

THE FEMININE ECOGOTHIC MONSTER IN MÓNICA OJEDA’S “EL MUNDO DE ARRIBA Y EL MUNDO DE ABAJO”: AN ECUADORIAN NEOGOTHIC ECHO OF MARY SHELLEY’S *FRANKENSTEIN*¹

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ABSTRACT

In the present article, I suggest an analysis of Mónica Ojeda’s short story “El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo” in light of four key concepts: ‘Gothic,’ ‘monster,’ ‘body,’ and ‘ecophobia.’ I argue that Ojeda’s text follows a tradition of recontextualizing the Frankenstein myth in order to understand other portrayals of the creator and the creature. In the current case, the echoes of *Frankenstein* resonate in the Andean mountains and take the form of a pseudo-shaman and his undead daughter. Ojeda’s short story resuscitates a pre-colonial time and belief system, thereby illustrating the endurance and extensiveness of this archetype.

Keywords: Ecophobia; Gothic Body; Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*; Mónica Ojeda’s “El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo”; Monsters.

EL MONSTRUO ECOGÓTICO FEMININO EN “EL MUNDO DE ARRIBA Y EL MUNDO DE ABAJO,” DE MÓNICA OJEDA: UN ECO NEOGÓTICO ECUATORIANO DE *FRANKENSTEIN*, DE MARY SHELLEY

RESUMEN

En este artículo propongo un análisis del cuento «El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo», de Mónica Ojeda, a partir de cuatro conceptos fundamentales: lo gótico, el monstruo, el cuerpo y la ecofobia. Sostengo que el relato de Ojeda se inscribe en una tradición de reinterpretaciones del mito de Frankenstein que permite explorar distintas representaciones de las figuras del creador y la criatura. En este caso, los ecos de Frankenstein resuenan en los Andes, donde adoptan la forma de un pseudochamán y su

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hija resucitada. El cuento de Ojeda recupera un tiempo y un sistema de creencias precoloniales, ilustrando así la pervivencia y el alcance de este arquetipo.

Palabras clave: Ecofobia; cuerpo gótico; *Frankenstein*, de Mary Shelley; «El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo», de Mónica Ojeda; monstruos.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mónica Ojeda's short story "El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo"³ (2020), although undoubtedly a product of the contemporary Ecuadorian Neogothic literature, echoes the Western Frankenstein myth in its portrayal of creator and creature figures. Since its publication, Mary Shelley's novel has been reinterpreted to shed light on other creator/creature models and relationships. In the current case, Ojeda explores the Frankensteinian motif of a demiurgic creator seeking to overcome death through a pseudo-shaman and his undead daughter in the Andean mountains. Ojeda's short story is an innovative entry in this tradition in the way it resuscitates a pre-colonial time and belief system, more than merely reinventing Shelley's text, illustrating the endurance and extensiveness of this theme. I will anchor my analysis in concepts of the Gothic literary genre, such as the sublime and the representation of women's bodies as sites of horror. Furthermore, monster theory, as proposed by authors like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Timothy Beal, as well as the notion of the monstrous feminine, explored by Barbara Creed and Rosi Braidotti, will be the guiding points of my study of Gabriela, Pedro's daughter. To understand Pedro's Frankensteinian portrayal, I will examine his and Victor's roles as representatives of the patriarchy through their fear of women's bodies and suppressed powers, as well as their pursuits to overcome death, which, I argue, are anchored on the notion of ecophobia, coined by Simon C. Estok, to describe a fear over the limitations of the human condition in the face of the uncontrollable nonhuman world.

Frankenstein (1818), arguably a hallmark of nineteenth-century Gothic literature, continues to exert its influence over contemporary Western culture. The doctor and his creature have become archetypes of the consequences of human ambition, inspiring various discussions on the ethics of scientific progress. According to Jay Clayton, "*Frankenstein*, perhaps more than any other novel, has been interpreted as a warning about impending events" (Clayton 84), which also alludes to the motif of Victor

³ "The world above and the world below". All translations herein provided are the author of this article's own, unless otherwise noted.

