

1. CIVILIZATION AND BARBARISM AND ZOMBIES: ARGENTINA'S CONTEMPORARY HORROR. *INÉS ORDIZ*

This chapter explores several Gothic novels and short stories published in Argentina during the past thirty years. Through an examination of a modest selection of these contemporary texts, it aims to examine the complex dichotomies connecting the natural world to a supernatural event, and the violent past to the global present. Works by authors such as Mariana Enríquez, C. E. Feiling, and Leandro Ávalos Blacha,¹ are examples of an equally universal and inherently Argentine literary terror; their narratives show a manifest influence of some of the masters of English and American Gothic and address global fears while, at the same time, successfully reflect the country's national identity and harrowing past. The texts make use of canonical figures of the horror genre such as the cannibal and the zombie to explore issues related to the opposition civilization/barbarism—which has allegedly shaped the Argentinean national identity through history. They also explore the traumatic return of the country's past violence, from colonial times to the last military dictatorship and the economic crisis of 2001. Some of the texts portray these national concerns while acknowledging the universal quality of contemporary Gothic, becoming a suggestive example of the collaboration between the global and the local in the postmodern literature of terror.

As mentioned in the introduction to this volume, the term “Gothic” has been systematically rejected in Latin American literary criticism, especially in relation to the fair amount of analyses of Magical Realism and fantastic literature. Julio Cortázar, one of Argentina's best-known and most prolific authors, defends the mode as having a strong presence in the Southern Cone. When trying to find a reason for the fair quantity of Fantasy

literature in the literature of Río de la Plata, the writer defines the Gothic as a mode intrinsically connected to Argentinean identity and history. In “Notas sobre lo gótico en el Río de la Plata” (1975) and “The Present State of Fiction in Latin America” (1976), Cortázar mentions Argentinean cultural polymorphism, derived from multiple migrations and the large geographic size of the country, as a reason for its isolation and boredom and for an expected turn to the fantastic in literature. Ultimately, however, the author understands the essential presence of the supernatural in Argentinean letters as pure chance, the same kind of chance that generated the creative explosion in the Italian Renaissance, in Elizabethan England, in 17th century France and in Spain during the 1930s (“The Present State” 527). On the other hand, in their prologue to the anthology *El terror argentino* [Argentinean Terror], Elvio E. Gandolfo and Eduardo Hojman assert that terror *per se* was never the focus of canonical narratives in the country, maybe because of the traditional rejection of certain modes and genres not considered “highbrow” (14-15). Exceptions in the Southern Cone, according to the authors, include Horacio Quiroga’s short stories, parts of Rodolfo Wilcock’s *El caos* [Chaos], *La sinagoga de los iconoclastas* [The Synagogue of the Iconoclastic] and *El estereoscopio de los solitarios* [The Stereoscope of the Lonely], some examples of Silvina Ocampo’s fiction, and some contemporary fiction of authors such as C.E. Feiling, Gustavo Nielsen, Carlos Chernov, and Mariana Enríquez. Moreover, contemporary Argentinean Gothic can be ascribed to a recent revisionist literary trend which makes use of literature to explore memory and, particularly, to describe the terror of the *Proceso*—the last military dictatorship (1976-1983).ⁱⁱ As it will be exemplified by various narratives explored in this study, authors resort to the Gothic to portray the terrors of a recent past that lurks in the shadows of a supposedly modernized society.

Moreover, when examining Argentinean Fantasy writing,ⁱⁱⁱ the Gothic contrast behind the dichotomy civilization/barbarism seems to be a suggestive starting point. These two terms have defined Argentinean identity, as well as political and literary discourse from the beginning of the 19th century, and still seem to appear in the country's contemporary literature of terror. In the years following Argentina's independence, two political projects began to appear: on the one hand, some groups emphasized reverence to the country's native history and symbols; while on the other, it was suggested that the new country should follow European models, rejecting the local and indigenous. This polarization was particularly relevant during the first years of the 19th century, when two political parties were formed: the European-centered *unitarios*, supported in the capital, and the locally-focused *federales*, backed by citizens of the rural provinces. These two models were linked to the concepts of civilization (cosmopolitanism, Europe, progress) and barbarism (Latin-Americanism, nationalism, *gauchos*, the natives) from the government of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-1852) (Fleming; Ordiz). This dichotomy was first defined by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in 1845 in *Facundo: Civilizacion y barbarie*, a work of creative non-fiction which equates the former with the cities and the latter with the countryside. One of the narratives which has historically been argued to represent this dichotomy, however, is Esteban Echeverría's "El matadero" [The Slaughterhouse]. Originally published in 1838 (1871 in the English translation), this story denounces the cruel abjection and violence taking place in Buenos Aires during the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1835-1852), and uses the slaughterhouse in the title as a metaphor for the whole country. Grotesque images of blood and animal entrails, combined with shocking descriptions of violence in the text becomes the ultimate evocation of the collective terrors of the times. The short story is not only a canonical narrative, but is also considered the first Argentinean short

