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‘Vampires in the Canaries?’ Miguel Aguerralde’s *Noctámbulo* (2010): Revitalizing Vampire Traditions in the Hispanic Periphery

Abstract

This article is the first detailed study of Miguel Aguerralde’s Canarian novel, Noctámbulo*. It explores the way in which the author revitalizes vampire traditions, submerging his vampire protagonist, who is transformed into a paid assassin, into the seemingly incongruous environment of Gran Canaria. Challenging and subverting expectations, and offering readers the opportunity to regard its Canarian vampire protagonist as a Robin Hoodesque hero,* Noctámbulo *incites us to reflect profoundly on matters pertaining to the specific Canarian context (particularly the islands’ status as ‘the outcast’ in relation to mainland Spain, issues concerning memory and grappling with the past), as well as on broader concerns. The article concludes by postulating that* Noctámbulo *is a liberating transnational novel, one which transcends genres and borders, refutes preconceived ideas and offers readers worldwide the opportunity to determine how they will interpret the work and envision their futures.*

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Introduction

At first sight, nothing could seem more incongruous than the notion of vampires in the sunny Canary Islands. However, as we will see, the Lanzarotean author Miguel Aguerralde Movellán (1978-)[1] directly challenges and refutes such assumptions in his novel *Noctámbulo (Night Owl).* Here the vampire protagonist (accorded the dual identity of Diego/Sable) is deracinated and transformed into a paid assassin working for an organization called *Paint it Black* on the island of Gran Canaria in the Hispanic periphery (the Spanish Archipelago located in the Atlantic ocean off the coast of North Africa). His friends, Javier (now a priest) and Paula (now Head of the Forensic Department) were aged 19 and 15 at the time of Diego’s ‘transformation’ (17 years ago) following his seduction by a vampire (Lucía). Diego re-encounters his friends after Paula carries out autopsies following a series of murders and discovers puncture wounds in the victims’ necks. Desperate to uncover the truth, she ventures into the criminal underworld and renews her love for Diego/Sable.

Aguerralde revitalizes vampire traditions through his setting, protagonist and by engaging readers with Canarian concerns in a subversive and hybrid work which merges features of the vampire novel with

[1] Aguerralde was born in Madrid, moved as a young child to Gran Canaria and studied at the University of Las Palmas. He currently teaches at the CEIP (primary school) in Playa Blanca (Lanzarote), where he also writes for the local press and leads creative writing workshops. To date (2019), he has published thirteen novels (*Noctámbulo* was the second), numerous short stories and press articles.

elements from the *novela negra* (thriller),[2] the detective and the romantic. The vampire is situated within a framework that addresses the Canarian context and its twenty-first century corruption scandals, in addition to provoking reflection on the islands' peripheral relationship with mainland Spain and issues relating to memory and the past. In their journey throughout *Noctámbulo* readers are immersed in a narrative experience that incites them to engage with the Canarian Robin Hoodesque hero-protagonist and the issues raised, to question the significance and impact of traditional assumptions and memories, and to confront matters concerning liberty and the future.

Revitalizing the Vampire Setting in the Canaries

One of the striking ways in which Aguerralde reworks vampire traditions is by setting *Noctámbulo* in Gran Canaria. Aside from the fact that 'Spain, geographically separated from the Eastern European home of the Slavic vampire, has been largely devoid of vampire reports in its folklore tradition' (Melton 2011: 661), a thought that instantly comes to mind is that the *Islas afortunadas (Fortunate Isles*), with their year-round pleasant sunny climes and prominent vistas of sand and sea, would be noxious to beings that originated from the steep, forested, mountainous regions of Transylvania and are frequently depicted in Gothic-type dark situations, often in large, spooky castles buffeted by a howling wind and engulfed in shadows and darkness. Challenging such expectations, *Noctámbulo* is set principally in the city of Las Palmas. The novel is accorded a setting that corresponds to reality as there are references to the capital's centre and coastal areas. In Chapter 8, for instance, we read how the vampire travels in his future victim's convertible along the Avenida Marítima (Maritime Avenue) before going to her apartment, which has views of the Cathedral and the old quarter. This road is mentioned again in Chapter 12 but this time the location is towards the North, close to the port, a fact made evident through the reference to the coloured fountain ('la Fuente Luminosa'). It is also possible to match particular places with their real-life counterparts; for example, Javier's church corresponds to the Iglesia de San Bernardo near San Telmo Park, the 'famosa cafetería' ('famous café') matches the *quiosco* (*modernista* kiosk) in San Telmo and the small market relates to the area above the main bus station, whilst the description of webs dangling from the walls and ceiling in Chapter 7 reminds readers of the island's fishing nets (Aguerralde 2010: 54). This setting not only provides a 'believable' background for the ('unbelievable'?) vampire story but contrasts starkly with the traditionally dark, gloomy settings of other vampire novels, such as *Dracula*'s (Bram Stoker, 1897) ruined castle. As Davies (2015) has noted, 'The Gothic mode is noted for its chill factor – and is therefore unsurprisingly antithetical to sunlight'. Thus 'nowadays the Gothic is not readily associated with Spain, which suffers from its own clichés, notably

[2] This is only an approximate translation since the Canarian *novela negra* is broader than the Anglophone concept of the thriller, frequently combining social criticism with features from the realist novel, crime mysteries and thrillers.

being over-endowed with sun.'[3] Although Aguerralde does (in typical Gothic style) incorporate some rainy scenes and 'gloomy' locations, he tackles such 'clichés' head-on. It is noteworthy, for instance, that in *Noctámbulo* light is not presented as dangerous and destructive to vampires (often reducing them to dust, as befalls Claudia in Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, one of Aguerralde's acknowledged influences). There is also an additional subtle 'dig' at the apparent incongruity of the sunny, garlic-loving and wine-producing Canaries as the setting for a vampire novel through the revelation that Aguerralde's Canarian vampire protagonist loves garlic, wine and is not remotely afraid of the sun.

Arguably, one of Aguerralde's motives for setting *Noctámbulo* in Las Palmas is that, in line with other vampire narratives, which 'reproduce the anxieties and fascinations of their times' (Gelder 1994: i), he wished to critique the contemporary context, uniquely the Canaries in this case, and to offer readers the opportunity to read the novel as an allegory. It is not insignificant that in 2009 (the year before *Noctámbulo* was published and when Aguerralde moved from Gran Canaria to Lanzarote), the corruption scandal, later known as the 'Caso Unión', came to public attention. This led to the 'Operación Unión/ Jable', the arrests of numerous politicians, lawyers and business people accused of corruption and receiving money in exchange for illegal building permits in the Canaries. Although Aguerralde attempted to dissociate his novel from a political context,[4] it is possible to maintain that there is at least a subconscious link between *Noctámbulo*'s focus on corruption and criminality, and contemporary Canarian concerns, if not a confirmation of Stephen King's claim that horror expresses 'what we would be afraid to say right out straight' (1982: 47).

