

FANTASY AND REALISM
IN
CONTEMPORARY ECUADORIAN
LITERATURE
(1976-2006)

KIMBERLY CONTAG, PhD
MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
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In the fall of 2005, I applied for a Fulbright Scholar Award for research on “Fantasy and Realism: New Voices in Ecuadorian Literature Since 1975.” It was a bold project that would require significant reading and writing time in Ecuador. I suspected the initial research and first draft of the manuscript would take me the better part of a year. I was expecting to receive notification concerning my application for a year-long sabbatical from Minnesota State Mankato and hoping the Fulbright award would come through. If successful, my family and I had decided that we would all be willing to move to Cuenca, Ecuador, so I could conduct the research and write the book. I was notified in the spring of 2006 that the Fulbright organization would support four months of research through collaboration with the State University of Cuenca, Ecuador, where I have had the privilege of conducting research in the library. I am grateful to Fulbright for sponsoring this project with so much enthusiasm, and to the University of Cuenca for their willingness to allow me to consult the books in their library. I express my deepest gratitude to Minnesota State Mankato’s College of Arts and Humanities for supporting my proposal to continue my research with the Nadine Andreas Faculty Research Award in the summer of 2009 and the Arts and Humanities Faculty Research Grant in 2013, and to the Department of World Languages and Cultures for their enthusiastic support for my sabbatical research and continuing research trips to complete the project in Ecuador.

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I dedicate this book to the Ecuadorian writers whose voices deserve to be understood beyond the borders placed by social, economic, geographic, and political boundaries.

Kimberly Contag
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Chapter One—An Introduction to Contemporary Ecuadorian Literature

Anyone who reviews literary criticism of Ecuadorian literature since the 1970s (and Latin American literary criticism since the 1950s) will realize that there has been an effort on the part of critics to explore how Ecuadorian literature fits into the broad panorama of Latin American literary and cultural production and, more specifically, how Ecuadorian writers measure up to the generations of writers identified with various movements, like the *boom*, the so-called *new Latin American novel*, and the later *new historical novel*. The question for critics of Ecuadorian literature, like Antonio Sacoto, is how the novels published in Ecuador in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, or more recently fit the requirements of the so-called new Latin American novel that appeared on the literary scene after 1938, and how these new novels respond to the social *realist* novels written in Ecuador in the 1930s, or how they compare to the neo-baroque, regionalist, existential novels of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Comparative criticism has its place in literary criticism, but it also breeds crops of writers who, *willy-nilly*, either imitate new techniques from other literary contexts to fit the mold, or they write works that fit their particular cultural context that comparative critics criticize for not “measuring up” when studied from a broad international perspective. In essence, the validation of globalized techniques and innovation perpetuates a two-tiered paradigm. While many argue that it is the job of the literary critic to assess fit, there are others who argue that we need to analyze cultural production within context.

My purpose in this book is not to assess how well Ecuadorian literature fits into the broad Latin American literary scene or the global scene in particular, but instead to read and analyze how Ecuadorian writers communicate ideas about the world they live in through realism and fantasy. It is the nature of Ecuadorians to express their experience in these terms to portray a unique and multifaceted voice. To that end, I propose a model for analyzing the function of fantasy and realism in literature, principally in the novel, short story, flash fiction, poetry, flash poetry, and theater, and offer examples of analysis by genre in the following chapters. This book is not an exhaustive study of all Ecuadorian literature since 1975, but rather a representative sample of how fantasy and realism have been used to communicate attitudes about human behavior in a specific Ecuadorian context. There are elements of what I will call here an *Ecuadorian voice*, a unique and multifaceted voice that emerges through the study of 25 years of writing by contemporary Ecuadorians.

The analysis of a unique Ecuadorian voice cannot be understood in isolation from the global marketplace of ideas, however. Part of the context of Ecuadorian contemporary writers relies on the ideas and techniques that are shared across our global marketplace of literary production and on the literary heritage we share as readers in an increasingly globalized world. Another context that has had an increasingly important effect on Ecuadorian writers is the global social experience of writing and reading shared at a moment’s notice around the world. Through Internet and media, the latest information can go viral, as can the most obscure information that readers would never have had access to only a few years earlier. So, on the one hand, while there is value in asking how contemporary Ecuadorian literature fits into the Latin American panorama, one could argue that the *fit* or lack of *fit* is only a small component of understanding cultural production in

the information age. Analysis of Ecuadorian literary production must also take into consideration the nature of its own cultural and historical environment of production.

When Antonio Sacoto asks, “¿Cuál es el sitio de la novela ecuatoriana en relación con el contexto de la ‘nueva novela latinoamericana?’” (20 años 5), or when literary historian and critic Claudio Malo declares that Ecuador really has not produced a *real* Latin American historical novel (Encuentro literario 2005), I feel compelled to provide a balance for understanding what Ecuadorian writers do offer readers, without the eternal comparison to North American, European, Latin American, or even Eastern contemporaries. Instead of providing a clearinghouse of those Ecuadorian writings that most closely resemble new narrative voices of Latin America or a list of *supposed deficiencies* that keep Ecuadorian writings from *making the grade* for distribution and study in the Latin American context or the global context, my purpose has been to read, investigate, and interpret how contemporary Ecuadorian writers explore their world through fantasy and realism to provide insights on perception of their world, daily life, history, and their concerns for the present and the future.

How these writers use (or avoid) fantasy or realism to communicate ideas about their world yields an understanding of why the genre of new historical novel in Ecuador might be different from the new historical novels produced in Mexico and Argentina, or why the genre of detective fiction, which is popular in the U.S. and in Europe, has few representative writers in Ecuador, and why a simple piece of wood with a soul of its own can observe the Ecuadorian experience and narrate more effectively the suffering, the beauty, and the tragedy of the Ecuadorian experience than any one particular *human* voice (e.g., Puky Andino’s *Medea llama por cobrar* or Iván Egüez’s *El Poder del Gran Señor*).

The focus on fantasy and realism creates a cross-section of representative Ecuadorian texts in four genres: novel, short story, poetry, and theater, and analysis provides insights into how fantasy and realism function as a means to create a more complete portrait of human interaction, or lack thereof, in the pluralistic social, historical, and cultural contexts as represented by the selected samples of contemporary Ecuadorian literature. I refer to *contexts* rather than *context* because, in Ecuador, there are at least three major social, historical, and cultural contexts that begin with geographical parameters: that of the Pacific coastline, or *la Costa*; the Andean *sierra*; and the interior, called *el Oriente*. There are also urban and rural contexts as well as ethnic contexts (Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, Euro-Ecuadorian, etc.). Therefore, I review representative samples from some writings that have won prizes and recognition, but I also explore the often ignored genre of children’s literature, women’s writings, and genres that do not always find their way into college classrooms or traditional literary discussions. I also sample a variety of literary categories. For example, in the area of novel and short narrative, I analyze the few samples of police or detective fiction and science fiction that were produced, as well as the more common historical novels that lay bare the sordid realities of corruption amongst the Ecuadorian leaders of the past two centuries.

In this study, I have not ignored the contributions of the earlier heavyweights of twentieth-century Ecuadorian writing, like Jorge Icaza, José de la Cuadra, Pablo Palacios, Gallegos Lara, Gil Gilbert or Demetrio Aguilera Malta, Adalberto Ortíz, or Angel F. Rojas. However, the emergence of new narrative voices is at the center of my study of fantasy and realism. Analysis of the multifaceted writings of Abdón Ubidia, Fernando Tinajero, Raúl Pérez, Jorge Dávila, Francisco Proaño, Miguel Donoso, Iván Egüez, Carlos Carrión, Edna

Iturralde, Gilda Holst, Jorge Velasco, Alicia Yáñez Cossío, Javier Vásquez, Eliécer Cárdenas, Santiago Páez, Juan Valdano, or poets like Jorge Enrique Adoum, Edgar Ramírez, Hugo Salazar, Margarita Laso, Jorge Martillo, Fernando Aertieda, Agustín Vulgarín, Fernando Nieto, Jorge Carrera Andrade, Julio Pazos, Marcelo Báez, Xavier Oquendo, Rubén Astudillo, Efraín Jara, Martha Lizarzuburu, Catalina Sojos, Maritza Cino, Sara Vanégas Coveña, or playwrights like Peko Andino or Luis Miguel Campos tells a new story about how Ecuadorians perceive their world.

I have not incorporated into this study any investigation of testimonial literature like Martha Bulnes' *Me levanto y digo, testimonio de tres mujeres quichua* (1990), or Hugo España Torres, a former national police officer's book on the disappearance of two brothers (1996), for example. I have not delved into essay except when the essay is pertinent to the literary study at hand. I rely on essays by Sara Vanégas Coveña, Alicia Ortega, Miguel Donoso Pareja, Mercedes Mafla, Antonio Sacoto, María Augusta Vintimilla, and Vladimiro Rivas Iturralde, et al., for their discussions of Ecuadorian literature and literary trends. The goal of this study is to analyze how some of the contemporary voices represent an Ecuador in and out of crisis, and to gauge the perceptions and concerns of writers at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. It is also an attempt to provide a systematic study of a broad variety of Ecuadorian works since to date there has not been a systematic effort to do so.

The literary scene in Ecuador shifted late in the twentieth century, and the role of fantasy increased in published works. In terms of the novel, the first harbingers of change were Demetrio Alguiera Malta's *Siete lunas y siete serpientes*, Jorge Enrique Adoum's *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda*, Iván Egüez's *Las Linares*, Jorge Dávila Vázquez's *María Joaquina en la vida y en la muerte* and Alicia Yáñez Cossío's *Bruna, soroché y los tíos* (Sacoto, *20 años de novela ecuatoriana* 13). Some of the earlier short stories by Miguel Donoso Pareja (*Krelko y otros cuentos* in 1962 and *El hombre que mataba a sus hijos* in 1968), and Lupe Rumazo's *Sílabas de la tierra* (1964), and the experimental "La marcha de los batracios" published in *Rol beligerante* (1974), for example, were also indicative of a shift. According to Alicia Ortega, Miguel Donoso's role in effecting change in the approach to realism and fantasy is that he explored a new hyper-consciousness to the narrative act that exposed the moment of fictionalization of writing (*Antología esencial* 54). Similarly, Miguel Donoso and Lupe Rumazo challenged the borders between what was real and what was imagined in a way that was new and unique in Ecuadorian literature.

The shift did not rely exclusively on a perception of narrative act but also on the perception of subjecthood. There is no doubt that after 1975, there was a greater exploration of gender and cultural difference in the Ecuadorian novel and short story in particular. By 1975, Ecuador and the world beyond its borders was introduced to new scientific ideas that challenged how men and women perceived their roles in society, as well as to a more militant view of marginalized sectors of society. Contemporary Ecuadorian writers illustrated how some of this new information, in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, or culture, played out in literature as a representation (fair or exaggerated) of perspectives and practices they saw in the society around them. For example, women writers in particular have focused on the experiences of Ecuadorian women as both victims of social pressure and as perpetrators of their own victimization. Ortega considers this fictional exploration of sexuality and identity in the 1970s a result of several changes including urban growth and modernization, expansion of a middle class, and an inability

of social movements to meet the unrealistic expectations of everyday people. The crisis of the contemporary experience, she argues below, is due to the fraying of traditional roles held by men and women in Ecuadorian society and the subsequent transformation of those roles that led to confusion, frustration, and a tenuous relationship between what was real and what was imagined to be:

el crecimiento y vertiginosa transformación de las ciudades, la expansión de nuestra clase media, las contradicciones de una modernidad que evidencia su incapacidad para cumplir las promesas de plena realización social, las paradojas y dificultades que encuentran los movimientos sociales en sus luchas en favor de la igualdad y los ideales utópicos, las vicisitudes de la pareja humana en relación con los nuevos roles sociales y laborales que assume la mujer en su decisión de integrarse a la historia desde la militancia, la academia, el arte y el trabajo. (*Antología esencial* 54)

The exploration of a new mode of expression to fit the changing social and economic environment meant that contemporary Ecuadorian writers sought out new literary techniques to accommodate the shift towards urban life and modernity, and challenged critical social perceptions by exploring how these relationships in flux played out in fictionalized microcosms in an Ecuadorian social context. The successful use of the social realism of the early twentieth century was no longer sufficient to address the contemporary relationships that were constantly being prodded and pierced by traditions or expectations of change. Elements of fantasy provided a means to dream of what might be possible, as well as a means to assess the true nature of illusion and reality in a culture that still applauded its national heroes and continued to celebrate European and American influences while struggling with a reality in which legitimate socio-economic change, gender equity, or political stability seemed remote.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Ecuadorian writers began to focus their exploration on the volatile urban setting and especially on an underlying sentiment of nostalgia for what had been lost: a strong sense of *self* based on what had been perceived as the way things were, if not how they should have been. This nostalgia for a clear identity was not necessarily for life that had been “better” in the past, but for what could be understood about the *Ecuadorian self* in the past. This confusion and disintegrated sense of self developed a new and complex awareness of social roles, bringing forth new requirements for being self-aware in society.

Raúl Pérez Torres’ writings are characteristic of this exploration of the complex ambiguities of self through the use of nostalgia and memory, especially in terms of the Ecuadorian social context that was portrayed as repressive. Abdón Ubidia is another contemporary writer whose short stories and novels exposed the intellectual crisis of the contemporary *subject* in the Ecuadorian environment. The exploration of self also led to what could be called an exposé of the shift in understanding gender. For example, Carlos Carrión examined *self* through the exploration of erotic sexuality and found that in the end the subject has no ability to possess another or even one’s self. He concluded the *self* is, in each instance, fleeting and nebulous. We see this search for a more modern identity even as late as 2006, for example, with the publication of *testimonial* short stories in

Mujeres divinas by Aminta Buenaño and in Juan Valdano's 2001 fictional autobiography, *El fuego y la sombra*.

These explorations of self in the contemporary Ecuadorian context had a complimentary effect in that main characters with a strong awareness of self seemed to be of less importance in novels and short stories after 1975. In some ways, the lack of a strong main character and the attempt to portray this blurred sense of identity may have set Ecuadorian literary expression on a course that was *intimista* and too regional to be easily accessible to readers beyond its geographical and social confines.

One might ask if this exploration of self and the *intimismo* that sets Ecuadorian literature apart can explain why few Ecuadorian writers are successful in the global literary marketplace today. In my estimation, this approach to the question is far too simplistic, but the tendency to look inward and find constant fault and lack of purpose is perhaps one of the most important cultural attitudes that have kept Ecuadorian writing from moving beyond its geographical borders. To illustrate this point, consider the case of Pablo Palacios' short stories and the more recent short stories of Oswaldo Encalada. The social realism Palacios used successfully in the early twentieth century highlighted the bleakness of human insensitivity and moved readers to challenge traditional perspectives. Oswaldo Encalada's social realism on the other hand, especially in his more recent short stories, analyzes the perception of the marginalized main character only to demonstrate the futility of modernity. In Palacios' stories, the tragic characters are unique. In Encalada's short stories, the characters have a unique voice but are emblematic of an entire generation of lost souls. Palacio's characters survive beyond the confines of a geographic setting because they are universal. Encalada's characters barely survive as individuals due to social, political, and geographic pressures that make them less than whole beings. These truncated characters are fascinating, but, in a globalized world of readers, they hardly make excellent main characters for a modern novel or modern short story.

The overwhelming focus on identity has affected Ecuadorian cultural production significantly and, more importantly, the interest in readership beyond geographical borders. Who, ask many Latin Americanists, are the great Ecuadorian writers? Which voices stand out amongst the many? Antonio Sacoto identifies novels by Adoum, Egüez, Dávila, and Yáñez Cossío as the few that "meet" the parameters of great novels:

trama interesante, creación de personaje y ambiente, lenguaje apropiado para la narración y la descripción, para sus voceros en sus respectivos estratos, para la comunicación entre narrador y narratario entre sus personajes, asunto medular y asuntos relacionados con el mural referencial de la novela, entorno sociológico, en fin, un sinnúmero de componentes que hacen de la narración una gran novela. (*20 años* 13-14)

As a case in point, Sacoto explores the elements of a good novel to suggest that none of the Ecuadorian novels of the 1980s and 1990s live up to the name of a great novel (Sacoto, *20 años* 14). He analyzes and discusses Eliécer Cárdenas' *Háblanos, Bolívar* (1983), Jorge Velasco Mackenzie's *El rincón de los justos* (1983), Raúl Pérez Torres' *Teoría del desencanto* (1985), *Sueño de lobos* (1986) by Abdón Ubidia, *Mientras llega el día* (1990) by Juan Valdano, *El ladrón de levita* (1990) by Jorge Velasco Mackenzie, *El deseo que lleva tu nombre* (1989) by Carlos Carrión, *Una buena razón para matar* (1990)

by Raúl Rojas, Alejandro Moreano's *El devastado jardín del paraíso* (1990), Luz Argentina Chiriboga's *Bajo la piel de los tambores* (1990), *A la sombra del verano* (1991) by Oswaldo Encalada, Eliécer Cárdenas' *Diario de un idólatra* (1990), and Iván Egüez's two novels *Pájara la memoria* (1985) and *El Poder del Gran Señor* (1985) and argues that none of these novels contain "todos los parámetros de lo que hace una gran novela." He suggests that the narrators lack "una angustia existencial que los roza el alma" (Sacoto, *20 años* 79).

According to Sacoto, the main characters of these novels lack development and will (*abulia*); some of the novels fail in their uncomfortable attempt to fuse literature and ideology, while others fail to hold together when they dive into the abuses of liquor, drugs, sex, or perversion, and make attempts to capture contemporary jargon at the expense of comprehension. In terms of inaccessible language, *Alucinaciones* or *Nunca más el mar* come to mind. Sacoto highlights the novels of the 1980s as a group that maintains its linguistic value in its ability to control language or "grandes logros en cuanto al manejo del lenguaje," but without a true protagonist to exemplify thematic richness and contemporary literary problems, these novels are good narratives but cannot be considered great novels (*20 años* 86). The pervasive use of soulless characters or characters that are truncated, incomplete, or heartless is disturbing and cannot be ignored.

Sacoto highlights a disturbing element of Ecuadorian narrative in the late twentieth century. He identifies the plurality of characters, the lack of development of main characters, and the multiplicity of voices as unsuccessful narrative techniques. His analysis suggests that the plurality of weaker characters leaves readers confused and dissatisfied. I believe characterization deserves to be analyzed in the context of the contemporary Ecuadorian novel and understood before moving forward into a discussion of fantasy and realism.

One novel that exemplifies the waves of perspectives and voices that dissolve instead of evolve is Miguel Donoso Pareja's *Nunca más el mar*. In its introduction, Fernando Balseca Franco reminds readers of the five constants in the Latin American new narrative that have a tendency to: a) abandon linear structure, order, and logic and replace them with the spiritual evolution of the protagonist or with experimental structures that reflect the multiplicity of that which is real; b) subvert the linear chronological concept of time; c) abandon realistic scenarios, replacing them with imaginary spaces; d) replace the omniscient narrator with multiple or ambiguous narrators; and e) increase the use of symbolic elements (Donoso Pareja 13, my translation and adaptation).

As a case in point, Donoso's *Nunca más el mar* features many narrators, and in most cases the reader does not know who is narrating, to whom the narrator is speaking, or if the clues that readers use to decipher the narrator really establish the identity of the narrative speaker and the desired narratee. In most cases, the narrator's social register and lexicon triggers a connection to the *who* and the *why*, but this guessing game makes *language* the topic of many of the book's chapters, overshadowing the notions of nostalgia, exile and return, friendship and desire, and omission and oblivion that run throughout the book. An example of when language takes precedence over character development is shown in Chapter 5 of his book, when a lifetime friend of the nameless main character, X, tells the narratee (while they drink a few beers) how he knew X. The language in this chapter is rough and vulgar and so repetitive that at times the importance of content is displaced by the mode of expression.

Me cuesta trabajo hablar de él, por la rechuca, porque era pana, buen muchacho, y pensaba por nota, adú, palabra, sin güevadas, tenía un chuchal de historias, sabía cosas y nos decía que éramos unos cojudos, que nos las pisoteábamos, que nos dejábamos joder, que la cosa era así o asao, en fin, mi pana, no tenía pelos en la lengua y era garganta el man, aunque a veces tenía una juma muy chucha e'su madre, de la gran puta, adú, y se trenzaba a golpes con cualquiera, pero después lo mataba el chucaqui moral, desaparecía un tiempo, hasta dejarse ver por la esquina, larguirucho, caminando bien rectito, qué hay cara e'vergas, chucha pana, sácate otra biela... (*Nunca más el mar* 118)

The message does come through about X—he was a leader of sorts with a social and moral conscience. The desire to understand the motives of X (a character who is better characterized by absence than presence) and other characters drives the novel, but we do not seem to be much closer to understanding X or the other characters, even though readers are given a variety of perspectives and clues. The multiplicity of structures and the illogicality of time and of voices leaves the reader, like the characters, wondering what is real or even logical.

In Juan Valdano's *Mientras llega el día* (1990) readers hope—as I did—that somehow the librarian would be a strong main character, but he is more an observer-poet who is regarded as a hero-leader and as a threat by factions in society. The love affair does not have the emotional energy that would be characteristic of a main character. In part, the librarian has a lesser role of making the insurgence in Quito a community revolution. Nevertheless, the community is too faceless to serve as a main character alone, leaving the readers of Valdano's highly enjoyable book wanting a stronger protagonist. The descriptions of the hated Spaniards are frankly more interesting, in part because of their perversions, than the characters most readers would enjoy admiring if strong characterizations were present. Perhaps this is why, in the film script of the insurrection of 1809 and slaughter of 1810, written by Camilo Luzuriaga and Mauricio Samaniego, the director allows the love story to play a much larger role.

The lack of a strong main character in the novels after 1970 may be due to a contemporary cultural movement to avoid taking individual responsibility for actions; the time for heroes has passed, and even fictional criminals, like the thieves in *Suena de lobos*, avoid taking such responsibility.

The notion of taking social responsibility is one that haunts the Ecuadorian contemporary novel, from children's stories (Iturralde's *Verde fue mi selva*) to the historical novel about the rise and fall of the severe-tempered García Moreno, one of the most important Ecuadorian politicians of the nineteenth century (Yáñez Cossío's *Sé que vienen a matarme*), or Eliécer's novel about Archbishop Federico González Suárez and the relationship between the church and powerful rulers in the Ecuadorian government in *Que te perdone el viento*. All these writers express a concern for Ecuadorian citizens' tolerance of abuse and misery as well as an awareness of a placid acceptance of an uneducated populace.

Writers like Huilo Ruales and Oswaldo Encalada give us stories that are a call to arms to combat the lack of education that permeates every corner of the country, which

most critically affects the children who suffer atrocities due to the lack of guidance and apparent negligence of the adults around them. The awareness of this lack of education and the predominance of *abulia* (a lack of will to progress) is also a common theme in many of the novels and short stories of the past thirty years.

Lack of education and *abulia* are also characteristic of the emerging narratives that focus on women. In representative texts over the last thirty years, women are portrayed as having miserable, truncated lives, which are only completed through fantasy (Jorge Dávila's *El dominio escondido*), as wearing their suffering as a badge of valor, leading to militancy (Chiriboga's *Jonatás y Manuela*), or as sharing an intimate relationship with suffering and its influence over self-awareness (Aminta Buenaño's *Mujeres Divinas*). There has been an evolution in how women are written in Ecuadorian literature. The most recent publications demonstrate real growth in self-awareness and an emergent feeling of fulfillment and joy. One example is the short novel for children *La señora Antuquita* (2005) by Soledad Córdova. La señora Antuquita is a completely "whole" person who finds satisfaction in her life and can still, at an advanced age, provide assistance to her extended family.

Sara Vanégas Coveña points out, in *Diccionario de autores ecuatorianos contemporáneos* (2005), several additional trends that are worthy of note. She suggests that after 1970, Ecuadorian writers no longer feel bound to the important writers of the past and their social realism. They are much more interested in the Latin American authors of the boom and post boom, or in the writing that is being published outside Latin America (*Dicc. de autores* 19). In terms of narrative trends, Vanégas argues that the narrative voices after 1970 lean away from realism toward questioning and diagnosis of the ills of Ecuadorian society (*Dicc. de autores* 21; *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda*, *Sueño de lobos*, etc.). Works like Huilo Ruales' *Y todo este rollo también me jode* and Oswaldo Encalada's *El día de las puertas cerradas* still retain the pervasive, revolting descriptions common to social realism; however, most of these works are not so much a call to arms (like those of Joaquín Gallegos Lara in the 1930s), but an exposition of the specific "non-romanticized" conditions of living in a particular historical and social moment.

The 1970s and 1980s also produced ideological works as well as challenging texts that provided a completely ambiguous discussion of Ecuadorian reality (e.g., *Nunca más el mar* by Donoso). The narrative space moved from the countryside to find itself completely at home in the urban spaces of Ecuador, where drugs, sex, alcoholism, prostitution, and a marginalized society of underdogs and criminals seemed to captivate writers' interest (Vanégas *Dicc.* 21; i.e., Ubidia's *Sueño de lobos*, Ponce Maldonado's *También tus arcillas*). Writers explored new avenues of describing sexuality and gender since the social sciences had made such reconsiderations possible (Ortega, *Antología esencial* 56)

If we look at the texts that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and compare them to the texts published since 1995, it is clear that Ecuadorian writers have made an attempt at simplifying language to address a broader reading public. Twenty-first-century narrative publications like Iturralde's children's book *Verde fue mi selva*, Buenaño's *Mujeres Divinas*, Valdano's *El fuego y la sombra*, and Yáñez Cossío's *Sé que vienen a matarme*, for example, are much more accessible in terms of language and narrative technique than both many of the narratives of the 1970s that explored and tested new literary techniques presented by boom and post-boom writers and the complicated Ecuadorian jargon of the

underworld that we find in books like Donoso's *Nunca más el mar* or Ubidia's *Sueño de lobos*. The more contemporary publications rely less on the earlier distortion of time and space, frequent changes in narrative perspective, and so on. Still, flashback and digression are very much a part of recent narratives.

There has also been a greater exploration of genres after 1975, which certainly was not part of earlier twentieth-century publications, specifically in the area of science fiction, detective fiction, and fantasy, by Páez, Naranjo, Vásquez, Valdano, and Dávila, for example. Santiago Páez's science fiction short stories appeared in 1994. These short stories have an ideological bent that focuses the reader's eye on communication as the key to human survival. Juan Valdano's *Anillos de serpiente* can be categorized loosely as detective fiction, as can Javier Vásquez's *El retorno de las moscas*. *Retorno* is an imitation of John le Carré's detective fiction and does not have an Ecuadorian detective protagonist. *Anillos de serpiente* is an exposé of the *dejadez*, or negligence, of Ecuadorian detectives and police as well as the corruption of power. Neither example of detective fiction highlights good police investigation but instead focuses much more on the lack of investigation or trust in the Ecuadorian and international context (*Retorno*). Jorge Dávila's *Cuentos breves y fantásticos* and *Acerca de los ángeles*, on the other hand, center on fantasy and beasts that live "en la imaginación, en el miedo, mas no en la realidad" (Dávila, *Historias* 97) or on human angels, whom we do not recognize, but who are clearly among us. Ubidia's *DivertInventos* is perhaps one of the most entertaining collections of innovative fantasies published in the latter part of the twentieth century by an Ecuadorian author. Ubidia explores the tenuous but rich border between fantasy and reality and between utopia and a world closer to home. He teases us into questioning the moral and ethical values and principles we recognize as modern readers and thinkers.

There are twenty-first-century questions about the fit of the more recent explorations of genre in the Ecuadorian setting. Some have argued that Ecuador does not have a "new historical novel," for instance. However, historical novels published at the end of the twentieth century and during the first few years of the twenty-first century in Ecuador assess and expose both the unusual and complex character of Ecuadorian citizens of renown (e.g., Yáñez's *Sé que vienen a matarme* [2001], *Polvo y ceniza* [1986], Cárdenas' *Que te perdone el viento* [1993], Juan Valdano's *Mientras llega el día* [1990]) and of the common person who finds himself or herself in an inhospitable environment due to the corruption of power and society (e.g., Chiriboga's *Jonatás y Manuela* [1994], Dávila's *El dominio escondido* [1992]). The more recent historical novels like Yáñez's *Sé que vienen a matarme* and Valdano's *El fuego y la sombra* (2001) delve into the personal and historical minutia of a respected Ecuadorian citizen's life to expose the important social and economic conflicts associated with greatness, as well as the not-so-ambiguous negativity associated with people who choose greatness over humanity and social interaction. These historical novels focus on the life of the individual and how this person's actions affect the lives of many. Set in the past, these novels are more an examination of Ecuadorian consciousness than a debunking of important statesmen, whose personal lives are exploited for popular consumption.

Where we can observe some of the shifts in attitudes is in how Ecuadorian writers handle the perplexing issues of their day, shown by an analysis of how they approach these issues through realism and fantasy. The manner in which each writer employs fantasy or realism provides a window to the world that they interpret for us as readers and helps us to

understand how Ecuadorians—albeit in fiction—perceived and dealt with the historical realities that surrounded them. This is a window to thirty years of history that left Ecuadorians facing diverse crises, including a stagnant social structure, political uncertainty (fifteen presidents and three juntas), economic upheaval (devaluation of the sucre and dollarization), a boom and bust cycle shaped by oil exportation and exploitation, a lack of serious educational reforms, followed by the closing of universities and re-examining of education for the twenty-first century, increased immigration and emigration, increased population and urbanization, etc.

Contemporary historical events and the writer's lens

A good part of Ecuador's contemporary history and literature have been shaped by three major booms related to the exportation of cacao, bananas, and, most importantly for the early twenty-first century, oil. The effects in literature of the exportation boom and bust are portrayed clearly in Valdano's *Anillos de serpiente* (1998) in terms of the exportation of tagua. Earnings boomed, but since the economy was not diversified, the fictional town of Todosantos suffered a bust in its economic development, which led to the *dejadez* (negligence) of its people. The discovery of oil in Ecuador as a new source of income allowed for increased public spending by the government, lower taxes, and subsidization. In Todosantos, earnings were not invested properly, nor were these earnings sufficient to sustain or improve the economic and social structures of society. Ecuadorian writers explore the perceived realities of poor economic management and political instability that may have hampered significant, sustainable development in urban and rural areas as they expose the undeniably tragic effects of continued poverty and lack of education in the coastal areas, isolated communities of the jungle, and remote towns of the Andes.

Two contemporary writers who excel at exposing the tragic effects of this *dejadez* and lack of education are Oswaldo Encalada Vásquez in the haunting short story collection *El día de las puertas cerradas* (1988) and Modesto Ponce Maldonado in his collection of short stories *También tus arcillas* (1996). It will be interesting for future literary critics to analyze how twenty-first-century writers (post 2006) will broach the rise in poverty after 2001 or the effects of dollarization and the depreciation of currency, which prompted the immense flight of many Ecuadorians to the U.S., Spain, and Italy in search of employment. Since the effect of dollarization and government spending cuts due to looming foreign debt and a lack of oil revenue initially led to a decline in spending on the neediest of Ecuadorian citizens, cultural and literary history has yet to be written.

It is impossible to determine where narratives may head in terms of the political arena since, even at the time of the most recent presidential election in 2006, there was a general feeling amongst Ecuadorian contemporaries that many sought a quick fix for social and economic inequities despite dreading the realities of political ineffectiveness at all levels. The lack of trust in the political process then—no matter who was going to be in office—highlights an overwhelming sense of distrust for anyone in power. The resulting connection that we saw in literary trends was main characters who did not exemplify leadership. Whether a more stable government after 2006 will lead to the emergence of stronger narrative protagonists or whether it will have an effect on contemporary writers' use of fantasy and realism is something critics will want to assess.

There is no doubt, however, that Ecuadorian writers are focusing on contemporary issues. For example, playwright Viviana Cordero exposes the effects of emigration from the female perspective in her plays *Mano a mano/Tres vidas* (2001). Peko Andino also handles this topic in his dramatic monologue *Medea llama por cobrar*, and we should expect to see more writers focusing on the lives of individuals here in Ecuador and abroad as typically inflexible social and even educational structures are challenged by absent parents and the economic influx of *remesas* (money from overseas). The challenge continues to be one of education, as *remesas* are often invested inappropriately and squandered on items that families can neither afford to maintain (cars and homes that sit unused) or on concerts or other diversions lacking immediate or long-term social impact. The brief hyperinflation after dollarization, underemployment, and lack of significant economic support for the indigent and very poor (nearly 50% of the population in the early part of the twenty-first century) as well as continued reduced spending on social services (especially health and education) should continue to resonate in publications that touch on topics of child labor, the spread of infectious diseases among the poor, the effects of migration and emigration on families, and changing responsibilities of parents, grandparents, and so on. We should also expect to see continued focus on sustainability and the environment, as many regions of Ecuador have suffered due to oil excavation and poor land use.

As an example of this topic, consider Edna Iturralde, who focused her narrative for children on communication between communities (indigenous as well as mainstream Ecuadorian and international) and education as an effective means to confront exploitation and environmental contamination. She puts the responsibility of caring for the environment on all, not the few, and recommends education as being the answer to helping all of these communities reach agreement on what can be done to preserve the natural environment as well as being the key to improving the lives of those living in affected areas (Iturralde's *Verde fue mi selva*, 1998). The theatrical comedy *Las marujas...muy viejas para verdes* (2009) also focuses on the nostalgia for what has been lost already and predicts impending doom for Ecuador's natural resources if sustainability cannot be reached.

In 2006, Ecuador found itself facing another "new" government under President Rafael Correa, who had carried the support of ethnic indigenous populations and many intellectuals. Expectations of quick change were high, and only time will tell how these power struggles—the gains and losses—will be interpreted by writers in the upcoming years. Correa's government has already provided subjecthood to nature, becoming the first constitution to do so, although we have yet to learn whether the argument for restoration and sustainability will withstand economic and political pressures.

The discussion concerning how topical issues are treated in contemporary literature is of importance because the writer's lens provides a panorama that shows how these issues are perceived and handled by subjects in fiction. While such fictional representations of social and economic issues do not exactly depict the societies that produce them, these representations give us clues about existing attitudes toward dealing with the conflicts and concerns of the day. One particularly perplexing concern for contemporary writers has to do with distribution practices of literature that undergird the realities of Ecuadorian cultural production in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Factors like readership, critical scholarship, and distribution of literary and cultural texts cannot be ignored when discussing cultural production in contemporary Ecuador.

One of the fundamental challenges affecting contemporary Ecuadorian writers is the lack of readership both in and outside of Ecuador. Sara Vanégas Coveña suggests in *Diccionario de autores ecuatorianos contemporáneos* that since 1970, books published in Ecuador have had greater distribution due to the printing of low-cost editions and the creation of public libraries. However, the outlets for publication still continue to be universities, the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, and the Center for Investigation and Culture section of the Central Bank of Ecuador (*Diccionario* 35). The most active private national publishing houses in the beginning of the twenty-first century were El Conejo, Abya-Yala, Corporación Editorial Nacional, Libresa, Libri Mundi, and Eskeletra (*Dicc. de autores* 35). Ecuadorian authors' texts have been published by international publishing companies, including "Planeta, Grijalbo, Salvat, Seix Barral, La Oveja Negra, Círculo de Lectores," etc. (*Dicc. de autores* 35)

The larger problem for writers, Vanégas insists, is not that it is difficult to publish, but that it *is* difficult to get adequate distribution of any particular written work since most magazines and newspaper supplements with dedicated sections to literature have been short-lived (*Dicc. de autores* 35-36). She argues there is a general lack of knowledge about Ecuadorian writers even from region to region despite the fact that their writings might be well known in one province or another. In addition, some writers who have been successful internationally are not recognized within Ecuadorian writers' circles as being significant. One of these writers who have had international acclaim is Edna Iturralde, who has written many books for children but was not invited to the 2005 Encuentro de Escritores Ecuatorianos, organized by the University of Cuenca, nor was she included in the Juvenile Fiction section of Sara Vanégas Coveña's *Diccionario de autores ecuatorianos contemporáneos*.

One of the most effective advancements for diffusion of literary works is the availability of publication on the Internet. The film industry, to a lesser extent, has also impacted distribution. Several films have been made based on novels published since 1970 (*Siete lunas y siete serpientes* by Demetrio Aguilera M., *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda* by Jorge Adoum, *Polvo y ceniza* by Eliécer Cárdenas and *Mientras llega el día* by Juan Valdano, for example). Film adaptations have brought greater visibility to certain writers, but the critical community cannot rely solely on films to give their works greater distribution, and the making of a film does not necessarily secure better distribution for the published book.

Several Ecuadorian universities maintain up-to-date websites on Ecuadorian writers. The Central Bank has archives of literary publications that can be searched online, and the Casa de la Cultura now has a searchable website that allows scholars access to a historical archive of magazine articles and newspapers with which Ecuadorian literary historiography can be reconstructed and enjoyed. Nevertheless, the majority of published works (magazines, newspapers, or books) are hard to find in bookstores or even on library shelves since the publishing houses only printed between 500 and 2,000 copies of any particular book. A case in point is the recent 2006 publication of the first and second editions of Aminta Buenaño's *Mujeres Divinas*. Although the book was a bestseller, the first edition had a run of only 1,500 copies, as did the second edition published only four months later in October 2006.

The long-term problem for literary scholars and critics interested in Ecuadorian cultural production is that some books published as few as ten to fifteen years ago are no

longer in circulation, and even university libraries do not have copies. Such was the case for Santiago Páez's *Profundo en la galaxia*. In 2006, for instance, *Profundo* could not be found on the shelves of the University of Cuenca. Nevertheless, *Profundo* is one of the few examples of science fiction in Ecuador and is a book that might have enjoyed broad-based readership outside Ecuador if it had been available. Many such books are on shelves in private collections but are inaccessible to scholars and readers outside Ecuador. It seems that, even at Ecuadorian universities and high schools, reading "literature" is completely out of fashion now that students and faculty recognize the power—and economy—of having access to information online. To my knowledge, however, most Ecuadorian writers have not taken the step of uploading their written texts online, in part because there is no economic benefit to doing so. Moving some of these works to the digital environment, where scholars and readers around the world can have access, would be an effective way to draw greater attention to Ecuadorian writers as well as to improve access to literary works that are currently hard to find for literary analysis or out of print.

Clearly, the discussion of trends in Ecuadorian literature and the use of fantasy and realism cannot be entirely divorced from the historical conditions that influenced writers. The significance of analyzing how these writers' musings preserve their interpretation of cultural and historical events is clear: an author's use of fantasy and realism to distort, highlight, and readjust a reader's perception of fictional contexts creates a lens through which readers can judge this interpretation, accept it, laugh at it, debunk it, or simply disregard it as meaningless. Any of these actions by the reader require reflection and a decision. That is the historical function of the act of writing and why writers use fantasy or realism at a particular point in history makes that reflection and decision interesting and telling.

Chapter Two—Exploring Fantasy and Realism in Ecuadorian literature: Designing a Model for Different Genres

The historical function of literature has been primarily to entertain and teach. At the turn of the last century, Ecuadorian literary production also worked to awaken the reader to the sordid realities and mystifying inconsistencies of Ecuadorian life. For fifty years during the twentieth century, social realism was the main vehicle used by Ecuadorian writers for awakening the reader to the ugliness of everyday life and alerting them to the perplexing anomalies of society (Pablo Palacio, Joaquín Gallegos Lara, and others). In some cases, social realism helped writers interpret the world around them in such a way that allowed them to denounce regimes that they saw to be promoting indentured service and corruption. In other cases, interpreting works through the prism of social realism was used to expose a specific historical moment in all its ugly and perplexing inadequacies, with the writer's purpose being to discredit the very reality of such a moment by eliciting the reader's disgust. Using social realism as the viewfinder had the potential for didactic purpose: by relying on disturbing images, writers could keep the economically and socially more fortunate reader fascinated with the uncanny and disturbing while bringing to their attention the most sordid conditions.

Carlos Béjar Portilla was one of the first twentieth-century Ecuadorian writers to tap into fantasy as a means to view these conditions from a different perspective, pioneering the genre of fantasy literature in Ecuador with his focus on science fiction. He wrote a series of fantasy short stories published in several collections (*Simón el mago* and *Osa Mayor* in 1970, *Samballah* in 1971, and *Puerto de Luna* in 1986). Told in first-person narrative perspective, his short stories provide an “insider's view” into the fantasy worlds that these narrative voices explain. In the story “A. C. Dobleu,” for example, the narrative voice provides a description of the “world” he sees:

Más lejos, un gigantesco horizonte poblado de bandas de masa lumínica corporeizada que se desplaza a velocidades increíbles. Asidos sobre el lomo, estas curiosas criaturas yendo y viniendo en su inmemorial peregrinar, sin interrupción alguna. Los reflejos de las ondas de las cámaras de desintegración que anuncian la llegada de nuevos viajeros. Huéspedes procedentes de todos los universos posibles. Diviso también una media docena de anticuadas naves escorando las proas sobre el planchón de los dromos en desuso. (“A. C. Dobleu.” *Cuentos fantásticos* 11)

Narrative voices in this genre characteristically offer firsthand narrations of fantastic worlds whose odd, mystifying properties appear realistic and normal only to the narrator. One unforgettable fantastic story that illustrates the dichotomy between what the narrator perceives as the commonplace nature of their fictional world and what the reader recognizes to be the world of fantasy is Béjar Portilla's *Diplocus* (1971), a story set in the 1950s about a boy's experience with the alien that their father had invited to dinner that afternoon. The perspective of the son, who narrates the story, is full of wonder and amazement at his father's decision to entertain an alien guest as well as disappointment in his younger brother Luigi's murderous mischief. The narrative voice balances details of everyday life in the 1950s. Setting a fancy dinner table and engaging in family gossip is

juxtaposed with the circus atmosphere when neighbors come to meet and gawk at an enormous insect who is eating at the dinner table at the invitation of the father.

¡Dale! A que no adivinas de las ocho patas utilizaba únicamente cuatro para mover los tenedores, y como tenía además una especie de pico de cacatúa, negro, filudo, qué le íbamos a hacer, si de cualquier forma nos gustaba y además era el invitado de papá... (*Cuentos* 72)

The humorous description of the outrageous guest relies on the youth's ironic announcement that the insect had only needed four legs to use a fork to eat, for example, and the narrative voice's ironic comment that the family delights in having such a creature in the household. When he explains that the neighbors took pleasure in watching the murdered victim agonize for days on end ("era cuestión de días") and suggests erecting a statue or even a temple in its honor, there is no real compassion for the tortured creature in his words. The morbid pleasure of watching something suffer for days is juxtaposed with the narrator's ironic expression of grief for the loss of another being worthy of respect as a result of Luigi's misjudgment.

En ese momento todo el barrio estaba agradecido de que papá los haya llamado a conocerlo. Por eso se prendaron, pero también por eso sus dolores cuando murió fueron tan intensos, que en muchos ya nacía el ánimo para erigir una estatua y hasta un templo, era cuestión de días, una lástima, tan joven, y nada hubiera ocurrido si a Luigi no le da por hacer lo que hizo. (*Cuentos* 74)

The joke is on the readers, of course, since we are also taken in by the hilarious fantasy of perceiving a tragedy in an encounter with an enormous alien insect, which is killed with a can of Flit due to a natural human aversion to insects at the dining room table. The narrator provides sufficient distance for readers to laugh when we learn that the younger brother, Luigi, is barred from attending the invited guest's funeral since he had been the one to purchase the can of pesticide and had poisoned the insect-like alien to the horrific delight of others. What is important here is the use of fantasy to expose two distinct kinds of human nature: there are those who are curious about the unknown and respect those who are different, and then there are those who attack without investigation and find joy in others' suffering.

Carlos Béjar Portilla is an expert at creating fantasy from absurd everyday reality. His use of the fantastic allows him to comment on human behavior. In *Icaro* (1971), a second example, the narrator is an archetypical Sisyphus who climbs up floor after floor to the 12,001st story of a building in search of a man named Gonzales, only to reveal that he has already made this ridiculous climb a thousand times over. The exaggerated height of the building is only topped by the notion of the futility of climbing the stairs for an *urgent* matter and enhanced by having made the climb a thousand times before (exactly 12,001,000 stairs). The woman who receives him at the pinnacle of his climb reports, "No está el señor. Salió y no dijo adonde iba." The main character begins to become ridiculous in the eyes of the reader when he answers, "Señora, por favor, cuando regrese dígame que necesito hablar de urgencia con él. Como a usted personalmente le consta, ésta es la

milésima vez que vengo” (*Cuentos* 16). These characters are nonsensical puppets in Béjar Portilla’s hands, and readers laugh when they recognize the idiocy of continuing to do things the same way, with the same conviction, even when it is futile and ridiculous. Again, the comment is on human behavior.

Béjar Portilla also illustrates man’s ability to fantasize at the expense of reality, no matter what year or which planet he finds himself on. For example, the narrator’s pursuit of love in *Puerto de Luna* (1997) allows him, a wandering ghost ship captain, to fantasize about the bewitching love affair that he longs for with his beloved Dolly. While readers do not recognize this fantastic reality as their own, the captain continues to yearn for a reality that is no longer his. His reality is totally unappealing to the reader: “Puerto de Luna no será más esto sino una simple choza empinada sobre el agua de arrozales. Tú, una humilde campesina desdentada llena de hijos, mi nave una endeble canoílla amarrada al palafito, que solo así se terminará el embrujo” (Béjar Portilla, *Cuentos* 110).

Béjar Portilla initiated the fantastic short story into Ecuadorian writing, in the style of the three discussed above, influencing many of the writers who used fantasy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. After 1978, Ecuadorian writers like Ubidia, Pazos, Dávila, and Páez began to experiment with fantasy to communicate parallel realities coexisting with the stark world presented by social realism. Béjar Portilla exemplified how these works of fantasy could provide social commentary on natural and unnatural human behavior. Abdón Ubidia points out how fantasy allows writers to portray dreams, desires, fears, and uncertainties in a more exacting way:

Si trasladamos estas ocurrencias a un territorio lejano y, como todo lo lejano: imaginario; si suprimimos nuestros referentes inmediatos –paisajes, etcetera–, es posible que, a cambio, obtengamos un dibujo menos borroso de nuestros sueños, deseos, miedos o incertidumbres. (Ubidia, *DivertInventos* 7)

The distancing effect of fantasy, he argues, will make that which is hard to see more accessible, because the individual will no longer be caught up in the immediacy of how they feel, allowing them to observe realities and emotions from a comfortable, fictional distance. This distortion of perspective creates a reason to reconsider what is or what could be.

Fantasy is a “brutal intrusion of mystery in the framework of real life” that alerts readers to the distorted perception of reality that would otherwise be incomplete without mystery and the imaginary (Todorov, *The Fantastic* 26). What was clear to some Ecuadorian writers, like Béjar Portilla, Ubidia, Dávila, and Páez, for example, was that certain elements of the everyday world might not be recognized as easily without the unusual inclusion of mystery in the fictional portrait of everyday human life and behavior.

In a similar vein, Maggie Burns explains how fantasy can enrich our understanding of reality in her brief article on realism and fantasy in the works of Tolkien. She argues that J.R.R. Tolkien:

described man as a Sub-Creator. As part of this he believed that fantasy not only was derived from reality, but also could enrich our view of it: “Creative fantasy . . . may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers, or flames, and you will be

warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you.” Fantasy could alert the reader to the spiritual reality which lies concealed behind the everyday world, and may be realised at any moment. Tolkien called this moment eucatastrophe a fleeting glimpse of joy, joy beyond the walls of the world. (Burns, “Realism or fantasy?”)

The imaginary or fantastic is then capable of providing a much more complex, or even more complete, portrait of human dreams, desires, fears, or uncertainties about the real world, causing readers to pause and reconsider the human behaviors they observe in these stories. For this reason, writers have resorted to using fantasy in literature throughout history and across cultures. The increased appearance of fantasy and works that rely primarily on fantasy in Ecuadorian literature marks a noticeable shift in literary tradition and, more importantly, provides different perspectives on issues of concern within the Ecuadorian cultural climate and society. Fantasy does not stand alone, however, and is intimately connected to realism.

George P. Landow explains the parasitic relationship between the two in an online article concerning fantasy and realism in Victorian art:

Fantasy is parasitic on realism; or, to state this point less pejoratively, one cannot have fantasy without realism. Realism precedes fantasy and provides its point of departure. As William Whewell, the Victorian philosopher, pointed out, “Reality requires things,” and to this we may add that realism requires the description of things. Realism depends upon a peculiar view of the world that implies only things exist. Realism, in other words, is a style that embodies philosophic materialism, the belief that only physical materiality exists and that spiritual or philosophical ideas, such as soul, self, and life, all reduce, inevitably, to matter. (Landow, “Fantasy and Realism in Victorian Art”)

Writers who use realism, and social realism in particular, perpetuate the notion that human beings are not motivated primarily by ideals or ethics but instead by the economic and social environments in which they live and work. Ecuadorian poet Julio Pazos pinpoints the role of fantasy and realism (in fiction, if we extrapolate) that Landow discusses:

Un libro no me sirve de cortina porque es garra,
Porque sirve para raer la roca, ella sí interpuesta
entre la gente. (Pazos in Santiago Páez, *Profundo* 55)

Julio Pazos is clear about his conviction concerning the power of books, whether they rely on realism or on fantasy. Books are claws (*garras*) that serve to abrade the rock of historical reality and must be placed among the people for their learning. Literature is not a pretext (*cortina*), but an end—writing is an instrument that effects change by abrading the surface of reality and our perception of it. It is not shocking, then, that Santiago Páez uses Julio Pazos’ poetry as the one means to save humanity in the science fiction short

story “Amarü, poeta de Shyric” (*Profundo en la galaxia*).

Realism and fantasy convey certain ideas about social and physical conditions that are worthy of addressing. For Jorge Dávila Vázquez, fantasy creates a parallel world that helps to complete the truncated experience of Ecuadorian women, which we see primarily in his book of short stories *El dominio escondido*. In the case of Santiago Páez, moving the scenario and his characters to a “utopian” world provides a useful method of focusing on the disturbing notions of community mind control and the ability of technology to interrupt human communication and sensitivity, issues that we face in a late twentieth and early twenty-first-century society (*Profundo en la galaxia*).

For Ubidia, in *Sueño de lobos*, fantasy provides a means of escape for his misfit characters. *Sueño de lobos* uses psychological realism to go beyond dispassionate descriptions of the disturbing realities of contemporary life for the poor and middle class in order to highlight the internal struggles, motives, and actions that result from how these characters understand or misunderstand their external circumstances. While the misfits attempt to cooperate, the conditions in which they live make them selfish, and they each struggle with an internal conflict. In an attempt to *save* themselves, the misfits become ever more aggressive and self-serving. Ubidia pries open the Pandora’s Box of human nature. The contribution of fantasy (dreaming about what could be and is not) and the internalization of the unlikely success of their attempted robbery is to more clearly contrast the rather boring surface world of these individuals with the tremendously conflictual underworld of internal and external insecurities in which they operate.