story (Torres-Rioseco 182) and the foundational text of the country's literature (Viñas 15; Gazzera 84). Given that the country's literary history seems to be grounded in terror as a mode of representation, Cortázar's claim about the Gothic as a mode characteristic of Argentinean identity might not be so far-fetched.

The simplified and biased notions that Sarmiento puts forward have been used to read the not-so-simple reality of Argentina's culture and that of other Latin American countries as well. In this chapter I would like to argue that this dichotomy can be read from the critical perspective of the Gothic as a means of highlighting the presence and significance of this literary mode in contemporary writing. The term "Gothic" itself was originally used to refer to the northern European peoples who sacked Rome in the fifth century AD. Subsequent generations represented the Goths as "barbarians, primitive peoples who with brute force had overturned the cultural achievements of Roman civilization," which enabled a set of dualisms such as "primitive versus civilized, barbarism versus culture" (Spooner 13). According to Catherine Spooner, not only have these binaries defined the way that the term has been recognized throughout its history, but the violent barbarism inherent in the perception of these peoples' role in history "lies behind the modern understanding of Gothic as the passionate overthrow of reason" (13). This lack of reason is embedded within Gothic literature's descriptions of the outsider, and it is precisely because of the mode's persistent description of an Other "Satan, demon, orphan, the outsider, vampire, ghost, non-Christian gods, sexually dangerous woman, racially different characters etc." (Khair 6) that it has been defined as a "writing of Otherness" (Khair 5). While the presentation of these absolute categories is characteristic of some of the first Gothic fictions, in the malleable literature of terror these dichotomies are being undone. The blurring of boundaries separating absolute concepts such as life/death,

good/evil, human/monstrous, male/female, self/other, and past/present is common in contemporary manifestations of the mode, particularly those written from a subversive standpoint. The Gothic has thus become an intrinsically heterogeneous mode of writing which continuously oversteps its own boundaries. In this sense, Otherness travels from the margins to the center of contemporary Gothic narratives, exposing the monstrous characteristics of what lies within, as opposed to what is kept “outside,” and existing “in part, to raise the possibility that all ‘abnormalities’ we would divorce from ourselves are a part of ourselves, deeply and pervasively” (Hogle 12).

This shift from unmovable opposites to a dissolution of boundaries, along with the reformulation of monstrosity as part of ourselves, mimics the evolution of the dichotomy civilization/barbarism in Argentinean literature. When examining the literary works of the country’s current generation of authors, Elsa Drucaroff describes the merging of these categories: “barbarism *and* civilization have fused, that coordinating conjunction *or* which separated them no longer makes sense, they are now indiscernible.^{iv} The author even coins the term “civilibarbarie” [*civilibarbarism*] (477) to denote this dissolution of a dichotomy long-established in Argentinean literary productions. Thus, while in Sarmiento’s worldview (and in many of the works of the *gauchesca* genre written in Argentina)^v the Other is the barbarian *gaucho*, the past years have seen a swift in the understanding of the monstrous. Thus, in some examples, barbarism starts to be understood not as a quality of the outsider, but as belonging to the center of the country’s literary imagination. This tendency entails a self-exploration (a redefinition of who is ultimately the “us” in the dichotomy us/them) and an innovative perspective of Argentina where a middle-class *porteño* can be more barbarous than a brain-eating zombie.^{vi}

The numerous readings of Sarmiento's text, together with a changing perception of history, culture, and tradition, have allowed the notions of civilization/barbarism to evolve from a reductionist binary into an informed understanding of the complexity of Argentinean identity, becoming key concepts in the cultural, historical, and literary analyses of the country's productions. The novels and short stories being analyzed in this chapter inscribe these binaries into a modern production of literature of terror informed by a "self-consciousness about its own nature" (Spooner 23) that characterizes contemporary Gothic texts. Some of the texts reflect on the dichotomy civilization/barbarism by reproducing it, recreating a self-conscious "writing of Otherness," while other works challenge this dichotomy, either by reversing it or by undoing it altogether.