The problems arising from Canarian corruption are conveyed through *Noctámbulo*'s criminals, who exercise control through bribery, violence and murder, indulging in materialistic comforts and alcohol. A particularly negative picture is portrayed of the complacent politician Arturo Calvo, who travels from the ballet to his flat on the (expensive) Avenida Marítima in his brand new BMW, 'pagado con dinero de sangre' ('paid for with blood money', Aguerralde 2010: 83), whilst the explicit reference to him as 'ex-político y ex-corrupto' ('ex-politician and ex-crook', Aguerralde 2010: 87) links him with the corruption scandals. Mauricio Galante is depicted in even more unfavourable terms; we read,

> El señor Galante manejaba droga. El señor Galante la distribuía. El señor Galante traía mujeres del este de Europa y también de Latinoamérica, comerciaba con ellas. Nadie lo decía pero todos lo sabían.

[3] Davies, nevertheless, convincingly argues that there is a strong link between Spain and the Gothic, and she examines the way Gothic sunshine is employed in a number of Spanish films.

[4] He claimed 'No soy buen lector de noticias políticas, tiendo a mezclar nombres, caras y fechas, porque no son ese tipo de historias las que me mueven.' ('I'm not a good reader of political news, I tend to mix up names, faces and dates because they aren't the kinds of stories that interest me.' *Lanzarotelandia* 2015.)

> (Mr. Galante dealt in drugs. Mr. Galante distributed them. Mr. Galante brought women over from Eastern Europe and also from Latin America, and used them for his business purposes. Nobody said so but everybody knew. Aguerralde 2010: 44.)

The repetition of 'el señor Galante' here underlines the character's indubitable responsibility, stressing his inflated ego and ruthless abdication of any remorse, whilst his name ironically highlights his womanizing tendencies. As in Calvo's case, Galante's criminal activities could be aligned to the cases of embezzlement, bribery, money laundering and forgery that led to countless arrests in Lanzarote, for instance in the following passage:

> A Paula no le extrañó que aquel hombre pudiera comprar a todos los abogados y legalistas del mundo y conseguir el mejor trato posible con el Estado, un pacto sin precedentes, una estafa grotesca pero, desde luego, saludable.
> (Paula was not surprised that this man could buy off all the lawyers and legal advisers in the world and clinch the best possible deal with the State, an unprecedented pact, a grotesque swindle, but one that was healthy, of course. Aguerralde 2010: 108.)

Paula's reflections highlight the way that money was used to secure evidence to pervert the course of justice in the Canarian corruption investigations. When Galante shows her the forensic photos that he has obtained through illegal means and taunts her by commenting that the press would pay a good price for them, she responds, '–¿Dinero a cambio de dilapidar la investigación?' ('Money in exchange for wrecking the investigation?' Aguerralde 2010: 112.) Even the Canarian police are not free from this circle of corruption; Paula ponders, 'Y ahora el mafioso [Galante] se había convertido en intocable, al menos para la Policía.' ('And now the Mafia leader had become untouchable, at least as far as the Police were concerned.' Aguerralde 2010: 44.) This seemingly echoes concerns regarding the influence of corrupt politicians such as Dimas Martín (leader of the PIL [Lanzarote's Independence Party], the ringleader of the 'Caso Unión' corruption cases), 'a character which [*sic*] has predetermined the way politics is done, the discourses, the alliances' (Ferrer, cited in Jiménez et al 2012: 21).

It is also worth noting that space (and principally the possibilities it offers for significant profit via urban development) was a significant factor in the Lanzarote corruption cases, which exposed 'the difficulties of ensuring a lawful government action when the incentives for urbanization and land speculation are large and when powerful private interests are determined to subvert the rule of law' (Jiménez et al 2012: 1). This is paralleled in *Noctámbulo*, where occupying space is equated with power, and criminals not only use their wealth to purchase homes that will display their status and supremacy for all to see, but also take

over the lives and buildings of others, which are consequently described as 'Arturo Calvo's/ Mauricio Galante's building' (Aguerralde 2010: 87 & 106). These criminal inhabitants merge into a coexistence with their environment(/'kingdom'), feeding off it to construct a formidable power force, thence the comparison of Galante to prominent individuals such as the king and the emperor:

> Toda la habitación, así como el personaje, rezumaban poder, olor a cigarros puros y perfume del caro, como si los dos fueran uno, despacho – edificio en realidad – y hombre, rey en su colina, emperador en su propio imperio privado.
>
> (The whole room, just like the man who inhabited it, reeked of power, cigars and expensive perfume, as though the two were one: the study – the whole building in fact – and the man, King of the Hill, Emperor of his own private empire. Aguerralde 2010: 108-109.)

This notion of a hostile takeover (also conveyed in Calvo's case) both heightens and reinforces the negative impact exerted by these individuals.

Parallels can also be drawn between the portrayal of the press in *Noctámbulo* and the Canarian press, which actively sought to expose the truth in the real-life twenty-first-century corruption cases. In Aguerralde's novel the press plays an influential role, stirring up the public with its articles on '«Colmillos de Vampiro»' ('Vampire Fangs', Aguerralde 2010: 189) and the murders. Paula initially conceals facts from the Canarian journalists because she is afraid of the mass hysteria they might provoke (Aguerralde 2010: 49). Her concerns, mirroring Baldick's comments, 'The daily Press, and the telegraph that in a moment spreads its attentions over the whole earth, fabricated more myths in a single day […] than could have been produced by earlier times in a century' (cited in Gelder 1994: 20), are apparently justified as the press's journalists and photographers are described in terms of brutal, animalistic hunger and greed. Thus the photographers' cameras '*se cebaron con* el cuerpo de Arturo Calvo' ('*feasted* on Arturo Calvo's body') and the police have to restrain the journalists 'para que *no devoraran* literalmente a la doctora' ('so that they didn't literally *devour* the Doctor', Aguerralde 2010: 87, my italics). However, eventually photographs and reports are illicitly shared with the public, as in real life.

The web, too, is a significant source of information and Paula ponders on the manner in which it could inspire future vampirically-based crimes: '¿Quiere usted matar como un vampiro? Pues aquí tiene todo lo que le hace falta. Un supermercado gratuito para el delincuente con falta de ideas.' ('Do you want to kill like a vampire? Well, here you'll find everything you need. A free ideas supermarket for the criminal who lacks them.' Aguerralde 2010: 46.) All this, then, demonstrates that *Noctámbulo*, through its unique and significant setting, is strongly rooted in modern-day Canarian society and voices serious concerns about corruption and the incitement to criminal activities on the islands.