Frankenstein's "inhumanity" and the creature's "humanity." This occurs because, as Andy Mousley states, "Frankenstein's unnatural creature has 'natural' human feelings and affections [...] and ironically even appears more human than the human who created him" (Mousley 229–30). Indeed, Victor Frankenstein appears to be motivated solely by an ambition to transcend the human condition and to be revered by a new species, but his "monstrous" facet is especially tied to his rejection of the creature he animated, regarding him as monstrous and horrible: "Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance [...] when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (Shelley 40). The creature, on the contrary, wishes to be human, or at least to be accepted in human society, but is instead doomed to a life of solitude, which is the main catalyst for his violent acts. *Frankenstein* exemplifies the elusiveness of the notion of "humanity", which makes it imperative for humans, in order to understand themselves and their place in the world, to define its borders, its beginning and its end, and to identify what surpasses it or what cannot match it. Frankenstein's creature represents the destruction of a rigid definition of "human" and suggests that the "monster" already exists within the human as a potential.

Moreover, *Frankenstein* has become a metaphor employed to understand other examples of creators in later works, spanning until the current day. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), Yorgos Lanthimos's *Poor Things* (2023), and Almudena Grandes's *La Madre de Frankenstein* (2020) are contemporary examples of iterations of Frankensteinian motifs without directly addressing Mary Shelley's novel. As Timothy Morton has claimed, "[e]veryone wants to talk about Frankenstein – so no one talks directly about Frankenstein" (Morton 209). Mónica Ojeda's short story is another such example, with a particularity: its approach to the demiurgic theme is anchored on a pre-colonial Southern-American perspective. In the following sections, I ponder Ojeda's approach to the monster and its links to Shelley's creature, considering her portrayal of a female monster, which further complicates the creature's relationship to her creator. Furthermore, an overview of the Gothic genre will be pertinent to illuminate Ojeda's Neogothic narrative through the exploration of three key elements: the body, the feminine monster, and the male patriarch's ambition to suppress her and an "Other," nonhuman element.

2. MÓNICA OJEDA'S ECUADORIAN NEOGOTHIC AND THE GOTHIC TRADITION

It is critical to our understanding of these two literary works as adjacent, despite their temporal distance, to regard them as products of the Gothic. Accordingly, Ojeda's work has been labelled "Gothic" despite her use of Andean traditions and mythologies, recalling a pre-Hispanic belief system, which has little to do with the common understanding of Gothic literature. "Gothic" was first employed by Horace Walpole in the second edition to his *Castle of Otranto* (1765) to merely define a narrative set in the Middle Ages (Matthews 51). "Gothic" was a word often associated with barbarism and an anti-Classical aesthetic, before it was adopted to define a literature comprised of a series of tropes, namely: a repressed past usually embodied by a ghost or other supernatural entities; enclosed and claustrophobic spaces; ruins of castles, monasteries, and crypts; oppressed women; and tyrannical fathers. Most notably, as Donna Heiland highlights, "the stories of gothic novels are always stories of transgression. The transgressive acts at the heart of gothic fiction generally focus on corruption in, or resistance to, the patriarchal structures that shaped the country's political life and its family life, and gender roles within those structures come in for particular scrutiny" (Heiland 5).

Ojeda's use of the Gothic, due to its temporal distance from the development of the genre, may be understood in the context of her writing as a mode, evoking an atmosphere of fear sustained by the intrusion of the supernatural that symbolizes a transgression and denunciation of an oppressive present. For this reason, Ojeda considers that the short stories in the collection *Las voladoras* fall under the "Andean Gothic" aesthetic, a controversial term as it was coined by international publishers and exoticizes this region of South America and its inhabitants (Rodrigo Mendizábal 60). Therefore, I will use "Ecuadorian Neogothic", the term suggested by Rodrigo-Mendizábal, to refer to Ojeda's work, as a product of a specifically South American Gothic style that interrogates subconscious inner fears, disturbing family bonds, and what it means to be a woman in a world still haunted by the ghost of patriarchy (Rodrigo-Mendizábal 70).

In "El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo," Ojeda imprints an inherent danger in the geographical depiction of the Andes mountains, suggesting the coexistence of supernatural and natural beings. This perspective recalls Alejo Carpentier's "real

