

**Homoerotic Ghosts in *Dona Flor and her Two Husbands, Even the Wind is Afraid, and
Undertow*¹**

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Ghost stories are commonly associated with the Gothic genre. The ghost, according to Dorothy Scarborough, “is the most modern of ancients and the most ancient of moderns. [...] Ghosts, whether regarded as conjecture or purely subjective, are closely related to the percipient’s thoughts. [...] Tis in ourselves that ghosts are thus so!” (65). However, if ghosts are thus a part of us, one would expect that out of the religious syncretism which emerged from the blending of African and indigenous religions with European Christianity we might see the Latin American ghost occupy a place not only within the gothic genre, but also within that of magical realism, since both genres coexist in Latin American cultures. Magical realist films, such as *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* and *Undertow*, invariably share a rural context, while Gothic films, including *Even the Wind is Afraid*², are remarkable for their tendency to feature capital city dwellers of a European mindset trapped within a threatening natural setting. In my view, the pre-Colombian past haunts us through magical realism in the sense that we are both empowered

¹ Original titles: *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos*, *Hasta el viento tiene miedo* and *Contracorriente*. All translations and photos are mine.

² Javier-Fuentes León, director of *Undertow*, supports this view and says ghosts “are present in Latin American literature and cinema. People are dead and somehow they reappear in a way that is not freaky. [...] They just appear and sit down with you and have breakfast, you know? [...] There is this mix of beliefs in saints, ghosts” (Critics’ Choice Video). He then goes on to discuss magical realism texts such as *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*, *Pedro Páramo*, and those by Gabriel García Márquez and states that these helped him to tell the kind of story that appears in *Undertow*. On the other hand, not all Latin American texts use the context of the spiritual-religious hybridity of the pre-Colombian beliefs; there are many gothic texts in the European style which describe the encounter between civilization (science) and barbarism (magic and spiritualism), in which the latter embodies a malignant and threatening image of death or monstrosity so as to justify its destruction from an imperialist perspective. This is a colonized view of the past and it creates violence against ourselves or others when we do not fit the western standards of their civilization. With regard to the gothic, Richard Greene, for example, affirms that “the state of being undead is bad. [...] Undead is generally regarded as being worse than dead” (4); the message being that there is nothing more abject than death. This interpretation is corroborated by western culture’s mission to prolong life and deny the rights of death in cases of even the most hopeless states of ill-health.

and assisted by its ghosts. This sense of belonging to a ghostly community whose ideas and powers we share gives us our history and identity. However, as acculturated mestizo people, this past can also seem threatening when viewed through the lens of western gothic convention, which demonizes such ghosts as part of the abject and evil barbarism we have to overcome if we are to take our place within civilized society. If we accept that there are both magical realist and gothic tendencies in Latin American films that cast the Other as a ghost, we might ask ourselves how this marriage of genres works within *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*, *Even the Wind is Afraid*, and *Undertow* and against what sets of circumstances their various ghosts appear. One striking point in common is that they all include the manifestation of homoerotic ghosts that are capable of loving from beyond the grave and which may only be accessed by the living through a love connection. In so doing, they deal with forbidden encounters with the Other within a filmic space.

As all individuals come to accept the norms of the adult society to which they belong, the polymorphous nature of infant love is cast aside. However, “in all of us,” writes Sigmund Freud, “throughout life, the libido normally oscillates between male and female objects; the bachelor gives up his men friends when he marries, and returns to club-life when married life has lost its savour” (*Sexuality* 134). This is precisely the issue for Vadinho, the first husband of Dona Flor; he abandons her on their wedding night to hang out with his friends at a gambling joint, and even returns to a brothel in the expectation of a farewell party. Groping the behind of his dwarf dance-partner,³ he declares that “Vadinho will never say goodbye.” As male figures, both Vadinho in *Dona Flor* and Miguel in *Undertow* are husbands that make mothers of their wives and then

³ It is important to be aware of the comparative significance of scenes displaying male and female behinds in this film, suggesting, as they do, that the anal stage may be prolonged. In a film that is ostensibly heterosexual, even a prostitute is hailed as having a “divine backside.”

escape their control by way of lies. In the case of the adolescent Andrea in *Even the Wind*, we learn through one of her classmates that “she didn’t want to grow up. She hated the idea of growing and because of this she never menstruated.” Ghosts thus appear to resolve in some measure this polymorphous latent desire, and, given that filmic space imitates dreams, they can introduce a spirit of tolerance that extends beyond the boundaries of real space. Therefore, love triangles involving a ghost are one means of bypassing the censors of normative behavior on an internal as well as external level.

