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THE COUNTERFEIT EDITOR: GOTHIC CUSTODY IN *LA CASA LOBO*[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article reads Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña's *La casa lobo* (2018) through the figure of the counterfeit editor, which Fred Botting identifies in the Gothic novel as the voice that vouches for a found manuscript. The film passes itself off as an instructional reel rescued from the shelves of a German colony in Chile modeled on Colonia Dignidad, and its prologue rewrites, almost phrase by phrase, the sleeve note of a record the colony released in 1969. The six published studies of the film recognize the forgery, and one identifies the narrator with the wolf, but none follows that voice to the film's last sentence. Drawing on the dialogue track and on correspondence with León, the article shows that the voice that certifies the document on the community's behalf also stalks María, annotates what the characters say, rewrites the tales they recite, and in the epilogue calls the viewer *cerdito*, little pig, as the colony called Chileans pigs, and offers to look after him. The figure reproduces how Colonia Dignidad legitimized itself for four decades: those who abused the children in its charge presented it as an institution devoted to caring for them, and the Chilean state vouched for that account. The article extends Botting's literary device to cinema, where the editor becomes a voice that can also act inside the story, and shows how *La casa lobo* places the viewer where those who believed the colony stood: offered care by the very thing they needed protection from.

Keywords: Chilean cinema; Colonia Dignidad; counterfeit editor; decolonial Gothic; found document; stop-motion animation

EL EDITOR APÓCRIFO: CUSTODIA GÓTICA EN *LA CASA LOBO*[2]

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza *La casa lobo* (2018), de Cristóbal León y Joaquín Cociña, a la luz de la figura del editor apócrifo, que Fred Botting identifica en la novela gótica como la

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[2] All translations from Spanish and German are my own. Claims that rest on correspondence with Cristóbal León in September 2026 are cited as (León, correspondence). Statements attributed to León report what he wrote; the interpretations built on them are mine unless the text says otherwise. Time stamps refer to the 2024 KimStim Blu-ray listed in the Works Cited. The directors released the film with English and with Spanish intertitles; intertitles are quoted from the English version.

voz que avala el manuscrito encontrado. La película se hace pasar por un filme didáctico rescatado de los anaqueles de una colonia alemana en Chile, trasunto de Colonia Dignidad, y su prólogo reescribe casi literalmente la contraportada de un disco que la colonia editó en 1969. Los seis estudios publicados sobre la película advierten la falsificación, y uno identifica al narrador con el lobo, pero ninguno sigue esa voz hasta la última frase del filme. A partir de los diálogos y de la correspondencia con León, el artículo demuestra que la voz que certifica el documento en nombre de la comunidad es también la que acecha a María, glosa lo que dicen los personajes, reescribe los cuentos que recitan y, en el epílogo, llama "cerdito" al espectador, como la colonia llamaba "cerdos" a los chilenos, y se ofrece a cuidarlo. La figura reproduce la estrategia de legitimación de Colonia Dignidad durante cuatro décadas: quienes abusaban de los niños a su cargo la presentaron como una institución consagrada a cuidarlos, y el Estado chileno avaló ese relato. El artículo traslada el recurso literario de Botting al cine, donde el editor se convierte en una voz que también puede actuar dentro del relato, y muestra cómo *La casa lobo* sitúa al espectador en el lugar de quienes creyeron a la colonia: el de quien recibe una oferta de cuidado de aquello de lo que debía protegerse.

Palabras clave: animación *stop-motion*; cine chileno; Colonia Dignidad; documento encontrado; editor apócrifo; gótico decolonial

1. INTRODUCTION

La casa lobo ends by asking its audience a question. After the house has fallen, after the two children have been swallowed by a tree, after a voice has told María that it was always inside her and that it is time to go home, an archival image returns and a man speaks over it: "Y tú, cerdito… que has visto nuestros sueños… y tu reflejo en el agua. ¿Quieres que te cuide?" ("And you, little pig… who have seen our dreams… and your reflection in the water. Do you want me to look after you?") (01:08:23–30). The viewer has been addressed as a pig and offered care. That is a strange way to end a film about a child's captivity, and it becomes stranger once one notices who is speaking. The voice belongs to the man who introduced the film seventy minutes earlier as a reel recovered from a colony's shelves, and to the wolf who spent the intervening hour demanding to be let into her house.

The film was made inside museums. Over five years Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña built and animated its sets in the Upstream Gallery in Amsterdam, Kampnagel in Hamburg and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago, with visitors watching the work in progress (León, correspondence). The result is a seventy-five-minute stop-motion feature, the pair's first feature-length film after a decade of making shorts together. It premiered in the Forum of the Berlinale in February 2018 and has since circulated through festivals, art cinemas and a specialist home-video release rather than wide commercial distribution; its published critical literature remains small. The working method is visible

on screen. Figures are modeled in papier-mâché, tape and paint; they climb out of murals into three dimensions and sink back into the wall; furniture appears and dissolves; the camera appears never to cut. The house behaves less like a set the characters move through than like a surface that keeps rewriting itself around them.



FIGURE 1: Painted heads on the wall of the house, one of them growing a modeled hand into three dimensions. Production photograph, *La casa lobo* (2018). Courtesy of Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña.

