**A journey through uncharted territories?:**

**Reassessing Canarian literature and the *Novela Negra* throughan**

**analysis of identity, solitude and place in Miguel Aguerralde’s *Claro de Luna* (2009)**

**Abstract**

The aim of this article is threefold: to call for a reassessment of Canarian literature and the *novela negra*, both of which have been undervalued to date, and to accord critical attention to the talented Lanzarotean author, Miguel Aguerralde. It sets out to fulfil this via the first close study of *Claro de Luna*, examining the ways Aguerralde employs the *novela negra* framework and other narrative devices to engage readers with the interconnected themes of identity, solitude and place. It demonstrates that in this complex, multi-layered novel, the narrative technique is used to subvert expectations and the choice of setting, the use of cultural allusiveness, together with the presentation of authority and gender can be related to questions concerning “a sense of place”, the “decentring” of Peninsular Spain to focus on the Canary Islands. Simultaneously, *Claro de Luna* transcends the specificity of its setting and the limitations of the *novela negra* by ambitiously tackling questions of universal relevance, exploring identity in relation to mental health and stability and interrogating the nebulous notions of fantasy and “the abnormal”. In-so-doing, Aguerralde questions the validity of objective constructs such as identity vis à vis subjective perceptions and poses questions about the islands’ future.

**Keywords**

Aguerralde, Canaries, Spain, Identity, Solitude, Place, *Novela negra*

In Labanyi’s words, “the whole of modern Spanish culture [...] can be read as one big ghost story” and she proceeds to write of “history’s losers”, noting that “modernity has rendered popular and mass culture ghostly” (2002, 1-2). Within the vast spectrum of contemporary Spanish literature, none has been rendered more “ghostly” or invisible than the literature of the Canary Islands. Whilst the literary works of regions such as the Basque country, Catalonia and Galicia have been accorded critical attention, Canarian literature rarely features in any anthology of Hispanic literature and even a fascinating collection of essays that is intriguingly entitled *Spain Beyond Spain* (Epps and Fernández Cifuentes 2005) barely considers the Canary Islands.[[1]](#endnote-1) The Spanish literary canon, thus, continues to be dominated by works published in the Peninsula and the tendency to overlook the Canarian output has been highlighted in Zebensuí Rodríguez’s provocatively entitled lecture on Lanzarote, “La isla de los libros desconocidos” in 2017.[[2]](#endnote-2)

To an extent, the current situation can be deemed to be a consequence of historical events, which, Álvarez Junco claimed, led to Spain’s absence from critical discussions concerning nationalism:

The principal reason for the patent neglect of Spanish nationalism is political. Under the Franco dictatorship of 1939-1975 all regional identities, especially the Basque and Catalan ones, were repressed in favour of the regime’s centralised, Catholic-conservative version of Spanish identity. […] Spanish identity rapidly became synonymous with Francoism, especially in its militaristic and fascistic dimensions. Even today, any manifestation of Spanish nationalism is regarded in many regionalist and certain progressive circles as inherently reactionary and untrustworthy. (2011, 2)

Whilst it could be contended that the regionalist undercurrents prevailed, despite concerted attempts to repress them (thereby bolstering Ortega y Gasset’s assertion that the “real Spain” existed alongside the “official Spain”), within the modern-day context and particularly given the proliferation of negative portrayals of fascism and the Dictatorship (Del Toro’s films *El laberinto del fauno* and *El espinazo del diablo* are just a few examples), the Canary Islands are at a significant disadvantage. They have been regarded as being notoriously pro-Franco since they were Franco’s stronghold and the location from which he launched his military uprising. The dominant presence today of the eagle to the left of the door of the imposing building of the Gobierno Militar in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, still bears witness to those years.

The islands have also been frequently (and unduly) dismissed as tourist resorts bearing little cultural worth, whilst their marginality is exacerbated by their location. “Like stepping stones into the Atlantic” (Fernández-Armesto 1982, 2), situated almost 2,000 kilometres from the Spanish capital, the Canaries are significantly closer to Africa than Madrid (the shortest distance between the islands and the African coast is just 115 kilometres). In terms of their customs, language and attitudes, too, they arguably share more similarities with Latin America than Spain. Santana has affirmed that

several historical studies have been devoted to the comparison of the colonization process in the Canaries to that of Latin America, and the fact that the Islands served as a testing ground and a platform for the colonization of the New World – not to speak of the linguistic similarities between the Spanish spoken in those areas as different from the accent of Peninsular Spanish, or the intense migrations from the Islands across the Atlantic – has prompted the analysis of close historical and cultural ties. (2000, 152)

However, “[c]ompared with the New World, the islands were settled at an early date by a cosmopolitan population” (Fernández-Armesto 1982, 45) and Martín-Márquez wrote of the Canarian affinity with the Saharawi peoples, noting that, “During the Franco years, an archaeologist and anthropologist from Cádiz, José Pérez de Barradas, laid the foundation for the reconceptualization of Canarian identity as Saharan and sub-Saharan in origin […], a shift that would facilitate the development of a radical separatist movement on the archipelago.” (2008, 337). Although this particular claim has since been refuted, it does attest to the distinctiveness of the Canaries.

Meanwhile, the islands’ insularity problematizes both commercial ventures and communications, even ease of access, as was the case following the eruption of Eyjafjallajökul in 2010, which led to the “entrapment” of innumerable tourists in the Canary Islands. Somewhat ironically (if not symbolically), Spain’s national TV weather presenters frequently stand in front of the tiny corner of the screen that the islands are allocated, often blocking them out, whilst the government’s initiatives to engage in oil exploration (2014-15) and the ensuing anger highlights how “distant” the Madrilenian “establishment” is from the islands’ societies and how those living there struggle to make their voices heard. Probably in recognition of the fact that the islands are perceived as being “the back of beyond”, some of those working there are entitled to *sobresueldos*, the equivalent of the UK’s “London weighting”, and significant problems are faced by those trying to publish and publicise their works.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In addition to overlooking their literary outputs, scholars have accorded relatively little attention to the question of Canarian identity, possibly because the topic does not have as strong a politically (or economically) loaded significance as in the cases of the Basque country and Catalonia, although a degree of independence can be seen in the celebration of the *Día de Canarias* in May to commemorate the islands’ autonomy and the first session of the Canarian government in 1983. However, theorists largely agree that the fact that the Canaries are islands is significant. Some have regarded them as an utopian space, which, “because of [their] mythology, history, literature and culture in general, […] belong to a cultural region that is not strictly Spanish but rather, Atlantic” (García Ramos, cited in Santana 2000, 153). Legend has it that the islands constitute the highest mountains that remained when Atlantis sank into the sea and that their original inhabitants, the Guanches, descended from the last of the Atlantean people.

Others have adopted a more negative stance, associating the Canaries with “island fever”, with notions of solitude and claustrophobia. Aguerralde himself stated,

Vivir en unas islas, y además en unas tan alejadas como las Canarias, trae consigo rápidamente el miedo al aislamiento, a la soledad, pienso que es un tópico insular el de ver la isla como un lugar claustrofóbico, como un lugar cerrado. (Alberdi 2010, n.p.)[[4]](#endnote-4)

However, this interpretation of the Canaries as “un lugar cerrado” has been challenged; Cola Benítez, centring on their position in the Atlantic world and their relationship with Europe, Latin America and Africa, notes that,

Canarias […] es una región sin fronteras cuyos límites, por la ausencia de territorios físicamente inmediatos, históricamente adquirieron dimensión Atlántica. Por su cultura es europea, por su historia siente su proyección americana, y por su situación es consciente de sus expectativas africanas. Y posiblemente sea el resultado de la conjunción de esta triple circunstancia, en la que mucho se podría profundizar, su primer signo distintivo como región.

Derivados de lo anterior, existen otros factores determinantes de la idiosincrasia de los canarios en general. Siendo geográficamente una región aislada, Canarias no ha sido nunca una comunidad encerrada en sí misma ni cerrada a los demás. A ello han contribuido razones de simple supervivencia, que han ido forjando a través del tiempo la personalidad liberal, cosmopolita y un tanto aventurera de sus habitantes. (2002, n.p.)

Pérez Minik has also perceived this notion of “borderlessness” positively, affirming that “El canario siempre tuvo una gran capacidad para trasmutar, elaborar o adoptar ese mundo de objetos, abalorios o pensamientos nuevos o viejos que le llegaban por el mar” (n.d., n.p.). Rather than confining them to isolation or insularity, then, the islands’ location has fomented an open, outward-looking nature, a notion that has been further endorsed by those working in the fascinating, relatively new field of Island Studies. Clark, for instance, has written that “island metaphors abound. To the extent that they reinforce images of isolation, they are misleading, since all societies have crucial interactions with other societies.” (2004, 287, cited in Hay 2013, 216).