In his *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault reminds us that “marriage is that rigorous moral that some defend and which demands a monopoly of pleasure; but which pleasures are permitted and which are excluded are barely mentioned” (164). These pleasures, while remaining thus unspecified are, however, understood by society and this unarticulated demarcation of correct and incorrect sexual activity is a defining force in the way we behave and the norms we observe. Such veiled control, according to Freud, produces civilization because certain desires become repressed and have to be sublimated in some manner through art, work, or lifestyle. These expressions of repressed libido are common to homoerotic desire and can be observed in the protagonists of *Dona Flor and her Two Husbands* (1976), *Even the Wind is Afraid* (2007), and *Undertow* (2009). In order to understand the problem presented by complicated love relationships, whether these be consummated or ideal, we will make use of Robert J. Sternberg’s theory of the love triangle in the three films that form the basis of this study. According to this theory:

Love can be understood as a triangle (which should not be confused with a “love triangle” of three people), of which each point is one of these components: intimacy (the top point of the triangle), passion (the left-hand point), and

decision/commitment (the right-hand point). A substantial body of evidence suggests that the components of intimacy, passion and commitment play a key role in love over and above other attributes. (5)

In the eyes of Steinberg, social norms demand that these three qualities be the exclusive right of our partner and none other. However, one feature of a magical realist and gothic filmic space is that we may break with any type of norm that takes our fancy and still not end up in a prison, mental hospital, or six feet beneath the ground, a point clearly articulated by Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (1976). Correspondingly, in each of the three films we have characters that are subjected to the areas of confinement mentioned above; however, they succeed in breaking free, and this rupture will be explored more fully in due course.

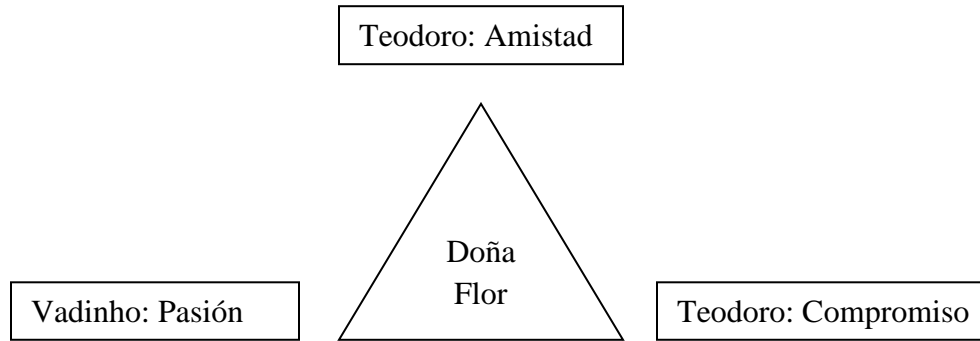
***Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (1976)**

This film is Bruno Barreto's faithful Brazilian adaptation of the novel of the same name, written in 1966 by the director's compatriot, Jorge Amado. The story presents a masculine and heterosexual perspective on the nature of feminine desire and classifies women clearly as either whores or madonnas. The story is narrated through the memories of Flor, and these reveal her frustrated desire to be a limitless and uncontrollable force, a feeling expressed in a song from the film called: "O que será – Trilha Sonora" ["What Will It Be"] (1976) by Simone Bittencourt de Olivera. This song introduces the main topic of the story: love has no limits. As the protagonist, Flor is young, pretty, an expert cook and, according to her, an ardent lover through the tutoring

of Vadinho.⁴ He dies early in the film, a victim of his own revelry, and in the opening scene we see him surrounded by friends cavorting about the streets in a sexually ambiguous manner; he is dressed as a woman but sports an enormous rag penis beneath his skirt. Upon his demise, Flor goes on to marry a man who, if sexually uninspiring, at least does not repeat Vadinho's habits of abandoning her for the company of his friends, beating the housekeeping money out of her for gambling, or cheating on her; instead, he offers her friendship, fidelity and economic security. However, she is not happy and confesses to the priest that she is prey to natural temptations of the flesh, which her friends declare is normal for a young woman.

Flor's problem is that she does not fit comfortably into either the category of whore or Madonna, as do many other characters within the film. We can see that she was unhappy with Vadinho, but so is she also with Teodoro, her second husband. Her sexual frustration in the second case is what spurs her unconsciously to call on Vadinho's ghost, and since no one else can see him, she is able to carry on as the respectable Dona Flor and resist the temptation of extra-marital affairs. Vadinho's comment to her that, "I am your husband and the first, and I have more rights ... here there is room for three," serves as a reminder of his libidinous tendencies, which, during life, were expressed in orgiastic parties with both male and female friends. The crucial problem for this modest woman is thus resolved with the following love-triangle:

⁴ This is an indication that sexual conduct is learned and that gender is a social construct. This concept is reflected in the two other films that focus on different stages of development, the first being *Even the Wind*, which focuses on adolescence, and *Undertow*, which deals with the gender expectations placed on an unborn child.