The result of including fantastic elements in the few cases briefly explored above is that instead of relying solely on social realism to communicate things in society that seem awry, these writers balance realism with fantasy to extract a deeper, more spiritual understanding of observable conditions and expose how characters interpret or misinterpret these realities. Neither the technique of realism nor fantasy is in itself necessarily more effective, but it is accurate to say that works relying heavily on fantasy confront expectations about reality and challenge the “traditional” perception of the way things ought to be in a significant and profound manner. In this way, realism and fantasy are both distortions of reality; one attends more to physical materiality and the other to spiritual perception.

Does the increase in the use of fantasy in Ecuadorian literature highlight a move to expose concerns of a spiritual nature instead of a physical one? Perhaps. The fact that, before 1970, twentieth-century Ecuadorian writers relied more heavily on realism to convey their social perception was probably influenced by a commitment to Latin American ideologies that focused the writer’s pen on specific representations of society’s “real” conundrums. Realism was used to portray what these writers “saw.” The purpose was to reveal a “truth”—often a distorted, ugly truth—to elicit a strong negative reaction from the reader. The characters in these works were often humble, working-class people or were individuals who had been completely oppressed, marginalized from, or abused by society. The settings of early twentieth-century Ecuadorian writings were primarily rural; however, after 1975, they became more urbanized, exposing the seedy lives of urban derelicts as well as the suffering and misfortune of hard-working, oppressed individuals.

Aesthetically, the technique of realism has always been used for writing dispassionate portrayals of the despicable and miserable realities of the economically and socially disadvantaged; the darker and crueller the realism, the more frightening and gloomy

the “read.” In most cases, there was the expected encouragement of social and political awareness, although a recipe for social action was not necessarily included.

At the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, the question about individuals and society had changed for many readers and writers. Was materialism all there was to life? Could realism really portray the breadth of human experience? Could it portray the depth and breadth of the Ecuadorian experience? Adbón Ubidia, author of *DivertInventos*, a collection of short stories that relies on fantasy, argues in his book of essays (*Referentes*) that there has been a trend to question what realism can portray: “Hay filósofos que sostienen que hemos abandonado la realidad, que el sentido no existe, que el mundo entero se ha vuelto una pura representación” (Referentes 9).

In the case of realism and superrealism, the onlooker and the reader get too close, and the reader becomes disgusted by the narrative’s callousness and the narrator’s position of superiority. Conversely, fantasy affords a *built-in* distance between the onlooker and the reader. While the narrator can still be cold or dispassionate, the reader’s reaction is necessarily different. By using social realism, the writer builds in an intended reaction of disgust and rejection. By using fantasy, the writer builds in a reaction closer to awe even though the narrative may use some disgusting imagery to provoke curiosity and a need for respecting the *other*. Awe brings the reader closer to the spiritual nature of what is perceived through the distortion of fantasy. Realism promotes a more experiential response in readers. Disgust brings the reader closer to the experiential sense of what readers perceive. Both techniques can elicit powerful responses: the first is more intellectual while the second is more physical. Fantasy highlights elements of what can or may exist beyond the real and urges us to be welcoming of the unknown. Social realism cannot do that.

As a case in point, we can take a look at one work of fantasy that moves readers to feel a more spiritual or even moral experience. With a good sense of humor, Ubidia’s short story in *DivertInventos* works marvelously toward exposing the frightening dangers of modern technology. “Del seguro contra robos de autos” is a good example. The antitheft system that protects the car at the expense of human life reveals the irony of “superb” functional technology and its tragic disregard for human life. Representation, whether gloomy social realism or shocking fantasy, can communicate effectively—and often uniquely—what writers want to express about the societies that surround them. Ubidia’s short stories point out that fantasy relies on the reader’s understanding that the description of physical reality and the ideologies that permit the continuing social inequities of the world, for example, is not all that there is. There are certain vantage points that can extract the essence of social and historical issues, which can be seen best through their distortion in fantasy. Fantasy can also help to put the spirit and soul back into these realities that have been fictionalized in such dark and frightening ways. Creating awareness of the soul or spirit and establishing a connection to it through an exposé of human behavior is perhaps the most important function of fantasy seen in publications from the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century in Ecuador.

Writers who use fantasy do not only create stories about fantastical worlds and creatures but also demonstrate that there are many things in our everyday world that seem

inexplicable. Some writers approach these uncomfortable anomalies through the magnifying glass of realism while others choose the prism of fantasy. As an example, Jorge Dávila highlights the importance of dispelling myths and lies in what people believe to be “real” in the voice of one of his characters in “Superchería”:

Además, ¿por qué seguir creyendo en esas supercherías estúpidas en las que solo creen los ignorantes? Sí, yo sé que aquí todo el mundo habla de eso, pero si no hay alguien que rompa con tradiciones tan idiotas, seguiremos sumidos en la ignorancia. (*Historias para volar* 71)

In this case, fantasy provides a different viewpoint with the potential to awaken readers to the need for change or simply provides them with a different way of looking at things that would otherwise seem common and usual. The verses of Julio Pazos remind us that the fantastic vision may make us weep, but we weep from a different vantage point and with a greater connection to the human spirit:

De alguna manera salen las lágrimas hasta el desolado confin
y van con iridiscentes contornos
a posarse
en el nuevo puesto de vigía.
(“Los sentidos” in Páez’s *Profundo* 81)

The vantage point of fantasy is useful and effective, according to Jorge Dávila, because “a veces es como si necesitáramos sentir el miedo; experimentarlo en la carrera demencial, en el corazón que amenaza salirse por la boca” (*Historias para volar* 88).

The Ecuadorian writers who moved away from the social realism of the 1930s and 1940s in order to incorporate fantasy may have done so because of the dissatisfaction with the limitations of realism felt across the Americas and Europe in particular, which provoked a concomitant boom in fantasy and magical realism. Equally likely, contemporary writers found that social realism no longer held the same potency for contemporary readers.

It is not surprising that the fantasy novel has had such a huge following in the youth literature category and has also blossomed well in adult fiction in recent years. Some successful writers whom we recognize as writers of fantasy are J.K. Rowling, with her *Harry Potter* series, Eoin Colfer and the *Artemis Fowl* series for young adults, Jim Butcher, with novels *Storm Front*, *Summer Knight*, *Fool Moon*, or *Grave Peril*, and the epic fantasy writers J.R.R. Tolkien and George R.R. Martin. Those who have become successful with science fiction and high tech science fiction include Michael Crichton, Frank Herbert, Orson Card, and Dean Koontz, for example; Jack Campbell has the hold on military and space adventure in the bestseller category. While this “boom” of fantasy literature continues to be strong in Europe and North America, fantasy has not had an explosion of the same fashion in Ecuador—or in Latin America, for that matter.

There are, of course, authors in Latin America who stand out for their use of magic or magical realism: Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Isabel Allende, whose *Eva Luna*, for example, employed magic realism and whose novels for young adults *La ciudad de las bestias* and *El reino del Dragón de Oro* relied significantly on fantasy. The

term magic or magical realism refers to the use of fantasy in serious fiction. Latin American writers have preferred to write serious fiction over what some might call “escapist” fiction that happens to overlap with the fantasy category. Magical realism expects the reader to believe the imaginary and fantastical as though it were “real” and even “acceptable.”

Animism, meanwhile, has a strong foothold in Ecuadorian literature relying on fantasy—even in literature for adults. The acceptance of a spirituality that goes beyond the observable is also part of the ancient cultures of Ecuador and has a dominant presence in Ecuadorian oral and written literature. Animism, in its broadest sense, is key to understanding the use of fantasy in contemporary Ecuadorian literature, and this topic will be covered in detail in subsequent chapters.

Science fiction, a genre that relies similarly on fantasy, has played a smaller role in Ecuadorian fiction than it has elsewhere despite Béjar Portilla having made significant inroads into the genre early in the 1970s. The thirty years between 1976 and 2006 have offered no more than three Ecuadorian writers who stood out in this category, two of whom focused less on technology or travel to new worlds than on understanding human nature. Science fiction and fantasy share an element of speculation and promote thinking about the “what if.” However, in the case of Ecuadorian literature, exploration of fantasy through science fiction seems to have a specific pedagogical intention and perhaps a hovering gloominess to it. The back cover of *Profundo en la galaxia*, for example, would have us think that humans are destined to perish for their lack of utility in a highly technologized world:

La Ciencia Ficción se ha enfrentado con los fríos ojos del futuro y, rica de esta terrible experiencia, ha condenado a muerte al mundo en que vivimos. La humanidad, la nuestra y la más cotidiana, no tiene derecho a la supervivencia, no puede permanecer porque el futuro utópico ha revelado su inutilidad, su muerte. (Páez, *Profundo* back cover)

Yet, there has been increasing interest in these genres that rely on fantasy. Andrea Bell and Yolanda Molina-Gavila published an anthology of science fiction works by authors from the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world (*Cosmos Latinos: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Latin America and Spain* 2003) but neither science fiction nor escapist fantasy have gained strong traction in Latin American literature despite there being increased production and growing interest elsewhere in these genres or in the success of these genres in other international online streaming video platforms (television, Netflix, Hulu, HBO, etc.).

Fantasy in adventure stories for the younger reading public has been gaining in popularity in Ecuador, as it is around the world, although fantasy has always featured prominently in literature everywhere for young readers. Leonor Bravo Velásquez’s *A medianoche durante el eclipse* and *La biblioteca secreta de la Escondida* both greatly involve books “coming alive” so that characters can interact with ghosts and other fantastic beings. The boundaries between fantasy and reality can become fragile for very young children, especially when the fantasy is quite frightening. For this reason, fantasy written for young children tends to be less gloomy, and the world inhabited by the characters is rather ordinary, except for the “inexplicable” elements (the appearance of ghosts that need

help, books and paintings that come to life, imaginary animals that talk, etc.) that the young protagonists—unlike most adults in the story— appreciate for their lack of conformity to the dreariness of everyday life. The imaginative creation of fantastic creatures for the sake of entertainment or illustration juxtaposes our world with their enticing lives in mysterious fantasy worlds parallel to ours, relieving the “real” and often boring lives of the protagonists.

Vladimiro Rivas argues that fantasy and the “fantastic” require the juxtaposition of mystery and real life, the real world and that which is unexplicable, that which is inadmissible and that which is inalterable in *Mundo Tatuado* (Rivas Iturralde, Prologue). Each opposite finds itself contained in its own contradiction, like vessels that communicate or like oil and water that momentarily mix. What is necessary for understanding fantasy’s profound investigation into human nature and the external conditions affecting motive and action is that readers be able to discriminate the property attribution of both real and fantastical entities. Fantasy must always be distinguishable from what readers perceive as admissible in reality. A distinct fantastic orientation in a novel or short story forces the reader to categorize both real and fantastical entities, and if the distinction between fantasy and reality is maintained, the fuzzy boundaries limiting the two parallel worlds can be explored.

When readers devote the utter imagination required by fantasy, they are able to envision both the limits and either the pleasant or alarming possibilities of imagination. Serving as an example of the alarming is Ubidia’s description of the fantastic antitheft device that locks car thieves inside the vehicles they try to steal and announces that escape is impossible before pulverizing its criminal victim into nothingness—leaving no “crime scene.” The prospect of untraceable vengeance against car thieves sounds too good to be true, and it is. The narrator lets the reader know that the homicidal antitheft device fails to recognize the owner of the car—as being different from a thief—in only one percent of cases. The thought of the number of times each of us enters our own car and the possibility of being in the one percent of drivers who might be mistaken for a car thief is ironic, humorous, and frightening. The fantasy of having the perfect system to fight car theft works off our desire for protection against theft as well as the recognition of car theft as a real social problem in countries like Ecuador where theft—especially of car radios and car computers—is common. The use of fantasy to reveal a social ill in this one-page short story pushes readers a step further to consider the utter disregard for human life when extraordinary and brutal technological advances become part of everyday reality, and the selfish desire to protect material goods overpowers our sense of justice and fairness.

The ever-moving boundary between fantasy and reality forces readers to actively reconstruct the fragile and mysterious distinction between these two competing fictional representations, which is why their study in the Ecuadorian literary field can be so enlightening. The discussion and interpretation of realism and fantasy points out new perspectives that challenge the idea of what is “real” or even admissible. The result is that as writers explore this fragile border, they allow readers to question the validity of what we consider “real,” “fantasy,” and what may be seriously “amiss” in each interpretation of human behavior in society.

The point of this chapter was to create a model for systematically reviewing the incidence of how and to what end Ecuadorian authors use fantasy and realism in the novel, short story, flash fiction, poetry, and theater. The following chapters are divided first by

genre in an effort to contextualize usage, followed by summary comments analyzing across genres in the concluding remarks. This analytical model may provide evidence as to whether the function of fantasy and realism is similar across genres.

In Ecuadorian street theater or pageantry, for example, fantasy plays a role that can be analyzed. Dramatic representation is deeply embedded in Ecuadorian culture and tradition. Fantasy is also linked to Ecuadorian folkloric and indigenous customs and belief systems and can be seen in everyday pageantry, where parades and celebrations include things like masked fantasy creatures on stilts, paper maché cows or deer pelts carried by disguised men who shoot off fireworks from underneath. Hundreds of boys dressed as the Spanish *mariscal* or young girls dressed in the traditional Spanish *traje de faralai* sit atop extravagantly decorated horses in the *Pase del niño*, and so on. Street theater and pageantry has a constant presence in the cities, towns, and villages of Ecuador. Entertainers of all ilks fill street corners with their displays of juggling, pantomime, circus talent, and so forth. At religious celebrations outside churches, short plays representing moral issues are performed often by actors dressed in allegorical costumes.

Street theater's prevalence is in part due to the lack of appropriate stages for formal theatrical representation. Lack of a formal space is not the only obstacle, however. Many significant obstacles pose serious challenges. For example, there are few lighting and sound designers in Ecuador, and the number of appropriate stages and state funding for theater are minimal. Often, spaces that might be appropriate for theatrical performances can be rented for numerous other cultural activities as well, creating a major issue for Ecuadorian dramaturges and actors. Playwrights continue to produce scripts, and actors still seek out an audience, but a supportive infrastructure is missing. Actors, scriptwriters, and other theater professionals have been pulled toward television and film in recent years, and there simply does not seem to be enough public or private financial support for staged theater to thrive.

Still, theater has its place in Ecuador, and over the last thirty years there have been some tremendous successes worthy of note. Luís Campos' beloved play *La Marujita se ha muerto con leucemia* is a case in point, being partly a comedy about the stereotyping of the diverse language, customs, and practices of the people who live in Quito, Cuenca, and Manabí. This comedic aspect plays to crowds that revel in the absurdity of the widely accepted stereotypes of cuencanos, quiteños, and manabitas. The title, of course, reminds audiences that while the individuals who represent these three cultures gab about trivialities, there are more important tragedies that go unnoticed. Marujita's death and her husband's attempts to garner sympathy and understanding from the three main characters are ignored. Although the play's broader sense of human tragedy is captured in the title (the death of a friend), the chatty, stereotypical characters remain caught up in the trivialities of life and are quite oblivious to the much more human suffering happening around them.

The comedy is hilarious but place-bound, and the play can be produced on a very small set, requiring only three actresses. Curiously, the same actresses who performed *Marujita se ha muerto con leucemia* so successfully throughout Ecuador in 2009 have continued the friendship of their onstage characters (Abrilia, Encarna, and Cleta) in their own production of a new comedy called *Marujas... ¡qué viejas para verdes!* among other new performances. The comedy produced by actresses Juana Guarderas, Martha Ormaza, and Elena Torres utilizes the double entendre of the word *verdes* (which connotes either

sexuality and lewdness or proactive environmental sustainability) to draw in the theatergoers who were so enamored with their representation of *Marujita se ha muerto con leucemia*. The action in the less scripted play is driven by an apocalyptic dream filled with sexual double entendres that Abrilia (the stereotypical cuencana) shares with her friend Encarna (the stereotypical quiteña) and Cleta (the stereotypical manabita). The three decide to meet at the base of the Cotopaxi to take off on an imaginary adventure to “hotspots” in Ecuador. The result is that they visit the coast, the sierra, and the Amazon region and come to recognize that they need to be more aware of the destruction of nature. The characters comment on Ecuador’s 2007 constitution, which was the first to provide *subjecthood* to nature and emphasized the importance of appreciating Ecuador’s natural beauty and diversity. The comedy is unusual in that there is a good amount of slapstick and verbal humor. There is even a burlesque striptease as the women, clad in rain coats, strip to their hilarious swim suits, but the comedy ends on a seemingly more serious note with the three characters enraptured by their imaginary jungle, its beauty, its diverse sounds, and its spiritual connection to the universe. The theatrical representation was an ungainly attempt at making absurdity and humor socially pertinent and educational. The staged play resorted to fantasy (imagination taken to the absurd, in this case) to make a point about a reality that haunts contemporary Ecuador: destruction of its biodiversity and contamination of the environment is unacceptable. The comedy, while somewhat successful with its inside jokes, was not able to cope successfully with the jump to seriousness at the end of the play. The fragile border between realism and fantasy was frayed into the ridiculous by the end of the play, and neither comedy nor seriousness seemed to hold together. Contemporary theater also tends to resort to absurdity rather than the exploitation of fantasy. Plays that use fantasy successfully rather than relying on the absurd seem to be more successful at social commentary.

Illustrating this idea is *La escoba*, a play that employs fantasy and madness to document human disregard without jumping to the absurd to make its point. As a theatrical monologue, it has a similar function of making Ecuadorian audiences laugh at themselves and their countrymen while reminding them—although only slightly—that their reality is one of tragedy and flagrant disregard for one another. The protagonist in *La escoba* is a mad, indigent woman dressed in rags who has returned to visit her “hometown,” which changes to match each city where the comedy is performed. In the play, the indigent woman converses with a broom that she turns at whim into Ecuadorian political figures, leaders, or renowned socialites. The play uses elements of vaudeville, slapstick, and raw comedy, the effect of which is that local audiences get a huge laugh at themselves, their own leaders, and well-known members of local society. It relies on fantasy to create a safe space for debunking its targets.

Both of the plays discussed above provide catharsis for audiences and use some elements of fantasy but plays like these are tremendously place-bound and are in many ways incomprehensible to outsiders, who cannot “get” the essence of the jokes and jabs since they are not part of the community, its verbal heritage of social traditions, its jargon, or its social hierarchy. In the case of *La escoba*, the play is renewed with each performance as the names of politicians and important families are changed to fit the contemporary circumstance of the audience. The role of fantasy is tied to the protagonist, who vacillates between moments of acute reality and madness, finding ways to interweave social, political, and economic criticism with the place-bound names of people recognized by the

community. The protagonist is featured as mad and indigent so that her monologue is necessarily both visionary and unreliable. No one can take offense when the cutting words emerge from the insane. As the actress imparts a monologue that weaves a quickly moving narrative thread between lucidity and madness, she is able to expose elements of political hypocrisy or the sordid face of social injustice without angering the crowd. Insanity and fantasy are therefore crucial to *La escoba* for expressing these uncomfortable conditions. The issue for critics and spectators, however, is that the play is necessarily place-bound. While it could be adapted to other areas with the creativity of a good writer, each rendition would necessarily be unique, as it must be fit to the culture and society of its spectators. This presents a challenge for studies like mine, where I analyze theatrical scripts and not interpretations or performances, which are subject to different analytical criteria. Nevertheless, I found it useful to review the use of scripted fantasy and realism in the plays I read as a means to compare them to the other genres studied.

Scholars will find a lack of more universal plays in Ecuadorian cultural historiography, due in part to several cultural realities explained best by Luis Miguel Campos in a 1980s article, which is the focus of the first part of the chapter on theater. Campos discusses how contemporary theater has moved toward being run by actors instead of dramaturges or playwrights and considers how this has affected the production of staged theater in Ecuador. He also explains the social organization of theater companies and the economics of stage productions (413-446). Campos discusses the context of the staged play; he does not take into consideration the importance of street theater and pageantry that is so common in Ecuadorian cities, towns, and villages or its role in Ecuadorian cultural production. Despite concerning himself only with staged theater, pageantry cannot be ignored in the broader national context.

The streets and plazas in Ecuador take center stage for public drama, and there is no lack of public participation in these events. There is truly little public thirst for more *drama*, no matter what the literary community thinks. With staged theater affordable only for the upper middle class and onward, even \$10 tickets are out of reach for the middle class, who are straining to meet basic needs. Schools instead get children involved in recitals and shows for family and the community. Neighborhoods, religious fraternities, churches, and indigenous groups alike put together floats, practice specific dances, learn to walk on stilts, learn to play instruments by ear (for lack of sheet music), and take their pageantry into the streets. Depending on the region of Ecuador, you might encounter the bambuco dancers from the coastal Esmeraldas or a group of dancers who dance in step to a Sanjuanito from the highlands. Tens of thousands participate in the *Pase del niño viajero*, a religious parade held annually in Cuenca on December 24 that celebrates the arrival of the Christ child and spills over into the New Year to give each neighborhood the opportunity to participate. During this event, the streets are filled with elaborately decorated donkeys, horses, and motor vehicles carrying children and adults dressed in rented costumes (mostly influenced by Spanish Andalusian dress) and surrounded by gifts of food (candy, cooked hog, guinea pig, chicken, or duck).

While pageantry does not rely on scripted plays, these activities do depend on choreography, dance, circus talents, song, costuming, and other elements to create a sense of fantasy and the imaginary. Through costuming, traditional dances, and song, street theater expresses the soul of its people by creating a safe space for imagining what could be. Although pageantry does provide a public outlet for street theater, encouraging

participation in informal theatrical activities may also prejudice the practice of holding successful staged theater in official playhouses. One could question whether there would be a significant cultural need for a high-cost staged theater production when the majority of the population has access to street theater already, which is much more common and readily available. The desire for staged theater in Ecuador, given the complexities of finding a suitable stage, sufficient financial backing, trained lighting and set designers, and an interested audience, could be necessarily weaker than in other more affluent countries or in those with a less-developed cultural practice of pageantry.

Nevertheless, there are several plays certainly worth reading and analyzing within the context of this investigation. In the past twenty years, playwrights like Arístides Vargas, Cristian Cortez, Viviana Cordero, and Peky Andino have sought other avenues for globalizing Ecuadorian theater. It would seem that their plays might find success in a more international scene where the thorny issues of immigration and immigrant populations might find a sympathetic ear. Cordero's *Tres Vidas/Mano a mano* focuses on the miserable conditions experienced by three Ecuadorian women who were each affected in some way by the realities of Ecuadorian emigration to other countries. Renowned contemporary playwright Peky Andino focuses on the role of immigration and Ecuador's inability to stave off further emigration from its borders in *Medea llama por cobrar*. Cristian Cortez broaches the realm of the fantastic and the absurd relationship between El and Ella in his short play *Noctámbulos*.

So, while representative samples of Ecuadorian theater would suggest that Ecuadorian audiences are most entertained by fictional representations of themselves and their regional character, there have also been some attempts to make the Ecuadorian experience and character appear more universal and less like a study of the Ecuadorian *character*, portrayed as being caught up in the tedium of life and unable to progress toward an identity that makes sense and can thrive. In the chapter on fantasy and realism in theater, I discuss how these plays communicate with their readers and audiences through the exploitation of realism and fantasy and discuss how theater has taken a necessarily different approach to fantasy and realism than contemporary short story, novel, or poetry due to the nature of staging a play and of published scripts.

In the last thirty years, Ecuadorian poets have also taken large steps toward a more universal and global reading audience, jumping across national borders through *intimism* and exploration of self. In many cases, poetry has moved beyond the exploration of regional social injustice to explore the individual emotional self. On the one hand, this makes some of the poetry more accessible to the outside reader. On the other, the poetic experience no longer feels a strong tie to anything particularly "Ecuadorian" except in the physical descriptions in the poems' language, where natural objects or edifices serve to frame the context of the emotional experience. While the journey of poetic voices has not been the same as the one taken by narrative voices (short story and novel or even theater), there is a parallel in their development that I will discuss throughout the chapter on fantasy and realism in poetry.

An individual author's employment of fantasy and realism in a variety of genres (novel, short story, poetry, theater) provides evidence as to how Ecuadorian writers since 1975 have interpreted human behavior and experience. The analysis of trends in the use of fantasy and realism to build an awareness of the unique challenges of how the most humble to the most powerful Ecuadorians—albeit in fiction—perceive the conflictive

distortions of what “is” or “might be” provides clues as to how Ecuadorians perceive themselves and their emotional, social, political, and historical circumstances at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century.

Chapter Three—Fantasy and Realism in the Ecuadorian Novel since 1976

Without a doubt, the most intriguing and memorable use of fantasy out of the sixteen novels I include in this chapter was Iván Egüez's sustained animism used to depict the sordid depths of human corruption in his 1985 novel *El Poder del Gran Señor*. César Dávila Andrade relied earlier on the animism of objects fashioned from nature in his short stories. For example, a piano carried over the Andes decides to take its revenge against the one person who mistreated the gentle Indians who carried the piano on their backs. Such use of fantasy in Ecuadorian literature is really quite fascinating to those unfamiliar with the notion of natural objects maintaining their own soul—objects that express feelings and exact their revenge as they are transformed from tree to flute, piano, crucifix, or puppet. The Ecuadorian concept of animism emerges from the traditional indigenous belief that all living things have a soul and maintain their individuality no matter what their physical form. For this reason, each flute has its own spirit and voice. While this is the only novel that uses animism as fantasy, it is a technique found to have a similar effect in other genres. Peki Andino more recently used the technique of animating a piece of wood carved into a human narrator in his dramatic monologue *Medea llama por cobrar*, for example, guided by the writer's hand, animism fits into the service of fantasy, creating a lens through which human behavior can be observed and exposed to readers without causing offense.

The employment of fantasy and realism varies among the novelists in the books studied for this chapter, although there are some patterns of usage outlined below. Just as Iván Egüez uses fantasy (through animism) to create a unique perspective to critique the observable in *El Poder del Gran Señor* (1985), Ubidia creates another distorted lens for viewing reality in *Sueño de lobos* (1986). The narrative is rooted in realism, but the analysis of fantasy, dreaming, and voyeurism in the novel reveals a social illness that haunts individuals who, inert and without structure or passion for living, wander from moment to moment in a fog of fragmented, meaningless life experiences, preying on each other and society without understanding their own motivations. Similarly, Javier Vásconez's *El retorno de las moscas* (2005), uses fantasy to expose the seedy and disturbing realities that go unseen. Fantasy has also served to broaden perspectives in an effort to solve crime. In *Anillos de serpiente* (1998) by Juan Valdano, fantasy is what drives the story forward, helping to unravel criminal behavior while providing a shield for rejecting certain historical truths.

Other novelists have pursued a stronger balance between fantasy and realism. Fantasy in their works does not specifically showcase different perspectives of history or attempt to flush out disturbing human behavior but instead relates more often to a character's purpose or need. For example, in *Jonatás y Manuela* (1994), a novel by Argentina Chiroboga, fantasy manifests itself in *conjuros* based on African natural medicine. The use of magic supports the African characters' struggle for freedom and pursuit of a new identity. In Lucrecia Maldonado's novel, *Salvo el Calvario*, the characters use realism and fantasy for their own purposes as each of the characters in this polyphonic novel finds a new awareness of themselves. Eliécer Cárdenas' novel *Que te perdone el viento* also employs dramatic realism but allows for one of the characters to fantasize to the point of his own seduction without taking away from the intense presence of a political

assassination. Juan Valdano's *El fuego y la sombra* (2001) is structured as a fictional autobiographical diary, and this genre demands that the narrator rely on his perception of historical reality and events. Valdano is a master of realistic description; however, his character is faced with *realities* that appear much more based in fantasy and magical realism than what he and others can accept at face value.

Then there are also several novels that have little room for fantasy. Marco Antonio Rodríguez's *Historia de un intruso* (1976) bridges the realism of the 1930s and the novels written in the 1970s and 1980s. In *Intruso*, fantasy, as presented through dreams, does not serve to alleviate the soul but instead heightens the similarities between the observable world and the absurd, grotesque, and nearly palpable seedy world of fantasy. Yáñez Cossío's *Sé que vienen a matarme* (2001), on the other hand, avoids fantasy altogether and relies solely on realism to counter any official eulogy of Ecuadorian president García Moreno by exposing a mountain of disturbing details about his personal life that led to his rise and fall. In this case, Yáñez Cossío uses realism to demonstrate that official history is another form of fantasy.

In four of the novels studied, fantasy does not seem to play an important role at all. In Alfonso Reece's *Morga* (2007), the narrator's descriptions are realistic, and he makes every attempt to expose historical curiosities. In Soledad Córdova's short juvenile novel *La señora Antuquita* (2005), what moves the story forward is routine tranquility and the importance of family and companionship. There is no need for fantasy in Señora Antuquita's world as there is no complication or struggle; Señora Antuquita lives in a world where everything is just fine because her attitude is that all is well despite the changes that happen. Silvia Rey's *Veleta* (2006) relies on realism to describe the main character's struggle to survive life as an immigrant and is nearly devoid of fantasy, except for the idea that true human love conquers all. Edna Iturralde's book for young readers *Aventura en los Llanganates* (1993) relies on fantasy, but fantastic imagination is countered by fantastic experience, blurring the borders between historical realism and fantasy. While the young characters discover "truth" in the legend of a lost civilization, they decide to perpetuate the myth instead of revealing the truth of their experience.

Such a preference for maintaining equal weight between the mysterious, fantastical, or *emotional* and the historical or physical is also evident in some of the novels studied here. Some of the most imaginative novels I read rely on an erasure of boundaries between fantasy and realism. Narrators in these novels prefer fantasies to the world around them. One of these novels is Carlos Carrión's *Una niña adorada* (1993), in which the main character struggles with emerging from fantasy to confront a painful reality. In his later novel *¿Quién me ayuda a matar a mi mujer?* (2005), Carrión calls primarily upon realism and erotic sensualism to advance the story but resorts at times to sexual fantasy, often triggered when the main character plays the saxophone. Fantasy drives his desire as he repeatedly imagines attempting to murder his larger-than-life wife without success.

The novels I have analyzed from before the year 2000 are Marco Antonio Rodríguez's *Historia de un intruso* (1976), Ivan Egüez's *El Poder del Gran Señor* (1985), Abdón Ubidia's *Sueño de lobos* (1986), Carlos Carrión's *Una niña adorada* (1993), Eliécer Cárdenas *Que te perdone el viento* (1993), Edna Iturralde's *Aventura en los Llanganates* (1993), Argentina Chiriboga's *Jonatás y Manuela* (1994), and Juan Valdano's *Anillos de Serpiente* (1998). The novels that are post-2000 are Alicia Yáñez Cossío's *Se que vienen a matarme* (2001), Juan Valdano's *El fuego y la sombra* (2001),

Carlos Carrión's *¿Quién me ayuda a matar a mi mujer?* (2005), Javier Vásconez's *El retorno de las moscas* (2005), Lucrecia Maldonado's poetic novel *Salvo el Calvario* (2005), and Soledad Córdova's *La Señora Antuquita* (2005), Silvia Rey's *Veleta* (2006), and Reece's 2007 baroque novel, *Morga*, even though this novel lies outside the chronological scope of this book. Each of the novels is discussed separately and in chronological order, followed by summary remarks about the function of fantasy and realism in the contemporary Ecuadorian novel.

Marco Antonio Rodríguez, Historia de un intruso

Estela Parel de Terrán suggests that the short novel *Historia de un intruso* represents a substantial change in the trajectory of Ecuadorian literature by moving away from an objective means of investigating emotional conflicts to a subjective one. This shift opened the door for writers to employ dreams and fantasies as a way of creating a diversity of perspectives:

Marco Antonio Rodríguez representa en nuestra literatura el más decisivo paso para un cambio sustancial. En *Historia de un intruso*, da un fecundo ejemplo; abandona completamente la modalidad objetiva para volcarse en los conflictos interiores, presentando una visión particular de lo que lo rodea a través de la sincera sombría confesión de un espíritu torturado. (*Historia* 19-20)

Historia de un intruso is a monologue given by its main character, Fermín, who speaks to his split personality named Antero. The *desdoblamiento*, or dual personality, affords Marco Antonio Rodríguez the luxury of providing a variety of perspectives, culminating in the rejection and acceptance of aspects of the ego and alter ego. Although Fermín rejects Antero's pessimism and hatred for the world and humanity, he also recognizes that he must accept his alter ego since Antero's perspective—as well as Fermín's own ability to feel compassion and even love—is part of his very identity and cannot be rejected any more than Fermín can reject his physical body or emotional state:

Tú y tus lúgubres ideas. Tú y tu desbordante pesimismo. Antero adherido a las ranuras, a cada uno de los detalles de su incurable manía depresiva. Antero en el desayuno, en el almuerzo, en la merienda. Metiendo sus narizotas en mis actos y reacciones. Antero en las horas de oficina. En el aire que mueve mis pulmones. En... No es justo. He decidido expulsarte de mi vida. Sin dilaciones. Ahora, miércoles 30 de marzo de 1974, a las 11 y 42 minutos de la noche. De nada me servirá. Antero—lo he descubierto—soy yo mismo. (73)

Fermín and Antero are tied to a world of raw, putrid decadence both in reality and dream. Fermín wants to deny his interest in the seedy side of life that Antero represents but cannot:

...Fermín—vive asido a esta convicción—, me cree un condenado intruso que le ha guiado por zonas prohibidas y le ha atiborrado de ideas insensatas, y siente a cada instante profundo asco por la ingenua curiosidad que le impelió a buscar mi alianza. (*Historia 44*)

No matter how ill the decadence and stark reality of life make him feel, however, the *desdoblado* Fermín/Antero remains captivated and is unable to deny the repulsion he feels when he witnesses it. For example, when t(he)y visit a gay bar and view the savage sexual encounter of a large black man and a slim man dressed in drag, the narrator reveals his revulsion and the fabulous, absurd effect it has on the decadent city. Emblemized by his black vomit, his aversion empties onto the street and heads on its own toward the most elegant neighborhoods and the city center, passing through outer and inner walls of houses, churches, sewers, and basements, even climbing to cover the vaulted ceilings of the banks:

Pasado un momento, me senté en la calzada, inmóvil, algo enérgico, protegiendo una vez más mi pertinacia por arrojar a todos quienes me rodeaban en los escrondrijos más confusos del mundo. Sin embargo, el vómito negro que se había generado en mis entrañas apareció en mi boca y se regó por la calle como un manto de alquitrán. Ascendió por las laderas de los barrios elegantes. Se deslizó por el centro de la ciudad. Penetró en las alcantarillas, en los sótanos. Traspasó muros y paredes. Franqueó las piedras de las iglesias. Se coló en las bóvedas de los bancos. Escaló los rascacielos. Anegó los mudos, viejos, eternos pasadizos del hombre y de la vida. (*Historia 48*)

The extraordinary staining of the city with vomit, from the most elegant neighborhoods and churches to the sewers and the bank ceilings, invokes the fantastic and inherently implies the complicity of mankind. No stranger than this pessimistic vision of the world are the fantasmagoric dreams that haunt the narrator's stream of consciousness. The oniric description that follows creates paranoia as the subject attempts to protect himself without success. Although still being able to touch his head makes him feel that he is in control of his senses, his bones turn to jelly and the walls begin to grow and surround him, becoming brains, eyelashes, excrement, and other human body parts. Pushing his fists through the wall, he feels nothing:

De repente las cosas se volatilizan y quedo yo solo y las cuatro paredes de las cuales van resbalando masa encefálicas. Palpo mi cabeza. Todavía está allí. Protegida por huesos gelatinosos. Pero las paredes han crecido y me siento recluido entre ellas como esos deprimentes genticillos en el vientre de lámparas maravillosas sepultadas en el fondo de los océanos. Ya no son de sesos únicamente las paredes. Han nacido de sus cuerpos: pestañas, fosas nasales, tímpanos, vísceras excrementosas, labios leporinos, ojos, dientes, uñas y se movilizan hacia mí, en rotundo sigilo. Me cercan. Puedo hundir mis puños en sus entrañas sin que estos toquen nada. Me disgrego en una laxitud estoica y desciendo a un vacío hasta el cual no llega ni siquiera el recuerdo de que fui. (*Historia 62*)

Finally, the subject retreats into nothingness and loses his sense of self. The narrator is haunted day and night by the visions of perverted reality. Exposure to such raw imagery produces a similar effect in readers as they are drawn by their curiosity to observe, as the *voyeur*, the human garbage dump “basural del mundo” (*Historia* 20) and are either repulsed by their own ability to be moved by the erotic imagery or angered by the flagrant disregard for compassion or understanding. Fantasy here divorces the reader from the psychological reality that the subject experiences. Its function is to attract the reader’s curiosity while still providing sufficient distance to avoid developing any compassion toward the subject.

One of the most outstanding examples of this uncomfortable balancing act is when the narrator feels compassion for Aguedita, an aging street woman who disappears and is found dead. She leaves behind a lithograph of Jesús del Gran Poder with their photographs on the reverse side. The reader is moved to feel compassion and sympathy for this woman who had nothing but who still clung to hope. The cynicism of the narrator is captured in the parenthetical comment following the narration of this experience with the woman. Here realism is what drives the imagery: nothing changes in this world when anyone dies. The world will continue to void its waste like an animal. The subject’s fatalism is clear: although death is certain for the individual, death alters nothing of the surrounding reality. Life goes on. Fornication, lies, exploitation, and abuse of body and soul by others will simply continue to the offender’s puerile advantage:

Nada se altera cuando mueres. El mundo necesita evacuar normalmente, igual que un animal. Y así, sin más, te vas a pastar chirotes en ninguna parte, a eregir la tienda malva de tus sueños en ningún sitio. Nada se altera cuando mueres. A lo más, los seres más entrañables, hacen lo imposible por borrar tu recuerdo. Qué más da, hay que seguir viviendo. Y todos siguen fornicando, mintiendo, explotando, utilizando las almas y los cuerpos de los demás en su puerco provecho. (*Historia* 31)

The identity that the *intruso* brings to the surface is a consciousness plagued by contradiction, cynicism, and internal conflict. Fantasy, as presented through dreams, does not serve to alleviate the soul from the torture of this disgustingly appealing reality. Instead, Rodríguez’s employment of fantasy and *desdoblamiento* serves to heighten the similarities between the sordidness of the observable world that seems no less absurd or disgusting than the nearly palpable world of fantasy.

Abdón Ubidia, Sueño de lobos

Abdón Ubidia is a master of fantasy and realism. Published ten years after Rodríguez’s *Intruso*, Ubidia’s 1986 book *Sueño de lobos* shares similarities with Rodríguez’s novel in terms of perspectivism and their use of fantasy and realism. Antonio Sacoto describes Abdón Ubidia as “un gran realista,” and there is no doubt that the physical descriptions in *Sueño de lobos* (*Wolves’ Dreams*) take the reader on a virtual tour of Quito unlike any other. The reader can very nearly breathe the suffocating environment of the district near the San Francisco Church. The description of the young man called Turk

Antonio, for example, is reminiscent of social realism's description of the 1930s, "la verdad de una cruda y desgarradora realidad que enmarcó la vida del campesino, producto de un modelo económico que imponía su más alto grado de injusticia entre los indígenas y mestizos, llámense cholos, montubios, etc." (Nancy del Rocío Castillo 43) The description of Antonio and the others who taught him how to live on the streets offers a portrait of snot-nosed street urchins who teach each other to survive by theft and deception:

Y eran días y días de caminar, sin rumbo, por estrechas y sucias callejas, en compañía de un par de socios ocasionales de aventuras, sus panas de ese tiempo, mocosos como él, pero expertos en el arte de sobrevivir. Ellos le enseñaron que no había que tenerle miedo al hambre. Para eso estaban los plátanos, los panes, la fritada, el hornado, las tortillas que se exhibían en las puertas de las tiendas y de las cantinas. Bastaba con ser un poco cuidadoso y huir a tiempo. Además estaban los autos. Plumas y tapacubos que podían vender en las covachas de La Marín, donde las traperas. (*Sueño* 246-247)

Antonio learned from his *panas* (partners), that he did not need to fear hunger if he was careful and could run fast enough. They taught him how to take advantage of others, to wear down others' indifference so he could panhandle them and, when necessary, to pick up the shoeshine box and earn a few sucres:

También era posible aprovecharse de los buenos sentimientos de las gentes, pedirles limosna, quebrantar su indiferencia, su dureza, fingiéndose ciego o inválido, que era lo que, generalmente, más les conmovía. Y si todo aquello fallaba, pues les quedaban sus cajones de lustrabotas para ganarse unos sucres embaburnando de tinta y betún los zapatos de estudiantes de nueva ola y oficinistas de pañuelo en pecho y periódico bajo el brazo, personas que pocas veces se resistían la tentación de lustrarse los zapatos. (*Sueño* 246-247)

Antonio's description of the seediest part of town, along with the dwellers' indifference to its squalor and their willingness to take advantage of people, is balanced by his opinion of those who use fantasy and lies to get what they want. However, his descriptions reach beyond the social realism of the thirties to embrace the new realism that can be seen as early as the 1970s in Ecuadorian literature, where the new aesthetic and literary tendency exposed by writers was no longer objective or a simple retelling of the events that mire these characters in the misery in which they live. Ubidia delves into emotional reality and fantasy instead.

The marginalized social characters who protagonize *Sueño de lobos* provide readers with their emotional perception of the world in which they live. Readers are privy to their dreams, fantasies, conflicting personalities, and to their real and imagined tragedies. For this reason, *Sueño de lobos* is not simply a book about the miserable lives of a group of marginalized men who decide to rob a bank without even understanding their own motivation for robbery, but rather a complex and fragmented collection of introspections on the frustrated spirit of humankind. When the spirit is broken, there is nowhere to seek refuge but in imagination and fantasy. Where there is only anguish and hopelessness in

the human spirit, the characters feel empty, angry, and without a reason to continue living. Planning the robbery provides this motley assembly with a goal that binds them together—ever so loosely—and provides for the basic thread of adventure and plot in this fragmented narrative made up of a multiplicity of perspectives and narrators.

In *Sueño de lobos*, Ubidia avoids focusing on a single main character, although it seems that the novel's most developed character is Sergio, an insomniac bank worker with a questioning spirit and perverse need to watch others and fantasize about them for his own enjoyment. Sergio finds some solace in imagination and reminiscing. He *writes* unwritten stories in his mind, constructing imaginary lives for others and, in this way, placates—albeit through fiction—his longing for the complete life he feels he does not have.

Sergio is married and has a son. He has a job at a bank. Nevertheless, he is a self-declared sleepless wolf who fantasizes about a passionate, seedy life that brings him greater pleasure than the routine life he lives as a *sleepwalker*—indifferent, unaware, and passionless. No matter how despicable his voyeuristic searching is in real life, in fantasy and fiction his searching is compelling and enriching. On the other hand, his indifference and negligence toward his family and social obligations is dull, off-putting, and despicable. Like Cervantes' famous Don Quixote, his imaginary life is full, but his everyday life cannot compete. Unlike Don Quixote, however, Sergio continues to separate fantasy and realism and is paralyzed there. Don Quixote takes fantasy and runs with it, making him a laughing stock and a madman, but a madman worthy of note.

Gavilán, a second character in the group of five bank robbers, is an angry, violent man who revokes his responsibilities to his fellow man through indifference and a sense of superiority. He is tormented by delusions of grandeur and is admired and feared by all, but his character does not steal the interest of the reader. His loveless and heartless relationship with Maribel is characteristic of an abusive man whose only interest is winning—even though he is not aware of what he wants to win. He is the only one of the group to realize his fantasies by putting others in danger.

El Maestro, a third character, is perhaps the most socially adjusted of the group of thieves. He too questions his reasons for participating in the robbery. He considers himself a happy man, with his own car repair shop, a family whom he believes he cares about, and relative economic stability. His spirit is challenged by his constant anger about being treated as a social inferior because he is an Indian. His dream of participating in the robbery is fueled by his need to belong to a group that thwarts the oppressors. Maestro is not driven by the pursuit of money but instead by the world of the senses (the things he can smell, touch, hear, see, and taste):

No tenía angustias económicas. Lo que ganaba en el taller hasta le permitía ahorrar una pequeña suma cada semana. Tampoco era ambicioso. Y el dinero por el dinero, el dinero desligado de sus gustos inmediatos, asomaba en su conciencia con un vago ruido metálico lejano y frío y le venía del otro lado de un vidrio opaco, y en el que no lograba reconocer las formas concretas, contundentes, que le aleraban la vida: el sexo delicado de la Rosita, el sabor del hornado, el sabor de la chichi y las cosas finas, la música de albazos y sanjuanitos, los deportes y juegos que practicaba con sus amigos, y hasta su mismo trabajo de mecánico hábil y curioso que le granjeaba cierto módico de prestigio entre sus conocidos. (*Sueño* 291)

Unlike Maestro, who is a relatively complete character but lacks ambition or direction, the other members of the group, El Patojo Gonzalo and El turco Antonio, both have truncated spirits due to physical and emotional deformities. El Patojo's spirit and body are damaged by the ravages of drug addiction and the fears and suffering that follow. In the case of Antonio the Turk, his spirit is dulled and damaged by his fantasies and obsession about having been rejected by Francisca, a woman he loves and desires.

In terms of the use of fantasy and realism, the description of Antonio's beating and recovery is probably the most captivating narration of the book, since its heartlessness and severity along with his abandonment are juxtaposed with both the caring hands of the woman who rescues him and his senseless fantasies about his beloved but heartless Francisca. Antonio's fantasies block his development instead of opening greater perspectivism.

The women in *Sueño de lobos* play a smaller role but are still very much a part of the universal picture that Ubidia paints of these Quiteños' fragmented lives. For example, Maribel's spirit is constantly threatened by her past as a prostitute and the abuse and victimization she receives from Gavilán. She fantasizes about marrying Gavilán in the hope that her life might be different if she were married to him rather than at his beck and call. Like Sergio and Antonio, her life is paralyzed by her fantasy and inability to focus on an achievable goal. While Gavilán wanders the street, Maribel fantasizes her life away in a miserable room. Luzmila, following a similar desire to improve her lot, is tricked by el Patojo into stealing from her own negligent father, Don Nacho, for the dream of having a different life than her own abusive one. Luzmila is portrayed as a pathetic, ugly maid whose brief flicker of spirit and desire is squelched and poisoned by a cruel twist of fate caused by both her fantasy of the life she hopes Patojo might give her, and of her desire to escape the abuse of her everyday life.

Ubidia's characters attempt to complete their lives spent on the margin of society through fantasizing and daydreaming. Sergio, Gavilán, el Patojo, el Maestro, Antonio the Turk, and even the female characters in the book are oppressed by a sense of desolation. Still, they attempt to fulfill themselves and reconcile a world they consider hostile through fantasizing and dreaming. Their collective tragedy is that their dreams, their wanderings, and their fantasies have no fibers of altruism or any real concrete goal for enriching their individual or common human experience. While each character in *Sueño de lobos* is persecuted by their own unique social illness, analysis of fantasy and dream in the narrative demonstrates a common lack of will, negligence or *dejadez* in each individual. Inert and without passion or structure in life, they wander from moment to moment in a fog of fragmented, meaningless life experiences, preying on each other and on society without understanding their own motivations.

Ivan Egüez, El Poder del Gran Señor

El Poder del Gran Señor is narrated by the soul of a tree that is cut down whose wood is sculpted into the crucified Christ. The narrative ploy of animism allows the narrating voice to compile verbal snapshots of the lives of both hypocritical, powerful figures and the underdogs (*los de abajo*). No one escapes the scathing debunking that reveals who they really are since each player in the book knowingly confesses their own

fictionalized deceptions as well as those they learn about through their relationships with others. Much like a video camera perched on a wall, the wooden Christ figure observes human behavior and captures the words and images of social tragedies. Curiously, the initial observation is uncompassionate for the human indignity seen in Villaltar, the pueblo in which the novel is set. The wooden Christ, prized by all who know of its beauty, does not feel sympathy but anger—when there is emotion—and the narrative voice is moved by what he sees, hears, and feels. So moved is this wood fragment that the sculpted figure remains indifferent to the surrounding madness of human society: “Por más palo que uno sea, por más estatua, no se puede quedar indiferente” (70). Here, the animism leads to perhaps the most powerful opinion of the book: no matter how cold or like a statue any living spirit could be, none could remain indifferent to the corruption and injustices he has observed.

Providing the reader with the perspective of an object (the sculpted Christ figure) that has the consciousness of a tree in a forest is both alarming and partly refreshing, because the traditional belief that nature has a spirit or a soul is not generally accepted by many of the cultures of the western world. Animism permits a different perspective in this context, where people seem to act as though they have no conscience or soul, and a sculpted tree trunk has a greater conscience than human beings who are supposed to have souls.

It is no surprise to learn that some indigenous Andean cultures believed that all natural things have a spirit or a soul. Ecuadorian musicians will tell you that that is why each handmade flute has its own unique sound. Edna Iturralde explains that the indigenous Shuar, for example, believed that each being (flora, fauna, or rock) has its *wakan*, or its own spirit; that is why it is not unusual to talk to trees or animals (trans. from *Verde fue mi Selva* 50). Therefore, the consciousness of a tree sculpted into an icon of the crucified Christ seems not only plausible in this context but quite comforting—albeit fantastical—to most readers. Narration being placed in the consciousness of a wooden sculpture is also alarming, however, as the idea that our most secret thoughts and vivid confessions could be processed and evaluated by inanimate objects around us is unnerving, especially when the evaluation reveals the selfishness and boorishness of humanity itself. In contemporary society, video cameras record our every movement, but humans still interpret the digital information. In this story, the natural world, represented by the wooden crucifix, records every movement and interprets this information for readers.

The key to the success of fantasy in this novel is a situation created by animism where the eye that sees and the ear that hears is unsuspected by the human beings, providing access to hidden “truths.”

The wood reveals itself as the narrator when he recollects his last days as a tree before he was taken to the sculptor:

Debido al tupido ramaje de mis vecinos (verdadero barroco vegetal), casi no gozaba del resto del paisaje, pues esas catedrales arbóreas no me dejaban ver el bosque. El último verano del siglo pasado me cortó un leñador con la fuerza de sus manos, de sus brazos y, sobretodo, de sus espaldas que son, en realidad de donde sale el vuelo del hacha. Tres días se pasó talándome de sol a sol. Casi al final, para ayudarme, puse el codo en el suelo. (8)

Cut from a tree in the nineteenth century, the animated soul has emotions, sees, and even feels compassion for the sculptor who works night and day. The personification is truly a delightful one since the narrative voice shares both what he feels (the shaving of the wood, the gentle brush of a handkerchief that a penitent wipes across his sculpted lips, the wetness of the wine that a man pours across his wooden mouth, etc.) and the emotional anger that the narrative voice shares with readers when someone demonstrates irreverence for humanity.