Greatly aided by advances in social media, even a quick snapshot of the current situation in the Canaries readily reveals that there is a vibrant, passionate and growing literary culture within each of these unique islands that merits scholarly attention.[[5]](#endnote-5) This article, then, sets out to call for a reassessment of Canarian literature and to question the relegation of contemporary Canarian writers such as Aguerralde to a secondary, marginalized status. As we will see, Aguerralde is a particularly interesting case since he is so open to outward currents and arguably more attuned to future possibilities than his Peninsular counterparts. Furthermore, a critical evaluation of what the Canaries offer regarding both the *novela negra* and questions relating to “What”, or even “Where is Spain?” (amongst numerous others) is long overdue.

**Background to the author and introduction to *Claro de Luna***

Miguel Aguerralde Movellán, the author of sixteen novels,[[6]](#endnote-6) numerous short stories and press articles to date (2020), was born in Madrid in 1978. As a child, he moved with his family to Gran Canaria and studied at the University of Las Palmas. He now lives in the south of Lanzarote, where he teaches at the local junior school (CEIP Playa Blanca), writes for the local press and delivers creative writing workshops, in addition to demonstrating the breadth of his talents and his versatility through his publications.

Aguerralde was launched into the literary world in 2009 with the publication of *Claro de Luna*, a novel that was strongly rooted in reality.[[7]](#endnote-7) The author stated that he incorporated personal elements from his life[[8]](#endnote-8) and there are biographical links, principally in relation to the theme of solitude[[9]](#endnote-9) within a novel where “el Terror”, “una emoción universal, un sentimiento que nos une a todos” (Martínez Gimeno 2010, n.p.), serves as a springboard to provoke questions.

Set principally in the city of Las Palmas (Gran Canaria), with some sections located in Roque Nublo and Playa Honda (Lanzarote), *Claro de Luna* is a *novela negra*, comprising elements of the thriller and the detective novel, as well as features of the realist novel.[[10]](#endnote-10) The protagonist is Luna Ortega, a radio presenter on a phone-in programme called *Claro de Luna*. One evening she receives a call from Clara Luna, a distressed wife and victim of domestic abuse, who phones the show, claiming that she has discovered “un secreto” and that her husband will kill her if he finds out. The phone-call is terminated following a scuffle and, as we shift to the husband’s perspective, we witness the murder scene. Some weeks later, Clara’s disfigured body washes up on the shore and Luna, who had initially been reminded of “películas de monstruos” (Aguerralde 2009, 64) and hoped that it was a joke, realises that she had witnessed the crime. (Clara was strangled with the telephone wire following her conversation with Luna). Thereafter Luna sets out to find the mysterious “caja” containing “el secreto” that Clara had described. In the course of her investigations, she strikes up a friendship with a man called Darío and the narrative oscillates between recounting her inquiries and “visions” as she seeks to uncover the truth, Darío’s reflections on their relationship and the frustrations of the murderer (Carlos), as he tries to track down Luna and prevent her from discovering “el secreto”, namely that he had murdered his parents and sister at their home in Roque Nublo fifteen years previously. The novel ends with the revelation that Darío and Carlos, the murderer, are one and the same and, in the Epilogue, we learn that Luna has moved to Galicia and acquired a new identity. Nonetheless, she writes to Darío/Carlos, who is prevented from replying (“A mí no me dejan contestarle” [Aguerralde 2009, 333]).

***Claro de Luna*: a *novela negra* in the Canaries**

At its most basic level, Aguerralde’s use of the *novela negra* framework serves a twofold purpose: it is directly related to the exploration of issues concerning identity in general literary terms (through the novel’s progression and resolution of the mystery) and also to questions regarding Canarian society and identity. As Krajenbrink and Quinn have posited,

Questions of identity have traditionally been central to crime and detective fiction. The term “whodunnit” points to the importance of unmasking the criminal and identifying the wrongdoer. However, over time, questions of identity raised within the genre have become more complex. The quest to discover the identity of the person responsible for a particular crime has come, in many cases, to serve as a pretext for, or to provide a framework for a wider interrogation of society or of what constitutes criminality. (2009, 1)

Identity is crucial to the form and structure of *Claro de Luna*, as the novel is constructed around a “Whodunnit?” plot and the reader engages with the protagonist’s experiences, along with her efforts to uncover the murderer’s identity and bring him to justice.

Reinforcing Krajenbrink’s and Quinn’s claims regarding crime fiction’s “wider interrogation of society” and like the Peninsular *novela negra,* “[que] se ha leído como una innovación narrativa del posfranquismo que intentó capturar la realidad social, cultural y política de la transición” (Rosi Song 2010, 460), *Claro de Luna* represents (and implicitly criticizes) contemporary society in Gran Canaria. This is crucially linked to questions of identity, this time in relation to the island. Real locations, notably Las Palmas and Roque Nublo, are represented and will be recognisable to “local” readers or those who have visited Gran Canaria,[[11]](#endnote-11) whilst the sense of contrast within the island itself, its diversity and its multiple identities (complemented, as we will see, by the novel’s openness to different interpretations) is portrayed through the range of different locations, from the city of Las Palmas, in particular the bustling street of Triana, la Isleta and the beach at Las Canteras, to the resort of Playa Honda (Lanzarote) and the rustic location of Roque Nublo in the centre of Gran Canaria.

Pérez Minik’s observation regarding the Canarians’ capacity for absorbing outside influences, notably in terms of popular culture, and their engagement with cosmopolitan culture is also evident in *Claro de Luna*. The novel engages in post-structural cosmopolitan discourses, refuting the characterisation of the island as a closed space and endorsing the notion that it is widely influenced and highly diverse*.* Elements of popular culture reproduced in *Claro de Luna* include the music that Marcos plays at the radio station and in the car (including The Beatles’ “Yesterday”, followed by Bob Marley and “No, mujer, no llores”), which ironically match Luna’s mood and the plot’s ambience at that particular moment. They are complemented by high-culture references to Bach (Aguerralde 2009, 54), whilst the novel’s title recalls Beethoven’s famous *Moonlight Sonata* and Debussy’s *Clair de Lune*. Other aspects of popular culture include references to the eateries, combining both Canarian and international roots, from the café to the Chinese restaurant and the standard mass-produced Big Mac that the murderer eats (Aguerralde 2009, 199),[[12]](#endnote-12) as well as the “tila” (lime blossom tea) that Luna drinks (Aguerralde 2009, 172), her trips to the cinema and the references to local Canarian newspapers (*Canarias 7* and *La Provincia* report Clara’s death). The novel combines specificity with cosmopolitanism, displaying Gran Canaria’s engagement with an increasingly globalized world intermingled with its unique character.

The choice of the *novela negra* framework is also significant when considering Martínez Reverte’s statement that when the Franco regime ended,

Se hablaba de que la novela policíaca era una salida para unos escritores que, hasta esos momentos de la transición, no habían podido expresarse [...]. Se ligaba la novela negra con la cuestión de la censura y la opresión política. (1989, 33)

*Claro de Luna* transports the Peninsular *novela negra*’s concern with contemporary society to the Canaries and raises questions concerning the nature of the islands’ present and their potential future. These pertain, in particular, to the presentation of those in positions of authority. Although there are some positive descriptions (notably of the sergeant [Aguerralde 2009, 263]), rather than providing a comforting sense of security, the police are largely presented as being detached since they initially dismiss Luna’s concerns and are both ineffective and slow to discover the truth. A direct criticism is expressed as “[Luna s]eguía sin entender que la Policía no hiciera nada” (Aguerralde 2009, 225) and she hesitates before calling them for help. Although she is generally portrayed as law-abiding, acting to obtain justice for Clara, Luna feels obliged to engage in criminal activity (breaking and entering into the victim’s flat) because she believes that this is the only way that she can discover the truth. Later, she even fears that the police will lock her up and is compelled to escape from their “protection” (in the “safe house”) in order to travel to Roque Nublo, where the truth will be revealed.

The police’s efforts to assert justice are demolished, not only as the reality of the criminal world and the “Big fish eat little fish” mentality is vividly conveyed, but as we fear for Luna’s safety and witness the murder scene in the gents’ toilets. Violence and perversity pervade the novel, extending from the domestic violence that Clara suffers and the subsequent murders, together with Julián’s gambling and previous alcoholism, our knowledge that the car crash in which Luna’s father died was caused by a drunk driver, and the fact that one of the callers phones the radio programme because her brother has started taking drugs again. The sordid side of Canarian society is clearly thriving. In this regard, *Claro de Luna* adheres to the tendency highlighted by Hart: “Probably the single most outstanding characteristic in the body of Spanish detective fiction is a basic distrust of the police.” (1987, 24) However, whilst Aguerralde’s novel poses questions about Canarian society, it does not (as stated by Krajenbrink and Quinn) “[interrogate] what constitutes criminality” or offer solutions.[[13]](#endnote-13) Instead, it is left to the readers to form their own opinions.