maravilloso”⁴ theory, according to whom the supernatural is an innate characteristic of material reality in Latin America (Carpentier 4–5). The horror explored in “El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo” stems mostly from feelings of grief and the inability (or rather refusal) to accept the loss of a loved one. Pedro, an inhabitant of the Andean mountains, becomes a shaman after losing his daughter, Gabriela, and looks to the mythical and symbolical planes for a way to resurrect her. This idea originates from the agreement he made with his late wife to perform a ritual to rejuvenate her body so as to render it fit to receive Gabriela’s spirit. However, what awakens in her mother’s body is a being incapable of speech, between life and death, decomposing as it moves and is forced to live. The way Pedro turns his wife’s body into a vessel and prevents Gabriela’s spirit from ascending to the spiritual realm represents the sort of violence explored in the overall collection: the violence inflicted upon women’s bodies. In this sense, Andean mythology is primarily used as a metaphor to showcase and denounce this violence, highlighting, according to Richard Angelo Leonardo-Loayza, how women’s bodies are often disregarded and seen as bodies that do not matter (Leonardo-Loayza 95). This occurs in this short story via the conversion of female characters into monstrous beings.

3. THE MONSTERS

What is a monster? It may be regarded as a threshold between what is deemed as ‘acceptable’ and ‘improper’, a liminal being that evokes Julia Kristeva’s notion of the ‘abject’ as an ambiguous creature, “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 4). Moreover, it originates from the human and thus ought not to be viewed as a separate entity. Timothy Beal asserts that monsters personify Sigmund Freud’s concept of the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, the familiar that becomes strange; they are “paradoxical personifications of *otherness within sameness*” (Beal 297, emphasis in original). In fact, the monster became a representative trait of the Gothic as “the violent and disordered underbelly of reason and democratic revolution” (Burnham 225), and remains a crucial characteristic of the fantastic and horror genres in contemporaneity, as, according to David Roas, the primary aim of every fantastic tale is to suggest the possibility of a breach in empirical reality (Roas 26). Yet monstrosity, to Tomás Martín Hernández, has been regarded as a way to reaffirm the norm (Martín Hernández 89) because of the threat it

⁴ “The marvellous real theory.”

poses to the established definition of human. This way, the monster both reiterates and questions the social order, challenging humans' interpretations of the world and providing, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen asserts, "self-knowledge, *human* knowledge" (Cohen 20, emphasis in original).

Nevertheless, this interpretation stems from an overall masculine understanding of the world, one that has often depicted other modes of existence as monsters. For instance, in horror films, when a female character is portrayed as monstrous, according to Barbara Creed, "it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions" (Creed 7), and this representation stems from "the ideological project of the horror film—a project designed to perpetuate the belief that woman's monstrous nature is inextricably bound up with her difference as man's sexual other" (Creed 83). Indeed, Creed highlights how historically the womb and the monster have often been pictured as inextricable (Creed 43), and how monstrous births become evidence of such a connection:

The womb represents the utmost in abjection for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination—blood, afterbirth, faeces. [...] The horror film exploits the abject nature of the womb by depicting the human, female and male, giving birth to the monstrous. (Creed 49)

The feminine is both an oppressed and feared element in patriarchal society, the creature in need of control. It can be defined as an opposition of "masculine," not necessarily bound by biological traits, but rather by cultural, sociological, and psychological attributes. In Western culture femininity is generally associated with a greater degree of sensibility (Heiland 11), and, as such, sensible male characters often become ill, physically and mentally (Heiland 89). Men are punished, seen as "weak," if they embody what is perceived as feminine characteristics in a patriarchal society whose main goal is to suppress Woman as both a dangerous and desirable component.

From Rosi Braidotti's perspective, the feminine is monstrous, in this sense, as a variant of the masculine, difference personified, and, like the monster, forever challenging the understanding of "man". According to Braidotti, "'she' is forever associated to unholy, disorderly, subhuman, and unsightly phenomena. It is as if 'she' carried within herself something that makes her prone to being an enemy of mankind, an outsider in her civilization, an 'other'" (Braidotti 64). The feminine is something to be desired, coveted, yet feared and hated as well; "Woman" is at once the motherly Virgin

Mary and the temptress Eve. In Gothic fiction, claims Jerrold E. Hogle, female characters are the ones usually confined in an effort:

to repress, as well as a quest to uncover, a potentially “unruly female principle”... that antiquated patriarchal enclosures have been designed to contain and even bury.... The Gothic often shows its readers that the anomalous foundations they seek to abject have become culturally associated with the otherness of femininity.... Social gender divisions have been designed to deny, even as they make us desire, this boundary-blurring source of ourselves that initially stems, the Gothic reveals, from the body of a woman. (Hogle 10)

