the end of *Don Quixote*, the helpless editor in *Insensatez* is tragically fated to sink ever deeper into madness.

Alonso Quijano is enchanted by the archetypal figures of chivalric romance, especially the heroic knight in shining armour, and by their archetypal actions, such as the slaying of monsters, but it is initially the perplexing wordplay and paradoxes he finds in his old tomes that blow his mind and make him susceptible to such enchantment. Prior to enumerating any of Quijano’s heroic idols and their feats, Cervantes quotes the syntactically strange, repetitious phrases that instigate the addling of the hidalgo’s brain:

[L]legaba a leer aquellos requiebros y cartas de desafíos, donde en muchas partes hallaba escrito: *La razón de la sinrazón que a mi razón se hace, de tal manera mi razón enflaquece, que con razón me quejo de la vuestra fermosura. Y también cuando leía: ...los altos cielos de vuestra divinidad divinamente con las estrellas os fortifican, y os hace merecedora del merecimiento que merece la vuestra grandeza.* Con estas razones perdía el pobre caballero el juicio, y desvelábase por entenderlas y desentrañarles el sentido. (1: 72)

For the editor in *Insensatez*, the incantation of wordplay also forms part of his enchantment. “[M]e sorprendían,” he says of the phrases he reads, “por el uso de la repetición y del adverbio, como ésta que decía *Lo que pienso es que pienso yo...*, carajo, o esta otra, *Tanto en sufrimiento que hemos sufrido tanto con ellos...*, cuya musicalidad me dejó perplejo desde el primer momento” (43). As in the quotations above that appear in *Don Quixote*, the quotations of testimonies in *Insensatez* are set apart by italics that enhance their numinous quality. It is as though the quotations belong to a distant world of unimaginable aesthetic beauty blended with unbearable physical and emotional anguish. In the manner that Quijano marvels at paradoxes, the editor also finds a phrase that brings him delight by coupling a defiance of linear chronology with poetic flare.

Que siempre los sueños allí están todavía, repetí esa espléndida frase que había iluminado mi tarde de trabajo en el palacio arzobispal con su sonoridad, su estructura impecable abriéndose a la eternidad sin soltar el instante, con ese uso del adverbio que retorció el pescuezo del tiempo. (122)

The beautiful phrases of the indigenous survivors are inseparable from the ugly horrors of genocide. At first, the editor holds these horrific realities of the testimonies at a distance; we see only the “modo egoísta y distanciado que el protagonista tiene de relacionarse con las experiencias traumáticas de la población indígena” (Grinberg Pla). For example, after reading about a Cakchiquel man who witnessed the slaughter of his wife and children, the editor finds himself, from a distance, “tratando de imaginar lo que pudo ser el despertar de ese indígena” (14). At this early stage in the narrative, the psychological implications of the genocide are merely an academic game for the editor. He is trying—“tratando”—to imagine the Cakchiquel man’s anguish because he has not yet fallen into the Dionysian

cauldron of inexorable fusion with the non-self. Prior to reading more accounts of slaughter, the editor is struck by their *unusual* rather than their *unendurable* aspects, and so his curiosity is piqued. “The odd is always interesting,” writes Miller, “We must figure out what to make of it and how to relate to it, therefore it compels our attention” (152). For Frans Weiser, the editor’s “greatest desire is to treat the testimonies as if he were a disengaged literary critic analyzing a text” (10–11). The unfolding of events, however, nullifies this analytical, aesthetic separation.

As the editor’s fascination intensifies and acquires the more absorptive qualities of awe, intermingled with horror, he begins to reproduce the unconventional syntax of the testimonies. The novella’s English translator, Katherine Silver, has discussed the difficulties of recreating this syntactical transition in her article “The Translator’s Art of Failure: Engaging the Other in Imperfect Harmony” (2009). She points out two phrases in which the editor’s self-expression has noticeably been “infected” by the testimonies (7). In the original Spanish, these odd phrases are “Como liberado de temores me sentí esa primera mañana cuando desperté en la habitación que me asignaron en la casa de retiro espiritual” (*Insensatez* 133) and the following:

Como liberado de pesadillas me sentí esa primera mañana al despertar en la austera habitación de blancas paredes, tirado en la litera desde que la gocé contemplar, a través de la puerta de cristal que se abría al amplio patio de césped y al bosque de pinos al fondo, la neblina que pasaba empujada por el viento. (*Insensatez* 134)

The narrator has ceased to be a mere editor and “disengaged literary critic” regarding the testimonies. In a stylistic sense, he has become a possessed *speaker* of the testimonies. He now experiences the texts in a way that Silver refers to as the “intersubjective” experience of translators:

[A] common occupational hazard for translators [is that their] minds *take on* the mind of the writer of the text [they] are translating. In the jargon of the psychology of human relationships, we translators, like our paranoid and poetically sensitive narrator [of *Insensatez*], sometimes have boundary issues.

(7)

In the editor’s case, his self-boundary breaks open and even his speech, something so personal and idiosyncratic, has ceased to be his alone.

The alterations in Alonso Quijano’s speech demonstrate how his path is ultimately toward sanity, whereas the editor’s path continues deeper into madness. In some of Quijano’s earlier dialogues as Don Quixote de la Mancha, he uses the vocabulary of a bygone heroic age that predates the seventeenth century: “La vuestra ferrosura,” he tells one woman, “puede facer de su persona lo que más le viniere en talante” (1: 135). These archaisms and other imitations of chivalric romance gradually disappear from his speech, and, at the end of volume two, he once again speaks normally. Paradoxically, in ceasing to imitate the archetypal hero, Alonso Quijano comes to resemble the archetypal hero; he has set out on a physical journey through the Spanish countryside and a psychological journey through madness, eventually returning from both, sanctified, hailed with the edifying epithet “Alonso Quijano el Bueno” (2: 588–591). Luis Andrés Murillo observes

that, with this circular journey, “traza el *Quijote* en su movimiento narrativo los mitos y leyendas . . . que en forma depurada transparentan las grandes epopeyas” (21).

