HISPANIC STUDIES
review

Route 303: On Science and Other Distanced Fictions, History, and Writing in Puerto Rico

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Abstract

Despite the utopian-futuristic inflections of the official narrative surrounding its twentieth-century political forms, and the aftermaths of an intense modernization process much impacted by Cold War politics and the Atomic Era, science fiction has been, until recently, relatively scarce in Puerto Rico, a territory once regarded as the U.S.'s "Showcase of Democracy." I examine here some aspects of the genre's (pre)history on the island, focusing on Wáshington Lloréns' *La rebelión de los átomos* (1960), generally considered the first short story collection in this modality within national literature. Based on a somewhat allegorical reading of its structure as reprising a peculiar dialectics of culture, politics, and identity, I consider the context of Lloréns' production during that critical period, some key reasons behind the absence of a stronger national SF tradition, and the implications of its recent flourishing. Towards the end of my discussion, I turn briefly to Eliseo Colón Zayas' *Archivo Catalina* (2000) and to Rafael Acevedo's *Exquisito cadaver* (2001), two novels that signaled the appearance of contemporary SF forms in the country. Taking Darko Suvin's and Fredric Jameson's theorizations as a point of departure, I explore how these imaginaries reframe the figure of the "broken showcase," while addressing what Jameson has called the "experience of the present" and its possible futures.

> El problema parecía ser la visión de este mundo como emanación de la trascendencia, siendo, según el cordero, todo lo contrario: una red de transhumanos/deidades puntuales generando entrañablemente ficciones de ser.
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> Aravind Enrique Adhantaya, "Ourumaru"

Rafael Acevedo has noted that the origins of Puerto Rico's novelistic tradition are "si no fantásticos, extraños, con permiso de Todorov. Nuestra primera novela es el relato de lo imposible. El cadáver fugado. Y queda esto como elemento residual" ("Divagaciones"). Acevedo, whose own work occupies a central position within the emerging field of science fiction production on the island, alludes with this to a foundational figure in national literature, the "padre y patriarca de las letras insulares" (Rivera de Álvarez 144), Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (1826-1882). Tapia, a prolific, cosmopolitan writer conversant with the work of Voltaire, Hoffmann, Verne, and the Spiritualist currents then in vogue, published, per Lidio Cruz Monclova's account, the earliest translation of an Edgar Allan Poe story in Spanish America in 1861 (Cruz Monclova 1). A few years later, he

would also produce two other singular texts: *Póstumo el transmigrado* (1872) and *Póstumo el envirginado* (1882), the later, itself, a posthumous work.

Tapia's two novels' sardonic play on Spiritualism, the transmigration of souls, and other *decadentista* fin-de-siècle motifs recalls the intersections of Gothic and what we would now call Science Fiction (SF) modalities that some years later would occupy *Modernistas* like Darío and Nervo, and separately or in combination leave their imprint, often under cover of the fantastic, throughout the Spanish American literary canon, as Luis Cano has argued (2006).[1] Though set in Madrid, Tapia's two "distanced fictions" still delivered, incidentally, "uno de los juicios más severos al gobierno imperante en el Puerto Rico decimonónico" (Fernández 21), even within the bounds of his reformist perspective.[2] Writing about contemporary "genre" literature on the island, Persephone Braham notes the unclassifiable hybridity of Tapia's novels, and what she characterizes as the "menosprecio" with which the author was for long regarded by the "literatos encargados del canon puertorriqueño," due, in part, to his lack of didacticism (36). At a foundational moment in national literature lies, then, a hybrid, distancing modality, a discomfiting and unhomely "residual element" often dismissed from the "casa literaria" or rehoused, for historical reasons, within more familiar contexts in the later tradition.[3]

The didactic angle is, as the above suggests, one of several relevant issues in considering the question of a Puerto Rican SF tradition—or, more precisely, the lack thereof— as I will do here, though from a slightly different and somewhat more temporally limited perspective. In recent years, Acevedo, Ángel A. Rivera, Emily Maguire, Braham herself, as well as other writers and scholars have opened new avenues of inquiry into these topics, marked at some level by the conundrum of a generic "absence." Rivera poses the question in these terms: "provoca curiosidad la ausencia de la ciencia ficción en uno de los países de Latinoamérica y del Caribe que con mayor celeridad experimentó la modernización y los efectos del desarrollo tecnológico y capitalista durante el siglo XX" ("Comunidades" 91).[4] In her contribution to a collection of essays