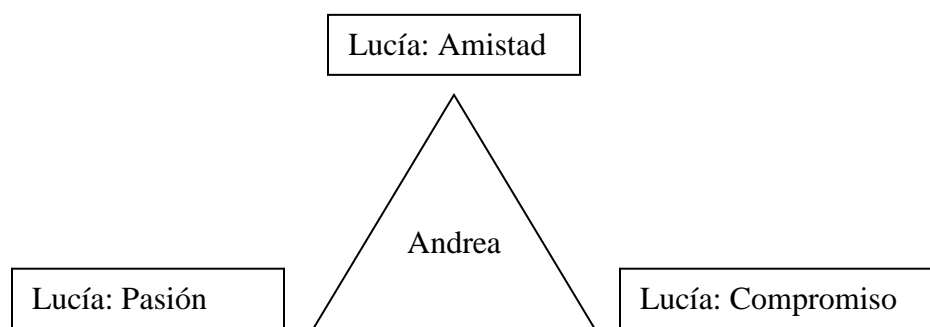


Even the Wind is Afraid (2007)

This is the first film by the Mexican director Gustavo Moheno, and it is a fairly liberal adaptation of the film of the same name directed and written by Carlos Enrique Taboada in 1968. In fact, Moheno wrote the script with three other people: Ángel Pulido, Alfonso Suárez Romero and a journalist called Mario Luis Pacheco Székely, who was responsible for publicizing another film entitled *The Other Family*, dealing with the adoption of children by a homosexual couple. This film could well have given him the idea of adapting Taboada's film into a story that highlights the difficulties experienced by those who engage in homosexual relations in the modern world.

The story is told through the eyes of Claudia, an adolescent whose dismay at not having the body of a model prompts her to attempt suicide by hanging herself from the second floor of an apartment on the outskirts of Mexico. Later in a hospital she attempts to cut her veins with a syringe and threatens to perform the same procedure on the doctor. As a result, her mother sends her to a rehabilitation center called Alquicira House. This facility caters for well-to-do young female patients, whose problems with anorexia, bulimia and other eating disorders constitute an extreme gesture of rebellion against the norms of a society that sets a high premium on the

beauty of the female body. The ghost of Andrea, a lesbian adolescent killed by Dr. Alquicira, takes possession of Claudia's body⁵ to avenge her death and to expose the fact that her supposed suicide was, in fact, murder spurred by jealousy. Andrea and Dr. Lucía Franyutti had been lovers, but Dr. Alquicira had wanted Andrea for herself. In Lucía, Andrea had discovered the three elements of love and refuses to rest in peace until she has Lucía once more at her side. In an impassioned address to Lucía, she declares, "We could have carried on together if Bernarda had not got in the way. Isn't that what you wanted, Lucía?" The two recover their happiness by reuniting in death, a condition that remained impossible for them within real space.⁶ Andrea withdraws from Claudia's body, who then leaves and takes her place within the social order. The lesbian love relationship exists within this triangle but becomes relegated to a gothic environment in which they may either remain locked inside a closet or center for rehabilitation, or else survive as ghosts that disturb reality:



⁵ When Claudia is possessed by Andrea, Claudia dyes her hair blonde to resemble Andrea who has European beauty and who is portrayed as an angel, the model Claudia wanted to be, and the reason why she tried to kill herself.

⁶ Given that Claudia tries to commit suicide and identifies with Andrea, it is worth noting that according to statistics, "queer teenagers are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide, and to accomplish it, than others, that up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be gay or lesbian; that a third of lesbian and gay teenagers say they have attempted suicide; that minority queer adolescents are at even more extreme risk." Pail Gibson, "Gay Male Lesbian Youth Suicide," US Department of Health and Human Services, Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide (Washington, D.C., 1989), vol. 3 pp. 110-142. (Sedgwick *Tendencies* 1)

Undertow (2009)

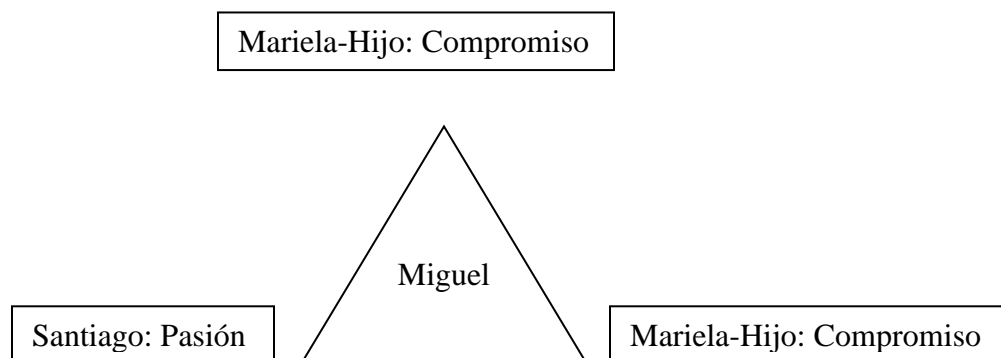
This is the first film written and directed by Javier Fuentes-León, who, after graduating in Medicine in Peru, was awarded a grant to study cinema in California, where he came out of the closet and began a new life. This autobiographical element is crucial because the film is presented from an honestly gay perspective, a feature that is reinforced in one interview when he revealed:

I have come out as an artist and a gay man. [...] *Undertow* is disguised as a ghost story and if people want to stay there, that's fine; but I really wanted it to be about Miguel's conscience and his struggle. The ghost of Santiago is the representation of that struggle and – as I mentioned earlier – Miguel's mentor. Once Miguel gains his integrity, he has to externalize it. He can't keep it inside himself.