Femininity is the abject in accordance to Kristeva’s theory, the desired and rejected element in a patriarchal society. Hogle considers this interpretation also applies to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, as the monster becomes a way for Victor to vicariously reconstruct his deceased mother through corpse parts. The monster becomes both site of desire and a fear that is similar to Creed’s description of the womb’s abjection. Victor, then,

commits his strongest act of repression by feverishly destroying the female creature that his first creation has asked him to make.... It is woman whom he has avoided most in his onanistic creation because it is the ultimate uncontrollability of the life-giving female that most crystallizes all of his many fears and abjections. (Hogle 10)

Anna Boccuti, in her analysis of Ojeda’s short story collection, pinpoints how the monster is viewed differently by male and female characters, as while the man’s reaction to the monster is typically one of fear and horror, the woman’s is more empathetic, as she finds that in reclaiming monstrosity, empowerment from the patriarchal order that oppresses her becomes a possibility (Boccuti 143).

The transgressive power of “El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo” is mostly linked to Gabriela’s uncanniness, or rather, her resurrected corpse’s stark differences from Pedro’s daughter, which highlight his inability to control not only the body of wife and the soul of his daughter, but the laws of Nature as well. Pedro counters the natural order by manipulating the corpse of Gabriela’s mother with his words, turning it into a womb to once again carry Gabriela and thereby reducing it to its reproductive function.

The body is frequently used in Gothic novels as a site of horror, because, as Xavier Aldana Reyes claims, bodies “either refuse absolute human taxonomies or destabilise received notions of what constitutes a ‘normal’ or socially intelligible body” (Aldana Reyes 5). The monster is a valuable venue to explore these bodily transgressions as it

negotiates “larger concerns about humanity and its shifting boundaries” (Aldana Reyes 7). The desecration of human bodies in Gothic fiction, which divests them of their human identity and turns them into something other, has been labelled by Kelly Hurley as ‘abhumanness’. An ‘abhuman’ body, she claims, is a liminal one, standing in between categories, thereby challenging one’s way of organizing and making sense of the world. As Hurley asserts,

The abhuman being retains vestiges of its human identity, but has already become, or is in the process of becoming, some half-human other – wolfish, or simian, or tentacled, or fungoid, perhaps simply “unspeakable” in its gross, changeful corporeality. Or the abhuman being may be some unimaginable “thing” incorporating, mimicking, or taking on a human form, thereby constituting another kind of threat to the integrity of human identity. (Hurley 198)

Frankenstein’s monster, by virtue of his condition as an amalgamation of different bodies, therefore, a desecration of cadavers which divests them of their integrity and identity, becomes an abhuman, liminal being, whose monstrosity hinges on his corporeality and his transgression of the life/death barrier. Likewise, Pedro, with his resurrection ritual, desecrates his wife’s body and his daughter’s spirit, changing their corporeality and humanity, merging, and consequently erasing, their human identity, and forming another type of being that unsettles because of its mimicry of the human body: a speechless, soulless body.

This reanimated corpse shares similarities with the Haitian zombie, the original interpretation of the popular zombie trope. The zombie may be defined as “that species of the undead that returns by some supernatural or pseudo-scientific sleight of hand” (Luckhurst 7). As Roger Luckhurst suggests, the zombie is a liminal creature whose “most obvious boundary breach [...] is between the seemingly definitive states of life and death” (Luckhurst 9). Furthermore, the zombie operates

as a warning to observe the proper social protocols of mourning and avoid the risks of too much melancholic lingering of the living among the dead. These creatures transgress but in the end help uphold cultural categories of purity and pollution, the sacred and the profane, the living and the dead. (Luckhurst 9–10)

The zombie figure was popularized in the United States by William Seabrook, who describes it as “a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive” (Seabrook 93). This description also

applies to the resurrected Gabriela, who was imbued with the ability to move in a similar way to the living while remaining a corpse. The narrative reveals Gabriela's monstrosity through this forced, unnatural resurrection, a product of her father's will. Likewise, it echoes the Gothic archetype of the tyrannical father who exerts control over his children and is primarily concerned with maintaining the line of succession. As a monster, Gabriela instils a sense of unease and estrangement in her father and the Andean people surrounding them. They look at Gabriela in horror, underscoring her abhuman status—"Un indio cruzó las inmediaciones montado en un caballo colorado y nos miró con horror"⁵ (Ojeda 57)—and remind Pedro of the limitations of his human condition through the repetition of the sentence "No eres un chamán, sino un hombre"⁶ (Ojeda 55, 63), like a mantra. This sentence stresses two different ideas: on the one hand, Pedro is not an Andean shaman, and thus he is regarded by the Andean people as an invader from a dominant culture playing with another's tradition—"Invasores. Terratenientes que juegan a la andinidad"⁷ (Ojeda 53), which emphasizes an important aspect of what is commonly labelled 'cultural appropriation', according to Rina Arya: the "asymmetry of power between two cultures that involves the majority/dominant culture taking from the marginalised culture" (Arya 3).