In the world that the chisled wooden sculpture describes, the men with Great Power show themselves to be corrupt (politicians, judges, clergy, the wealthy) and those of humble means show themselves to be foolish in terms of the decisions they make and the requests they ask at the feet of the wooden image of Christ. The sculpted wooden Christ figure comments on what he calls the “human comedy” and his role as *auditor* of the requested favors as well as personal sufferings that he is exposed to:

Es increíble la de cosas que uno puede enterrarse aquí sin hacer nada, solo oyendo los favores que vienen a pedir, las súplicas que hacen, los azotes que se dan en los adentros. Si hay algo que distingue a los villatareños es la capacidad de inventarse motivos y justificaciones para todo. (91)

The immobile, wooden Christ is not indifferent to the villagers’ pleas in the sense that he is repulsed by what he hears and sees. Instead, he observes the oddities of human nature and man’s ability to invent motives and a justification for every act. He calls humankind blind and deceived: “Viven ciegos como maridos engañados” (92). For example, the sculpted Christ figure is angered by the drunks who come to complain of their lot in life at the altar:

¡Señor! No estoy conforme con mi suerte
ni con la dura ley que has decretado,
pues no hay una razón bastante fuerte
para que me hayas hecho desgraciado.
Te he pedido justicia, te he pedido
Que aplaques mi dolor, calmes mi pena,
Y no has querido oírme, o no has querido
Revocar tu sentencia a mi condena. (Egüez 92)

The villagers’ complaints are that they do not deserve their fate and they ask for justice because they feel ignored or rejected. The wooden Christ responds silently in disgust—not to the supplicant who asks for his just desserts—but to his readers, accusing humanity of false penitence and lust for riches. According to the sculpted Christ, the greatest offenders, of course, are those who visit the church’s altar. Humans come to cry at the altar looking for eternal security but do not change their evil ways, their lust for wealth, and they complain about the world in which they live.

Pero después de venir a moquear en el altar, todos salen conformes. Vienen en busca de su póliza de seguridad eternal, se golpean el pecho y salen frequitos a seguir siendo lo mismo. O vienen a pedirme piedad, a

reclamarme henchidos de cólera por lo mal hecho que está el mundo. Pero de tanto pasar arrodillados, salen amortiguados, con calambres hasta en los ojos, pues por el brillo del oro de la iglesia no ven nada en el contorno, se encandilan como cuchuchos. Claro que este templo es deslumbrante, pero a veces deslumbra hasta ofender. Aquí hay más oro que en el Banco Central. (Egüez, *El Poder del Gran Señor* 93)

Even the revolution against corruption and oppression that the wooden Christ figure observes in Villaltar barely survives the tremendous sarcasm of the narrative voice. The revolution is seen through the relationship of a young woman referred to as Negra and her boyfriend who meets her secretly in the nave of the church to engage in a love affair and a small revolution.

The only action that takes place in the entire novel, other than that of experiencing and reporting, is in the ambiguity of the last few lines. When the boyfriend is killed in the process of the revolution, those who love him and the revolutionaries beg him not to abandon them in death. Their quest for change is applauded with a reference to César Vallejo's poem "Masa" (1971). The narrative voice of the wooden Christ tells the reader, "Pero el cadaver, ¡ay, siguió muriendo!" Then, there is a miracle. "Entonces, todos los hombres de la tierra le rodearon; les vio el cadaver triste, emocionado; incorporóse lentamente, abrazó al primer hombre; echóse a andar" (Egüez, *El poder* 191). The hope for humankind lies in this reference to solidarity in the pursuit of social change.

Fantasy in *El Poder del Gran Señor* functions to provide both a caustic portrait of humanity and a glimmer of hope for the future. As the illusory great powers of society are debunked through scandalous confessions and acts of corruption, the quest for change is allowed to survive in the final moments of the novel when the nameless student who pursues justice is revived by humanity itself and the "poder del Gran Señor" is finally exposed as the power of one to change the lives of many.

Egüez uses fantasy to explore a very despicable social and economic reality in fiction but then turns the readers' expectations at the last moment to hope in the fantastic and emblematic power of the individual. The Christ figure remains simply an observer and commentator on humanity, not a figure who has the will or capacity to change humanity. According to the novel, humans only have that "great power" which is earned through solidarity and selfless love of justice. It is a glimmer of hope that is nearly too late, however, as the distorted and degraded society represented in the actions and words of the Altarvilleños and the inertia of the world around them—especially in the sculpted wooden narrator—is what remains with the reader more than the miracle of resurrection and hope for revolutionary change.

In part, the narrative turns on itself since the revolution and miraculous resurrection of the spirit is much less interesting than the outrageous onslaught of one societal perversion after another from the perspective of the perfectly sculpted tree that represents so very cleverly, a passive Christ figure or the soul of the natural world. While Egüez succeeds in keeping his reader's attention focused on human digressions—albeit in fiction—and on the impotence of both nature and spirit to affect change from without, his conversion of the spirit from within is less successful and somehow less compelling to readers. If the resurrection of the spirit was meant to be "too good to be true," Egüez completes, in this way, a tremendously dark book. If the human resurrection of the spirit

was meant to provide real hope for change through revolution, the argument hinges on whether the reader can make this last-minute jump to the suspension of disbelief.

Carlos Carrión, Una niña adorada

Carrión's creation of a fantasy world that is more compelling than the world of reality is a psychological novel that explores the sometimes uncomfortable and contradictory inner workings of the human mind. The main character struggles with facing the world he has determined is his "real world" but is impotent when it comes to denying fantasy its own pervasive reality.

Una niña adorada is one of those novels that entrap the reader by seduction. The seduction is based on the first-person narrative of a father's obsessive fascination and nostalgic love for his deceased daughter, Susan. The rare third-person narrative that is juxtaposed to the first-person narration reveals the stark, absurdly empty reality in which the father, Fernando Fernández, lives and breathes. His routine life as a law professor is barren. There is no love or caring between him and the woman he married, Susan's mother. He is a lonely, desperate man without the nostalgic recreation of his vivid memories of his beloved daughter Susan. However, the first-person narrative of the experiences that Fernando Fernández relives in a fantastic dialogue with his deceased daughter is captivating, moving, and warm, but his obsessive focus on the only true joy and pain in his life, the memory of lived experiences with his daughter, flirts uncomfortably between paternal love and an incestuous fantasy. Fantasy and memory work together to reveal a father's love which is the only means by which Fernando Fernández, narrator, can remove himself from utter indifference to the terror of living.

Fernando Fernández narrates to his beloved, deceased daughter and we, as readers, find ourselves in her place, reading the memories. Fernando explains his only reason for marrying Isabel was her pregnancy. His joy in life began at the birth of Susan and he narrates his entire life as a series of emotional reactions to the interaction with his daughter. He recalls his overpowering fear of loss when, as a young schoolgirl, she is "lost" and found, his dedication when Susan fell ill with typhoid, his violent reaction to seeing Susan naked and drunk with her boyfriend, and his hatred for his wife Isabel who is too busy dedicating her life to Jehovah to stay home with her ill daughter or to attend her only child's funeral.

Fantasy relies on the Fernando's narration of recreating and revitalizing the past lived experience so he can break the promise he made to his daughter that he would never abandon her or their home. Now that she has been dead for months, he finally admits that he never made a promise to the deceased Susan but only to the living Susan. However, when the idea of leaving his wife and home brings no happiness or hope to Fernando Fernández, the law professor realizes that even with the joy and pleasure he felt before his daughter's fatal car accident, he was never happy and now that she is dead, he has no chance of happiness except by recalling the past and recreating it as though it were life:

Pero no, ya que no pude ser feliz cuando tú vivías, no quiero la felicidad para mí solo; no hay felicidad para un hombre solo. Menos aún si su soledad pertenece a la muerte del ser amado, del ser amado para el cual le ha sido dado el único amor de verdad de que es capaz, sin equivocarse que ama.

Pues, no sabría donde poner esa felicidad, no sabría que hacer con ella. No sabría que es para mí. No sabría reconocerla. Además me [he] hecho una promesa suprema, como te hice y te cumplí la promesa suprema que te hice en tus cinco años. Hoy es el día de cumplirla. Hoy es 17 de febrero. Es el regalo de cumpleaños que te traigo, aunque tampoco sé adónde ir con esta maleta de ropa y conmigo. (*Una niña adorada* 126-127)

Fernando Fernández packs his suitcase with the intention of leaving his home, his daughter, his memories, his pain and suffering, and desires to be with her. But, the book’s ending is ambiguous:

Y qué hacer con Isabel, con sus lloros nocturnos, con sus botellas de después de venir de la iglesia los jueves y los sábados, con su puerta sin llave, con su pena de ti. Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan Susan... (*Un niña adorada* 127)

Fernando Fernández leans over his daughter’s pillow and whispers a tearful “Adiós,” but he leaves his suitcase at his daughter’s bedroom door. The third-person narrator tells the readers “Ahora no recoge la maleta, sigue con el paraguas en el brazo y el sombrero puesto. Se dirige a la habitación de su mujer y empuja la puerta” (*Un niña adorada* 128). Readers are left wondering if he has the strength to “live” by saying goodbye and leaving, or if he is simply pulled back into the normality of his routine life whose obsessive memories are all that is left of “living.” Does he leave his sense of self, his spirit with his suitcase in the world of the dead or does he liberate himself by leaving the suitcase behind?

There is no doubt that Carrión captures the suffering and loss of a man and father who finds no beauty in life or joy without his beloved daughter. The portrayal of Fernando’s emotional obsession is both tragic and beautiful. However, the depiction of Fernando’s extraordinary emotional reality and the spiritual connection between the living and the dead (orchestrated through dialog with the reader) completely overwhelms all strong connections to the living or the future. The paralysis of loss seems complete and it is uncertain that Fernando can escape his obsession of breathing fictional life into the daughter he lost in the physical world.

Eliécer Cárdenas, Que te perdone el viento

Eliécer Cárdenas explores the “insider-history” of Quito’s well-known Archbishop Federico Gonzáles Suárez (1844-1917) who, in official historical record, was also an archaeologist, orator, and considered one of the greatest Ecuadorian historians of all time. The novel relies on a variety of perspectives: a diary of the young Federico who fell in love but rejected human love for the love of the soul; the thoughts of the aged Federico who is appalled at the rebellion and murderous acts against imprisoned Eloy Gonzalo and his men as well as the rampant hypocrisy and corruption in Quito; the thoughts and actions of the curious canon Contreras who steals into Gonzáles Suárez’s room to read the diary and fantasizes about the novice Federico’s first love; and the narrator. The narration moves from time period to time period and the reader reconstructs the story chapter by chapter.

The novel relies, for the most part, on extraordinary realistic description to provide the “insider” details of the murder, dragging, and burning of Eloy Gonzalo and his supporters. The “insider” details are included both in the brief dialogs that are included in the narration as well as the journalistic description of events. Cárdenas’ dialogs have a dynamic dramatic quality about them that brings the dialog “to life” and readers are able to visualize the moment. For example, the dialog below brings to life the violent details of the attack and dragging of the former president:

- Cuando iba a comenzar el arrastre de los cuerpos, alguien gritó “falta uno.”
- Todavía faltaba uno, Santo Dios.
- La gente se regresó aullando a las celdas, como fieras que hubieran dejado escapar una presa.
- Ese otro general no quería dejarse matar así nomás.
- Como los otros.
- Desde un rincón de la celda tumbó con un disparo al primero que asomó. Estaba armado.
- Valiente era.
- Bragado el montuvio.
- Le echaron un montón de tiros desde fuera, dos le atravesaron la cabeza, los otros desconcharon las paredes de la celda.

(Que te perdone el viento 17)

The gory details of Eloy Gonzalo’s death is put into perspective first by the use of the word “desfile” or parade instead of the term “arrastre” or dragging of the nearly dead Gonzalo through the streets of Quito. There is speculation as to whether he was quite dead or still moving his lips in prayer:

- Con un puñal le abrieron el vientre.
- Y entonces comenzó el desfile.
- ¡El desfile!
- El arrastre, señora. Tenían suficientes sogas bajo los ponchos y las levas.
- ¿Y él?
- Ya estaba muerto.
- Mentira. Yo le vi. Sus labios se movían.
- Estaría rezando.
- Pidiendo perdón a Dios. *(Que te perdone el viento 17-18)*

The “captured” dialog the aged archpriest hears provides sordid details about Eloy Alfaro’s assassination on January 28, 1912. It is clear that the Archpriest is embarrassed and disturbed by the actions of the Quiteños, who pulled the imprisoned dictator from his cell in the Panóptico prison on Rocafuerte Street and dragged the mutilated bodies through the streets of Quito to Ejido Park where the corpses’ remains were burned. The Archpriest,

while not specifically a fan of the radical liberalism represented by Alfaro and his followers, respected and venerated the man who was a fellow student and someone whom González Suárez admired quietly for his valor and visionary spirit, as well as for Alfaro's confrontation against the ultraconservatives who succeeded the oppressive government of President Gabriel García Moreno.

The novel relies on the many voices that make up the narrative to present González Suárez as a man who aspired to and achieved greatness in spite of the personal sacrifice and suffering that he faced throughout his life. Eliécer Cardenas' ability to provide a range of explicit details, whether in the written words of the young González Suárez (addressed to his mother), in the dramatic details of the assassination, or in the imagination of canon Contreras, is remarkable and the storytelling is compelling, even though at times it seems somewhat sensationalistic.

The fantasy in this novel is focused primarily in the thoughts of canon Contreras, who has taken the liberty of reading the personal papers that González Suárez had written and kept. The first letters to his mother reveal González Suárez understanding of his position as priest, mostly as counterpoint to Father Wagner, whom he accompanies into the jungles of Ecuador on a failed mission to save indigenous souls. The papers that indicate González Suárez's love for Leticia while still a novice are labeled, "MEMORIAS INTIMAS. NADIE DEBE LEERLAS HASTA DESPUES DE LA MUERTE DE SU AUTOR" (*Que te perdone el viento* 74), and Contreras reads the forbidden memoir anyway and fantasized, to the point of his own seduction, about the physical and emotional beauty of the possible relationship. Otherwise, the novel employs a dramatic realism that takes its readers to the very spot and moment where the narrative flashes back and forth between perspectives on González Suárez and the canon while preserving the intense and graphic presence of a political assassination.

Juan Valdano, Anillos de serpiente

Juan Valdano's *Anillos de serpiente* is closer to the type of detective novel readers expect given the extreme distrust of law enforcement in the Ecuadorian environment in the second half of the twentieth century. *Anillos de serpiente* is the story of how Heráclito Cardona (a middle-aged government detective) and Tiberio Sangurima (a small-town chief of police) solve the politically charged case of the "death" of small-town politician Fico Farah. Heráclito Cardona, sent by Minister Milla to prove Farah's "natural" death a politically motivated assassination, sets in motion the unraveling of the fiction and realities surrounding both the orchestrated "murder/death" of the corrupt Fico Farah, the involvement of Farah's wife and political and financial cronies, as well as the farce of a government that is portrayed as one that is determined to *make its own truths* no matter what the historical realities are.

As far as investigative detective novels are concerned, this novel has more to do with scratching out the ills of a broad sector of society in decadence than it has to do with police investigation itself. Tiberio Sangurima, more concerned about his fantasy romance with Farah's wife Mary Morán, simply writes up the report of Farah's death without

investigating Farah's blue-colored face or the drink he has in his hand, although he does document its curiosity. He does not order an autopsy because Mary Morán asks him not to. The report is factual and without speculation:

A eso de la 1 y 30 minutos de la tarde del día señalado, esta autoridad, en cumplimiento de su deber, se constituyó en la casa de la familia indicada para realizar el levantamiento del cadáver, tal y como manda la Ley, y pudo comprobar que el ahora occiso fue encontrado ya tieso y frío, en postura de sentado, frente a un escritorio y teniendo en la mano derecha un vaso que contenía un líquido espeso de color café oscuro y en donde nadaban algunas moscas. Además, se deja constancia del hecho, bastante curioso por cierto, de que el muerto tenía unas ojeras profundas de coloración azulada. Por la rigidez cadavérica que presentaba el cuerpo, esta autoridad dedujo que la muerte, del que en vida fue don Fico Farah, alias el Turco, se produjo unas ocho horas, como mínimo y unas doce horas como máximo, antes de esta diligencia. Acerca del motivo o los motivos de este deceso, el doctor Epaminondas Flor, médico legista, dictaminó que fue paro cardíaco fulminante producido en momentos en los que, el ahora occiso, libaba por algunas horas y de manera incontenible. En vista de que se trató de una muerte natural, esta autoridad creyó del caso acceder a los pedidos de la familia y no ordenar se hiciera la autopsia del cadáver. Esto es todo cuanto este representante de la Ley puede decir en honor a la verdad. Dios, Patria y Libertad. El Ecuador ha sido, es y será país amazónico. Tiberio Sangurima, Comisario de Policía de Todosantos. (*Anillos de serpiente* 97-98)

The irony is that although Fico Farah has been declared dead. He is not really dead and the lack of investigation is due to a series of orchestrated falsehoods that lead Tiberio to write a report that makes readers laugh. When Tiberio writes in the police report that this is all that this “representative of the Law can say about the truth,” it is both ironic and truthful. Tiberio Sangurima is the epitome of a detective who detects nothing. He is the opposite of Sherlock Holmes who investigates, deduces, and solves crimes. Instead, Tiberio Sangurima stumbles upon information and clues. Others come to him to offer information that he shares—when he thinks of it or when it finally seems pertinent—with his past student and “friend” Heráclito, who has been sent to investigate the Farah case. Tiberio never analyzes what he encounters. Heráclito, the younger and more serious investigator from Quito, narrates the incidents that unfold in his investigation of the death of Fico Farah to reveal the utter disintegration and corruption at all levels of Ecuadorian political and economic society (hence, the ironic and pejorative reference to Ecuador as an *Amazonian* country. The implication is that Ecuador was still a country that could be understood or controlled by civilized minds).

The story is not just about a faked murder or a lackluster detective. Instead, the unraveling of betrayal, mystery, and death is the stage on which detective Heráclito Cardona tests his own beliefs about the government that employs him, about the people he believes he serves, and about his own understanding of his identity and beliefs when faced with a world that *creates its own realities* to perpetuate the wealth and power of a few over

the poverty and misery of the many. The serpent rings (*anillos de serpiente*) are the ever-tightening rings of corruption and false appearances that squeeze the breath out of individuals who attempt to challenge the political and economic powers that be.

Valdano's use of realism in *Anillos de serpiente* is most evident in his detailed descriptions of the decrepit, murky river town and the woebegone, masquerading inhabitants of Todosantos:

Solazo. Pasos sonámbulos me llevaron hasta el malecón. Las barracas de los vendedores de cerveza, refrescos y comida estaban desoladas, los fogones apagados. La brisa levantaba y golpeaba las latas mal clavadas de sus techos. El lugar era desaseado y maloliente. Al centro de sonoros torbellinos de moscas pudríanse desechos de pescado y marisco. Amarradas a las bitas del muelle, unas canoas abanonadas se mecían en el agua del río. Si no hubiera sido por el sol que me doblegaba habría pensado que estaba atravesando un sueño. (*Anillos* 59)

The *ghost town* of Todosantos and its people are a dark and mysterious shadow of what they were during the brief economic boom during the years in which the cultivation and sales of tagua brought prosperity to Todosantos. The hideous "Gato Negro" bar with *live* shows is the symbol for the impoverished town. There are no actors on stage under the age of seventy and Heráclito notices that the players are not up to the roles they have to play:

Calvicies mal disimuladas, pelucas desteñidas, bocas a las que les faltaba dientes, voces atipladas, alaridos latimeros. Todos se vanagloriaban de sus éxitos, de sus aplausos y del adulo que habían recibido de otros públicos, en otras partes y en otros días ya distantes, ya perdidos. (*Anillos* 147)

Heráclito is scandalized by the ovation that the *Gato Negro* audience gives these theatrical frauds or *farsantes*. They attempt to deny the worn-out realities of their bodies much as the *Gato Negro* denies its own impoverished and decrepit, rotting shell of its past:

El "Gato Negro" era una de esas reliquias de un pasado común recuperado con nostalgia. Con sus grandes espejos manchados de azogue, sus mesitas redondas de mármol blanco, sus sillas de Viena, su crujiente piso de Madera ennegrecido con petróleo, su piano desafinado y su olor a mantequilla rancia y a helado de vainilla era, algo así como un viejo barco encallado allí, en una orilla de la memoria, en los recuerdos de esos días de antaño y en los que muchos fueron ricos y despreocupados. (*Anillos* 133)

The "Gato Negro" and Todosantos is a microcosm of what is wrong with the society depicted in *Anillos de serpiente*. The grandstanding, corruption, and eventual decline and poverty in the river town after the bust of the tagua market left Todosantos (*All Saints*) without saints and in complete denial of any possibility for accepting reality as reality. Valdano is a master of portraying the wonderfully tragicomic details of this smelly, bog-like *ghost town* and its fragile, dolled-up characters who try to perpetuate myths of who

they are (*farsantes*), only to have the make-up—real or metaphorical—wash down their faces in tears of pain and disgust.

Anillos de serpiente, in spite of the realism used to portray the sordid details of a society in decline, is a distant cousin to serious criminal fiction. Tiberio, Heráclito, and the people they investigate have the substance of distorted, comic book characters that make them seem both tragic and comic as they move in and out of the steamy shadows of the Gato Negro bar with *live* shows. The comic irony of Valdano's characters is that while characters like the moribund trumpet player Nico and the dolled-up *legendary* Madame Corina Dumond are *sold* to the local audience as the ultimate in entertainment or seduction, these entertainment *has-beens* are just a breath away from age-induced death. Readers are charmed by the irony that permeates the descriptions of the seedy underworld of Todosantos. The underworld gives the appearance of being *something* special and is not. The characters of the novel are stuck in a place where it *seems* that something must have happened, and it has not, and where false appearances come and go like waves washing lazily against the murky shores of the Todosantos river, revealing only more murkiness and confusion between seamliness and unseamliness.

Fantasy is the element that drives the story forward since fantasy is used as a cover-up for the rejection of realities. In this novel, fantasy is not escapist but instead is a tool that serves to derail the understanding of historical reality. The effect for the characters is, of course, confusion and disillusion.

The effect of the fantasy for readers is disbelief and laughter since there is enough distortion from reality to reveal the comic book character of Todosantos and its inhabitants. Nevertheless, Valdano does not allow the comic book to be devoid of seriousness, and his urban detective Heráclito Cardona is allowed to mature in his understanding of fiction and reality so that he rejects official history to embrace human history, his own failings, and his own strengths.

This novel does not rely on magical realism or fantasy that is beyond belief. The function of fantasy here is to highlight that *reality* is beyond belief and unacceptable. The suggestion is also that only one individual can come to grips with the persistent and pervasive deception that is propagated as the Ecuadorian reality portrayed in fiction. Valdano's character leaves the reader with hope for social change—he still believes these representative Ecuadorians have a conscience. He still believes in their rejection of the absurd realities that are being constructed to perpetuate myths concerning order, power, and society.

The real heroes of the novel are the few who are aware of the farcical fraud and who reject it. The real criminals are those who are aware of the fraud and perpetuate it. In *Anillos de serpiente*, just as in Juan Valdano's later novel, *El fuego y la sombra*, the main character takes a similar journey toward understanding his own identity and role in society. Fantasy provides the means for unmasking hypocrisy while the recognition of disjuncture between fantasy and historical reality allows for the rebuilding of self-identity for one, but not for all.

Argentina Chiriboga, Jonatás y Manuela

Argentina Chiriboga's novel traces the lives of several generations of enslaved African women from Angola to Ecuador and Peru. The novel begins with the suffering of

Ba-Lunda, a young mother who recovers from malaria shortly before being hunted down in her African homeland and taken by slavers. She is captured with her infant daughter but leaves behind a husband and family. Ba-Lunda is taken first to Cádiz by Spanish slavers and then to work on the sugar cane plantations in Ecuador where she and many other slaves suffer physically from poor conditions and long work hours. They suffer emotionally from violation, humiliation, and the loss of their given African name and cultures.

The novel follows the lives of Ba-Lunda's daughter and granddaughter (Jonatás) and the integration and segregation of two societies in Ecuador: the decrepit and perverse society of the Spanish lords and the fragmented but determined society of the slaves who take enormous risks to gain freedom. The title of the novel refers specifically to the relationship between the young slave Jonatás (known to her mother as Nasakó Zansi) and the illegitimate daughter of a Spaniard, Manuela Sáenz. Don Simón Sáenz purchased Jonatás from another plantation owner as slave for his daughter, but she is also expected to serve as a playmate. The relationship between the two girls, who grow up together, bridges the gap between lord and slave as they work together to free other slaves. Thus, Manuela becomes part of the liberation movement as Jonatás becomes an essential part of the liberation movement within Ecuadorian society for slaves and their descendants.

Argentina Chiriboga's novel is a compelling story about how these individuals made a difference—sometimes through extraordinary means (poisoned fruit, murder, robbery, blackmail, etc.)—in the pursuit of freedom. The novel is set in the time shortly before independence when Manuela Sáenz was summoned by Antonio José de Sucre from her home in Lima, where she lived with her English husband, to Quito, Ecuador just prior to the battle of Pichincha in 1822.

Chiriboga's novel does not resort to obsessive realism or to overt fantasy. Fantasy is used in two ways in the novel: first, the slaves rely on traditional herbs to bring their desires and fantasies to fruition. Lu-Banda kills two Spaniards by poisoning them. Jonatás uses traditional African amulets to affect a relationship between her mistress Manuela and Jaime Thorne. For readers, the fantasy lies in the *conjuros* based on African natural medicine while, for the characters, fantasy supports their struggle for freedom and pursuit of a new identity. Since the world is seen from the African and slave perspective, the slavers, priests, and plantation owners are portrayed as odious, perverse, and cruel humans. Slaves are portrayed as strong human characters who, with the exception of one slave who buries her memory of African roots and accepts her slave status as her destiny, struggle to find the road to liberation from their oppressors.

Jonatás, a second-generation slave in Ecuador, prays to African gods and is a product of her own Angolan grandfather's incantations that give her the protection she needs to escape being identified as a thief. Jonatás does not buy her own freedom with the jewels stolen from high society since she feels that she has her freedom with Manuela who not only treats her as a friend but as an accomplice in the pursuit of freedom for others. Jonatás uses her status within the Sáenz and Thorne households to make freedom possible for others. The only issue that Jonatás pursues for herself is to find her mother. The search for her mother ends when Jonatás is spotted by her mother in Lima. While the encounter could have been a climax for the novel, it is merely a moment of personal closure for Jonatás and is far less important than the overall struggle for liberation from Spain and from oppression.

Chiriboga's narrative hinges on how heritage (African, European, and to a very small degree, Indigenous) and the pursuit of power conducts individuals from all walks of life toward both heroism and heinous acts of destruction. Jonatás and Manuela seem immune from having to take responsibility for their acts; they steal but are never caught. Jonatás is the consummate liar and keeps thieves from detection and, hence, retribution. Jonatás feels no remorse for blackmail or theft as long as she can use the booty for the freedom of others. Her ends always outweigh the means.

Jonatás y Manuela does not leave the reader with a sense of tragedy or of disgust about the human condition. Rather, the novel provides a sense of empowerment for women in the struggle against oppression and condones the use of whatever ploy is necessary to provide others with the ability to buy freedom. On the last pages of the novel, Manuela and Jonatás leave family and duty behind to lead a mission for independence in Quito:

Manuela adelantó el viaje a Quito; dejó a su padre muy enfermo en Guayaquil, al cuidado de Natán y atravesó con Jonatás la cordillera. Una madrugada, toman dos recuas de la hacienda de un familiar y las envían a Sucre con quince peones. En el trayecto, liberan esclavos y convencen a curiosos para que marchen con ellas y se enrolen en el ejército independentista. (*Jonatás y Manuela* 173-74)

The novel ends with Jonatás (the granddaughter of an African slave) and Manuela (the illegitimate daughter of a Spanish plantation owner in Ecuador), her mistress, and friend on horseback and in battle with Sucre against Spanish oppressors. The two women liberationists see Abdón Calderón's flag wave in the air at the pinnacle of the Pichincha and, for a moment, Jonatás feels the youthful freedom that she felt as a child playing at war with young Manuela. The ending of the novel, more than the rest of the book, seems too contrived—and even farfetched—to be historically realistic or even psychologically realistic for Manuela or Jonatás; however, the empowerment of two young women in the struggle for the freedom from oppression for the benefit of others is still quite powerful and does not deny the strength of the women in the novel who struggle tirelessly to free themselves and others from injustice and oppression.

Alicia Yáñez Cossio, Sé que vienen a matarme

In *Sé que vienen a matarme*, Alicia Yáñez Cossio takes on one of the most turbulent periods in Ecuadorian history to explore the man behind the tyranny of García Moreno. The novel, set in the nineteenth century, relies on realism to create the historicized fictional account. The narrative voice she chooses to tell this story of ambition, power, fanaticism, tyranny, and betrayal is omniscient and nearly dispassionate. The voice is reminiscent of the traditional storyteller at a sixteenth century puppet show because the function of the storyteller is to tell the unofficial history in a dispassionate way while letting the actions of the puppets steal the hearts or incite the anger of the crowd.

In the case of *Sé que vienen a matarme*, the strongest emotions that García Moreno and his family evoke through their actions are pity and loathing. Marginalized, solitary figures who are trapped by outrageous religious fanaticism—either their own or the fanaticism imposed on them by others—and an exaggerated sense of duty and obligation,

drive the novel forward toward the obvious and necessary end in which dictator García Moreno is murdered with bullets and machetes on the steps of the Government Palace.

The narrator's lengthy description of how Gabriel García Moreno became the ambiguous hero and traitor of the Republic, and of how his vengeful nature and religious fanaticism and superiority drove him to make improvements that benefited many in Ecuador at the expense of others does not leave the reader a shed of admiration for the leader who has been called both tyrant and martyr, defender of the Church and madman, and hero and degenerate in both fiction and in history. The description of his murder and the days following his death provide a window to the function of realism and Yáñez Cossio's punctuated style of writing in *Sé que vienen a matarme*:

Se declara la República en estado de sitio. Las campanas de todas las iglesias doblan por tres días seguidos a difuntos. Se ordena la autopsia del cadáver y se comprueba que tiene seis heridas de bala, ninguna de las cuales es mortal. Se extrae el corazón y se lo guarda en una ampolla de cristal. Se observa que el cadáver lleva colgado del cuello dos escapularios, uno de los cuales tiene la imagen del Corazón de Jesús pintada por el maestro Salas, un rosario de cuentas negras, una medalla con el rostro de Pío IX y un relicario de plata con una cruz pequeña que lleva la inscripción de que es una reliquia de la cruz en que murió Cristo.

Se le ordena al doctor Esteban Gayraud que embalsame el cadáver, trabajo por el cual se le pagan doscientos treinta y dos pesos con dos reales. Ese mismo día, se manda que se celebren honras fúnebres de cuerpo presente. Visten el cadáver con el uniforme y los galones de General en Jefe de Ejército. Lo colocan sentado en un lujoso sillón de terciopelo rojo. Le cruzan la banda presidencial sobre el pecho y en la cabeza destrozada le ponen un sombrero de tricornio. Tiene los ojos entrecerrados y la boca abierta y desde el más allá tal vez mira lo que no puede ver ni jugar ningún entendimiento humano.

Un grupo de soldados escogidos del Cuerpo de Ingenieros, vestidos de zapadores, con mandiles y guantes blancos, lujosos morriones de pelo, a imitación de los granaderos imperiales y con fusiles, hacen guardia de honor en el altar mayor de la Catedral. Al pie de ese cadáver embalsamado se colocan coronas de flores, banderas, estandartes, lanzas, espadas y fusiles. Hay inquietud y consternación entre la muchedumbre que se agolpa en el templo, pero hacen falta lágrimas. (*Sé que vienen* 230-231)

Readers, like the masses in the Cathedral in the text, have no tears to shed for the the character who, in his youth, forced a student to eat excrement, married for self-preservation and self-advancement, and tortured his wife with insults filled with hatred toward her and his own offspring. The narrator demonstrates no overt emotion and the description of García Moreno is matter-of-fact and to the point, but the specific use of *ese cadáver* and avoidance of García Moreno's name or position, the detailed exhibition of how his cadáver is dissected first and then dressed and perched on a velvet chair with a Spanish three-cornered hat set upon his bashed-in head, eyes semi-closed and mouth open,

clearly denies any genuine sympathy or compassion toward his passing. The narrator explains that outward signs of mourning and reverence surrounded the cadaver but there is, according to the evidence, no sincere lamentation on the part of the crowd since no tears are shed.

The factual character of the narrative voice avoids the conscious distortion of history by means of omissions, exaggerations, and anachronisms, replacing these with a mountain of evidence against the character of García Moreno. The effect of realism in this work, then, is first to counter any official historical eulogy of García Moreno and his rise to power with a mountain of disturbing details of his personal life that led to his rise. Likewise, the evidence serves to debase the perception of him as hero, saint, or person of decency and dignity, and the effect on the reader is a questioning of how a country could first allow such a man to come to power and secondly, how could it be possible to consider him a national hero or even a worthy representative of the Church. The narration is free of explicit parody or irony or any sense of humor as Yáñez Cossio relies strictly on dry, disturbing evidence to impugn the legitimacy of official versions of history instead of the interpolation of commentaries by a narrator who might “interpret” the evidence and thus render it “invalid.”

Juan Valdano, El fuego y la sombra

El fuego y la sombra is a fictional autobiographical travelogue in which the fictional autobiographer, Juan de Dios, recounts the events and thoughts over the course of one month (April 30, 1883- to May 31, 1883). The fictional autobiography is presented to readers as historical since the introduction reveals that the travel diary was found in 1987 after a strong earthquake removed it from its “hiding spot.” Juan de Dios, in many ways, is an imitation and more secular reincarnation of the Archpriest of Hita, a medieval archpriest who sermonizes about how to love God (*buen amor*) while demonstrating to his reader how futile and damning lust and fornication with women (*loco amor*) is to the path toward salvation.

In this story, Juan de Dios is not a priest but a married man who decides to abandon his wife for Thalia, the wife of a local doctor who does not pay attention to her. Juan de Dios’s travelogue reveals his dissatisfaction with the demands of his everyday life with his wife and sets off into the jungle on an expedition with the intention of not returning to city life or his wife, who was the beloved and desired niece of the lustful Ecuadorian president García Moreno.

Since Thalia lives in the jungle and Juan de Dios expects to enjoy a new, passionate life with her, the journey of self-awareness and sexual exploration is what carries the novel from beginning to end, even though the vivid descriptions of the jungle (its noises, the mud, the flora and fauna) are marvelous. The expedition itself is less important to the story than Juan de Dios’s emotional journey from rejection to acceptance of his “true” love, the love of his wife. Juan de Dios’ sexual exploration—first the illicit, passionate love affair with Thalia, the sensual and dream-like relationship with Eva (whom he discovers had been dead for two years before he “met” and fell in love with her), and the exotic sexual relationship with Flora—is part and parcel of his “awakening” to true love which, in this case, is based more on pity and responsibility than on what most would consider “true

love.” Juan de Dios decides to return to his wife and back to support the political aspirations of Eloy Alfaro.

The narrative structure of the fictional autobiographical diary demands that the autobiographical writer rely on historical reality and realistic descriptions of historical events and his interpretation of them. However, Juan Valdano’s character is faced with *realities* that appear much more based in fantasy and magical realism than in realities that he and others can accept at face value. The first magical reality is the appearance of Eva, the daughter of a man who takes the feverish Juan de Dios into his home. Eva treats Juan de Dios’ illness and her beauty captivates him. They fall in love in the short time they are together, and the relationship seems to him to be the most fulfilling love affair he has experienced. Thalia becomes a distant memory and readers begin to dislike Juan de Dios for his infidelity first to his wife, to Thalia, and his disturbing lack of direction.

The realism characteristic of a diary account is challenged by the inclusion of two events that reveal how fantasy can also move Juan de Dios toward making better decisions in his life. When Juan de Dios asks Eva’s father about her whereabouts, her father insists that she had already been dead for two years and buried with the hat that Juan de Dios now had in his hand. His sensual and sexual experience with the otherworld serves as a reminder that human passion is ephemeral and that the afterlife is powerful but that he must find himself in the reality in which he lives and breathes.

The second magical event that Juan de Dios reports in his travelogue is the encounter with the black woman, Flora, who provides Juan de Dios his most extensive and passionate lovemaking experience at the expense of his traveling companions whom she turns into barking dogs. He must trick her into allowing him to complete his expedition and save his companions. Fantasy is as important as historical reality in leading Juan de Dios to accept responsibility and to make decisions that will further his own future, as well as the future of his country. Thalia is pregnant with his child and she demands as much or more of him as his wife did. He rejects this new responsibility and Juan de Dios determines to return to his wife and to the service of Eloy Alfaro.

The book is a fun read due to the marvelous descriptions of the Ecuadorian landscapes that come to life in the hands of Juan Valdano, the varied romantic episodes and the exotic—albeit realistic—descriptions of the expedition through dense jungle, for example. Likewise, the emotional journey of Juan de Dios is both exciting and unnerving due to the short time period in which all these exhausting physical experiences, devastating illnesses, hexes, and sexual encounters take place. The effect is that while the narrative structure begs readers to believe the unbelievable, readers have difficulty doing so. The witchcraft and the titillating encounter with the dead are useful in turning the tide for Juan de Dios, but both put a greater distance between reader and the notion of autobiography. Therefore, the outcome of the fictional autobiography is one that serves more for entertainment value than as a moral sermon on self-awareness.

Juan Valdano exploits the structure and purpose of a fictional autobiography like Juan Ruiz’s medieval *Libro de Buen Amor* without quite reaching the historical function of providing moral guidelines for behavior to others through *exempla*. The sexual exploration and exploitation of women in the story as a means to set Juan de Dios on the right path toward greater social and political responsibility, no matter how entertaining, threatens the reader’s ability to accept the transformation and catharsis as genuine. The hallucinatory fantasy, while entertaining, detracts from the historical function of the

autobiographical connection to real historical situations that are presented in the travelogue and leads readers to distrust the narrative and its narrator.

Carlos Carrión, ¿Quién me ayuda a matar a mi mujer?

Carlos Carrión explores the relationship between fantasy or obsession and the “real” world in the humorous, erotic novel *¿Quién me ayuda a matar a mi mujer?* In this novel, protagonist Ulpiano Rojas, a saxophonist from Loja, narrates his inability to destroy the “reality” he has created for himself in his southern Ecuadorian hometown or in Madrid, Spain, where he aspires to improve his lot. Ulpiano is a musician who struggles with the choices he made in abandoning his *true* love, Johana, for an opportunity to complete a master’s degree in music in Madrid and to pursue his most satisfying love, playing jazz.

The novel is at times hilarious. For example, Ulpiano exposes his irrational hatred of old, fat people and self-deprecating conformism but, ironically, finds his life full of both. Ulpiano recognizes that the worst deception, the most disaggreable fantasy but the most effective is the fantasy of love that each creates in his own conscience:

Puesto que si hubiese sido amor, el amor crea el mundo y la hermosura que el hombre necesita para ser menos animal cotidiano, y la ciudad es la más bella, la gente la más buena y los árboles los más verdes, aunque no hubiera ciudad ni gente ni árboles.” (145)

When Ulpiano flees the Loja he despises, “una cárcel de animales solos, un moridero crudo, una ciudad de mierda de la que había que huir lejos,” he travels to Madrid, Spain to write a thesis and earn a master’s degree (144). He meets María Rosa, a woman whose interest in sexual play she calls *nanay* leaves Ulpiano drained and empty after frequent, demanding sexual escapades that immobilize him in terms of his career. In an effort to run from this second created reality (Madrid and the failures it represented), he returns again to his despised Loja, only to discover that he has never been able to escape the disturbing realities he created in his own conscience. He is forced to tolerate the created reality since he refuses to find real love or real life anywhere outside his emotional fantasies.

Carrión relies primarily on realism and erotic sensualism to move the story forward, but resorts at times to sexual fantasy, often triggered when Ulpiano is playing the saxophone or by simple words that invite sensorial experience, although not necessarily sexual *intimacy*. His irrational hatred of a reality is what continues to promote the fantasy that moves Ulpiano to attempt murdering his larger-than-life wife over and over again but without success.

Ulpiano, ironically, is not the consummate criminal mind because he is a reluctant conformist. He is driven by the sensualism of his beloved Selmer saxophone and finds he can only divorce himself from the reality he detests by losing himself in its fabulous, transformational sound. On one occasion, the young female Conservatory students and their teacher disrobe and stand naked before him after he has played jazz for an hour instead of teaching the regular class. Jazz is fantasy and imagination for Ulpiano. For Ulpiano, fantasy is everything that reality is not:

Era una noche más para todo el mundo; menos para mí. Cada noche de jazz, no era una noche de jazz, sino la única forma de vivir. Es decir, de tolerar los días y las noches y a una mujer no amada, con quien estaba solo por culpa de la cobardía o la compasión o el hijo. O por la rutina o por el animal de costumbres abominables que es un hombre. Por la misma razón, no comprendía cómo pude estar vivo los oscuros años que viví sin jazz y sin Johana. (155)

Even when Ulpiano finally reunites illicitly with his *true* love, Johana, who somehow seems to escape the aging process that Ulpiano's wife was subject to, and he experiences the sensual and fulfilling experience of physical and emotional loving, he cannot free himself from his conflictive reality: "Tengo que matarla bien muerta—me dije, desesperado. Sin embargo, el muerto casi fui yo." (209)

Ulpiano's desire to murder his wife is fueled by his obsessive need to possess Johana's pubescent love and to have his fantasy made reality. As Ulpiano reasons the unreasonable, readers are exposed to the dilemmas of his two worlds (fantasy and reality) that he wants to merge into one:

El amor de Joahna me daba una coraza de tanque blindado. Pensaba que no me entrarían las balas; que mis planes eran intachables, y yo el mJOR jazzista del planeta. Que, en el supuesto de que me atribuyeran la muerte de María Rosa, bastaría un momento de jazz para convencer al juez de mi inocencia. Como si el espíritu santo de los asesinos me protegiera. (213-214)

His illusion is perpetuated by his strange love affair with Johana. She is an adulterous, married woman, pregnant with her lover's child, but has no more scruples or sense of reality than an adolescent. Her bedroom was still outfitted for an adolescent, her reasoning and sense of responsibility no more acute than that of an adolescent girl:

Le pregunté por los antojos de embarazada Hermosa y me dijo que el primero era el de amarme por encima de todo el mundo. También me contó que ya tenía su maleta lista, escondida debajo de la cama. Para que su madre ni sus hermanas sospecharan, por si algún momento se olvidara de ponerle llave a su cuarto y entrasen. Era su habitación de adolescente y tenía las paredes empedradas de pósteres de Sandro, Camilo Sexto, Salvatore Adamo. De peluches, de fotos con sus primas y sobrinos, de muñecas, de tarjetas. Me enumeró las cosas que llevaría: tres faldas, tres blusas, tres pares de zapatos...

-¿Por qué tres?

-No sé. Es un número genial. (215)

Ulpiano fails at nearly everything he attempts, precisely because he cannot reconcile passion and reason or manage the fantasies of the flesh and the spirit with the realities of the material world in which he lives.

Carrión is successful in exposing the power of the human mind to make decisions that lead along a path of self-destruction. The characters delude themselves and, in doing so, find themselves in thread-bare realities where fantasies about lust, murder, and even individuality keep them from living successful lives.

Javier Vásconez, El retorno de las moscas

In *El retorno de las moscas*, Javier Vásconez brings George Smiley, the famous spy character created by John le Carré (a pseudonym David John Moore Cornwell), out of retirement. *El retorno de las moscas* is offered in homage to John le Carré and his morally complex and dialogic mystery fiction/spy novel. *Retorno* follows the tradition of a three-novel series from the 1970s and reprinted in 1982 as *The Quest for Karla*. Vásconez's not only takes the character out of retirement but also imitates the more realistic and not-so glamorous circumstances associated with the international agents involved in crime and its investigation or resolution of le Carré's novels. In *El Retorno de las moscas*, Gregorivius, a Russian diplomat, the American Philip Albee, British agent George Smiley, and the mysterious Soviet agent Karla are all involved in an underworld of plots that affect degenerate personal lives of some and that may or may not affect international intrigues that go beyond the individual country of the crime. In a subplot, George's wife, Anne, appears in photos in the bed of another agent and creates the mental anguish that moves George in and out of desperation and then pushes him to take on the assignment in the Andes.

Even before George Smiley is pulled from his emotional whirlpool of depression to investigate the death of Russian agent Gregorivius who has been killed in an Andean city, readers learn that the agents in Vásconez's *Retorno* are quite clearly morally corrupt and delve in the unglamorous business of pornography, violence, drinking, sex, and work in ways that seem to promote international upheaval instead of resolving it. Vásconez reiterates, through his agents, that the intention of spying is not necessarily to solve crimes or to promote a specific national ideology, but instead to intervene and to manipulate lives to the point of obscenity (85). Thus, the air of skepticism characteristic of the spy novels of le Carré is also pervasive in *El retorno de las moscas*. Spies serve themselves first and the requirements of the agency or the needs for national security as a secondary goal.

Smiley is called to investigate the homicide of Gregorivius after American agent Philip Albee, working in the Andes, argues that Gregorivius had been liquidated by a member of the KGB after maintaining contacts with people in Washington. The investigation of the homicide in the Andean city turns out to be just a local crime in which a *john* takes vengeance on the Russian agent after learning that Gregorivius had taken pornographic photographs of one of his women without paying him his share. Smiley, however, is not satisfied with the local crime and investigates Gregorivius' apartment to the point of exhaustion and finds a bundle that includes a photograph of the infamous Karla, the Russian director who, in the novels of le Carré, had escaped detection.

El retorno de las moscas provides the realistic, sordid details of the lives of agents and the marginalized characters with whom they interact. The women in the book are spineless and do not recognize their own exploitation. Rosana, one of Gregorivius' recruits for pornographic photographs, explains to Smiley that Gregorivius's offer to make her into

a sculpture, made her feel like the artist she wanted to be:

Me dijo que quería convertirme en una escultura. Me pidió que me desvistiera y me aseguró que esas fotos podían ayudarme en mi carrera de artista. No le creí, pero sus ojos azules me daban confianza. Además, me sentí menos utilizada y más útil, vestida con las prendas de encaje que Gregorivius me hacía poner, que cuando el Lobo me desnudaba en la pocilga donde vivíamos y me decías puras mentiras al oído, después de quitarme la plata. En una ocasión, Gregorivius me pidió que me desnudara sobre la alfombra, y me regó abundantes pétalos de rosa sobre los senos. Eso me hizo sentir como una artista. (72)

The resulting photograph, according to Smiley, is pornographic, not artistic.

Entonces la vio con el cabello desparramado sobre los hombros. Una mujer, Rosana, en actitud aparentemente provocativa, lo miraba desde la superficie abrillantada del papel. Sus grandes pechos, con pezones negrísimos, parecían apresados entre sus manos como una ofrenda o una copa de vino... (85)

The obscene photographic fragmentation of the female human body becomes an expression of hatefulness and violence as the naked female body is sold like a “can of sardines.”

Al ver esas fotos pensó que el ruso había recogido una biblioteca exhaustivo del cuerpo humano, un aglomerado hecho de ladrillos y de cuerpos apilados al igual que los pollos desplumados de una granja en una pesadilla. ¿de dónde salía todo ese odio y por qué se exhibía el miedo en el cuerpo de cada una de esas mujeres? ¿Dónde se había originado esa violencia? Tanto en el mundo de la industria como en las arenas movedizas de la pornografía, pensaba Smiley, el horror cobraba sentido, crecía, se inflamaba como el papel gracias a la rapidez y capacidad con que un objeto era fabricado y consumido. Una mujer desnuda era vendida como una lata de sardines. Reaccionó con animosidad hacia el vislumbre del infierno proporcionado por aquellas fotos sórdidas, obscenas, tan ofensivas para el pudor humano. (85)

The realistic descriptions of the photographs, the state of the murdered Russian agent’s apartment, or the descriptions of the mundane world in which Smiley lived in Europe is only capable of providing a partial view of the world that the narrator wants the reader to understand.

Fantasy, in the case of *Retorno*, functions as a means to complete perspectives of fragmented reality and thus, becomes a means to solve crime. While the evidence only provides a portion of what might have happened, imagination and fantasy lead the detective to create a version that must have happened to Gregorivius the night he was murdered by the greedy and vengeful pimp called Lobo. Fantasy and imagination allow for speculation to approximate reality but the imagined “truth” is promptly put into doubt when the narrator

counters with “it is also possible he was never there.”

La noche en que fue asesinado, Gregorivius tuvo una súbita sensación de mareo cuando salió del Normandy. Probablemente decidió aprovechar el frío para tomar el aire de la madrugada. Después cruzaría el parque con el cuello del abrigo subido hasta las orejas. Un cielo enciente, de nubes difusas, se confundiría con la bruma esparcida entre los árboles, de la cual se desprendería, inesperadamente, la figura amenazadora del Lobo. También puede ser que no estuviera allí. (77)

Still, the realistic details of what could have happened seems far more realistic, almost a videorecording of what happened, than what may have happened. Fantasy allows the detective to get into Gregorivius possible thought process. This is a very interesting technique because it sells the probable version to readers as though it were the real version.

Debió de sentir una sacudida, una especie de calambre, el degarrón de la hoja del cuchillo al desplazarse por el interior de sus entrañas. Apoyado contra el tronco de un árbol, observaría de cerca el sudor del hombre desparramado por las mejillas en tanto que a él se le iba lentamente la luz de los ojos. Por un momento se le ocurriría una idea absurda, a lo mejor no iba a morir. Así que esbozaría una sonrisa, echando la cabeza hacia atrás, al tiempo que retrocedía unos pasos. Más allá, separado por el sendero de arena, el hombre se limpiaría el rostro con la manga del abrigo y Gregorivius se desplomaría hundiéndose la cabeza en el barro, hasta que al día siguientes un niño lo descubriría tirado al pie de un árbol. (80)

The verb tenses remind the reader that the realistic description is still only fantasy since it *must have been* what happened.

What is important is that fantasy holds greater weight than real evidence. There is no real investigation of the murder by the American agent or by Russian agents, and the Andean police are never mentioned at all in the book. The lack of true investigation, except on the part of Smiley who seems to wander nearly aimlessly through his investigation of the homicide, is that finding out what really happened to the Russian agent is much less important than uncovering the seedy side of agents and the underworld in which they work. Fantasy compliments reality in that, in the end, the reader comes to understand that truth is only a series of probabilities that might be, or that may be, and that understanding the probability of events and their perpetrators brings readers closer to understanding motive and character than having clear evidence of events that indicate real experience.

El retorno de las moscas is a short novel in a genre that has no significant history in Ecuadorian literary historiography. The lack of detective novels or the spy novels in the Ecuadorian literary corpus may be due to the common distrust that police and detectives actually investigate crime. The genre which has been so cultivated in the literature of Britain and the United States (books, films, TV, etc.) has not been cultivated by Ecuadorian writers—with the exception of Vásquez in *El retorno* and Juan Valdano in *Anillos de serpiente*—even though television programs like *CSI* have a significant following in

Ecuador. *El retorno de las moscas* plays to the lack of investigation by local authorities by setting the scene with foreign agents who conduct an investigation—however rudimentary—without the collaboration of local authorities or any particular use of good evidence.