Revitalizing the Vampire Protagonist through the Canarian Assassin

An even more striking feature of *Noctámbulo* is the way in which Aguerralde revitalizes the vampire figure, recasting him into a highly complex Canarian protagonist. In Auerbach's words, '[e]ternally alive, [vampires] embody not fear of death, but fear of life: their power and their curse is their undying vitality' (1995: 5), whilst Emek Bakale (*Noctámbulo*'s witchdoctor) affirms that 'ningún mito tiene su comienzo sin una realidad terrible detrás' ('no myth begins unless there is some terrible real fact lurking behind it', Aguerralde 2010: 134). If we take on board these statements we can contend that Aguerralde's Canarian vampire, like the setting, could be related to contemporary life in the islands and serve as an additional opportunity for the author to express his concerns. Read in this light, Diego/Sable could be associated with the Canarian criminal underworld and perceived negatively as he destroys others for personal financial gain. The way he discharges some tasks is unemotional, if not robotic, whilst the justification for his actions is materialistic; murder grants him the opportunity to purchase a new car or a bigger television. His lack of emotion is matched by the style in which this is communicated: 'Había recibido el encargo, la paga era buena.' ('He had received the mission, the pay was good', Aguerralde 2010: 11.) In accordance with Freud's theories, killing also guarantees Diego's/Sable's survival: 'El estremecimiento de la víctima que pierde su vida para que él pueda continuar la suya.' ('The shudder of the victim who loses his life so that he can continue with his.' Aguerralde 2010: 28.) Endorsing his negative associations, like other vampires (for example Rice's Lestat and Louis),[5] Diego/Sable is equated with the devil; thus his first victim sees a mist that is transformed into a creature 'con mirada de demonio' ('with the look of the devil', Aguerralde 2010: 14) and later we read, 'Era un diablo, un demonio de la noche atormentado por pesadillas.' ('He was a devil, a demon of the night tortured by nightmares.' Aguerralde 2010: 52.) Through these references Aguerralde mixes both Christian and Slavonic motifs since 'The Devil is a Christian conception, just as the vampire is Slavonic' (Lawson, cited in Gelder 1994: 40).[6]

Intensifying this negative perception of *Noctámbulo*'s Canarian vampire protagonist, a link is established between the criminal activities of Arturo Calvo and Mauricio Galante (who enjoy drinking alcohol), and the murderous actions of Diego/Sable as the term 'embriagándoles' ('intoxicating them',

[5] For instance, Louis questions, 'Am I from the devil? Is my very nature that of a devil?' (Rice 2002: 72).

[6] The intermingling of Christian and Slavonic motifs is a common feature in *Noctámbulo*. The characters' trust in Christianity is displayed as they seek refuge in the Church, whilst other locations, notably the mausoleum, and Javier's vocation in the priesthood highlight the deep-rooted Catholic traditions in the Canaries. Simultaneously, Paula questions religious beliefs and, despite her initial skepticism, she turns to the Romanian Emek Bakale, who enlightens her to the vampires' Slavonic origins, conveyed to readers as early as Chapter 7, where we read of Lucía's 'embriagador acento eslavo' ('intoxicating Slavic accent', Aguerralde 2010: 59). This is developed further through the accounts of vampires throughout history, culminating in the battle with Stephanek de Bàer for Paula's life. (Stephanek had been born in the 13th century, had murdered his father and elder brother in order to become a Baron, had been poisoned but returned as a vampire to wreak havoc.) Interestingly, Aguerralde also adds an extra twist to the mix, as we read that Emek wears his hair in a ponytail 'como si fuera un indio americano' ('as if he were an American Indian', Aguerralde 2010: 129).

Aguerralde 2010: 99) is used to highlight the charm he employs to lure his victims. He could also be related, like Dracula, to degeneration theory since his destiny is apparently mapped out from a young age:

> Desde pequeño, Diego había mostrado un carácter inquieto y explorador, su madre siempre decía que iba a acabar dirigiendo un safari en Kenya, a lo que el muchacho respondía con desdén que solo si en su safari habitaban lobos, murciélagos y arañas. Entonces su padre reía y le decía que mejor se metiera en un safari en Transilvania.
>
> (From a young age, Diego had been restless and liked exploring; his mother always said that he would end up being in charge of a safari in Kenya, to which the boy disdainfully replied that would only happen if there were wolves, bats and spiders on his safari. His father would then laugh and say that he had better set up a safari in Transylvania. Aguerralde 2010: 18.)[7]

In symbolic terms, too, Aguerralde's Canarian vampire could be associated with those who leech off society. The dual meaning of the verb 'desangrar' (frequently employed by Aguerralde) is significant as it offers both literal and symbolic readings. Whilst it literally means 'to bleed to death' (referring, of course, to the draining of blood following the vampiric bite), in financial terms it equates to 'bleeding someone or something dry'. However, since Sable's assassinations are primarily conducted on rich criminals, the moral dimension of the act is complicated somewhat because *he* is not the social leech (as per Marx, 'Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' [*Capital*, Chapter 10]), but is *draining* the social leeches. Although it could be contended that the term's significance relates to nineteenth-century ideas of 'psychic vampirism' (Melton 2011: xxxi),[8] whereby the vampire benefits from the leeches' deaths, it does raise questions as to whether Diego/Sable is truly evil.

Aguerralde further problematizes (and subverts) this expected polarity between good/evil by simultaneously setting up his Canarian vampire as some kind of modern-day hero, not dissimilar to Robin Hood. In so doing, he both plays on and takes further the effect described by Botting: 'objects of terror and horror not only provoke repugnance […] but also engage readers' interest, fascinating and attracting them […]. Terror, in its sublime manifestations, is associated with subjective elevation' (cited in Curbet 2002: 164-65). Read in this light, in a somewhat perverse, transgressive manner (since the objective is achieved through murder), far from signifying 'a process of invasion' (Butler 2010: 2), Aguerralde's vampire assassin

[7] The notion that Aguerralde's Canarian vampire is condemned to an inescapable destiny is broadly referenced through Emek's comment that 'el vampirismo es hereditario, como las enfermedades' ('vampirism is hereditary, like all illnesses', Aguerralde 2010: 137). It is also possible to link vampirism in *Noctámbulo* with 'cultural crisis', in line with Pick's observation that in nineteenth-century France, '[i]n medico-psychiatric investigations, alcoholism, sexual perversion, crime, insanity, declining birth rates, syphilis, prostitution, anarchism, suicide rates, economic performance, and so on, become the intertwined signifiers of cultural crisis' (1989: 43). (Chapter 6 of Pick's book, 'Fictions of Degeneration', examines the relationship between *Dracula* and degeneration theory.)