**Going beyond the “traditional” *novela negra*: subverting expectations**

Building on the notion of *Claro de Luna*’s “difference”, when we delve deeper we come to appreciate that what is particularly striking about this novel is that it diverges from the traditional linearity of other *novelas negras* and their primary concern with social issues. As we will see, Aguerralde dexterously employs the narrative technique to construct a multi-layered work that actively engages readers with the process of deciphering (or attempting to decipher) identity, firstly in relation to the Canaries, secondly in relation to the novel’s key components and thirdly, on a broader universal platform, whilst exposing the complexity of this matter and subverting expectations. This process operates on various levels: in relation to the plot, style, the characters and presentation of gender. It can additionally be discerned in the novel’s descriptions, form and ending.

*Identity, the plot, style and characters: confused identities*

The revelation of the truth regarding the murderer’s identity is obstructed by numerous questions and doubts, on the part of both the protagonist and the reader. The novel is frequently embroiled in confusion, ensuing largely from a plethora of confused identities, flashbacks and multiple perspectives, sometimes of the same event. This results not solely in our inability to establish who is the “hero” and who is the “villain”, but also in the blurring of boundaries between the characters’ identities and themes.

The notion of confused identities is apparent from the work’s title. As well as highlighting the moonlight as a key motif (which will be examined later), *Claro de Luna* bears a close resemblance to both the name of the protagonist, Luna Ortega, and the victim, Clara Luna.[[14]](#endnote-14) The confusion (or blurring) of identities is epitomised in the fact that in the title three become one, with Clara’s name converted into the masculine “Claro”, merging with Darío/Carlos and pointing to the future blurring of traditional gender distinctions. Luna’s first name, for its part, appears as a surname, whilst the conjunction “de” highlights the inescapable bond between the three. The link between Clara and Luna is explicitly established as the murderer reflects, “Clara Luna, Luna Ortega, todas las lunas del mundo le habían vencido” (Aguerralde 2009, 247), whilst in Aguerralde’s words,

Si Luna es el alma de la novela, Darío es el corazón, porque es el que la mueve, el hilo conductor, el que la narra y el que la sostiene. Darío nació en una de esas confusiones de ideas en las que de pronto en tu ordenador dos y dos son cuatro, se cierra el círculo y todo brilla alrededor. (Martínez Gimeno 2010, n.p.)

The intrinsic bond between the characters and their confused identities is further highlighted through Luna’s “visions”, where she is apparently controlled by Clara and effectively, on occasions, becomes Clara herself. This process commences when she first sees herself in black and white and observes her hands, “pero no eran las suyas” (Aguerralde 2009, 148). Later, she sees Clara in the mirror (Chapter XV), reflects on how she felt the violent blows to which she was subjected and the telephone wire digging into her neck at her home in La Isleta (Chapter XVIII), finds herself wearing Clara’s wedding ring (Chapter XXI) and her black shoes (Chapter XXVI) and bleeds as a result of the blows (Chapter XXII).

These confused identities are, furthermore, heightened through the dual identity of Darío/Carlos and Aguerralde employs different narrative devices, including a first-person narrator and free indirect discourse to confuse readers, who are led to question whether they can trust what they are reading, whether the text is presented from the perspective of a character who is genuinely sincere, or whether he is manipulative and prone to deceive others; in short, whether Darío is actually a friend or an enemy. This corresponds to Auden’s observation that “The interest in the thriller is the ethical and eristic conflict between good and evil, between Us and Them.” (1946, 406)

Initially, a clear contrast is established between Darío and Carlos through the employment of different styles. When narrating Darío’s thoughts and reflections, the style corresponds to that of a lover who is fascinated with Luna. The unknowing reader might well equate his sentiments with attraction as he reflects, “No solían gustarme las chicas con pelo corto, pero ésta sin duda era especial” (Aguerralde 2009, 112). By contrast, the sections focussing on Carlos’s reflections are consumed with thoughts of violence; we read of his intention to “arrancarle la cabeza y tirarla por la ventana” (Aguerralde 2009, 124) and in Chapter XV he imagines raping her.

Carlos’s frustration and desperation is conveyed through the use of repetition and short, stilted phrases when he discovers the futility of his attending Marcos’s funeral since Luna was not there. The repeated use of “estaba” stresses the significance of the theme of “location”, as Carlos desperately attempts to find (and trap) Luna, mirroring the efforts of Luna (and the readers) to track down and ascertain the murderer’s identity:

Sin embargo Luna *no estaba* allí, eso *estaba* claro. Y si *no estaba* allí, *no estaba* en su casa, *no estaba* en el parque, *no estaba* en Triana, si no se había marchado a otro planeta ¿dónde demonios *estaba*? (Aguerralde 2009, 245. My italics)

Elsewhere, the numerous swearwords, the references to Luna as “[l]a muy cambrona” (Aguerralde 2009, 198) contemptuously establish a distance between Carlos and Luna. On reflection, and when compared with the sections focussing on Darío, they also highlight the character’s split personality (if not bipolarism), exposing the manner in which he is able to manipulate and effectively use his superficial charm to sway others.

However, clues that Carlos and Darío are one and the same are planted throughout the novel. For example, in a section narrated by Darío, Luna is described as “la locutora”, a term regularly used by Carlos and the same occurs with the child metaphor (examined later). It is also notable that the sections focussing on Carlos’s and Darío’s thoughts are often communicated through the first-person narrator, a device usually used to elicit sympathy, yet paradoxically the reader’s affinity to Darío here is complemented by a feeling of repulsion towards Carlos. There is, thus, a simultaneous sense of both distance and intimacy as any attempt to attach the simplistic categories of hero/villain to Darío/Carlos is annihilated.

*Gender in Claro de Luna*

A similar process is at work in relation to gender, as questions are raised about the identities of Luna and Clara. As Colmeiro has observed, “the detective genre [...] functions as a space of exploration, critique and subversion of the patriarchal values and hegemonic masculinity of the traditional models, as a new form of questioning gender/genre conventions” (2015, 15).

The two women are initially presented as passive, conforming to the traditional representation of women as “dolls” or “ángeles del hogar”[[15]](#endnote-15) and inferior female characters in traditional *novelas negras.* Of Juan Madrid’s *Regalo de la casa*, Macklin writes,

the women in the *novela negra* are prostitutes, strippers, barmaids, masseuses, singers, long-suffering girlfriends”, “[t]heir depiction is seldom positive [...]. Generally, they have a negative effect upon the hero, who is frequently knocked unconscious or disabled by the female villain’s henchmen. (1992, 59)

Luna, on the contrary, plays a significant role in *Claro de Luna* and, unlike the *novela negra*’s conventional female characters, she assumes power as the novel progresses. Nonetheless, her preoccupation with others’ opinions, particularly the pressure that she feels in terms of conforming to her family’s expectations that she will marry and settle down, indicates that the question of female independence is, as yet, unresolved and problematic. *Claro de Luna* does not endorse feminist theories *per se* but it does raise questions, thereby inviting reflection on such matters.

More importantly, Luna and Clara, have shifting identities that overturn the reader’s expectations, quashing any quest for stability and determinacy. Both characters are initially portrayed as inferior, conforming to the stereotype of women as the weaker sex. The murderer exploits this notion of female submissiveness and passivity, attaching animal terms to Luna and Clara, and dehumanising them; he thinks of his wife as “la muy perra” (Aguerralde 2009, 69) and “la zorra” (Aguerralde 2009, 67, 69 and 92), a term later applied to Luna as he imagines what he will do to “esa zorra de locutora” (Aguerralde 2009, 124). Furthermore, Luna, in one of her “visions” sees herself in the kitchen of a doll’s house (Aguerralde 2009, 149). In addition to implying that she merely fulfils the role of a passive possession or plaything, this location evokes links with Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House*,raising questions in relation to female inferiority, whilst simultaneously drawing upon the concept of gendered spaces and the suggestion that women’s true place (as “ángeles del hogar”) is in the home. In Chapter XIII, too, Luna is portrayed (probably in the policeman’s eyes) as “una fierecilla perdida, huérfana y desvalida como el cervatillo Bambi” (Aguerralde 2009, 130), with all its connotations of innocence and vulnerability. This replicates the previous image of her as “[v]ulnerable y frágil como una figurilla de cristal” (Aguerralde 2009, 105), whilst the fact that one of her favourite songs is “Princesa prometida” suggests that, in stereotypical “girly” fashion, she likes fairytales and romantic music.[[16]](#endnote-16)