The history behind the film is well documented, but the film withholds it. Colonia Dignidad was founded near Parral in 1961 by Paul Schäfer, a German lay preacher who had left West Germany ahead of charges of child sexual abuse. For four decades it operated as a closed settlement whose children were separated from their parents and whose labor went unpaid, and which served Pinochet's secret police as a site of detention and torture. That required public standing as well as secrecy. Carl Fischer sets out the reciprocity: the Chilean state donated the colony's land and protected Schäfer before, during and after the dictatorship (7). María Angélica Franken, quoting the corporation's founding statutes from Lola Larra's novel *Sprinters*, shows that their stated object was the education of needy children (qtd. in Franken 187). The colony held its ground by presenting itself as a work of care, and the presentation was believed. Jan Stehle's account is the fullest, and one of its findings bears directly on this reading: what survives of the colony's own record has emerged piecemeal, released by the people who controlled it

(39). None of this is named on screen. Erick Neher observes that the names Schäfer, Pinochet and Mengele, and the word Nazi, never occur in the film (469), and León, writing to the author, describes the setting as "una secta parecida a la colonia, pero no directamente de ella" ("a sect similar to the colony, but not directly the colony itself") (León, correspondence). The film supplies a document where the record is missing and declines to say whose document it is.

Read this way, the film belongs to a body of work that Gothic studies has claimed only recently. Enrique Ajuria Ibarra argues that Latin American Gothic "is not a sign of Western literary or critical dominance, but rather the result of overlaps in the genre's elements and the region's inherently dark cultural concerns" (264), which answers anyone inclined to treat a film about a Chilean cult as political cinema that happens to be frightening. His survey includes a close formal relative. Gustavo Hernández's *La casa muda* (Uruguay, 2010) confines its action to an abandoned house and uses long takes that "trick the viewer into trusting Laura," concealing the abuse committed by her father and his friend (266). *La casa lobo* shares the enclosure, the continuous take and the patriarch's crime, and differs in how trust is managed. In *La casa muda* the camera withholds; here a voice vouches.

Six published discussions have read *La casa lobo*, and all six recognize that its prologue is a forgery. Neher named the device, calling the opening "a mock propaganda film" and invoking Pirandello without developing the comparison (468). Marcela Parada treated the prologue as detachable and concluded that without it the film's link to Colonia Dignidad becomes *ortopédica* ("orthopedic") (694–95). Pedro Moscoso-Flores and Sebastián Wiedemann read the sequence as "una suerte de spot publicitario que busca 'lavar la imagen'" ("a kind of publicity spot that seeks to 'launder the image'"), whose rupture into animation strips the colony's images of "su función representacional" ("their representational function") (278). Franken calls the film a "cuento de hadas disciplinador" ("disciplining fairy tale") whose heroine "debía volver" ("had to return") (187), and follows the wolf's voice inward until it becomes "la voz de la conciencia de la misma María" ("the voice of María's own conscience") (185). Fischer takes the prologue's thanks for "the support of the government of Chile" as evidence of "ties of complicity" between the state and the colony (7). Julián David Saldarriaga Cardona comes closest, identifying the narrator with the wolf and reading his hold on María, after Kristeva, as

possession (108, 110–11). None, however, follows the narrator to the final sentence quoted above.

The figure they stop short of has a name in Gothic criticism. Writing about *The Name of the Rose*, Fred Botting identifies "the gothic device of a counterfeit editor's preface" (181). *La casa lobo* is organized by such an editor: a voice that forges the film's provenance, annotates its characters as it transcribes them, revises the tales they recite, and, at the last, extends to the viewer the care it has spent administering the film. Botting's examples are novels, and in them the counterfeit editor plays a game with literary authority. *La casa lobo* puts the device to the use the colony made of its own documents, and the article's second claim follows from that. The convention names something Colonia Dignidad did, which is why the film can end by turning it on the audience.

2. Terms and Method

Three terms organize this reading. The first is Botting's. A counterfeit editor is the fictional figure who presents a Gothic text as a document he has found, translated or restored rather than written. His preface supplies the document's provenance, his notes vouch for it or doubt it, and his presence lets the author disown the fiction while making it look authentic. The convention he serves is the discovered manuscript, which the next section traces through Walpole, Reeve, Hogg and Eco. This article speaks more broadly of the found document, since what *La casa lobo* claims to recover is a reel of film. Cinema has its own form of the convention in found-footage horror, which presents a film as recordings recovered after the events they show. Saldarriaga Cardona places the film's prologue in that tradition, drawing on Alexandra Heller-Nicholas's argument that found footage has given horror cinema "concrete examples of narratives of national crisis" (qtd. in Saldarriaga Cardona 110), and Ajuria Ibarra reaches for the same figure when he compares a ghost story spread online to "a lost manuscript unearthed from the sea of digital information" (271).

The second term is this article's own. Custody names the authority the editor claims: the right to hold the document, to vouch for it, and to look after the people inside it. The word joins two senses that the film keeps together. An archive has custody of its records, and an institution has custody of the children placed in its care. Colonia Dignidad claimed both. Its statutes defined it as a society devoted to helping needy children, and what survives of its record has been released piecemeal by the people who controlled it

(Stehle 39). The film's word for the second sense is *cuidar* ("to look after"), with German counterparts such as *aufpassen* and *Pflege*, and the section "Custody as Care" follows that word through the film.