Castellanos Moya’s post-*testimonio* literature, however, is a turn away from the epic mode—except for the ironic epic of Eduardo Sosa—and so the editor never reintegrates his crumbling psyche.

The editor tries to avoid his tragic fate by communing with others, but he is unsuccessful. He recites to friends and acquaintances the quotations he has copied into his personal notebook, but his listeners consistently respond with looks of consternation. When the editor reads the phrase “*que se borre el nombre de los muertos para que queden libres y ya no tengamos problemas,*” he observes that “hasta algunos indígenas sobrevivientes no querían ya recuperar la memoria sino perpetuar el olvido” (144). The testimonies’ possession of him causes both his psychic fragmentation and his alienation from society.

4.2.2 The Dionysian Libertine

Much like Edgardo Vega and Laura Rivera, the editor in *Insensatez* does not want to be implicated in what Neumann calls “the shadow problem” (*Depth Psychology* 89) which refers to the repressed evils lurking in societies and individuals. Whereas Vega and Rivera are Apollonian snobs who attempt to expel the Jungian shadow beyond their self-boundaries through the ego-protecting emotions of disgust and contempt, the editor is a Dionysian libertine who attempts to diminish the shadow’s relevance by reducing the importance of morality per se, an attitude that Neumann outlines as follows:

[T]here is one more form of reaction to the insistent demands of the shadow that should perhaps be mentioned. This is the attempt to remain free of all

moral values and to conceive of life in terms of behaviourism or libertinism or utilitarianism. It is an attempt to shut out the world of darkness once again, and, by so doing, to evade the inescapable crisis of consciousness which is involved in any real effort to take the problem of evil seriously. (*Depth Psychology* 89)

The editor's libertinism is expressed through his heavy drinking, philandering, and strong distaste for the Catholic Church and for all other moralistic institutions. He describes himself as "un ateo vicioso" (16). His pleasure-seeking, Dionysian lifestyle is consistent with his tendency to utter frenzied confessions that are characterized by excess and followed by metaphorical "resacas":

[U]na vez que me estimulaban para comenzar a hablar quería contarlo todo, con pelos y olores, vaciarme hasta la saciedad, compulsivamente, en una especie de espasmo verbal, como si fuese una carrera orgásmica que culminaría hasta entregarme totalmente, hasta quedar sin secretos, hasta que mi interlocutor supiera todo lo que quería saber, en una confesión exhaustiva después de la cual padecía la peor de las resacas. (124)

The editor's Dionysian temperament is highlighted by its contrast with the Apollonian temperament of Joseba, a psychiatrist from Bilbao, Spain who has written analyses of the genocide survivors' mental states which are also being edited as part of the humanitarian report. Even though Joseba delves into the emotional repercussions of the massacres, he remains unfazed. The editor, on the other hand, whose job is to manage the grammar and punctuation on the surface level of the texts, is sucked down into horror. As a writer by

profession, the protagonist is a more free-flowing prose stylist than the psychiatrist whose writing he describes as “aséptico y un tanto académico” (27) and, more positively, as “pulcro y claro” (82). Joseba’s writing is reflective of his Apollonian character which is marked by “la prudencia y el recato” (85). The editor perceives the Spaniard, moreover, as embodying a heroic, masculine, Western, self-sufficient ideal: “mostraba no solo salud, sino un temple rozagante, el porte alto, recio, de pecho enhiesto, tal como yo imaginaba a esos caballeros andantes que vinieron a conquistar a los indígenas de estas tierras” (82). The editor begins to worry that the handsome Joseba could infringe on his attempts to seduce the Spanish women who are working at the archiepiscopal palace, but these worries are an example of his paranoia and a projection of his libertinism onto a married man of a dissimilar disposition.

Despite his atheism, the editor possesses the religious impulse that compels one to seek experiences of awe. Like Edgardo Vega, he has an acute aesthetic sense and can therefore be awed by art, particularly by poetry. Unlike Vega, on the other hand, he seeks blissful self-dissolution through sex. When the young, attractive, Spanish woman Pilar appears before the editor for the first time, at the archiepiscopal palace, he exclaims, “¡una aparición!, me dije, ¡padre eterno divino!” (45), fittingly employing religious language because he views Pilar as a portal into the rapture of sex, into momentary fusion with a higher power, into “ese instante en que en la magia de la posesión surge esplendorosamente” (95). His seduction of Pilar, however, is constantly hampered by his libertinism clashing with her limitations: whereas the protagonist is a politically *in-*correct journalist detested by half of his compatriots for his tactlessness at the keyboard, Pilar is “una fanática de la sandez llamada corrección política” (46); whereas the editor

likes to sink his teeth into “un buen corte de carne tierna y jugosa” (46–47), Pilar is a vegetarian who takes him to a vegetarian restaurant on their first outing together. This outing worsens when Pilar is reminded of her ex-boyfriend who has recently left her, and she begins to sob. The callous editor narrates that “el peor fastidio es una mujer llorona” (50), expressing anger rather than sympathy regarding this “llanto . . . francamente grosero, irrespetuoso hacia mi persona” (51). He nevertheless persists in his seduction because he senses Pilar’s vulnerability, narrating, “nada excita tanto mi fantasía como la posibilidad de fornicar con una chica guapa y recién abandonada a causa de su propia estupidez con la cual podría ensañarme gratamente durante el ejercicio amatorio” (52). His diabolical plan to attain pleasure by taking advantage of Pilar evokes what Nietzsche calls the “abominable mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always appeared to me as the true ‘witches’ brew” (25). When the editor succeeds in entering Pilar’s apartment late at night, he blames her refusal to have sex with him, a new acquaintance, on Christianity: “me hizo a un lado y se retrajo, diciendo «no puedo», con dos mil años de culpa secándole el coño” (55). The ancient, civilizing norms of religion, in the editor’s opinion, have thwarted his even more ancient, animal lust.