However, these traditional gender associations are overturned since Clara demonstrates her power by divulging the murderer’s secret, a threat that she had concocted in Chapter II and, in Luna’s case, the power dynamic changes. This is conveyed as Darío/Carlos portrays Luna as a bullfighter: “De hecho le vino esa imagen a la mente, un toro salvaje arrollando al torero inútil que se cree capaz de detenerle. En su imaginación Luna era ese torero [...]” (Aguerralde 2009, 233). As well as being a stereotypically Spanish association, relating to an activity that (not unlike women’s rights) has been the subject of much controversy to date, the bullfighter metaphor not only highlights Luna’s power (reflecting the perceived superiority of humans over animals) but also accords to her, a woman, a role traditionally associated with men. Thus it is the murderer, not she, who pants outside her door “como un toro embravecido” (Aguerralde 2009, 157). Although, in his eyes, he is more powerful, representing an intractable, savage beast, it is Luna who escapes at the end of the novel, whilst he is imprisoned. To an degree, this is apt since Luna tends to reject the roles traditionally ascribed to the female sex, unlike Clara, who, a victim of her husband’s abuse, can be more conventionally aligned to the figure of the passive, inferior female. Probably because she refuses to be passive, Luna affirms (albeit ironically, as it is to Lucas, her West Highland terrier, and “con una sonrisa pícara”), “al fin y al cabo soy una mujer.” (Aguerralde 2009, 273) Luna’s “power” is also expressed as we witness Carlos’s frustrated attempts to “capture” her and observe that his attempts to assert his control (through violent and sexual acts that capitalize on his physical strength and masculinity) are merely based upon fantasies. Power and passivity thus alternate dramatically in the novel and the imagery emphasises the fact that *Claro de Luna* is based on conflicting situations and emotions.

Furthermore, our expectations regarding character identities are subverted. Luna and Darío/Carlos, the key female and male characters, initially appear to be polar opposites, simplistically representing good versus evil and conforming to the concept of “the Other”, which “is always and continuously a threat to the security and integrity of those who share a common home” (Morley and Robins 1993, 8). Disturbingly, however, they share similarities and not only alternate between experiences of power and victimhood, but sometimes undergo parallel experiences. Thus Luna is described as being in a tunnel (Aguerralde 2009, 80), whilst the murderer feels that there is “la cortina de payasos consumistas” and later “un muro de gente y bolsas de plástico” between himself and “la muchacha” (Aguerralde 2009, 103) and they both wear glasses (sunglasses in Luna’s case). The clear bond between the two characters is evidenced as we witness their mutual solitude and feelings of marginalization. In Chapter XII, Luna opens up to Darío, telling him “No tengo a nadie a quien acudir...” and he reciprocates: “[...] quiero que sepas que puedes contar conmigo para lo que sea. Yo también estoy solo y....” (Aguerralde 2009, 118). Furthermore, their bond is spatially highlighted in Chapter XIV, where they are on opposite sides of the door, which, in Simmel’s words, emphasizes “how separating and connecting are only two sides of precisely the same act” (Simmel 1997, 167). “Neat” assumptions and preconceived ideas, then, are challenged as readers are presented with characters with fluctuating identities. This severely complicates the process of ascertaining “true” identities and leads to confusion.

*Identity and the novel’s descriptions, form and ending*

This process is mirrored in the novel’s descriptions as our expectations are similarly subverted. Even a murder scene acquires a degree of artistic beauty; we read,

Cuando terminó con él y le dejó caer, deforme y sin vida al suelo, en la copa de uno de esos árboles [en el aseo], como si las nubes encima del cadáver llovieran bolsas de sangre que estallaran al chocar con las ramas” (Aguerralde 2009, 128-29).

A sense of distance is placed between the brutal and horrific reality of the murder and the stylistically beautiful, rhythmic and symbolic portrayal of the incident, ironically drawing upon the positive associations of images from Nature. In the course of this incident, the young man is threatened “como si se enfrentara a una bestia salvaje” (Aguerralde 2009, 127), which establishes a disturbing link with Luna as “torero”. On this occasion, however, power is accorded to the perverse perpetrator. The image of the “bestia” is also hauntingly referred to in the other character’s thoughts, although the possibility of such a monstrous attack is dismissed: “que una bestia monstruosa estaba atacando a alguien, pero tenía treinta y seis años y sabía que esas cosas no existían”. (Aguerralde 2009, 129) This blurs the distinctions between ugliness, horror and criminality (which arguably leads to marginalization), on the one hand, and conformity, justice and beauty on the other. To a degree, albeit perversely, given the nature of the subject matter, it concords with Bourdieu’s theory of “taste”:

[...] nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even “common” (because the “common” people make them their own, especially for aesthetic purposes), or the ability to apply the principles of a “pure” aesthetic to the most everyday choices of everyday life, e.g., in cooking, clothing or decoration, completely reversing the popular disposition which annexes aesthetics to ethics. (n.d., n.p.)

Expectations are also subverted through the novel’s form and ending. Even though the ramifications of the latter, in typical Aguerraldean style, are not unravelled, the “Happily ever after” trope is seriously questioned as Darío/Carlos painfully recalls Luna looking at him: “[...] creo que era de amor. Amor roto” (Aguerralde 2009, 326). Whilst the phrase “creo que” here reminds us that everything is subject to personal interpretation, “Amor roto” confirms that this is a novel about a relationship that ended in pain, not happiness, thereby questioning what Auden has termed as “the phantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence [...].” (1946, 412) This is a romance that has been turned on its head, not unlike the film that Luna goes to see and dismisses:

Las aventuras de dos actores famosos intentando odiarse cuando en realidad se aman y todos sabemos que van a terminar juntos. No, era mucho más interesante guardarse las espaldas, controlar las puertas y vigilar a los demás espectadores [...]. (Aguerralde 2009, 229)

**The role of the reader: navigating identity**

It is evident that the reader needs to navigate through the confusion ensuing from the blurred, fluctuating identities and the subversion of expectations and power, to take account of the style and narrative resources employed, to interpret and, ultimately, attempt to join together the disparate jigsaw pieces in an attempt to make sense of the whole picture.[[17]](#endnote-17) This is apparent from the very first chapter, where the isolated excerpt from a conversation and the readers’ failure to make sense of them at that particular point in time remain at the back of our minds, exacerbating the tension:

— Dime, ¿por qué elegiste Darío?

* ¿Darío? Era sólo un nombre. (Aguerralde 2009, 13)

Re-reading the novel reveals that these words were probably taken from Darío’s/Carlos’s conversation with the doctor, who was attempting to ascertain the motives behind the murders. Taken out of context, however, his questions are disconcerting. On the one hand, they encourage readers to question the validity of the name (for example, whether links are being established with the *Modernista* poet Rubén Darío and his belief in art for art’s sake, or perhaps with the Kings of Persia, or even Ciudad Darío in Nicaragua?). On the other hand, the character’s response refutes the validity of such interpretations. This process is repeated as confusion pervades the novel.

The reader is also required to fill gaps and attach meanings to other references whose significance is not made explicit. In Chapter XIV, for instance, readers are presented with a series of descriptions which might seem nonsensical until we reflect on potential links. As well as reflecting her preoccupation with time, Luna’s fascination with the rabbit clock could relate to the Mad Hatter, *Alice in Wonderland* and Alice’s (if not Luna’s) “descent into madness”, since Luna had previously run away from the murderer “como un conejo asustado” (Aguerralde 2009, 88)*.* “La caja”, too, in addition to linking to the gift that Luna gives her mother, can be associated with the themes of secrecy/ignorance and revelation/confession in the novel, especially since Luna acts as “un confesor” (Aguerralde 2009, 22) on the radio programme. There are also links to Pandora’s box (which contained all the evils of the world), Chinese boxes and the innumerable presence of “cajas” throughout classical literature, for instance the treasure chest in children’s literature. As Bachelard has observed, “For many people, the fact that there should exist a homology between the geometry of the small box and the psychology of secrecy does not call for protracted comment.” (1994, 82)[[18]](#endnote-18)

**Reading *Claro de Luna* symbolically: place and the Canaries as “the Other”**

What does all this, then, signify in relation to the Canaries? Is it possible that the novel is symbolically addressing questions concerning Canarian identity? In order to address these, we can usefully commence by examining how the Canaries are presented in relation to the Peninsula. It is noteworthy that cultural differences between the two are underlined in *Claro de Luna*, to an extent “decentring” the Peninsula and presenting the Canaries as “the Other”. Recognizable and stereotypical Spanish references in the novel (notably the references to the “toro” and “torero”) are tinged with questions as we recall that bullfighting was banned in the Canaries in 1991 and this, hence, arguably only bears relevance for the Peninsula.[[19]](#endnote-19) The singularity of Las Palmas and the distinction between the Canaries and the Peninsula is also expressed, following Luna’s departure to the North, through the statement “En Galicia había estaciones” (Aguerralde 2009, 331). The use of ellipses ensures that it is left to the readers to make the connection since only those familiar with the Canaries would know that this underscores the direct contrast with Gran Canaria, which, as one of the “islas de la eterna primavera”, has no real seasons and is, in many ways, radically different from the Peninsula. However, rather than being “motivated in large measure by an implicit or explicit hostility to Spanish identity” (Álvarez Junco 2011, 2), *Claro de Luna* expresses an awareness of distinction between the Canaries and the Peninsula that encompasses elements of both uniqueness (normally positively perceived) and alienation (with its negative undertones). Instead of attempting to degrade one or the other, Aguerralde exhorts readers to reflect upon the complex nature of “the Other”, namely Canarian identity. He draws our attention to the complex and heterogeneous nature of Hispanic identity that extends far beyond the Peninsula, arguably endorsing Bhabha’s contention that “The problem is not simply the ‘selfhood’ of the nation as opposed to the ‘otherness’ of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population.” (1994: 98).