Civilization vs. barbarism

El terror argentino, the collection of Argentinean short stories written during the 19th and the 20th century, was published in 2002. As a retrospective view on Argentinean Gothic from the 21st century, some of the texts chosen reproduce a traditional conception of the civilized and the barbaric—tellingly, the first story in the volume is Echeverría's "El matadero." In some of the texts, such as Manuel Mújica Lainez's "El hambre" [The Hunger], Germán's Rozenmacher's "Cabecita negra" [Little Black Head], and Lázaro Covadlo's "Llovían cuerpos desnudos" [It's Raining Naked Bodies], the pervasive and overwhelming violence is inscribed within the narration of Argentinean history. "El hambre" (originally published in 1950) imagines the extreme circumstances that may have brought settlers to perform acts of cannibalism during the first settlement of Buenos Aires in 1536. "Cabecita negra" (originally published in 1961) also represents an attempt at reading the country's history and cultural constructions in terms of its cultural terrors. The

short story reproduces the Argentinean archetypal fear that barbarism (represented by the *federales* in the 19th century and the *negros* in the 20th century) causes in civilization (Gandolfo and Hojman 159). European immigration to Argentina and the practical extinction of the indigenous and Afro-Argentine peoples during the second part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries facilitated the preponderance of images of whiteness which were “instrumental in the establishment and reproduction of a regime of racial domination that subordinated lower-class people with indigenous, mestizo and, to a lesser extent, African ancestry” (Aguiló 178). With the emergence of Peronism (1946-1955), a political movement based on the legacy of Juan Domingo Perón and his second wife, Eva Perón, these discourses of homogeneity and uneven social structure began to be contested politically. This movement mobilized the masses that had moved to Buenos Aires from the provinces to look for work, generating anxieties within the capital’s middle and upper classes that were expressed through racialization. Terms such as *cabecita negra* and, simply, *negro* (black) were used to refer to mestizo people. These designations “did not simply entail dark skin, but also ... a provincial and working-class background, lack of civility and appropriate social behavior, and a political allegiance to Perón” (Aguiló 179). This civilized terror or provincial barbarism is embodied in the main character of Rozenmacher’s story, a conservative middle class man whose home is invaded by what he perceives as a black man and a black woman.^{vii} This narrative reproduces the horror trope of the home invasion while also representing a homegrown type of historical terror.^{viii}

“Llovían cuerpos desnudos” (originally published in 2000) reenacts another violent era in the country’s history that returns to haunt the protagonist in the form of trauma: Marcelo, the protagonist and narrator, is traumatized by his experience during the country’s military dictatorship. The *coup d’état* of 1976 was followed by the *Proceso* in which

“disappearances” of political opponents were frequent. During these years, it became common practice to throw bound and/or drugged people into the Río de la Plata from military planes. Marcelo suffers from constant visions of naked bodies falling from the sky, which leads him to eat and drink too much and to hit his wife, eventually leading her to suicide. The impossibility of forgetting a traumatic past, which in turn generates violence in the present, is the main theme of the text, which becomes an example of Gothic resources projected upon Argentinean history. In this sense Marcelo’s trauma, which traps him between a violent past and an uncomfortable present, mirrors the country’s division on how to approach the memory of the dictatorship in institutional terms. While some demand a (re)opening of the criminal archives in order to try in court government officials responsible for human rights violations, others advocate for simply moving on (Dinardi 217).

These short stories reinterpret the country’s past by means of its terrors, configuring a narrative tradition that reflects societal violence and fears. As barbarism is associated with the first Spanish settlers of the 16th century, the *federales* of the 19th, as well as both mestizos and the forces of Jorge Rafael Videla in the 20th century,^{ix} brutality is revealed as a feature intrinsic to the history of the country. The presence of violence in Argentina’s historical identity has, of course, been insinuated before: in *Facundo*, Sarmiento also considered the concept of terror as key to understanding the politics of barbarism in the 19th century. While depicting Rosas as a monster, the author inaugurates a literary practice which makes use of Gothic strategies to represent historical and political terror (Ansolabehere 3). In a similar way, *El terror argentino* recuperates texts which describe some of the most violent events of the country’s past and, while reinscribing them in the

context of the Gothic, highlights the presence of barbaric terror as an essential feature of Argentina's history.