When Pilar introduces the editor to her friend Fátima, who is another young, attractive, Spanish woman, he channels his powers of seduction into this new acquaintance. He once again seeks awe through “la magia de la posesión,” but he experiences the contrary emotion of disgust during his sexual encounter with Fátima. The problems begin when Fátima asks a question that strikes him as “más propio de la prostituta zamarra que ofrece menú y precios al cliente excitado que de esta linda chica española” (94). He feels that her question has degraded her and threatens to drag him down with her. Then Fátima

takes off her boots and socks, and her bare feet emit an “insoporable hediondez” (97) that makes intercourse with her disgusting. The following day, the editor finds a white, pus-filled bump on his penis—a sexually transmitted infection. He perceives the bump as a disgusting entity, beyond his self-boundary, that can look back at him: “ahí estaba la gota de pus tan temida, mirándome, acusadoramente” (115). His efforts to alleviate the horror of the testimonies through sexual rapture have gone woefully wrong. Throughout his nightmarish journey to Guatemala and later to Germany, his only source of awe is the poetic language of the very texts that exacerbate his horror.

4.2.3 *Sparagmos*

Dionysus is popularly thought of today as a god of wine and merrymaking, which he is, but he is also a god of destruction and pain. Paglia illuminates the more disturbing aspects of the Dionysian and defines *sparagmos* in the following passage:

[T]he great god Dionysus is the barbarism and brutality of mother nature . . . Dionysus liberates by destroying. He is not pleasure but pleasure-pain, the tormenting bondage of our life in the body. For each gift he exacts a price. Dionysian orgy ended in mutilation and dismemberment. The Maenads' frenzy was bathed in blood. True Dionysian dance is a rupturing extremity of torsion . . . The violent principle of Dionysian cult is *sparagmos*, which in Greek means 'a rending, tearing, mangling' and secondly 'a convulsion, spasm.' The body of the god, or a human or animal substitute, is torn to pieces, which are eaten or scattered like seed. (*Sexual Personae* 94–95)

We have seen that Miller lists carnage among the primary causes of horror. Referring to the war flashbacks of a sufferer of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Miller states that “the awareness of death, pain, torn bodies, and terror invade and overwhelm . . . and draw him into the realm of horror” (87). The effect of these flashbacks on the PTSD sufferer resembles the effect of the testimonies on the editor in *Insensatez*, as the latter is also traumatized by the imagery of carnage and the spectre of death. Miller maintains that “rent body images are the most disturbing of intercategorical encounters” (87), and it is precisely the *rending* of bodies that Castellanos Moya highlights in his descriptions of the genocidal massacres in Guatemala. Nathalie Besse elucidates this aspect of the novella:

No sorprende . . . que el texto de Horacio Castellanos Moya, que describe una verdadera carnicería, haga hincapié en el desmembramiento. Cuántas veces leemos verbos como «despedazar», «descuartizar», «destazar», «cortar», «tasajear», «desgarrar», «reventar», «machacar», con gran refuerzo de cuchillazos y machetazos, en una espiral de crueldad que raya en la demencia.

(3)

On occasion, Castellanos Moya gives the carnage uncanny qualities, such as when he describes machete-hacked corpses as “palpitantes trozos de carne humana” (14) whose palpitations blur the line between the animate and the inanimate, between the living and the dead.

The opening phrase in *Insensatez* is the most recognizable phrase in Castellanos Moya’s entire oeuvre: “*No estoy completo de la mente*” (13). The editor repeats this several times, meditating on the idea that neither the Guatemalan population nor he himself is mentally

sound (13–19). The quotation, originally uttered by a genocide survivor, links the fragmentation of the victims’ bodies to the fragmentation of the witnesses’ minds. The phrase therefore echoes the notion encapsulated in the novella’s epigraph, taken from Sophocles’ *Antigone*: “Nunca señor perdura la sensatez en los que son desgraciados, ni siquiera la que nace con ellos, sino que se retira” (11). Survivors of tragedy are fated to madness. For the editor, tragedy is exposure to the enchanting and horrifying testimonies that unravel his sense of self. He enters Guatemala in 1998, impervious to the collective bereavement of the sociohistorical context, but his fortified ego is gradually diffused into the suffering.

In the archiepiscopal palace, the editor finds himself working in an office with bare, white walls and boarded-up windows, as though he were a patient in a psychiatric institution. The only ornamentation on the white walls is a crucifix, which is both the primary symbol of Christianity and one of the ancient Romans’ preferred instruments of torture. Like the testimonies on their white pages, this crucifix fills the silent, colourless room with imaginings of screams and blood. In the maddening mildness of this space, the editor views himself as a “cordero a punto de encaminarme hacia el sacrificio” (17), which conjures the Passion of Christ and reiterates the notion of white surfaces—the lamb’s body in this case—as containers of imminent, splattering blood. When the editor relocates to a spiritual retreat to complete his work, he once again finds himself in an austere, white-walled room (134). There is a marked contrast between his blank surroundings and his bloody thoughts, which also exists between his nonviolent encounters and his paranoia of the violence that he never endures. In Miller’s brief analysis of Kafka’s *The Trial*, she states, “the horror of K.’s life is that insanity is masked

in what – tonally and emotionally – bears the trappings of the quotidian. No one is yelling. No blood flows. The world is meekly insane” (77). The quiet calm in K.’s world defies the emotionality of his impending execution. Similarly, the white-walled rooms and the absence of violence in the editor’s daily life defy his gory daydreams and his paranoia.

