



Materiality as a representation of gothic Latin American trauma narratives

Amaia Robertson Nogues

Both 'Adela's House'¹ and *The Wolf House*² highlight the materiality of the physical form to demonstrate an abstracted reality. The texts possess a gothic texture as they embrace the abject and the fragility of human experience through experimentation with transient materials and non-linear narratives to reflect generational trauma. Continuing the notion that 'the past is a site of terror, of an injustice that must be resolved';³ the home is abstracted through bodily hauntings and the physical self is repositioned within wider Latin-American socio-political turmoil.

Enriquez, Cociña and León experiment with subversive narration in order to demonstrate the malleable nature of memory. The disjointed approach to time contains a gothic materiality as it exposes the fragile nature of human experience, which I aimed to explore in my own adaption (see appendix 1) through the rejection of a chronological narrative. 'Adela's House' features a non-linear timeline, with Clara's fragmented recollections positioning her as an unreliable narrator: 'I don't remember which [stories] Adela or Pablo made up'.⁴ This creates a disorientating environment as the real experience is questioned through Clara's omissions. The rejection of chronology evokes a haunting nature of the narrative, where past and present are interwoven to create a sense of disorientation and loss. Here, reminiscing also evokes an emotional distance which mirrors trauma responses representative of the Argentinian social body, as well as complicating the novella's timeline. Enriquez exploits these omissions to reflect the refusal of the state to acknowledge the mass disappearances that occurred under Videla's dictatorship. Therefore, the disjointed timeline in 'Adela's House' reflects the fragmented individual and national experience.

The Wolf House also comments on the fragility of memory through gothic materiality and form. Paper is used to create abstract characterisation; as a material, it exhibits a tangible presentation of experience (for example literature and journals) but is also easily teared. This texture thus implies how Maria is documenting her traumatic upbringing within the Chilean Nazi colony through unconventional narrative means. Her references are abstract, driven by the disembodied narrator and thus her recollection is similarly delicate. Within the form of the trauma narrative, paper represents the fragility of the human mind as Maria cannot recall a reliable reality. Moreover, it expresses the covert desire to document her experience through physical materials in order to authenticate trauma which may be unfathomable in retrospect. The use of layered paper in my creative piece (see appendix 5)

¹ Mariana Enriquez, 'Adela's House' in *Things We Lost in the Fire*, trans. by Megan McDowell. (London: Granta, 2019).

² *The Wolf House*, dir. by Joaquin Cociña and Cristóbal León, (Diluvio and Globo Rojo Films, 2018).

³ Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2006). p. 18.

⁴ Enriquez, p. 69.

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invites the viewer to interact with the material in hopes of mirroring how texture presents fragility as an expression of horror.

Taking Lovecraft's approach to the gothic as 'weirdly horrible tales as a literary form',⁵ the genre is seen to be defined by fear and morbid curiosity. This is echoed by Vázquez-Medina, who notes 'audience-oriented solicitation of emotion as *the* integral part of the genre's demarcation'.⁶ Emotional texture is therefore a defining quality for the gothic. For instance, intertextual references present an abstract idea of materiality and the genre as a whole. Enriquez interweaves horror even in the glamorised portrayal of Adela's childhood home with 'stained-glass- [windows] yellow, green and red'.⁷ The description of glimmering proportions evokes the traditionally morbid childhood stories of fairy-tales and suggests that 'Adela's House' refers to both her home and the house of her disappearance. Materiality is hence used to hide a traumatic reality, in which Adela is taken or even entirely imagined. Moreover, the use of intertextuality references broader Hispanic trauma narratives; Adela was famously featured in 'The House of Bernada Alba',⁸ which was Garcia Lorca's final play before his assassination during the Spanish Civil War. Both writers comment on a suppressed national trauma and anxiety surrounding physical materiality where the home is a site of horror, with Garcia Lorca's Adela subjected to a forced confinement inside the home which drove her to suicide. To reference this tradition, in my adaption I included impressions of Adela only within the house (see appendix 2). Enriquez therefore demonstrates a multitextured ability to respond to trauma narratives through genre materiality.

The Wolf House continues this intertextual referencing by framing fairy-tale narratives as a means of moral policing. This is evident in 'the wolf' being a manifestation of the house, a metaphor for familial obligation, or a godlike-figure policing Maria's actions. Maria being derived from the biblical name Mary and the non-sexual reproduction used to create Pablo and Ana imply the materiality of the narrative and structural surroundings of the house to be religiously and morally coded. The home therefore acts as a translation of the total control that Maria was subjected to within the colony. As such, 'intertextuality is a way of placing us... in [a] complicated and interwoven structure (the first meaning of "texture")',⁹ which is why I attempted its highlight borders and structures in my own illustrations (see appendix 1). Intertextual materiality and texture are therefore used to demonstrate how the fairy-tale narrative represents trauma.