Exploring further the potential symbolic interpretations of the novel, it is possible to contend that Luna represents Gran Canaria, perhaps even the Canaries in general. We note that both she and the islands are “cut off” and she is “extraña en una tierra desconocida” (Aguerralde 2009, 38) (not unlike the relationship between the Canaries and the Peninsula). Her father’s death, in addition to affirming Caruth’s observation that a traumatic event obtains “its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it” (1991, 3) may be related to the Canaries’ “haunting” history with Franco. One could go further and suggest that Luna’s conflicted image, and particularly her feeling of discomfort at “home sweet home”, indeed the place where her safety is later jeopardized and whence she must escape, might even be associated with the ideas of Hall and Rose, who “have written in the case of England [that] the cultivation of home, with its coherence and sense of belonging, goes hand in hand with the creation of nationalism as a similarly imagined place of belonging and enclosure” (Surwillo 2014, 75). Luna certainly does not experience a “sense of belonging” and thus she might, then, symbolically express the Canaries’ uneasiness with the current state of Spanish nationalism. Read in this light, Luna’s migration from Gran Canaria to the Peninsula may be surprising since it could be seen as representing the abandonment of the Canaries, whilst the Peninsula constitutes a refuge, a new identity and beginning for the character,[[20]](#endnote-20) even though she is compelled to move to guarantee her safety. An unresolved contradiction within the novel lies in the fact that both she and the Peninsula are “decentred”, whilst the island of Gran Canaria remains as the location wherein the confined Darío (who, as mentioned previously, could be regarded as “the Other”) continues to be “condemned” to solitude.

However, it is equally notable that Luna writes to Carlos after her departure. The fact that her memories and her relationship with the murderer will endure (kept alive by Luna, notwithstanding the traumas of the past) may, then, serve to remind us that past and present will continue to be intertwined and will exist side by side. Despite the fact that they alternate between the roles of victim and perpetrator, it is evident that the bond between Luna and Darío/Carlos is unbreakable. As well as reflecting the Stockholm syndrome (whereby victims emotionally bond with offenders), this indicates that Luna is unable to wipe out the past, a time when Darío was her confidant and friend.

One might argue that it is significant that Aguerralde chose not to send her to Latin America, but to mainland Spain, and question whether the author is implicitly engaging with Crang’s suggestion that “writing the ‘foreign’ [in this case Spain] helped construct a notion of the ‘home’ [/Canarian] culture through a process of ‘Othering’, whereby the ‘self’ is defined in relation to the characteristics of an ‘Other’ culture” (Crang 1998, 59-60). Is the novel suggesting that the Canaries are inextricably bound to the Peninsula as they forge a new future and identity? Furthermore, could one question whether the choice of Galicia (rather than the capital of Madrid) implies that peripheral regions could share and enjoy a greater sense of affinity that could yield more benefits than a relationship with “the centre”?

Whatever the case, the novel’s setting is clearly far more than just a backdrop and it engages with other influences and themes that extend beyond issues that are specifically tied to its Canarian location. In some senses, the setting’s importance can be related to the *novela negra* and Chesterton’s observations. (These are particularly relevant when Luna visits Clara’s home to look for clues):

the spaces of detective fiction are always integral to the texts of detective fiction… the spaces of the genre are always “productive” of the crime they contain and structure, forcing the detective to engage with the setting s/he inhabits in order to understand and therefore solve the crime… [to the detective] there is no stone in the street, no brick in the all that is not actually a deliberate symbol – a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or postcard. (Cited in Crang 1998, 51)

Crang comments that “The detective is thus set up as an interpreter of urban life, rendering the spaces of the city legible” (1998, 51) but *Claro de Luna* goes even further since the Canarian capital takes on the form of a character in itself.[[21]](#endnote-21) As well as building on the theme of “location”, Aguerralde links the presentation of places (and particularly “the home”) to the themes of contradiction and insecurity. A contradiction is established, for instance, as the homelessness and drunks (representing the decay of the present) take refuge in the beautiful Plaza de Ranas in Las Palmas (representing the beauty of the past).[[22]](#endnote-22) Likewise, a distinction is established between Darío’s/Carlos’s “nueva casa” (far from “new” since it is “el tugurio pestilente y foco de cucarachas” [Aguerralde 2009, 191]) and his “antiguo hogar” (the murder scene). Images of decay also prevail in the other murder scene (Darío’s/Carlos’s “*otro antiguo hogar*” [Aguerralde 2009, 319]) at the house in Roque Nublo, whilst Luna’s flat is far from the refuge that she desires. Thus, after it is ransacked by the murderer, she moves to the “safe house” but this, too, becomes a prison from which she must escape. The novel thereby subverts the concept of “Home sweet home” and Bachelard’s statement that “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.” (1994, 6). It also draws upon Morley and Robins’s analysis of the significance of “Home in a world of expanding horizons and dissolving boundaries”, at a time when “Places are no longer the clear supports of our identity” yet, simultaneously, “There is a need to be ‘at home’ in the new and disorientating global space” (1993, 5). Luna does not feel safe in her “home” and, disturbingly, the murders of Clara, her future sister-in-law and in-laws are carried out in the “safety” of their homes and more shockingly (yet realistically) by a close relative (Carlos).[[23]](#endnote-23) In this way, Luna’s insecurity is exacerbated by her alienation from places that should offer her a sense of refuge and comfort. According to Tuan, “Place helps us forget our separateness and the world’s indifference” (cited in Crang 1998, 112), yet this is evidently not Luna’s experience.

More significantly, like the characters, some locations acquire a dual identity, if not a “personality”. Although he was referring principally to the positive associations accorded to “the house”, Bachelard’s words, “Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor” (1994, xxxvi), can be applied to *Claro de Luna*. Bachelard goes on to note, “It [space] has been lived in [...] with all the partiality of the imagination” (1994, xxxvi) and this is the case in *Claro de Luna*,although the focus here is on “place” (rather than “space”) in line with the definition offered by Carter, Donald and Squires:

How […] does space become place? By being named: as the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population. Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed. (1993, xii)

On occasions, in *Claro de Luna* the “ascribed meaning” leads to the places’ association with “the fantastic” as they are aligned with the characters’ moods, in addition to reinforcing questions relating to the main themes. Thus the seemingly innocent bus station in San Telmo corresponds to Luna’s dark moods and fears as it assumes a sinister identity, reminding the reader of its nickname “El Hoyo”. The connotations of death and graves are further enhanced in the description, “A las cinco de la mañana la estación de guaguas de San Telmo se diferencia poco de un cementerio.” (Aguerralde 2009, 27) The buses, “las guaguas apagadas”, are described as “ataúdes de acero y cristal invadidos por una oscuridad azul que parecía tener vida propia*”*, whilst the drunkards are “como zombis enmonados” (Aguerralde 2009, 30)and we later read that “volvía a parecerle [a Luna] el típico bosque sombrío que precede al cementerio gótico de las películas de terror en blanco y negro” (Aguerralde 2009, 76). In parallel with the presentation of Luna’s complex character, these descriptions challenge the dismissal of fantastical occurrences in the novel, although the illusion of a conventional, knowable, stable reality is sustained through the assumption of the readers’ prior knowledge of the places described.