Amidst the carnage of *Insensatez*, Castellanos Moya refers frequently to smashed heads and, more specifically, smashed brains. The organ associated with thought, rationality, and selfhood is reduced to chunks of meat strewn about the sites of the massacres. One phrase that the editor repeats compulsively, in uncanny fashion, contains the image of brains that are “tirados” as if they were pieces of garbage: “*Allá en el Izote estaban los sesos tirados, como a puro leño se los sacaron . . . repetí cada vez con mayor furia hasta que vi el esplendoroso leño haciendo volar por los aires los pedazos de mechones canosos untados de sesos*” (63). A common practice for soldiers during the genocide, which is portrayed in the novella, was to grab indigenous children by the ankles and swing them overhead, like helicopter rotor blades, crushing their heads against the pillars of houses (Kobrak cited in T.D.C. Miller 106) and spilling their “sesos palpitantes” (*Insensatez* 138).⁷⁹ The brain is the seat of the mind, and so its destruction evokes the motif that begins with the inaugural utterance: *Yo no estoy completo de la mente*.

⁷⁹ This practice is mentioned in *El arma en el hombre* when the Guatemalan colonel Castillo says, “Cuando agarro a un niño enemigo por los pies y lo hago rotar a gran velocidad en el aire hasta despedazar su cabeza contra las paredes, garantizo el sometimiento del enemigo por varias generaciones” (66).

While reading the testimonies, the editor comes up with an idea for a novel that reiterates the image of destroyed brains but replaces the horrific realities with a bit of pacifying magic.

[L]a novela . . . comenzaría en el preciso instante en que el teniente, con un golpe de machete, revienta la cabeza del registrador civil como si fuese un coco al que se le sacará la apetitosa carne blanca y pulposa, y no los sesos palpitantes y sangrientos . . . y a partir de ese golpe el alma en pena del registrador civil contaría su historia, en todo momento con las palmas de las manos sin dedos apretando las dos mitades de la cabeza para mantener los sesos en su sitio, que el realismo mágico no me es por completo ajeno. (73)

Unlike the bloodiness, pain, and death of the editor's irrepressible daydreams, this novelistic fabrication features clean, white brains, like the walls of his rooms, and it allows the civil registrar to go on thinking and communicating even though his head has been sliced down the middle. It is the editor's attempt to *edit* the genocide, to clean up the horrors rather than *translate* them into his own self-expression or *act* them out in his daydreams. At this moment, he is following an artistic impulse that is more Apollonian than Dionysian insofar as it raises him above, rather than submerges him in, the chaos. Therefore, he gets some respite from the genocidal horror, but this creative spark is a flash in the pan that he does not sustain.

It can be challenging to comprehend the violence that erupts in war and genocide. The notion of the mark of Cain as expounded by Castellanos Moya⁸⁰ provides a compelling hypothesis for such savagery: when civilizing structures collapse, primordial violence arises. Regarding the Guatemalan soldiers' practice of crushing children's heads against pillars, Kobrak writes, "Es posible que mataran a las criaturas así para no gastar sus municiones o tal vez matar era un juego para los soldados" (quoted in T.D.C. Miller 106–107). It is not far-fetched to posit that torture became a sadistic game as the atrocities unfolded. Adalbert, a perpetrator of the Rwandan genocide of the Tutsi people, illustrates how violence and the pain of the *other* can become a source of pleasure:

There were some who brutalized a lot because they killed overmuch. Their killings were delicious to them. They needed intoxication, like someone who calls louder and louder for a bottle. Animal death no longer gave them satisfaction, they felt frustrated when they simply struck down a Tutsi. They wanted seething excitement. They felt cheated when a Tutsi died without a word. Which is why they no longer struck at the mortal parts, wishing to savour the blows and relish the screams. (Adalbert quoted in S.B. Miller 101)

Adalbert observes that brutality had become a means of attaining "intoxication" and "excitement" for some of his fellow perpetrators. Similarly, the editor in *Insensatez* refers to one massacre in Guatemala as a "bacanal" (29) and to the genocide itself as an "orgía

⁸⁰ See pages 18–19.

de sangre y pólvora” (81), terms with Dionysian connotations⁸¹ that, like the ecstatic ritual of *sparagmos* and the bloodlust described by Adalbert, mix delight with horror.

Like *La diabla en el espejo* whose title alludes to Laura Rivera’s psychic fragmentation into a self and a mirrored self, *Insensatez* also employs the mirror as a symbol of lost psychic unity. When the editor is victim to “la sensación de estar cayendo en un precipicio oscuro y sin fondo” (215), he rushes into a bathroom where he sees “espejos de varios tamaños en los que se reflejaba [su] rostro” (126). His fragmentation, represented by his many faces in the myriad-sized mirrors, is concurrent with his fear of annihilation because, if he continues to break into schizophrenic subpersonalities who lose themselves in daydreams of genocide and who fear encounters with ruthless military officials, he will eventually succumb to total madness. Many critics have noted the symbolic importance of another mirror-scene, in the novella’s final chapter, when the editor is frightened by the unfamiliarity of his own reflection while seated at a bar in Germany:

[M]i atención estaba fija en mi rostro, que se reflejaba en el espejo, con la concentración puesta en cada uno de mis rasgos, en mi expresión, que de pronto se me hizo ajena, como si el que estaba ahí no hubiera sido yo, como si ese rostro por un instante hubiera sido de otro, de un desconocido, y no mi rostro de todos los días, un instante en que me fui irreconocible y que me causó el peor de los pánicos, al grado de que temí un ataque de locura. (147–148)

⁸¹ A *bacanal*, or “bacchanalia” in English, is a festival of Bacchus, the Roman equivalent of Dionysus (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bacchanalia>).