Lucrecia Maldonado, Salvo el Calvario

Salvo el Calvario is a *polyphonic* novel, narrated from distinct points of view that correspond to the three main characters. Each character finds a way out of themselves through love and friendship and the pain of suffering to affirm what each of them learns is the most important aspect of their lives: living life to its fullest by understanding *who* each of them is.

Three voices narrate the story and each uses realism and fantasy to their own purpose. At times the voices incorporate dialogs; at other times the characters narrate past events and their feelings as though it were stream of consciousness. The novel represents realistically the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the characters in both prose and verse.

Fantasy's only realm is in the wishful thinking of Susana (in terms of her nascent and misplaced love of Fernando) and the questioning of purpose and identity that each of the characters wrestles with throughout the novel. *Salvo el Calvario* is a novel about human suffering and learning to love and to live life to the fullest, even in the face of suffering and untimely death. *Calvario* refers to life, death, and loveless life, and a life full of love, as Lucrecia Maldonado indicates on page nine preceding her novel with a poem by Emily Dickenson:

That I did always love
I bring thee Proof
That till I loved
I never lived –Enough-

That I shall love always—
I argue thee
That love is life—
And life hath Inmortality-

This-dost thou doubt-Sweet
Then have I
Nothing to show
But Calvary

Love, sacrifice, and suffering are themes that tie the poem to the novel and that also provide the tie between the characters in the novel. *Salvo el calvario* focuses on the friendship and love between the three main characters: Fernando Simpson, a quiet doctor in his mid to late twenties who also volunteers his time in the community, is a pianist, guitarist, and agnostic; Susana (Misú) Montero, receptionist and secretary for Dr. Simpson, whom she adores secretly, a fervent Catholic, in her early twenties; and Miguel Vera, a twenty-one-year-old university student in literature and communication, who is a poet

driven by Eros and Bacchas. The three become fast friends shortly after meeting and working together in Dr. Simpson's office. They indulge in music, film, poetry, drink, and fraternal, as well as hetero and homosexual love. Their friendship and love is tested when Miguel learns that he is suffering from leukemia. Susana learns that her secret adoration of Fernando will go nowhere because he loves her but not as a lover. Fernando is forced to reveal openly his homosexual feelings for Miguel when Miguel asks him to consider assisting his suicide when he faces certain death. Miguel learns to love Susana as a woman and friend and Fernando as a friend and soulmate. He reconciles with his estranged father and dysfunctional maternal family to find solace in both friendship and love. Each carries a family burden and is liberated physically and emotionally from their burden by experiencing the exciting friendship and love they share with each other.

Each character learns that the lives they led before their encounter at Dr. Simpson's office was an incomplete life, one that was filled with pain, repression, and rejection. The understanding of *living* that comes through their friendship helps them to figure out what life really is all about and that each is capable of loving each other and themselves. According to Susana, living, then, is a product of experience:

¿Quién te quita lo bailado? Y la respuesta es demasiado simple: nadie. Lo bailado, así como lo sufrido, lo gozado, lo reído, lo llorado, sencillamente está ahí aunque ya no esté en ninguna parte, tal cual encuentro en la mesita auxiliar de mi sala el rostro de los cinco que anduvimos juntos durante unos meses, en una noche cualquiera, sentados a una mesa del desaparecido **Karaoke de la Nueva Trova** en donde festejamos todos nuestros cumpleaños, tuvimos algunos nuestra primera borrachera de verdad, lloramos por los ausentes, y también aprendimos a cantar en idiomas que no constan precisamente entre la lista de los más utilitarios ni comerciales. (236)

For Fernando, it is recognition and acceptance of self. He writes a poem to Miguel that is printed on a compact disk of Renaissance and Baroque music that he has published:

más allá del silencio
del miedo
de la sombra que dejamos
más allá de mi cuerpo consumido
más allá de tus ojos devastados
más allá del pecado
del infierno seguro
o del dulce calvario
más allá del absurdo
y el viejo sinsentido que nos mostró la vida
más allá de nosotros
la redención posible
lo que fuimos
lo que el amor nos hizo
y lo que somos (236-237)

The poem is a microcosm of the life these friends have lived. The poem reminds each that we are who we thought we were, the sum of the events of our lives, and the awareness of whom each becomes as a result of these experiences.

Edna Iturralde, Aventura en los Llanganates

Aventura en los Llanganates is an interesting novel for youth in terms of its pursuit of adventure and mystery. The argument is whether dreams, reality or fantasy, communal memory, and history should all be accepted as a mystery.

Edna Iturralde's *Aventura en los Llanganates* is an adventure story about Andrés Costa, an eighteen-year-old Ecuadorian who after living overseas for ten years, finds himself embroiled in a criminal caper after a bag mix-up at the airport. Upon arriving in Quito, he learns that a strange passenger on the flight has traded suitcases with him and he finds he has an unusual, stolen sixteenth-century painting of the Virgin with a concealed map of the trail to the Holy City of the Llanganates where, he learns later, the gold of Atahualpa is kept. The bag switch leads Andrés, his cousins Ignacio and Chito, a childhood friend and neighbor, Alana Torres, and their dog Chomps on a frightening adventure into the Llanganates Mountains.

The young protagonists are followed and entrapped by Walter Alzán and his criminal treasure hunters, forced to enter caves in the Llanganates Mountains to help these criminals find the secret treasure of the Inca, a legendary secret revealed by the last descent of Rumiñahui. The caves lead to the isolated Sacred City of Llanganates from which, according to the ancient chieftan Ati, they may never leave. The youths plan an escape but when the gold-seeking criminals come and threaten the Sacred City, they help to preserve the existence of the Sacred City and help dispense with the criminals instead of concerning themselves with an escape plan.

Andrés, Ignacio, Alana, Chito, and Chomps are freed by chieftan Ati because they proved their valor and saved lives, and the youths promise never to reveal the secret location of the Sacred City. Fantasy and memory are attacked as the chieftan of the lost civilisation, Ati, makes it easier for them by taking the memory of their adventure in Llanganates from their mind. When they discover a souvenir of their adventure, Ignacio stipulates the importance of keeping the mystery a mystery:

Quizás es mejor dejar las cosas como están—repuso Ignacio—. Sueño, realidad o fantasía, alguien nos dio como recuerdo estos dijes y sospecho que quiere mantenerse en secreto. Creo que debemos aceptarlo como un misterio. (138)

Ignacio suggests that fantasies and even reality, sometimes, is best kept as a secret.

Soledad Córdova, La señora Antuquita

La señora Antuquita tells the story of the everyday joys and difficulties of an older woman who lives with her cats Caralipo and Clementina in her own home that overlooks the city. Córdova's narrator describes the widow's life in detail, recalling for her readers

the rich spirit and character of the happy, aging widow and her Ecuadorian surroundings. Antuquita and her cats are characters that think and appreciate their surroundings:

La señora Antuquita se siente feliz en el silencio de la azotea y mira desde lo alto cómo la ciudad todavía dormita. Luego, extiende la mano y se pone a acariciar a su gato, que se ha trepado al murito del borde de la azotea. Juntos observan cómo todo se llena poco a poco de la luz del nuevo día. Allí se quedan pensando muchas cosas en el silencio fresco. (16)

Señora Antuquita is happy because she can get everything she needs with the help of her neighbors and she can find what she needs to buy at the stores that are near her home. Nevertheless, she misses her dearly departed husband and her children who now live quite a distance from her. The only real complication of the story is when her granddaughter and family ask her to come live in a small house they have built for her next to their house, she must decide if she will or will not go, live there permanently, or visit for short periods of time only. At the end of the book, she has not decided whether she will decide to stay permanently in Cununyaco or in Quito, but what is clear is that she will remain independent and happy no matter what her decision.

The story of Señora Antuquita is based on a quotidian reality that faces many seniors whose families have moved out of downtown to avoid the contamination and noise of the bustling cities. Córdova does not provide the negative realities of city life or even of aging or the agonizing choices that family members have to make. In *La señora Antuquita*, routine tranquility and the importance of family and companionship move the story forward. There is no need for fantasy in Señora Antuquita's world as there is no need for complication or struggle.

It was difficult to decide how to categorize *La señora Antuquita* since the story does not have the complications of a novel or the single-mindedness of a short story. The story did not seem entirely appropriate for young readers or juveniles who would prefer adventure, mystery and discovery to the simple life of an aging woman who has been invited to live with other family members. Nevertheless, the book has a subtle message that reveals everyone benefits when family members help each other to make choices that can benefit the many and not just the individual. The gentle interaction between Señora Antuquita and her granddaughter's family is devoid of conflict, unlike the majority of challenges facing the aging population and those who care for them in modern society.

Silvia Rey, Veleta

This recent novel by Silvia Rey is a romance novel with a twist of adventure. *Veleta* is the story of an abused young woman who runs from her Ecuadorian homeland and to find a better life in the United States. She encounters abuse and loss while traveling with a coyote smuggler and finds life extraordinarily difficult in the western United States as she moves from one job to the next, earning a good salary as a stripper and prostitute, later choosing to work as a waitress after she has a spiritual revelation. In New York, Veleta meets a wealthy American man, Phillip, whom she loves but is abandoned by him when he learns she is pregnant and when Phillip learns that his parents disapprove of the union. Years later when Veleta returns home to Ecuador as an old, ill, wealthy woman

whose body is ravaged by AIDS, a disease she acquired from her bisexual husband of convenience, she encounters the father of her child and soulmate only days before her death.

The stories of the two star-crossed lovers run concurrently. Veleta narrates the pains and joys of her past life to her priest, Father Antonio, from her deathbed in Portovelo. The narrator, meanwhile, follows the complicated subplots that reveal Phillip's present dilemmas and past choices. Philip has come to Portovelo in search of his family's mystery, as well as to dispense with a gold mine his father has left him as his inheritance. His ignorance of Veleta's hometown or the connection between his own father and Veleta's mother before his birth makes the plot wind hither and thither and Phillip finds himself embroiled in a net of both personal and political chaos that leads him to be accused of murder, on the one hand, and to be scorned by his own son. The stories all unite in Veleta's bedroom in Portovelo where she reunites with her beloved Phillip and, in death, is able to help forge a new and lasting relationship between Phillip and their mutual son and his new family.

The novel relies on realism for the descriptions and is nearly devoid of fantasy except for the fantasy that the main characters learn to believe about the existence of true love and that true human love conquers all. The novel is interesting for its description of Veleta's departure as an emigrant from an Ecuadorian homeland that has offered her a vile and painful life and of her struggles as an illegal immigrant in the U.S. The novel has an additional character of interest, Father Antonio, who, because of his love and concern for Veleta and his position as confessor, finds a way to bring the two star-crossed lovers together for a final reunion and brief marriage. The subplots that lead to the murder of a corrupt, local politician and the strife of three generations of families that try to find a path to happiness do have elements of fantasy but, for the most part, fantasy is focused more on created illusions and not on true fantasy. Even Phillip's father's apparent *delirium tremens* and his "treasure map" are nothing more than the key to a family reunion after years of historical cover-up of a love affair between Veleta's mother and Phillip's father.

Veleta, published in 2006, seems to be directed toward a female reading audience and to fans of romance, in particular, or those interested in the experience of migrant workers in the U.S. Unfortunately, the characterization of Veleta's love interest, Phillip, is such that readers never come to like him very much and the *happy* reunion between Phillip and Veleta at the end of the novel is both bittersweet and brief. Happiness is only achieved with the next generation when an arrogant Phillip is humbled and his son finds a way to forgive him for thirty years of rejection and abandonment.

Alfonso Reece D., Morga

Alfonso Reece's *Morga* is an historical novel told as a fictional autobiography by the main character, Antonio de Morga, who was, in history, the president of the Real Audiencia in Quito between 1615 and 1636 and who served the Spanish government in the Phillipines, New New Spain (Mexico), and Peru (Peru and Ecuador). In history, Morga is best remembered for his work as an historian and his book, *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas*, which was published in 1609. Alfonso Reece's novel is set in the seventeenth century at the end of Morga's life. The fictional life created by Reece in *Morga* will be remembered

more for its saturation with unusual sexual pleasures than for the political life that Morga leads in the novel.

This contemporary novel is an imitation of Spanish baroque literary style with the expected chapter titles that are reminiscent of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, of the picaresque fictional autobiographies like the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and Francisco de Quevedo's *La vida del Buscón*. Chapter VII, for example, is titled, "De como casó la hija del doctor Morga y de la manera en que este se fue de las Filipinas" and the narrative is conducted in first person. Reece's imitation of the archaic seventeenth-century style and lexicon is not flawless but the imitation does not make the book harder to read. A disclaimer for the "authenticity" of the style is made in the prologue when the prologuist explains that the *original* text encountered has been modernized and reworked somewhat since the original was in such a bad state. The disclaimer indicates that the text we read is faithful to the "original" since "Consideramos que esto no falsifica la base del discurso, porque añadidos no superan una centésima parte del texto" (11).

Reece recognizes his historical and literary sources in the bibliography at the end of the novel. He relies on José Calvo's *Así vivían en el Siglo de oro* (1989), John Leddy Phelan's *El Reino de Quito en el siglo XVII* (1995), and Carlos Sainz Cidoncha's *Historia de la piratería en América española* (1985), for example, and for discussions of sexual relationships (especially concerning sodomy) on Federico Garza Carvajal's "An emasculation of the 'perfect sodomy' or perceptions of 'manliness' in the harbours of Andalusia and colonial Mexico City, 1560-1699" (1998) and Julio César Montané Martí's "El pecado nefando en la Sonora colonial" (Centro INAH, Sonora PDF, no date). The historical research serves to provide the narrative with some elements that give the impression that the novel is, in fact, a reproduction of a manuscript written by Morga and found by the prologuist in an antique shop in Lima, Peru; however, the narration itself is not entirely convincing.

The novel relies on realism for its descriptions and makes every attempt to expose historical curiosities. For example, when describing Indian religious practices, the narrator explains:

Todos los indios que se pueden ver en la ciudad y las villas son cristianos, aunque de manera curiosa. En tanto pueden, evitan recibir los sacramentos y hasta ir a misa. Tienen gran estima por las imágenes, a las que adoran de manera muy supersticiosa. Piden a los sacerdotes que les presten cristos, vírgenes y santos para llevarlos a sus casa y poblados, donde celebran fiestas y ritos muy indecentes. Es común descubrir que los de tal o cual pueblo siguen adorando a sus ídolos en las huacas, que son sus oratorios, a los que sacrifican ciertos conejos de la tierra que llaman cuy, no les ofrecen animales más grandes porque no podrían hacerlo a las escondidas. (122)

The interest in the indigenous or mestizo communities or politics is far less than in Morga's sexual delights and interests.

The representative sample of contemporary Ecuadorian novels analyzed here provides no evidence of the writer's attempt to create an alternate world (like the alternate world we find in *The Lord of the Rings*) or a space in which awe or creative investigation

has a place. When there is an opportunity for creative investigation, it is squashed or denied. The result is that fantasy is relegated to the individual only where truncated or frustrated characters are incapable of transformation or fulfillment.

What contemporary Ecuadorian novelists have attempted to do with their employ of fantasy is to open an alternative space, not an alternative world, but a space in which individuals can attempt to seek out a way out of listlessness or the ugly realities that surround them. The challenge in focusing fantasy on the alternative space of the individual, however, is that the sordid realities of the social and natural context of these novels as well as the breadth and depth of description rooted in realism characteristic of the Ecuadorian novel since the early twentieth century often outweigh even the most imaginative fantasy of the individual character.

One of the ways in which readers can visually imagine the truncated spirit of the individuals portrayed in many of these contemporary novels is to take a look at the images produced by Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín (1919-1999). With the exception of his self-portraits and perhaps some of his tender paintings of mother and child, most of his paintings and murals reveal fragmented humans, contorted faces, and knotted hands of aching frustration. His paintings portray the souls of the truncated, oppressed spirits who live and work amongst those with power whose individual fantasies or negligence suffocate any meaningful expression of human compassion, social justice, or gentleness. The fragmentation of the human spirit in these novels implies a plethora of sordid realities that remain within and beyond the surface of the narrative. However, the individual character is never allowed access or a defined space designed for transformation through serious investigation and reflection.

What is significant is there is sufficient evidence in the analysis above to indicate that the binary function of realism and fantasy in these novels is to project the image of a society that continues to hold the transformation of the individual at bay because there is no space in society for individual growth or for living as a complete human being. When the attempt at fulfillment relies on voyeurism and not on stepping outside of the individual perspective to view the world of possibilities through another perspective or through fantasy, there can be no transformation or readjustment in the individual or the society in which he lives.

Chapter Four—Short Story and *microcuento* (*Flash Fiction*)

Contrary to the stagnation or truncation of the human spirit that we find in the contemporary Ecuadorian novel, the contemporary Ecuadorian short story writer uses fantasy and the creation of alternate worlds to champion a space for a complete human spirit and for transformation.

Some of the best studies of Ecuadorian short stories have been by Juan Valdano, Carlos Carrión, and Antonio Sacoto. Others who have studied the Ecuadorian short story are Vallejo, Ansaldo, Ortega, Donoso Pareja, and Mario Campaña. Since the short story continues to be one of the most practiced genres in Ecuador during the thirty years that make up this investigation, I have included a wide variety and diverse quality of writing. Each analysis contributes to an understanding of how fantasy and realism are used by short story writers and therefore, I have not arranged the short stories in chronological order but instead in a progressive order that promotes the understanding of the literary and cultural functions of the writer's employment of reality and fiction.

Antonio Sacoto explained that Ecuadorian writers, like many Latin American and Caribbean writers, were influenced by magic realism and the tremendous success of the so-called Latin American "boom" writers. He argues that as the decade of the 1980s continued, writers began to divest their writing of magic realism and fantasy in exchange for a more modern dress with traces of realism:

A principios del 80 todos escriben bajo la lupa del realismo mágico y están inmersos en la literatura del boom; sin embargo, poco a poco van despojándose de los ropajes de magia y fantasía para trocarlos por un atuendo de la modernización con vestigios del realismo. (Sacoto, "El Cuento" 16)

The analysis below will demonstrate that short story writers do continue to use fantasy to explore the potential transformation of the human spirit, and to create alternate realities where individuals can become complete through transformation. In most cases, the transformation only takes place in secret. For this reason, the analysis begins with Jorge Dávila's use of fantasy and, in particular, his short story that reveals where the human spirit can be complete, in the secret territory the afterlife.

Jorge Dávila, "El dominio escondido" (Secret Territory)

There is a sense of fatalism in the fantasy that permeates Jorge Dávila Vázquez's short stories in "El dominio escondido" (1991) and many of the works that Dávila writes using fantasy. In the case of Dávila's writing, fantasy seems to serve either as a poor substitute for living or as a means to complete an unfulfilled life by juxtaposing lived experience with a fulfilling eternal space where the eternal soul can finally reflect and take control. In life, his characters are stifled and truncated by miserable life circumstances and they find greater adventure and "real living" in what lies beyond this miserable reality. Fantasy for these characters is a way to take control of their perception of the miserable

circumstances they lived in, not necessarily as an escape from them, but as a way to lead a complete life, as a way to live a fulfilling life, albeit in fantasy, of an animated spirit in the afterlife.

“El dominio escondido” begins with a poem to a female reader: the poetic voice encourages the spectator to lift the curtain to expose the world of fantasy, a world that is new and unknown and secret:

Anda, querida, mía, levanta la cortina,
más allá existe un mundo
desconocido y nuevo. . . (75)

The curious and inventive beings like the female *addressee* of the poem can find an entire world, an unexplored planet, in every corner of her home where adults make their way unawares:

Los seres como tú, curiosos,
inventivos,
encuentran un planeta inexplorado
y nuevo
en todos los rincones de la casa,
en cada sitio
por donde los adultos
sin asombro
transitan. (75)

The poetic voice explains that beings like the addressee can discover the fantasy and mystery of a world behind the curtain of reality to which the female *addressee* is accustomed. It is a place where the past—a discarded doll or the nostalgic smell of vanilla—can be a portal to a hidden place behind the curtain of reality, where all things have life and where all aspects of life have mystery and charm.

Anda, querida mía, levanta la cortina,
un muñeco olvidado,
la baldosa que brilla,
el aire de oro,
la tarde
olorosa a vainilla,
todo es parte de un dominio escondido,
un país infinito
donde todas las cosas tienen vida,
donde toda la vida es un misterio. (75)

The surprise to readers is that the curtain of mystery is the portal to life itself: fantasy in a hidden or secret world is none other than the experiences of life that cannot be lived in the suffocating and oppressive world of reality in which we think, we move, and live. The world of fantasy is also life, but its reality is part of a hidden empire that, in many

ways, is a stronger and more positive life experience than those experienced in the characters' stifled daily lives:

Anda, querida mía, levanta la cortina
del misterio
y enfréntate al secreto
del dominio escondido,
Enfréntate a la vida. (75)

The call to raise the curtain of mystery and to recognize the secret of the hidden control each of us has is a fresh way to face life. "Enfréntate a la vida" is a call to take control of life experiences rooted in the mystery of fantasy and not just reality. The secret power is a way of providing counterbalance and completion to the dreary, incomplete lives of the characters Dávila exposes in this selection of short stories.

In the first chilling short story of the collection of short stories with the same title, Dávila presents several perspectives and voices. The first are of two women in the cemetery who observe a lonely burial. The voices and thoughts that follow are those of two sisters, Victoria and Mercedes. Mercedes has the power to dream of a future, to fantasize, to forgive, to play, and to love. Victoria has the power and desire to squash all creativity and happiness. The element of fantasy that holds the short story together is the juxtaposition of a narration of the realities in the bedroom and the realities narrated from the afterlife. Victoria is the epitome of the uncompasionate soul whose indifference to life and death are recorded in the way she reacts when she discovers her only sister has died in the bed next to her:

Victoria seguía insomne. Volvió a oír el quejido, un poco más fuerte, se incorporó y llamó a su hermana. No hubo respuesta. Se levantó y la sacudó por un hombro, "Mercedes." Nada. Encendió la lámpara y contempló el rostro arrugado, pálido, desencajado. No se alteró. Le acercó un espejo a la boca y se aseguró de que se había muerto. Recordó que a los difuntos hay que bajarlos de la cama al suelo, para que no penen, pero solo buscó un pañuelo y le ató alrededor de la cara de Mercedes, apretando la mandíbula para que no se soltase. Después, apagó la lámpara y se acostó.

En alguna parte un grifo seguía goteando así que no pudo dormir. (86)

Unlike the unfeeling automaton, her sister Mercedes's soul narrates from the afterlife with great feeling. The joy and pain of living is evident in the narration of Mercedes' thoughts which are always written in italics as a counterpoint to the drier realities in which the "living" sister, Victoria, finds herself. Mercedes' words take her to another reality in which she can take in the pleasures of life in fantasy and explore her feelings and senses:

me quedé dormida encima de la cama, soñando en un patio fangoso lleno de pétalos blancos, sanguinolentos, y sintiendo las uñas de ella en mi

hombro, como ahora, mientras oía un grito casi perdido de tan lejano:
“Mercedes.” (86)

Mercedes is able to escape the torture of a squelched life by moving comfortably beyond reality to a world that, as fantastical as it may seem to the reader, is no less *real* than the dull reality that surrounds her sister who, without creativity, is an unhappy, uncaring insomniac.

Critics like Iván Carvajal and Felipe Aguilar see Dávila’s use of fantasy as a means of highlighting the sordid and miserable reality of those whose lives he investigates. Iván Carvajal suggests that Jorge Dávila Vázquez seeks to build a world of fantasy from the realities that surround him:

parece andar a la búsqueda de un mundo fantástico. Lo va edificando con retazos de la realidad de su ciudad: beatas, vírgenes en espera perenne del hombre que las despose, tontos que nacen tontos y mueren tontos, lavanderas que siguen con su miseria después de muertas, arcángeles que descienden de los altares para poseer a niñas locas. (Carvajal, “A manera de presentación.” cited in “El dominio Escondido” 51)

While there is no doubt that the characters in Dávila’s short stories are generally very miserable beings, some of the miserable beings choose to live full lives—albeit through fantasy—and therefore find ways to complete and fill their otherwise droll circumstances. Another short story by Dávila, “Este Gabriel,” tells of one of those dreamers.

“Este Gabriel” is less about the Gabriel in the story who is born a fool and dies a fool than about the narrative voice who fantasizes about having the opportunity to touch and love the young laundress Elvira who follows Gabriel to an uncertain end. The role of fantasy is captured in the repetitive yearning of the narrative voice who awaits the return of Elvira who has run off with the fool Gabriel because a relationship with Elvira would complete him: “... y ven Elvira, ven, lava acasito para que lagua tuya pase por mi lado, agua mugrosa, negra, pero para yo poder jugar con lespuma que te azulea las manos y las piernas. Elvira, ven, no seas mala, ven” (90).

Diego Araujo Sánchez does not agree that Dávila Vázquez’s short stories allow for a space of transformation and he describes Dávila Vázquez’s fictional world as passive and inalterable one:

como un gran claustro en donde el amor está condenado a fracaso, y la existencia a producir los mismos gestos sin esperanza. Una realidad sin presente ni futuro, es decir, sin historia, es el ámbito de vidas raquíticas, de seres que se debaten en la soledad, el abandono, las puertas de la noche; hombres y mujeres que nunca aciertan el lenguaje que communique sus conciencias y les permita reconocerse.

(“Relatos imperfectos.” Ctd. *El dominio escondido* 52).

Araujo Sánchez describes Dávila’s works as a cloister where love is condemned to failure and where solitary figures are never finds a language for self awareness. It is true that while Dávila’s characters are lonely and alone, many of them still have secret, fantasy

lives. An example of this use of fantasy supporting Araujo Sánchez hypothesis is the case of Dávila's short story "La Señorita Camila," except that even she recognizes in a panic that her fantasies have so taken over that she may not have recognized her passing from a dreary lived life to life eternal.

The elderly señorita Camila lives in her house, surrounded by animals and nieces and nephews, but she is lost in visions of grandeur and nobility that have nothing to do with the sordid reality that surrounds her in what others call "reality." She takes on airs and condemns others hypocritically day after day, living in her own created fantasies of superiority at the expense of real living only to realize—as the narrator hopes—that when the first light of dawn breaks, she finds herself trembling and wondering if she had not already died without taking notice:

La luz del alba la encuentra muchas veces así, con el rostro desencajado, los ojos enormes, la huella del pánico nocturno en el semblante, a tal extremo, que cuando se mira en el espejo desconchado para aplicarse la mota de polvo y el carmín, se pregunta temblorosamente, no te has de haber muerto, Camilita, hija, sin darte cuenta, ¿no? ("El dominio escondido" 97)

The irony of Señorita Camila is that she lives a life of poverty ("tiene ahorrados unos centavitos en el banco y los va comiendo lentamente." 92) and retains such a nostalgia for a fictional life that she is unwilling and incapable of living. She hates students because they are lazy and noisy, laundresses because they are all thieves, the cooks because they are dirty (93). She lives only to report hearsay and rumor without ever attempting to live a life of her own and deceives herself with her own desires and fantasies.

Araujo Sánchez also suggests—as does Felipe Aguilar A. in the introduction to the collection of short stories—that Dávila has a purpose in using fantasy.

Recrear este mundo con la lúcida conciencia de su necesaria abolición, me parece al aporte de estas ficciones a la verdad, a nuestra verdad. La acción benéfica de conjurar fantasmas de un pasado todavía vivo en la experiencia de nuestros pueblos, se cumple eficazmente en estos cuentos. La clave final de su carácter intenso, de su tensión subterránea, está—que duda cabe—en el poder de la poesía que brota siempre de la prosa narrativa de Jorge Dávila Vázquez. (*El dominio escondido* 52)

While it may be perceived that Dávila's intention is to expose the banal existence of lives, the preponderance of fantasy as a motivational force to offer a parallel living experience is just as important. Fantasy, then, is not just a negative force but a creative, living force that provides alternate—abeit secret—life experiences. Jorge Dávila's fantasy short stories in *Historias para volar* provide ample evidence of fantasy as a creative force.

Abdón Ubidia DivertInventos

Abdón Ubidia takes a different path with fantasy in *DivertInventos*, which is a delightful collection of short stories in which Ubidia explores the tenuous but rich border between fantasy and reality and between utopia and a familiar world based on the moral and ethical values and principles we recognize as readers.

The setting for the short stories is *somewhere else*—perhaps Germany or Japan—that is both *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, *familiar and unfamiliar*, reminding the reader of core values that somehow seem twisted or exaggerated just beyond what is comfortable or acceptable. The result is that readers feel connected to the represented world that is reminiscent of the very world they inhabit—or perhaps have visited as a tourist—yet the distortions challenge the reader’s sense of appropriateness so severely that they have to reject that very sense of closeness, of familiarity, of knowing because even in fiction, or fantasy, it is too *real* to be comfortable.

In the first short story in the collection, “**R. M. Waagen fabricante de verdades**,” a desperate man by the name of Kraus seeks out the assistance of the successful, century-old business called Casa Waagen whose patrimony is to fabricate truths. In other words, the business supplied documents, proofs, witnesses, and assistance to establish or reestablish any truths required by the client. In the twentieth century, technical advances had made it possible for the Casa Waagen to evolve from a small, dark loan office in one country to a robust multinational company that had its fingers in all truth-creating aspects in every corner of the world. The modern Casa Waagen now owned radio stations, newspapers, television, and theaters, and it was rumored that the Casa Waagen had even taken part in orchestrating a good part of the scandals in WWII, Watergate, assassinations, the death of Pope John Paul I, and so forth (12). Since Casa Waagen worked with large and small clients—just like a bank that serves both large corporations and the individual client with a small bank account—Krause decided to use their services to solve his problem of taking out vengeance on his philandering wife.

After filling out the proper forms for Casa Waagen, Krause explained his problem to one of the clerks: He had killed his wife’s lover in an elaborate and detailed premeditated plan and had implicated his wife, not himself, in the murder. However, he had left too many loose ends that might implicate him and he wanted them taken care of. The Casa Waagen did not sell cover-ups but truths. He asked the clerk to take care of these incidental loose ends, which Casa Waagen did by erasing any remnants of the original truth and replacing the truth with another truth. Krause’s wife confesses her false *truth* of being the premeditated killer and is imprisoned. However, Krause’s need for vengeance is truncated and rendered void when his wife not only takes the blame for the killing but she also provides all the necessary, intricate details of the murder to close the case without question. Krause is left without even the satisfaction of vengeance since his murder is erased (and denied) except in his own memory. He spends his nights anguishing in front of the fireplace where the last vestiges of his contract with Casa Waagen were destroyed. As he becomes the victim of his own vengeance, Krause turns inward in an obsessive effort to keep alive—at least to himself—“the truth of what truly was the truth” (*la verdad de lo que en verdad fue la verdad*, 21), even though there is not a shred of evidence of his role in the murder except his own memory of having committed the act.

The description of Krause’s obsessive desire to reestablish truth that is no longer acceptable as a truth is stunning. Krause lives two lives: during the day, he surprises those who know him by exercising obsessively and eating right—seemingly entirely sane. At night, he sits in front of the fireplace recalling the details of a lost truth, now a lie, that he must relive without acceptance until decomposition and death overtake him—madness. The intention of his daily preservation of his body and the nightly preservation of his mind, according to the narrator, is an effort to prolong his own life because it is the only

mechanism for maintaining a shred of what he remembers is really the truth—a truth that can only be perpetuated as long as his mind and body recall it.

The story about Kraus and the Casa Waagen is one of those haunting short stories that readers love and hate. They love the short story because it is ingenious. They hate it because historical cover-ups and fabricated truths are a part of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that readers most want to reject. In the information age, truths are tenuous and fluid. Fabricators of truths are not only those who are involved in the media or in politics but those who live and work among us. For this reason, “R. M. Waagen fabricante de verdades” is such a poignant and powerful short story. Fantasy, in this case, parallels reality in a way that makes readers feel quite at home and *extraordinarily* uncomfortable.

“Relojos” (“Watches”) illustrates how the new digital watch, one that physically marks a present without recognizing past or present no longer heralds eternity, a future, or a connection to the past and predicts the end of humanity. The hands of the older watches used to mark the passing of time as well as the symbolic rejuvenation of each hour and day as the hands marched around the face of the clock imitating the *eterno retorno* of time. The digital clock is the epitome of the instant, of solitude, of abandonment (26).

The digital clock, then, according to Hans Mauer, who sells digital clocks to the scandalized narrator of the short story, is a product of its time and a reflection of the mentality and the future of its creators. The narrator, in an effort to find a substitute for his newly acquired digital watch, becomes an obsessive pendulum who, like the clocks of the past, travels from his home to the store and back again in an effort to find a more suitable, less disillusioning watch. Finally, Mauer finds a suitable watch replacement for his client. He hands him a watch that has sensors that detect the vital signs of the wearer. Its hands travel counter-clockwise and at the rhythm that approximates the speed at which the wearer gets closer to his own death. The narrator tells readers, “Sabía que entre el horror que palpitaba, silencioso, en mi reloj de pulsera y aquel otro, burdamente físico, que exhibía en su mano extendida, yo no podía escoger” (27). Every man is a man of his time: curiosity about what might be next is the curiosity “that killed the cat.”

In “Relojos”, the watch dealer, Mauer, is portrayed as the distributor of technological novelties that fascinate the narrator and as a sinister fortuneteller who smiles cynically when he gives the narrator the new watch. For readers, the age of technology and its latest creation provide a clear warning: contemporaries are fashioning items that announce the end of humanity. While the implication is distressing, the manner in which Ubidia suggests the global tragedy in concrete human terms is astute, pertinent, skillful, and to the point.

The short stories in this collection all focus on technology and the affect on life. The one that is possibly the most cynical is the shortest: “**Del seguro contra robos de autos.**” The narrator reminds us, nearly, of a reporter who simply states the facts in an emotionless, seemingly objective manner:

El sistema funciona así: cuando el ladrón consigue entrar al automóvil – cosa por lo demás nada difícil—y se sienta frente al volante, unos dispositivos accionados electrónicamente traban las puertas y aseguran las ventanas. La operación puede o no ser silenciosa. El Segundo paso sobreviene cuando el intruso trata de arrancar el motor. Entonces, sobre el tablero de los instrumentos parpadea una luz roja. A continuación una voz

grabada repite, cada treinta segundos, el mismo mensaje: “De aquí no podrá salir... De aquí no podrá salir”. (55)

The car’s anti-larcency system locks all doors and windows and announces, ominously, that the perpetrator of a robbery will never get out of the car, which is the case since the car’s anti-larcency system includes a hyperdermic needle in the seat of the car injects the robber, leading to paralysis of the legs and the voice. The computerized voice systematically narrates the detailed events of captivity and ultimate destruction to the robber, now victim, who subsequently is pulverized and destroyed with an odorless gas, leaving the car as it was before the attempted robbery:

El espaldar y el asiento se corren hacia la derecha (en los modelos inglese hacia la izquierda) dejando al descubierto un sistema de engranajes y embolus entre los cuales el ladrón es perfectamente triturado, comprimido, y disuelto en un poderoso ácido inodoro cuya fórmula es un secreto de la casa fabricante. Luego, asiento y espaldar retornan a su posición normal, de tal manera que el propietario cuando entre a su vehículo y lo ponga en marcha no encuentre un solo indicio de lo que ha ocurrido ahí. (56)

Thus, the technological insurance against car theft is impeccable, clean and cold-hearted until the last line of the short story. “La casa fabricante garantiza que solo en un uno por ciento de los casos, el dispositivo confunde ladrón con propietario” (56). The last line of the short story is key because it points out the potential grotesque murder of the owner of the car when the system fails on average 1% of the time. The reliance on technological advances, then, is at best, a fool’s game.

Readers must smile when they are told that this fabulous, foolproof anti-theft mechanism makes an error in distinguishing between thief and proprietor of the automobile in only 1% of cases. Here fantasy plays on our desire to preserve what is “ours” at all costs and on the common belief that criminals should pay for their crimes. However, by preserving a car “at all costs” and by belittling human life—pulverizing the perpetrator to the point of extinction and to the point where we have no trace of responsibility in the act—we promote indifference to human life and risk life itself. The ultimate insurance against car theft is absolute even when mistakes are made.

Ubidia includes a similar story about absolutes called “Del confort en los aviones.” The narrator indicates that to prove the excellence of their services, the airline has installed in the comfort panel above the traveler with the normal buttons for light, air, and calling the stewards, and a new red button that allows for exploding the aircraft. The narrator explains that if only one traveler presses the button, a warning is announced. One more than half of the travelers must press the button at once for the plane to explode into a million pieces. The narrator assures readers that the button is somewhat entertaining on long flights when someone pushes the button for excitement and some laugh, others worry and some threaten. Since the decision to blow up the plane must be a rather democratic one (50% plus one), the narrator assures readers that the risk of explosion is minimal. Nevertheless, the narrator paints for readers a colorful portrait of blowing the airplane to bits: “El avión estalla en las alturas y se dispersa en el aire purísimo como un arco iris de partículas brillantes y multicolores” (75-76).

The imagination prescribed by the narrative relies on the reader's ability to recognize the fallibility of human curiosity and indifference. To play with mass murder and self-destruction in fiction is funny but to place it in a context of societal indifference is devastating.

In Ubidia's "**La genética y sus logros,**" the last story in the collection, a man who spies on his lover María is confronted with the possibility that his lover is the victim and benefactor of a cruel experiment on twenty human couples in the mid-1930s. According to a man who claims to be María's husband, the elderly couple was abducted in 1935 and treated at a sanatorium. According to El, scientists had found a way to invert the process of evolution by regenerating cellular material, thereby allowing for humans to reverse age or get younger and thereby have eternal life. María and her husband, according to the tale, escaped after the sanatorium was bombed but were caught in the regeneration part of the cycle. When they escaped, they were each about 65 years old yet, in 1968, they were both in their 40s and their love for each other had waned. In 1968, they had made a pact that in twenty years, they would find each other and try again. They had both changed, however, and María had rejected her husband of many years. Just as in the twentieth-century play with the same topic of reversing age, "Cuatro corazones y sin freno" by Spanish playwright Jardiel Ponce, the reversal of an aging is a societal fantasy that has only devastating consequences for the reality in which the individuals live.

Ubidia's short "DiverInventos" use fantasy to highlight the absurdity of trying to turn back the clock with medicine or technology or to create *fail-safe* mechanisms that overrule human wisdom and morality.

Santiago Páez Profundo en la galaxia

Profundo en la galaxia is a collection of seven short stories in the science fiction genre in which Santiago Páez explores the fantasy of two worlds in contact and the ensuing mayhem that surrounds the encounter. Curiously, the two worlds are separated by time and space but still have a connection to the Andean communities of the Ecuadorian highlands.

In the first short story, Yachak, an Andean shaman awakes to an altercation in the universe. He senses a tremendous shiver that shakes him and his entire world:

La montaña entera se crispaba, desde su más mínimo terrón hasta la más rotunda de sus rocas. Su misma matriz, de tierra comprimida por los siglos, se erizaba en un escalofrío intolerable. (*Profundo* 9)

The shaman is shaken by a change in the physical realities that surround him and his physical being is affected by Mother Earth (la pachamama) on which he had been lying. The natural world communicates with the shaman:

Lo había despertado la tensión de la *pachamama* (madre tierra) sobre la que descansaba su cuerpo. Sin hacer un solo movimiento puso todos su[s] sentidos alerta. Su pulso trató de acoplarse al del suelo, sin conseguirlo. Abrió los ojos. En apariencia todo en la choza estaba bien, sin embargo, el desajuste de las cosas era tal que el mal se aposentaba en paredes y objetos, con el peso de una [una] piedra negra y nociva. (*Profundo* 9-10)

The danger that awakens him and that he senses through his secret or magical connection to the earth allows him and his apprentice son to prepare for the arrival of an extraterrestrial spaceship that carries the tiny TSKZZ of Orkyyun. The TKZZ beings are in constant mutation and yet their society is “una de las más exactas y programadas del universo. Eran expertos constructores de máquinas que, dotadas con las características de la vida, mezclaban células, moléculas y fluidos subatómicos” (*Profundo* 11).

Unlike humans on earth, the tiny TSKZZ of Orkyyn had turned over their own existence to their technological creations whose pseudoartificial minds governed society, business travel, techno-economic exchange treaties with other civilizations in the galaxy, and so on (11). According to the narrator, the weakness of the TSKZZZ was that since they lived in a absolutely controlled world and that whenever one emotion was out of proportion, the entire civilization was at risk of death. As the TSKZZZ spaceship from Orkyyun is attacked by the emotion “fear” and as the ship heads to the nearest planet, Earth, the pilot realizes that the illness of fear will affect not only his shipmates but also those who live on earth, leading to mass destruction.

Yachak prepares for the altercation in the universe by setting an altar with objects that allow all the energies of the world to be concentrated in one place and whose energies allowed the Yachak to diagnose ills, understand the altercations of the universe, cure, and control the powers of nature. When the spaceship lands in the Andes, the Yachak is prepared for the arrival of the extraterrestrials and he recognizes the illness of fear:

El Yachak reconoció el mal del espanto. La falta de armonía. La ausencia de la fuerza que mantiene separados y en equilibrio al calor y el frío. El escalofrío de la pachamana. Todo se explicaba así. Era un monstruoso, un inmenso mal de espanto. (*Profundo* 15)

The Yachak invokes the forces to return harmony to the universe with his words in Quechua and precious power stones, calling for assistance from the mystical powers that surrounded him: Jesus Christ, Ancient Father Cayambito, Ancient Father Chimbo, Ancient Mother Cotacachi, St. Peter, Saint Jusi, Imbabura, Caranquesito, Pedrito, Juanito, Josésito, Lucita, Mother of Quinche, Mother of Baños, and Mother of Lajas. He battles the fierce winds and flames of nature from his altar, in front of his apprentice and others who have come to observe him battle the evil spirits that attempted to take over his body and his natural world.

The Yachac’s call for assistance retuned a corrosive rain shower that cleaned the bioelectronic channels of the spaceship that lands near the Yachac’s altar. The Yachac must return harmony by ridding the universe of fear so that both space travelers and earthlings can survive. The Yachac’s perception and ability to restore harmony not only saves the space travelers but earthlings as well.

What is interesting about this first short story about the encounter between two worlds (one that is controlled by technology and another that is controlled by communion with a spiritual universe) is that Páez puts restorative powers in the hands of a few extra-perceptive human beings. This is a staple in the fiction created by Páez. His main characters have the ability to overcome technological threats for their own survival and the survival of others.

“**Sicario**,” the second story in this collection by Páez, is about an ultra-perceptive hired assassin who attempts to outwit and outrun Dr. Skinner who uses technology to control his subjects much like modern videogame players determine how their “me” will fare on the battlefields in wargames or what powers their “me” will have in the virtual societies in which they attempt to thrive.

The narrator describes the assassin’s heightened senses and reaction to being controlled:

Sus sentidos se agudizaron hasta lo insoportable. Percibía, además de sus músculos, sus articulaciones y ritmos internos, el latido cada vez desasosegado de su corazón, sus intestinos, crispados por la falta de comida, y el erguirse de los vellos de su antebrazo. Sintió la contracción del escroto, el cambio de posición de sus testículos y el inestable proceso en el que los pulmones oxigenaban su sangre. La mirada interior, que le permitía dominar el cuerpo en momentos de tensión y peligro, se había intensificado hasta lo intolerable. (*Profundo* 18)

The ability to perceive, stay calm when threatened, and to be able to be flexible and make shifts when necessary, allows the character to survive in the catacombs underneath the city of Quito. The story takes place in 2114 at a time when the technology of the few attempt to control the lives of many.

Dr. Egas Skinner attempts to control the emotions and lives of many in the catacombs by typing in versions of reality and emotional responses. The Sicario is able to mutate fast enough to escape the ravages of technology with a force that he believes could put an end to his predetermined society, his predetermined world. This force resides in the collective memory of the Monks of the Labyrinth who live in extensive, labyrinthean tunnels beneath the city. The monks evolved a shared perception that allowed them to escape the *neuroticized* and destructive world of the surface. By tapping into this energy, the Sicario escapes death on the surface and is accepted into the brotherhood of the monks who await the self-destruction of the surface humans so they can reconstruct a new world when the other no longer exists.

Páez allows fantasy to highlight the destructiveness of controlling technology, and to remind readers of the strength of the human spirit, flexibility, and creativity.

In a third short story and the story that gives the title to the book, “Profundo en la galaxia,” Xemayetl, an exile from his home planet, recognizes the importance of song to life itself and his role in preserving life by becoming a wandering jongleur. Xemayetl also finds his identity and his destiny by turning inward, by finding within himself the power to tap into the continuity of the universe.

This successful use of fantasy to transform the human experience is what we did not find in the novels studied in Chapter Three but Páez’s science fiction short stories do find a way to push human creativity beyond the social confines and even the natural confines of the natural world.

Páez focuses the successful transformation on an individual who heroically moves beyond others by relying on secret powers. In “**Amarü, poeta de Shyric**,” an impotent galactic Dictator Vaalnoor realizes that he is the only one who can save his world by seeking out the secret powers of defense of a small group of survivors who were able to

keep Intergalactic Intelligence from overtaking them and controlling them. The group of survivors, “la Cofradía de los Guardianes del Libro,” offers Vaalnoor their only weapon, a book that has been salvaged by their forefathers and guarded by them. VaalNoor, seeking a technological weapon that can be used against the technological tactics of the Intergalactic Intelligencias to save humanity, is disillusioned. Nevertheless, he takes the poet Amarü with him to combat the Intelligences. In an effort to stave the progress of the Intelligences in the battle to control humanity, Amarü removes some yellowed sheets of paper from the book he has been guarding and reads a poem by Julio Pazos titled “Los sentidos” over the communication channels. The Intelligences begin to lose their control over enslaved humans and are converted into inert circuits of energy and silica.

As Amarü closes his book, millions of robotic humans recover their conscience and recognize who they are. “Amarü, poeta de Shyric” once again reinforces Páez’s interest in fantasy: for humanity’s survival, we need to turn inward to our own creativity and the creativity of our ancestors to fight and win against the attacks of modern technology and lack of immorality and indifference. Fantasy, in Páez’s fiction, is not a means to complete an identity—as Miguel Donoso Pareja in *Nunca más el mar* (a novel) might have perceived it—but rather a way to recover the connection to the universe, song, poetry, nature, and creativity when humans lose sight of their true essence in a modern world fueled by technology and technologists.

In contrast to the detective stories we find in a novel like Juan Valdano’s *Anillos de serpiente*, Páez’s detective is able to investigate and bridge the unknown. “**Líndica, Tirana del Oc.**” is a curious story about Saul Ramírez Larrea who inherits a book from his estranged and deceased grandfather that is from a parallel world. Saul finds himself a reluctant detective in a strange set of worlds that he does not understand. Nevertheless, when faced with the choice of returning to his everyday life as a commercial engineer in a regulated world in the Andean city of his past, he chooses adventure and steps into the adventurous parallel world of the Empire of Oc. that his grandfather discovered and left for him as an inheritance. Again, by recovering the creative adventure of past and future, Saul finds his true destiny and is able to bridge the strange coexistence of two worlds.

While the premise of parallel worlds is interesting in itself, the charm of “Líndica, Tirana del Oc.” lies in the importance of staying connected to art and to one’s own history. Saul learns to understand the parallel worlds because he has access to his grandfather’s letters and to a version of a poem about Líndica that provides the clue to the parallel world of Oc. When Saul kills the guard from Oc., puts on the guard’s helmet, and steps into the adventurous parallel world of Oc., he leaves behind a world he once considered normal and comfortable. He leaves behind the world of a hot shower, a Mercedes, credit cards, executive clubs, cocktails, and fashionable clothing (*Profundo* 111) which, he decides, is a world of objects that meant little or nothing to him.

When Saul puts on the dead guard’s helmet, he chooses a life that is both frightening and exciting. It is this new world that provides him with an understanding of his past, his present, and his future.

In contrast, Páez’s “**Haladriel, asesino del intertiempo**” (“Haladriel, Intertime Assassin”) does not fit the same mold as the other stories analyzed above. The story is told in first-person narrative by an agent whose job is to patrol carnivals around the world since carnivals are the preferred place for a group of time travelers to cause havoc in the world. The narrator is contracted by Intertemporal Control of Spontaneous Portals to oversee a

carnaval in the Andean town of Guaranda, not too far from Quito. The story is a detective story in which the agent who goes by the pseudonym of Piet Mondrian, attempts to control single-handedly the evil doings of the time travelers who arrive with “las ratas de las edades” through spontaneous time portals. Páez uses the first-person narrative in this instance to provide an eyewitness to the upheaval caused by time travelers in the future, some time after 2100 in a small town outside Quito.

Agent “Mondrian” explains that the goal of the Intertemporal Control is not to supervise the time travelers but instead to fight crime:

No es supervisar a las ‘ratas’ el objetivo del Control Intertemporal de Pórticos Espontáneos, única entidad capaz de utilizar el viaje a través del tiempo con procedimientos tecnológicos. Existimos para combatir a los Criminales del Intertempo, los secuaces de Haladriel, seres que suponemos humanos y que desde hace milenios han circulado de carnavales a carnavales provocando, con procedimientos telepáticos, grandes crisis: motines, asesinatos masivos, actos de terrible barbarie colectiva. Lo hacen porque se nutren, según sabemos, de la extraña energía neuronal de las masas alteradas. (*Profundo* 124)

The time-traveling criminals gain strength from neuronal energy from altered multitudes.

The agent, a type of mercenary, is no saint but he does manage to keep the criminals at bay. The one obstacle he has on a personal level is the relationship he explores with a woman named Amanda who, he learns, is one of Haladriel’s gang of criminals. She also warns him that if he kills Haladriel, that Intertemporal Control will be able to take over humanity with mind control. Mondrian chooses to kill his lover Amanda since, as he comments to readers, her death will help preserve the battle between the Center and the criminals:

No me pagan para cambiar el curso de la realidad. Si Amanda decía la verdad, el dejar vivo a Haladriel conservaría las cosas como las conocía, al menos se mantendría la lucha entre el Centro y los Criminales. Si la lucha continuaba, yo debía cumplir con mi obligación. (*Profundo* 140)

Páez’s characters are continually disturbed by the notion of mind control and the ability of technology to interrupt human communication and sensitivity.

The theme of mind control and communication also runs through the shortest story in the collection, “El analista”. In this story, traditional rituals and beliefs come into stark contrast with 1200 years of technological advances that allow control of physical disturbances like the eruption of the Tunguragua volcano outside the city of Baños. In this short story, the “analists” are aliens who spend time in a human body to observe how humans behave during physical disasters.

Profundo en la galaxia works as an anthology of science fiction and imparts a clear message to readers. Human existence depends on communication, art, and human interaction to combat the absurdities of technological advances. In this sense, fantasy plays

a very important role in the modernization and technical advancement of societies that are both traditional and spiritual like the Andean societies in which Páez sets his stories.