Gabriela, as a monster, constitutes a warning (Asma 13), echoed by the disquieting feelings she arouses in the Andean people they pass by during their trek up the volcano. They regard her with horror and admonish Pedro for disrespecting the laws of Nature. Recalling Timothy Beal's considerations regarding "the monster's religious import" (Beal 299), Gabriela may be regarded as a portent or a reproach from Nature, thereby operating as a reminder that humans are incapable of countering death. Pedro himself regards the creature he awakened as monstrous and constantly highlights the differences between her and his daughter; Gabriela's inability to speak and her dry, ash-coloured skin weigh particularly on him (Ojeda 60). It is these dissimilarities that make him realize and accept the death of his daughter, at the end of the text. This acknowledgement comes as they reach the top of the volcano, a climb from the world below to the world above, as the title of the text suggests.

⁵ "A native passed by riding a red horse and looked at us in terror."

⁶ "You aren't a shaman, but only a man."

⁷ "Invaders. Landowners playing Andean."

Edgar Allan Poe has claimed that a woman's death is the "most poetical" (Poe 19) motif, which, as Elisabeth Bronfen points out, underscores the endurance of the relationship between women and death in art (Bronfen 60). Woman is a feared subject because she signifies ambivalence in patriarchy; a being that resists categorisation; a monster. Particularly, Bronfen highlights the association between Woman and Nature, both uncontrollable subjects that, therefore, frighten Man. As a body, Woman is both a symbol of fertility and life and sexual lust and decay: "Woman's body is seen as polluted, as fatal to the masculine touch, an agent and carrier of death... This paradigmatic coupling of Woman and body serves to allegorise the aspect of corruption, vulnerability and disembodiment inherent in human existence" (Bronfen 67). The womb thus becomes a tomb, an allegory of the cycle of life and death that humanity cannot command. Pedro's wife's body is both womb and tomb, and Gabriela's zombie-like return is a reminder of his inability to change the laws of Nature.

As such, Pedro echoes the same controlling male character seen in Shelley's novel. As Heiland suggests, *Frankenstein* is a narrative about patriarchy, in the sense that Victor's attempt to erase the female factor in the production of life also constitutes an attempt to erase death. However, Shelley's novel suggests that the complete suppression of women does not dilute their power; it creates a monster. As Heiland writes, "Women's power might be dangerous, but it seems to be equally dangerous to do away with or usurp that power" (Heiland 103). The monster, therefore, "functions as a double for patriarchy generally, and for Victor Frankenstein specifically, a physical reminder of the destructive energy at the heart of the patriarchal family" (Heiland 103).

Having briefly reflected on the binomials Woman/Monster and Woman/Death, I will now turn to a second aspect of this latter dyad, previously merely alluded to: the relationship between Woman and Nature, and particularly the fear of the "Other", the "Nonhuman", the uncontrollable forces of life and death and both Pedro and Victor failed to overcome and that point to a larger human fear: ecophobia.

4. ECOPHOBIA AND ECOGOTHIC NARRATIVE

Ecophobia has begun to be approached by ecocritics since Simon C. Estok defined it as the terror over "the loss of agency and fear of the loss of predictability" (Estok, "Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia" 134). In this sense, Estok goes on to state, "Nature becomes the hateful object in need of our control, the loathed and feared

thing that can only result in tragedy if left in control” (Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness" 210). Therefore, ‘ecophobia’ may be understood as a feeling of hatred and horror over the unpredictable and untameable nonhuman world. From Brian Deyo’s vantage point, ecophobia also mirrors the human concern with “self-conception” and “the fear of death—a fear that is closely related to awareness of our animality” (Deyo 200). Taking the notion of ‘ecophobia’ into account, as well as the gothic aesthetic, the type of horror explored in Ojeda’s short story may fall under the ‘ecogothic’ term, as authors like Mackey have suggested, which portrays Nature and nonhuman elements as monstrous and fearful elements. The ecogothic, rooted in ecophobia, gives shape to anxieties stemming from the unstable relationship between human and nonhuman. In an ecogothic narrative,

nature has its own agency [...]. At the broadest level, then, the ecogothic inevitably intersects with ecophobia, not only because ecophobic representations of nature will be infused, like the gothic, with fear and dread but also because ecophobia is born out of the failure of humans to control their lives and their world. And control, or lack thereof, is central to the gothic. (Keetley and Sivils 3)