1 Both Ricardo Gutiérrez-Mouat (2004) and Pablo Brescia (2008) have identified the celebrated *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, first published in 1940 and edited by Borges, Ocampo, and Bioy Casares, as the point of origin for what could be called the momentous reframing of the Gothic and some forms of SF under the arguably more capacious and cosmopolitan label of the fantastic, a move of significant consequences in Latin American literary and cultural history.

2 I am referencing here Darko Suvin's 1977 notion of "distanced fiction" that, considered as a "macrocategory," as A.G. Steimberg indicates, encompasses fictions—ranging from the marvelous to the fantastic to science fiction—distanced in different manners and degrees from realist mimesis (Steimberg 121). In Suvin's definition: «La fiction peut donc se diviser selon la manière de mettre en lumière les rapports des hommes entre eux, et avec leur environnement. Si cette manière cherche à reproduire fidèlement les textures et les surfaces empiriques reconnues par les sens et par le sens commun, je propose de l'appeler *fiction* '*réaliste*.' Si, au contraire, on cherche à mettre ces rapports en lumière par la création d'un cadre formel radicalement ou nettement différent —un locus spatio-temporel ou des protagonistes différents, échappant à toute vérification empirique— je propose le terme de *fiction distanciée*» (*Poétique* 25). "Fiction can therefore be classified depending on how it treats the relations between human beings themselves and their environment. If it aims at faithfully reproducing the empiric textures and surfaces acknowledged by common sense and the senses, I propose calling it *'realist' fiction*. If, on the other hand, these relations are showcased through the creation of a distinct or radically different formal framework—a character or spatio-temporal presentation that escapes all empirical verification—I propose using the term *distanced fiction*." [My translation].

3 On Tapia and Spiritualism, see Saldivia-Berglund 37-47, and Fernández (2002). See Rivera (2013) for an analysis of Tapia's critical stance, in addition to Marta Aponte Alsina's classical essay "Póstumo interrogado: relectura de Tapia." Recent investigations, such as Héctor J. Martell Morales' 2016 study-anthology of Puerto Rican nineteenth century fiction, have helped revise conventional notions regarding the relation between the fantastic and national literature. Documenting a longer and much more robust tradition, Martell argues, for instance, that a story published in the *Aguinaldo puertorriqueño* of 1843 "inició la literatura fantástica no solo en Puerto Rico, sino en toda Hispanoamérica" (19).

4 As this article went into print, Ángel A. Rivera's new book, *Historia de la ciencia ficción en Puerto Rico*: *Heraldos de la catástrofe, el apocalipsis y el cambio,* was published in Puerto Rico under Rafael Acevedo's imprint, La secta

born out of the *Primer Congreso de Ciencia Ficción del Caribe Hispano*, co-organized by Acevedo in 2014, Ana Teresa Toro muses, similarly, on "lo inexplicable que es que solo exista una pequeña tradición de literatura de ciencia ficción en el país" (99).

As Matthew Goodwin intimates in discussing the politics of Caribbean SF in his essay on the same collection (79), the key to the enigma is, to an extent, summed up by Nalo Hopkinson's observation regarding the "familiar SF meme" of "going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives," and how, from the space of postcolonial experience, this evokes notions not of "a thrilling adventure story [but] non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere" (Hopkinson 7). John Rieder has examined the other side of this question in exploring how SF's imaginary of "alien" lifeforms, encounters, and invasions has encoded "anxieties around nation-state sovereignty, colonialism, race" since the genre's inception (8). As noted earlier, despite the recurrence of SF modalities within the Spanish American literary tradition, these anxieties have also found echo within the critical establishment, as

> La desconfianza de la crítica latinoamericana hacia la ciencia-ficción tiene larga data y complejo origen. Muchos trabajos tienden a rastrear sus fuentes en la producción anglosajona, subrayando las relaciones con el *pulp*, o buscan las raíces de la ciencia-ficción en lo fantástico… como formas de legitimar una modalidad de producción que… no parece ajustarse con claridad a los modelos folkloristas, localistas y/o contestatarios que han constituido buena parte de la producción cultural latinoamericana. (Kurlat 15)