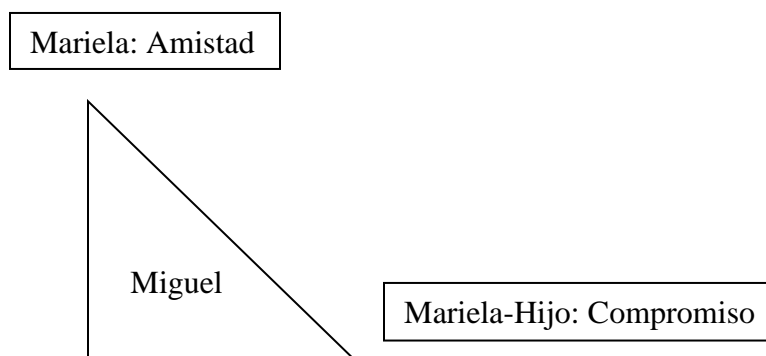
(Interviews 8)

This explains why we see the story from the perspective of Miguel, a fisherman from a very catholic village who, along with having a wife that is seven months pregnant, is also seeing a male lover that he keeps under wraps. The brand of religion practiced by the village is something of a hybrid in that although the villagers perform catholic rites over their dead and affirm that no spirit can rest in peace without God's blessing, they prefer to submerge the deceased in water rather than bury them under ground, a procedure we see in the opening scenes. Consonant with these beliefs, when Miguel's lover Santiago drowns in the sea surf, we find that his body must be found in order to prevent his ghost from walking among the living for all eternity. When Miguel is eventually able to locate the corpse, he ties it to a stone under the sea

and strives to keep up appearances in a similar manner as Dona Flor. The following triangle conveys the situation in *Undertow*:



However, this arrangement is disturbed when Santiago's body begins to float and is by chance found by Miguel's fishermen friends. He at first denies his love for Santiago, but finally comes to terms with his sexual identity when he understands his lover's words: "You're no queer, and you know why not? Because to be one, you need balls and you don't have them, asshole. You're a dirty coward that thinks that one cannot be a real man without a wife and children." Miguel finally carries Santiago's body at the funeral and reads the final rites before the whole community with the priest in attendance. Abandoned by his wife, Miguel does not know if she will ever forgive him, a condition which, along his acceptance of bisexuality and the disappearance of the ghost, results in a reconfiguration of his triangle:



In these three ghost story films, the ghost is located on the left side of passion and at the vertex, which is friendship or intimacy, indicating that they represent romantic love relationships. According to Sternberg, “in this type of love, the man and the woman are not only drawn physically to each other but are also bonded emotionally. This is the view of romantic love found in classic works of literature, such as *Romeo and Juliet*” (20). However, the existence of these feelings between two men and two women proves that queer love can also be romantic⁷ and that the circumstance or tragedy that separates such couples is the same as that which afflicts heterosexual ones. One such destructive circumstance is a competitive phobia on the part of one group that uses its belief that it is different as a way of justifying its superiority over another. Such an ideology is passed down through generations and is evidenced in the conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues and between orthodox heterosexuality in the face of homosexuality. In such conditions, commitment between couples is rendered impossible as much through internal as external pressure, since the ideology becomes internalized so that individuals believe that their homoerotic feelings are the result of willful choice and ought to be hidden within traditional and socially acceptable homosocial⁸ relationships.

As a consequence, the *leitmotif* of these films is *eros* (love and life) and *tanatos* (death and aggression): the impossible nature of romantic love results in melancholy though separation

⁷ Dr. Helen Fisher maintains that “gays and lesbians in all cultures also feel romantic passion [...] their brains [have] exactly the same human wiring and chemistry for romantic love as everybody else” (216) and that they suffer more as a result of the obstacles they encounter in this kind of relationship. It is worth noting that this opinion is shared by the actor Manolo Cardona, as he made clear after making the film, according to one piece of video footage.