Alternatively, materiality is used to reflect an abstracted reality through physical and liminal spaces. The house where Adela vanishes in 'Adela's House' possesses impossible proportions which supersede the boundaries of the mundane domestic space. I aimed to experiment with layering elements in my visual adaption to evoke these complicated material spaces, with the layers corresponding to different narrative points. The house of Adela's disappearance is an 'endless room...that made no sense'.¹⁰ It therefore exceeds physical limitations and human comprehension, positioning the house as an undefined purgatory.

⁵ H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, (Dover: Dover Publications, 1973) p. 12.

⁶ Olivia Vázquez-Medina, 'Ugly Feelings in Mariana Enriquez's Short Fiction', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 98.2 (2021), 289–317 (p. 292).

⁷ Enriquez, p. 72.

⁸ Frederico García Lorca, *The House of Bernada Alba: La Casa De Bernarda Alba*, trans. by Gwynne Edwards (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

⁹ Julia Kristeva, "'Nous Deux" or a (Hi)story of Intertextuality', *Romantic Review*, 93.1 (2002), 7-13 (p. 9).

¹⁰ Enriquez, p. 78.

Enriquez therefore subverts the domestic space as a place of security, with incomprehensible rooms replicating the enigmatic nature of Adela's disappearance. I aimed to reproduce the threat of the house (see appendix 4) as it acts as a reflection of the destabilised family structure which offers no protection from the external violence of Argentina's dirty war. The destabilisation of the family space also reflects the generational trauma of this period, with many children kidnapped and rehomed with sympathisers of the regime. Political terror is directly linked with this space: '*the house is a hell*',¹¹ as Enriquez references the local concentration camp, explicitly relating abstracted realities to political violence. The physical boundaries of the house evoke the material boundaries of '*el infierno*' as the ultimate threatening space. Therefore, the physical materiality of domestic structures are abstracted in order to reflect family insecurity and the unacknowledged traumas of Videla's Argentina.

The Wolf House also presents the home as an undefined space by experimenting with boundaries as a site of traumatic experiences. The house acts as a liminal space between the real and surreal through personification and displacement, as the space Maria inhabits exists outside of reality, with the walls acting as the boundaries of the narrative setting. I therefore experimented with boundaries within my own adaption, using cut outs to complicate narrative planes and to evoke the claustrophobic feeling of the house which echoes the entrapment Maria experienced within the fascist colony. This is emphasised by the omnipresent threat of the narrator 'I have been here all along/inside of you'.¹² The reinvented position of the home as an internal force reflects how the haunted house narrative has been defined by emotive experiences rather than physical threats, with the sensation that 'we have come home to our deepest terrors *and* that we are trespassing into thrillingly forbidden territory'.¹³ Therefore, domestic spaces act in the emotional realm as a re-enactment of traumatic experiences haunted by fascism. The house exists in an undefined reality where Maria may have never escaped, remaining psychologically and physically entrapped in the home. Liminal spaces consequently supersede the boundaries of physical reality to create surreal impressions of the trauma narrative.

Both texts cross the boundaries of (in)human materiality through the abstract nature of the house setting. The home possesses an eerie human quality whilst physical bodies are abject; Enriquez demonstrates this through the house's biological qualities, housing nails and teeth with familial ties: 'molars... like my father's'.¹⁴ The home therefore has a mosaic human identity which transcends the boundaries of the independent body. The possessive nature of the title 'Adela's house' continues this personification of the space, in which Adela's physical absence is exchanged for her spiritual presence in the house. The gothic motif of haunting is clear as the house becomes an extension of Adela's own materiality; the walls, teeth and nails of the space becoming an expression of her re-invented (in)material body. This abjection of the body is foreshadowed in Adela's characterisation as framed by loss, with her being 'missing an arm'.¹⁵ This notion is continued in the absence of Adela's body after her disappearance, hence I chose to only hint at her character through the motif of the disembodied arm (see appendix 3). Disembodiment also serves to penetrate the readers

¹¹ Enriquez, p. 80.

¹² *The Wolf House*, 1:06:43.

¹³ Monica Michlin, "The Haunted House in Contemporary Filmic and Literary Gothic Narratives of Trauma." *Transatlantica*, 1. 1 (2012), 1-24 (p. 18). doi:10.4000/transatlantica.5933.

¹⁴ Enriquez, p. 78.