In this scene, the editor has become an uncanny doppelgänger of himself. He has ceased to know just who he is when he sees his own face looking back at him. He says, “a nadie le gusta verse en el espejo y encontrarse con otro” (148), which resembles Erasmo Aragón’s statement, “a nadie le gusta que otro sepa más sobre uno que uno mismo” (*El sueño* 52). Like Aragón, the editor in *Insensatez* has come to realize that his ego cannot control or even know the entirety of his psyche. The next subchapter, on Octavio Pérez Mena, illustrates the editor’s confrontation with inner evils that he did not know belonged to him.

4.2.4 Octavio Pérez Mena: Devil and Serpent

In the West, the devil is a personification of the “archetypal shadow” (*Depth Psychology* 138), a condensation of humanity’s evils into one being. In a quotation from Jung in subchapter 4.1.4, we saw that the devil is sometimes symbolized by the snake—humankind’s primordial enemy. Octavio Pérez Mena appears in the testimonies of *Insensatez* as a torturer and killer of Guatemala’s indigenous populations, and the editor comes to view him as a devil and a serpent. True to the paranoid nature of Castellanos Moya’s novellas, Pérez Mena never actually appears in the flesh before the editor, but he does appear throughout the testimonies, and he begins to haunt the editor in the latter’s daydreams and hallucinations. Citing Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Jung writes that “the devil tortures souls by keeping them waiting” (*Spirit in Man* 110), and the editor in *Insensatez* undergoes this diabolical form of psychological torture, pacing feverishly around Guatemala “con el diablo en los talones” (42) without ever confronting Pérez Mena or other members of the military apparatus that he so fears.

Octavio Pérez Mena is a pseudonym for Otto Pérez Molina (*Testimonio Once Removed* 557), a man who served as a Guatemalan military official and politician from 1966 to 2015. Otto Pérez Molina has been accused of involvement in genocide, torture, and the assassinations of the guerrilla leader Efraín Bámaca and the bishop Juan Gerardi. Despite these allegations, Pérez Molina became the 48th President of Guatemala on 14 January 2012,⁸² eight years after *Insensatez* (2004) portrayed him as a monstrous violator of human rights. In Castellanos Moya's oeuvre, impunity is associated with insecurity; the *unsafe world* of horror results from the knowledge that criminals like Octavio Pérez Mena (who represents Otto Pérez Molina) are on the loose and often occupy positions of power.

Amidst the testimonies, the editor reads about a young woman who was repeatedly beaten and raped over the course of a week by Pérez Mena and a half-dozen of his subordinates (108). The editor is stunned that, in spite of this and other such harrowing stories, Pérez Mena became “un respetable general que se paseaba orgulloso y ufano por esta misma ciudad donde la mujer [violada] lo reconocería con el mismo terror de entonces” (109). When the editor attends a house-party in the tenth chapter of the novella, he hallucinates that he is witnessing a conspiratorial meeting attended by Pérez Mena while spying into a room from the house's courtyard. He is certain that he is looking at the torturer, even though he has never seen him before: “nunca había visto yo foto alguna [de Pérez Mena] porque el muy zamarro sabía pasar desapercibido, vivir en la sombra era su oficio y que la prensa ni de broma lo tuviera. Horrorizado quise largarme de ahí para

⁸² Otto Pérez Molina served as Guatemala's president until 3 September 2015 when he was arrested on corruption charges. His wartime offences are still in impunity.

no ser testigo de una conspiración que podía costarme la vida” (128). Akin to José Zeledón and Laura Rivera’s dubitable visions of Robocop, the editor’s vision of Pérez Mena is paranoid. When the editor flees the house-party, he is too shaken to respond to Fátima as he passes her on his way out. Beholding the editor’s fright, Fátima unknowingly puts her finger on the problem: “Joder tío, ¿qué te pasa?” she says, “Parece que hubieras visto al *diablo*” (131, emphasis added). In effect, Pérez Mena has merged with the archetypal shadow—the devil—in the narrator’s psyche.

Pérez Mena is ascribed serpentine qualities that enhance his devilish aspect. The editor states that Pérez Mena has a “mirada de cobra a punto de atacar” (128) and a “cara de culebra venenosa” (136). When the editor, while staying at the spiritual retreat in the countryside, goes out at night without taking any precautions, he juxtaposes the danger of venomous snakes with the danger of Pérez Mena; he goes out “sin poner[se] a pensar que una culebra venenosa pudiera estar al acecho, sin considerar que el general Octavio Pérez Mena con su partida de sicarios pudieran echar[le] la mano encima” (140), which suggests that Pérez Mena is both terrifying and subtle, like a snake in the grass.

The devil and the serpent are cunning and capable of seduction. In the Bible, they are tempters: the devil tempts Christ in the desert, and the serpent tempts Eve in the Garden of Eden. The editor is disturbingly charmed by the diabolical-serpentine Pérez Mena; he cannot resist the recurring urge to imitate the atrocities that the torturer committed, particularly the most horrifying act of all, that of crushing infants’ heads against wooden pillars:

[U]na misma imagen se me imponía en los momentos de descanso, una imagen que se repetía en varias partes del informe y que poco a poco me fue penetrando hasta poseerme por completo cuando me ponía de pie y empezaba a pasearme en el reducido espacio de la habitación, entre la mesa de trabajo y la litera, como poseído, como si yo fuese ese teniente [Pérez Mena] que irrumpía brutalmente en la choza de la familia indígena, tomaba con mi férrea mano al bebé de pocos meses por los tobillos, lo alzaba al vilo y luego lo hacía rotar por los aires, cada vez a más velocidad, como si fuese la honda de David desde donde saldría disparada la piedra, lo hacía girar por los aires a una velocidad de vértigo, frente a la mirada de espanto de sus padres y hermanitos, hasta que de súbito se chocaba su cabeza contra el horcón de la choza. (137)

When the editor becomes possessed by the archetypal shadow, Castellanos Moya's motif of vertigo arises once again. The editor's spinning occurs at "una velocidad de vértigo," emphasizing his temporary ignorance of where he is and who he is. Physically, he is in the safe solitude of the spiritual retreat; mentally, he has gotten lost in the testimonies where he imagines that he is Pérez Mena, in the manner that Alonso Quijano gets lost in his chivalric romances and imagines that he is the hero.