⁸ The adjective homosocial “is applied to men’s and women’s bonds [...] There are strong male homosocial bonds throughout the heterosexual erotic ethos. [...] Male homosocial desire is within the structural context of triangular heterosexual desire” (Sedgwick *Between* 16). The rivalry or competition between two men for one woman is, for René Girard, a form of admiration and mimesis between males that is strengthened by the role of the woman. See: *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Gayle Rubin also speaks of how men conserve and retain power by exchanging women among fathers and sons-in-law, which suggests a trafficking of women. In Latin American culture, as David William Foster reminds us, there exists a male bonding similar to the godmother-mother relationship with “various manifestations of physical intimacy” (69) which has perhaps been passed down from indigenous cultures and their “ritual homosexuality and pansexual eroticism” (3).

from the love object. This means that the films have a circular-mythical structure, like the image of the *uroboren* or the snake that bites its own tail, representing the cycle of death and life. We may observe in *Dona Flor* that Vadinho dies at the beginning of the film dancing in a carnival that celebrated life; however, he is revived in ghostly form, and at the end of the story we are left with the image of Flor emerging very happily from a church on the arms of both her dead and living husbands. In *Even the Wind*, on the other hand, Claudia shifts from a position of weakness, in which she attempts suicide through a belief that no one will love her without the body of a supermodel, to one of strength, whereby she is finally capable of learning to love herself. In so doing, she is able to recover from her anorexia and experiences menstruation, which she calls “lifeblood.” In *Undertow* the first image of the pregnant Mariela represents a symbol of life, after which the camera turns its attention to a knocking at the door of Miguel’s cousin, who has recently died. In this case, the ending is more melancholic because the lovers are not reunited as they are in the other two films; instead, they part with a kiss and Miguel releases Santiago’s body into the sea, which, as well as conforming to his religious beliefs, also returns his body to the natural maternal womb in the hope of rebirth within less homophobic times.

For Freud, the human being is possessed of an ambivalent psyche that manifests itself in the instinct for life (*eros*) and the instinct for death (*tanatos*); however, we sometimes fail to achieve a successful balance between the two because we are born prematurely against our will with the consequence that:

There is dependence upon, and submission to, authority figures prior to the emergence of sexuality. [...] Human beings, at the level of desire, identify with political authority. From this angle, civilization is generally secure in enforcing a truce between desire and control. Sexual and aggressive passions are turned back

upon individuals with vengeance by social institutions, thereby a sense of guilt, anxiety and unhappiness into the human condition. (Elliot 44-5)

This explains why there exists a power dynamic between couples in which one partner turns on the other in an act of defiance against bourgeois social norms. The degree to which one accepts the control of such norms varies and is an indicator that they are imposed rather than natural. As Sarah Ahmed maintains, “One is not born, but becomes straight” (79) and we might add that whoever rebels will have a ghostly existence because s/he is excluded from the community. In each of the three films, those who love are violent towards their partner because one of them has, more than the other, internalized fear in accordance with prevailing social norms of patriarchy, heterosexuality, and hierarchy. Besides, heteronormativity “demands that the loss of queer love must not be grieved: such loss might not even be admitted as loss, as the possibility of such love is out of reach” (Judith Butler in Ahmed 91); it is the love of ghosts, the undead, or, as Oscar Wilde declared, what cannot be named. Even now it is condemned to exist in a parallel world which, it would seem, horrifies more than just a few.

Consequently, we may observe conflicting dynamics of power played out in the relationship between Flor and Vadhino, who depends on his wife like a child and in one scene is even seen in a bib at the breakfast table. However, he hits and insults her when she refuses to give him money so that he might go and play with his friends, an example of the way in which he rebels against all the norms of society. Soon after this outburst, he is driven by guilt to serenade Flor outside the window and to give her a present, two conventional gestures for which he has no respect. As we can see, this film is a prime example of the ways in which patriarchal structure can allow a man to play a double standard when he is alive, while the woman, in the

shape of Flor, can only put an end to her anxiety and unhappiness through nothing more adventurous than the ghost of her first husband.

An imbalance of power is evident also in *Even the Wind*. Prior to the action of the film, Andrea was a student, while Lucía, a doctor of nutrition and gynecology within the establishment, is the partner within the relationship that internalized social norms more with the result it took her longer to reciprocate Andrea's love. Andrea thus emerged as the more aggressive defender of love before Doctor Alquicira, expressing an intensity which even drives her to return as a ghost to claim justice, thereafter to take her place with Lucía⁹ once more. When Claudia arrives at the institution, we find other young female boarders incessantly insulting one another and, during various bouts of self-starvation, engaging in self-harm; one girl, Josefina, cuts herself on the insides of the legs, saying that it was an act of Andrea and not herself. Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla has observed that "repetition, or the unconscious representation, reveals the presence of the real" (78); likewise, the girls are constantly acting out Andrea's rebelliousness in a bid to resist the social norms expected of women: biology is their destiny. Menstruation means that they are rendered capable of having children and signals a point at which society demands separation from friends and the search for a husband with whom to initiate motherhood. The alternative to this fate is to take on one or more deviant roles, including that of rebel, invalid, mental case, drug addict, nymphomaniac, bulimic or anorexic, and to then