The third term frames the ending. Sheri-Marie Harrison builds her account of decolonial Gothic on the "ethic of incommensurability" proposed by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (25). For Tuck and Yang, that ethic "recognizes what is distinct and what is sovereign" in projects of decolonization instead of folding them into human and civil rights based social justice projects (1), and it stands against reconciliation, which in their account protects the normal life and the future of those who benefited from colonization (35). The frame fits *La casa lobo* for a concrete reason. Colonia Dignidad was a German enclave that set out to Germanize and whiten the Chilean children in its charge, as Franken and Fischer both show, and the film stages that project through María's honey and her pigs (Franken 185; Fischer 7). An ethic of incommensurability describes an ending that refuses to reconcile what the colony did with the care it claimed to give. The section "The Last Handover" argues that the epilogue offers such a reconciled ending and then withdraws it.

The method is close reading of the dialogue track, set against two outside sources: the 1969 record sleeve that the prologue rewrites, and correspondence with Cristóbal León in September 2026. León's statements serve as production testimony. They establish what the directors used, decided or intended, such as the source of the prologue or the rule governing the film's languages. They do not settle what the film means, and where this reading goes beyond what León said, the text marks the difference.

The reading adds to two discussions. For criticism of *La casa lobo*, it moves from recognizing the forgery, which all six studies do, to tracing the forger's voice through the whole film, including the final sentence that none of them discusses. For the study of the counterfeit editor, it shows what the device becomes when it moves from print to film. In a novel the editor is confined to the preface and the notes, outside the text he presents. On a soundtrack he is a voice, and a voice can also speak inside the story. *La casa lobo* uses that possibility to make the guarantor of the document and the predator inside it one speaker, and it ties the device to the colony's own self-certifying documents, to which the conclusion returns.

3. The Counterfeit Editor

La casa lobo opens by telling you where it came from. A man identifying himself as the colony's pastor describes a community living "en medio de la naturaleza semisalvaje, con un marco de cerros de imponente belleza" ("in the midst of semi-wild nature, framed by hills of imposing beauty"), gives its motto as "Ayudar hace feliz" ("Helping makes one happy"), and presents the film as a reel rescued from the colony's shelves (00:00:28–00:02:20). The provenance is invented. The prose is not. In 1969 Colonia Dignidad released a record of its choirs on RCA Victor, and the unsigned note on its back cover supplies the prologue almost phrase by phrase. The note presents a group of Germans who live, work, serve and sing in the same half-wild landscape framed by the same imposing hills, gives the same motto, and adds that the local mountain people regard the Germans as their brothers and companions in hardship (*Coro de la Soc. Benefactora*). León confirms that the prologue's register and much of its text come from that sleeve (León, correspondence).

Two substitutions turn the sleeve into a forgery. The sleeve describes the colonists from outside, in the third person, and the pastor speaks from inside, so "viven, trabajan, sirven" ("they live, work, serve") becomes "vivimos, trabajamos, servimos" ("we live, work, serve") (00:00:55); the institutional "we" that governs the rest of the film is produced by that change alone. The second substitution is a pair of nouns. The sleeve ends by explaining that the record grew out of the Society's wish to say something to the Chilean people, and closes: "Este disco fue hecho gracias a la colaboración de Miguel Ramos Aldunate" ("This record was made thanks to the collaboration of Miguel Ramos Aldunate") (*Coro de la Soc*. *Benefactora*). The film keeps the frame and changes what it announces. The pastor shares a film rescued from the colony's shelves, and "Esta película fue restaurada gracias a la colaboración de Cristóbal León y Joaquín Cociña" ("This film was restored thanks to the collaboration of Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña") (00:02:20–58). A real record becomes an imaginary film, and the man the colony once thanked becomes the two directors who made the forgery.



FIGURE 2: Back cover of Coro de la Soc. Benefactora y Educacional Dignidad (RCA Victor CML-2783-X, 1969). The note in the center column supplies the film's prologue almost phrase by phrase. Courtesy of Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña.

The rest of the film's documentary surface is built the same way. León reports that the songs heard in it are the colony's own recordings, used after an unsuccessful attempt to trace who held the rights, and that the archival footage is part bought from stock libraries and part staged; the man in the wheelchair is the Chilean poet Carlos Cociña, Joaquín's father (León, correspondence). One of those recordings can be identified. The 1969 record is sung throughout by the colony's own choirs of children, girls, youths and mixed voices, and its sixth track is Brahms's "Die Blümelein sie schlafen" ("The Little Flowers Are Sleeping"), performed by the Coro de Niños ("Coros Dignidad"). Two earlier studies have noted that this Brahms lullaby appears on the colony's record, though neither discusses its sleeve (Franken 195; Moscoso-Flores and Wiedemann 274). León identifies the sequence in which the characters sing "Die Blümelein" as the only one in the film

animated to a pre-existing recording, and confirms that the recording is the one on that disc (León, correspondence). In the film's single moment of lip-sync, the animated children mouth the voices of the colony's children. The forged reel is assembled from the colony's own materials, and at its one point of exact synchrony the voices belong to children the colony held.