**Solitude, “madness” and “what is reality?”**

Proceeding with the possibilities proffered by the novel in terms of symbolic readings, it is evident that the aforementioned perception of the Canaries as “un lugar claustrofóbico” acquires a universal significance as it is explored in relation to the characters’ personal experiences of solitude. To an extent, this goes against the trend noted by Carter, Donald and Squires, that

the consistent logic of modern social and cultural thought has been to undermine the notion of individual identity. Sociologists and Marxists have insisted on its social determinations; Freud’s account of the unconscious showed the inherently split, and so non-identical, nature of the self; Saussurean linguistics posited the self as the product rather than the author of symbolic codes and systems; Foucault and others point to the processes of subjectification operated by cultural apparatuses and technologies. (1993, viii)

However, this focus on the individual does not limit the novel’s coverage since it serves as a springboard for broader discussions regarding marginalization, alienation, madness and mental instability, in Aguerralde’s words, “el lado oscuro”.[[24]](#endnote-24) This is explored to some extent through the character of Darío/Carlos, whose crimes may well shake our sense of complacency, especially if we had hitherto assumed that the consequences of solitude were innocuous; in the words of Thomas Mann: “Solitude gives birth to the original in us, to beauty unfamiliar and perilous - to poetry. But also, it gives birth to the opposite: to the perverse, the illicit, the absurd.” (1912, n.p.).

The theme of solitude is also explored through Luna as we gain an insight into her personal dilemmas, her struggles with social interaction, her psychological state and her mental health. In the author’s words, *Claro de Luna* is

“la metáfora de una joven locutora solitaria torturada por un sin fin de terrores y dudas, no es más que el reflejo de lo que todos hemos sentido al encontrarnos por primera vez solos ante las espinas de la vida”.[[25]](#endnote-25)

In exploring these matters, Aguerralde unearths their complexity and accords a universal significance to his work.

Luna plays an important role in enabling Aguerralde to both highlight and examine issues relating to social interaction, mental health and madness. Although she is likely to be the character with whom readers will identify most closely, questions are posed regarding Luna’s mental stability. It is clear that she feels detached from the company of her female relatives and “friends” during her visit to Playa Honda. The experience resembles “[un] funesto circo de variedades en el que ella era la atracción principal” (Aguerralde 2009, 35), her mother’s friends are “aves de rapiña”, “buitres”, and “alimañas” (Aguerralde 2009, 33 and 43), and she, “la triste solterona”, feels “fuera de lugar” (Aguerralde 2009, 33 and 38). She is resistant to the pressure they place on her to “conform” (in other words to settle down like her aunts, cousins and mother’s friends, “todas felizmente casadas con hijos” [Aguerralde 2009, 33]) and her sense of detachment is conveyed through references to “un túnel siniestro” (Aguerralde 2009, 80), reminiscent of Ernesto Sábato’s novel *El túnel*. We also read of Luna’s fear of monsters and being persecuted. Animal/bird imagery is frequently used to convey her sense of alienation, with the employment of terms such as “jauría”, which was first associated with her relatives when she arrived in Lanzarote.[[26]](#endnote-26) Her vulnerability and fear[[27]](#endnote-27) is emphasised when she tells Darío during their first encounter, “No suelo comer con extraños” (Aguerralde 2009, 111) and he observes that she looks around like a child looks at a wardrobe, convinced that there is a monster inside. Luna’s chosen loyal companion, thus, is not a human but her West Highland terrier, Lucas, and she justifies her behaviour on the basis that “Habían sido los demás que la habían convertido en lo que era” (Aguerralde 2009, 46), presumably alluding to her past broken relationships. Nevertheless, she, like Darío/Carlos, is acutely conscious of the way in which she appears to the outside world and this is frequently represented through her preoccupation with mirrors in the novel.[[28]](#endnote-28)

The moon, which is physically present on occasions and additionally referenced through the names of Luna, Clara Luna and the novel’s title, draws the readers’ attention to the theme of madness. An explicit parallel between the moon and the protagonist is drawn as Luna leaves the cinema and is confronted by “una luna como ella misma” (Aguerralde 2009, 230). It appears frequently, inviting readers to question the validity of their interpretations. The theme of madness is also present, not only through the description of the murderer as mad,[[29]](#endnote-29) but as questions are constantly posed about Luna’s sanity, despite her eagerness to persuade Darío that she is not mad (“No estoy loca” [Aguerralde 2009, 135]). We know that she is suffering from “un estado renovado de depresión” (Aguerralde 2009, 43) and an insight into the mental trauma she has suffered is provided through our knowledge of her past.[[30]](#endnote-30) Memory plays a key role here and it is evident that she has been traumatised by her father’s death in a car accident when she was driving. Although we are informed that his death was caused by a drunk driver, she still feels guilty, a common experience for those who have suffered trauma or bereavement, whilst the constant flashbacks imply that she might well be suffering from Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[[31]](#endnote-31) Even the term “asesinar” is employed to reflect her guilt: “todavía experimentó la sensación extraña, a medias entre la culpabilidad y la náusea, por volver a tocar un volante después de *asesinar* a su padre.” (Aguerralde 2009, 290. My italics).[[32]](#endnote-32)

Through Luna, too, Aguerralde exploits the potential of the *novela negra* framework to not only bridge the gap between Literature and the Sciences (specifically Psychology), but to question “What is real?” This process commences in Chapter VI as Luna notes the curious similarity between her name and that of the caller, Clara Luna: “Estaba segura de que no podía ser más que inventado, aunque claro, tanto Clara como Luna podían ser nombres perfectamente reales [...]” (Aguerralde 2009, 54). Later, this question is inextricably linked with the “the abnormal” and “the fantastic”. Luna appears to suffer from a persecution complex, as she tells Darío that she feels “Como si unas garras gigantes estuviesen a punto de atraparme.” (Aguerralde 2009, 117) We subsequently read, “los edificios parecían tener ojos” and she is convinced that “las pocas personas con quienes se cruzaba parecían dirigirse hacia ella, como si fueran a decirle algo, a detenerla, a atacarla.” (Aguerralde 2009, 227-28) Although these fears are founded (since she *is* being pursued by Darío/Carlos), readers may question the reliability and, indeed, significance of her “visions” (in Luna’s words, the “fogonazos, como fotografías en blanco y negro” [Aguerralde 2009, 195]) since they can seem incredulous. Sometimes she, herself, dismisses them,[[33]](#endnote-33) whilst Darío reflects that her fear is extreme: “Sus ojos mostraban un miedo que rara vez se podría encontrar en la vida real [...]” (Aguerralde 2009, 117). Moreover, when she tells him about her visions and asks, “¿Crees que soy vidente o algo?”, they both laugh and she responds, “Lo cierto es que sí. Je, parece una locura...” (222) Nevertheless, in spite of the clear visual division between “fantasy” and “reality” (as the visions are experienced in black and white), the boundaries are extremely hazy and the reference to “el momento *real*”as Luna witnesses Clara being attacked (Aguerralde 2009, 243) prolongs the questioning and doubts.

Doubts ensue as questions are posed on the basis of what we know about Luna’s past and possible mental instability and rational explanations are sometimes provided. In addition to learning about the devastating impact of her father’s death and broken relationships, we know from a relatively early stage in the novel that Luna is physically weak (we are told that she suffers an asthma attack in Chapter XIV) and she has probably suffered from panic attacks in the past.[[34]](#endnote-34) One might conclude that this is why she has detached herself from real life and hence is “como un fantasma” (Aguerralde 2009, 101). We also learn that she has been affected by films about monsters when she was a child, which might well have influenced her belief that the murderer has the semblance of a monster: “Cada vez lo siento más cerca. Como si unas garras gigantes estuviesen a punto de atraparme.” (Aguerralde 2009, 117)[[35]](#endnote-35) The suggestion that she behaves like a child might also constitute a reason for dismissing the veracity of her experiences. Once again, however, this reference invites radically different interpretations. On the one hand, it has negative connotations, harking back to the nineteenth century, when women were contemptuously regarded as “adult children”.[[36]](#endnote-36) The Anthropologist James McGrigor Allan, for instance, wrote, “physically, mentally, and morally, woman is a kind of adult child... The highest examples of physical, mental, and moral excellence are found in man” (1869, ccx).[[37]](#endnote-37) Conversely (and simultaneously), it has positive associations, highlighting the belief (often advanced in Gothic-influenced literature and films) that children, in their innocence, sometimes possessed superior insights and were highly sensitive to ghosts and the abnnormal.[[38]](#endnote-38) It could even be argued that Luna (perversely?) sometimes revels in this fantastic world; thus when she returns from one of her visions, the adjective “patética” is employed to describe reality: “regresó a la vida en color, a la *patética* realidad” (Aguerralde 2009, 294. My italics).

In Chapter XXI an “objective” perspective of Luna is provided as we read, probably from the porter’s viewpoint, “Luna seguía inmóvil en la puerta del cine, *como en un trance hipnótico*, mirando el cielo.” (Aguerralde 2009, 231. My italics). This is complemented by the possibility of a rational explanation as we read, “empezó a agitarse *como si sufriera un ataque epiléptico”* (Aguerralde 2009, 231. My italics). Nevertheless, the repetition of phrases like “como” and “como si” leave the interpretations open. Hence Aguerralde subtly embroils readers in a process of identification and distance, of security and insecurity, as we waver between alternative, often radically different interpretations, sometimes dismissing what we read as irrational, but at other times accepting suggestions, for example the plausibility of Luna’s role as a medium.