⁹ Andrea appears not to have read any self-help book where science recommends forgetting a grievance along with religion and, since human justice does not work, wait for that God to bring about justice on the day of judgment. Dr. Daphne Rose Kingma, for example, states that "though it can feel like passivity, letting go is in fact a shift in consciousness that's a critical part of how you will solve the problem" (70). Silencing a murderer does not, I believe, provide a solution to crimes committed against lesbian girls without families. The lack of any kind of confrontation is what is brought out in these films. As Sedgwick observes, there exists a "complicity of parents, of teachers, of clergy, even of the mental health professions in invalidating and hounding kids who show gender-dissonant tastes, behavior, and body language" (*Tendencies 2*).

be rehabilitated with through a cocktail of confinement, pills and discipline.¹⁰ In such a climate of oppression, the inmates of Alquicira House are under perpetual observation, numbering, as they do, among those that have slipped the net of family control in the same spirit, if not manner, as Vadinho.

Finally, in *Undertow* we also find an unequal power relationship between Miguel, a poor fisherman, and Santiago, a high-class painter and photographer. The former, however, is dependent on his wife-mother and, like Vadinho, uses lies to escape from his house to meet up with his lover, who is open about his homosexuality. Their meetings are conducted in hidden, dark and out-of-the-way places as if the lovers were ghosts seeking refuge from the watchful and disapproving eye of the social status quo. We learn that Miguel hides his homoerotic desire through fear of being rejected like Santiago, who, alive or dead, belongs to another dimension from which he operates both inside and outside the community, and even Miguel attacks and mistreats him when he offers Miguel a present. Santiago's response to this rejection is to take photos and paint pictures of Miguel so that he at least has images of his lover that he may enjoy in his own secret place. Santiago's pain is that he must always pretend that there is nothing between them, thereby complying with the wishes of Miguel, whose cruelest act of violence is to deny the relationship even after his lover's death.

The confluence of *eros* and *tanatos* also has a religious context in these films, and the ghosts repudiate "the clear delineation of the domains of the living and the dead," according to Colin Davis (157), which affords them a space within a Latin American hybrid of spiritualism and Catholicism. In one instance in *Dona Flor*, the word 'defunct' is used to describe Vadinho's

¹⁰ Marilyn Yalon declares that no one should be surprised that women are rebelling "against patterns that have been around for more than two millennia. [Starting with] Hebrews, and later Christians and Muslims" (1-2) we have the religious and historical myths that have laid the foundations for the continuing dependence of women and their role as property of the patriarchy within the tribe.

dead body “unlike corpse, *defunct* contains both body and spirit ... [It] suggests a premodern connection with the dead, a kind of colonial specter roaming in the dark semantic recesses of the word” (Moser 88); in addition, the Brazilian traditions of the Bay of Candomblé, which connect the living people with their beloved ancestors, are evident in the custom of Vadinho and his friends to always dress in white as testament to their membership of the brotherhood. One friend in the group also hands Flor a bouquet of red roses, a symbol of passion, in the name of the deceased. Later, a mulato woman tells her that Vadinho is protected by the devil and must be resting in peace, upon which Flor removes the red ribbon from the wreath of flowers before dropping them on his tomb. His protector is Exú or Eleguá, a hermaphrodite Yoruba god that appears over doors and roads needing to be crossed. He presides over the sexual act like a playful god (Grönlund & Mills 167-8), and in this is perhaps similar to the Cupid of our western tradition, except that he does not deny physical pleasure. Vadinho thus returns to his ardent widow, and, on account of her attempt to send him back to the realm of the dead through a Candomblé ceremony, he emerges as the more determined of the two that they be reunited. A different set of influences prevail in *Even the Wind* since the film takes place in an urban Mexican context, and it is in this setting that Lucifer, the symbol of fallen Catholic-European angelhood, manifests himself to Andrea, a student who has fallen into sin. When Claudia falls from the tower and the angel gets broken, Andrea takes over her body in a manner comparable with diabolical possession. After one of the girls has convinced the others that it is possible to communicate with the dead using XIX century Ouija boards, we later see them calling out to Andrea in a spiritualist séance. This association of Andrea with the devil appears to be exorcised when Claudia returns to Lucía a cross on a chain that she had given Andrea as a present.

Afterwards, Lucía and Andrea reunite forever with the sacrifice, or suicide, of Lucía in the bathtub, the baptismal font of a possible rebirth.