[8] 'Nineteenth-century romantic authors and occultists suggested that real vampirism involved the loss of psychic energy to the vampire and wrote of vampiric relationships that had little to do with the exchange of blood.' It was notably during this period that 'the literary vampire […] transformed the ethnic vampire into a cosmopolitan citizen of the modern imagination.' (Melton 2011: xiii).

can be seen as enacting some form of justice as he roots out the rotten sections of society and exercises the limits of his liberty. He does this as he crosses boundaries during his international travels while investigating the vampire myth; this, in addition to referring to Harker's travels in Stoker's *Dracula*, is an ironic allusion to the 'Grand Tour' since Spain was excluded from this trip 'and was therefore perceived as remaining geographically as much as in terms of intellectual development, on the outskirts of Europe' (Curbet 2002: 163). He also transforms himself (like Dracula) into a mist to enter through the window in order to kill his first victim (whose mansion garden was well secured and patrolled by guards) and turning into a wolf in order to enter Galante's building, which was equally well protected.[9]

Like Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*, Diego/Sable is 'human' and elicits compassion, but much more than Rice's vampire. This is largely on account of the use of free indirect discourse, which offers readers a close insight into Diego's/Sable's mindset and facilitates our engagement with his emotions, notably his capacity for forgiveness and overriding devotion to Paula. He also differs radically from the vampires in other works that inspired Aguerralde, notably 'the monstrous predators of Bram Stoker ([*Dracula*] 1897), Richard Matheson ([*I am Legend*] 1954) and Stephen King ([*Salem's Lot*] 1975)' (Chaplin 2002: 37). Rather than provoking indifference or contempt, Diego/Sable is convincingly portrayed as a victim grappling with his powerlessness and struggling desperately to survive in the face of adverse circumstances. He pleads with Javier, 'No me juzgues. [...] Sabes que no puedo evitarlo. [...] Es mi naturaleza.' (Don't judge me. […] You know I can't help it. […] It's my nature.' Aguerralde 2010: 91.) The priest's understanding and compassion, in addition to the vampire's self-contempt and mildness in comparison with Stephanek's mindless brutality, inspires sympathy.[10] It is also noteworthy that the antipathy generated in readers towards his victims, including the first, whose '*modest* mansion'[11] had been 'paid for through cocaine and human trafficking' (Aguerralde 2010: 11), increases our sympathy for Diego/Sable. Later victims are equally worthy of the readers' contempt; his female victims are portrayed in a similarly negative light since they indulge in materialistic comforts (notably fashion and flashy cars) and 'prey' upon Sable, whilst the majority of his male victims are the novel's 'evil' characters, the criminals and 'fat cats' of modern-day life. Faced with such hardened, ruthless and 'untouchable' characters, readers might well feel that the humans are more monstrous than the vampire, and that Diego/Sable is justified in his actions and the venting of his anger: 'El vampiro desahogó toda su ira, toda su rabia en aquel hombre [Galante].' ('The vampire unleashed all his anger, all his rage on that man', Aguerralde 2010: 117.) If readers expected Diego/Sable to be selfish and

[9] Schuller has noted that 'his formidable powers of metamorphosis may be regarded as one of Dracula's most significant and, at least for his Victorian antagonists, most disturbing characteristics. His power to rejuvenate himself and to transform into a dog, a bat or swirling mist questions the very notion of a stable identity' (2015: 103).

[10] Once again, Javier guides the readers, as we read, 'Aquel no era como él. Era malvado y vil, no como Diego, este era un auténtico demonio, una criatura infernal.' ('That vampire [Stephanek] was not like him. He was wicked and evil, not like Diego, he was a real demon, an infernal creature.' Aguerralde 2010: 178).

[11] '*Modesta*' appears in italics as this was probably how the victim referred to his home. However, the disjunction between 'modesta' and 'mansión' leads the reader to suspect that it is ironic since his home was steeped in extravagant luxury.

seductive (like other vampires, notably Dracula and Rice's Lestat), this, too, is subverted since it is clear by the end of the novel that he differs radically from the 'traditional' vampire, 'an expression of the dark side of human nature', 'the grand archetype of all the dark, repressed urges in the human heart' (Riccardo 2011: xiii). By contrast, through his resolution to die so that Paula can live, Diego/Sable sets himself up as a sacrificial victim in the name of the most powerful human emotion: love. In Aguerralde's words, 'Es una revisión muy personal de la figura del vampiro, una atrevida fusión entre lo fantástico y lo policíaco aderezada con una historia de amor inquebrantable.' ('It's an extremely personal revision of the vampire figure, a daring fusion between fantasy and detective fiction embellished with a story of unbreakable love.' Alberdi 2010: n.p.)

One could contend that on account of his 'differences' from other vampires and his ability to elicit the readers' sympathy, Diego/Sable represents 'the other'. In more general terms, by promoting affinity with the vampire, *Noctámbulo* challenges a central aspect of contemporary Gothic horror, 'the fear of foreign otherness and monstrous invasion' (Bruhm 2002: 260) and contests Freudian theories on horror:

> Freudian analysis of the horror genre has often considered the ghost or monster of conventional horror films as representing the marginal or deviant side of society, 'that which must be excluded, or repressed, so that the western drive towards technological progress and world domination can proceed'. (Cook 1999: 197, cited in Thomas 2011: 10).

Rethinking 'the Outcast' and 'Memory' in the Hispanic Periphery

Building upon the questions concerning the extent of alienation and horror provoked by 'the other' (or 'the outcast') and the possibilities of reading *Noctámbulo* as an allegory, we could draw a parallel between *Noctámbulo*'s protagonist, since the vampire is 'the outcast, the outlaw, the dangerous outsider who flagrantly violates all of society's norms' (Riccardo 2011: xiii), and the Canary Islands, which are 'always-marginalized' (Martín Márquez 2008: 47), 'cut off' from the Peninsula and could also be considered in terms of 'otherness'. This sense of 'otherness', which can also be related to the characters' loneliness, is, moreover, enhanced through the employment of the Gothic genre since it has been regarded by Williams as a 'skeleton in the closet' (1995: 1) and the Romantics' 'black sheep, an illegitimate cousin who haunts the margins of "literature", pandering cheap and distressingly profitable thrills. From the high Romantic ground, disreputable Gothic appears shocking and subversive, delighting in the forbidden and trafficking in the unspeakable.' (1995: 4). Turning to the question of 'the unspeakable', we could question whether *Noctámbulo* invites readers to not only rethink our expectations of the vampire character, but to reflect more broadly on perceptions of 'the outcast', both in relation to the Canaries and the vampire novel's potential for provoking profound reflection on crucial matters. It could be contended that by enabling

readers to engage with Sable, Aguerralde is effectively championing 'the underdog' and promoting tolerance, as well as prompting readers to look beyond their subconscious prejudices, which may affect their (negative?) perceptions of the Canaries and vampire traditions more broadly. Worthy of consideration here is the contribution of *Noctámbulo* as a 'peripheral' work (both in terms of the fact that it is Canarian *and* a vampire novel) to the Spanish discourse on historical memory. Spain's transition to democracy saw what was known as a 'pacto de olvido' or 'de silencio' ('pact of forgetting' or 'of silence'), which involved the process of 'forgetting' or 'remaining silent' about the horrors of the Civil War (1936-39) and Franco's dictatorship (1939-75). It is widely known that this resulted in struggles with memory-related issues but, surprisingly, the Canarian contribution to such discussions (possibly because the islands are still perceived as 'the outcast'?) has been overlooked to date.