Civilibarbarism... and zombies

Younger generations of Argentinean writers seem to have engaged in an active undoing of the dichotomies separating civilization and barbarism: "Before, one of the two terms was often challenged in some way, but today's post-dictatorship literature brings along something painfully new: the realization that this antinomy has lost all meaning" (Drucaroff 478). The alienation experienced by contemporary Argentineans who write after the dictatorship, but during the remnants of the economic crisis results in a distressing undoing of structures:

In the Argentina of the defeated democracy, the security forces and the crime forces are one and the same and corruption is not an exception but a structural mode for political action; savage capitalism presents crime as naturalized to the very poor and the very rich, and doesn't even give any reasonable objectives to give meaning to life to the rest, especially to young people. (Drucaroff 484)

Some authors of the younger generation read this disillusionment in Gothic terms. Mariana Enríquez, one of the young Argentinean authors who is working in the field of terror, has in fact affirmed that "the Argentinean reality is Gothic" (qtd. in Drucaroff 297). So far, Enríquez has published four compilations of short stories: *Cómo desaparecer completamente* [How to Disappear Completely] (2004), *Los peligros de fumar en la cama* [The Dangers of Smoking in Bed] (2009), *Chicos que vuelven* [Boys Who Return] (2010), and, more recently, *Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego* [Things We Lost in the Fire] (2016). Because of limited space I will focus on the latter, which reproduces a type of terror

originating in the reality of social injustice, everyday sexism, and a silenced past that refuses to disappear. Most of the stories are narrated by female characters with different backgrounds, such as unhappy wives and mothers, madwomen, witches, repressed lesbians, and victims of hate crimes against women. All of them live in an imperfect, patriarchal society that oppresses them in distinct ways. In “Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego,” the eponymous story of the anthology, a group of female activists decide to burn themselves as a sign of protest after several women are burned alive by their partners. The story is reminiscent of the witch burnings of the Inquisition, but offers a reinterpretation of this history: “Siempre nos quemaron. Ahora nos quemamos nosotras. Pero no nos vamos a morir: vamos a mostrar nuestras cicatrices” [They have always burned us. Now we burn ourselves. But we won’t die: we will show our scars] (Enríquez 192). The re-appropriation of history underlies both the barbarism inherent in the old structures of power and its continuation within civilized societies.

In “Nada de carne sobre nosotras” [No Flesh on Us], the unnamed narrator takes home a skull that she finds in the street and obsesses over it to the point that she plans to steal bones from mass graves in order to give it a body. The story offers a commentary of both anorexia (the protagonist aspires to be as thin as her friend, the skull) and of Argentina’s violent past: “Todos caminamos sobre huesos, es cuestión de hacer agujeros profundos y alcanzar a los muertos tapados” [All of us walk on bones, it’s just a question of drilling deep enough to reach the covered dead] (Enríquez 129-30). In “Tela de araña” [Spider web], an unhappy wife tells the story of her trip to Corrientes (in Northeastern Argentina) to see her family and the events that take place between there and Asunción (Paraguay), where they choose to travel to from Corrientes. The narrator is married to Juan Martín, an uptight, privileged, and oppressive *porteño* whom she despises, but is unable to

leave. His character is portrayed in opposition to that of Natalia, the narrator's beautiful and tolerant cousin, who is described as a benevolent witch. The plot revolves around several dichotomies intrinsically connected to Argentinean identity and history. While Juan Martín represents civilization's fear of barbarism, the privilege of the aristocracy living in Buenos Aires, as well as the oppressive patriarchal order, Natalia embodies everything that this order fears: she is free, powerful, sexual, and refuses to be subjugated, all of which incite Juan Martín to call her a "puta" [whore] (Enríquez 110). The urban background of both the narrator and her husband contrast with the provincial and uncivilized realities that they experience, such as the market in Asunción, a hotel in Clorinda (Formosa) with no warm water, and the difficult roads crossing the jungle. The caricatured portrayal of Juan Martín offers an intelligent mockery of traditional perceptions of the civilization of the city (versus the barbarism of the provinces), which yet again highlights the meaninglessness of the distinction.