León reports that the directors considered using the colony's real film material and decided that faking it was more fitting (León, correspondence). The shelves they invented have a history. Stehle records that Colonia Dignidad was never systematically searched for documents, that much of its material has probably been destroyed, and that in 2016 members of the colony's leadership handed the Chilean director Cristián Leighton hundreds of video cassettes and audio tapes together with thousands of photographs (39). León met Leighton during production, was refused access, and reports that hearing of the archive shaped the premise: the directors imagined, as an absurd possibility, that the archive they could not enter held an animated film made to indoctrinate the colonists (León, correspondence). The film is that hypothesis, filmed. The resulting reel arrives vouched for by an editor whose vouching is precisely what the film asks the viewer to distrust.

The convention has both a name and a history. Botting describes the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* as arriving with a preface that "was itself a fiction … with pretensions to historical authenticity and veracity" (45): it declared the book a translation of a medieval Italian story. He identifies the operative fiction as "the device of the discovered manuscript" (45). Within thirteen years, it had become a convention available to anyone willing to pretend that they had merely found the thing they wrote: Clara Reeve, Botting notes, published *The Champion of Virtue* anonymously in 1777 "in the guise of a translated old manuscript" (49). *La casa lobo* assembles the same parts in the same order. A document arrives from elsewhere. A custodian explains how it survived and who repaired it. A moral is supplied before the story begins, when the intertitles sentence María to a hundred days of silence so that she will reflect on what she has done (00:03:25–30).

Neher named the device first. Reviewing the film for *The Hudson Review*, he describes a prologue that persuades us "we are watching a period documentary made by Colonia Dignidad," and calls the result, "in short, a mock propaganda film" (468). The phrase captures the prologue's genre but not the person who hands the genre over and

then stays to comment on it. Botting's term does. The preface of *The Name of the Rose*, he argues, "though stating its absolute distance from contemporary concerns, ironically focuses attention on the relation between history and the present" (181–82). That is the mechanism of the pastor's disavowal, and here the film adds to its source rather than copying it. The sleeve sets the legend aside in a subordinate clause, "al márgen [*sic*] de la leyenda negra, que se ha querido crearles" ("setting aside the dark legend that some have tried to create around them") (*Coro de la Soc. Benefactora*); the pastor stops to account for it, and the dark legend "se debe principalmente a la ignorancia" ("is due mainly to ignorance") (00:01:34). The denial is what raises the subject denied. Botting's example is a novel of 1980, which matters here: the convention did not expire with the nineteenth century, and a film of 2018 inherits it without special pleading.

The voice that presents the film as a recovered reel is also the wolf who hunts María inside it. This identity separates the film's editor from his Gothic predecessors, who ordinarily stand outside the documents they print. Botting's nearest case is James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, where an "'editor's' narrative" frames the confessions, "ironically plays with gothic devices aimed at verisimilitude," and attempts "to assess the authenticity of the confessions" before proposing what they might mean (100–101). Hogg's editor is a reader like us, at a distance from what he has found. *La casa lobo* closes that distance. Neher briefly calls the prologue "Brechtian—or perhaps Pirandellian" (468); the second term fits better, because, as in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the line between those who present a fiction and those who live inside it gives way, and the presenter turns out to inhabit the story he introduces. The film itself establishes the identity. Halfway through, the wolf breaks off from María and turns outward: "María ya no me escucha. Pero yo sé que usted sí" ("María no longer listens to me. But I know that you do") (00:56:13–15). That *usted* (the formal "you") belongs to the prologue, not to the story, and Rainer Krause speaks both roles. León's account corroborates what the film shows: he describes narrator and wolf as "el mismo personaje omnisciente, omnipresente" ("the same omniscient, omnipresent character") (León, correspondence), written in deliberately different registers, and says the directors chose not to make the identity explicit. The custodian who vouched for the document and the predator who stalks its subject are one speaker, and the film says so aloud.

The document speaks as an institution before it speaks as a person. The storybook intertitles that follow the prologue narrate in the colony's first person plural: María lived "in our Community" (00:03:09), she was disobedient and let three pigs escape, and her sentence issues from a collective mouth, "'You will spend a hundred days and a hundred nights without talking to anyone… so that you may reflect on what you have done,' we told her" (00:03:25–30). The epilogue closes the same way, crediting María's rescue to "nuestra incesante búsqueda" ("our unceasing search") (01:07:48). Between those two plurals sits an hour of singular address, a voice that calls María "mein hübscher kleiner Vogel" ("my pretty little bird") (00:12:39) and demands to be let in. According to the closing credits, two performers speak throughout the film. Rainer Krause voices the pastor, the narrator and the wolf; Amalia Kassai voices María, Ana and Pedro. One performer is the colony in both its registers, and the other is everyone it holds. The film offers no third register: no narration stands outside the colony, and no level of the document is merely reporting. Everything the viewer is told arrives either from the institution as "we" or from the predator as "I," and the film never allows those to be separate speakers. That is the formal condition the rest of this reading depends on.



FIGURE 3: Two figures at a table spread with honey. Production photograph, *La casa lobo* (2018). Courtesy of Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña.