Although *Noctámbulo* does not engage directly with questions concerning the impact of the Spanish Civil War, one could contend that Paula's contempt for Galante's corrupt 'pacto' (pact) with the State (cited previously)[12] could be related to contemporary skepticism towards the 'pacto de olvido'. More significantly, issues associated with the impact of past memories feature prominently in the novel. Thus Aguerralde adheres to the custom that 'the Gothic as a genre is profoundly concerned with the past, conveyed through both historical settings and narrative interruptions of the past into the present' (Spooner 2006: 9). Diego/Sable is haunted by past memories; as early as Chapter 1 we read 'La memoria era todo lo que le [al vampiro] quedaba' ('All the vampire had left were memories', Aguerralde 2010: 10) and he frequently suffers from nightmares. As we discover later, these relate to the memories associated with his former life as a human although we do not at that point know that the vampire Sable was previously the human, Diego. The connection between memories and pain is frequently underlined, as we read, 'El dolor le hizo recordar la mirada del viejo' ('The pain made him remember the look the old man gave him', Aguerralde 2010: 11) and, in the shower, he feels as if 'el agua removiera viejos recuerdos, abriera antiguas cicatrices' ('as if the water stirred up old memories, opened old wounds', Aguerralde 2010: 58). Later, in Chapter 9, a process of metamorphosis is associated with his memories as they merge and Lucía the vampire turns into Paula, into the girl from the disco and then Paula again.

Other characters suffer similar experiences that correspond to Caruth's 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). Towards the end of *Noctámbulo*, following Paula's transformation into a vampire, when Emek asks Javier if he is alright, he responds, 'No. […]. Perdona, son los recuerdos.' ("No. […] Forgive me, it's the

[12] 'A Paula no le extrañó que aquel hombre pudiera comprar a todos los abogados y legalistas del mundo y conseguir el mejor trato posible con el Estado, un pacto sin precedentes, una estafa grotesca pero, desde luego, saludable.' ('Paula was not surprised that this man could buy off all the lawyers and legal advisers in the world and clinch the best possible deal with the State, an unprecedented pact, a grotesque swindle, but one that was healthy, of course.' Aguerralde 2010: 108.)

memories." Aguerralde 2010: 263.) Paula, in particular, is tormented by her memories; we learn that she had avoided visiting her brother for some time and the ellipsis highlights her mental block:

> Un vínculo más allá de la razón le impedía visitarle sin recordar a... En fin, llevaba demasiado tiempo luchando contra aquel recuerdo. Debía superar los fantasmas del pasado, y se había prometido a sí misma intentarlo.
> (For some inexplicable reason she was unable to visit him without remembering… In short, she had spent too long battling against that memory. She needed to conquer the ghosts of the past and she had promised herself that she would try. Aguerralde 2010: 75.)

The repetition of the term 'olvidar' (forget), strategically positioned at the beginning of the sentences in the following quotation, dramatically expresses the failure of Paula's desperate objective 'to forget': '*Olvidar* la muerte, *olvidar* la sangre. *Olvidar* a los que matan, a los que mienten. *Olvidar* a los malvados, *olvidar* a los vampiros' ('*Forget* about death, *forget* about the blood. *Forget* about those who kill and those who lie. *Forget* about the evil, *forget* about the vampires.' Aguerralde 2010: 97, my italics.) All this could be related to Spain's 2007 *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* ('Law of Historical Memory', which proposed to remember what the 'pacto de olvido' had committed to forget), thereby aligning a specific context, based on what are still for many Spaniards raw personal experiences resulting from past events and the innumerable deaths during the Civil War, to the characters' predicaments. It also highlights the futility of the 'pacto de olvido', since the process of 'forgetting' involves 'not confronting' and 'not dealing' with some key issues. Going further, we could draw links between the memory-associated issues in *Noctámbulo* and Labanyi's theory of hauntology, especially since Paula needs to 'superar los fantasmas del pasado' ('conquer the ghosts of the past'), in other words the souls and spirits of those who have died, alongside the 'living dead' and the 'undead' vampire:

> In a country [Spain] that has emerged from forty years of cultural repression, the task of making reparation to the ghosts of the past – that is, to those relegated to the status of living dead, denied voice and memory – is considerable. Derrida's notion that history occupies in the present a 'virtual space of spectrality' abolishes the supposed opposition between postmodernism and history, for history is always a 'virtual', rather than 'empirical' reality. (2001: n.p.)

One could also apply Ellis and Sánchez-Arce's thoughts on Del Toro's films to *Noctámbulo*: '[p]erhaps storytelling is the only way to begin the process of remembering how to remember, particularly in Spain where there have been so many decades of political and private pressure to remain silent' (2016: 205). Brinks, for her part, writes, 'Because the gothic is a genre concerned with how a repressed or denied past

intrudes into the present in an unwanted, fear-inducing guise, it is a genre well-suited to explore the continuing effects of traumatic history, whether individual or collective.' (2004: 293) Should we therefore read *Noctámbulo* as a Canarian vampire novel that communicates the impossibility of escaping from the 'ghosts of the past' and/or interpret the vampire's bloodthirstiness as an allegorical portrayal of the draining of the Hispanic life-force by the Francoist dictatorship? As Labanyi observes, 'It has been noted [by Kraniauskas] that stories of vampires […] have been rife in Peru and other parts of South America in recent years as a way of dealing with historical trauma', whilst 'Vázquez Montalbán has described the effects of Francoist repression and censorship as a "vampirización de la memoria"' ('vampirization of memory') (2001: n.p.). However, as we have seen, *Noctámbulo*'s Canarian vampire is a contradictory character and attempting to accord moralistic readings to the work can be problematic since the novel evades such 'neat' (arguably simplistic) interpretations.

At this point it is worth noting that, as well as provoking reflections on Spain's (and the Canaries') problems whilst grappling with the past, Aguerralde transports the issues arising from memories onto a broader platform. Paula's experience, in particular, engages strongly with the wider human experience of dealing with memories, expressing an emotion that is both timeless and universal. Questions concerning the process of remembering, the retention and impact of memories more generally are also explored by Aguerralde with acute psychological sensitivity and notable accuracy. For example, of the fatally wounded Paula, we read that 'su memoria transportó a recuerdos de antaño que creía olvidados' ('her memory carried her back to the distant past that she thought had been forgotten', Aguerralde 2010: 238). This matches the near-death experience accounts reported by real survivors.