Modesto Ponce Maldonado, También tus arcillas.

Modesto Ponce Maldonado's short stories in *También tus arcillas* (*Also in your Clay*, 1996) are stunning due to the portrait of a cold, uncaring society in which his characters move. In "**Hay un bosque espeso hacia el oeste**" ("There is a Thick Forest to the West" 23-33), the narrative voice tells the story of a boy who was born without his mother knowing. She was too tired from working, taking care of her alcoholic husband and six daughters to notice. The narrative voice tells us that the boy was born half dead (*muerto y medio*), mute, and frighteningly ugly and that he is such an aberration that he is caged. By the time he is ten years old, the deformed child Lucho climbs out of his cage and over the wall to make friends with the plants and flowers and with the animals who never leave his side. His relationship to the animals and plants is the only positive relationship in his life. Plants grow miraculously with his touch and the animals grow quiet and obedient around him. People are so afraid of him that even the local priest refuses to baptize him.

When Lucho's family begins to modernize in terms of dress and their home, they demolish the orchard, Lucho's only solace. He is frightened and stops eating and drinking. Then he disappears altogether. The narrative voice suggests that he has fled to live in the hills where, according to the ancients, one could live without ever being found. Ponce Maldonado relies on realism to portray the cold indifference of family and community but counters that frugidity with the boy's natural and fantastic connection to the spiritual and natural world around him.

"Hay un bosque espeso hacia el oeste" is nearly naturalistic in its description and chilling in terms of its exposition. The social realism is reminiscent of the lack of communication and disintegration of society in works like *Vidas Secas* by Brazilian author Graciliano Ramos. The narrator never lets us know directly if Lucho had fantasies that completed his otherwise empty world—a world empty of human love or compassion. Lucho found ways to escape from the love-less and human-less world to which his family had condemned him. He found joy and satisfaction in plants and animals where he could nurture the natural world with an uncanny ability, an ability to which his family was blind. The narrative voice provides an element of joy and hope when he reports that one man said that, according to the ancients, someone could live without ever being found in the Blue and Yellow Hills where there were ferns, fruits, berries, guatusas, parrots, deer, bears, squirrels, and more than 100 species of orchids (*También* 33). The suggestion is that Lucho's natural instincts have led him to flee to the Blue and Yellow Hills to live a full spiritual life away from the humans who shunned him.

The silenced role of fantasy in this short story highlights the stark absence of human love and interaction in a family and town where an Indigenous family turns their back on nature in preference for modern clothing, bricks, and concrete. The apparent attractiveness of the modern world blinds them to the interior beauty and creativity of one of their own.

In a second short story in the collection, "**Los hombres sin rostro**" ("Faceless Men"), fantasy has a much more prominent function in the narration of this story about two brothers who are murdered erroneously by police. The narrative voice, in this case, is the

voice of one of the murdered brothers who—speaking from the grave—asks his father why he did not come to their rescue in time. The narrative begins with a marvelous teaser when the voice tells us that the local people no longer look at the police station, women cover their baby's head as they pass it, and so the reader is hooked into finding out what has caused this fear. Readers learn that the two boys are arrested; Andrés is killed but the brother (narrator) is not told until the police take the narrator to see his dead brother. They kill the narrator as well and then the two brothers are finally together in death. In the blurred space between the here and now and eternity, “un espacio en el cual el tiempo y la eternidad se mezclaron” (108), the deceased narrator sees his father sitting in a rocking chair, doing nothing. The result is that Modesto Ponce exposes in this short narrative “hombres sin rostro” are uniformed men who, nameless, show no compassion or care for others. It is a portrait of a cold, uncaring society in which even a father disconnects from his own son.

In this case, fantasy provides the ability to narrate from the grave, and makes it possible to describe a dehumanized society in a way that provides a window to the sordid realism of everyday life. Fantasy, here, allows the narrative voice (and more importantly, the reader) to see “the whole story” of the tragic human reality which seems to be devoid of curiosity and love. Readers recognize the lies and cover-up that was given lipservice by the police and understand the metaphor of the irresponsible and uncaring *men without a face*.

Oswaldo Encalada Vásquez, El día de las puertas cerradas

Oswaldo Encalada Vásquez's *El día de las puertas cerradas* (1988) is a collection of short stories told both in first- and third-person narrative; however, in either case, the narrative voice is always strong and prominent. The stories take place in the rural Andean town, Amanta, where the narrative voice is that of a young person who is both observer and participant in a cruel reality in which these not-so-innocent or protected children live. The narrative voice is so uniform that the book of short stories almost reads like a novel. In the first story, “El día de las puertas cerradas,” a young girl tells that the entire town of Amanta has closed its windows and doors to the arrival of her homicidal uncle, Feliciano. Her curiosity keeps her on the outlook for her uncle only to be the first to see that no one in the town opens their door to him, even though he knocks. Later on, she remarks that she sees a cross marked in charcoal on the whitewashed church wall above blood-splattered rock with pieces of skin still clinging to it on the blood-splattered ground. She says, without emotion, that this must be the place where her uncle Feliciano had bashed his head until he died

The lack of emotion of the narrative voice is chilling as she recounts why her uncle was not welcomed in his hometown and how she figured out why he disappeared:

Dos días, después, al azar, pasé por el cementerio. Había una tumba nueva: tierra movida, sin ninguna señal de que fuera él. Solamente una cruz hecha con palos amarrados al apuro. Lejos, al extremo se hallaba la de su mujer, la misma a quien hace veinte años, un mes después de casados—nadie sabe hasta ahora por qué—había arrojado al pozo de quince metros que estaba cavando, y, luego de comprobar que únicamente tenía las piernas rotas,

había tratado de taponar con piedras y tierra. Hasta el momento en que lo descubrieron y condujeron amarrado hasta Gualantambo. (*El día de las puertas cerradas* 11)

The girl's curiosity at the beginning of the short story is juxtaposed to the emotionless cold-blooded murder of her uncle and her aunt.

The narrative tone is similar throughout the short stories in Encalada's collection. In "La cola," the young narrator, seduced by the prospect of drinking Cola Fox, goes out to collect green weeds to make herself sick since she has learned that some doctors recommended that Don Alustiano drink Cola Fox to settle his stomach. When she vomits and loses control of her bowels, she begs her mother for the desired remedy: a cola. Her mother, worried sick about her daughter's health, trades her late husband's poncho for the debt of three bottles of Coke that her daughter drinks to appease her burning stomach. The next day, the mother had to carry her daughter to the hospital in Gualantambo and the costs threw them into an economic state that was even below the poverty they had already known: "que en esos días habíamos caído más abajo de la misma pobreza, que no teníamos nada, que no éramos nada" (16). The girl remarks to the reader at the end of the short story that due to her ill nature, she didn't realize that she should have repented and admitted she made herself sick. The seduction of modernization, represented in the Cola Fox, led the family to destitution. The lesson is clear.

This collection is full of stories about the inhabitants of Amanta who have no money, nothing to lose, and who have no recourse to changing their state. "Nunca se quedaba a pedir limosna en Amanta y es que sabía que nosotros también éramos pobres, que poco nos faltaba para andar por esos mundos con el sombrero en la mano o las palmas extendidas." ("El ciego Santiago" in *Puertas cerradas* 18-19) The children, for lack of education and due to extreme poverty, always find themselves in harm's way.

In "Humo," the narrative voice tells us that because her older brother had told the other kids that the dark exhaust fumes that came out of motors made you feel good, the children took turns smelling the exhaust from the dump truck and, since her little brother was crying and wanted to play, she laid him underneath the exhaust pipe so he could breathe in the marvelous fumes while they played longer. Readers are forewarned of the tragedy with the narrator's ironic remark, "Había que ver la cara de contento que puso al principio" (*Puertas cerradas* 23). However, the cruel reality of children left unattended is doubled when the narrative voice explains that the yelling of the workmen interrupts her murder of an squirming earthworm. The men accuse them as assassins and one of them raises a swollen, dead body that looked like a loose bundle of burned rags.

Más tarde vimos llegar a los hombres de las máquinas, regresaban de su comida. Conversaban tranquilos, cuando uno de ellos corrió gritando algo que nos paralizó a todos, a mí en el mismo momento en que con una piedra levantada iba a plastarle a una lombriz que se retorció. Le vimos alzar un bulto negro desde el suelo. Adivinamos que podía ser algo relacionado con nuestro hermano menor que estaba dormido. Corrimos hacia él y nos gritó cosas que a medias comprendimos, yo solo escuché "animales, asesinos". Y rompí a llorar también, como si fuera igual a mi hermano menor. El bulto

estaba negro, inmóvil, hinchado. Parecía un pedazo de trapo quemado. (*El día de las puertas cerradas* 23)

The nauseating social realism of these short stories is reminiscent of the bleak realism of the literature of the generation of writers in the 1930s; everyday reality is crude and cruel. Unlike the realism we find in the fantasy in Ubidia's *Divertimentos* or even in the escapist fantasies of *Sueño de lobos*, here there is no room for fantasy. The small town of Amanta with its lack of education or outlets for the poor is asphyxiating. The desperation is overwhelming, the lack of common sense due to isolation and lack of education is so severe that human life looks like nothing more than a bundle of burned rags.

The *outside* world for the inhabitants of Amanta goes no further than the next town, Gualantambo, where there is a hospital and a police station or, in one case, Guayaquil where Napo finds a job, a wife, and a future (*Puertas cerradas* 90). Still, there is no room for fantasy, not even for dreams in Amanta. The inhabitants are more concerned with what others might say, “Podía ser que me estuvieran mirando y se rieran” (*Puertas cerradas* 92) than investigating crimes, understanding each other, teaching each other anything, considering options for change, or sharing anything but misery and desolation.

The hideous crimes of Amanta—both intentional and due to negligence or lack of education—are confessed only to the reader:

Esto que le digo nadie más sabe. Si nosotros ya estamos condenados no queremos que mamá sepa. Se moriría. No nos hemos confesado porque el padre José podría avisarles a todos y ya para nosotros no existiría lugar en el mundo. Sólo usted sabe y en usted confiamos para que de su boca no salgan las inhumanas verdades que le hemos dicho. (*Puertas cerradas* 51)

The “usted” who is asked to become an accomplice to murder and a cover-up is no one in particular and everyone. “Usted” is the reader who is to be the keeper of “inhumanas verdades” that, while common in Amanta, are not talked about. What Encalada Vásquez has done in this book is, ironically, to let his narrative voices ask the reader to become an accomplice to the silencing of human indifference with the effect that the reader feels uncomfortable upon remaining complacent. However, readers are by nature silent. Therefore, the effect of complicity in being responsible for guarding the secret is, on the one hand, piercing and moving, and on the other, ironic and static.

Whereas the first-person fictional autobiographies of the Spanish picaresque exposed the degradation of low-life upstarts in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain, here the intention is not to alienate and mock through grotesque description, but to move the reader to anger or shock over the lack of human compassion and loss of human dignity. The characters are not social upstarts but impoverished human beings whose lack of education and significant social interaction lead to an inability to “feel” anything when faced with their own hand in sickness, death or murder.

Huilo Ruales Hualca, Y todo este rollo también me jode

Huilo Ruales Hualca employs humor and irony to bring his readers to laugh at the absurdity of tragic realities in *Y todo este rollo también me jode* (1984). With these bleak

and disturbing stories, he motivates readers to become aware of human responsibilities and needs. The world his characters inhabit in *Y todo este rollo también me jode* is a marginalized urban world in which reality is so utterly despicable, that it is both comical and sickening. The book is a collection of twenty-two short stories from which only a few have been selected for analysis: “Maqueta de una lechuga sarnosa,” “Doña Andrea aprendió la resignación de las gallinas,” and “Karma-Sutra.”

The protagonist of one of the short stories “**Maqueta de una lechuga sarnosa**” (“Scale model of a Mangy Lettuce”), for example, is Goyaesque caricature of a girl who is born in a garbage can, learns to live as a prostitute, even though she lives like a head of lettuce, wrapped in street garbage and surviving on marketplace scraps. Ruales narrates the story with such narrative distance and creative imagery and language, that there is no real pain or sorrow that can be associated with her tragic circumstances:

Nació en un tarro de basura. El azar perforó sobras de comida, periódicos mugrientos, tomates podridos, y le dejó un agujero para que le chorreara la vida.” (*Y todo este rollo* 47)

In the hands of other writers, the nameless woman called “Lechuga” might be treated as a victim of society; a throw-away child whose life was a shameless tragedy. In the hands of Ruales, the matter-of-fact narrative voice never allows “Lechuga” to be considered a victim. Lechuga “*was born in a bucket of trash. Chance perforated eatable leftovers, filthy newspapers, rotted tomatoes and left her a hole through which her life could sprout*”). She is a character whose life is worth telling (albeit ironically) precisely because the character has no sense of shame or conscience of her own tragic abandonment. She has only marginal contact with humans so her primary education as well as her awareness of self is summed up in just a few sentences. When “Lechuga” is frightened at her own puberty, a “compassionate” street sweeper gives her the first lesson in life: he demonstrates that puberty is normal by taking her out to the most distant ravine where he used her for sex without further explanation. The lesson taught her how to get men to have sex with her but not enough to understand pregnancy or why that act led to giving birth to a child:

Una madrugada amaneció con pezones y se espantó de palparse la entrepierna ensangrentada. Compasivo, un barrendero le dijo que era la cosa más natural del mundo, y para demostrarlo la condujo hacia la quebrada menos distante. Allí le proporcionó el placer de agrandarle los pechos, de utilizar como una culebra la lengua para el beso, y la manera de gritar a la dicha en el orgasmo. No le explicó nada más: por eso, cuando en el reverso del pellejo se le extendía ese oscuro agargajo que nunca supo que se llamaba pena, psss psss le pedía a cualquier hombre que la llevara a la quebrada. Por lo mismo, no se explicó el porqué le había hichado tanto el vientre mientras dormía, y para salir del basurero tuvo que escupir de entre las piernas una cosa pegajosa como guagua y como pulpo. (*Y todo este rollo* 48)

The narrative distance never allows readers to feel compassion or anything else for

“Lechuga,” but readers do feel repugnance and disgust, although only slightly due to the relentless and caustic irony of the narrative voice.

When Lechuga’s only beloved companion, a dead cat that she has dried out and turned into a hat, is taken away from her by a group of young drunks who attack her, leave her unconscious, and run away laughing or when she, “due to contact and convenience” falls in love with an enormous piece of plastic that provided a roof for her her traveling *treasures* and that she spent long hours in the evening cleaning, sewing, and with whom she conversed, readers understand the imagery that replaces human contact and understanding and are moved by the narrator’s description of the now old Lechuga who weeps at the disintegration of her plastic companion “Faraón.” Her dearest plastic friend each night lets in more and more water as he became ever more scarred and worn out by age. The transposition of love from humans to objects is describes when “Faraón” finally is carried away by the wind and Lechuga, on hand an knees, drags herself after “him,” calling “him” to return, he is carried away on the atenna of a truck, and forever lost. Lechuga finds herself alone under her tree, ravaged by mange, and she pulls at the mange on her rotting limbs and begins to devour it, pushing the scabs into her rotting flesh, into the cavernous holes in her body, and finally determines to baptize her mange with the name of her favorite thing “Faraón.” It was the only thing she had left to care about after all.

The word “maqueta” or model to scale is telling because as a miniature, the story of Lechuga becomes allegorical for a much larger social problem of throw-away, forgotten, abused, uneducated, and marginalized people. Ruales’ stories reveal a compassionless and heartless urban environment for unprotected innocents. His realistic description of experiences that are so disturbing is a testament to a call for action and for change.

Ruales’ other stories are similarly ironic and disturbing. In **“Doña Andrea aprendió la resignación de las gallinas”** (“Lady Andrea learned the resignation of the chickens”), Doña Andrea gives birth to fifteen children (fourteen boys and one girl) in ten years and all of them die with the exception of the daughter who, after being robbed of her virginity, gives birth to a sickly son. Doña Andrea, upon seeing the impending death of her grandson who is afflicted with the same illnesses as her own dead sons, climbs to the churchtower and throws herself to her death on the stone patio below, making sure to fall in the same spot where her own husband had dashed himself to pieces. The story would be tragic except for the ironic distance achieved through the dispassionate narrative descriptions.

After attempting to pull out her own fallopian tubes with her hands after death number six, she spends the afternoon washing her hands and her bloody thighs and decides she has to resign herself, like a hen, to witnessing the birth and death of all her children. But she is incapable of such resignation and with the fifteenth pregnancy she pulls out her own hair, throws herself against the walls, and even constructs a sheet metal girdle to keep the child from growing within her. Nevertheless, her daughter is born. She learned to speak at eight months of age and crawled until she was six years old. At twelve, she reaches puberty and at fifteen has her first child. Doña Andrea cannot watch her own life repeat itself and determines that while she can resign to watching her own eggs come to naught, she cannot watch the same thing happen to her own daughter. Her suicide, like her own husband’s, is a demonstration of her own humanity, of her own rejection of having to live accepting the pain and suffering of loss while expected to go on, like a chicken, producing offspring without caring what happened to them.

The stark realization at the end of the story that Doña Andrea gave up on resignation and fought back with her own suicide, is, while ironic and tragic, provides an ambiguous end to what could have been simply a disturbing tragic story. By “fighting back” through suicide, she rejects her lot in life and chooses death. Readers do not feel sorry for Doña Andrea because the narrative voice is too matter-of-fact to encourage compassion of any kind. Nevertheless, the cold and ugly reality represented in the life and death of Doña Andrea is a “poster child” for what Ruales wants to communicate to his reading audience: all people—no matter what their social and economic situation— will seek out what humans need (warmth, compassion, and the ability and need to love and be loved). That is why the title of this collection of short stories, *Y todo este rollo también me jode* (*This also pisses me off*), is both off-putting and poignant. Ruales puts readers in a situation where they must recognize their own sympathy for the situation through their own laughter and repugnance at the narrator’s lack of compassion for such sordid and complicated human realities.

There is no space for fantasy in Huilo Ruales’ stories. The characters do what they can to “survive” in a vulgar and dangerous environment. In the story “**Sansábado**,” in the same collection, Muchitas feels threatened and sets another prisoner aflame just as his cellmates had tortured and killed the rats they found in their cell (*Y todo este rollo* 17-21). The character in “**Karma-Sutra**” recognizes he has no future and goes out to take advantage of anything and everything before he sets himself—and his last poetic verse— aflame. The entire short story is simply a paragraph:

Una vez que supo con toda certeza lo inevitable de su muerte, salió a la calle, regaló el abrigo a un árbol, aprendió a fumar con la luz apagada, cruzó todas las comidas y los vinos, sintió la dicha de respirar sin ningún propósito, viajó orientado por el dedo meñique, se orinó en la puerta del palacio presidencial, escribió premoniciones obscenas en la cárcel, se metió a la fuerza en los más insólitos pubis, visitó pitonisas arrodillado solamente para que le permitieran inseminarles hijos adivinos y, regresó a su cuarto. Se miró en el espejo hasta obstruir el mecanismo del pestañeo, fumó un largo cigarillo, se afeitó, incendió el colchón, la mesa, la silla, la música, los libros, todos sus cuadernos, y mientras su cuerpo se volvía un caracol de llamas tranquilas, escribió el último verso. (*Y todo este rollo también me jode* 37)

The *exotic* pleasures of “Karma-Sutra” in which the condemned man entertains himself are both purposeless and violent. Rather than providing comfort for someone else, he gives his jacket to a tree. He smokes in a dark room, eats and drinks, walks around without any direction, urinates at the door of the presidential palace, writes premonitions on the jail, ravages unusual women, and so on, before setting himself on fire. Ruales rejects the purposelessness of self-centered preservation and the absence of conscience precisely because this unidimensionality is all his grotesque characters can manage in their social milieu. The effect is that Ruales presents one character in this short story who engages in unworthy and violent “pleasures” before the end of his life, but the example here is once again an allegorical miniature for what humans do on a grand scale.

All humans know that someday they will die. What do they do with their lives once

they realize they will die? Do they do grand things or do they walk in the footsteps of this man who left nothing of substance behind? The micro-story focuses the readers' attention on the absurdity of living and dying an abusive, purposeless, empty life.

In this series, Huilo Ruales Hualca employs irony and narrative distance of sordid realities to portray the marginalization of humans in urban societies. The function of his stories is to awaken in the reader a sense of awareness that *we should be bothered* by these sordid realities that reflect a lack of education or understanding, abandonment, impotence and social injustice, for example, and the apparent indifference of the narrator voices that tell the stories. In the cold and distant, sterile voice of the narrator, there is no space for fantasy except those miserable attempts by characters to fantasize a relationship with objects that might somehow replace the human warmth and compassion they desire but live without.

Aminta Buenaño, Mujeres divinas

Aminta Buenaño's *Mujeres divinas* (2006) is collection of fictional short stories about the lives of women whose histories, according to Buenaño, are based on real experiences as they were related to her in interviews. Buenaño relied on conversations and interviews with over one hundred women in her experience as a writer for the magazine *La Maga*. The stories of these women provided the inspiration for *Mujeres divinas*. In a book presentation in Cuenca on December 15, 2006, Buenaño suggested that these stories revealed womanly secrets: "secretos de lo que les callamos a los hombres." The narration of each story is not specific to one woman in particular, however, since according to Buenaño, she molded the stories of many into one, fictionalizing them in this way without compromising the psychological realism of her characters or the voices of her narrators.

The stories in this collection are fresh and they have a sense of modernity to them. At times, the narration is even humorous as we recognize experiences that perhaps remind us of our own battles with obesity, our own emotions with a first sexual experience, or how someone we knew recognized the guilt and cowardice of infidelity and rejection. At other times, the narration, often in first person, is tragic, principally because the narrative voice is self-aware of her own incapability to surpass a very simple human need: to feel companionship and to empower oneself with self-love.

Writer Viviana Cordero explains in the prologue to *Mujeres divinas* that as a reader, she was moved by the cumulative pain of these stories of women who were dependent but solitary, self-destructive yet aware of their own nature. Cordero explains that the greatest human tragedy is our self-destructive nature: we eat away at ourselves, participate in activities that lead to self destruction, we forget to love, and we destroy our own lot:

Lo primero que me vino al terminar de leer *Mujeres Divinas* de Aminta Buenaño es una sensación de dolor, como una puñalada en la boca del estómago. ¿Somos las mujeres seres tan dependientes, tan pendientes del otro sexo, del amor? ¿O sea que si no nos aman estamos acabadas? ¿Estamos tan necesitadas de cariño que no nos importa arrastrarnos como perras para recibir una migaja de pan? ¿Qué pasa? Me dije, una y mil veces, avergonzada de mí y de mi género, porque llegué a reconocermé, en muchos de los monólogos. Después comprendí que es *la saloperie de factor humain*

como lo dice Jean Paul Belmondo. Los seres humanos, no solo las mujeres nos acabamos, nos destruimos, nos olvidamos de querernos y nos hundimos. Triste situación que quizás con lo que ha hecho Aminta al ponerlo por escrito logre sacudirnos. Porque todas estas historias lo que tienen es una fuerza que conmueve, que cuestiona. (*Mujeres divinas*, “Prólogo” 11)

Cordero suggests that Buenaño’s short stories are meant to create an awakening, to shake things up enough so that readers begin to question what moves them, what makes them curious. What makes *Mujeres divinas* work as a collection of short stories is the sense of discovery in the realization of self. The narrators present some of the promised womanly secrets to be sure, but more importantly, the narrators share their own tragic discovery of their own perception of who each is, whether they like themselves or not.

Buenaño does not have a “formula” for writing these stories, but there is a basic structure that draws the reader in, usually beginning with a startling opening sentence and then an unraveling and weaving of a personal story. For instance, “**Monólogo de los corazones rotos**” begins with a frightening opening sentence: “Como usted ve, soy una mujer de la mediana edad, y estoy a punto de pegarme un tiro” (*Mujeres Divinas* 23). However, in the narrative that follows, the narrator walks the reader through the emotions and struggles of accepting and then rejecting as alien to “self” a woman’s lot in life. The reader or listener “Usted” plays an important role in the narration because the narrative voice refuses to see how she can evolve beyond her own situation:

“Usted dirá por qué, si la vida es bella, si aún tengo la vida por delante, si tengo tres hijos fuertes como camellos y que me aman como los cachorros a las ubres de su madre y otras tonterías que se dicen por el estilo; pero le diré que no, que no es así, las cosas no son tan fáciles como parecen. (*Mujeres Divinas* 23)

The story hits a common chord with women who attempt to be what others in society expect them to be, denying themselves in the process. The story ends with the destruction of the self-less woman she had become and the birth of the woman she decides to be. The lack of self defines the woman she was and leads her to live a life that blinds her to events that affect her sense of self.

When the woman’s husband finds a lover, the narrator reveals she dresses seductively to entice him back into her arms so she can attempt to hold on to her fragile and elusive identity as wife and mother. She is as unsuccessful in attracting the husband who pities her as she is in perpetuating a mythical version of herself. Their marriage, like her own self-perception, is not based on truth or love or self worth. It is only when the narrator pities the woman she was and can no longer be, that readers understand why the narrator has begun her story by saying she is a middle-aged woman who is at the point of killing herself:

En mí se estaba gestando algo inexplicable, reconocía que esto lo veía venir desde la mitad de esta historia, desde que se torció mi vida por algún lado del camino, desde que empecé a reconocirme en los otros y no en mí misma

y entonces lloré con los ojos vacíos, sí, lloré con los ojos secos y lloré por mí y no por él, lloré por lo que había sido y por lo que me negué a ser. (*Mujeres Divinas* 35)

Murder of the woman she was, the woman that had no self, then, was the only answer to being born anew as a woman whom she can recognize and respect and with whom she can continue living. Murder of that other self is the only road to happiness:

No ve que aunque triste, aunque vacía, aunque todavía no avizoro propósito ni fines, aunque el río de mis lágrimas no tiene límites, me siento alegre porque hoy, precisamente hoy, he matado a la antigua mujer que era yo, le he pegado un tiro a la sien a ese pequeño ser crédulo y miedoso que no merecía vivir, a ese remedo, a esa mal copia de mí misma que era yo, para renacer en otra que recién empiezo a conocer. (*Mujeres Divinas* 35)

No matter how sad or empty and without purpose she seems, the new woman is no longer a “small, gullible, and frightened” creature who did not deserve to live. There is hope now for a future that no longer relies on others’ fantasies, lies, or self-denial.

The future, in this story and many of the others in this collection, looms bleak, but the most powerful emotions of the stories are realized when the female narrators recognize fantasy as fantasy and their own willingness to suffer the realities of the lives they have in spite of themselves. This is the case in the short story “**Gorda soy y no me compadezcan**” (“I am fat and don’t take pity on me”) in which a woman feeds her enemy (her body) and becomes obese, then starves and punishes her enemy to the point of near-death. She finally accepts her true self—not the image she fought in the mirror and in the mirror of the eyes of her husband, her mother, her friends and her doctors and nurses—and accepts herself and her true emotions unconditionally:

... me encontré con mi verdadero cuerpo, como una gema preciosa, algo gordito, pero espléndido y sano que aunque no lucía la esbeltez del ciervo, era capaz de sentir, temblar y maravillarse, de reír cada vez que era acariciado, de emocionarse y sonrojarse, de verter sus líquidos sabios cada vez que amaba y arrojarse frente al éxtasis y al fuego... (*Mujeres Divinas* 58)

Similarly, in what appears at first to be an abusive relationship of a woman with a man, a mother recognizes her self-sacrifice in “El vampiro” when her infant son sucks the very blood of her being from her breast while feeding and falling asleep carelessly when he finishes. She allows him to satisfy himself even though she is in pain and bleeding because when stirred by the pain of feeling like a woman, she feels *something*.

In the short story “**Almuerzo**,” María de Lourdes does an erotic striptease in front of her indifferent, overweight husband who prefers his soccer game to the seductive game his wife offers. She takes in her own desire in the mirror seeing own scintillating body as though it were someone else’s with “instruments of her daily torture,” her apron, her housecoat, her slippers, and the broom, lifeless on a chair. She recognizes her own need and takes pleasure in herself. When her husband remains indifferent, she pulls at his sleeve

and announces that his dinner is ready. When the husband utters “Ya era hora,” readers sympathize with María de Lourdes, whose described passion and eroticism are truncated but not denied. She accepts her role as wife, mother, and housemaid, but she is unwilling to deny herself the role of passionate, seductive woman.

In the short-story “**En-cinta**,” a young, unmarried adolescent discovers she is pregnant. The format of the story is that of a diary where the young girl expresses her emotions and the events that change her life, her opinion of herself, her attitude toward the child growing within her, and her treatment by her parents, boyfriend, and friends. The story is an engaging one as readers are captivated first by the young girl’s impetuous emotions and actions and the development over the months of her pregnancy of attitudes befitting a young, responsible mother. The story is frightening due to the loneliness and helplessness that the young girl feels when faced with the enemy of her unborn child and the painful accusations and rejection of her own parents. The story finds positive energy as the young mother, and her now extended family, grow to love the newborn—not only the new child, but also the young woman who has cut the umbilical chord herself and has launched into a new, uncertain future.

Yo no sé que sera de mi vida, es claro que estudiaré y lucharé. Francisco tampoco está seguro; pero yo bailo, dudo, afirmo, vacilo, soy un mar de confusiones y de incertidumbres, también de certezas y de alegrías.

La vida me sonríe, se afirma a través de mí y yo tengo raíces, me descuelgo de sus nudos, me debato pero miro de frente y estoy dispuesta a luchar. Pero si me preguntas, querido diario, qué es lo que se siente, te diría que en este momento lo único que sé, lo único que pienso, lo único que repito con insistencia es, lo hice, lo hice, lo hice. Pese a todo; ¡lo logré! (*Mujeres Divinas* 87)

Each of the stories in *Mujeres divinas* plays on the notion of fantasy and reality, and illusion and reality. The old woman in “Olvido” recognizes that while she cannot defy her age, she can defy her fear of aging by accepting her wrinkled, sagging skin and by seeing herself as she chooses. As her memory fades and her mind forgets, she sees herself as she was when she was younger, as a fifteen-year-old on her way to childhood.

In “¡Mami no mates a Papi!” the daughter of an abusive, violent father and a mother without self-concept has no illusions about the reality that others in her life want her to present to “save face.” The young girl recognizes the shame of her own vanity when she realizes she worried more about the broken strap on her dress and dancing with a handsome boy than the fact that he had whirled her around the dance floor with the unannounced stain of an early menstruation on the back of her skirt.

Mujeres divinas is a collection of stories about women who *feel*, who are *aware*, and who *realize* that their emotions and their self-concept are paramount to who they are and who they will become—no matter how painful the emotion or event that serves to “awaken” them from their stupor. Unlike the stories by Dávila, Ponce Maldonado, Encalada Vásquez, and Ruales Hualca, Buenaño and Páez access an uncomfortable but pertinent relationship with hope. Páez accesses it through the requirement of human

communication and Buenaño accesses it by allowing her female characters to feel and express a sense of awareness of the *real* versus the *fictionalized* self.

Máximo Ortega Vintimilla, El hombre que pintaba mariposas muertas

Máximo Ortega Vintimilla's *El hombre que pintaba mariposas muertas* (2004) is a collection of fifteen short stories. The first story gives the title to the book. "**El hombre que pintaba mariposas muertas**" is the story of two lovers, a husband, and a nosy neighbor. It is a tale of murder or *mercy* killing and incarceration of innocents. The man who painted dead butterflies is a disturbed husband whose adulterous wife deceives him. He is a husband who is obsessed with getting his wife's lover out of the house.

The wife's lover comes to the painter's home with the pretext of harassing the painter so he can get his overdue paintings for his restaurant. The underlying purpose of his visits is to check on his lover and to try to make arrangements for her to leave her husband. The lover is also married and in the process of a divorce, but he wants to take on the responsibility of the woman and her child to release her from the abusive relationship in which she lives. A nosy neighbor, an older woman, despises the lovers and feels sorry for the painter. She sets the lovers up to take the fall for a murder she commits after the wife leaves the painter. The complication of the story, however, has to do more with the lover's fascination with the painter, his fragile state of existence, and the symbolism of the dead butterflies he paints than it does with the lives of these four people. The lover is as enticed by the beauty of the surrealistic images as readers are repulsed by the mutilated humanoid butterflies, assassinations of expressionistic butterflies in pastel colors, violent images of dead butterflies and a crying young boy. The fascination (instead of terror) that the lover feels is unnerving.

... le llamó la atención un óleo grande, con marco dorado, en donde, con un aire surrealista, varias mariposas multicolores caían muertas con sus alas ardiendo en llamas hacia un gigantesco reloj. También le asombró la madera contrachapada pintada con esmalte en la que se veía llorar a unas mariposas de color lila con forma humanoide de cuyos vientres abiertos le salían sus víceras. Le impresionó además un cuadro pequeño al pastel, con tinte expresionista, en donde varios de los mencionados insectos eran asesinados por las municiones de una escopeta. Le gustó, asimismo, otro pintado al acrílico en donde, con un aire hiperrealista, se veía un bala gigantesca y tres mariposas apolo muertas amarradas a su alrededor, y en el ángulo izquierdo de la parte inferior del cuadro un niño lloraba. (*El hombre que pintaba mariposas muertas* 27-28)

The inebriated painter explains to the elegant restaurateur that he paints dead butterflies because they are the remedy to his illness: tremendous remorse for having participated in a massacre of a village of young girls he and other soldiers were ordered to commit while they were soldiers. His only relief from his nightmares was painting these dead butterflies. The colorful butterflies, some with humanoid form, represent the transformation of the massacred human souls of the girls into beautiful butterflies whose lives were cut short. The child crying in the corner of the painting reveals the painter's

sadness at the tragedy. The paintings that are “hyperrealistic” portray the tragedy the painter relives through both realism and fantasy as the realistic distortion goes beyond realism to provide a fantastic version of the recalled, traumatic memory. The beauty of the paintings and their violent depiction of murdered innocence is advertised as a cure for emotional trauma but the juxtaposition of beauty and violent evisceration functions as a narrative omen for the reader.

Readers are not entirely surprised when the painter of the dead butterflies is turned from victimizer to victimized again however, when, oblivious to the attentions of the older female neighbor, he becomes a casualty of her obsession. The neighbor, traumatized by the suicide of her own son more than by the death of her husband during the war, sees a likeness of her dead son in the painter. She poisons the painter and sets the lovers up to take the fall by gossiping with the neighbors and providing false testimony to the police. The narrator’s ironic description of the neighbor with *Christian principles* (34) is the wolf in sheep’s clothing who becomes the villain of the short story while maintaining her own “heroic” innocence. The lovers go to prison, the painter’s child is sent to live with the grandmother, and the assassin who lived next store becomes the subject of local gossip.

Ortega Vintimilla relies on realistic description and dialogue throughout the short story, but he uses fantasy in art to portray the grotesque tragedies and injustices of the past. The artistic cover up in the painting that reveals the slaughter of innocents is paralleled in life with the artistic cover up of the painter’s murder.

“**Brillante ministro**” is another short story in *El hombre que pintaba mariposas muertas* (74-78) and is one of the few examples of science fiction besides Páez’s short stories. The Earth’s equine leader presents Doctor J. L. Martin, a horse engendered naturally and not through artificial insemination and who earned a doctorate in Space Ecology *en el extranjero*, as the new Minister of Ecology. J.L Martin explains in first person what motivated him to accept this new position as Minister of Ecology: while on a space vacation on a planet in System K 981, he observed the torture and mockery of a human who, like others of his race, had been dispersed throughout the universe to keep them from reproducing and from starting wars. J.L Martin feels compassion for the tortured human who attempts to communicate with him. When Martin steps away from the rest of the tourists to hear what the human tells him in a language that few understand, the human asks Martin to intercede on his behalf, to give him a job in the fourth dimension because he wants to work toward peace and against war. The human concluded his statement by saying that he did not lose hope that someday he, and others of his species, would be able to form a new and better civilization far from Earth where now horses ruled (*El hombre que pintaba mariposas muertas* 76).

The “brilliant minister” uses this story to introduce himself as the new Minister of Ecology because preservation of his equine species and their domination on Earth depends on squelching the hopes and relentless desires of humanity. Máximo Ortega Vintimilla uses fantasy in this short story to point out human weakness (the nature to dominate and destroy) by demonstrating equine weakness akin to humanity is also to feel compassion and be empathetic.

In another short story in the same collection (“**El gran misterio**” 91-93), living machine beings created by humans attempt to prove the existence of the “Great Creator of the Universe.” Humans, who do not believe in the “living” existence of the machines they make, decimate the planet Earth with atomic bombs. The irony is that these created living

machines, with consciousness and an ability to communicate and speculate, survive and travel to the ends of the universe to pursue the great mystery of the great creator. When space travelers arrive at the end of the universe, they see an image of the great creator: a naked woman moving in space. Here again, the exploration of alien consciousness (fantasy) serves to highlight human weakness (the reality of the human need to destroy) and the legacy that humanity leaves which is not more than a curiosity to understand creation.

These three stories in *El hombre que pintaba mariposas muertas* demonstrate Ortega Vintimilla's interest in the destructive and self-destructive nature of human beings, but also in the legacy that humanity may leave for the beings that follow. In each of these stories, the world does not seem better off without the human destroyers and assassins since, it seems, the species that carry on after their demise continue to be overshadowed by the human practices that preceded them. The images of dead butterflies, death, and destruction permeate the book of short stories. The butterflies that symbolize the searching of the human soul for reincarnation, reestablishment of a different life, or a "second chance" crashes resoundly into death since human nature cannot be altered or tolerated by other species. Nevertheless, those who were deemed unworthy and who were subjugated by humans rise to take their place in history, but they are not without frailties or faults inspired by their connection to humanity.

Martha Rodríguez, Nada más el futuro

In Martha Rodríguez's *Nada más el futuro* (2005), the writer relies on realistic description to communicate the realities of the perception of youth and aging and its emotional toll on the young and the old. In "El castigo (*Nada más el futuro* 37)," an adolescent narrator describes an encounter with his mother who is obsessed with aging and his guilt for being angry at his mother for punishing him when he demonstrates his independence and desire to "grow up." The punishment, however, has more to do with the narrator's realization that no one can alter the course of time and that no matter how he may deny (with words) the ravages of time on the human body. He must accept them because change is inevitable.

"El perdón" is short story in the collection that portrays the asphyxiation of a truncated life and the psychology of a young woman in love (*Nada más el futuro* 57-58). "El perdón" is narrated in the third person but the narrator reflects the thoughts of a young woman who, incarcerated in her own home to keep her from meeting with her lover, fantasizes an escape and determines the best way to gain forgiveness is her own death. Her fantasy takes her to a busy downtown street where she waits for death with a smile hoping that the touch she feels on her fingers is the touch of her beloved one. In her fantasy, she recognizes it could also be the touch of her fingers against the moss she felt earlier outside the bedroom window. The narrator leaves the reader with doubt as to whether the girl ever left her room physically or if she simply took a fantasy trip to meet with her lover. The ultimate decision she makes, however, is unequivocal: she is determined to earn forgiveness for her failure to obey through her own death.

Fantasy, in this case, provides an escape from suffocating realities that the adolescent experiences. The title, "El perdón," is an indication of the impending tragedy that the young woman contemplates and replays in her head: she plans a suicide pact to acquire the forgiveness of those who prohibit this adolescent love. The function of fantasy

here imitates the psychological turmoil that the adolescent experiences as she tries to find a solution to her problem. The fact that readers cannot decipher whether the solution is real or simply a fantasy allows us to slip into “her world” briefly as we contemplate the fuzzy and fragile border between reality and fiction.

In another short story in the collection, readers find a similar exploration between reality and fantasy. In “**Más allá de todos los sueños** (*Nada más el futuro* 83-85),” not even death can put an end to the joys of loving and the fantasy that is, at times, preferable to the drudgery of daily living without love. In this story, Fernando’s wife returns to their bedroom after her own death to see if her husband has read her suicide note. Readers read along through the ghost’s eyes the written confession that she left on the nightstand next to the bed. The letter explains how she made the choice between her husband (in a real world that she rejected) and her beloved (in a fantasy world that she embraced after knowing the man only three weeks). The pull of the dead lover from the grave is stronger than the pull of reality that she desires to reject:

Pero su muerte apenas ha cambiado la evolución de mis sentimientos; durante las noches él continúa acariciándome, desvanecido su rostro del triángulo. Y me refugio en esa pasión perfecta, extraña y nueva, solo por amor, porque me consuela y alivia, porque no sé cuánto más podré continuar existiendo durante el día –pesada, tangible y absurdamente- más allá de su presencia. (*Nada más el futuro* 85)

The narrator explains that the woman chooses death (and the intense love of the fantasy that she experiences with the nocturnal dead lover) over life with her husband Fernando:

No pudo continuar, alzar la vista en busca del rostro. Sabía que la esperaban los ojos más tiernos y sombríos de la tierra, que los ojos intensos del amor y de la muerte la envolverían con una fuerza de la que no podría ya escapar, más allá de todos los sueños. (*Nada más el futuro* 85)

Martha Rodríguez’s character creates a fantasy that is more compelling than reality. The wife chooses fantasy and death over the reality of the world in which she finds herself *imprisoned*. The flight to fantasy and love is an escape from a world where each of Rodríguez’s characters feels truncated in terms of their own evolution and suffocated in terms of their daily breathing. The social constraints of family life and expectations do not allow for liberty and a choice to love. Fantasy becomes the means to escape the everyday misery of a cloistered, restricted life, and death becomes the doorway to the parallel world where they feel true love can flourish.

There is a parallel here in the way in which Jorge Dávila Vázquez and Martha Rodríguez use fantasy as a means to escape to the afterlife and an eternity of “living” because everyday living in reality squelches the spirit.

Liliana Miraglia, “El infierno”

The narrator in the short short story “**El infierno**” by Liliana Miraglia (1998) reflects the overall tone characteristic of many narrators in Ecuadorian short story: there is nothing heroic or even outstanding about the narrative voice, the character, or the tone of the narration. The female narrator appears to be a quotidian personality with a quotidian problem that, in the case of the short, short story, has an element of fantasy and the miraculous to it. The female narrator receives an authentic letter from her dead friend who tells her of his rather routine life in hell:

Mi amigo Rubén no hace mucho tiempo que murió, aunque si es suficiente para que yo empiece a sentir su ausencia. Es que Rubén y yo éramos muy amigos, nos contábamos casi todo.

A veces me he descubierto marcando el teléfono para llamar a su casa y saber si han tenido noticias de él. Cuando he hablado con su madre he estado siempre a punto de salirse la fracesita ¿y qué ha sabido de Rubén?, porque de pronto me parecía como si ella hubiera sabido algo, pero siempre he acabado aceptando que era inútil, porque los muertos no le escriben siquiera a los parientes más cercanos. Sin embargo, acabé recibiendo una carta de Rubén, cosa que ni yo misma, llegando el momento, podía creer. Como Rubén siempre fue medio parco para expresarse, su carta es una carta común, no tiene mayor explicaciones. Empieza con saludos, sigue con unas cuantas maldiciones y termina en lo que parece ser una torpe pero auténtica descripción del infierno, algo así como una maldita estúpida rutina.

The irony of the short, short story or flash fiction is fundamental to the sly smile the narration is able to urge from readers’ lips. When the narrator announces that she is drawn to call Rubén’s family on the phone to see if they have had any “news” from Rubén, readers suspect that the loss of her closest friend has affected her connection to reality and that her desire to call is based on wishful thinking instead of reality. When readers learn that the narrator suspects Rubén’s mother has received “news” from her son, readers are cautious in accepting this narrator as reliable. However, when she indicates that she has already received a particularly authentic letter from the recently damned Rubén, the narrator’s words trip the trigger between realism and fantasy to have readers believe the miraculous is real, since the narrator has demonstrated “proof” that the fantastic is not only real but also—ironically—quite boring.

“El infierno” is a delightful short, short story that plays on superstitions and fantasy, as well on common human reactions to loss of a loved one. Miraglia uses fantasy to help illustrate that the reality of death and condemnation to hell is a companion state to what people had in life.

Iván Egüez, “El triple salto” in *Cuento Ecuatoriano a finales del siglo*

Iván Egüez’s “El triple salto” (1981) is the confession of an embittered, aging circus clown who decides to commit suicide as a means to demonstrate his love for a successful, young trapeze artist known as Tania. Ironically, his purpose is to exact vengeance for her selfishness and falseness. He outlines his plan to steal her best moment at a competition for the triple somersault by wearing the very costume and mask that she had planned to wear. The clown’s narration takes the reader on a journey into the mind’s workings of a man who takes on several perspectives in the short story. He is a rejected lover-in-waiting, a paternal figure who saves the young Colombian orphan Clara Inés by helping her find work in the circus as Tania, and he is a disgruntled trapeze artist turned clown called Payaso Payayón who can no longer be successful in the limelight except as a misfit clown, and as a member of a gang of three circus clowns who have determined to kill Tania to punish her.

“El Triple salto” refers to the tremendous acrobatic achievement of three somersaults in mid-air but it also means hop, step, and jump. In this story, the title has a double meaning. On the one hand, the title refers to the acrobatic jump that Tania is famous for. On the other hand, it refers to the mind’s process of how the clown determines to take his final death jump in an effort to save the young trapeze artist he loves, and to exact vengeance by harming her personally with his own suicide.

The musings of the man behind the mask of Payaso Payayón reveal his insecurity and his disillusion with life. The other clowns who are planning to kill the haughty and proud trapeze artist have also suffered physically and mentally in an attempt to give Tania what she needed to become famous. Now the angry Pez Volador and Braceador refuse to tolerate her selfishness and her titillating beauty. The narrator recounts the nasty plan of what the Flying Fish and the Wrestler plan to do to “you,” the woman of his dreams:

Yo les escuché el plan macabro, al tercer vuelo, al momento del impulso para el enganche el Pez te daría menos viada, la justa, la necesaria como para que el Braceador, haga visible su esfuerzo por sujetarte inútilmente y caigas y mueras y muera contigo la duda que les atormentaba a los dos desde hace mucho tiempo, desde que comenzaron a dormir los dos payasos juntos, desde que se celaban mutuamente viendo en tu belleza la rivalidad ante el mundo que los rechazaba. Y ese amor ya un poco carcomido por el vilipendio, quiso afirmarse en algo más fuerte que el amor mismo: la complicidad en tu muerte. (“El triple salto” 195)

The narrator wants vengeance, but he is incapable of the murder that the other two are planning. He indicates that he will sacrifice himself, leave a love letter for her that, in her selfishness, she will never read, preferring instead the public destruction of the love letter and poems in her hand. With a final note of tragic irony, the suicidal clown reminds the reader that the circus master, instead of calling the clown’s death a suicide or a murderous crime, will declare that this tragic event was simply Payaso Payayón’s way of demonstrating his loyalty to the company by filling in for an infirm Tanya because, of course, “the show must go on.”

All of the narrator's musings for the future are part of his last hope for a moment in the spotlight. He fantasizes what others will do and feel when the botched murder plan and completed suicide become known. His only hope is that his fantasy of earning a place in the spotlight will be remembered at least in the mind of the female trapeze artist he desires to scorn, but he is a realist. He recognizes that the world that he leaves behind will not offer him even that satisfaction. The circus master will turn his vengeance to martyrdom and even his last hope for recognition of his sacrifice and love will be dashed into the sawdust along with his broken body. The ironic tragedy of this short story is that the narrator recognizes the sordid realities for what they are: none of his hopes will be accomplished in his lifetime. Therefore, there is nothing to live for. There is no space for turning fantasies into realities in the world in which he lives and works.

Sara Vanégas Coveña, "Barro"

In the short, short story "**Barro** (*Poesía y cuento ecuatorianos* 1998)," Sara Vanégas Coveña turns a common scene (a mother washing clothes, a child playing in the mud) and an everyday verbal exchange between them into a mystery. The narrator reports the scene: a child plays with mud while his mother, Mary, washes the family's clothes against a rock. When the mother reprimands her son for getting his hands dirty, the mysterious miracle begins as the clay between the child's fingers transforms to birds that fly:

¡Cómo! ¿Otra vez con ese lodo?

Y nota que el muchacho ha modelado diminutas esculturas de pájaros.

Mamá, es que me siento solo... Pero no es barro. ¡Mira!

Y en ese instante los pajarillos echan a volar.

María sonríe ante la travesura de su hijo y tiernamente se lo lleva de la mano. (*Poesía y Cuento* 175)

The young boy who has fashioned birds from the mud and brings them to life exclaims that the birds are not made of mud. The birds take off in flight. The narrator comments that the mother sees the creativity as a trick (*travesuras*), not as reality. The ambiguity for readers is pertinent. Mary smiled and held his hand, tenderly, not recognizing the miracle. Readers, on the other hand, can joyfully accept the transformation as a miracle, if they choose.

"Barro" is a creation story that relies both on realism and fantasy for its execution. The mother's name, "María," clues the reader to the connection with the Biblical miracle of Mary and Jesus and negotiates meaning from the fantastic back to a plausible reality for readers. The son explains his reasons for creating the miracle, "Mamá, es que me siento solo..." (175) When accompanied by his busy mother, the son still feels alone. His new playmates are birds created from mud, not human children. The mother's tender reaction to her son's creativity and easy acceptance of the miracle is due to the recognition that her

son has miraculous powers that defy reality. The effect on readers is that readers can be charmed by the ingenuity of the story and its implicit connection to another son who performed miracles. On the other hand, the story recognizes the universal fascination of adults in the presence of children who have tremendous imaginations and who challenge the fragil borders between reality and fantasy on an everyday basis. This story is similar in its structure to Jorge Dávila Vázquez's short stories about everyday angels on earth who go unperceived in daily life (*Acerca de los Ángeles*).

Jorge Dávila, Acerca de los ángeles. Historias para volar

In Dávila's short, short story collection, *Acerca de los ángeles. Historias para volar* (2001), the female protagonist of Pescadora picks up fish that have been abandoned by fishermen to rot on the ocean's shores either because they are too small, too venomous to eat, or simply useless for human consumption. The *fisherwoman* takes the abandoned fish to the sea and with her *winged* hands, she brings them to life and sets them back into the sea from which they came. While the main character is an angel, according to the narrator, no one recognizes her as such. She is simply a domestic servant who lives in a small house made of cane who serves as domestic helper and companion to two elderly people. The narrator describes how her miracles go unperceived by those around her:

Y cuando alguna vez en el ocaso, le resplandecen las alas, ninguna persona se fija en ella, porque creen que es el sol del atardecer muriendo sobre las aguas. Y ese es un prodigio repetido desde siempre, que no llama la atención de nadie. (*Historias para volar* 29)

The notion that the "prodigio" or the miracle is one that has been repeated from the beginning of time puts fantasy and the miraculous creation of life into the hands of earthly angels who live among us and resurrect those lives that we least value. The fantasy points out an aspect of reality that permeates the fiction of Dávila Vázquez: the inability of humans to value life in its complete form. Dávila Vázquez's fiction focuses closely on lives that are truncated that can only be completed through some aspect of fantasy. In *Pescadora*, readers can see how the use of realism to narrate the fantasy of creation can move readers to rethink how we use and abuse the natural world in which we live.