Such an exaggerated Catholic context, although a hybrid as in the previous film, surfaces once more in *Undertow*. The director of art confesses to Fuentes-León, “I actually had to bring religious paraphernalia down from the walls [...] that tells you how much Catholic stronghold there was in Cabo Blanco” (*Interviews* 3). In addition to the religious paintings and images that we see on the walls and the purple candle of the purple Christ that Santiago gives as a present to Mariela for the day her baby is born, scenes are also used in a church in which both Mariela and Santiago read parts of the bible that speak precisely about forbidden passions. The most interesting allusion is the fact that Miguel is a fisherman like Jesus, the fisher of men, except that in this case the catch is a painter who has the face of Jesus. Close-ups of Santiago against a background of water suggest a similarity to the savior and it is through accepting his love for Santiago that Miguel will eventually achieve redemption. Miguel is initially depicted as if playing with fire, and the image of him standing before the stove with Mariela and Isaura with his pointy beard is reminiscent of the playful devil disguise of Vadinho and perhaps also of Judas, who refused to be an apostle and ended his life with betrayal and suicide. On the other hand, the funerals at sea are, according to Robinson Murphy, a form of reconciliation that “requires the cleansing properties of water” (496), like a baptism or a rebirth free of sin described in the Irish texts on homoeroticism by Colm Tóibín. Interestingly, this tradition does not exist in Cabo Blanco, but was instead the invention of the director who, from his gay experiences and his beliefs, created this rite. Owen Davis finds that in the neo-platonic conception there is an interconnection between living and dead spirits and concludes that “ghosts and angels served to demonstrate the workings of providence, in other words the direct guidance

of human affairs, while witches and evil spirits provided confirmation of the devil's constant attempts to undermine Christian Faith" (8). Therefore, Santiago's face against the sea and later his body indicate the redemption of homosexuality cleansed of sin on the condition that it receives the blessing of the whole community.

In the three films, ghosts are beings that challenge the boundaries of any epistemologically defined classification founded upon reason. Vadinho, Andrea, and Santiago are neither living nor dead, are neither exclusively male nor female, and are neither adults nor children. They own no special power on account of their social class, and can be identified as neither good nor evil. They are our reflection that acts as the double we would wish not to see and which we consider despicable for casting doubt on the positive image we have of our own identity. This image is associated exclusively with what is good through the conditioning of a society that has put western religion and scientific positivism in the service of progress and linear existence.¹¹ Marina Warner considers that the doppelgängers, doubles, alter egos, metaphorical beings and other outsiders "relate to your innermost, secret self, and act epiphanically to unveil you to the world – and to yourself" (164). As a result, in these films there are numerous representations of pictures, windows, doors and mirrors that help us to observe other aspects of ourselves that continue to live within the unconscious. Thus, we see Vadinho seated in a window frame with one foot inside the house and one outside, and with one hand within our vision and the other inside his underwear, beneath his navel. This image is typical of all ghosts that emerge from frames that seek to bind them within a fixed identity, and, for this reason, those among the

¹¹ Nowadays it is not unusual to find books in which science and religion go hand-in-hand and in which we are told what is normal in sex and what is not, according to God's mandate. We could cite Omar A. Hein in order to understand this type of study: "God, in addition to keeping us save from perverse men and strange women, gives us science, wisdom and intelligence in order to sweeten our lives and bring enjoyment to our sexuality by making it appealing and fun" (49).

living who also wish to step out of their “frames” must, in turn, see themselves first in a mirror in order to accept the unorthodox nature of who they are.

First, we have Dona Flor who comes to terms with her own desires through culinary language. Curiously, she remembers a cookery class in which students were asked what dish they should serve to a *gourmet*, and upon describing the ingredients, she ends by saying, “served is a young pretty widow.” This association indicates that oral eroticization is not just infantile or pre-genital, but that it continues to thrive with the same success as kissing does from its origin of breastfeeding. However, Freud states that in the first stage, “sexual activity has not yet been separated from the ingestion of food; nor are opposite currents within the activity differentiated. The object of both activities is the same; the sexual aim consists in the incorporation of the object – the prototype of a process which, in the form of identification, is later to play such an important psychological part” (*Three Essays* 64). Accordingly, the fact that Flor shares with Vadinho the erotic pleasure of eating prompts the viewer to question whether there really is an evolutionary linear process with respect to sexual desire and the accepted wisdom of the transition from oral to genital, or whether earlier behaviors survive. Grönlund and Mills comment, for example, that when Flor asks Vadinho if he likes caviar, he compares the taste to that of her “*boceta*, Flor’s little box” (176). She realizes that her desires cannot be confined within the limits of a box when she is washing her face and she sees herself in the mirror, a moment which is followed by a scene shot through the window in which we see her touching herself naked in bed.