The aesthetic quality of the novel comes to the fore as key questions relating to the future are conveyed symbolically. As the novel’s title suggests, it is dark but the light from the moon possibly suggests hope, awaiting the dawn and the new future to come, a potential message that is also reinforced by the work’s structure as the section titles suggest cyclical progression (from “Claro de Luna” to “Luna clara”, “Luna llena” and finally “Luna nueva”, as we move towards the revelation of the truth). Ultimately, though, the moon will naturally revert to “Claro de Luna” and the novel’s beginning will link directly to the ending, hence the work’s overarching title.

**Conclusion**

*Claro de Luna*, not unlike the realist novels,[[39]](#endnote-39) subtly combines artistic flair with probing questions, serving as a springboard for reflections on contemporary society, modern-day concerns, trauma and the nature of reality, both within and outside the Canaries. In-so-doing, Aguerralde accords a newfound relevance to the *novela negra*, a genre that might easily be dismissed by some critics as popular literature constituting pure entertainment,[[40]](#endnote-40) and challenges Auden’s statement that “detective stories have nothing to do with works of art” (1946, 406).[[41]](#endnote-41) Furthermore, contesting the views of theorists such as Wendt, who maintained that identities are “relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self” (cited in Fearon 2013, 4), in *Claro de Luna* we discover that identity is a slippery construct, one that is largely a matter of perception, both on the part of the “self” (as the individual feels pressurised to conform) and the “other” (as preconceptions are anticipated and adhered to). Aguerralde’s complex novel advances a viewpoint closer to Hall’s:

Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses. [... Until recently, we have incorrectly thought that identity is] a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action the logic of something like a “true self”. [... But] Identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself. (Cited in Fearon 2013, 5)

Like the novel itself, identity in *Claro de Luna* is not fixed or immutable; it is fluid and, as we have seen, it may be subject to manipulation by the individual (as in Darío’s case). This refutes *OED*’sdefinition of “identity” as “The *sameness* of a person or thing *at all times* or *in all circumstances*; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality” (cited in Fearon 2013, 7. My italics). Meanwhile, solitude is not bound by geographical boundaries or physical isolation; it may be the product of a personal mind-set, configured by the “self” in Luna’s case, by the “other” in the case of Gran Canaria, equivocally regarded as a location that is isolated and, thence, “cut-off”. *Claro de Luna*, then,presents us with a situation that could well be aligned with “The Solitude of Latin America” described by García Márquez in his 1982 Nobel Prize lecture.

Aguerralde’s novelnot only contests the notion of “presumed certainties of cultural identity, firmly located in particular places which housed stable cohesive communities of shared tradition and perspective” (Carter, Donald and Squires 1993, vii), but “displaces” the reader - both literally and metaphorically. It presents identity as a stage in a process, something that awaits recognition and definition, a burning question for the Canaries. Although they appear to be infrequently associated with postcolonial theory, one could perhaps apply Bhabha’s (1994) conception of the “Third Space” to the Canary islands as “it refers to the interstices between colliding cultures, a liminal space ‘which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’.” In this ‘“‘in-between’ space, new cultural identities are formed, reformed, and constantly in a state of becoming”.[[42]](#endnote-42) However, this process of “becoming” constitutes a formidable challenge, particularly since the responsibility rests largely on the individual. In the words of a columnist writing about Aguerralde “Ya se sabe que nadie es profeta en su tierra, y si esa tierra es Lanzarote [...], más difícil todavía”. (Anon. 2015, n.p.). It is not insignificant, either, that Aguerralde has described his writing activity as “soñar despierto”, whilst the novel’s final words are:

Fin

*A solas*. 28 de septiembre de 2008. (Aguerralde 2009, 333. My italics)

Notwithstanding this, far from being escapist, resigned to solitude or marginalization, through his novels, Aguerralde has committed himself to reflection, challenge and change. According to Said, “Culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience.” (1994, xxiv) One could go further to contend that in *Claro de Luna* Aguerralde has constructed an imaginary that not solely derives from historical experience, but also anticipates what might happen in the future. History, as far as the Canaries are concerned, is in the making and the future for Canarian literature promises to be fascinating as Aguerralde and other writers on the islands actively engage with this through their unique and innovative outputs.

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1. The exception is the chapter “Mapping National Literature” (109-24), by Manuel Santana, who contends that “works of ‘regional’ historiography such as the *Historia de la literatura canaria* by Joaquín Artiles and Ignacio Quintana [...] do not define their interests in terms of independence from the literature of the rest of the country, but rather as a function of the restoration of an identity that, although regional, is compatible with citizenship in the common tongue.” (In Epps and Fernández Cifuentes 2005, 111).