Dávila's angels are not physically beautiful nor do they stand out among humans. In the short story "Feo," one of the angels describes himself and contrasts his ugliness to the beauty that artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Sandro Botticelli have afforded angels in the plastic arts:

¿Y qué decir de mi pobre cuerpo debilucho y desproporcionado: largos y flacos brazos, espalda encorvada, piernas en arco?

Ignoro si será verdad o no que la belleza no lo es todo, que están el talento, la bondad, el espíritu... De cualquier modo yo soy sobre todo eso, espíritu, bajo una efímera y fea envoltura carnal; pero si un angel pudiera sentir el agobio de la fealdad del rostro y del cuerpo, aunque no sean más que prestados, yo los sentiría como nadie. (*Historias para volar* 16)

In “Feo,” the purpose of the voice of a physically ugly angel (apparently one of many living among us) is to highlight the non-angelic human preoccupation with physical beauty over kindly spirit and good works or talent. Dávila uses the more human characteristic of complaining to provide readers with the realistic description of human ugliness to prepare readers for the miracle of understanding. According to this short story, angels have the physical appearance of everyday humans and they walk among us:

Y yo, ¿por qué tengo esta cara tan desagradable, tan impresionante en su fealdad, que cuando las gentes me miran no pueden evitar un escalofrío? ¿Por qué este pelo erizado como un bosque de púas? ¿Por qué estas cejas tan ralas; estos ojos pequeñitos, opacos, huidizos y separados en exceso; esta nariz, como si alguien me la hubiese torcido de intento; esta boca que tiene más de cicatriz que de otra cosa? ¿Y esta quijada prognática, que recuerda a un pelicano? (*Historias para volar* 15)

The narrator asks why he does not look like the fictional angels in the paintings only to explain that while he is ugly (by human standards), he does not turn bitter like humans who have these same characteristics. The message is clear; physical beauty is no more than physical beauty. The spirit within is what must be valued, just as the cast-away fish in the *Pescadora* must be valued for their spirit, not for their value in human terms.

Paulina Soto, Muchachas ocultas

Fantasy seems to play a different role in the short stories by Paulina Soto, a writer from Loja. In the first two short stories in *Muchachas ocultas* (2002), fantasy is employed as a way to quiet anger and restore a sense of harmony after loss. In “Un cuento de sal y H_2O ,” for example, a young woman goes to the seashore to cure her anger and pain after being hurt and abandoned by a man. When she kneels at the sea’s edge and reveals her desire to be purified and protected by the sea, the sea laughs and takes a human form. The sea laughs because the young woman uses the masculine “el” to address the sea, instead of the feminine form that the sea claims to be. The sea animates an ancient woman-like form made of salt who comforts the distraught young woman by telling her that the ocean is female (*la mar* not *el mar*) and that for this reason, the sea understands her, unlike the shore that is male. The shore never listens and does not understand the pain of the female sex but the sea is female and understands her situation. The sea explains that a woman’s wound is always open, her sexual organ sporadically painful or bloody, but always open just like the sea:

Y la mar es mujer. Y solo como mujer entiende lo que es ser mujer, lo que es tener una herida siempre abierta, esporádicamente sangrante y dolorosa, a veces, pero siempre abierta. (*Muchachas ocultas* 13)

Su herida, querida, es la vida que bulle en sus corrientes y en sus profundidades, su ira son sus tormentas, su voz sus vaivenes, sus suspiros la brisa marina, su leche la sal ... (*Muchachas ocultas* 14)

The discussion between the young woman and the sea's animism into an ancient sand-female revives the spirit of the young woman and cures her of her sadness and her ire. She awakens from what seems to be a dream-like trance and feels renewed. She sings of her rebirth and returns happily to be with her own kind. Fantasy in the hands of Soto relies on animism, which has the natural power to cure life's maladies.

Soto also uses fantasy and a trip to Limbo to cure a woman of anger in the second story in the collection. In "**Baltiana, Ceniza y Endora,**" the function of fantasy is purification of ill and renewal of spirituality that has not been possible within the context of reality. Ceniza, who feels her destiny is to suffer and lament her suffering, is renewed by a visit to Limbo. In Limbo, Ceniza is able to begin to purge herself from anger, sadness, and loss, but she cannot purge herself. She is still tormented by the wolf demon within who preyed on her sense of wellbeing. Endora recommends that Ceniza confront her demon, purge herself from the past, and begin anew. Ceniza finds solace and peace by facing her sexual demon and finding a way to free herself:

Pues, me enfrené a mi demonio. Estuve gritando y gritando, todo el tiempo, para que me salga todo lo que tenía en el pecho, el odio, la rabia, la tristeza y la duda. Me esforcé, que de verdad lo perdí todo, mi orgullo, mi sentido común, todo. Y a medida que gritaba, la corteza de mi demonio se descascaraba. ¿Sabes? El era humano, después de todo. Bajo esa máscara de colores incendiados, estaba su piel de hombre, vulnerable, terrestre. El verdadero demonio, estaba más dentro de mí misma antes que dentro de él. Cuando me vacié de todo, Endora querida, me sentí llena. Cuando lo perdí todo, me di cuenta, de que lo que perdí era la pared que me tenía prisionera. En cuanto esa pared se derrumbó, el viento sopló sobre mis cenizas y las volvió a encender. Así fue cómo me convertí en Antorcha. (*Muchachas ocultas* 30)

The stories by Soto insist that women find their strength within themselves, not in external realities nor in the fantasies that they hope will provide them both solace and fulfillment. Nevertheless, all of the female characters in this collection resort to fantasy to learn that they must rely on themselves. In another short story in this collection, "**Sobrevolar las rosas ("Flying over Roses"),**" Soto again highlights the relationship between fantasy and realism with an experience of a flying dragon and a princess. The message of the story is that each woman has the ability to go beyond her own created image:

El dragón la elevó por los aires y en un suspiro estuvo otra vez en el balcón de su vieja habitación.

Todos tenemos dentro el valor para sobrevolar nuestras propias rosas le dijo, señalándose el pecho.

La princesa se tocó el centro del pecho, y pudo sentir una espina bajo su piel. Y entendió. (*Muchachas ocultas* 91)

The final story in the collection, “**La Rendija (“The Slit”)**,” is also telling in terms of the function of realism and fantasy. The narrator realizes that she believed in fantasy until her virginity was taken from her. She laments that her virginity was not taken by a man but by a woman, a queen, who, convinced that appearances and interests were more important than spirituality, opened the door to pain and to evil (*Muchachas ocultas* 105). Fantasy and reality cannot coexist except in the mind of the characters who believe that neither fantasy nor reality alone can lead to understanding or self-fulfillment. Only by experiencing both can the full sense of self be realized.

Francisco Proaño Arandi, “La doblez”

In Francisco Proaño’s collection of short stories, we find “**La doblez**” in which the protagonist, a once happily married husband, describes his perception of how his marriage to his wife fell apart. The narrator describes their initial years as one of unity, the period of hypocrisy when they attempted to reconcile their difference, and the unfolding of their eventual transformation of his wife into a woman with two faces. One face appeared “real” and the other deformed by broken crystal and, metaphorically, presented his wife as the “other.” The rupture in their marriage was complete and the woman he now saw through the glass was no longer recognizable as the woman he once married.

The story relies on realism for its descriptions but there is a point when fantasy plays a role in the transformation of the narrator’s perception of his home and life in it. He does not understand their alienation from each other, their inability to “touch” in spite of their togetherness, and he wonders if his own home is an accessory to the criminal dissolution of their togetherness. The mirrors that reflect a deceptive image of the house “as usual” mock the humans who, unwittingly, have been transformed through time, even though the outward appearance is that things have not changed:

Pienso, de pronto, en la posible duplicidad de las habitaciones, cuartos que son aparentemente los mismos, pero a la vez diversos, fraguados, en materias distintas, superpuestos. Quizás el dilatado ejercicio de ver las cosas desde ángulos irreductibles, nuestros devoradores silencios, ese ir acostumbrándonos a un persistente desencuentro, ha obrado este raro sortilegio, esta aparición de la casa dispar, desdoblada, seccionada en un punto infranqueable. (*Cuento ecuatoriano de finales del siglo XX, Antología crítica*. 206-207)

The narrator reconstructs the transformation of the “one” into “one and its double” because the rooms of the house itself have shattered the image he held. The role of fantasy is the perpetuation of a stagnant world as the “real” one and the parallel but secret individual world that was emerging and gaining power over the dissolving, fragmenting marriage. The parallel world that each fabricated to survive the pain of separation and growth, led to a parallel world in their own home:

Inconscientemente, habíamos fabricado cada uno nuestra dual vivienda, por un tiempo incluso aprendimos a intercambiarnos, a realizar una especie de secretas visitas que nos permitían, por ejemplo, tocar de manera

similar un idéntico objeto, mirar a la propia mujer y no a esa otra que cruza sin verme, oír al marido de siempre y no a este otro, del que no llega siquiera la voz. (*Cuento ecuatoriano de finales del siglo XX* 207)

Finally, the parallel folds of a double life that each was leading unfolds and exposes the distortion that each person has become, revealing for the narrator, a woman that he no longer recognizes and that he can no longer reconstruct through fantasy or imagination. The narrator explains:

Me estremecí de horror puesto que entendí de repente, tu metamorfosis, tu tránsito, palabras que no alcanzan a precisar tu radical, nuestra radical brevedad. Te desconocí de pronto tras el cristal. Te perdí. La mujer que luego emergió ya no era la misma. El universo era otro. (*Cuento ecuatoriano de finales del siglo XX* 207-208)

Fantasy allowed each partner to create a parallel world that allowed each to survive or be consumed by a failing marriage, a marriage that grew beyond the rigid boundaries that the husband wanted to preserve as static. What the narrator demonstrates is that the original perception of what he thought was real—and wanted to preserve— was indeed an ephemeral fantasy that his wife outgrew:

En el principio, el lecho era uno solo, éste, desde allí mirábamos la misma lámpara, la compartida extensión del tumbado, escuchábamos, los dos, la huída de la lluvia en las noches, el viento que dispersaba papeles extraviados, la obsesiva estridencia de la ciudad, a la madrugada. Nos amábamos, reíamos y yo te perseguía precedido siempre por tu carcajada limpia, tu cuerpo limpio y mío, tu pelo, el frescor de esa edad primigenia, la nuestra. (*Cuento ecuatoriano de finales del siglo XX* 203)

In the early days of their marriage he argues, “La casa era toda univocal, indivisa, sin duplicidad ni divergentes perspectivas” (204). His wife changes and transforms, however, and he places the transformation of his universe on the shoulders of his wife and the house they share:

En el lecho, podías ser tú, pero al mismo tiempo una extraña. La casa entonces ya no era igual, su unicidad comenzaba a resquebrajarse por mil fisuras, los cuartos se me antojaban otros, absurdamente agrandados. Después, empezaron a producirse otros fenómenos todavía más extraños. (*Cuento ecuatoriano de finales del siglo XX* 204)

Even the air in the house is fractured into the different worlds in which they live. While he suffocates in the stagnation that he wants to preserve, she breathes easily and comfortably in her “own” air that she no longer shares with him (205).

Proaño’s short story exposes the lives of a comfortable, middle class couple that sets out to live a stereotypical life in which spouses live in continual unity of opinion and desires. The stereotype is an illusion and a deception, a corrupt reflection of what can be

seen not in the mirror but in the shards of the crystal glass: a reality in which two individuals retain their own individuality, desires, and needs and that are now no longer compatible since their transformation has ruptured the universe they thought was theirs.

Jennie Carrasco Molina, Cuentos de ceniza

Carrasco's *Cuentos de ceniza* are tied together by two narrative threads. The first is the importance of desire and fantasy as a way to escape from or change the attitude of a *real world* that seems indifferent to the needs of the protagonists. The second is the metaphorical relationship between the ashes left after a volcanic eruption and the aftermath of frustrated physical human passion.

In the first short story, "**Romênia y Caetano,**" the narrator tells us that Romênia has found a way to divert her fears of the physical noise of the active volcano that rumbles beneath her feet and the reality of living in danger by delving into the melodious voice of Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso. His music draws her further and further into a trance and keeps her from her work and even from recognizing the dangerous realities that surround her. Romênia, in fit of fright after a blackout in the town, heads toward Caetano's voice, only realizing when she is face deep in volcanic ash that the man's voice whom she hears calling her is simply a recording that is playing over a loud speaker at a video store. The function of fantasy in this story is that recreation of a myth can blind and lead to perdition.

In the second story, "**Nada de Nada,**" the ballads of French singer Edith Piaf trigger desire in the nameless female protagonist. She adores her own nakedness in the mirror as she moves with the music and imagines how her nakedness might jolt a broader public out of their everyday complacency to recognize their own appetites and desires that, like hers, are ready to overflow like the volcano. While listening to the lyrics of Piaf's ballad, the protagonist decides to don a coat over her nakedness and to head off to a popular local bar. The narrator indicates that she believes the clientele will be moved to react to her, calling her names and forcing her to dress.

Her intention is to awaken the animal within, to arouse them and even move the onlookers to anger or jealousy: "Despertar al animal que tienen dentro, el del pudor y el del deseo, el del morbo y el de la castidad, la rabia y hasta la envidia, por atreverse" (*Cuentos de ceniza* 14). She strips off her coat and everyone is paralyzed by her nakedness, but they do nothing. She walks out of the bar slowly, like a model, but no one moves or says anything. The last sentence of the short story indicates she is inflamed by the reality that did not live up to her fantasy and expectation: "Afuera, la noche resplandece y su cuerpo brilla con el fuego que vomita el volcán" (*Cuentos de ceniza* 15). Nothing moved this public from their complacency.

The third story in *Cuentos de ceniza* centers on animism of the statue of the Virgen Mary set atop a volcano for protection. When scores of religious pilgrims make the pilgrimage to the top of the caldera where the statue has been placed for protection and overwhelm with their own weight the construction that serves as the scenic viewpoint for the volcano, the statue comes to life to intercede. Instead of waiting for the disaster, she closes her eyes tightly, breathes deeply with her palm on her forehead, and determines to put an end to the danger as she has at least once before. As the viewpoint bends with the weight and threatens to send the pilgrims to the abyss at the river far below, the statue concentrates; the earth shakes, and at that moment it seems that the overlook will shatter

and send its victims to their death. Just then, the statue of the Virgen explodes and with her sacrifice, the mountain is eternally tranquilized.

Animism is a powerful tool for fantasy because it relies on the spirit and not on the physical. Extraordinary passion, even in the most inanimate object, is powerful and volatile. The point of the story, it could be argued, is that passion is at the apex of being, but these spectators are unaware of the earth's power or its nature. The pilgrims portrayed here stand in peril and do not realize they have foolishly put their own lives in danger. They are indifferent to their circumstances. The explosion of the statue of the Virgin is pertinent in that fantasy (animism of an inanimate object) seems more viable than tapping into a sense of awareness amongst the pilgrims.

The last story in the collection, "**Como un dinosaurio,**" also portrays characters that are oblivious to their surroundings. The protagonist returns from the city to her village only to be hounded by a past suitor who declares his love publicly no matter how she runs from and denies his public demonstration of affection. She prefers to fantasize a relationship with the volcano of her childhood and in an act of desperation, climbs to the edge of the mountain's caldera, rejects the face of the man who now disgusts her, and throws herself, smiling, with total surrender into the mountain of her dreams and the lava below. For the protagonist, self-preservation is death to the senses. Like the dinosaurs before her, she will be preserved as a fossil. The reality of death is preferable than the illogical world that surrounds her.

Edna Iturralde, Verde fue mi selva

Edna Iturralde's collection of short stories for children, *Verde fue mi selva* (1998), has some very unforgettable environmental children's stories. The fourteen stories in this collection rely on the representation of the responsibilities of those who live in the tropical rain forest of Ecuador and the values of modern and traditional communities in contact. In the prologue to this collection of short stories, Soledad Córdova argues in the prologue that *Verde fue mi selva* provides a window into the world of the jungle and information that can help us protect and preserve the jungle, its animals, and its inhabitants:

También escuchamos que hay que salvar la selva. Que la Amazonía es el *pulmón* del planeta y que el aire que respiramos viene de esos enormes y magníficos bosques lluviosos. Que no debemos contribuir a la destrucción de la selva porque ello sería poner en peligro la vida de la Tierra.

A los que no pertenecemos al gran bosque lluvioso, el libro nos acerca a la realidad de nuestro Oriente y nos permite descubrir que están allí, cerquita, y son parte de nosotros: personas, vegetación, animales, unidos en la armonía frágil de un mundo único y especial. ("Prólogo" *Verde fue mi selva* 8-9)

The stories of *Verde fue mi selva* delve into the lives and cultures of the diverse indigenous populations of the Ecuadorian rain forest. Iturralde's stories portray the indigenous cultures of the Amazon basin: the Achuar with a population of about 500 and the the Shuar with a population of 35,000-40,000 who live near the Santiago, Morona, and

Pastaza rivers; the Huaorani with an estimated population of about 1,000-2,000 who live between the Napo and Curaray rivers; the Siona-Secoya with a population of about 1,000 who live between the Aguarico, Eno, Shushufindi, and Cuyabeno rivers; the Eastern Quichuas, about 60,000, who live north of the Villano and Curaray rivers in the western part of Napo and Pastaza provinces; the Cofán, about 600-800, who live in eight distinct communities along the Aguarico and San Miguel rivers in the Sucumbios and Napo provinces (“Pueblos del Ecuador”).

The story that gives the book its title is set in the Cofán culture and deals with the contact between the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Cofán and the practices of the petroleum companies that have poisoned the jungle. The short story “**Verde fue mi selva**” (“My forest was green” 131-142) tells a simple story: Tae, a young Cofán girl, was happy and playful until the arrival of the white petroleum engineers who polluted the river and its banks where she and the other members of her community lived. The Cofán, according to the narrator, believe that spirits live near the river’s edge and that is where Tae decides to pronounce her final words. She is witness to the fact that the brilliant verdor of the leaves is dulled by an oily film that cannot be washed off by the rain and the riverbanks are discolored by the black, thick muck that is left from the extraction of petroleum.

“Verde fue mi selva” is the final nostalgic phrase that Tae speaks aloud. Her words are poignant as she bemoans the state of her jungle which is no longer green, no longer natural. Her community builds Tae a small hut where she spends her days and nights in silence, losing the palor of her skin color, wandering to the river’s edge in the hopes of seeing her reflection in the water that is now too dense with contaminants to allow her to see her own reflection. Every day her health becomes increasingly fragile. Yet nature tends to her: the butterfly flies here and there, seeking out animals, insects, and birds to come to her assistance. All of the animals, including the butterfly, bat, jaguar, toucan, deer, and anaconda work together to save Tae, who grows weaker every day. The only one who is successful is the small ladybug who whispers into her ear that the jungle is hers forever and a day, no matter what happens and therefore, it is her responsibility to protect the jungle, especially when others were trying to destroy it. What the little ladybug tells her cousin, the bat, is that humans, whether large or small, have something inside them called hope. Upon hearing the message of hope and responsibility, Tae stands up, walks to the river, and lets a few heavy tears drop from her cheeks into the river. Wherever the tears fall, the water becomes cristaline again. The message is that Tae can work toward saving the jungle; she now has hope and a mission.

The story is a delightful call to arms for the inhabitants of the regions most affected by petroleum engineering, but also is a call to all to take care of the ecological region where they live. The story is based on a real ecological tragedy in the area of the Ecuadorian jungle, but Iturralde employs fantasy in the voices of jungle animals to speak to the young Cofán girl to give her hope that she and other humans can restore the environment. Putting the voice of reason into the tiny ladybug is the motivation for the smallest of humankind to take on the mission of preserving and cleaning up the environment. Iturralde resorts to fantasy to fashion a recommendation to those who might be most impressionable and most inclined to work toward the betterment of their world: children.

Another story that relies more on realistic description and psychological realism than animism is “**Cacería (“The Hunt” 49-55),**” which is set in the jungle area of southeastern Ecuador and revolves around the culture of the Shuar. The narrative is a

coming-of-age story in which a twelve-year-old is on his first hunt. The young boy sets out alone with the intention of killing an animal to show his coming of age. Nevertheless, when he is faced with killing a mother ocelot with kittens, he makes the better choice to return home without a prize rather than kill a mother and, consequently, her young kittens. The choice between returning as a man with his kill or returning as a man who respects nature and his place in it is a difficult choice, but the one that Iturralde has this young Shuar make. Fantasy does not interfere but rather a conscience that relies on sustainability and good judgement.

In the short story “**Las letras (“Letters”)**,” a curious, young Huaorani boy called Kadouae becomes the unsung hero of his community as he becomes an interpreter who communicates the government’s ruling on the Huaorani territory. Determined never to attend school or give up the freedom of his Huaorani childhood, Kadouae collects fruit from the *chonta* tree and tries to convince himself that he will not attend classes in the small hut reserved for the community school, wasting the best hours of his day looking at squiggles on pages. Instead, he argues to himself that he will run and live free and play games, for in his culture, no one plays to win or lose, but only for the sake of playing. Nevertheless, Kadouae’s curiosity gets the best of him and he is the only student in the community who learns to read letters (and words) well in a second language—that we assume is Spanish—and not his first language called *Huao*. The teacher leaves him a book of stories that he wraps in palm bark and hides in his hut. On the day that a female Huaorani leader arrives with outsiders who have brought a government communiqué, young Kadouae is the only community member who can bridge the trust and communication gap between the Ecuadorian government who has promised to respect and protect Huaorani lands and the community.

Iturralde’s short story plays cleverly on the responsibilities of community members to find ways to connect with other Ecuadorian communities in an effort to promote both trust and mutual understanding. “Las letras” is a story that supports integration in terms of knowledge and communication but not assimilation. The story suggests that the isolated Huaorani tribe needs to educate themselves and their children so they can protect their lands since, if they cannot communicate or understand what the Ecuadorian government representatives say concerning their communities and their lands, they cannot protect themselves, their lifestyle, or the land that they consider theirs.

Iturralde’s story, for the most part, does not condemn the ways of life of the Huaorani. Instead, the knowledge of the jungle and the Huaorani’s cultural and agricultural practices are treated with dignity and fairness. However, when it comes to the ability to read, the community is reported to feel ashamed: “*Los niños se rieron avergonzados. Los ancianos trataron de lucir más dignos que nunca. Los adultos se movieron inquietos. Quién hubiera dicho que mandar a los niños a la escuela hubiera sido útil*” (Verde 86). Iturralde is able to make a point about education and reading that is applicable to all communities, but also raises the issue of perspectivism. Reading is important for connections to be maintained outside of the community, not inside the community, yet the community members—from the narrator’s perspective—feel ashamed and uncomfortable when faced with the responsibility of promoting bilingualism and alphabetism. The overall message, however, seems positive since Kadouae enjoys reading the stories he has guarded in his hut. More importantly, he comes to value his skill in reading since it benefits the

overall Huaorani community by providing them with the means to communicate with the outside world.

While this story is clearly a children's story and has universal significance for communication across languages and borders. In the case of the Ecuadorian Huaorani, it has clear implications for survival. The Huaorani community is small and isolated. Some of the communities now share their property with petroleum and logging companies and must communicate in Quichwa or Spanish to be able to both protect their land and livelihood and take advantage of opportunities that these companies offer them. The real necessity for bilingualism and reading/speaking competency is the sense of reality behind the children's story. Iturralde relies on realism here, not fantasy, to convey the urgency of taking education of the illiterate to a different level.

Iturralde's stories indicate that she understands that the culturally and linguistically diverse people of the Amazonian jungles must realize that as guardians of the cultural diversity of the land in which they live. They must defend them and their land by gaining an education that allows them to protect and preserve their language, their culture, their religion, and their rich relationship with nature. Iturralde's short story also recognizes the bountiful knowledge of the indigenous communities in terms of their spirituality and understanding of the natural world. Iturralde's short stories are fanciful and light. If there is any connection to "fantasy" it is in describing and imitating the marvelously diverse and rich world of the indigenous communities that serve as the setting for her stories and animism of the fauna. Any perception of the drudgery of reality and any sordid or miserable life circumstances of these communities is never dealt with strict realism.

Raquel Rodas Morales, Ecuador, cuentos de mi país

Analysis of the children's stories in the most recent edition of *Ecuador, cuentos de mi país*, provides insights to the use of fantasy and realism in narratives meant for children. Since there is no publication date listed for the individual stories, I have selected some of the youngest writers' work for analysis here: "**La máquina de cuando seas grande**" ("The Machine for When You Grow Up" 23-33) by Mercedes Falconi, "**El Delfín Rosado**" ("The Pink Dolphin" 35-43) by Edna Iturralde, Renán de la Torre's "**Ñiquito, el carrizo flaquito**" ("Ñiquito, the Reed Flute" 63-71) and Raquel Rodas Morales' "**El señor blanco**" ("The White Man" 63-71). In the first story by Mercedes Falconí, fantasy leads to disillusion. In the second story by Iturralde, fantasy focuses on the spiritual commonality between a Siona Shaman and the magical pink dolphins. In the third, fantastical animism leads to a connection with common beliefs about musical instruments that are rooted in the Ecuadorian indigenous community, in particular. In the fourth story, fantasy allows an ordinary, indentured farmer who is rooted in the harsh realities of everyday life to view the treasures of the gods and return to speak of his adventure.

In Mercedes Falconí's "**La máquina de cuando seas grande**," Margarito Pérez, a scientist-magician, introduces his invention at local Ecuadorian fairs. His marvelous machine tempts the children to enter to see what they will look like when they are adults. The children who look at the grand machine see a giant photographic camera and beg their parents to let them take a look into the magical mirrors. The magic of the machine was not only its mirrors that demonstrated either the future or past likeness of the person, but the machine also generated questions that frustrated the old and young alike. The question

“How was God born?” and “Why do parents get divorced?” or “Why do ears hear?” were all questions that neither the adults nor the children could answer. The result is that the machine is a flop because it didn’t resolve anything besides the likeness of the person, just the appearance. It did not provide answers for any of the questions. When Margarito figures out that his invention is worthless in the community, he closes himself up in his laboratory to write and design a new machine: the machine that tells why adults do not repond to their children.

Fantasy in this short story relies on the notion of curiosity. Knowing what we will look like in the future or recalling who we were in the past is enticing, but when there is no substantial change in what people know or understand, the magic is lost. Appearances are nothing more than appearances and that is why the invention failed. Fantasy supplies the means to provide a framework for questioning minds but the people of Guanobamba do not want questions, they want answers. Margarito’ machine did not give answers, but instead served its purpose by providing fascinating questions. Unfortunately for Margarito and the country of Guanobamba, there was no interest in answering real questions or in engaging the curious mind.

In “**El Delfín Rosado**” (35-43) by Edna Iturralde, the fantasy rests in the magical rose-colored, fresh water dolphins of the rivers of the Amazon. She sets the story in Amazonia, an area where the Siona Indians live, in part because the Siona believe that the dolphins are magical and that when they die, they will be reborn as pink-bellied river dolphins. The Sionas abelieve that the freshwater dolphins of the Amazon help the Siona survive in nature and that they are capable of capturing the stars to perpetuate the light in the river.

In this short story for children, one young Siona girl is distracted from the tribes’ collection of tortoise eggs and she sits next to the river fascinated by the antics of a river dolphin. The narrator is omniscient and readers are introduced to the thoughts of the dolphin, which delights in having an audience for his antics. The story turns sad when the tribal Shaman arrives to warn the dolphins that there is a great black mass coming down the river and that he can do nothing to save the dolphins. The black mass is, of course, the black waste from petroleum extraction. When the black oil has poisoned the dolphin and the river is dying, the Shaman returns to the river dolphin and, in the shape of a gigantic dolphin, leads the pink dolphin to the afterlife where the jungle looms further and further below but the stars are ever closer.

Iturralde uses fantasy based on traditional indigenous Siona beliefs to turn her story from a simple story focused on the relation between humans and animals with souls to a commentary on the tragedy of the destruction of the jungle. Unlike the stories in *Verde fue mi selva*, this story provides no model for protecting the rainforest or the jungle’s rivers. Instead, Iturralde uses fantasy and animism to provide a common afterlife for humans and animals destroyed by pollution. The responsibility for protecting the environment lies elsewhere. The functional aspect of fantasy, however, is similar to the way that Santiago Páez used fantasy *Profundo en la Galaxia*: fantasy allows for communication between beings that, under other circumstances, do not communicate. Their communication allows for collaboration in terms of changing the realities that surround all natural things and all living things.

Fantasy is common in children’s literature and is used by authors to connect with the marvelous imagination of the young person’s mind. In juvenile literature, the borders

between fantasy and realism are necessarily blurred because the attribution of human qualities to animals or inanimate objects helps children (and the adults who read the stories to them) to understand the fragile relationship between humans and the other natural things that surround them.

In “**Ñiquito, el Carrizo flaquito,**” Renán de la Torre animates a family of common reeds that grows near water with an emphasis on the smallest of the group who calls himself Ñiquito (short of Meñiquito because he was not larger than a human pinky finger). When the rest of his family of canes is cut down and taken away, he is left behind as waste since he is so thin. He is picked up by the little shepherd, Andrés, who uses him first to hurry the sheep along and later cuts into his “flesh,” making Ñiquito angry, but eventually is turned into the musical instrument that he had always wanted to be. Ñiquito has always admired the wind and the fresh harmony of running water and finds his happiness in his own hollowed-out body because musical inspiration comes from within. The flute has a soul: “era él, dentro de las fibras más íntimas de su alma, donde encontraba cadencias y ritmos que pugnaban por salir, por expresarse” (71).

The story relies on the belief that the soul of nature lives in the wood and cane that is harvested. In fact, this belief is held by some craftsmen who create musical instruments in Ecuador today. It is a fact that flute makers do not know until they carve the final hole in the flute whether the flute will be a good one or not, or whether it will be able to *sing* more than an octave. For this reason, the fantasy of animism in this short story for children is pertinent to the indigenous belief system, but more than that, the story helps children to recognize the spirit of natural things and they learn they must respect all natural objects.

The natural objects, not the humans who use them, provide the rhythms and tones that are necessary for the sanjuanitos, the pasillos, the yaravíes, and tonadas that the humans play. The flute itself carries the harmonies. The magic is, however, also in the hands of the human carver who knows how to turn a simple cane into a musical instrument. This story is delightful because it turns fantasy on its head, asking readers to be witnesses to the cutting down of reeds and canes that do not die, since they simply transform and keep their souls. We see the same sort of transformation with the tree who becomes the cognizant, sculpted, crucified Christ in Egüez’s novel *El Poder del Gran Señor*. The animism in Ecuadorian literature for children and for adults follows a long tradition and has its roots in the ideology of the indigenous communities of Ecuador.

In “**El señor blanco**” by Raquel Rodas Morales, fantasy and realism play an equal part in the development of one man’s understanding of his world. The narrator tells us the story of Juan Colimba, an illiterate farm hand, who worked and lived a harsh reality in the icy mountains near the Cayambe volcano. He had earned the respect of his patrons and was given a “huasipungo,” a small hut on a piece of land where he settled with his wife and children. He never earned “money” but he complied with all the obligations that were required of him. He worked tirelessly and with dignity. Nevertheless, as the narrator tells us, he felt compelled to visit the Cerro Blanco of the Cayambe volcano to see the snow-white Lord and his Lady.

The narrator’s realistic description of Juan Colimba’s daily life comes in sharp contrast to the narration of his encounter with the god and goddess of the mountains, precisely because his everyday life is filled with work and few material goods while the treasures behind the secret door of the gods reveals plentiful grains and farm machinery in gold and silver. He has little to do but marvel at what he sees. He takes only one flower

from the fantasy world of the gods and returns to his huasipungo, leaving behind the treasures that he saw there. Nevertheless, the gods pester him with restlessness until he finally returns the flower and hears the voice of the Lady who says, “¿Por qué no te llevaste lo que viste en los trojes? ¡Cualquier cosa! Pero la flor no, porque es la llave del Señor Blanco” (*Ecuador, cuentos de mi país* 115). Juan Colimba leaves the mountain fantasy in humility but with his dignity preserved:

Sin atreverse a mirar a ningún lado. Colimba salió con ‘la cabeza gacha y el corazón de cuy’. Apenas traspasó la puerta, oyó a sus espaldas, un golpe seco y fuerte. Era el sonido de la puerta que cerraba la doña.

Colimba regresó aliviado y orgulloso, al mismo tiempo. El Señor Blanco le había mostrado sus tesoros y él no le había quitado ni un solo grano. Ahora todo estaba a salvo: la riqueza de monte y también su dignidad. (*Ecuador, cuentos de mi país* 115-116)

Even though Colimba takes others to the door of the gods, the door never opens for him or for others in his care. The narrator suggests that the gods are waiting for another chosen one.

Fantasy in this short story has an ambiguous function. On the one hand, it provides a means for children to understand that even the meekest among us can be chosen by the gods. On the other, by creating a fantasy of treasures within the bowels of the Cayambe, a common theme in Ecuadorian children’s tales, the narrator is able to set an example for perpetuating the greater importance of the natural over the material. When Colimba takes the unusual flower, the natural wealth of the mountains, the gods are angry. They value the natural wealth of the mountain over the gold and silver material icons for agricultural wealth.

The stories included in *Ecuador, cuentos de mi país* provide clues to the use of fantasy and realism in literature for children. In each case, fantasy allows for the spirituality of humans and other natural living things to be highlighted and valued. Realism provides the connection to everyday human experience so that the children can understand how these characters fit into their own human world, one that is ordered by materialism and the specific social structures that hamper our ability to realize the potential of the spiritual connections between man, beast, and the natural—and spiritual—environment.

There is greater diversity of fantasy and realism both in terms of how these writers treat individual topics as well as how they employ fantasy or realism to communicate ideas. Ponce Maldonado, Encalada Vásquez, Ruales Hualca, and Proaño all focus on the self-destructive nature of humankind. Iván Egüez and the early short stories by Jorge Dávila focus primarily on the individual ability to complete a truncated life, similar to the function we saw in many of the novels analyzed in that chapter. But later stories by Jorge Dávila, Sara Vanégas, Paulina Soto, Iturralde, and others use fantasy and realism to reinstill hope in humanity by relying on the regenerative nature of the spiritual and natural world.

Chapter Five—Fantasy and Realism in Ecuadorian Poetry

Poetry, like short story, continues to be one of the more cultivated genres in Ecuador. In this chapter, the analysis of some of the more recognized voices, as well as some newer poets, provides a more balanced look at how individual poets employ fantasy and realism to communicate to readers.

The two quotes from poets Sojos, an Ecuadorian, and Borges, an Argentinian, sum up the essence of poetic expression. Sojos expressed that reality can not be said, “La realidad es indecible.” (Calderón Chico, 24). No matter how many words and realistic images poets use to describe the reality that surrounds them, the expression of reality always falls short. Reality cannot be *told* but only interpreted and felt. Jorge Luís Borges put into context the essence of experience of reality: “¿para qué sirve el sabor del café?” (Calderón Chico, 24). The memories and feelings that are awakened or aroused by the smell of coffee cannot be simply interpreted as a reality, nor does the smell of coffee have the same function for each individual. Poetry relies on our ability to use our senses to visualize and feel the presence of poetic expression. Whether the poet relies on realism or fantasy to express him or herself, the images and the sensorial experience readers re-live is much like a sip of coffee or even a whiff of the coffee, a breeze that carries the scent of the rose that takes us to where the poetic voice wants us to share in an experience.

This poetic experience may be a very personal, sensual one or it may be a shared experience with an historical or political bent, as it is in the verses from “Granzudas para abrir el mundo” (*Poesía* 48) by Ecuadorian Poet **Julio Pazos Barrera** who introduces readers to one interpretation of the curious relationship between fantasy and realism. In Pazos’s poem below, the fragile boundary between realism and fantasy is tested as readers must decipher similes, metaphors and figurative language to fix the subject of the poem in the realm of the fantastic or in the realm of realism. (Throughout this chapter I have translated select poems into English to make these works more accessible to a broader reading public and I have included the translation either to the right of the original verse or I have included the translation of the poem in its entirety following the original poem).

Viaja el tercer mundo a lomo de unicornio,
Alguna vez le ponen un motor para decir
que es el tiempo actual.
(*Oficios* 1984)

The developing world travels on a unicorn’s back,
Sometimes they put a motor on him to indicate
that the time is the present.

In the case of these verses by Pazos, the message to readers is evident: the developing world relies on fantasy (unicorn) to carry the realities of everyday life. The humor of the verses depends on the use of the motor, an absurd metaphor for modern

technology, and speed that is falsely fitted to the fantasy of a beast that walks with hoofs and flies with wings. The final verse is both laughable for its sarcasm and poignant for its criticism of the developing world's haphazard application of technology associated with the modernization of the developed world and the supposed intention to bring the fantasy of the developing world up to speed. Pazos's verses highlight the distance between true modernization and the woebegone neverland that he links in this poem with the developing world.

Pazos includes a poem in the collection, "La ciudad de las visiones," (99) that pursues the fantasy of unraveling what *is* and he uses wishful thinking to fantasize about *what cannot be*:

cómo me gustaría escribir todo al revés
los clásicos al revés
los caballos surrealistas al revés

cómo me gustaría desvivir
hacerlo de nuevo
desvivir el tiempo para colocar el fuego fuera de la cocina

caminar el tiempo al revés para asustar a la gente

cómo me gustaría caminar por los tumbados
y hablar con las autoridades al revés
y solo mirar el mar al derecho

cómo me gustaría ser feliz al revés
que mis hijos sean mis padres
que mi mujer sea yo

cómo me gustaría poner las comas
en los lugares no previstos por la gramática
y morder a los perros
y perseguir a los dictadores

recostarme al revés
finalmente morirme al revés
(*Poesía 99*)

how I would like to write things backwards
do the classics backwards
create surrealist horses from end to beginning

how I would like to undo my life
live life in reverse
undo time so I could place fire outside the kitchen

make time go in reverse to frighten people

how I would like to walk amongst the fallen
and speak with the authorities the wrong way
and look only at the sea the right way

how I would like to be happy in reverse
turn my children into my parents
and my wife into me

how I would like to put commas
in places unforeseen by grammar
and bite dogs
and persecute dictators

rest upside down and backward
finally die in reverse.

The play on the word “al revés” is difficult to translate into English because the translations rely on a number of words that can be summed up in one in Spanish. The essence of the poem is to do the impossible: make time go *in reverse*, be the opposite sex, take an opposite role in life, and say all the wrong things to people we would only imagine saying. The effect is to fantasize what isn’t possible, except in fiction.

The humor, however, reveals a sense of dissatisfaction with things as they are. However, wishful thinking does not turn things around or even change perspectives. Still, we have to question why the poetic voice uses fantasy (wishful thinking) to express emotions about the present state of things. While it is absurd to want to bite dogs, might it also be absurd to persecute dictators? The ambivalence of fantasy allows for saying what one cannot say directly but can only imagine.

The one element that the poetic voice wants to see *the right way* is the sea. The sea is timeless and churns past, present, and future over and over again with each wave, mixing an apparent eternal timelessness for the viewer. There is no reason to want to see the sea upside-down, backwards, or inside-out because the sea is always churning. The connection to realism or to real experience is not lost in the wishful thinking of this poem as the fantasy cannot have meaning without the reality it contradicts. Wishful thinking exposes the perceived limits of experience in day-to-day living.

According to Carlos Aulestia, Julio Pazos treats a variety of human preoccupations in his poetry and works especially with topics of love, death, and the revelations of everyday life (Pazos, *Poesía* 3). In his book entitled *Oficios (Professions)*, Pazos illustrates the slightly uncomfortable relationship between illusion and reality in poems that are based on memory or on dream-like visions. To understand Pazos poetry, the reader must understand the curious and contradictory relationship between that which is *material* and that which is *illusion*, in other words, between what is portrayed as realism and what can be fashioned as fantasy.

Ramiro Oviedo also plays with intertextual fantasy, exposing material things and illusion in a poem called “Aniversario,” published originally in *La ruta de piscis* but with

a different purpose. The narrator of this humorous epistle-like poem speaks to his wife, Dulcinea, on their thirteenth wedding anniversary.

“Aniversario”

Querida Dulcinea, cúpleme expresarle
mis más sentidas condolencias con motivo de nuestro
trigésimo aniversario de bodas,
al mismo tiempo que mi más rendida admiración por su
paciencia, ya que sin ser yo propietario de ningún Titanic,
ni siquiera de una simple piragua,
usted, más bien digna candidata a contraer nupcias
con un romántico hacendado, con por lo menos dos
pintores renombrados, o a dar un mal paso con un
guapísimo ingeniero del Ayuntamiento de la capital,
ha preferido quedarse toda la vida comiéndose las uñas
junto a este aprendiz de lobo.
Mis más cálidas gracias por dejarme solo estas vacaciones,
sin interferir con mi afán de despejar la niebla.
No obstante, séame dado un señalado servicio:
vocabulice un poquito –por favor—cuando habla dormida.
¡Me muero de curiosidad!
A cambio le prometo calentarle los pies hasta en la tumba.
(Es que a veces los versos –como los champiñones—
me estallan en los pies.) (*Escáner* 58)

“Anniversary”

Dear Dulcinea, allow me to express to you
my most heartfelt condolences on this occasion of our
thirteenth wedding anniversary,
and at the same time my most overwhelmed admiration for your
patience, since I am not the owner of a Titanic,
nor even of the most simple canoe,
you, a more worthy candidate for marriage
with a romantic landowner, with at least two
renown painters, or someone who could take the tragic leap with
a gorgeous government engineer from the capital,
have preferred to sit and wait your whole life, nibbling at your nails
next to this wolf apprentice.
My most endearing gratitude for leaving me alone during this vacation,
and for not interfering with my effort to clear away the fog.
Nevertheless, grant me the following important service:
speak up a bit—please—when you speak in your sleep.
I am dying of curiosity!
In exchange I promise to warm your feet even in the grave.

(It is that sometimes verses—like fungi—
break out on my feet.)

Ramiro Oviedo plays with the archaic language of chivalry in this poem—a parody of the language of the Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, creator of the peerless and imagined Dulcinea, beloved fantasy of the mad hidalgo Don Quixote—allowing the narrator of the poem to express his ironic condolences to his wife of thirteen years who married him instead of other “worthy” gentlemen he mentions. The realistic details of the poem indicate she was also good enough wait for him (biting her nails with anxiety) while he took time off to clear his head of other nonsense. Although the references to chivalry are burlesque, there is a clear connection between the poetic voice and the image of Don Quixote, a man who slipped up somehow and made inappropriate decisions with a foggy head but returned to his wife after recovering from his insanity. The joke, however, is on the poetic voice since he points out his own inadequacy both as a marriage partner and as a faithful husband while heralding her superiority. The jest is still ambiguous, though, since Dulcinea can only be imagined; she is no heroine and her most realistic characteristics are superiority and nail-biting.

“Dulcinea” is a pertinent window to fantasy and realism since the name recalls the peerless beauty of the fictional illusion of beauty on which the burlesque “chivalric knight” who called himself Don Quixote fixed his illusions. The poem is tongue-in-cheek as the poetic voice asks his wife to speak louder when she is dreaming at night since he is curious as to what she is dreaming about. The poem plays on the notion of curiosity and the adventures that we experience while fantasizing while we sleep. The curiosity evident in the words of the poetic voice is delightfully refreshing since he wants to share his wife’s nightly imaginary adventures and promises that, if she speaks up so he can hear her, he will keep her feet warm throughout eternity. The humor of the last two verses is characteristic of Cervantes’ burlesque poems preceding the 1605 edition of *Don Quixote* and is telling in its hilarious but realistic simile: even verses bud from the least expectant poet, *like fungus between the toes*.

Oviedo’s epistolary poem is more interesting for its creative conceit and playful jostling of literary characterization than it is for its poetic quality, perhaps. However, the use of fantasy here is important. The poetic voice is interested in why his wife has been able to survive the thirteen years of their marriage despite his lack of romance, good looks, or place in high society. The poetic voice suspects that, perhaps, his Dulcinea fantasizes in her sleep and that there might be an answer there within her dreams. So he asks her to share her nighttime fantasies with him. The poetic voice is grounded in reality while the imagined Dulcinea has the ability to continue to create fantasies and experience fantastic adventures in her dreams. The promise to keep her feet warm even in the grave is a promise for love throughout eternity, and it is a hilarious metaphor for how desireous reality—albeit fictional in this case—is of the fantastic voyages and journeys that fantasy and imagination can provide. While the wishful thinking of love beyond the grave is presented as somewhat silly, it is, nevertheless, an attempt at making an eternal love promise between realism and fiction. When the poetic voice follows the promise with a comparison between outbreaks of poetic musing with an outbreak of foot fungus, the juxtaposition between the esoteric and the low-brow humor of a smelly reality is comic and telling, but also charming.

As a counterpoint to Oviedo's poem that plays humorously with fantasy and realism, **Violeta Luna's** poem "La casa" uses realism to describe the disintegration of a house that is falling into ruin. The purpose is not to remind readers only of the ill state of the house that seems to be falling apart before our eyes, but rather to interject at the last moment the precious human characteristics (*tanta vida y tanto aroma*) that remain in the ruins and in the imagination of creation. By personifying the decayed house with human emotions and actions (coughing, sweating, sobbing, groping, etc.) she transforms the reality of a simple constructed and destroyed house into a "home" that through fantastic animism breathes and sighs (odor) and remembers.

"La casa"

Las casas envejecen en silencio,
 comienzan a enfermarse
 y tosen, sudan, tosen.
 Y lloran en las noches de diciembre
 pensando en el bullicio de otros días.
 Las casas envejecen
 y empiezan a partirse por el pecho.
 Las tejas encanecen,
 las vigas se desploman con su arthritis.
 Sollozan las paredes
 mordiendo hasta los últimos sabores.
 Y los pilares quedan,
 se doblan de dolor pero se quedan.
 Las tablas ya leprosas
 se llevan los tropiezos y los golpes.
 Los corredores se hundan
 soñando en la merienda dominguera.
 Y el pasamano cae
 silbando un villancico fatigado.
 Las gradas en hilachas
 recuerdan las pisadas más diversas:
 las bolatas centenarias y las sandalias niñas.
 Las casas envejecen
 con las ventanas ciegas y harapientas,
 con una puerta anciana
 en donde la humareda se hace noche,
 con una luz de piedra
 y un sueño paralítico.
 He visto envejecer aquella casa
 que tuvo diez pilares
 con sogas y sombreros dialogando.
 He visto envejecer esas paredes
 que ayer tuvieron brillo, miel y canto.
 He visto ese tumbado

Houses age in silence
 They fall ill
 And cough, sweat, cough.
 They weep on December nights
 Recalling earlier days of hustle and bustle.
 Houses age
 And begin to split open at the core.
 The shingles turn grey
 The arthritic beams collapse.
 The walls sob
 groping at the lasting flavors of living.
 And the pillars remain standing,
 They bend in pain but they stand.
 The leprous floorboards
 Still bear stumbles and falls.
 The hallways sag and collapse
 Dreaming of a Sunday tea.
 And the handrail falls
 Whistling a weary carol.
 The ragged staircase
 recalls the most varied footsteps:
 Century-old heels and juvenile sandals.
 Houses grow old
 with blind and ragged windows
 with an ancient doorway
 where a dense cloud becomes night,
 with the glare of stone
 And a paralytic dream.
 I have seen that house age
 that had ten pillars
 with ropes and hats in dialog.
 I have seen the walls age,
 Walls that yesterday were sparkle, honey 'n song.
 I have seen that pile of rubble

abrirse de ternura y de cansancio.
 He visto los dinteles,
 aquellos que estuvieron siempre firmes
 con su cortina de aire, sol y plumas.
 Aquella era la casa campesina,
 la que de tarde en tarde
 olía a pastelillos y a guayaba.
 He visto sus ladrillos ojerosos,
 la mesa ya curvada y andrajosa
 y un clavo sin repisa y sin guitarra.
 Las casas envejecen en silencio,
 se enferman y se mueren.
 Pero en el tibio escombros
 se queda tanta vida y tanto aroma.

Welcome tenderness or weariness.
 I have seen the window frames
 that were always sturdy, filled
 with airy curtains, sun and feathers.
 That was the country house,
 a house that emanated each afternoon
 The smell of pastries and guava.
 I have seen her well-worn bricks
 the sway backed and bedraggled table
 And a nail without its shelf or guitar.
 Houses age in silence;
 They fall ill and die.
 But in the cooling rubble of their demise,
 So much life and so many aromas persist.

(Luna, *Antología esencial* 501-2)

Violeta Luna's poem uses realism and animism to give dignity to the fantasy of the vestiges of the past that continue to breathe and smell of life even in death. The poem is an ode to the importance of the now ruined country house as a home, where even the curved and tattered dinner table evokes the memory of the human vitality that lived there and vestiges of the smells that once characterized the dwelling.

Euler Granda, on the other hand, pursues realistic description and an ironic tone to draw out the uncomfortable relationship between the sordid realities of Ecuador and the fantasies of tourists who are called upon to visit the country in the poem "El turismo fuente de riqueza." The poem begins as an invitation to tourists to visit Ecuador, the land of perpetual spring and quickly turns to outline that while Ecuador is a tourist's fantasy for them, the country is full of deception and misery for the Ecuadorians who happen to live in it. Like the Pazos poem with the unicorn above, Granda exposes sordid realities through exaggeration. The verses in which the poet contrasts the marvelous propaganda of iconic temples and cathedrals to attract tourists with the harsh realities of life in Ecuador that allowed this country to become a tourist attraction:

En la vitrina rota
 De la patria,
 Por muy pocos centavos,
 Ud. podrá admirar
 Toda la colección de gestos

Del paisaje.
 Más que escuelas,
 Más que servicios médicos,
 Tenemos muchos templos coloniales,
 Mucho templos de piedra
 Tallados con las uñas de los indios.
 Si bien es cierto
 Se cometen crímenes

In the worn out showcase
 Of the homeland,
 And for pennies on the dollar,
 You can admire
 An entire collection of cultural
 expressions
 From the landscape.
 More important than schools,
 More important than medical services.
 We have many colonial temples,
 Many stone temples
 Carved by the fingernails of Indians.
 Although it is quite clear
 Crimes are committed

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Por menos que un almuerzo, | For less than the cost of a mid-morning snack, |
| Los altares son hechos | The altars are built |
| Con pan de oro; | With gold leaf; |
| Hay oligarcas | There are members of the oligarchical authority |
| Gordos y cristianos, | who are both fat and Christian. |
| Hay mucho sol | There is a lot of sunshine |
| Sino que a veces todo se trueca negro | But at times everything turns to doom and gloom |
| Porque toca vivir | Because you end up |
| Bajo las gradas. | Living under the stairs. |

(fragment, *Antología esencial* 453-454)

Here, descriptions are characteristic of the social realism of the novels and short stories studied earlier and this poem emerges in counterpoint to the grandeur of history that the tourists are invited to experience at the expense those who live in the country. Juxtaposed to the reality of how these grand temples were built is the nature of the suffering of those employed to build them (scraped by the nails of the Indians). The warmth of the sun, so coveted by tourists seeking beauty and a good tan, is countered by the blackness that the locals experience when they find themselves living beneath the stairs.