The importance of seeing oneself in a mirror surfaces also in the dénouement of *Even the Wind*. In this case, the oval shape of the mirror is symbolic of the female. Lucía is naked in her steam-bath and cuts her wrist before she looks in the mirror and realizes that she resembles Andrea. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock has observed that within the anti-lesbian tradition, “women who desire women repeatedly find themselves derealized or vaporized by metaphors of spectrality” (110), a fate which succeeds in eliminating carnal scenes. In *Even the Wind*, however, as well as in the two other films, ghosts are able to touch their lovers.¹² Accordingly, in the three films we have a range of very tender scenes involving sexual acts, although it may be worth noting that what happens between Lucía and Andrea takes place beneath the sheets or under cover of steam. Be that as it may, Andrea, as a figure of tender carnal love, also takes on the role of mentor to Claudia when she encourages the young inmate to raise her self-esteem and cure her anorexia by looking at herself in the mirror and by loving her female body. Later, when

¹² Dorothy Scarborough has made a study of modern ghosts and notes that while classical ghosts were perceived through sight, sound and the sixth sense, “nowadays more points of contact are open to them and they haunt us through the touch, the smell, as well as sight and hearing ...” (Messent 109). Undoubtedly, we can add taste to this list, as evidenced in the films: *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (1976), *Como agua para chocolate* (1993), *Volver* (2006), among others.

she is under the influence of Andrea, she appears naked to her companions and this seeing of herself and being seen enables her to shed her fear of life.



In *Undertow*, there are the pictures and photographs of Santiago and a doorless entrance that functions like a window. We may observe that while Santiago seeks to preserve the past through his art, Miguel wishes to live without leaving any tracks, an impulse that turns out to be impossible since, as human beings, we are what we do. Thus, Miguel's attempt to deny his relationship with Santiago is futile, even though he takes active measures to erase his face from a painting using red paint, a color associated with love and pain. Never having posed for Santiago, he is astonished that there should be so many paintings of him. Only at the end does he have the courage to enter Santiago's studio and speak with his mother in order to request the body in the midst of an array of pictures all displaying his nudity. It is through Santiago that Miguel is finally able to accept himself as a homosexual at the moment when he dares to walk hand-in-hand with him in the full light of day.¹³

¹³ This scene shows the influence of Barreto's film in the one by Fuente-León, since in an interview he is on record as saying that the role of the gay in a triangular love affair, as in his film, is commonly that of a prostitute, and there is evidence of this in his first version or in the lover in the case of *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (6).



Thus in all three films we have the theme of certain characters recognizing various hidden sexual desires and becoming open about them and, to a greater or lesser extent, gaining acceptance for so doing. In the case of *Dona Flor*, we see a very traditional married woman who has always lived and worked within the dark confines of the home and whose sexual experiences are limited to those she has had with Vadhino. Conversely, her husband is able to sit astride the window, thereby demonstrating that he is able to be a public figure without totally abandoning the home, and while Flor may criticize him on account of such divided loyalties, she secretly yearns for the same. Upon becoming a widow, her blossoming shows that she is living up to the full promise of her name, a transformation for which her mentor, Vadinho, pays her an admiring compliment. Flor succeeds in becoming happy when she joins her husband in accepting the unbounded nature of desire, and she ends by walking out in full daylight on the arms of both her husbands.

In *Even the Wind*, there are also emphases on the effects of light and darkness as in the previous case, but here there is a tower that acts as a panoptic or lighthouse wherein the ghost of Andrea remains on permanent vigil. Although everywhere is shrouded in darkness, a light shining from Andrea's window forms a contrast with the surrounding gloom, and despite the

prevailing atmosphere of terror, discovering the secret of her death becomes a crucial step in the adolescents' ability to confront their fear of sexuality. Not only are the adolescents observed from outside, they observe each other from within, so that the watchful, controlling eye becomes also the look of desire in the Foucaultian sense. The book written by Dr. Alquicira called *Confrontation* communicates a grim irony that it was she, ultimately, who failed to put her own theory into practice and perhaps had only herself to blame for her eventual death by hanging, as did Judas. The symbol of light in *Undertow* is manifest in the lighter used by Isaura when discovering Santiago's pictures in the darkness, and the candle's purple color, a symbol of the queer community, perhaps represents the spiritual chakra or Jesus as the Lord of the Miracles / The Purple Christ who is brought out for processions, just as the procession that follows the funeral of Santiago. The key moment is when Miguel discovers that Santiago's candle, thrown out of the house by Mariela, remains lit in the sand throughout a dark night. With his son in his arms, Miguel promises that he will return to look for him after organizing Santiago's funeral with the community. In this way, he becomes an example for his son and for future generations, and it is the young people that gather around Miguel and help him to carry the body of Santiago/Jesus Christ.

These three stories could be considered filmic Bildungsroman on homoerotic desire at the hands of a ghostly guide or mentor that helps the protagonists understand that there is nothing perversely pathological or diabolical about having an intimate relationship with one of the same sex. There exists a range of stories within magical realism and the gothic genre that have similarly drawn attention to this social problem. Others related to the institutionalizing of social parameters have attempted to narrow and classify all anthropological and cultural knowledge into clear watertight categories, an endeavor that has proven not only to be impossible but also

the root cause of widespread suffering. The extent of this failure is conveyed within the three films, and whether we happen to subscribe to pre-Columbian or Christian doctrine, they each highlight the pervasiveness of our own religious beliefs. So it is that the cinema, with its myriad spectrum of images and sounds, enables us to experiment with our search for self-knowledge within a spiritual-religious context.

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