Similarly, Pedro’s attempt to command the natural world expresses this ecophobic sentiment that characterizes humankind’s efforts to dominate Nature. Additionally, Pedro does not only oppose natural laws, but also challenges mythological laws, on the one hand, by resurrecting the dead, and on the other, by preventing Gabriela’s soul from reaching the spiritual plane.

This short story’s ecological approach is also reminiscent of *Frankenstein’s*, in the sense that, as Timothy Morton asserts, it “might make one consider how we treat other life forms; about what constitutes a human as opposed to a non-human” (Morton 209). Moreover, the creature’s abhuman characteristics may also reveal an ecophobic sentiment, a hatred and a fear of the nonhuman. Morton states that Victor’s interpretations of the creature’s expressions, “of psychopathic malice or zombie animation” may in fact be “anthropocentric, overcharged (Victor-centric) reactions to something that might seem more like the eyes of a sheep. Their blankness invites Victor’s horror, whereas it might invite a caring uncertainty” (Morton 217). Like Gabriela, the creature “provides those around him with lessons in abjection, and abjection is the basic feeling of ecological awareness” (Morton 220). The notion that humans, to exist, depend on other living beings, coexist with them, may seem terrifying, but the acceptance of the existence of the nonhuman around and within the human is crucial for self-preservation. Jed Mayer claims

that *Frankenstein*, at its core, is about the intertwinement of the human and the nonhuman and that one can be manipulated, made, replicated, and replaced by the other. The novel “is about living with the consequences of human tampering with nature” (Mayer 234). The ecophobic, or ecogothic element of fear, Mayer argues, “can instill humility before phenomena we do not fully comprehend” (Mayer 236).

This sense of fear towards the nonhuman may be traced back to the Romantic notion of “awe” and “sublime,” which Romantics described feeling toward the overwhelming, beautiful, and terrifying Nature and the supernatural. Edmund Burke states, to that effect, that “whatever is in any sort terrible [...] is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the human mind is capable of feeling” (Burke 36). Kant suggested that after experiencing this sense of helplessness toward the nonhuman, one would assimilate it into her comprehension and transcend it. Jed Mayer contends that Shelley’s novel “systematically counters each narrative evocation of the sublime with a radical subversion, repeatedly undoing the anthropocentric disposition towards the other promoted by Kant” (Mayer 238). It asks the reader to look at the monster, to know where it came from, why it exists, and what it can mean about the humans who create and fear it. Likewise, the undead creature Pedro animated in his wife’s body forces him to acknowledge her as a different being, to accept the irremediability of death, and to understand his position in the circle of life as an integral element, not a dominating one. It recalls Donna Haraway’s provocation to learn to coexist, to “make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” as a possible response to the anthropocentric enterprise to destroy the “chthonic ones,” the beings of the earth (Haraway 2). With the failure of the human methods to control the nonhuman world, what remains for Pedro and Victor Frankenstein is to recognize their limitations and their place as humans in the world and to live with the consequences of their tampering with the nonhuman.

5. CONCLUSION

“El mundo de arriba y el mundo de abajo” echoes *Frankenstein* as it portrays humans and their demiurgic ambition to overcome their limitations and to manipulate Nature, life, and death. Humans’ fear over their lack of control over Nature (symbolized by Woman and the Monster) is explored in the way Pedro’s shamanic ritual fails, his

wife's body loses its human identity, and Gabriela's spirit finds itself trapped in a rotting corpse. The human man is rendered impotent as he faces the truth embodied by the feminine, ecogothic monster: that no word, no spell, no ritual is strong enough to change the laws of the nonhuman world. This way, Ojeda's short story highlights the necessity to allow the dead their rest, not to succumb to a long mourning process, so that grief does not consume the living, as the zombie warns. Furthermore, the text emphasizes the necessity, like *Frankenstein*, to learn to coexist with the nonhuman, to "make kin" with it, and fear becomes a tool to inspire humility as a first step in that direction.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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