Moreover, in addition to revitalizing questions associated with memory and situating them in a broader framework, Aguerralde subverts the commonly negative connotations they are accorded in the Spanish context. Labanyi alludes to the burden of the past when, of Juan Marsé's *Si te dicen que caí* (*The Fallen,* 1973), she observes that '[…] if fantasy is an attempt at mastery, memory is a form of slavery to the past' (1989: 172). Contrarily, a positive message may be gleaned from *Noctámbulo*. Although memories can burden the characters, they are also vital. The identity of the dead girl from the discotheque is effectively erased as nobody can remember her: 'No recordaban verla bailar con nadie, ni siquiera hablar con nadie. De hecho, no recordaban verla.' ('They didn't remember seeing her dancing with anybody, or even talking to anybody. In fact, they didn't remember seeing her.' Aguerralde 2010: 80.) More importantly, memories can be centred on constancy and loyalty, with past love offering an opportunity to overcome the horrors of the present. Thus Javier, despite his priestly vocation, which should arguably induce him to condemn a murderer, cannot relinquish past bonds:

> El padre Javier no pensaba que tuviera a sus pies a un asesino, no identificó a aquel ser con un demonio nocturno, un ángel de la muerte. Sabía que Diego no podía cambiar, pero sabía que, por encima de todo, aquel muchacho era su amigo.
> (Father Javier didn't think that he had a murderer at his feet, he didn't regard him as a nocturnal demon, an angel of death. He knew that Diego couldn't change, but, above all, he knew that this man was his friend. Aguerralde 2010: 77.)

Paula, for her part, is able to use her past memories of the sulphuric smell for a positive purpose, namely to reconstruct the truth and uncover Diego's existence (Aguerralde 2010: 98). In Chapters 14 and 25, too, she is able to 'forget' Diego's past crimes and only remember her love. The terms 'olvidar' (forget) and 'recordar' (remember) are loaded with significance here, reminding readers that the process of remembering is not necessarily logical; it may be piecemeal and is subjected, above all, to human willpower. In other words, memories can be retained or forgotten as their 'owner' desires. Diego/Sable thus discovers that his hatred towards Lucía diminishes ('[…] con el tiempo, como las cicatrices de aquel primer mordisco, su odio por ella también había desaparecido' ['over time, like the scars from that first bite, his hatred towards her had also disappeared', Aguerralde 2010: 58]), whilst his love for Paula remains constant. Learning to live with the past, to disregard negative memories and focus on the positive, is the experience that makes the characters strongest:

> Recordaba su voz, recordaba sus ojos, su cara, pero su olor... El mismo olor de siempre. Recuerdos, imágenes, sensaciones que creía perdidas, sueños imposibles que tomaban forma al otro lado de aquella puerta.
> (He remembered her voice, he remembered her eyes, her face, but her smell… It was the same smell as ever. Memories, images, sensations that he believed had been lost, impossible dreams that began to take shape on the other side of that door. Aguerralde 2010: 74.)

As this quotation reveals, time, like the process of remembering, does not correspond to a logical sequence of events in *Noctámbulo*. Sometimes time stops for the characters as they struggle to reconcile past and present. When she re-encounters Diego 17 years after he disappeared,

> El tiempo se detuvo para Paula cuando reconoció aquellos ojos, volvió hacia atrás y se paró de nuevo, después regresó al presente sin creerlo y tuvo que dar media vuelta y retroceder otra vez diecisiete años, pero no era posible [...].

> (Time stopped for Paula when she recognized those eyes, she went back and stopped again, then she returned to the present without believing it and had to take a half-turn and go back seventeen years again, but it was impossible […]. Aguerralde 2010: 118.)

Hence the novel will often jump forwards and backwards, requiring the readers to try and make sense of it.

Challenging Expectations and Revitalizing Readerly Experiences

As can be surmised from the above, Aguerralde builds the process of challenging expectations (for instance with respect to the Canarian setting, the vampire and memories) into the reading experience. The significance of remembering is notably embroiled in this, as the author plays upon our memories of what we have read or experienced in the past. In so doing, he transfers the 'narrowness' of the issues concerning Spanish memory onto a more universal platform and, revitalizing such matters, once again challenges the readers' assumptions and preconceived ideas.

Noctámbulo has a strong metatextual dimension and often relies on the readers' prior knowledge of the traditional portrayal of vampires, which is interlinked with the literary world of Dracula, the supernatural, of werewolves, bats and devils, as well as ghosts, real murders (Lee Oswald), thrillers and horror films (Hannibal Lecter and *Nosferatu*).[13] As noted previously, the author stated that he had read *Dracula* and other vampire novels,[14] and had been inspired by *Interview with the Vampire.*[15] In addition to these key works, readers are able to recognize, remember and enjoy multiple features of vampire traditions more broadly as familiar terms, including the Germanic/Slavonic equivalents of *wampyr* and *nosferatu* are employed in the novel, together with *strigoi*, whilst Sable's code name is *Vladymir Tepes* (an allusion to Vlad the Impaler). Sable, too, as 'el noctámbulo' ('night owl') has the traditional vampiric association with the darkness and there are links with the settings and atmosphere of Gothic literature. For example, the old house where Diego was seduced by the vampire Lucía shares parallels with the 'haunted house' (like Marsten House in *Salem's Lot*). It is described as 'el viejo caserón, del que las leyendas eran por lo menos tan antiguas como el propio pueblo' ('the old house, the one whose legends were at least as old as the town itself', Aguerralde 2010: 17), set in the depths of a forest presumably in the centre of the island of Gran Canaria with a seeming life of its own: 'La casa era realmente aterradora, como un cadáver que en cualquier instante fuera a cobrar vida y moverse.' ('The house was really terrifying, like a body that suddenly came

[13] Aguerralde revealed that 'Para escribir *Noctámbulo* me empapé de leyendas vampíricas centroeuropeas [...].' ('In order to write *Noctámbulo* I immersed myself in Central European vampiric legends.' *La ventana secreta*, May 2014.)

[14] '[…] disfruté con la revisión moderna que del mito hace Stephen King en *El Misterio de Salem's Lot*, una de mis novelas de cabecera, junto con *Soy Leyenda*, de Richard Matheson.' ('I enjoyed Stephen King's modern revision of the myth in *Salem's Lot*, one of my favourite novels, along with Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*.' *Opinión de libros* 2010.)

[15] 'No me gustó nada, lo reconozco; pero me abrió los ojos a unos personajes que sólo había visto en películas, de los que sólo había oído en las típicas historias para niños. Me sirvió para interesarme por el vampiro en la literatura.' ('I admit that I didn't like it, but it opened my eyes to some characters that I had only seen in films, that I had only heard of in children's stories. It helped to fuel my interest in the vampire in literature.' *Opinión de libros* 2010.)

back to life and started to move.' Aguerralde 2010: 24.) As Vidler notes, 'The house provides an especially favored site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits' (1992: 17). Other Gothic settings and features include the mausoleum,[16] the church, together with the storms, the lightning, the blackness, the shadows, the candles and candelabra, the coffins and so forth. However, *Noctámbulo* is far from derivational. Although such references apparently (and initially) serve as bases for assumptions, they are combined with unexpected locations, for example the discotheque and the beach (presumably Las Canteras), where Sable conducts his murders. Similarly, the representations of vampires are refuted, even contradicted, as vampire traditions are revitalized.