These women's stories are set in a background of social inequality, which becomes an all-pervading presence haunting them in the form of violence, ghosts, and unnamed monsters. In Enríquez's "Bajo el agua negra" [Under the Black Water], a district attorney is trying to find enough evidence to convict a policeman accused of killing two teenage boys by throwing them into the Riachuelo, a river in Southern Buenos Aires. Even though Riachuelo is considered one of the most contaminated places in the world, 20,000 people reside near the river basin, 60% of whom live in territory which is considered unsuitable for human habitation (Walsh). In Enríquez's narrative, social injustice and the Gothic are intertwined: if the real children currently living in this area are ill (Urdinez), in the story they are grotesquely malformed; if the river is a wasteland of pollution and toxic waste, in the fictional account it is also home to a Lovecraftian demigod who is awoken by one of

the teenage boys thrown into the river. Moreover, just like Covadlo's "Llovían cuerpos desnudos," this story situates the source of barbaric terror in the abuse of power by the authorities. From a contemporary perspective, Enríquez seems to suggest that brutality has never stopped being a part of Argentinean reality.

Leandro Ávalos Blacha also belongs to a younger generation of authors who uses the Gothic to effectively undo the dichotomy civilization/barbarism while offering a social commentary of contemporary Argentina. In 2007, the author published *Berazachussetts*, a zombie novel which won the Indio Rico award in 2007.

Zombies are perhaps one of the most interesting Gothic monsters to be analyzed from a binary perspective: while they physically represent everything Other, their recent use in globalized media make them subversive figures that remind us of our own monstrosity. Because of their abject bodies and their liminal existence (halfway between life and death, human and monster), the living dead "is always the alienated, the foreigner. And it brings out our fear of the outsider" (Fernández Gonzalo 25). On the other hand, zombies have been used in contemporary narratives as an unwieldy reminder of human monstrosity and, more specifically, of the atrocities brought about by globalized capitalism: "Zombies are us: figures of unproductive expenditure, too slow, lumbering and inflexible to cope, too corporeal and disconnected to be anything other than the jetsam of a virtual dematerialisation entailed in the flight of globalisation" (Botting 196). In this context, zombies become contemporary metaphors for an excess of representation (*too* slow, *too* corporeal, *too* abject), the emptiness of postmodern existence and, ultimately, ourselves.

In *Berazachussetts*, four friends walking in a forest stumble upon an unconscious semi-naked punk girl leaning on a tree. After deciding to take her to their apartment, they find that she is not a normal girl, but a zombie called Trash^{xi} who likes to keep leftovers

from her flesh-eating banquets in Tupperware containers. This scene demonstrates the bitter sarcasm that characterizes the whole novel that, with each description of a new character, evolves into the grotesque. Some of these characters are Periquita (a disabled girl and an extortionist), Francisco Saavedra (a corrupt politician), and Arévalo (the sadistic son of Saavedra, who enjoys torturing the homeless), among others. The currency in use in Berazachussetts is the “patachussetts.” This name is reminiscent of the *patacón*, the voucher that the Buenos Aires authorities issued between 2001 and 2002 as an alternative currency in an attempt to alleviate the economic crisis by covering the absence of money circulation. Other names are also invented and often correspond to a parody of globalization: Longchamps Élysée (a hybrid between Longchamps, a city north of Buenos Aires, and the Champs-Élysées in Paris), Boedimburgo (Boedo, a working-class neighborhood of the capital, and the Spanish name for Edinburgh), Rin del Plata (as in *Río de la Plata*), Ezpeletámesis (Ezpeleta, in Quilmes, and the Spanish name for the river Thames), Pehuajóollywood (Pehuajó, a *partido* in the province of Buenos Aires, and Hollywood). The imagined chronotope of the novel is both international and parodical.^{xiii}

In *Berazachussetts*, the realization that “zombies are us” is only the starting point of the narration. Trash is not a villain, but a protagonist, and is much less monstrous than her human counterparts. Susana murders her husband, Milka kills an old lady by covering her with cement, and the Ligestri couple sings lullabies to the empty crib of their dead baby, whom the wife nurses when it comes back to life as a zombie. Barbarism and death are defining features of Ávalos Blacha’s invented reality which, ultimately, is nothing but a metaphor for contemporary Buenos Aires. These stories are centered around characters who live in the author’s interpretation of the Argentinean capital, offering a grotesque metaphor of social life in the city before the 2001 crisis in which zombies are much less threatening

than corruption, class inequality, and an unavoidable social disaster waiting to happen. The novel makes use of the absurd and the grotesque to completely undermine the dichotomy civilization/barbarism by highlighting the viciousness at the core of civilization. The 2001 economic crisis was not the consequence of a brutal outsider, but a product of the uncontrolled and barbaric capitalist aspirations of banks and financial capital, and the violent politics aimed at protecting businesses (Drucaroff 481). It is by revealing this fact that *Berazachussetts* becomes both a subversive zombie narrative and an intelligent commentary of contemporary Argentinean history.