The function of the realistic descriptions here is to point out the vast social and economic realities for contemporary tourists and the indigent inheritors of the great indigenous civilizations of the past. The continued influx of outsiders seems to be blind to the stark realities that separate the colonized from the colonizer and, more pertinently now, the indigent from the well-heeled tourist. The effect is that fantasies of a paradise sought out by tourists are lost in the grim realities of a painful present. The narrator turns to sarcasm in the final verses of the poem, calling the tourist to be witness to the stark contrast in lifestyles:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Conozca el Ecuador | Get to know Ecuador |
| señor turista, | mister tourist. |
| es un lindo país, | It is a beautiful country. |
| si Ud. | If you |
| hambre no tiene | never feel hungry, |
| nunca tendrá problemas | you'll never have problems here |
| sino que a ratos | except, at times, |
| uno se enferma, | when you can fall ill, |
| gravemente se enferma de limpieza | seriously ill, from getting cleaned out, |
| y entonces le entran ganas | and then you feel like |
| de echarle gasolina a todo. | throwing gasoline on everything. |

(fragment, originally published in *El cuerpo y los sucesos*, included in *Antología esencial* 453-455)

The poetic voice's sarcasm is both humorous and ominous: Ecuadorians cannot ignore the blatant issues that the poetic voice indicates face them every day: lack of housing, hunger, lack of services, crime, a corrupt oligarchy, pollution of natural areas, etc. The tourist can enjoy a visit if he can turn a blind eye to these atrocities. If not, these issues can literally "clean him out" economically, emotionally, or physically through purging, leaving the tourist weakened and ill. The imagery relies on the relationship of purging to traveler's diarrhea, an illness produced, in most cases, by exposure to enterotoxigenic *E. coli* bacterium that is associated with contamination from human feces. The poetic voice means to point out the discomfort of the deceptive superficial beauty that is polluted by the unseen contamination within. The irony lies in the verses "if you/never feel hungry," since the play on words is antithetical and an observer cannot truly enjoy an illusion of beauty without coming to grips with the realities of the implied distemper and ill.

Cristóbal Zapata rejects fantasy in a poem whose title seems to require fantasy. Zapata delivers a poetic space in which there no space for fantasy or illusions in his poem titled "Conjuras" or "Conspiracies" (*No hay naves para Lesbos* 41).

"Conjuras"

Él ha visto
a las mujeres que amó
dejar en sucias tinajas de aluminio
membranas, tejidos deshechos
como la trama suspendida del amor.

Ofendido y paciente
asistió
a las consultas clandestinas
donde terminaron
las ilusiones nacidas
en cuartos con vistas y sol
o en habitaciones de paso
donde la austeridad no impedía concebir
la luz, la luz, únicamente la luz.

Él ha visto
a las mujeres que quiso
abrir sus bellos muslos
para desprenderse de él
como de una excrecencia,
una desmesura, una maldición.

"Conspiracies"

He has seen
The women he loved
Leave in dirty aluminum vessels
membranes, ruined tissues
Like a cancelled love plot.

offended and patient
he attended
the clandestine consultations
where they terminated
the illusions born
in sunny rooms with a view
or in an entryway
where austerity did not impede
conception of
light, light, and light alone.

He has seen
The women he loved
Open their lovely thighs
To rid themselves of him
As if he were an abscess,
an excess, a curse.

The poem reveals the rejection the male subject of the poem feels as he observes his future offspring being tossed out like garbage by his numerous paramours, as though

his offspring were nothing more than a cursed, overgrown wart. The realism of the poem is chilling and disturbing in part because the poetic voice speaks as an observer of a man who continues to deposit semen in a number of women who “open their lovely thighs” only to feel offended when these women dispose of unwanted fetuses that he has engendered. The message of the poem is clear: just like the man who seeks virgins in a brothel, this man deludes himself into possible parenthood by depositing his seed into an unwilling mother. While the poem depicts a tragic reality of numerous aborted and unwanted pregnancies, the poetic voice also reveals the absurdity of planting seeds where they will be uprooted. The conspiracies, although apparently against the women who rejected him and his seed, also conspire against a fool who repeats the same foolishness time and again. Like Sissiphus, the male subject is depicted as a fool as he feels deceived by the female vessels that he feels deluded him into potential parenthood and then forced him to observe the rejection of his offspring. The realities of the poem are disturbing because of the violence against the unborn child and the women who dispose of his seed. The challenge for readers is to determine the purpose of the third verse and the interpretation of “loved.” The repetitiveness implied in the plural “women” and repeated abortions denies the “love” a spiritual quality and reveals the man’s relationship was a physical and sexual, not spiritual one. In this way, the poet communicates the absurdity of the subject’s disillusion since his commitment to the women was no more than the effort of sowing seeds where life could not thrive.

Realism is used quite differently in **Sara Vanégas Coveña’s** poem “Tomebamba.” Here, the poetic voice draws readers into the fantasmagoric world of memory where the Tomebamba River of Cuenca and the city streets of Munich somehow work together—albeit in language—to wash away absent traces of identity. “Tomebamba” can be found in Vanégas Coveña’s collection of poems *Versos transhumantes* (2004), which contains a selection of her poetry from the 1970s through 2004. “Transhumante” refers to someone who travels from place to place as beehives are moved from one location to another or as sheep and the shepherd go from northern pastures to southern pastures from winter to summer. The “transhumante” follows a specific corridor and rambles from moment to moment, losing sight of any ultimate destinate since the traveler enjoys and savors each environment encountered along the path. It is no surprise that in this collection of poetry, Vanégas takes her readers along a path that winds from Ecuador to Palma de Mallorca, from Germany to Yugoslavia, from Spain to Mexico. Her poems express the emotional energy of nostalgic recollection and the creative powers of self discovery.

In the poem “Tomebamba,” she allows the image of chunks of sand and the cool water of the river in Munich to lead readers toward the imagery that takes them toward a brief but penetrating memory from the riverbanks of the Tomebamba River that flows through the city of Cuenca, Ecuador. The re-creation vivifies the wispy and flexible stalks of the retama bushes whose dainty yellow flowers at the tips remind readers of the beauty and delicacy of the flora at the riverbank. The poetic voice draws readers into the fantasmagoric world of memory where the Tomebamba River of Cuenca and the city streets of Munich somehow work together—albeit in language—to wash away lost traces of identity:

“Tomebamba”

“Tomebamba”

bloques de arena los recuerdos
mi mano desmaterializada
penetra los fantasmas
hasta llegar a la edad de las retamas
bloom
a orillas de este río
que hoy se prolonga en nostálgicas
avenidas/

a lamirme la ausencia
de tus huellas

chunks of sand the memories
my disappearing hand
penetrates the visions
until arriving at the retama bushes in
along the banks of this river
prolonged today in nostalgic avenues

that lick from me absent
traces of you

(*Entrelíneas*, published again
in *Versos Transhumantes* 24)

Absence and longing, or nostalgic desire, are the elements of fantasy in this poem that bring readers and the poetic voice closer to understanding the emotional realities of memory.

Vanégas also captures the ephemeral state of life in a very short micropoem that employs the rose as a metaphor for the prime of life and dust for when we return to the earth in death. The metaphor is an ancient one but comes to life in the hands of the poet. The wondrous peak of life at its fullest is lost in the flicker of an eyelid, the passing leaves only sadness and yearning for what has already been lost:

entre la rosa y el polvo
un parapadeo

y la nostalgia

between the rose and dust
the blink of an eye

and nostalgia

(first published in *Indicios*
(1988) and again in *Versos*
Transhumantes 32)

The re-creation of memory and its palpable *materiality* through emotion is a theme that runs through much of Vanégas poetry. Emotion is real and is described using material objects just as we saw Jorge Luis Borges highlighted the function of the taste of coffee. Memory only gains materiality through fictional re-creation and evocation of emotion. The real emotions triggered by memory and its counterpart, the recognition of absence and loss, navigate between the realism of the moment (heartfelt sentiment) and fantasy (the moment when we realize that the re-creation is nothing more than a painful re-creation of a memorable moment already gone). The poetic voice captures a fleeting image of a “flourishing” only to find it disintegrate into nothingness:

el recuerdo es ave
migrante

memory is a bird
migrating

entre mi corazón y la nada

between my heart and nothingness.

(first published in *Indicios*
(1988) and again in *Versos*
Transhumantes 29)

In this poem, memory is associated with the flight of a migrant bird that flutters between the palpable emotions generated by a yearning, nostalgic heart and the empty nothingness of absence that the mind recognizes as loss.

Catalina Sojos also explores the relationship between realism and fantasy in a book of poetry called *Cantos de piedra y agua*. *Cantos* is a book of poetic “songs” to Cuenca and the theme of the poems are based on her love-hate relationship with her native city. “Canto segundo” captures the tenuous relationship between the Cuenca that the poetic voice loves and the cold, antagonistic and even hypocritical Cuenca that resists her affection:

“Canto segundo”

amo con ferocidad, lo intuyes.
soy incapaz de permanecer quieta
camino fuera de mi cuerpo sin reparar en las hojas
que ocultan el aire machacado.
en la llanura ancha como el cielo
han tendido cuerdas de escarcha roja
los jueces elevan cánticos
y el trino de los pájaros
yace
como una hierba seca.
existe un mar detrás de las cerradas puertas
escucho su ovillo oscuro
el naufragio de las bocas abiertas.
condenada a la otra orilla
no encuentro el ojo de luz.
la llave es solo un puente hacia la nada.

te escribo
desde aquella que ama el viento
y deja su cuerpo
como un pájaro petrificado
en los excesos

noche espesa
mi corazón hace un tajo en su ceguera

entre un golpe de vida
y otro de muerte

tu flor se yergue voluptuosa.

(*Cantos de piedra y agua*, 1999)

“Second Canto”

you perceive intuitively that i love ferociously
i am incapable of remaining still
i walk outside my body without staring at the leaves
that conceal the choppy air.
on the plain, wide like the sky
they have hung cords of red frost
the judges raise their songs
and the trill of the birds
rests
like a dry weed.
a sea exists behind closed doors
i hear her dark windings
the shipwreck of gaping mouths.
condemned to the other shore
i don't find the porthole of light.
the key is only a bridge toward nothingness.

i write you
from the one who loves wind
and who leaves her body
like a bird petrified
in excesses

dense night
my heart slashes through total blindness

between a thrust of life
and another of death
voluptuous your flower stiffens.

Cantos has elements of mysticism and tells the story of a soul searching for its beloved who, unlike the beloved deity in San Juan de la Cruz's mystical poem of the soul uniting with the beloved God (*Noche oscura*), here the beloved is represented as one who is without warmth, busy with a hubbub of voices that hide the truth behind closed doors. Sojos uses these images to portray an unwelcoming city but a city to which the poetic voice is drawn, helplessly. The harsh realities of Cuenca are not enough to keep the poetic voice from recreating an extraordinarily sensuous relationship through metaphorical language. The fantasy is within the language of the mind that navigates between reason and passion only to find a palpable reality still standing outside the poem and the ephemeral encounter with a fleeting, passionate emotion no more than a created nothingness, a fantasy.

Catalina Sojos captures poignantly the relationship between fantasy and reality in human relations in a poem that was yet unpublished in 2007 titled “Arena”:

“Arena”

Cuando el hombre llegó me ofreció un ramo de rosas, yo deseaba un
espejo; me negué a aceptarlas.
Sonrió y se marchó en silencio.
Pasaron seis meses hasta que apareció con un violín, yo deseaba una esfera; me negué a
aceptarlo./

Sonrió nuevamente y se marchó en silencio.
Anoche volvió, me entregó una espina.
La acepté silenciosamente, entonces el hombre se deshizo delante de mis ojos atónitos.

Ahora cargo mi espejo, mi espacio y mi espina pero sigo deseando la arena de su cuerpo
que desapareció con la última ofrenda./

“Sand”

When he came, he offered me a bouquet of roses. I wanted a
mirror; I refused to accept it.
He smiled and left in silence.
Six months passed before he came with a violin. I wanted a sphere; I refused to accept it.
Again he smiled and left in silence.
Last night he returned. He gave me a thorn.
I accepted it in silence, then the man turned to sand right before my astonished eyes.

Now I carry my mirror, my space and my thorn but I keep longing for the sand of his
body that disappeared with his very last gift./

The poetic voice’s preference for a mirror (narcissism), a sphere (space and time) over the material offerings of romance (roses and the violin) that the suitor brings, refers to the fantasy that youth, beauty, and romance—all ephemeral and fragile—will last and that we need not live for the day. The final verse describes the moment when the poetic voice recognizes that the fleeting moment (love, romance, beauty, fantasy, the gift of life) has silently been snatched away with the passing of time, leaving only sand—as a metaphor for death, absence and nostalgia—in its stead. The poetic voice is left with the reflection of self (“*my mirror*”), loneliness (“*my space*”), pain (“*my thorn*”), and a sense of longing for the ultimate gift (a youthful, palpable, breathing, caring body) that was never accepted and therefore lost. The poem recreates an emotional experience that readers can understand both in terms of the fleeting reality of human experience and in terms of the more philosophical questioning of how we each make choices and feel loss for some of those paths not taken. Sojos is able to communicate in this brief poem a reflection on the moment when each realizes fantasy and reality for what they are. Illusion is illusion and only palpable in terms of language that we use to recreate it. What is material and palpable is merely so until it disintegrates into nothingness with the passing of time.

These poems by Sojos are reminiscent of earlier poems by **Rodrigo Pesántez** who also explored the theme of the passing of time and loss in a poem that is included in Xavier Oquendo's *Ecuador y América Latina en sus letras* (173). Pesántez's *Crucigrama* is an exclamation of surprise to the passing of the present, future and even the past; even what we thought was real, may not be. The word *pasa* is used in a variety of contexts in this poem. *Pasa* travels through the poem unchanged in Spanish but it has very different subtle meanings as can be seen in my translation into English:

“Crucigrama”

Todo pasa en esta vida:
 Pasa la uva,
 Pasa el vino,
 También pasa la pasa.
 Pasa el presente,
 Pasa el futuro.
 ¡Quién creyera!
 También
 Pasa el pasado.

“Crossword Puzzle”

Everything happens in life:
 The grape dries out,
 Wine turns sour,
 Even the withered raisin disappears.
 The present time passes,
 The future happens.
 Who would have thought it possible!
 Even
 The past is unreliable.

(Pesántez in Oquendo's *Ecuador* 173)

The poem is short, profound and ironic: anything can happen in life even what we consider immutable—the past—is challenged. The past is not a reality but a construction of that reality.

Violeta Luna illustrates in a similar fashion but with less irony how humans use fantasy to create their own perception of reality in a longer poem titled *Cada uno*, included in Oquendo's *Ecuador* (178). I have incorporated only fragments of the longer poem here, but the essence is preserved: everyone fantasizes their own world and their surroundings even at the expense of the realities that are denied through fantasy. The poetic voice bemoans the hypocrisy that fantasy allows, but she builds herself a desirable fantasy home that seeks an ideal location right between the arms of her beloved:

“Cada uno” (fragment)

Cada uno construye su casa como
 Quiere.
 La pone sobre el aire,
 La siembra en la cintura de la luna
 O encima de las olas.
 Cada uno la pinta de manera diferente,
 La baña con el cielo
 Y el oro verdidulce de la tarde.
 afternoon.
 La llena de jilgueros,

“Each and Everyone”

Everyone constructs his house as
 He desires.
 He builds it on air,
 He plants it on the midsection of the
 moon
 Or on top of the waves.
 Each paints his house in a different
 way,
 He bathes it with the sky
 And the verdisweet gold of the
 afternoon.
 He fills it with goldfinches,

De música y hortensias.

. . .
Qué lástima pero ninguno
Construye a su medida su refugio
Con solo la verdad de cada día
Y el sol bien compartido.
Qué lástima que nadie se haga casas

A prueba de mentiras, olvido y desamor.

Yo quiero hacer mi casa a mi manera

Sin puertas ni cortinas.
La quiero dulce y tibia
En medio del camino de tus brazos.

With music and hydrangeas.

. . .
How unfortunate that no one
Custom-makes his refuge
with only the truth of each day
And a well-shared sun.
How unfortunate that no one builds
homes
To withstand lies, forgetfulness and
indifference.
I want to build my home in my own
way
Without doors or curtains.
I want the home to be sweet and warm
And right in between your arms.

(in Oquendo's *Ecuador* 178)

The purpose of this poem is to point out the self-serving nature of humanity, on the one hand, and the realization that this poetic voice is not unlike anyone else who fantasizes their world to fit their own desires. While the poetic voice laments the fact that no one builds dreamhouses on truth or on the natural state of reality that surrounds us, the voice reports, cheerfully, that the custom-built house that she desires will be built with honesty and openness and located within the grasp of the one she loves.

Let us turn next to the newest poets in Ecuador to see how they employ fantasy and realism principally because, according to poet and critic Xavier Oquendo Troncoso, the most vital characteristic of poets born after 1964 are disillusion and desire for freedom from the past. How then, do these young writers use fantasy and realism to express the void (nulos) they sense and the desire to seeking what is worth salvaging from the past and what must be tossed out (*Ciudad en verso*). Oquendo Troncoso explains:

Ahora, los jóvenes cultores de poesía tienen la opción libre de sentirse nulos en un mundo atroz. Esa nulidad en otras épocas—hace poquísimos años—era imposible, sobre todo para un artista, que debía ampararse en la puerta abierta hacia lo trunco de la libertad, de los sueños difuminados en este siglo de revoluciones sociales, políticas y estéticas. El fin de siglo (y de milenio) ha servido para repensar en qué es lo que nos ha tocado: qué nos sirve, qué podemos arrojar al tarro de la basura. (*Ciudad en verso* 29)

The purpose of this new generation of poets, he argues, was not to destroy but to gather information, work it through, and construct an emotional reality that is different than the reality that may surround them outside of the poetic experience. For this reason, the voice of the individual or the “yo” is much more evident than the outcry of the many that was part of the poets like César Dávila Andrade whose famous poem “Boletín y elegía de las mitas” (1959) was a social cry of the many in the voice of one. This is, as in the more recent novels in which individual characters choose their present role in the world (Valdano’s characters for example), the poetic voices rely on a pervasive “yo” who

contemplates and “feels” the experience of a sensual, sexual or erotic moment, an encounter in ordinary city life or even the mysterious and compelling encounter with the sea. Readers no longer find in these poems the connection to local and regional Ecuador, to overwhelming misery and sordid realities. Instead, there is an attempt to experience *self* in a broader, universal community. One of the writers in this contemporary group, Xavier Oquendo Troncoso, explains the focus of this generation of poets:

Le tenemos miedo al localismo, porque sabemos que el Ecuador no está incluido en los “mapamundi.” Ecuador es lo mismo que inédito o imaginario. Y como nadie nos mira, y como no estamos en nada, entonces, desde aquí adentro tenemos que escribir para afuera. (*Ciudad* 40)

Instead of portraying their “Ecuadorian-ness,” this most recent generation of poets moves away from any sort of discourse that would place their writing in the region or within the traditional topics of misery and suffering, outrage at corruption, etc. that would have been characteristic only a few years earlier. The poets resort to a more complicated discourse that attempts to build the bridge to the global reader and they present this discourse in a very small package.

The poems are characteristically short—some even micropoems of a few lines—and do not rely on formal structure. They are held together by intense rhyme, acute poetic imagery, and the pursuit of emotions. One of the poems by **Sophía Yáñez** is an example of how these young writers use rhythm to provide structure to the text:

“Línea girasolar”

Pasos que esconden
la razón de los suspiros,
pasos que se mueven estancados,
pasos que presiente
los pasos del otro,
su intención de luz,
su desmesura.
Pasos al salir el sol,
pasos al rozar la piel,
pasos pintados por la voz
y el alma del musgo
que crece bajo los techos;
pasos de boa silbando,
pasos de boa con sed,
pasos que olvidan
sin pena ni estruendo
la silenciosa sílaba
descalza y solitaria
que aprieta nuestros pies.

(in Oquendo, *Ciudad* 115)

“Revolving line (like a sunflower)”

Footsteps that conceal
the motive for sighing,
footsteps that move at a standstill,
footsteps that foreshadow
the footsteps of the other,
the desire for luminescence,
for excess.
Footsteps upon stepping into the sunshine,
footsteps that brush the skin.
footsteps painted by the voice
and soul of the moss
that grows indoors;
footsteps of a whistling boa
footsteps of a thirsty boa
footsteps that forget
without grief or turmoil
the silent syllable
barefoot and alone
that squeezes our feet.

There is no attempt to play with the subtleties of language and syntax that might provide either humor or puzzles for the reader. This generation of poets no longer plays games or experiments with capitalization or punctuation as was common in writers like

Sara Vanégas Coveña and Huilo Ruales. These writers focus on the “conceit” and they pursue their idea with the briefest possible poetic imagery necessary to communicate the emotions associated with the “conceit.”

Beatriz Vera’s *Piel de ébano “del amor y los deseos”* (2006) focuses on the sensorial experience of sexual relations and the emotions that are evoked through them. Her poems are filled with metaphors that turn the physical body into a craft of art. In “Labrador,” the poetic voice calls to her absent lover to be her gardener and leave her filled with his life-giving seed:

“Labrador”

Regresa a la memoria
 Vuelve a explorar mis campos
 Deja que los ríos se desborden
 Deja que mis campos
 Se inunden con tus besos
 Déjame dormir en marejadas
 Será gratificante esta pesca
 El terreno está ya preparado
 Hecha la simiente
 Abre los ríos de tu espera
 Y hazme fértil con tu savia.

Laborer

Come back and remember
 Come and explore my fields
 Let the rivers overflow
 Let my fields
 Drown in your kisses
 Let me sleep on the heavy sea
 The catch at sea will be gratifying
 The field has been prepared
 The seed already cultivated
 Open the rivers of your urgency
 And make me fertile with your sap.

(Piel de ébano 2006)

Vera uses the landscape and metaphor of a laborer who works the land and who fishes the seas to incite her lover to plant his seed within her. The metaphor is not difficult nor is the poem too graphic. What Vera’s poetry does not do is move toward the erotic or pornographic in spite of the extraordinary visual elements in her poetry. In “Nostalgias,” the last poem in this collection, memory functions as fantasy since it is memory that allows the poetic voice to recall, longingly, the loving moments that were never shared:

“Nostalgias”

Nostalgias de vivir
 A la sombra de un recuerdo
 De vivir de tu mirada triste
 De vivir como un desierto sin oasis
 De traspasar deseando
 Tu regreso

 Nostalgias de no beber ya de tus labios
 Las lágrimas dulces de la euforia
 De no participar ya de tu fiesta

“Longings”

Longing for living
 In the shadow of a memory
 Of living off your sad gaze
 Of living like a desert without oasis
 Of lying awake desiring
 Your return

 Longing for not drinking yet from your lips
 Sweet tears of euphoria
 Of not yet sharing in your celebration

De no calentarme más
Entre tu fuego

Of not yet being aroused
With your passion

Nostalgias del amor que no se estrena
Como una virgen te aguardo entre su templo
Preparando el ritual de la vendimia
Preparando para gastarte la piel
Con tantos beos.

Longing for love that has not begun
Like a virgin I await between your temple
Preparing the ritual of the harvest
Preparing to wear you out
With so many kisses.

Nostalgias del amor que no nos dimos
De los deseos cuantas veces muertos
De las lágrimas que nunca se bebieron
De la siembra jamás echada al huerto.

Longing for a love we never shared
Of lusting so often left for dead
Of tears that were never drunk
Of seeds never planted in the orchard.

De todas las estrellas titilantes
Que jamás volverán a nuestro cielo
De todas las mañanas compartidas
Después de la jornada en nuestro lecho

Of all the titillating stars
That will never return to our sky
Of all the mornings shared
After the journey in our bed

Viviré atada a tu sombra
Caminaré labriego a pleno sol dormido
Seré el recuerdo que no acaba
Aunque hayamos inventado despedidas

I will live tethered to your shadow
I will walk barefoot in the dozing sun
I will be the memory that does not end
Although we may have feigned goodbyes

Viviré en las palabras nunca dichas
En la hiedra que jamás se seca
En los muros que marcan horizontes
Viviré en las horas de tu espera.

I will live in unsaid words
In the ivy that never dries out
In the walls that limit horizons
I will live in the hours of your delay.

(82-83)

The poetic voice of this collection of poetry, although vibrant and female, moves between evoking a strong sense of sexual self awareness and becoming a physical tapestry on which another weaves his enchantment and curse through daydreaming.

This collection of poems focuses on a relationship between lovers/*amantes* and not on a relationship between two people who are *beloved of* and *beholden to* each other. The poems provide vivid imagery of memorable lovemaking but readers are continually reminded of the emotional tragedy of absence and fear of eternal loss.

“Nostalgias” puts the poems of the rest of the collection into focus because the poetic voice conjures up what the absent “tú” —so vibrant and virulent in the desired lovemaking—has left her. Passionate desires of fruitful copulation can be construed through fantasy and recreated in memory; however, the realities of painful loss or abandonment and in this case, the passions that never were, are what remain and haunt the subject who longs for what was never experienced.

The intention of turning toward self awareness and understanding or toward the intimate emotion of “one” works, perhaps, as much to *reject* as to *project* beyond the borders that delineate the Ecuadorian experience, to reach a broader audience by writing short and condensed but complicated, emotionally stimulating verse.

Oquendo Troncoso highlights the nature of the perspective of the poetic voice that charges forward toward a new image of the historical self that fits a more universal awareness of identity and self. He suggests that these young poets resort to Greek myth to universalize their experience:

La recreación de mitos es fundamental para entender a este grupo de poetas. Esa recreación parte de sus conocimientos, de sus exploraciones, de su propio yo, hacia una universalización histórica, en donde el poeta deja de burlarse de la historia y de dispararle por otros rumbos (como se dio en la poesía anterior a ésta). Ahora el poeta busca lo fidedigno, contrae su discurso al héroe mitológico y lo recrea a su “imagen y semejanza”. La recreación de mitos, en estos poetas, se da partiendo desde el personaje, no desde la historia mítica. (*Ciudad* 49)

The awareness (and even obsession) of the need to find a bridge to the outside reader—to connect with the universe instead a local or Ecuadorian sense of self and self as writer—is characteristic of this young generation of contemporary poets, according to Oquendo Troncoso:

Una temática recurrente y absolutamente nueva dentro de los poetas de esta nueva hornada generacional, es el buscar el justificativo del “escribiente”, de lo que es el poeta y qué hace frente a un mundo tan ofuscado, escribiendo. El poeta y su sentido de la escritura, ese rebuscarse por todos los flancos de una sociedad que no tiene a los poetas como hombres productivos, sino como simples casualidades de un destino. (*Ciudad* 54)

The young writers appeal to a more universal reader that perhaps values writers, readers, and the humanities to justify their own literary production. We can see this in the poem “Presencia” by **Marcelo Silva** (*Estación de ausencia*) develops the notion of the “presence” of the writer in the moment of writing:

“Presencia”

El primer verso tiene a veces
sabor a sal enfurecida.
El filo de muerte que forja la duda,
sintagma rugoso que describe el silencio
de días labrados bajo horas sin sueño,
de cada segundo pegado al reloj.

The first verse tastes a bit
like angry salt.
The edge of death that creates doubt,
rough syntagma that describes the silence
of extended work days without sleep
every second glued to the clock.

¿Y qué puede hacer cuando escapan las letras?

And what's to be done when letters escape?

¿Cuando barcos de plata no atracan en puertos de luz?

/ports of light?

¿Acaso nombrar a la muerte como texto desierto,

Should death be called an empty text,

decir que el odio es sangre que alimenta la nada,
o quizás, recorriendo viejos parajes,
afirmar que la magia es otra forma de amor?

hate be called the blood that feeds nothingness,
or perhaps, while traveling along ancient places,
should magic be declared another form of love?

No. No hay espacios para tanto delirio,
ni flechas doradas que hieran la roca
sin que mueran las nubes.
No se vislumbra el pasado evocando destellos.
Por eso solo me cabe esperar,
esperar que el tiempo tome y envuelva mi pluma,
y que mi pluma escriba otro verso:
la extraña e incompleta presencia de Dios
avanzando en la hoja.

No. There is no room for such delirium,
nor golden arrows to wound the stone
without killing the clouds.
You cannot glimpse the past by recalling flashes.
That is why I must wait,
wait for time to take over and surround my pen
and wait for my pen to write another verse:
until God's strange and unfinished presence
advances on the page.

(*Ciudad* 88-89)

The poetic voice expresses the emotion of frustration a writer who finds he must wait for inspiration. The obligation of the poet is not to despair but to learn patience for the words will eventually flow from his pen. In the final verses the poetic voice explains that he relinquishes the creative moment and the pen itself, like the pen at the end of *Don Quixote*, writes on its own. The animism of the pen through the spirit is the writer's muse and he is a puppet in that presence.

Bruno Sáenz, in a poem called "Dormición de la palabra," also focuses on the pregnant moment of creation and writer's block:

"Dormición de la palabra"

"Sleepyhead with words"

Pesa, pesa la lengua
En la cuenca sedienta de la boca.

Language weighs heavily, heavily
In the thirsty basin of my mouth.

Pesa, pesa la tinta
en la espada sin filo de la pluma.

Ink weighs heavily, heavily
on the unsharpened blade of my pen

Pesa, pesa la sangre
En la bolsa de vísceras.

Blood sinks heavily, heavily
Into the pocket of my entrails.

Pesa, pesa el silencio
En el eco que aguarda,
En la quietud alerta del oído.

Silence falls heavily, heavily
into the awaiting echo,
of the alert hollow of my ear.

Pesa, pesa la ausencia
En la voz que se quiebra,
En la mano que calla, que sofoca la letra
Sobre el papel en blanco.

Absence weighs heavily, heavily
on the voice that cracks,
on the hand that hushes, suffocates the handwriting
on the blank page.

(Sáenz, *La voz y la Sombra* 50-51)

Sáenz describes the frustration writer's block with realism but the repeated words are like the heaviness of a sleepwalker that is neither fully awake nor fully asleep. The tongue weighs heavily in his mouth without being able to pronounce a word. The ink weighs heavily and lazily in the pen that does not write. The blood sinks to his the writer's belly as he contemplates what his voice will not say, what thought his hand silences and keeps from the blank page.

Roberto Altamirano also expresses a concern for the occupation of writing in an unpublished work entitled *Ciudad sin retorno*:

VIII

Fluyen intuiciones poéticas
Se propagan como el temor
Trasapando altos muros y almas
Retornan con voces y cautivos resplandores de criptas.

Poetic intuitions flow
They propagate like fear
Piercing high walls and souls
Returning with voices and glittering captives
from the crypts./

Ellas guían mi mano e inscriben versos antiguos
Que poseen el ritmo continuo del silencio.

They guide my hand and inscribe ancient
verses/
That possess the constant rhythm of silence.

(Oquendo, *Ciudad* 92)

Jorge Luis Borges'² response to Osvaldo Ferrari in *En diálogo I* about the justification of writing poetry seems to answer the questioning that these young Ecuadorian writers propose in many of their poems with a universal flavor:

Sí bueno, se ha tratado de quitar la poesía de todas partes, la semana pasada me han preguntado en diversos ambientes..., dos personas me han hecho la misma pregunta; la pregunta es: para qué sirve la poesía? Y yo les he dicho: bueno, para qué sirve la muerte?, para qué sirve el sabor del café?, para qué sirve el universo?, para qué sirvo yo?, para qué servimos? Qué cosa más rara que se pregunte eso, ¿no?" (117)

Borges' question "¿Para qué sirve el sabor del café?" is perhaps, for a coffee drinker, the most profound of his musings. The emotional effect of a cup of coffee is the expression of sense of who we are, what we are doing here on earth and where we are headed. In this sense, these young Ecuadorian writers represent the essence of their own nascent reality: I express what I feel and thereby reassess human experience. Their poems rely on the reality of experience as a way to connect with the outside world.

The rejection of a national past that these contemporary poets do not accept as their own does not mean that their poems are devoid of realism or fantasy. They are imbued with both in ways that provide new perspectives on the contemporary experience. A poem by **Marialuz Albuja** is a case in point:

El Principito pidió que le pintaran un corderito.
Yo te pido que me hagas un hijo.
Que me lo pintes por dentro

The little Prince asked me to paint him a lamb.
I ask you to give me a son
Paint him inside of me

que tus pinceladas viertan óleo debajo de mi falda
y que haya vida en sus colores más preciados.

Let your brushstrokes spill oil beneath my skirt
And let there be life in your most precious colors.

Píntame un niño
Para verte en cada uno de sus rasgos
Para olerte en sus bracitos tiernos
Y poder enumerarte en cada uno de sus dedos.

Paint me a son
So I can see you in each of his features
So I can sense you in his tiny arms
And I can count you on each of his fingers and toes.

Píntame el niño que una vez desdibujó sus débiles tejidos
al saber que te marchabas para siempre
Y tuvo miedo de nacer.

Paint me the son whose feeble tissues faded
Upon learning that you were leaving forever
And was afraid to be born.

(Oquendo, *Ciudad* 148)

The poetic voice recalls the initial encounter between the airplane pilot who has crashed in the Sahara desert and the little prince from another planet in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. In the story, the strange little prince asks him to draw a sheep but the drawing is never quite right. Finally, in desperation, the pilot draws a box and tells the prince that the sheep is inside. This, of course, is acceptable to the little prince whose imagination—much like a child's—is much more accurate than any drawing the adult can attempt. In the case, of the poem above, however, the poetic voice asks the reader of the poem to paint her a child with the brush strokes of his life-giving sperm so that the father's own image, his smell, and genetic characteristics can be experienced through the son.

The image that is transferred from *The Little Prince* to the woman's womb is one of perfection and absolute joy. It is also one of emptiness. The final tercet of the poem reveals there is a tragic reality within the wishful life-making that the subtle language of the poem communicates. The poetic voice asks the absent father to paint the very same child that unraveled in her womb in fear when it was known that the progenitor had abandoned the mother and child forever. The poem, startlingly simple in terms of language, provides a profound message to readers. The poem highlights the overwhelming emotion of loss and emptiness—loss of someone beloved, loss of a child in the making, and loss of hope for a future child. The wishful thinking of “Píntame el niño” is fantasy and goes unanswered, but the emotion of loss is poignant and leaves the reader with the “conceit” that the poet desired.

The analysis of these select poems draws a panoramic view of the approaches poets at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century are taking to express the emotional realities. The earlier poets used fantasy and realism to communicate the disjuncture between the illusion and realities of a contemporary Ecuador that was still emerging and that survived on the fumes of fantasy. Other poets used realism to breathe memory and continuation into either what seemed already lost or had only been yearned for.

The intimacy of poetry relies heavily on imagination of an interior world with emphasis on sensorial experience that uses realism and fantasy to construct an awareness of self. There is a similar reliance on awareness of self in the short stories but the outcome is quite different. In the short stories that rely primarily on realism, the lack of space for imagination and creativity is replaced by a fictionalized enemy that goes unmentioned: ignorance and the lack of education and opportunity for real knowledge perpetuates a myth of self that is devastating and destructive. In short stories that rely on fantasy, there is a

juxtaposition of the absurd world that is uncanny and perplexing against silenced common realities of the readers' experience. The effect is laughter at the distortion of what is narrated as a reality that is so absurd that it could be no more absurd than the experience the reader is *expected* to have as an Ecuadorian outside the narrative. Playwrites use a similar means of exposing the irrational and the absurdity of human experience to highlight social realities in contemporary Ecuador.

Chapter Six—Fantasy and Realism in Contemporary Ecuadorian Theater

Some readers might question why theater is included in this analysis of fantasy and realism in Ecuadorian literature since theater, in terms of its representation on stage, relies on so much more than the textual script. Theater involves choreography, lighting, stage machinery, set design, actors, directors, producers, etc., and how a play is reproduced on stage is affected much more by social, political, and economic environments than any novel, play, or poem would be. Even the spectators, the time when the play is produced on stage, and even the stage itself—or the lack of a stage—can have an effect on how a script is ultimately reproduced in front of an audience. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to the overall analysis of the function of fantasy and realism in contemporary Ecuadorian literature to discuss the role of fantasy and realism in Ecuadorian theater both in relation to script and to production. Ecuadorian scripted theater has played a significantly smaller role in the area of Ecuadorian cultural production than novel, short story or poem, yet the lack of scripted theater is not primarily due to the fact that dramatists and writers have avoided the genre, but instead the economic and social factors have truncated production possibilities.

Luis Miguel Campos explains how theater has both survived and been transformed in Ecuador, in “Actualidad del teatro ecuatoriano en ocho puntos” (*La literatura ecuatoriana* 413-446). Campos outlined important issues on the state of Ecuadorian staged theater and the professional difficulties for production in Ecuador. While his discussion is already nearly 20 years old, many of the issues he exposed are still in place today. He explained that many plays had not been published because few publishing houses were willing to publish plays, and that when publishing houses *did* agree to publish them, little attention was paid to the taste of the reading public. The lack of attention to younger readers also resulted in low sales (*La literatura ecuatoriana* 416-417). Moreover, many plays would be too expensive to produce on stage in Ecuador because they required too many actors and theatrical machinery or even space, and there was no public funding for production, insignificant private funding for producing plays on stage and even a lack of suitable playhouses.

At the time of the publication, Campos indicated that all the potential stages for production in Quito were on the north end. However, a lack of transportation made it impossible for potential theatergoers to attend because the majority of young people who might want to attend plays lived primarily on the south end of Quito and did not have readily-available transportation to attend productions in the north. Likewise, appropriate stages for theater production had poor sound and lighting since the stages were multipurpose and did not have professional artists to run the lighting and sound equipment.

What is important about the economics of producing theater, according to Campos, is also tied to the political and economic environment, as well as to the social environment that truncates stage production. He argued that actors have been the motor behind theatrical production in Ecuador, not writers or directors. According to Campos, acting companies were primarily organized by seniority and not by ability so the system itself did not favor youth or talent; hence, there was little innovation and acting was primarily mimetic (422). The social organization was dysfunctional in this respect and led to companies with only a handful of actors. Campos’ assessment of the Ecuadorian environment provided an answer to a major question I had concerning theatrical productions in Ecuador. Many plays are monologues; some have only two characters. When there are several characters in a play, the stage instructions indicate that most of the plays can be completed with two to four

actors, each playing multiple roles. It is clear that the environment affected the types of plays that could be produced.

It is not surprising that there are so few actors for the stage in Ecuador since, according to Campos, being an artist—theatrical or not—was not considered a profession. According to his article, no artists were listed on the Civil Registry Office's list of professions. Ecuadorians seeking their identification cards could not choose violinist, sound designer, film director, or ballerina, for example. They could indicate they were employed. Campos argues that because there was no legitimized space for being a dramaturg, an actor, or a set designer. Hence, there was no incentive to participate in the cultural production of theater in Ecuador.

There is no doubt that Ecuadorian social factors affected the production of plays in terms of cause and effect. However, actors and playwrights did respond to the unique environment for play production in curious ways. If an agency needed to push a social issue, there was an attempt to provide a play that promoted that particular social issue. The recent production of "Las marujas... muy viejas para verdes" is a good recent example since it seemed to be a propaganda tool for pushing social responsibility in terms of environmental protection and sustainability. Just as a "mecenaz" in sixteenth-century Spain might commission a work that portrayed his family in a brighter light, a group of actors might find economic support to promote a politically appropriate staging of a comedy. The political climate, then, could also interfere with stage production of scripted plays. Campos' fear that Ecuadorian theater might indeed become "soul-less" because of the charged political environment and its need to comply with social, political, and economic whim, is most likely not off the mark (435).

A comedy written and performed by Juana Guarderas, Martha Ormaza, and Elena Torres like "Las marujas... qué viejas para verdes" does become *soul-less* since it is less a reflection of human engagement in understanding the complexities of life—the subject of a play with soul—than the information that political groups expect the actors to convey to the public. So while novelists, poets, and short story writers are also affected by the economics and social constraints of political whim, staged theater is even more constrained by these outside elements. Campos pointed out that even when plays were published and put on stage, Ecuador did not have artistic critics who could provide a critical review of staged productions for the public through media outlets (434).

My personal experience with the staged production of "*Las marujas... muy viejas para verdes*" is a good example of how actors found ways to capitalize on the unique circumstances for staged theater in Ecuador. The actresses that had had such a tremendous run with Luis Miguel Campos' play "*La marujita se está muriendo de la leucemia*" gambled on large audiences for *Las marujas... muy viejas para verdes*. The sequel drew in audiences who desired to see a play like the successful original "*La Marujita se ha muerto de leucemia*," but the actress-created comedy was more a vaudeville show with one-liners than a play with a soul. The actresses were able to get the audience to laugh at the jokes and ironic one-liners and even to laugh at the exaggeration of the regional characters, but it was not a play for the educated audience member. The sound and lighting were often inconsistent and competed for front stage with the actresses. The stage interaction was more characteristic of a TV sitcom than of a staged play, lacking in appropriate choreography leading to a sense of bumbling characters that were incapable of carrying out the message needed for a public message focused on educating the public in

terms of environmental sustainability. “*Las marujas... ¡Qué viejas para verdes!*” is not the only staged play that responds to pressures for didacticism in theater.

Alicia Yáñez Cossio’s play for children is one of the starkest examples of how Ecuadorian writers have attempted to find a niche for publication and success in theater. Her collection of children’s plays *¡No más!* (2004) exposes the issue of child abuse and raises awareness of children’s rights. In the first play, however, there is so much talk of verbal and physical violence that it seems such a play, represented on stage, would be far too graphic and frightening for a young child. As a publication, its visual images are reminiscent of illustrations of Ronald Dahl’s famous children’s story *Matilda* but the staged play would have to be clownish to avoid the terror a child might feel when hearing about children who were beaten even by their own parents, or whose parent attempted to cut off his own son’s hand with a knife (Yáñez, *¡No más!* 33).

At the end of *¡No más!* a small group of schoolchildren decided that no one else would be successful in changing the mistreatment of children except themselves. The juxtaposition of the verbal and physical violence in a repressive environment to an acute awareness of how alone the children are in changing their society skirts the real issue at hand. The victims of violence were the only ones expected to change the attitude and behaviors. In this play, adults were distorted into monsters that were out of control, indifferent, or unjust, and their violence was sensationalized to the point of terrorizing the audience. One can only imagine how this play might be staged to make it both comical/acceptable and pertinent/educational in terms of its audience. The child characters in the play give lipservice to children’s rights in a way that is very propagandistic. The play provides a perspective of the world upside down where victimized children are the only ones capable of recognizing adult injustices and doing something about it. *¡No más!* highlights the perception that schoolteachers and principals were as abusive as doctors and parents. The play provides an example of abuse by an ignorant teacher who is moved to another school after reporting the students are aware of their own rights, and a principal who punishes the children by forcing them to play until they are exhausted. Another child who recovered from typhoid fever reports that most of the children in the hospital that he encountered were not sick but victims of abuse. It is questionable whether these plays would be effective on stage.

Genoveva Mora’s argued in the *Anthology of Contemporary Ecuadorian Theater* (2002), that contemporary theater is characterized by its exploration of and exposure to Ecuadorian daily life. She argued that most of the plays used a clear style but resorted to discourses that lost their logic and that at times moved toward the theater of the absurd and fantasy (*lo lúdico*). Some of the plays she may have been thinking of when she suggested this argument is *La casa de Rigoberta* by **Aristides Vargas**, the strange “provocation” of *La repetición* by Isidro Luna or *El bolero de plomazo* by Juan Carlos Terán Guerra. In *La casa de Rigoberta*, the parents (El y Ella) cannot get beyond the minucia and pain of living. In this play fantasy was used to create the conflict of imperfect borders between the living and the dead.

Rigoberta, long dead and her deceased grandmother, seem much more alive than El or Ella. While Rigoberta and her grandmother resemble the inhabitants of a legendary country called Santa Bernarditarde los Manatales (198) where the inhabitants continue to act as though they are living because no one has informed them that they are dead, the nameless parents are no less living-dead than Rigoberta. Living at the border of illusion

and reality is the paralysis that leads the parents toward self-destruction. While nostalgic recollection and memory give the appearance of living, their lives are paralyzed and without purpose or function in contemporary reality.

Luna's *La repetición* (2002) is an attempt to move the quotidian into the world of the absurd. The overall purpose of the work is to point out that all human interaction is just a repetition and that there is nothing original (105). **Isidro Luna's** script relies on repetition and finding connections, no matter how lewd or absurdly represented, for his audience. Sex, for example, is simply another "delirio" that humans experience. They delude themselves to believe their own sexual experience is unique. The script is bawdy, disturbing, and even scandalous; nevertheless, Luna makes his point by demonstrating that there is something uncomfortably disturbing about not being tremendously unique in terms of human experience. The illusions people believe about their own uniqueness is simply a fantasy. The metaphor the male character uses to describe this notion is his questioning of what an erection without desire would be and then answers himself: it would be like a gift (Act 2). Luna's point is that each human desire to be different is just an illusion.

Juan Carlos Terán Guerra's *El bolero de Plomazo y Plumón* (2000) also focuses on the quotidian but with two characters that border on the grotesque who seem entirely incapable of handling the marriage in which they find themselves. They are perpetually in crisis from the moment the curtain opens and they engage in a verbal and physical battle over a TV remote to the point where they display their sexual frustrations to a canned, pre-recorded psychiatrist who is more interested in nasty details of their private lives than in providing marriage counseling. The daily quibbles resonate in the disturbing and incessant crying of their unborn child from the womb. The tragicomedy of the marriage hinges on a lack of mutual consideration and a lack of communication between the two inept spouses.

While Terán Guerra's play would probably elicit plenty of laughs based on the vaudevillian slapstick, ridiculous verbal interactions throughout the play, and the exaggeration of the idiocy of the characters, it has the feeling of a TV situation comedy that seeks laughter at the expense of all else. If the writer was aiming at the burlesque striptease of marriage by stripping away the fantasies to expose the tragic but real realities within, the play falls short since neither of the characters is up to the realities of marriage or parenthood. The weeping child's eerie laughter at the end of the play might provide comic closure for the staged play and, depending upon how the sound engineer decided to use the laughter at the director's disposition, it might even provide an ominous and more serious end to what was otherwise a vaudeville act turned situation comedy.

In either interpretation, the play does use fantasy (through the telling of dreams) to expose the lack of communication between the couple. Plumón, unable to woo his wife, streaks her and then spends time talking to his own penis like a friend for whom he has purchased a new jacket (condom). Plumazo explains how neither of them is capable of leaving the marriage because they are not strong enough to make a decision. Her dream moves her to envision hundreds of miniatures of her husband on a platter and she eats him over and over again, even though the miniature versions ask her not to do so. These fantasies are interpreted in a technical and incomprehensible manner by the pre-recorded psychiatrist but since neither character can understand what he has said, they simply decide to swear their love for each other and go on with the minucia and ridiculous attempt at living.

In *Bolero*, exaggeration and deformation to make fantasy work is pertinent because it highlights lack of awareness of reality on the part of the characters. The audience laughs at the mother's belly that expands quickly like a balloon and blows apart because it is fantasy. Fantasy makes the educated spectator laugh at what the two frustrated lovers cannot understand about themselves or about the reality that surrounds them.

Fantasy has a similar function in **Hugo Avilés Espinosa's** play *Colcha de retazos* even though this play does not resort to the absurd in its presentation like the plays analyzed above. *Colcha de retazos* is a play about Doña Rosa, a fifty-something widow, and the three people who have rented rooms in her dilapidated house. None of her boarders have sufficient funds to pay her and, in an effort to deal with her deplorable situation, she considers setting a section of her run-down house aflame and goes as far as pouring a flammable liquid on an area of her house. When one of her boarders pushes his rent under the door and tosses his cigarette as he leaves, he unwittingly sets the entire house ablaze and it burns to the ground. In ruins and without resources, the four pull together to stay warm under an old quilt made years earlier by Doña Rosa's grandmother. The quilt has magical properties and allows the characters and the audience to witness memories or creative fictional memories that help these characters reconnect with their own identities and their place in the world of sordid realities, a world where illusion is given lip-service by the media and realities are what they cannot free themselves from on stage.

In the introduction to the *Colcha de retazos*, Genoveva Mora suggests that the characters saw themselves as “soñadores, idealistas, hoy la realidad los ha cambiado, los ideales ya no están, solamente les queda ánimo para ir resolviendo lo inminente” (52). In my reading of the play, it is clear that the characters learn about themselves from viewing a play within a play. The magical quilt remnants cover them to provide warmth but also provide a link to a recreation of memory and a recreation of how they each perceive their own past and present. When Doña Rosa views her own recreation that emerges from the quilt, she envisions an enthusiastic young girl who believes her uncle will give her a trip to take her from her impoverished reality but her father squelches any hope for illusions. The dreamers become the marionettes who act out their own recreations of personal tragedies and, in Rosa's words, “no sabíamos como continuar” (90).

The tragicomedy only becomes more acute when a reporter sensationalizes their situation and suggests that a fund must be opened to help them. While each of the characters fantasizes how to spend the millions they will—in reality—never receive, they tear the memory quilt into pieces. None of them can find their way in life. None of them are equipped to deal with illusions, disillusion, and the realities that creep in like an icy breeze between the sheets that remind a dreamer the world is not what we have wanted to think it is.

The characters in *Colcha* are nicely drawn but all are shortsighted, stunted in their development and understanding. Each comes to a better understanding of him or herself through the element of fantasy that is introduced by the quilt and by the character's wishful thinking. Emérito, a sixty-five-year-old businessman recognizes he has never had the strength to love for the long term or to take on real fights. His words, “Nosotros somos gente honrada, trabajadora, descendientes de casta guerrera y luchadora” (101) is ironic since he has never fought for anything, nor has he been particularly successful at being hardworking, honest, or strong enough to fight. Rafael, a university student, argues that they are just like the quilt in that they have history and a particular connection to living,

but they are too weak to fight for a full and complete life: “nos obliga a luchar y luchar agota” (101). In this context, Rosa’s final words are telling:

“nos servirá para saber que no olvidar siempre es mejor que recordar... mientras nos cubra no irá susurrando al oído de dónde hemos venido, como un incesante repicar de campanas que llaman a revuelta.” (102)

The difficulty in accepting her words as truth is that the foursome is still struggling with the same detritus six months after the fire. The reality is that unless the characters can get beyond memory and their own plight, they cannot think beyond the present. Emérito suggests that the attraction to the outside world is that the sordid realities that surround them at home do not allow them to think clearly:

“¡Que sabios que son los pensamientos extranjeros! Será por eso que la gente se va de este país, para poder pensar con claridad.” (100)

The notion of emigration is raised to prove, albeit humorously, that the environment of impoverished Ecuador does not allow for people to think straight or to find their way out of poverty.