Like Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, Aguerralde questions traditional assumptions concerning the vampire but he goes much further. At the beginning of *Noctámbulo*, common knowledge is assumed through the references to traditional vampirism (conveyed via the allusions to the vampire's pale skin, his almost albino eyes and a blood stain) but the novel then proceeds to question such assumptions as the vampire mocks 'las majaderías de cuentistas y literatos que aseguraban que debía ocultarse del sol' ('the nonsense written by short story writers and authors who insisted that he had to hide from the sun', Aguerralde 2010: 10) and insists that he does not need to conform to the '[las] necedades de guionistas y fabricantes de *best-sellers*' ('the rubbish written by screenwriters and best-selling authors', Aguerralde 2010: 15). As mentioned previously, we discover that Diego/Sable conforms to few vampire traditions and does not share their hatred of garlic,[17] wine and fear of crucifixes, nor their fear of the sun. Thus on one mock-comic occasion, before offering Diego/Sable some red wine, Paula remembers Bram Stoker's novel: 'Se sintió como una boba. *Nunca bebo vino,* decía Drácula a su invitado.' ('She felt stupid. *I never drink wine,* Dracula told his guest.' Aguerralde 2010: 195.) Diego/ Sable, however, assures her that he loves it. Furthermore, the distinction between Diego's/Sable's behaviour and that of humans is not as radical as we might expect. This is highlighted in Chapter 3, where we read, 'Sable despertó sobresaltado. Los vampiros también sudaban. También tenían pesadillas.' ('Sable woke up with a start. Vampires sweated too. They also had nightmares.' Aguerralde 2010: 27.) It is also acknowledged by Javier, who tells Paula, 'Por lo que yo sé un vampiro no se diferencia demasiado de ninguno de nosotros…' ('Based on what I know, a vampire isn't that different from either of us…' Aguerralde 2010: 187.) Harking back to his former life as a human, Diego/Sable still continues to engage with human activities: he takes showers, he eats (out of habit), wears shirts and so forth.

Drawing upon Spooner's contention that 'The arcane, cursed or dangerous book has always been a recurring feature of Gothic fiction' (cited in Davies 2017: 57), books exert a major influence over

[16] This location is not dissimilar to the cemetery, described by d'Humières as 'the place where one feels the presence of absence' (cited in Davies 2017: 70).

[17] Paula asks Diego/Sable, '–¿Y qué pasa con el ajo?– […]
–Mmmm. […] Me encanta el ajo.'
("And what about garlic" […]
"Mmmm. […] I love garlic." Aguerralde 2010: 193.)

Noctámbulo's characters. Paula's and Javier's attitudes towards Diego/Sable are based on memories of what they have read and real works (including Stoker's *Dracula* and McNally's *In Search of Dracula*) are mentioned, conferring a degree of veracity on the novel. However, when Emek reads from historical books on vampires, Diego/Sable is extremely critical and challenges what has been written: '–Tonterías– gruñó Sable–. Nada se sabe de los vampiros. Todo lo que se cuenta en los libros y en las películas son estupideces' ("Nonsense", grumbled Sable. "They don't know anything about vampires. Everything that appears in books and films is utter rubbish." Aguerralde 2010: 227.) This echoes the contempt he had expressed in Chapter 7: 'Novelistas, pensó con desprecio mirándose en el espejo, según ellos no deberías estar ahí.' ("Novelists", he thought contemptuously, looking at himself in the mirror. "According to them you shouldn't be there." Aguerralde 2010: 58.) Here the mirror image, a 'placeless place' that yields 'a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself' (Foucault 1986: 24), not only refutes the traditional belief that vampires cannot see themselves in mirrors, but ironically undermines the mimetic pretensions of realist novels in the past, as well as drawing upon Foucault's concept of heterotopia.[18] Later, Sable continues to describe such assumptions as 'chorradas' ('nonsense', Aguerralde 2010: 236), although Emek rebukes him: 'No son tonterías, muchacho […]. Mucha gente ha creído en esto durante siglos.' ("It isn't nonsense, my son […]. Lots of people have believed in this for centuries." Aguerralde 2010: 231.) Diego/Sable then retorts, '¡A la mierda la gente! […] ¡Yo soy un vampiro, viejo! ¡Yo soy uno de ellos! Y te aseguro que ninguna de esas patrañas tiene un solo rasgo de verdad.' ("To hell with people! […] I'm a vampire, my old man! I'm one of them! And I can assure you that none of those tales has a single grain of truth." Aguerralde 2010: 231.) Indeed, it turns out that Diego/Sable is not a unique case because Stephanek, the other vampire, is not afraid of crucifixes either and even Javier had been forced to acknowledge that 'los libros [sobre vampiros, mitos y leyendas] no le habían servido para nada.' ('the books had been no use to him whatsoever.' Aguerralde 2010: 42).[19]

Remembering 'common knowledge' regarding vampires (especially that acquired via reading), then, is revealed to be erroneous and rooted in ignorance. This is a recurring pattern throughout *Noctámbulo* as other expectations are also challenged. Gender expectations, for example, are similarly subverted, notably through Paula's transformation. Like Rice's child vampire, Claudia, she becomes an even more ruthless and ferocious killer than Diego/Sable, echoing the *femme fatale* figure of the vampiric Lucía, who, sharing similarities with Lilith, seduced Diego with her beauty and crystal-like voice and turned him into a vampire. It is not insignificant that Lucía's 'voz [que] sonaba a cristal' ('crystal-sounding voice', Aguerralde 2010: 59) is matched by Paula's 'risa de cristal' ('crystal laugh', Aguerralde 2010: 75). Furthermore, Paula, in the act of murdering Daniel, is described as 'aquella víbora' ('that viper', Aguerralde 2010: 258), equating her with the

[18] Foucault defines heterotopia as 'real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable.' (Cited in Davies 2008: 396).

[19] He also tells Paula, 'Al parecer no todo lo que se pone en las novelas es cierto […].' ('Apparently not everything written in novels is correct. […].' Aguerralde 2010: 187.)

brutal animal world, and she abandons his body with contempt: 'Le miró, parecía un guiñapo, un saco de vísceras, carne y semen, daba asco.' ('She looked at him, he looked vile, like a sack of viscera, flesh and semen, he was disgusting.' Aguerralde 2010: 259.) This contests the assumption that

> [i]t has become almost *de rigeur* in academic writing on horror to posit the monster as male and, more particularly, the victim as female; as Creed notes, 'the conventional interpretation is to argue that the male monster of the classic horror film (ape, werewolf, vampire) represents the repressed bestial desires of civilised man and that woman is almost always the object of this aggression' (Davies 2006: 141).