An examination of some of the Gothic narratives written in Argentina during the past seventeen years reveals a fascinating shift in the literary representation of self and Otherness with regard to the dichotomy civilization/barbarism. While some of the authors use the mode to reproduce a historical fear of the outsider such as the *federales* or the mestizos, others make use of the Gothic to fictionalize a dreadful recognition of the barbaric within the core of the country's social and political institutions: the military, the government, and capitalism.

These writers' Gothic texts expose the dark corners of the nation's mixed identity, situated in an ambiguous realm defined by future hopes and past violence, by the existence of both the European and the native, by the "imported" civilized and the native barbaric, and, ultimately, by representing a collapse of these oppositions.

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ⁱ Rather than presenting a complete account of contemporary Argentinean horror literature, a project which would be overambitious for a single contribution, this chapter offers a heterogeneous selection of texts published during the 21st century in the attempt to expose some of the current trends of the mode in the country. Authors not included for the sake of space are, among others, Diego Muzzio, Alejandro López, Pablo De Santis, Sebastián Basualdo, Gustavo Nielsen, and Carlos Chernov.

ⁱⁱ Among all the novels published in the last thirty years on the Argentinean Dirty War, or the period of state terrorism from 1976 to 1983, Nogueroles stresses the importance of Liliana Heker's *El fin de la historia* [The End of History] (1996), Sara Rosenberg's *Un hilo rojo* [A Red Thread] (1998), Luis Gusmán's *Villa* (1995) and Martín Kohan's *Dos veces junio* [Twice June] (2002). It might also be relevant to point out that this topic is also explored by Julio Cortázar in a rather Gothic manner in "Apocalipsis en Solentiname" [Apocalypse in Solentiname].

ⁱⁱⁱ I use "Fantasy writing" as an umbrella term encompassing the Fantastic, the Gothic, the Uncanny, Science Fiction and the Marvelous.

^{iv} The emphasis is the author's.

^v The *gauchesca* literature is a subgenre which uses the figure of the *gaucho* (a cowboy of the prairies of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, southern Brazil and southern Chile) as the central figure. The narratives normally took place in open spaces, like the Argentinean *Pampa*, and were written by authors who sometimes romanticized (and somehow *othered*) the figure of the gaucho.

^{vi} *Porteño* is a term commonly applied to people from the city of Buenos Aires. Its origin is the word *puerto* [port].

^{vii} For an in-depth analysis of 21st century literary representations of race, I recommend reading Ignacio Aguiló's "Tropical Buenos Aires."

^{viii} Julio Cortázar's famous "Casa tomada" (1946) also reproduces this trope, as it has been argued by numerous critics, to present an anti-Peronist allegory.

^{ix} Jorge Rafael Videla was dictator of Argentina from 1976 to 1981.

^x The author herself admits that the story quotes H. P. Lovecraft (Velasco).

^{xi} Trash is a *zombified* version of a character appearing in Dan O'Bannon's 1985 film *The Return of the Living Dead* (García); through this reference, the author acknowledges the filmic zombie tradition while adapting it to a new context. Trash's humanity can also be interpreted as an intrinsically *Romerian* evolution of the zombie figure. In Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985), the director had played with the idea of a humanized zombie, personified in the domesticated Bub.

^{xii} In an interview with Facundo García for the periodical *Página/12*, the author ascribes this global quality of the novel's references to an aspiration of *Europeanness* which he sees as characteristic of Argentinean cities: "In their attempt to become what they're not, [the characters] end up being grotesque. And this links to the widespread notion that we, as Argentines, are the 'most European country of Latin America'. All it takes is

a little rain for the old ladies to say 'Buenos Aires looks like London!'; when it overflows 'it looks like Venice!' We never look inwards to find what we are, we just imitate." The international spaces reimagined by the story thus represent both Ávalos Blacha postmodern take on the zombie narrative and his understanding of Argentinean urban identity.