Stagnation and truncation are themes that run throughout these plays. Characters are incapable of developing beyond a specific point; some playwrights create characters that are truncated because they are shortsighted and funny. Others create characters that truncate their own lives and cannot move beyond their ruminations. **Jorge Dávila Vázquez’s** early play *Con gusto a muerte* (1971) is a good example. (Mora 2000)

In *Con gusto a muerte*, three sisters and their mute maid live as shut-ins in their own home because they killed the one man who may have provided them an outlet to spinsterhood. They murdered him and his lover, a maid, because he chose her over the high-society sisters. The truncation has turned each of the sisters mad, in their own way, and they become co-dependent in their hate of one another. In other words, the passion of hate replaces the passion of love between sisters. They cannot move forward and their emotional development is stagnated. They continue to age and steep in the guilt and jealousy that makes this play almost Lorquian in its composition, theme, and execution. Dávila provides important lighting instructions to provide the suffocating atmosphere in which these women coexist. We see these truncated lives in Dávila Vázquez’s short stories as well as this theater piece. The truncated characters are characteristic of the works by contemporary playwright Cristian Cortez (several plays in the anthology *Teatro I*), for example.

Genoveva Mora also identifies death as a recurring theme in contemporary plays as well as a sense of a search to find what is at the center of it all, a search for what lies “within” the verbal exchanges. The plays that I have read for this study focus on a variety of themes that can be outlined here: characters are indifferent to their surrounding or are completely out of touch with their environment, their history, and their future. This lack of awareness of the past and even the important issues facing them and their compatriots (corruption, poverty, violence, etc.) made real communication impossible as these issues distorted identity and responsibility. The characters are caught in a flurry of tedious, but insignificant, activities and cannot sort out what is important from what is not. **Carlos**

Martínez Borja's short one-act play, "Los imaginarios," is similar to a theatrical interlude and is an illustrative example of this type of characterization.

In "Los imaginarios," Coronel González and his sargeant, Jacinto, find themselves at a crucial moment when the play begins. Jacinto has just slaughtered his soldiers and Coronel González has his gun at Jacinto's head. The scene leaves the audience in doubt as to whether González will shoot his own sargeant. The next scene is a flashback and takes the audience to the camp and battleground at San Miguel and to a discussion between the Coronel and Jacinto in which González indicates there will be no battle. In scenes three and four, Jacinto explains to the audience that during their months and years of pseudo-fighting and attempts at revolution, they have made no progress in battle and the Coronel explains that the only ground they can gain in the battle of souls, not on the literal battlefield itself. The scenes that follow are a burlesque of gaining power because the Coronel fabricates his victory over nothingness much like Cervantes' mad hidalgo Don Quixote imagines his own gains in a battle against windmills or sheep. As a mirror image to the seventeenth-century literary masterpiece, González pulls his sidekick Jacinto into the madness and the self-deceived and obedient Jacinto lines up his imaginary troupes and announces with pretentious words exactly *who he is* as sargeant:

Soldados. Soy el sargento Jacinto Pigua, ya me irán conociendo. No soportaré faltas a la disciplina, desobediencias... me oyeron, no tengo corazón de madre. Tengo, ojos en todas partes guambritos...

Así que a mi nadie me engaña, nadie me hace el tonto... y mi gente tiene que ser recta... me escucharon, recta... ("Actualidad del teatro ecuatoriano" 333)

His pompous words delivered to no one are representative of what a sargeant might say in reality; the fact that he delivers them to no one is hilarious. The sargeant has learned how to imitate an officer but officers need soldiers to be effective or even pertinent. He is neither and is therefore funny. The fantasy of *being someone* is what he imitates only to realize later on that he has no real audience. His audience is the silence of nothingness. Without his audience he does not even really exist.

The image of the sargeant rounding up his imaginary troupes, giving them orders, and even killing them is tragicomic because the sargeant is so befuddled by his new imagined and recreated position as sargeant that he stands alone in front of his imaginary troupes and puts on airs. He is no less credible or serious than a marionette who imitates. In the very next scene, the befuddled sargeant gets drunk with his imaginary men and begins to complain about their irreverence and irresponsibility, only to reveal in his own drunken stupor and dream that he is no one, not a sargeant, not a victorious warrior. He realizes in his dreams that he has been "bought off" with the Coronel's money to do what he has been asked to do but the prostitution of his services has disgraced him and made him an insignificant man whose very existence is in question since he has no true function or role.

When Jacinto is finally awake, the Coronel "plays his last cards" and chases Jacinto around the imaginary battlefield while killing off imaginary men, asking Jacinto not to let

even one enemy escape. Jacinto breaks down in tears when he finds himself standing alone with the Coronel who commends him for his tremendous valor in the situation:

Jacinto.—Es que... es que... aunque yo sé que eran imaginarios... los quería.... los llegué a querer aunque eran imaginarios. (336)

Jacinto weeps because he has murdered the final vestiges of imagination to find himself standing alone, insignificant, with the Coronel who put him up to the farce. The Coronel smiles and explains that even Jacinto, in his faithful cooperation and support, is just another figment of the imagination. He merely perceived he was living and had a purpose, a past, and a future. The coronel points his revolver at Jacinto, shoots, and when Jacinto calls out that in spite of being imaginary, that the imaginations will return, he kills him. The interaction points to the absurdity of imagining victory and power over nothing. Seeing Jacinto dead, the Coronel utters, “Bien, bien...” (336). Ironically, the game of illusions is over but there is nothing left to replace it. Reality itself is nothing more than an illusion, a fantasy.

The suggestion by the characters in the play is that a true revolutionary battle cannot happen on the battlefield but in the soul and mind of the individual. Curiously enough, the Coronel is the victor but in a personal battle that leaves no one and nothing in its wake. This is an allusion to the “alma vacío” that is a topic that returns time and again in theater and in other contemporary literary productions. Fantasy, in this theatrical interlude, becomes key to playing out the soulless environment of the Ecuadorian psyche. The play is funny because it relies on the audience’s reaction to these two burlesquely quixotesque and panza-esque characters who play-act being entities of power and social significance in the absence of all things significant. They look to spectators like inept madmen acting out an orchestrated burlesquely macabre massacre. Their antics are funny because no one is there, but the implication of the massacre and the intentions behind their antics are tragic.

The notion that many of the contemporary plays suggest, like the scripts published by the Casa de la Cultura after the theater competition in 1990, is that the social and cultural environment itself does not allow the people living in it to think straight, to move beyond the present to conceive of a future or even to understand the past, even an invented or imagined collective past. The characters have difficulty accepting themselves or others because there is no space for psychological or emotional development, for real questioning of ideas and concepts. There is no room for coherent and significant conversation, no space for concrete responses to important social, economic, and political issues that affect individuals in Ecuadorian society. The choice for representation on stage is not only to suffocate and despair by to do so by siphoning off any sense of meaning and hope through laughter. So while there is great diversity in the individual playwright’s approach to dealing with the recurring topic soulessness or emptiness or the sence of devoid of seriousness, this truncation is the particular thread that seems to reach across playwrights and dramatic representations from the 1980s to the present.

Abdón Ubidia’s *Adiós siglo XX* illustrates this truncated and restrictive environment (209-254). *Adiós siglo XX* is a comedy in which fantasy motivates the characters to grasp at the seriousness of the reality in which they live and work. The four prostitutes live and move in a world that does not make sense in reality. It is a world in which money buys everything and all things and one in which betrayal, treachery and

murder can be happily forgotten because rules of reality do not strictly apply. To make a point: the owner of the brothel, Madama, is neither affected by eating the rat poison her own daughter put on chocolates nor by the death blows delivered by Coca, one of her employees, in the middle of the night. The plays dialogs and visual images are frightening because the audience believes these women are involved in murder attempts: Dolly poisons her mother's lover, Mario, and Coca throws him out a window to his death. However, Mario is not dead. Spectators learn he has run off with another woman leaving his lover-Madama and lover-Marilyn behind. Madama survives all attempts at assassination and forgives not only her daughter for the attempts but also her prostitute employees as well.

The play vasculates between the tremendously tragic and the comic as the borders between what the audience believes happened (murders) and what did happen (nothing) is blurred. Dream sequences seem more realistic than reality. Illusions and dreams of what could be (often presented in song) are juxtaposed to the realities of the tedious lives of these four women. Selling themselves as prostitutes has not led to wealth or love or happiness. Dolly, a 38 year old prostitute who hates her mother for being forced to turn tricks since her adolescence, only finds solace and peace by listening to the voice she hears when she locks herself in her bedroom closet. The owner of the Siglo XX bordello finds only superficial happiness in a young lover who reminds her of her first true love, sleeps with her employee and abandoners her for a better ticket to more money. The women realize they are little more than marionettes (**Marilyn**. —Parezco un fatoche... (*se ríe*). **Madama**.—Todas somos fantoche... Y Mario también. (*risa*) (*Teatro Ecuatoriano* 251). The reason they feel like marionettes or puppets is that there is no substance to them. No one is even capable of being killed when the characters recognize they are without substance.

The social criticism that is summed up in the final song of the play is that when there is no hope for love, no bright future, nothing to believe in, the only solution is to laugh. The final song is sung by the chorus:

Porque si todo
va mal
no nos queda más remedio
que reírnos
de nosotros mismos.

Y si la crisis golpea
y el amor no viene a nuestra puerta
ni los sueños se cumplen
ni el futuro es azul
no nos queda más remedio
que reírnos de nosotros mismos. (252)

When there is nothing to hope for or to count on, only laughter remains. And when laughter no longer works, there is physical pleasure that can be purchased for a small price at a bordello. The ironic verses of the final song are caustic in their social implication:

Que en el Siglo XX
no hay pena, dolor
o traición
que no se logre
sepultar
bajo una capa de alegre olvido.

Que en el Siglo XX
no hay amor, persona
o ilusión
que no se logre comprar
con muy poco dinero. (*Adiós Siglo XX* in *Teatro Ecuatoriano* 254)

The play and the integrated songs reiterate that nothing in the Siglo XX will last; nothing can be expected to last. People's lives, their dreams, their hopes, even their perception of reality, are all for sale.

The tragedy is that the play makes an allegorical connection suggesting that Ecuadorians have prostituted themselves for pennies on the proverbial dollar and have nothing to show for it. *Adiós Siglo XX* provides a pessimistic perspective on reality through a comic lens. The comic lens draws the audience into the game: they too are laughing uproariously at nothing. Nothing is what it seems. The only reality at the end of all things and the end of the play is what you paid for entertainment.

So, we might ask what the roots of contemporary theater are that explain the loss of soul, the loss of substance that is characteristic in the plays of the 1990s and 2000s. Why do playwrights resort to fantasy to highlight a reality of truncation? According to Mora, contemporary theater in Ecuador begins with the Escuela de Teatro, founded in 1973, at the Central University in Quito (8). She identifies a variety of theater groups were begun in the 1980s (Teatro Ensayo, La Compañía Ecuatoriana de Teatro, El Taller Teatral, El Tenglado, and Teatro Estudio de Quito) followed by new groups like the well-known Malayerba in Quito and El Juglar in Guayaquil, organized by Ernesto Suárez. In 1982, "La Trinchera" theater troupe produced plays that had regional and national themes. La Espada de Madero (1989), an experimental group, led the stage in terms of developing and producing plays that took on social, environmental, and anticorruption themes. In 1990, Jorge Matheus founded "El Callejón de Agua," followed by the group "Contraelviento," formed in 1991 in which playwright and actor Peko Andino served as director.

In 1990, there was a national theater competition that resulted in the publication of eight plays by the Casa de la Cultura of the thirty-eight plays submitted. While I am unaware of the criteria for selection for publication, all the plays included here were authored by male writers: Jorge Dávila's *Espejo roto*, Luis Miguel Campo's *San Sebastián*, *Luces y espejos en la oscuridad* by Iván Toledo Albornoz and Raúl Arias, *El ojo de la aguja* by Álvaro San Félix, Abdón Ubidia's *Adiós Siglo XX*, Pablo Cuví's *La estatua enemiga*, Petronio Cáceres Artega's *Retablillo de teatro* and **Carlos Martínez Borja's** short one-act *Los imaginarios* and they seem to have a tie to this notion of soulessness that we can also see in later plays anthologized in the Mora publications in 2000 and 2002 (*Teatro ecuatoriano: ocho obras seleccionadas*).

Luces and espejos en la oscuridad (Teatro ecuatoriano 103-160), for example, utilizes black and white images to present a world that is blind to nuances in reality. The characters wear white face paint and black glasses, the spirits and goblins taunt the characters who are unaware of their presence, and a soprano sings irritating utterances and verses that echo and respond to the realistic but caustic social commentary of Mamá Blanca, a symbol for a sarcastic and fed-up Quito. Fantasy and realism coexist in terms of a stage presence with dialogs volleying back and forth between the imps, the fornicating historical lovers on the bed at center stage, the Espejo and his helper Manula or the President and his pretentious prostitute. The purpose of this play is to highlight the truncation of the importance of the Ecuadorian populace incarnated in the personage of Espejo. Espejo is both reflection (looking back and forth in time) and mirror (a means by which humanity can understand how it appears to others). The fast stykomythia between Manuela and Espejo at the end of the play reveals the purpose of the dynamics of the play and draws the relationship between the Espejo/mirror of Ecuadorian realities and the perceived hope for change:

Manuela.—Dijeron que era indio y también mestizo.

Espejo.—Pero me gané un lugar entre los blancos con mi educación.

Manuela.—Preguntaron por sus títulos, abolengo y extracción.

Espejo.—Y respondí con mis libros.

Manuela.—Quisieron que trabajara con las manos.

Espejo.—Pero trabajé con la razón.

Manuela.—Quisieron que trabajara, simplemente.

Espejo.—Pero yo me puse a pensar.

Manuela.—Quisieron que no pensara, simplemente.

Espejo.—Pero me convertí en filósofo.

Manuela.—Le dieron un lugar en el pathos.

Espejo.—Pero yo conquisté el logos.

Manuela.—Quisieron que aprendiera artes y oficios.

Espejo.—Pero dediqué a las ciencia, y me convertí en médico.

Manuela.—Quisieron que corrigiera pruebas.

Espejo.—Pero me convertí en periodista.

Manuela.—Quisieron que no hablara.

Espejo.—Pero me convertí en Duende y Topo.

Manuela.—Quisieron que eno dijera nada.

Espejo.—Pero adopté el seudónimo y me convertí en el Gran Desengañador.

Manuela.—Le pidieron silencio.

Espejo.—Pero me hice político.

Manuela.—Muchas cosas quisieron de él.

Espejo.—Y yo solo quise ser un Bello Espíritu.

. . .
Espejo.—Hay que iluminar al rincón más oscuro del mundo. Poner luz en el ingenio de los habitantes de estas tierras. ¡Luz! ¡Luz! ¡Hasta que despierta!

(Teatro ecuatoriano: ocho obras. 103-160)

The exchange reveals the truncated environment in which Espejo and others like him try to move forward and the realities that brought the illusion of improvement to a standstill. Espejo calls for illumination to wake those who sleep and dream fantasies that they have overcome repression and stereotypes. Mirrors alone cannot move people and their attitudes toward change. Education alone cannot effect change. Simply identifying deception as deception cannot effect change. Change requires awareness and action. Change requires lights and mirrors in darkness.

In 1991, there was a breakthrough of sorts in the theater scene when *La Marujita se ha muerto con leukemia* by Luis Miguel Campos had its debut and was successful. No contemporary play in Ecuador has had as long a run or as broad an audience as *La Marujita*. By 1998, the theater scene has incorporated theater and dance with the Mudanzas group (dance and pantomime) and Sarao (a combination of theater and dance). In Cuenca in 1998, Isidro Luna, Pablo Aguirre, and Fidel Román established the author's theater with Teatro del Quinto Río.

The theater scene in Ecuador did not just rely on regionally and nationally produced plays. In fact, audiences were attracted to international spectacle. Economic success, at times, depended on not representing the works of local, regional, or national playwrights because international artists were more popular. Nevertheless, playwrights did not stop writing in Ecuador and Franklin Rodríguez Abad identifies the following contemporary playwrights José Martínez Queirolo, Alvaro San Félix, Peko Andino, Viviana Cordero, Cristian Cortez, and Luis Miguel Campos as those of renown in *Tres décadas de teatro ecuatoriano (1960-1990)*.

Peko Andino, Cristian Cortez, Luis Miguel Campos, and Viviana Cordero are the most contemporary of playwrights and I have analyzed some of their published plays in an effort to describe how each uses fantasy and realism to communicate in dramatic fashion. Luis Miguel Campos called theater "the reflection, the soul of a people" ("Actitud del teatro ecuatoriano en ocho puntos," *La literatura ecuatoriana* 435) but many of the playwrights highlight the lack of soul, indifference toward the past, and a resistance to real communication and understanding in the plays that are analyzed here.

Peko Andino Moscoso author of *Kito con K (Ceremonia con sangre, Ulises y la máquina de perdices, 1998)* and *Ulises y la máquina de perdices (2001)* is probably most recognized for his monologues and his portrayal of the tragicomedy of the modern man. He uses visual language and bombards the spectator with absurd images from different time periods through videoclips and the use of technology. The work that captures the essence of Peko Andino's theater production is *Medea llama por cobrar*.

Medea llama por cobrar is a lengthy monologue. The Ecuadorian Medea is an *anima* made initially of wood. She is based on the Medea of Greek mythology; a servant to Jason, the hero who abandons her at the end of his quest. In this perversion of the Greek Medea, the disembodied voice claims she was rebuilt from the grave and is set forth by Jason (her heroic and problematic Ecuador) to retrieve the many emigrants who left Ecuador's borders in search of a better life in York, a pseudonym for New York. The now humanoid Medea of this play calls her prince Jason (Ecuador) *collect (llama por cobrar)* to inform him that the Ecuadorians who have emigrated from their homeland will not return until there is freedom from stagnation in Ecuador. The reason for the collect call is that it is Ecuador's turn to pay. There will be no more sacking of the emigrants.

In her one-sided phone conversation, Medea describes how she was created for this purpose by Ecuador and she informs Jason how she has combed the city of York and followed the lives of the Ecuadorians there, only to discover that it is better to suffer the painful and difficult life of an illegal Ecuadorian in New York than to return to a country where there is no justice, no freedom, no jobs, no respect, no room for personal or intellectual growth. She calls Jason (the anti-hero she calls Ecuador) to say she is the henchman and assassin who wants to inform him, albeit as a disembodied voice and on a phone from York, that none of his countrymen and women will return to their country made of mud until the Ecuador of injustice and corruption is dead. The last line of the monologue articulates rejection of the paternal past: “De ti nacimos y a ti nunca volveremos, padre, marido, príncipe, país de barro.” (*Medea llama por cobrar* 31).

Peky Andino relies on the story from Greek mythology in which Medea, King Aetes’s daughter, was smitten by passion for Jason through an enchantment and attempted to help him. But this modern Medea is not deceived: Medea sets out to help Ecuador reclaim citizens who have immigrated in the late twentieth century but is keen to the future abandonment of ideals. In the Greek myth Medea is abandoned by Jason. The Ecuadorian Medea is not so foolish as to live a myth. Here, the frightening tests of the early Greek myth (bulls with feet made of brass that rip open a man’s flesh) are bulls made of mud and she is not afraid. The Medea in this play points out and demystifies the illusions that are considered acceptable reality by the metaphorical Jason. The Medea of Andino’s play is considered a sorceress but only by reputation, not because she is capable of creating magic. The Medea of Greek tragedy was bewitched and served Jason for this reason. In this modern version, Medea is aware of the inconsistencies between reality and fiction and points them out to Jason/Ecuador who, in effect, is the audience of her phone call. While she explains her perceived role is to communicate the status of Jason’s/Ecuador’s emigrants and to encourage them to return home, her experience with her compatriots overseas is clear: while their plight is real, they prefer freedom as illegals than to be subject to the injustices of Jason/Ecuador.

The language of the play is caustic and filled with a realism that is reminiscent of the visual imagery painted by the famous but controversial American artist Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009). The imagery in *Medea* is unsettling and raw:

Ahora tomo fotos en el parque central y luego meto mi cara en ácido con la esperanza de que por fin se revele mi rostro. Porque aquí soy un fantasma anónimo, no como allá, el combustible de tu hoguera bárbara.

Después de todo, príncipe mío, soy la parte más oscura de tu soledad. Tu peor hija. Tu esposa de palo. Tú incesto más inútil.

¿Todavía recuerdas, necrófilo mío? (12)

The juxtaposition of taking self-portrait photos in Central Park and bathing in acid to try to find her real *self* relies on both fantasy and realism to work its critical message. Her identity is a created illusion. When the voice of Medea describes how she was formed from the boards of a coffin, the audience is assaulted with the eeriness of the barbaric recreation that is Medea:

De madera de ataúd me hiciste, convencido de que creabas una muñeca de magia negra. Más que rostro me diste una actitud de angustia permanente, un cuerpo relleno de viento, dos manos pálidas, las piernas de palo y cubriste mis pies con serpientes. Todo por regresar a la vida a tus héroes incondicionales, a esos que se dejaron matar por partes en las batallas de la independencia.

Todo por tus amantes de mayo que te dormían con la mitología de un tiempo heroico, por sus adulos, por sus besos y sus penetraciones. (13)

The descriptions are not devoid of emotion and readers are left with a feeling of anxiety and disgust. The anxiety is purposeful, and Medea accuses her Jason, her soulless prince, her Ecuador, of mistreatment and of driving Ecuadorians from the borders. Jason's objectives in sending Medea to York were not to retrieve and protect but instead to retrieve to continue victimization:

Segura estaba entonces de que aquellos no podían ser tus vellocinos, nadie podía maltratar así a sus tesoros. Dejé de creer que tuvieses favoritos, príncipe desalmado, que necesitaras de la vuelta de alguien para reinar sobre un territorio de sespectros, al fin y al cabo siempre tuviste suficiente con los reptiles que te manejan desde tus fuentes del poder. Que mi estadía misma en York, era parte de tu juego perverso. (28)

The Ecuador that gave birth to her and her compatriots was a perversion and, in her words, the abused had had enough; they would never return:

La niña de tus ojos dejó de ser niña contigo. ¿Te acuerdas cómo devorabas su piel en los pabellones más oscuros del palacio y luego la sacabas en carne viva para que las arpías la cubieran de papeletas y estadísticas? Y ella, pobrecita mía, no se quejaba. Ni siquiera cuando los cafiches parlamentarios y sus putas madres la violaban en los platós de los cabarets televisivos. Tampoco cuando tenía que parir a flor de páramo, mendigos sin dientes. (29)

...

¡Ay hija, ay guambrita mía! ¿quién te puso de nombre Patria? ¿Quién a tan temprana edad, te hizo madre patria? (29)

...

Todos los destierros conducen a los vellocinos, pero su búsqueda borra los caminos del regreso. (29)

Medea explains that all means of exile lead to the proverbial golden fleece (vellocinos) or, in this case, Ecuador's emigrants; however, as Medea explains, the best way to seek them out is to erase all paths and desire to return to the homeland.

In *Medea llama por cobrar*, Peko Andino uses a mixture of fantasy or the kitch supernatural and extraordinary visual realism to impart a sense of alienation and rejection

to both the modern world and Ecuador's misplacement in it. Even the dangerous and ugly world of York that Medea describes, with its abuses and disgusting images, emerges as preferable to the absurd, anti-heroic world built on mud and clay represented by her narcissistic and self-perpetuating creator, Jason. Ecuador, according to Medea, does not deserve her own exiles. Only when Jason is dead and his obsessive power made impotent will the exiles return:

Subirás a la cumbre del volcán taita y en lo más alto del reino que estás por perder y al filo de la muerte contemplarás por última vez el territorio verde que te empeñaste en secar, que sin embargo estará allí bello, extenso, eterno, como la prueba más cruel de lo inútil que resulta al final el poder. Te poseerá el mismo abismo de pena que sienten tus hijos cuando se van, rezarás por tus víctimas, llorarás hasta que tus ojos se cuezan, hasta que tu boca se llene de sangre, hasta que tu corazón prostituto se denintegre. Luego, caerás al infierno de la que espera por ti desde tu nacimiento y te derretirás despacio junto a tus cadavers ilustres, a tu gabinete de muñecos, a tus próceres de la nada, a tu policía de plomo, a tu congreso de cafiches, a tus jueces de papel moneda, a tus sodomitas con posgrado, a tu inquisición mercurial y partidista, a tus depredadores sindicalizados y burocratizados, a todos los que nos robaron la vida en nombre de los fantasmas. (30-31)

The criticism is fierce but it is made palatable through the use of fantasy and by means of distance. *Medea llama por cobrar* is a powerful monologue whose elements of fantasy provide the deformation necessary to provide clues to perceived injustices in a homeland that no longer seems hospitable to its own.

Viviana Cordero also provides a look at the issue of emigration and the fractured lives of women who have sacrificed their own happiness to attempt to provide for their families in Ecuador in the two plays *Mano a mano* and *Tres* (2000). The plays impart a message that indicates that moving from one country to another provides some awareness of what is lost, the enormity of the sacrifice for self and family and the futility of returning. Sordid realities are at the core of these plays with no attention paid to fantasy except for the characters' imagining about what might be happening to their family members. Fantasy is replaced by nostalgia and once again the lives are truncated and suffocated by a disconnection in time and space.

Luis Miguel Campos can claim the number one "best seller" of plays in his quickly written "*La Marujita se ha muerto con leucemia*," (1990) which has had more than 600 shows on stage. This is perhaps the most successful play because it allows Ecuadorians to laugh at traditional regional and female stereotypes without causing offense. The social message is not blatant or overbearing. The message is that these women are too concerned with their own idiosyncracies and exposing their regionist nature (comedy) to be concerned about the imminent death of a friend or her spouse who has called to inform them of the tragedy (tragedy). The comedy is hilarious but its message is clearly social.

La Marujita se ha muerto con leucemia is a comedy about three female caricatures (a Cuencana, a Quiteña and a Manabita) that get together in Cuenca to figure out how much money they should donate from their organization. The play has very little to do with donation, really, but is a hilarious mockery of representatives from three different cities,

three different cultures and three different perspectives. The caricatures, almost like puppets, expose their idiosyncrasies while avoiding discussions of anything that really matters. These things that do not really matter, however, do become fodder for small, hilarious battles and nasty comments. None of the three women, no matter how seriously they take themselves or their own heritage, can focus in on what is really important about what they have at hand: determining the amount for the donation or learning about the death of a friend. Instead, they argue over whose heritage is the purest and which eggs are the best for a specific recipe (a ridiculous 7seventy-one eggs from Tumbaco, of course), for example.

The caricatures of the Manabita, the Cuencana, and the Quiteña are even more hilarious since these caricaturesque Ecuadorians do not always understand each other—in their language or in their gestures. For example, the Manabita does not know where Tumbaco is or that eggs from Tumbaco are not from a special bird, but from an area outside Quito. The Cuencana does not know history from Quito and vice versa. Caricature allows the spectators to laugh at each caricature and to laugh at themselves and their compatriots as all are roasted on stage. The message, albeit through comicality, is that these stereotypical women, on the one hand, still have a great deal to learn about each other, the country they share, and the world. On the other, the women never complete the task of the donation and the play ends with the Cuencana finally remembering something of importance: Marujita's husband was calling with the news that she had died of leucemia.

There is fantasy in this comedy especially in the yearning for a better, nobler, and even romantic past. The present is one of the losses of grandeur and economic sustainability, houses in disrepair and without the accustomed servants, tattered clothing, nut-less cookies made with flour, spinsters whose lust, while no longer viable, still is at the root of their fantasies. Again, the juxtaposition of realism (albeit distorted on stage) of women in denial of their impoverished state and the fantasy of still being able to fulfill the age-old responsibility of donating to the poor and the needy—themselves, if they looked in the mirror—is comical but telling. Perhaps, this is why the play has had such broad acceptance in the Ecuadorian community. Unfortunately, the characteristic language and accents of the play make this comedy less universal than some others since the jokes will be necessarily lost on unfamiliar ears.

The characteristic of focusing on the trivial instead of things of greater social important is one that runs throughout many of the contemporary plays. We see it in the early play by Jorge Dávila Vázquez as well as in Campos' *La Marujita* but the expert with this theme is playwright **Cristian Cortez**.

Cortez's absurd farce *Noctámbulos* (Night Owls) has two characters (El and Ella), a husband and wife and could easily be titled "Midnight madness" in English for its weaving in and out of reality and fantasy. It is the night before the husband returns to work after being unemployed for four years and the play opens with the couple in bed making love when the wife screams and calls her husband a thief. The exchange between the two is hilarious because the wife seems to float easily between knowing their history and make-believing she does not know her own husband. The interlude—it is too short to be called a play—focuses on a lack of communication, in spite of their expressing utterances—and a lack of focus, on the part of the woman, on serious issues. Her husband complains about her interest in maintaining beauty, for example, at the expense of paying appropriate

attention to her husband. He talks about his wife in the third person as though she were not next to him in bed:

Él.- Ella no se preocupaba por mí, se pasaba todo el día embarrándose lo que se en la cara: cremas de pepino, rábano, tomate... Un día se puso caca de pato.

Ella.- (*Se toca la cara*) Bueno, a veces una... (Cortez, *Teatro I* 32-33)

The playwright employs fantasy by resorting to the third person, thereby allowing for reality and fantasy to play on the same level of the conversation without having the couple speak directly to each other about important issues. Neither the husband nor the wife moves forward in the conversation due to the absurdity of the wife, Paola. The conversation is a game that ends in the couple talking about the ridiculousness of their marriage. As the title indicated, the play would have a happy ending in spite of the rudeness of their nocturnal exchange:

Ella.- A veces no sé si te quedas por mí o por mi cuerpo.

Él. – Por favor, es por ti.

Ella.- O sea que no te gusta mi cuerpo, siempre lo supe.

Él.- Claro que me gusta, me agrada, me fascina, me enloquece.

Ella.- Entonces hazme tuya antes de que amanezca.

(Cortez, *Teatro I* 34-35)

Cortez's characters are absurd but somehow charming as they vie against each other, against their own relationship, against the sanity itself, only to find themselves sexually interested when, at dawn, the alarm clock interrupts them and Paola calls to her son that it is time to get up to school. The reality of everyday marital interaction is treated as a farce and the fantasy of a game permits the couple the escape to consider their own idiosyncrasies and excesses from an additional, although absurd, perspective. Neither grows through the experience but the truncated personalities are funny and ludicrously reflective of the absurd interactions couples play. This interlude is neither tragic nor serious.

Cortez's award-winning *Soufflé de Rosas* also plays with the trivialities of everyday, modern living and the exaggerated pining of two abandoned women. (*Teatro I*) The word soufflé in French refers to the fluffy, baked egg dish as well as to the verb to "puff up." In this case, the soufflé refers to the truncated lives of eight women, each whose name begins with rose (María Rosa, Rossana, Rosemary, Rosario, Rosangélica, Rosa Amelia, Rosaura and Rocio) who are "puffed up" and showcased for the audience. María Rosa and Rosanna are best friends who do not really know or understand each other. María Rosa, abandoned by her husband Carlos, preserves the roses he left her on the day he announced he was leaving just as she preserves a nostalgic hope for his return. She is convinced that he has left her because her soufflés no longer taste right. She is caught up in the appearances of the soufflé of her life and cannot bring herself to accept the reality that Carlos has left for good. Even when he calls to request that she pack up the last shirts he left behind she prepares another soufflé to try to win him back. The roses that signify

her abandonment, still onstage, droop and lose petals according to her state of deception. Even when María Rosa wins a soufflé baking contest, she is denied her prize because she has no lover and no husband with whom she could enjoy the second honeymoon trip. Her social status is stripped, and her self-esteem is only bolstered by her attempts to create a new image, a new fantasy, a new soufflé.

Her best friend, Rossana, on the other hand, is the realist who only reveals to her best friend five years after being abandoned that she is a lesbian. The true nature of her love affair is played out in front of a television audience when Rosemery, a code-switching Miami television personality, forces Rossana, a psychiatrist who writes about how to maintain strong love relationships, to come out as a lesbian and, moments later, has her ex-lover claim that she was domineering and unrealistic in her expectations.

Two scenes in the play also expose the relationship of these two truncated women and their mothers. Rossana's mother never accepts her for who she is. She feels invisible and unfulfilled. María Rosa's mother provides false love, accusing her of being worthless because she made the mistake of not staying with the father of her daughter, no matter how negative the relationship was. The recourse to historical evidence that "made" these two women who they are moves the play forward as both resist denying self. By the end of the play, they have an awareness of their illusions, but they still are incapable of accepting themselves and moving forward. Their lack of total acceptance is in their inability to complete their sentences:

María Rosa- Superaste lo de...

Rosanna- Sí... lo superé, pero sigo esperando... esperando y recordando...pero decidida a hablar y que mi voz se oiga...

María Rosa-Me parece muy bien... ¿Y ahora estás sola?

ROSSANA asiente con la cabeza.

María Rosa- Bueno, por lo menos ahora a las mujeres se nos ve menos mal quedarnos solteras...

Rosanna-Sí, y por lo menos ahora a las mujeres se nos ve menos mal ser madres solteras...

María Rosa- Y para serte sincera, odio el soufflé de choclos...

Las dos ríen y lanzan los naipes al aire... Sube la música. Bajan las luces. Se ilumina un jarrón con rosas frescas. Ambas desaparecen. Apagón. (Teatro I, 100)

The roses at the end of the play indicate symbolically that the women are whole again but their sentences indicate they have made progress and that society has made progress by not judging as severely women who survive without a partner to provide them social status and emotional security.

Soufflé de rosas, it seems, would be successful on stage due to its theme and its representability on stage. Audiences would be entertained by the hysterics, the theatricality, the attempt at globalizing the problem with the televised scene and code-switching television personality, and a social notion of needing a partner in life to meet society's expectation. *Soufflé de rosas* is a clever play that exposes the hysterics of the modern woman who is caught between what she was taught and what she has learned through

experience. The characters are distorted and exaggerated but the realities of the social relationships are telling and do have a didactic function.

Aristides Vargas' play *Jardín de pulpos* (Cortez, *Teatro I*) also uses a tenuous relationship between fantasy and realism to provide a strong message about past history that has caused both protagonists (José and Antonia) to fantasize a fictionalized past to make it possible to move forward in the future. José has some sort of amnesia and Antonia, a stranger, has offered to help him by taking him to a beach where he can imagine a past. Antonia seems no less disconnected from reality than José but she is aware of her own fictionalized self. By pulling a dark handkerchief over his face, José indicates a shift from reality to a dream world in which he interacts with his deceased mother and deceased, gluttonous brother whose stomach contents reveal the comedic and tragic notions involved in being poor and hungry in a country that denies its own history, its own past:

Madre: Es que estabas estreñado, -¡años sin ir al baño!-, y encima esa enfermedad—gula creo que se llama--, enfermedad de pobres. En fin, que el día en que te abrieron salió de todo: pescados, conchas, piñas papayas; la cosa se puso rar cuando empezaron a salir nubes, pájaros, flores, y un dedo. En tu desesperación por comer, te habías merendado tu dedo índice, Remigio. ¡Eso fue el colmo, el colmo! En fin... enfermedad de pobres. Lo último que salió fue un libro...

José: ¿Un libro?

Madre: Sí, mijito. Era la historia de este país carcomida por los jugos gástricos de Remigio, tu tatarabuelo. Era la historia de un estómago hambriento que había devorado su pasado tal vez buscando una respuesta... ¡Pobre Remigio! Su mujer era española. Cuando él murió, ella solo atinó a decir: “¡coño!” ... Mercedes se llamaba y murió a distancia. (Vargas, *Teatro I* 28-29)

Vargas sets up a relationship between Spain and the Americas with Remigio's wife, Mercedes. After his death, the mother reports, Mercedes sat at the sea and imagined the Americas from the perspective of Europe, losing sight of reality:

Madre: ...eras tú misma la que se había abandonado hacía mucho tiempo. Te volviste una sonámbula y tus pies ya no dejaban hellas en la arena. ¡Pobre abuelita! Yo te cuento esto porque te quiero y porque los muertos no pueden contarse a sí mismos tanta tristeza. (Vargas, *Teatro I* 30)

According to the mother in the dream, José's predecessors were sleepwalkers. One of them, Remigio's brother hooked up with a mermaid who was in vaudeville (artista de variedades) and who found he could not live without her and he carried her carcass with him wherever he went. Finally Alfredo turned into a merman and swam out to sea:

Madre: Pasó el tiempo y Alfredo no dejaba el cuerpo de la sirena; le nacieron agallas y escamas; entonces se metió al mar y nunca más volvió porque no aceptaba ser sireno sin sirena... (Cortez, *Teatro* I 32)

The fantasy here highlights the disjuncture between identities. The sea becomes the fabric between realities, between imagined Europe and imagined Americas, between being the proverbial “fish out of water” or recognizing you are a fish. In this case, the fish is between two worlds and is mestizo. To forget one’s origin is to lose an understanding of self.

José learns from a dreamwalking encounter with his imagined licentious aunt and her military companion that he is tempted to carress the beauties of the past but he is struck down violently by the military presence that follows her. Scene III would be an emotional one for the theater audience because José is represented as a young boy, his licentious aunt as a flirtatious vixen who tempts and punishes with vigor.

José’s dreamwalking leads him to the conclusion that dreams are worth more than reality and explains the function of fantasy in this particular play:

José: En fin, que un sueño vale más que una realidad porque es una realidad por venir, y si es porvenir puede subvertir y divertir porque no se puede subvertir sin divertir, ni dar a luz sin parir. (*Teatro* I 43)

José explains that dreams are realities that have not yet occurred but since they are both futuristic and part of a destiny or eventuality, they can subvert perceived reality through illusion and therefore amuse and entertain those who experience fantasy. It is, he reminds Antonia, that one cannot pervert realities through fantasy without amusement just as one cannot give life to an image or a concept without giving it birth by making it real.

Both Antonia and José recognize that understanding the pain of the past, no matter how real or illusory, is key to understanding self:

Antonia: El problema es que si olvidamos lo que nos duele, posiblemente olvidemos lo que nos puede hacer felices; es más, quizá a nosotros ya nos hayan olvidado, pero si nos olvidamos de sonar, el país de los sueños sería un enorme desierto sin pasado ni porvenir. (*Teatro* I 69)

The play ends with Antonia telling José the legend about universal history, a legend about how the Sun ate the Moon—becoming one-- and created day and night, how their battles and murderous ways created the mountains, the volcanoes and its fiery center; how the tears of sadness of the two sisters created the rivers and lakes. In their sadness, the sisters travelled to opposite ends of the earth and raised children, forgetting that they were all offspring of the Sun who devoured the Moon. Antonia explains that this is why José has lost his memory:

Antonia: Hay un hijo, tu hijo, José, que no termina de morir porque aún no devoran su cadáver; como el Sol, el de la Luna. Esto es lo que te hizo perder

la memoria. Ahora ya lo sabes: detrás de cada memoria hay una guerra antigua... tan antigua como el dolor. (*Teatro I* 76)

José recognizes that his suffering, his tears and his pain were for a homeland that was no longer his because he had forgotten its heritage (78). Antonia, on the other hand, explains she prefers to dream what has not happened yet, that dreaming the future without ignoring the past is the path to hope, creativity and change. Dreaming the future allows for people to move forward. The beach where Antonia has brought José to dream is a beach that others stopped visiting because it was home to a mass grave of murdered young people whose dreams and ideas were abandoned and thrown into the sea. She sees how those ideas and dreams remain in the froth and foam at the edge of the sea, lapping against the shores reminding others to take up and move forward toward the future. Antonia finds it is a good place to dream because she sees an octopus garden (*Jardín de pulpos*) where these young victims who died for a purpose still are present; their ideas float in the foam at the edge of the sea and are not lost but instead remain to be picked up by others.

The play, as it is read, has depth of ideas and poetic character. The salient images are cast through rich verbal descriptions and metaphor. The elements of fantasy through dreamwalking and through the telling of legend become Vargas' preferred means to identify the critical issue of recreating personal and national history, of not forgetting the past or imagining a future.

Jorge Dávila Vázquez also uses theater to recreate a fictional space between life and death in which the character of renown, Ecuadorian poet César Dávila Andrade, can find the answers that he could not find in life (*Espejo roto in Teatro ecuatoriano: ocho obras*). In life, the poet completed suicide in Caracas in 1967. The play exposes elements of the poet's family life and friendships in by allowing the deceased character to view interactions and to engage in dialog with others in the afterlife for the purpose of finding answers to questions he could not answer while living. While the Dávila's character does not find satisfaction amongst the living, the literary characters of his poetry provide him comfort and peace. As his deceased friend Diógenes Paredes and César Dávila witness a group of Indians pass by them in the distance, isolated voices call out from the group, "Yo soy Juan Atampam," and "Yo soy Blas Llaguarcos," "Bernabé Ladina," etc. They call to him saying they were resurrected from Dávila recognizes them as his literary creations and calls them his brothers, his children and a representation of himself (37). As the chorus of literary spirits representing the historically downtrodden call out that Dávila has resurrected them from the dead and forgotten and allowed them to be remembered, Dávila explains he finally understands the purpose of his life:

Dávila.—No, Diógenes. Aquí todo es irreversible. Pero déjalas. Ya han contestado a mis preguntas más secretas; ya sé para qué tanto esfuerzo, tantas lágrimas, tanto dolor como me costaron mis poemas. Ya no hay ningún hueco existencial, Monstruo. Estoy en paz. (*Teatro ecuatoriano* 38)

Fantasy allows for Jorge Dávila to educate the audience on the trials and tribulations of his uncle, to expose the complexities of his life as a man who did not walk easily in the world of reality. The play represents difficult family relationships, an unusual marriage and a life truncated by interrupted studies and work that was unrelated to his poetic genius.

By breaking the reflection of life that he saw as the mirror, he moved to the afterlife where the poet could find peace amongst the characters of his work. His literary companion, Parecedes, suggests “Sí, Fakir, sí... a lo mejor esto es la eternidad...”

Dávila Vázquez also employs realism in the script and on the set but it is fantasy that allows the playwright to work the magic of the broken mirror, which was for César Dávila an illusion of living. Once broken, he could see beyond the illusion of living to the reality of his fictional creations.

There is no doubt that *Espejo roto* is offered in homage to César Dávila Andrade as illustration of family matters that affected his attitude toward life as a means to expose some of his greatest literary creations. Jorge Dávila Vázquez is able to weave some of his most beautiful verses into the play, highlighting some of the more lyric verses written by the poet. Living, according to the play, was simply unsatisfactory for Dávila Andrade but, in death, the poet found that his verses lived on and that his life’s work made sense—but only from the perspective of the afterlife. The individual voices of his poetic creations have depth of character and a spirit of their own; the characters and their voices are eternal and the poet, in death, can appreciate the enormity of providing individual Indigenous voices that stand proud in the cultural environment that otherwise put them last. The voices of the oppressed were heard above the silence and angst, above the tears of César Dávila Andrade’s wife Isabel Córdoba, above the discussions of the dissatisfied father Rafael Dávila Córdoba and hard-working mother Elisa Andrade, above the police commissioner’s voice, above the voices of his friends, above the voice of painter Diógenes Paredes. The voices of the oppressed loom over the indistinct images of characters walking across the stage and provide the lasting image that the playwright wanted to leave with the audience: an artist’s life and even the gossip about an artist’s life are insignificant in terms of his literary production. The artistic production is immortal. No matter what difficulty the artist had during life, the work the artist left for others was what can be shared and what will bring the artist lasting peace.

Even though many Ecuadorians disregard the advances that have been made in Ecuadorian theater in the past 30 years, there are some very poignant plays that have been successful either on stage in Ecuador or on stage in Europe and the United States. With the exception of a few plays, like Dávila’s *Espejo roto*, for example, the use of fantasy and realism is used by playwrights to expose either the pervasive lack of ability to communicate meaningfully or the exposure of a ludicrous sense of historical self. The function of these plays is inherently centered on exposure of ills at home in the Ecuadorian community. The plays focus on trivial details of the breakdown in human interaction and the social relationships that expose a metaphorically incestuous social system that is irreparably damaged because of its reliance on social chatter and inaction (*Medea, La Marujita se ha muerto con leucemia, El y ella, Soufflé de rosas*, etc.), on the one hand, and complacent denial of the abuses of a troubled past, on the other. While poignant, comprehension of many of the plays relies heavily on an acute appreciation of Ecuadorian social norms and cultural practices and even on the great demographic diversity in Ecuador so some of these plays are a challenge to perform to a broader, non-Ecuadorian audience. Nevertheless, the importance of plays by Peki Andino, Cristian Cortez and Avilés Espinosa, to name but a few, should not be ignored. The work of artists like those studied here is key to unlocking perceptions about the greatest challenges concerning the perception of what it means to be Ecuadorian in contemporary times and how, through an exaggerated prism of realism or

an exaggerated prism of fantasy, each playwright summons a call to evaluate inaction, lack of awareness and denial of what can only be labeled here as truth.

Conclusion

“Y a quién diablos le interesa mi opinión?”
Jorge Enrique Adoum

Jorge Enrique Adoum's question above asks "Who really gives a darn about my opinion." What difference does the voice of one make on a community? The new voices in contemporary Ecuadorian literature offer a response that is unique and significant. No matter what the genre, fantasy functions as the means of highlighting the illogicalities of living in contemporary Ecuadorian society while realism connects readers to the oppressive nature of living truncated and hopeless lives in a culture that frequently does not provide the environment necessary for living life to its fullest. Fantasy provides narrative space for new perspectives and alternative endings of lives that could be or could have been different. Realism provides a connection to the unique social and cultural makings of the contemporary Ecuadorian experience.

It is through analysis of fantasy and realism in the works of contemporary Ecuadorian writers that readers experience a spiritual connection to the "other" (i.e. fantasy connections to space creatures or to spaces that offer hope to tattered emigrants living in New York) as well as a connection to the chronic criticism of a stagnant society that has not been successful in providing opportunities for healthy and consistent development of the individual. In an environment where idealized perceptions of relationships are given lip-service and the opportunities for sharing, compassion and love are reduced to trivialities, the spiritual heroes look just like everyone else (Dávila) and go completely unnoticed. In such a restricted space, even would-be criminals do not have the drive to complete real crime (*Sueño de lobos*). The would-be detectives are so caught up in their own crisis, the crimes they are investigating really are solved by others (Juan Valdano or Javier Vásconez).

So, what is the role of the literary critic in reviewing the importance of a corpus of contemporary literature for readers today? No one is more aware of the role of literary criticism than the writers themselves. Jorge Enrique Adoum's question, "And who in the devil is interested in my opinion?" cited above from an interview in 1971 (Literatura 24), was in response to Carlos Calderón Chico's request that Adoum provide his own opinion about possible new trends in Ecuadorian literature with the critical acclaim of Miguel Donoso Pareja's *Día tras día* and Iván Egüez's *La Linares*. Adoum rejects the notion that popularity be a criterion for considering a work of particular merit. Jorge Enrique Adoum reminds us all that writers and literary critics work with words and representation and not with reception as a valid criterion for merit, (Calderón Chico, 24). While other people work with wood, flour, metals, clay, software or technology, the writers' medium is the word itself. As such, writers—novelists, poets, short-story writers, screen writers and dramaturges—are witnesses to the time in which they live. They contribute to action in society by writing. Each writer, Adoum suggests, seeks his own way, his own truth in representation, and his or her writing should be the litmus test of what they have done. Nevertheless, Adoum identifies the role of the literary critic as "situating a work or an author in a specific context (a specific literature, a specific language, a specific continent, a specific country, a specific epoch) and not to inform the "public and the clergy" whether or not the critic liked the work or not.³ (Calderón 25) Therein lies the importance of a book like this one: Ecuadorian literature has not made its way into the corpus of works read by the majority of Latin American scholars nor has it made its way, for the most part, to the global arena but the works do mark an important change in historical perception and in historical consciousness.

Many writers will agree that whether a work is published or receives acclaim has nearly as much to do with the work itself as with its acceptance into the official culture which is polarized at times into official government culture and official literary culture. In Ecuador we must consider the writer's connection to powerful friends and to a system of social interaction that requires individuals to protect the other, as though they were family. In many ways, what Adoum and Barrera Valverde suggested over 25 years ago holds true today. In Ecuador, writers, editors, publishers and booksellers are involved in a battle over what constitutes good writing, what sells, what is innovative and what is not, who publishes for whom, and so forth. Few of the books studied here are available to readers around the world. There are few copies of any of these works and fewer yet in public circulation. However, in the twenty-first century, the battles will become more individualized as Internet publications increase and publishers have less and less control over what makes it into print and literary critics have more material to wade through to find the kernels of truth in the works they study.

Nevertheless, efforts to identify major writers and to create a virtual sounding board for authors continue to be of importance in Ecuador and especially to Ecuadorian writers and those who support them. For example, the University of Cuenca has been instrumental in bringing Ecuadorian writers together through a conference called the Encuentro Literario and celebrated every three years. The Encuentro provides an atmosphere of camaradery for Ecuadorian writers and gives the sense that, in Ecuador, there is a support system for writers who are part and parcel of a national Ecuadorian voice—no matter if they are writing in Riobamba, Ambato, Cuenca or in Mexico City or Paris. Efforts like this counter the cantonesque nature of publication in Ecuador and the challenging distribution practices that often serve as a barrier to national or international exposure. The *Encuentro* allows writers to focus on how their own writing follows or deviates from trends of others in Ecuador as well as how their writing aligns with trends that have been observed throughout Latin America and the world. The Encuentro, and national or international conferences like the Latin American Studies Association conference held in Cuenca, Ecuador in 2013 are excellent environments fostering a support system and a means for writers to learn, compare and contrast what they are writing with the cultural production of their peers in Ecuador and around the globe.

There are potential challenges to such literary encounters, though. For example, the invited Argentine scholar, Claudio Malo indicated in an early morning workshop on the *novela histórica* (Encuentro literario 2005) that Ecuador had not produced a true sample of *novela histórica* as Anderson Imbert, J.E. Pacheco or Fernando Ainsa define it. In saying so, he looked out at the audience and proposed that perhaps one of those in the audience might be the future writer of an Ecuadorian *novela histórica* that would fit the definition. The suggestion disregards the writers' responsibility to work the medium of the word and to represent the world they understand as their own, in an effort to fit the expectations of what might resemble or echo other literary scenes in Latin America.

There is no valid cultural reason why Ecuadorian writers need to produce works that fit the production of other cultural contexts, although there may be a perception that doing so may lead to more notoriety in global literary circles. My contribution with this book is to allow the new voices of Ecuadorian writers to communicate meaningfully without attempting to push each work into a specific literary category so readers can look at individual voices and how they communicate within the context of contemporary

Ecuador, not contemporary “Latin America” which is entirely diverse in language and cultures.

The space for exploration amongst Ecuadorian writers has focused strongly on challenging the identity of Ecuadorians in all their diversity, for exploring the minutia of the shared struggle for understanding an individual world within a culture that is stifling and stagnant, and for securing a space between the two competing expressions of the world that cannot coexist but somehow do. Ecuadorian writers explore these parallel expressions in poetry and prose in an effort to expose the authenticity of a fictionalized experience that reveals what it means to be Ecuadorian.

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