It also changes the dynamics of the power relationship within the vampire novel, which is not dissimilar to that of the horror film, where 'male pleasure in horror arises from the feelings of mastery and power that it induces in the male spectator […]' (Hutchings 1993: 85). Witnessing the control which the females exercise over their male counterparts, as Lucía mesmerizes Diego ('Sintió que hubiera ido con ella, que hubiera volado por ella, que sería su esclavo si se lo pidiera.' ['He felt that he would have gone with her, he would have flown for her, he would be her slave if she asked.' Aguerralde 2010: 59]), and the horrific manner in which Paula vampirically murders her victims, readers of *Noctámbulo* may well be disconcerted by this topsy-turvy turn of events. It is matched by the disturbing transformation of the 'knowable', sunny sea-city of Las Palmas into a grey, Gothic-horror setting, whilst the love story between Diego and Paula is turned upside down[20] and the Canarian vampiric assassin becomes the unconventional hero discharging justice through murder.

In addition to expressing specifically Canarian anxieties, then, *Noctámbulo* can be deterritorialized. Gelder observes that the 'combination of "terrible certainty" and bureaucratised doubt is a split common to Victorian vampire fiction' (1994: 53). All too frequently, readers are left in a state of uncertainty and limbo, a state where assumptions and preconceived ideas are challenged, where nothing appears to be stable. Kirkham and Thumim's observation that 'The questions of power and disempowerment, of control and loss or control […] underpin spectator pleasure in horror' (1993: 24) can also be applied to the readers' experiences in *Noctámbulo*. We see powerful characters juxtaposed against those who are powerless, in addition to witnessing those who oscillate between wielding their power and then losing it (for instance in the case of Diego/Sable and also Paula, whose 'destiny' is ultimately determined by the male characters). *Noctámbulo* also goes further, as there is a broader lesson to be gleaned. In many senses, Aguerralde's novel is self-reflexive as it raises questions about the status of reading and contests the trustworthiness of written

[20] '[…] el fuego les devoró convertidos en amantes eternos. Murieron abrazados, como siempre habían deseado estar, como a partir de entonces estarían para siempre.' ('[…] the fire devoured them as they became eternal lovers. They died in each others' arms, where they had always wished to be; from that moment they would be locked in an eternal embrace.' Aguerralde 2010: 274.)

records. Various questions are posed in this regard: is what is recorded in the 'history books' always accurate? What, too, is the relationship between films and reality? Can we distinguish between real life, written records and films, between fact and fiction, and fake news?

As can be deduced, it is not possible to ascribe a single generic classification to *Noctámbulo*. It is a Canarian vampire novel but it is also a recasting, a rewriting, if not a parody of the vampire novel, as the readers' (and characters') traditional expectations are refuted. As Aguerralde said,

> 'Yo quería ponerme en la piel de un hombre normal al que le cambian la vida y no entiende cómo ni por qué, y deshacerme de supersticiones y mitología impostada durante cien años de cine tan fabuloso como manipulador de la tradición del no muerto.'
> ('I wanted to put myself in the shoes of a normal man whose life is changed and who doesn't understand how or why, and cast off all the superstitions and myths that have arisen over 100 years from cinema, that both fictionalizes and manipulates the tradition of the undead.' *Ultratumba* 2011.)

Thus *Noctámbulo* is essentially a hybrid Canarian novel as it merges features of the vampire novel with those of the *novela negra* and the detective novel. It is also a love story that goes wrong, with a mixture of comic and tragic elements, revitalizing vampire traditions. In Aguerralde's words:

> '[Es] un policiaco en toda regla, con detectives, con malvados, con misterio e intriga. Quería víctimas y quería asesinos, y qué mejor asesino que un vampiro. Y qué cuento de vampiros no es a su vez una tragedia romántica terrible…'
> ('It's a detective novel in all senses, with policemen, villains, mystery and intrigue. I wanted victims and I wanted murderers, and what better murderer than a vampire. And what vampire tale isn't, at the same time, a terrible romantic tragedy…' *Opinión de libros* 2010.)[21]

Conclusion

Noctámbulo is a hybrid novel set in the Canaries and about the Canaries but it is, moreover, a work that takes features of the vampire novel and reworks them to express specific Canarian anxieties concerning corruption, the islands' peripheral situation and the past, frequently subverting expectations and inciting readers to engage and decipher the novel's meanings. In so doing, Aguerralde highlights the timelessness

[21] 'El vampiro es uno de los terrores clásicos más potentes, por el que tengo fascinación, y quería explorarlo desde un punto de vista más cercano y actual, casi te diría convirtiéndolo en algo posible, dentro de unas pautas fantásticas que me permití establecer. Incluyéndolo en una trama policiaca realista, puedo descubrir un monstruo nuevo y diferente.' ('The vampire is one of the most powerful figures in Classic horror. It fascinates me and I wanted to explore it from a closer and more contemporary perspective, I'd almost say turning it into something possible, within the fantasy framework that I set up. By including the vampire in a realist detective plot, I have been able to uncover a new and different monster.' *La ventana secreta,* 22 July 2014.)

and universal relevance of vampire traditions. Ultimately, *Noctámbulo* is a liberating novel as it questions and refutes restrictions; this operates on multiple levels as the author plays with our expectations regarding the setting, protagonist, genre and our experiences as readers. Like the Canaries, which, as noted by Pérez Minik, are open to outward influences (possibly more so than Spain), Aguerralde's vampire is both a Canarian construction and a transnational character who literally and metaphorically traverses and challenges boundaries, capturing the essence of what Gelder describes as 'the vampire's mobility' (Gelder 1994: x). Likewise, through *Noctámbulo* Aguerralde has exercised the right to challenge, subvert and transcend genres, to combine specificity and universality. As such, it is far from being a superficial 'low brow' vampire novel that merely serves entertainment purposes.

Finally, *Noctámbulo* unfetters readers from the restrictions of genre and conventionality, challenging us to recognize the coexistence of multiple interpretations, to take advantage of the opportunity to choose between them and to formulate our own opinions. In the author's words, *Noctámbulo* focusses on 'la libertad de cada uno para girar tantas veces como aguante la tuerca de un mito universal' ('the right that each and every one of us has to unscrew the nut attached to a universal myth as many times as we can'. *Opinión de libros* 2010). One might well apply Walter Benjamin's suggestion regarding the historian to *Noctámbulo*'s readers, who are invited to take on the role of *bricoleur* (collector), exploring the rubbish, ruins and rubble of the past, reassembling them to construct a new 'constellation' that expresses 'the unvoiced' (1997: 45 and 104), learning, throughout the process, to experience the significance of the 'structure of feeling' described by Raymond Williams (1954). The novel, thus, will be what each individual will make of it, just as memories of the past and the future of the Canary islands will be in accordance with what its inhabitants decide. As Aguerralde said of Lanzarote, 'Cuántas posibilidades tiene esta isla, qué gran presente y futuro podría albergar. En fin.' ('How much potential this island has, what a great present and future it could enjoy.' *Lanzarotelandia* 2015.)

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