The editor's most revealing work happens at the dinner table (00:49:36–00:51:52), where he does not narrate the scene so much as annotate it. He introduces each child as a

transcriber would, announcing what Ana says and then what Pedro says, and he attaches the speech tags after their lines, as in "…dice Ana correctamente" ("…Ana says correctly"). He grades them as he transcribes: Ana speaks correctly, Pedro is intelligent but still slow of speech. He even reports his own response to the record he is presenting: hearing Ana moves him. Just before the meal he has asked the document two questions it cannot answer: what Ana and Pedro dream of (00:49:36–40). León describes the figure in terms that go past annotation: the narrator sometimes gives María acting directions (León, correspondence). The apparatus is the one Botting finds in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, where "an editor who has also provided extensive scholarly annotations introduces a discovered manuscript" (186). Then the scene gives the apparatus away. Ana says that she feels free because the wolf is far away, and four seconds later the editor answers, "Ojalá que tenga razón" ("I hope she is right") (00:51:42–49). The wolf hopes the child is right that the wolf is far away. In four words, the custodian of the document and the predator inside it speak together, and every guarantee offered in the prologue is heard again in that voice.

The prologue offers five guarantees. The film came from the colony's own shelves. Two named filmmakers restored it. The Chilean government paid for the restoration. The speaker holds pastoral office in the community he is describing. And he states his purpose without embarrassment, to "disipar los horribles rumores que han enlodado nuestra reputación" ("to dispel the horrible rumors that have muddied our reputation") (00:02:28–35). Five warrants within three minutes make certification itself conspicuous, and every one of them comes from the voice that will spend the next hour hunting a girl through a house and will end by inviting the audience home. The film leaves the inference unstated: in *La casa lobo* certification discredits, because everything the editor certifies is also something he controls.

The prologue's closing clause has been read once already. Fischer takes "gracias al aporte financiero del Gobierno de Chile" ("thanks to the financial contribution of the Government of Chile") as evidence of the state's long complicity with the colony (7). León's account supports both parts of Fischer's reading. According to León, the film was almost entirely financed by the Chilean state, and putting that credit inside the fiction was meant to implicate the funder: the aim was to make the state "cómplice de esa restauración" ("an accomplice in that restoration") (León, correspondence). Inside the forged apparatus the state credit and the restorers' names are both true. The counterfeit

editor annexes these facts instead of falsifying them, and so makes the film's real authorship part of his own warrant. Walpole invented a translator to stand between himself and his book; León and Cociña reverse the maneuver, writing themselves into the colony's document as its conservators and letting the wolf introduce them. An editor who has forged a provenance, annotated his characters, and certified his own document retains one further authority: control over the stories told inside the reel.

4. The Editor's Fairy Tales

Critics have already cataloged the film's fairy tales. Neher observes that it is hard to name a classic fairy tale the film does not reference, and lists Red Riding Hood, the three pigs, Snow White's mirror, the Grimm forest and Hansel and Gretel, with Lewis Carroll behind the spatial incoherence (469). Parada puts it more briefly: "Son Perrault y los hermanos Grimm revisitados" ("It is Perrault and the Brothers Grimm revisited") (690). Both identify the film's fairy-tale archive, but neither asks what happens to the tales in transit. The film edits them. Three arrive altered in ways that change what they instruct, and the hand that alters them belongs to the voice that opened the reel.

Take the mirror. María addresses it with the Grimm opening and then asks the wrong question: "Spiegel. Spiegelein. Wer hat das schönste Haus im ganzen Land?" ("Mirror. Little mirror. Who has the most beautiful house in the whole land?") (00:52:39–46). Not who is fairest, but which house is finest. The substitution moves the question from the body to the enclosure, which is the film's subject, and the answer confirms who is speaking: her house is beautiful, but another is more beautiful still, and she will find it if she searches her heart (00:52:48–57). María takes the reply at face value and asks why her own house is not the finest of all. Then she recognizes the voice and asks why the wolf would say such a thing (00:53:11–17). The oracle of the tale has been replaced by its antagonist, and it answers with an instruction to look inside herself for a better house. Neher finds the exchange "straight out of *Snow White*" (469) and does not register that the question has changed. The change ties the tale to this article's argument: the editor now speaks through the tale's oracle, and his answer points María toward another house, the one the epilogue returns her to.

The second revision is graver because María performs it on herself. Bound and about to be eaten, she borrows the wolf's own threat and prays for the breath: "Bitte blas fest und brich die Wand. Iss Pedro und Ana. Lass sie mich nicht fressen" ("Please blow

hard and break the wall. Eat Pedro and Ana. Don't let them devour me") (01:05:31–37). What she fears is the children, not the wolf. In Spanish the plea becomes a nursery rhyme that begs the wolf to come and blow the walls down (01:05:50–57). What the tale gives the pigs as their terror she asks for as her rescue. Then the editor does something no character does. He completes her rhyme and adds two lines she never spoke, promising to blow away her sorrow and draw her smile (01:06:10–22). The wolf answers the prayer, and he also finishes the poem. Supplying its last two promises is an editor's act performed on a text rather than a wolf's act performed on a girl.