As the novella concludes with the bar scene in Germany, the editor once again hallucinates, like he did at the house-party in Guatemala City, that he is looking at Pérez Mena. He approaches the phantasm and screams "*Todos sabemos quiénes son los asesinos*" (155), a cry of protestation against postwar impunity. This phrase is repeated five times (153–155). According to Emily Wilson, repetition is used in tragedy to

“convey the feeling that things go on the same, without change or growth or death, or connections between one thing and another . . . The use of repetition enacts the anguishing sense that there is mere addition without alteration” (8). The editor fears that the killers will continue to wreak havoc in Guatemala, and his fears are promptly realized when he receives word via email that the bishop’s head has been smashed in with a brick by opponents of the humanitarian project. In real life, Bishop Gerardi’s assassination was attributed by many to the intellectual authorship of Otto Pérez Molina, the man whom Castellanos Moya fictionalizes as a personification of the archetypal shadow.

Conclusion

This dissertation, in its examination of various works by Horacio Castellanos Moya, has endeavoured to find tragedy where countless scholars have seen cynicism—a stubborn, dogmatic label that has been stuck to Castellanos Moya’s literature. Alberto Moreiras’s article “La cuestión del cinismo. Una lectura de *La diáspora*” has been interpreted, in this study, as a sensible call to shift away from Beatriz Cortez’s *estética del cinismo* which has been the leading theory in analyses of Castellanos Moya’s oeuvre since it first emerged in Cortez’s 2001 article of the same name. Moreiras’s speculative affirmation that the political perspective of Castellanos Moya’s literature is tragic—not cynical—has provided the starting point for the literary explorations that have been documented here. At the outset, the overarching question was posed: are Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes tragic? Though this is not the first analysis of Castellanos Moya’s fiction to eschew the *estética del cinismo*, it is the first to ask and to illustrate how Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes are tragic. Previous scholarship has established that Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes deviate from the heroes of epic and *testimonio*; the present study has demonstrated, more specifically, that his antiheroes undergo metaphorical deaths that invert epic immortalizations and exemplify tragedy.

Death has been at the heart of tragedy since Dionysus, the “suffering and dying god” (Otto 49, 78), legendarily implored Aeschylus to write the first tragic play. Whereas epics emphasize the protagonist’s self-realization or apotheosis, tragedies emphasize the protagonist’s annihilation. The metaphorical deaths of Castellanos Moya’s tragic antiheroes take the form of emotional breakdowns that culminate in the *tremendous*

horror or blissful rapture that Nietzsche ascribes to the Dionysian experience of complete self-oblivion; these breakdowns have been referred to here as “Dionysian disintegrations.” Castellanos Moya’s antiheroes’ tragic wanderings away from individuated selfhood and into self-oblivion twist and turn with the disorienting effects of self-boundary-altering emotions (Susan Beth Miller) and confrontations with the shadow—the dark side of the self (Carl Jung and Erich Neumann). These protagonists pass through feelings of disgust, horror, fascination, and awe, and they are haunted by their own buried evils, as they struggle to subsist in a disenchanted, hero-less world.

The diasporic orphans Erasmo Aragón and José Zeledón are, like all Salvadorans of their generation, afflicted by the historical tragedy of the civil war and the mass migrations of the nation’s populace. They are both unravelled by horror. In addition to their loss of the *patria* and their loss of parents—through the murder of Aragón’s father and Zeledón’s accidental matricide—these characters are orphaned by the deaths of Roque Dalton and Archbishop Óscar Romero, two role models who had brought hope to the revolutionary movement. In *Moronga* (2018), Aragón and Zeledón continue the rootless drifting that characterizes the self-exiled protagonists of Castellanos Moya’s debut novella, *La diáspora* (1989). This novella features a prototype of Aragón in the character Gabriel, a self-exiled intellectual who was irreversibly devastated by Dalton’s assassination. It also features a prototype of Joselito (i.e., Zeledón) in Quique López; Joselito and Quique represent the tragic notion that the civil war violence was fuelled by young men who, in many cases, were more moved by adventure than by politics.

Aragón’s Dionysian disintegrations in *El sueño del retorno* and *Moronga* are the result of *tremendous horror*. In *El sueño*, Don Chente’s hypnosis sessions awaken Aragón’s

Jungian shadow and force Aragón to recognize his own violent impulses. The horrifying thought that he might have committed murder produces within him “una especie de vértigo, como si estuviese en el borde de un hoyo negro” (77). His horror is augmented by the memory of his cousin Albertico’s murder by an *escuadrón de la muerte* and Don Chente’s possible capture by the army upon arriving in El Salvador—two thoughts that Aragón broods over as he squeezes himself into the fetal position, naked on his bed, a fragile being in an *unsafe world*. In *Morongá*, his encounter with Amanda Packer and her older brother Calín of the Mara Salvatrucha leads to the false accusation of sexual assault levelled against him, his destiny of facing the US penal system, the loss of his job, his madness, and his internment in a clinic.

Zeledón’s Dionysian disintegration is also due to *tremendous horror*. As a youth, Joselito (i.e., Zeledón) is free of horror and filled with self-awe as he expands his self-image by participating in guerrilla missions. Horror enters his life with his accidental matricide, a memory that pursues him like the Furies pursue Orestes. He lives among ghosts whom he has forced into the basement of the unconscious but who nonetheless arise, unbeckoned. His intertextual arc climaxes with the appearance of Robocop who, Zeledón believes, died long ago. The vision of Robocop engenders a horrifying revival of the violence of the past, and it provokes an anxiety attack in Zeledón that is characterized by “una especie de vértigo” (*Morongá* 116).