   Elsewhere, Santana argues that “Up to the 1960s, Canarian literature had a long and recognized tradition in poetry, but few would have been able to point to more than a few samples of narrative. The transformation of the literary field produced by the emergence of the Latin American new novel, however, gave impetus in the Canaries to a surge in the production – and, equally important, in the circulation – of autochthonous fiction.” (2000, 151-52). He notes that “[a]s with other regional literatures in Spain, increasing attention was paid to Canarian authors in the late sixties” and highlights the significance of the new literary prizes (the Premio de Novela Benito Pérez Armas [1970] and the Premio Canarias [1973]) and the foundation of two publishing houses (Inventarios Provionales in Las Palmas [1970] and Taller de Ediciones JB in Madrid [1973]), which, he claims, “provided the breeding ground” for the ‘boom’ of the *nueva novela canaria* (2000, 152). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. # This focussed specifically on Rafael Azorarena’s novel *Mararia* (1973). (See *Dragaria* 2017).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. As Aguerralde has explained to me, if his novels are published by a publisher in mainland Spain, they can be difficult to obtain in the Canary islands and vice versa. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. It is hardly surprising that Aguerralde, who has a strong sense of his identity as a Canarian writer, should engage with these ideas. In 2012, he wrote, “Todas mis novelas se enmarcan en el suspense o el terror y salvo una de ellas todas suceden en mi ciudad, Las Palmas. Autor canario, editorial canaria, localizaciones canarias.” “Harto de la "nueva" narrativa canaria”, 7 de octubre de 2012. Accessed 31 July 2016. <http://miguelaguerralde.blogspot.com.es/2012_10_01_archive.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Notable Canarian authors also writing within the *novela negra* genre include José Luis Correa (1962-) and Alexis Ravelo (1971-). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. However, the novels *En la oscuridad* and *El fabricante de muñecas* are revised versions of *No podrás salir* and *Última parada: La casa de muñecas*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. “José Luis Correa, que fue profesor mío en la universidad, [...] me dijo que para que el lector se creyera mis novelas tenía que empezar creyéndomelas yo, que escribiera sobre lo que conociera.” (Martínez Gimeno 2010, n.p.). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Luna’s flat was based on “[el] primer apartamento al que me mudé cuando salí de casa de mis padres, un cubículo aterrador pegado al Parque San Telmo, sin mirilla ni apenas luz al final de un tétrico pasillo, con una comunidad de vecinos espeluznante y una sucesión de sonidos indeterminados cada noche. Ponía los pelos de punta.” He also revealed that the novel was inspired by an incident on the programme *Hablar por hablar*. <http://relatosdeterrordesdeelsotano.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/presentacion-de-la-novela-claro-de-luna.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. In Aguerralde’s words, the novel focusses on “la soledad de la indefensión, del camino de uno mismo por romper con la confortabilidad de la infancia y la adolescencia y atreverse a irrumpir en el mundo adulto como un soldado en campo abierto”. <http://relatosdeterrordesdeelsotano.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/presentacion-de-la-novela-claro-de-luna.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. According to Martínez Reverte, “La novela policíaca es una novela de género más marcado, que establece el misterio, que establece una estructura muy firme, y que basa fundamentalmente en la existencia de un crimen toda su razón de ser.” “La novela negra [...] ha escapado de muchos corsés de la novela policíaca, llegando a hacer que no hubiera la necesidad directa de ese crimen y mostrando otra serie de realidades. Lo que la define más que la existencia de esos crímenes es una fórmula narrativa muy peculiar, que se basa en una estructura lineal en la novela negra moderna, ligada al periodismo y a la narrativa cinematográfica. [...] Debemos insistir en que la novela policíaca es puramente especulativa mientras que la novela negra entra en juego dentro de lo social. La novela negra es más comprometida en lo social y político. La novela policíaca puede ser un puro juego intelectual de planteamiento de misterio.” (1989, 40-41). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Thus of Roque Nublo, we read, “esa silueta que tan bien conocia, que todos los canarios conocían, y más los residentes en Gran Canaria” (Aguerralde 2009, 285). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See Crang 1998, 113 for a discussion of “McDonaldisation” and “global (eroding?) space”. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. This is a common feature of the *novela negra*: “el interés primordial no radica tanto en la resolución del problema como en la configuración de un cuadro de conflictos humanos y sociales, además de un estudio de caracteres, a partir de un enfoque realista y sociopolítico de la contemporánea temática del crimen.” (Estébanez Calderón, cited in Viscardi 2013, 113). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Luna reflects upon this: “[…] sabía perfectamente que su nombre podía ser bonito, poético y hasta sugerente, pero desde luego no era habitual. Y encontrarlo, además, unido al peculiar adjetivo que hacía de primer nombre, resultaba todavía más curioso” (Aguerralde 2009, 54). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Luna is also notably referred to as “*ángel* de la guarda” (Aguerralde 2009, 21. My italics) as she listens to Clara’s “secret” during the radio programme. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The temporary comfort she derives from hearing this song is brutally shattered by Marcos’s murder. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. This was Aguerralde’s intention; he stated, “[…] lo más importante en *Claro de Luna* era crear ese misterio, alentar la curiosidad del lector mediante una serie de pistas, contrapistas y cabos sueltos, de manera que al final todo encajase. Y crear esa cadena de descubrimientos, destapando lo justo pero nada más, resultó dificilísimo. ¡Y para colmo no me bastaba con crear un villano al uso!” (*Ultratumba* 2011, n.p.). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Complementarily, the possibility of open interpretations is represented in visual terms through the illustrations in the book, although these only partially convey the contents and regularly require the reader to take a second look in order to determine their relationship with the written text. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The association between Spain and the bull is explicitly conveyed in works such as Miguel Hernández’s poem “Llamo al toro de España”, which begins, “Alza, toro de España”. Lorca, for his part, stated that “El toreo es probablemente la riqueza poética y vital de España.” Accessed 4 October 2016. <http://www.laopinioncoruna.es/cultura/2010/01/03/ultima-entrevista-garcia-lorca/347503.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. “Ahora es una mujer distinta y ahora..., ahora ya no se llama Luna.” (Aguerralde 2009, 333). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. As Aguerralde observed, “me planteé, que si *Claro de Luna* tenía un marcado carácter urbano, si sus personajes eran sin duda gente de la calle, la ciudad de Las Palmas en la que viven tenía que ser un personaje más de la historia, porque nos define y mucho a sus habitantes. Localizar la novela en mi ciudad no sólo me ayudó a escribirla y me facilitó imaginármela, sino que configuró una parte importantísima de los personajes, de su forma de ser, de vivir y de hablar.” (Martínez Gimeno 2010, n.p.) [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. “[Luna] se preguntaba por qué una plaza tan bonita estaba invariablemente ocupada por gente sin hogar y bebedores empedernidos de vino barato.” (Aguerralde 2009, 169). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. See, for example, “Most Murders committed by Friends, Family”, *The Spokesman Review* (11.07.1994), an article reporting on a Justice Department study that revealed that 80% of murder victims were killed by acquaintances or family members. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Aguerralde stated, “Todos los ámbitos de nuestra vida, desde la familia hasta la política, están constantemente sacudidos por lo vil, por lo secreto. Es imposible abstraerse del lado oscuro del ser humano.” (Tabar 2011, n.p.). [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. <http://relatosdeterrordesdeelsotano.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/presentacion-de-la-novela-claro-de-luna.html>.. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. “Se detuvo ante la cristalera y observó la jauría de amas de casa que la esperaban con la escopeta cargada.” (Aguerralde 2009, 35). Later, Luna fears that turning on the light will reveal “una jauría de bestias monstruosas dispuestas a atacarle” (Aguerralde 2009, 80) and thereafter, alone in the crowd, fears that “una jauría de ratas o un enjambre de abejas” (Aguerralde 2009, 106) is going to descend upon her. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Darío describes her as “histérica” (Aguerralde 2009, 111). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Luna frequently looks in the mirror, for example when she dresses up to become “La nueva Luna” (Aguerralde 2009, 48) and also in Chapters XV and XXII, when she sees Clara instead of her own reflection. Darío/Carlos, on the other hand, avoids doing so in Chapter VII and his glasses appear to be his most distinguishing feature. They are mentioned in Chapters XII and XXVIII: “llevaba gafas y tenía aspecto universitario” (Aguerralde 2009, 109) and “Sus gafas, su pinta de empollón, de profesor universitario” (Aguerralde 2009, 318). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Ironically, this is accompanied by a high-cultural reference to Shakespeare on the one hand (we read, “Ese era el verdadero dilema – como decía el Hamlet ése [...]. Se estaba volviendo loco” [Aguerralde 2009, 252-53]), and a comparison with the Incredible Hulk on the other (“Por algún motivo le recordó al Increíble Hulk, aunque no era verde” [Aguerralde 2009, 154]). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Caruth offers the following definition of trauma: “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (1996,11). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. “[...] el crujido estremecedor de los huesos de su padre se reproducía en su cabeza como una explosión cada vez que pensaba en subirse a un coche.” (Aguerralde 2009, 34). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. In future novels (notably *Última parada: La casa de muñecas, Caminarán sobre la tierra* and *Despiértame para verte morir*), Aguerralde would proceed to demonstrate his perceptive insight into stress disorders following trauma and abnormal psychological states. In-so-doing, he bridges the “gap” between Literature and Medicine and takes advantage of the possibilities offered by the *novela negra*, which, in the words of Vázquez Montalbán, “puede emplearse como método de conocimiento del delito [...] es decir, la literatura como instrumento del conocer” (1989, 59). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. In Chapter XXVII, for example, she dismisses the possibility that Clara is at her side (“creyó que Clara Luna estaba realmente a su lado, aunque claro, eso era imposible” [311-12]). The phrase “es/parece una locura” is also employed on numerous occasions, sometimes by Darío/Carlos (Aguerralde 2009, 176 [“Me explicó lo que le había sucedido la otra noche y lo que pensaba hacer me pareció una locura”] and Aguerralde 2009, 180 [“Pero es una […] locura”), and by Luna herself, as she plans to escape to Roque Nublo. (“Pero es que era una locura. No tenía permiso para salir, no tenía coche, no tenía valor..” [Aguerralde 2009, 286]). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Following a vision, we read that she breathes deeply “como muchos años atrás le había enseñado su padre a hacer para relajarse [...]” (Aguerralde 2009, 150). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. This might serve as an explanation for the reference to “el hombre-monstruo” in Chapter XXVI (Aguerralde 2009, 298). [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. For example, Darío/Carlos reflects that “[Luna] miró otra vez a las profundidades de la calleja por donde había aparecido, *como un niño* que mira en su armario seguro de que allí se esconde un monstruo terrible” (Aguerralde 2009, 111. My italics). Later, the murderer questions, “Dónde estaba la condenada *chiquilla*” (Aguerralde 2009, 232. My italics) and in Chapter XXVI we read, “El corazón le latía con fuerza en el pecho *como a una chiquilla traviesa* que sabe que está haciendo algo mal.” (Aguerralde 2009, 289. My italics). Likewise, a parallel is drawn between the world of Luna’s childhood and “stories”, as she pretended that she was too ill to go to school and her “real” escaping from the safe house: “La sensación era la misma, sólo que ahora se la estaba jugando de verdad.” (Aguerralde 2009, 289). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. This idea was also expressed in Schopenhauer’s essay “On Women”, which described women as “big children, a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man, who is the actual human being, ‘man’.” (Cited in Murphy 2012, 1104). [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. It can be seen, for instance, in such diverse films as *El espinazo del diablo* or the adaptation of Stephen King’s *The Shining.* [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. As Macklin notes (1992, 51), two key *novelistas negras* have highlighted the link with Realism. Vázquez Montalbán claimed that the *novela negra* was “la renovación o recuperación de la novela realista”, whilst Madrid wrote of “la posibilidad de un nuevo discurso realista”. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Chandler comments on this in relation to the detective novel: “There is a very simple statement to be made about all these stories: they do not really come off intellectually as problems, and they do not come off artistically as fiction.” (1944, n.p.) The *novela negra* is also sometimes viewed with contempt, despite the claims of writers such as Vázquez Montalbán, who wrote that in the future “podría decirse que ha ofrecido la posibilidad de continuar una posible novela social” (Vázquez Montalbán 1989, 59). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Arguably, relatively little has changed since the early twentieth century, when “crime novels were still considered a low-brow form of literature and publicly disdained or dismissed by writers and intellectual readers in Spain [...].” (Vosburg 2011, n.p.) [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. <https://www.amherst.edu/museums/mead/exhibitions/2008/thirdspace> [Accessed 13 March 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)