The third tale is the one María tells, and it is the film in miniature. María announces to Pedro a story called "La casa y el perro" ("The House and the Dog") (00:26:54–58) and recites it: a house loved a disobedient dog, fed it, and "lo cuidaba" ("looked after it") against the dangers of the forest (00:27:31). The house warns the dog never to run away or jump out of the window, because it might get lost and never come back (00:27:40–46). The dog jumps, runs until it cannot find its way back, and dies offstage; the wind carries the smell of wounds and broken bones to the house. Then the moral, delivered in German and without irony: pity the poor house, which wanted to do everything well, and blame the disobedient little dog (00:28:46–51). Franken notes that María reads the pigs a disciplining tale (185). Her observation can be extended. The tale's plot is this film's plot, its verb is this film's verb, and the reel we are watching was introduced in the prologue as exactly this kind of instruction, addressed by a custodian to a charge who might otherwise leave.

The revisions have a language. León describes the criterion the three co-writers worked to: María uses German when she talks to herself or to the wolf and when she sings the songs of her childhood, and Spanish to speak with the Chileans, meaning the pigs. In the film as released, almost every altered formula falls on the German side; the wolf's completion of the rhyme, in Spanish, is the exception. The mirror is German. The prayer is German before it is Spanish. And "La casa y el perro" begins in Spanish, for Pedro, switches into German once the dog has run too far to return (00:28:11), stays in German for the destruction and the moral, when the wind brings the smell of wounds and broken bones into the house (00:28:23), and comes back to Spanish only to tell Pedro that the story is over (00:28:55). León cautions that the rule may not hold throughout (León, correspondence), so this article treats it as a working criterion rather than a law. Even as

a criterion, the distinction is analytically useful: the instruction María received is in the colony's language, and the instruction she gives is in the language of those she instructs.

Botting observes that "the grounds for excluding, punishing and externalizing vice become far less secure when implicated in narrative frames" (67). In *La casa lobo* the insecurity is manufactured. The tales do not reach the viewer unmediated, to be recognized and enjoyed; they arrive already edited, their questions rewritten, their rhymes completed by an interested party, their morals supplied in advance. A viewer who recognizes Snow White is being invited to trust a formula whose answer now belongs to the wolf. A viewer who recognizes the three pigs watches the tale's victim beg for the tale's violence. The editor's authority over the document extends to everything quoted inside it, and by the time María asks to be looked after permanently, every story she has to think with has been corrected by the figure she is asking.

5. Custody as Care

María Angélica Franken has taken this voice as far inward as it goes. The wolf's speech, she argues, is first identified with Schäfer's and then becomes María's own conscience, so that surveillance migrates from outside the subject to inside her until María ends as "la más fiel reproductora del pensamiento de la Colonia" ("the most faithful reproducer of the Colony's thinking") (185). Her Foucauldian reading accounts persuasively for this internalization, but not for the film's repeated vocabulary of care. Something else travels through *La casa lobo* besides a voice entering a person, and the film names it each time it moves: the duty to look after somebody. That duty gets handed over rather than internalized: the colony delegates it to María, María imposes it on the pigs she remakes, the children she made inherit it and turn it on her, she asks the wolf she fled to take it back, and at last it leaves the film altogether. Five transfers, one verb (*cuidar*) and its German equivalents.

The word arrives before María does. "Ayudar hace feliz" ("Helping makes one happy"), the pastor announces in the prologue, offering it as the colony's motto, and the community he describes exists to educate, to heal and to give (00:01:07). This is not the film's invention. The founding statutes that Franken quotes from Larra's novel give the corporation's object as "prestar ayuda a la niñez y juventud necesitadas mediante su educación física y moralmente sana" ("to provide help to needy children and youth through a physically and morally sound education"), with instruction moral, scholastic,

technical and agricultural (qtd. in Franken 187). Care was the institution's legal purpose and its public face, the argument it made to Chilean officials and to the parents who handed over their children. When María later describes herself as care and love, she is not inventing a private idiom. She is quoting her employer. What follows is a story about inheritance rather than about cruelty, and that distinction is what the film's ending depends on.

María's first act in the house is to feed two animals and, as she later reports, to tell them to eat so they will grow strong (00:10:23). By Christmas she has named herself a mother, an angel, and "Pflege und Liebe" ("care and love") (00:21:10–14). She then names the two children and sets out the terms: she will teach them everything she knows, they will be very good children, and they will never have to escape (00:22:31–41). The sentence that follows matters most: "Les di dignidad" ("I gave them dignity") (00:23:10). She has given them the colony's name. Franken is right that María becomes its most faithful reproducer (185). Her self-descriptions are in the colony's language; her instructions are in the language the colony assigns to the people it civilizes.

Honey is the film's instrument of whitening. Franken reads the pigs' humanization and their later whitening by honey as a figure for the colony's practices of acculturation (185); Fischer likewise reads honey as a mechanism that segregates German children from adopted Chilean ones and turns Pedro blond before our eyes (6–8). Fischer reports María's account of who was refused honey (7); neither critic dwells on the fact that a single man made the choice. Where she comes from, she tells Pedro, the honey was hidden underground and handed out to the chosen; when the dark-skinned children begged for it, the man in charge refused them, calling them stupid and lazy (00:38:09–26). She is describing a system in which one man decides who is cared for, and she describes it in the same breath as her own punishment in a dark room. She has already been operating it. Her promise to heal Pedro's burned skin (00:37:14) made the honey medicine, administered by someone qualified to decide who needs curing. Care, in this house, already includes the power to withhold it.