¹⁵ Enriquez, p. 67.

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own detachment, as 'bodily involvement can strengthen their engagement with a story at the level of socio-cultural meanings'¹⁶ and the audience themselves become disembodied witnesses to the narrative and social trauma. As such, dismemberment from the physical body represents a national deterioration under the Argentinean dictatorship with loss coded into the very fabric of the community.

The Wolf House also experiments with inhuman materiality as Maria is introduced as a projection on the walls. Cociña and León challenge the boundaries of personhood through Maria as she is constantly represented through non-bodily materials. She is often presented and destroyed through dismembered forms, and the rejection of skin in favour of textured materials implies a rejection of the biological bounds of the self. Maria is framed by abjection as she is defined by the house's walls rather than a tangible body and I wanted to mirror this in the abstract characters of my own work (see appendix 5). Cociña and León ultimately demonstrate the materiality of the house to be crucial to the understanding of the shifting characters within the form, and this further serves to destabilise Maria's reality. Simultaneously, Maria is a disembodied ghost which haunts the house whilst she also *is* the house, which acts as a direct manifestation of her need to escape. Trauma is therefore shown to redefine the self through the destabilisation of bodily and structural materials in order to demonstrate the fractured recollection of the trauma narrative.

In conclusion, both texts effectively experiment with narrative and physical materiality to explore the boundaries of the (in)human experience. Enriquez, Cociña and León's works are in conversation with gothic traditions of abjection and the nuances of horror narratives. Liminal spaces and the absence of the physical self appear to haunt both texts as ultimately 'one need not be a chamber – to be haunted'.¹⁷ I hope to have reflected the nuances of the undefined structural borders within my own multi-layered adaption, where the personification of physical materials and the exploration of inhuman materiality complicate understandings of the lived experience. Therefore, the exploration of undefined and abstract spaces creates a gothic materiality reflective of the fragmented personal and national trauma of these turbulent Hispanic socio-political environments.

¹⁶ Marco Caracciolo, *The Experientiality of Narrative*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014) p. 10.

¹⁷ Emily Dickinson, 'One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted' in *The Poems of Emily Dickenson*, ed. by R. W. Franklin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1862) p. 407.

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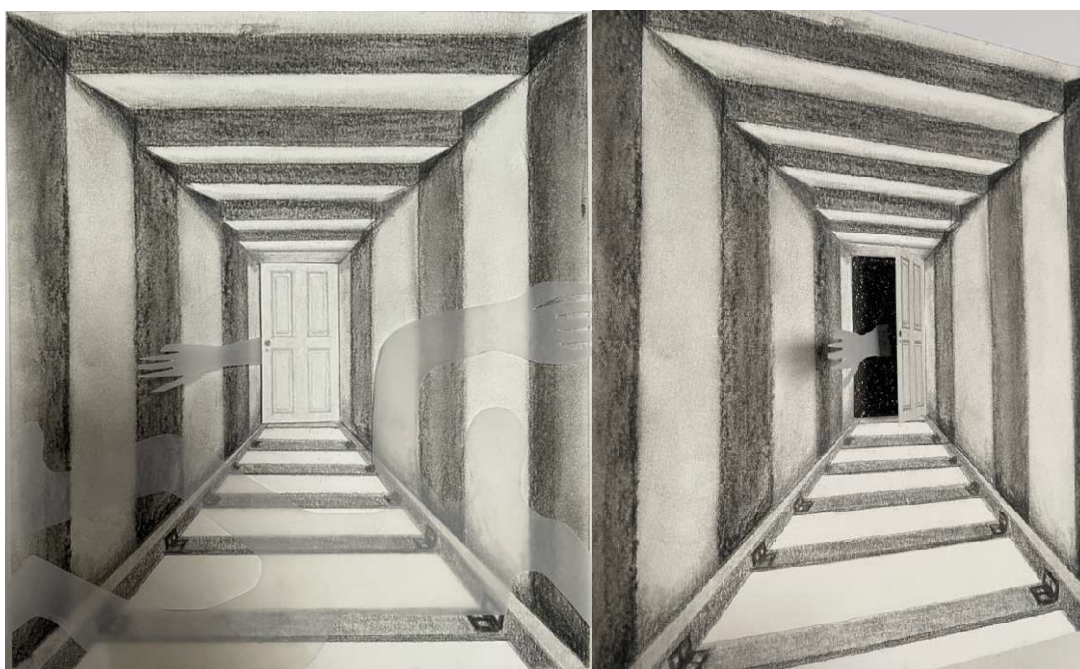
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Appendices



3.



4.



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5.