The self-protective snobs Edgardo Vega and Laura Rivera try to protect themselves from *tremendous horror* with hyperbolic disgust and contempt, but they are unsuccessful. Vega, the narrator of *El asco*, is disgusted by El Salvador’s degradation of the human spirit through a lack of appreciation for the arts. Rivera, the narrator of *La diabla*, is

contemptuous of Salvadorans who do not belong to the upper crust of society. These Apollonian, self-boundary-fortifying emotions—disgust and contempt—give both Vega and Rivera an enhanced sense of self that distinguishes them from the inferior *other*.

Vega's homecoming to El Salvador following an eighteen-year absence is filled with physical disgust and moral disgust that aggravate each other in a feedback loop. His relation to his brother Ivo parodies such ego-shadow pairings as Osiris-Set, Cain-Abel, and Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde. Ivo represents Vega's shadow, but Vega has expelled so much from his character that he is nothing but a superficial persona, whereas Ivo, despite being a "shadow brother," is a normal, well-adjusted person. When Vega temporarily loses his Canadian passport, which bears the name "Thomas Bernhard," he loses the talisman of his persona. He breaks down with the recognition that he, just like the provokers of his disgust, is Salvadoran. The momentary loss of his Canadian passport is the momentary death of his persona, and he enters "el vórtice del delirio" (98) in a fit of *tremendous horror*.

When Laura Rivera's best friend Olga María de Trabanino dies, Rivera dissociates from her horror and creates an imaginary interlocutor—*la diabla en el espejo*—who permits her to defend herself from existential dread by reinforcing her egoic fortress of contempt. While hurling insults every which way, she continues to pedestalize Olga María's flawless persona. Ultimately, however, she must address Olga María's shadow and endure the horror of betrayal when she learns that her best friend slept with her ex-husband. Her horror is then aggravated when Robocop—the shadow who lurks behind the frivolous, ruling class represented by Rivera—escapes from jail and adds danger to the already *unsafe world*. Rivera's dependence on her imaginary friend reaches its apex

as she runs into the street, paranoically screaming for help amidst no immediate threat, consumed by *tremendous horror*.

The enchanted imbibers of this study are Eduardo Sosa of *Baile con serpientes* and the editor of testimonies in *Insensatez*. These antiheroes differ from the diasporic orphans and self-protective snobs in the emphasis their narratives place on the positively toned emotions of enchantment—fascination and awe. Sosa is enchanted by the vagrant Jacinto Bustillo and his four snakes, and the editor is enchanted by the testimonies of survivors of the Guatemalan genocide. Sosa’s enchantment leads him all the way to *blissful rapture*, whereas the editor’s enchantment paradoxically draws him deeper into *tremendous horror* as he faces the devastation of genocide.

Sosa is an unemployed sociology graduate who lives a dull existence, imbued with *hastío*, in the neoliberal age. When he accompanies a personification of his shadow, Jacinto Bustillo, on a night of drunken debauchery, he finds himself “en el vértigo, en las sinuosidades nocturnas” (23), which leads to his murdering and assuming the identity of Bustillo; Sosa renews himself like a snake that sheds its skin. The horror he spreads across the city contrasts with the enchantment he experiences as the son-god avenger of Bustillo and the lover of his serpentine companions. His Dionysian dissolution occurs amidst an orgy that resembles the ecstatic rites of Dionysus and the maenads. Music, intoxication, and dance lead to sex, orgasm, and *blissful rapture*.

The editor in *Insensatez* is a Dionysian libertine who is insensitive to others but nonetheless extremely sensitive to poetic beauty. Much like Alonso Quijano is enchanted by his books of chivalric romance, the editor is enchanted by the perplexing incantations

he encounters in the testimonies. Recurrently, while staying at the spiritual retreat outside of Guatemala City, he enters trances in which he becomes possessed by the most horrendous torturer of all—Octavio Pérez Mena—a manifestation of the devil, the archetypal shadow. As the editor spins “a una velocidad de vértigo” (137) in imitation of Pérez Mena’s whirling infanticides, he loses himself and fuses with *tremendous horror*.

In addition to the motif of vertigo, which generally indicates the crumbling of an antihero’s self-identity, three other motifs have emerged over the course of this study and dovetailed with Dionysian disintegrations: symbolic deaths, hallucinatory threats of violence, and second selves. We have seen several symbolic deaths: in *La diáspora*, Gabriel is haunted by the assassination of Roque Dalton, and Juan Carlos is haunted by the assassination of Comandante Ana María; in *El sueño*, Erasmo Aragón recalls that the murder of his cousin Albertico by an *escuadrón de la muerte* was the motive for his exile; in *Morongá*, Aragón is haunted, like Gabriel in *La diáspora*, by the death of Dalton; in *El asco*, Edgardo Vega is disturbed by the murder of Olga María de Trabanino; in *La diabla*, Laura Rivera’s life is torn apart by that same murder; José Zeledón’s intertextual downfall from *La sirvienta y el luchador* to *Morongá* is overarched by the assassination and absence of Archbishop Óscar Romero; finally, *Insensatez* ends with the assassination of Bishop Juan Gerardi. These symbolic deaths cast antiheroes into a chaotic, hero-less world, and they could be significant in future studies on Castellanos Moya that have a more historical focus. Another notable motif is hallucinatory threats of violence: José Zeledón suffers an anxiety attack when he believes he has seen Robocop; Laura Rivera has a nervous breakdown when she imagines that Robocop is hunting her down; Rita Mena is panic-stricken when she thinks that she has seen Jacinto Bustillo’s yellow