The wolf's central demand concerns qualification rather than possession. Confronting María over the burned pigs, he argues: "Du kannst nicht auf die Schweine aufpassen. Aber ich kann" ("You can't look after the pigs. But I can"); she thinks she can do everything by herself, he adds, and she should let him in (00:32:53–00:33:08). Parada reads the scene as an escalating state of siege (692), but the wolf's claim is narrower and

stranger. He does not claim María; he claims the pigs, on the grounds that she cannot look after them properly and he can. She answers in the same terms, refusing not his authority but his punishment: "Ich will nicht mehr bestraft werden" ("I don't want to be punished anymore") (00:33:12). The exchange is a custody dispute conducted entirely in the language of fitness to care, which is the language the colony used about the Chilean children it took in.

When the food runs out the arrangement changes hands instead of collapsing. Pedro and Ana bar the door and give María her own doctrine back: "Nadie puede salir. Hay comida aquí en la casa. Afuera está el lobo" ("Nobody can leave. There is food here in the house. The wolf is outside") (01:00:24–30). Every clause is hers. Bound to the bed, she reports Ana adopting her tone as well: María has to behave, and must not speak to them, because talking confuses them (01:02:43–52). The order to behave comes from further back than María's doctrine. In "La casa y el perro" the house tells the dog "Perro… pórtate bien" ("Dog… behave yourself") (00:27:12), so what Ana gives María is the lesson of the tale María told Pedro. Saldarriaga Cardona reads María's treatment of the pigs as displaced abjection, the abused turning on those weaker still (117, 120–21); the children's revolt reverses that direction. On the reading offered here the children are neither more abject than María nor less. They are her successors. They repeat her sentences because those sentences come with the role, and they take charge of her because in this house somebody is always in charge of somebody.

The fourth transfer is the one María requests. Tied down and about to be eaten, she does not pray for escape. She prays for custody, and she prays to the wolf. She tells him that she needs him, that he was right, and that he must come "bevor sie mich auffressen" ("before they devour me") (01:05:06–26). Then, in Spanish, the sentence this section has been moving toward: "Necesito que alguien me cuide. Permanentemente. No puedo yo sola" ("I need someone to look after me. Permanently. I can't do it alone") (01:05:43–48). She asks to be taken into care, permanently, by the figure whose care she fled in the first place. The German is not incidental. By León's account it is the language she reserves for the wolf and for herself, so the plea is made in the colony's tongue before it is put into the one she uses with children. This is where Franken's reading and this one part company. A conscience does not need to be asked to come in.



FIGURE 4: A painted eye covering the wall of a furnished room. Production photograph, *La casa lobo* (2018). Courtesy of Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña.

The house has been read as the agent of all this. Saldarriaga Cardona calls it a porous prison, inescapable and yet open at every point, so that the terror said to live outside flows freely through it (119–20). The description is accurate, but agency lies elsewhere. Nothing in the house acts on its own account. Walls open when the editor wants a room, a painted eye appears where he wants to look, and the tree that swallows Pedro and Ana arrives at the moment he announces he was always inside her (01:06:40). The house is what the custodian uses, like the honey and like the rule about languages. This leaves a final question: once the house is gone and María is back in the colony, who is left for the editor to look after?

6. THE LAST HANDOVER

The editor has turned to the viewer once before, and the first time he only explains himself. Halfway through the film, with María beyond his reach, he changes audience mid-sentence: “María ya no me escucha. Pero yo sé que usted sí. Pasó mucho tiempo. María, Ana y Pedro eran una familia feliz. Pero no habían sido precavidos” (“María no longer listens to me. But I know that you do. A long time went by. María, Ana and Pedro were a happy family. But they had not been careful”) (00:56:13–33). Two glosses follow the address, and both are editorial: a summary of elapsed time, and a judgment about what

the characters failed to do. This is annotation, addressed to the person he has established as the document's reader. When he returns to that reader at the end, the annotation has become an offer.

The epilogue restores the institutional voice, and it opens by declaring the story over (01:07:44). María Wehrle, we are then told, was rescued by the colony's unceasing search, recovered her vitality and her serviceable spirit, and now devotes her days to "el cuidado de niños" ("the care of children") who come from all over Chile to be educated and healed in the colony (01:07:48–01:08:09). She ends at the institutional end of the chain this article has been following, employed in the care of Chilean children exactly as she was once employed in the care of two pigs. Then, forty seconds after announcing its own ending, the document turns: "Y tú, cerdito… que has visto nuestros sueños… y tu reflejo en el agua. ¿Quieres que te cuide?" ("And you, little pig… who have seen our dreams… and your reflection in the water. Do you want me to look after you?") (01:08:23–30). The verb is *cuidar* ("to look after") and the noun matters as much. León reports that the colony called Chileans *Schweine*, pigs (León, correspondence), and that the film made them literally so in order to keep the word, María humanizing the two animals and then Germanizing them. On this reading, to address the viewer as *cerdito* ("little pig") is to put him where the colony put Chileans. The pronoun moves as well: when the wolf first turned outward, he used *usted* (00:56:15), and here he uses *tú* (the informal "you"), the form María uses with the animals she is raising. León does not recall that shift as a decision (León, correspondence), and it does not need to have been one. Everything the film has shown that word doing is now proposed to the person who has watched it being done.

The published criticism stops before that sentence. Saldarriaga Cardona ends on the wolf's "Ich war immer in dir" ("I was always inside you") and the narrator's report of María's rehabilitation (110). Neher closes on the wolf being inside her and the house being his: "The Wolf is always at the door" (470). Franken transcribes the epilogue as far as "para ser sanados en la Colonia" ("to be healed in the Colony") and her quotation ends there (187). Parada does not discuss the ending at all. Moscoso-Flores and Wiedemann mention the ending only as the point where the colony's choral music closes the frame it opened (274). Fischer reads the prologue (7). Six published discussions, and the film's last sentence appears in none of them. The omission is intelligible, because a film that has

spent seventy minutes inside a house seems to end when the house is gone. It does not. It ends one address later, outside the story, with a question.

Because the film never names its colony, the closing offer becomes portable. A document that identified its own institution would make a historical proposal, bounded by a place and a date. This one names nothing, and the custody it offers has no edges. Here the decolonial frame set out in the introduction applies. For Harrison, decolonial Gothic is an aesthetic whose "chief vehicle is that which is unsettling" (25), and for Tuck and Yang reconciliation is the work of rescuing "settler normalcy" and a "settler future" (35). *La casa lobo* supplies exactly such a reconciling ending and then withdraws it. The epilogue gives everything a settled close requires: the victim recovered, her vitality restored, her life returned to the institution as useful work. Then the voice turns outward, and the film ends beyond the story it has just closed, on a solicitation nobody in the room can answer. That withdrawal is the film's refusal of reconciliation: the final question keeps the colony's version of how its children turned out from closing the account, and no answer the viewer could give would make the colony's care and its abuse commensurable.

It is tempting to read the ruin as weakness. The house is destroyed, Pedro and Ana are swallowed by the tree, the enclosure that held everyone collapses into paper. None of that costs the editor anything, and the last sound in the film says so. María sings "Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf" ("Sleep, Little Child, Sleep") to the pigs early in the film (00:10:40), in Kassai's voice; over the closing credits the same lullaby returns in Krause's. León does not claim the reprise was calculated, but he gives its logic: "tenía sentido que el narrador haga dormir al espectador al final del cuento de hadas" ("it made sense for the narrator to put the viewer to sleep at the end of the fairy tale") (León, correspondence). Having asked the viewer whether he would like to be looked after, the counterfeit editor sings him to sleep. The collapse of the house has not ended the editor's authority. The lullaby is what care sounds like once the custodian has your attention.

7. Conclusion

The Gothic found document has always been a way of implicating a reader. Walpole's translator asked his audience to accept a manuscript on his word. Hogg's editor invited readers to weigh confessions he had assembled himself. Eco's counterfeit preface insisted on its distance from the present in order to refocus attention on the relation

between history and the present. What *La casa lobo* adds is a custodian who does not stop at asking to be believed. He asks to be allowed to look after you. Because this editor is a voice instead of a preface, he can make that request from inside the story as well as from its frame, and that is what the device gains in its passage from the Gothic novel to the screen.

That request is legible only if the film's spoken frame is treated as its governing structure rather than as packaging around an animated nightmare. Parada's thought experiment is instructive because removing the prologue does dissolve the historical link, which clarifies how much the frame is carrying. The production history runs in the opposite direction: the prologue and epilogue came late, after years of animation, because the directors judged the film stronger the more clearly it was tied to the history behind it, and the finished film has never been shown without them (León, correspondence). The voice that forged the provenance is the voice that grades Ana's grammar at the dinner table, that changes the mirror's question from a face to a house, that completes María's prayer with promises she never made, and that is still speaking after the house has fallen. It is one speaker throughout, and no part of the film stands outside the colony.

The device is not an ornament attached to a political subject. The colony was itself a producer of documents about itself: a hospital that advertised free treatment to the poor of the region, statutes that promised the education of needy children, a record of children's choirs sold to Chilean buyers with a sleeve note that set the dark legend around the settlement to one side. Each of those was an instrument of survival, and the state that received them donated land, granted charitable status and looked away (Stehle 35, 121, 128). *La casa lobo* forges one more such document and lets the wolf sign it. What the film adds to the historical record is not information which exists elsewhere and in more reliable form, but the position the record puts its reader in. To accept the colony's account of itself was to be offered care by the thing one needed protection from, and the film's last question puts the viewer in that position.

What that colony called help, and wrote into its statutes as its purpose, this film shows as a transferable obligation: held by an institution, delegated to a girl, imposed on two animals, inherited by the children she made, requested back by her when she can no longer bear it, and finally offered to whoever is watching. The last sound is a lullaby sung by the wolf. The ending resolves none of these transfers. The document has simply finished with its subject and turned to its reader.

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