Chevrolet; and the editor in *Insensatez* believes that he sees the devilish, serpentine Octavio Pérez Mena on two occasions. These visions result from paranoia which results from living in an *unsafe world*. The motif of hallucinatory threats could be analyzed in future studies in relation to Ricardo Piglia's *teoría del complot* which highlights the paranoia-inducing aspects of literature. Finally, we have seen the motif of second selves, which have been interpreted as manifestations of the Jungian shadow: Erasmo Aragón is both a harmless citizen and a murderous fiend; Thomas Bernhard is both a Canadian with no past and a Salvadoran named Edgardo Vega; Olga María de Trabanino is both a faultless friend and a depraved deceiver; El Yuca is both a charismatic politician and a criminal drug-addict; Eduardo Sosa is both a harmless citizen and a snake-charmer/terrorist named Jacinto Bustillo; the editor in *Insensatez* is both a guiltless foreigner in Guatemala and the torturer Octavio Pérez Mena. These protagonists with second selves are a throwback to nineteenth century antiheroes who are paired with "Gothic doubles," such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dorian Gray and his portrait, and Dostoevsky's Golyadkin Sr. and Golyadkin Jr. We have also seen that Castellanos Moya's Robocop is a fabricated monster, much like Mary Shelley's Gothic cyborg—Frankenstein's monster. A comparative study of Castellanos Moya's fiction and Gothic fiction could be conducted in the future.

* * *

Susan Beth Miller's schema of self-boundary-altering emotions has allowed for an affective analysis of Castellanos Moya's antiheroes, and this analysis raises a new question: how do readers, in affective terms, experience Castellanos Moya's antihero narratives? When reading about these characters' Dionysian disintegrations, do we

undergo the catharsis⁸³ that, according to Aristotle, results from the pity and fear aroused by the tragic hero (69)? Or do tragic *anti*-heroes, in their pronounced immorality, fail to provoke pity and fear? Do they instead provoke *schadenfreude*—pleasure in the misfortunes of others? Or perhaps they provoke the “comic emotions” of sympathy and ridicule that Northrop Frye ascribes to the spectators of Old Comedy? (43). These are questions for another study.

Carl Jung and Erich Neumann are the leaders of the Jungian school of thought which, despite its erstwhile absence in literary criticism of Castellanos Moya, has proven to be applicable here. Jung and Neumann’s focus on people’s internal struggles is complementary to the focus on external struggles that has predominated the discourse surrounding Castellanos Moya. The influential *estética del cinismo* is the offspring of an intellectual lineage that begins with Karl Marx and passes through Michel Foucault to the Foucauldian-Marxists Fredric Jameson⁸⁴ and Gayatri Spivak. Cortez and these thinkers whose ideas she incorporates into her work emphasize economics, politics, class warfare, and the role of power in human relations—topics that are relevant to Castellanos Moya’s literature and understandably abound in analyses of it. Jung and Neumann alternatively emphasize psychology, morality, and the role of symbols in human culture and cognition—these neglected topics are also relevant to Castellanos Moya’s literature.⁸⁵ As

⁸³ Castellanos Moya often describes his writing process as cathartic (“Escribir me mantuvo a flote”; “Horacio Castellanos Moya: ‘La literatura’”; “Nos hubiéramos matado” 101; *Roque Dalton* ch. 13).

⁸⁴ Moreiras illuminates the conceptual link between Jameson and Cortez in “La cuestión” (pp. 120–124).

⁸⁵ Camille Paglia, whose work has also been integral to this dissertation, explains in her article “Erich Neumann: Theorist of the Great Mother” (2006) that she was heavily influenced by Neumann. Paglia does not go as deeply into psychology and morality as Jung and Neumann, but she is eminently attuned to the role of symbols in human culture.

he portrays societal conflicts, Castellanos Moya simultaneously portrays conflicts within the individual's soul, revealing the demons that pester the better angels of his or her nature. "Si yo fuera un hombre religioso," Castellanos Moya has stated, "diría que la literatura es una reacción de la virtud ante la fuerza de mal, que sólo desmembrando y desentrañando a la fuerza del mal, mostrando sus vísceras, es posible una mejor comprensión del ser humano, de sus complejidades" (*Roque Dalton* ch. 13). Whereas Marxism and its derivative theories highlight dividing lines of power and corruption that run through societies and give rise to such dichotomies as bourgeoisie/proletariat, hegemon/subaltern, or master/slave,⁸⁶ Jungian psychology, like Castellanos Moya's fiction, stresses the capacity for evil within all individuals. From the Jungian-Moyan perspective, shadows loom within us all but, under most circumstances, can be masked by personae.

In what sense can we affirm that Castellanos Moya's antiheroes are indeed tragic? Analyses of his diasporic orphans, self-protective snobs, and enchanted imbibers have shown that these characters helplessly disintegrate while in the clutches of horror and enchantment; they go mad and lose their self-identities, dying metaphorical deaths like Oedipus the King. At the Festival of Dionysus in fifth-century BC Athens, spectators in the sunlit amphitheatre on the south slope of the Acropolis hill used to behold Oedipus as he realized he was not the person he had previously imagined. The tragic hero blinded himself, and the chorus cried: "Oh, most inhuman vision! A world of pain out-suffered and outdone" (Sophocles 256). The excruciating yet exhilarating outpouring of emotion

⁸⁶ The *estética del cinismo* focuses on the subjectivity of a subaltern slave (*Estética* 25), which implies a dichotomy with hegemonic masters.

in Oedipus's bloody tears and in the chorus's collective cry emanated from depths of feeling that were unfathomed in the earlier storytelling of myth and epic, and the spectators were pulled empathically into the tragic hero's abysmal horror. This sanity-defying extremity of emotion was plumbed by Sophocles and relished by Nietzsche, and its echoes reverberate in the Dionysian disintegrations of Horacio Castellanos Moya's tragic antiheroes.

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