Researchers have been increasingly engaged in exploring SF's lines of development in "peripheral," postcolonial contexts, and in further theorizing its forms, not excepting interrogations of Darko Suvin's still foundational yet somewhat "Apollonian" (Nicholls and Clute, "Gothic SF") view of its poetics of "cognitive estrangement," an important issue in considering contemporary genre hybridizations with fantasy or the Gothic.[5] More to the point, inquiry is advancing into the question of what happens "cuando los artistas y escritores del Caribe usan la ciencia ficción" (Goodwin 79), and in Spanish America generally, areas where SF

> [f]rom the nineteenth century to the present day… has consistently proved to be an ideal vehicle for registering tensions related to the defining of national identity and the modernization process. These tensions have long been exacerbated in Latin America by the challenge of constructing and/or maintaining a national identity in the face of significant influence from the North and by the uneven assimilation of technology in Latin American countries…. (Haywood 3)

With respect to the specific Puerto Rican context, Toro points in her remarks to events such as the 2014 SF Congress and to other ambient signs as evidence that "apenas ahora comienza a resonar y a construirse comunidad. Pero hay algo en el ambiente" (99). Like Rivera, in reflecting

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de los perros. My discussion here references Rivera's chapter on Lloréns from that volume, as well as personal communications with the author regarding Lloréns' work, though not to the totality of the book, which I have been unable to access in time for this publication.

5 Regarding the first point, see, for example, Langer's *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2009) and the essays in *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World* (2010), edited by Hoagland and Sarwal, in addition to Haywood, Cano, Kurlat, Hopkinson, and other SF critics included in the bibliography. On the relations between Gothic and SF, see Brantlinger (1980), Wasson and Alder's introduction to *Gothic Science Fiction 1980-2010* (pp. 1-18) for an overview, as well as R. Luckhurst's and A. Mousoutzanis' essays in that same volume.

on the lack of a more substantial SF tradition, Toro zeroes in on conditions associated with the country's long colonial experience, especially since the 1898 invasion by the U.S., speculating on some of its long-term ideological effects (99-101).[6] Within the cultural field, the question of SF's generic "absence" is fundamentally tied also to the complex battles waged to reclaim the country's Hispanic heritage, in tension and interplay with a political opposition largely dominated by anticolonial, separatist convictions. As I discuss below, the privileging of certain forms of realism throughout the mid-twentieth century period that especially concerns me here had much to do with resistance to "a state that had become invested with something like a 'marvelous concoction,'" and with a literary production that, in response, would be seen "as saving reality qua reality, that is, a reality entrenched in its most mundane qualities rather than in fantastic forms of representation" (Soto-Crespo 87). While SF's more conventional forms could too closely resemble, in this context, a culturally alien and colonialist symbol of Americanization, such animus does not entirely satisfy the "curiosity," however, regarding the lack of this kind of generic response to modernity from other points of the ideological and cultural spectrum. This is especially the case given the peculiar political and cultural negotiations at work in the country during its long "modernizing" adventure, and why Lloréns' work is of especial interest in this respect.

Regarding SF's recent emergence—and putting into brackets, for the moment, the important issue of the formation of a community of SF creators and enthusiasts that Toro's comment points to—, consideration of contextual elements is equally critical. This connects to matters both broad and punctual, from the economic impacts of late capitalist formations in the region, to the alleged end of political "metanarratives" and the pervasive influence of the "tecnocultura mediática de la postmodernidad" (Díaz, "Escritura"), to the boom in Internet use on the island since the mid-nineties. Among other developments I will turn to later, an especially relevant context is also provided by the long period of "economic contraction" that, with roots in the mid-1990's displacement of the island "from its position of privilege in global value chains" (García Pantojas, "Is Puerto Rico" 59), intensified around 2006 and, combined with other factors, has led to grave economic and social repercussions.

Emilio García Pantojas has characterized this protracted crisis as the progressive "collapse of a colonial, protectionist politico-economic system in a post-colonial world, that is, the world of globalization" ("Is Puerto Rico" 68). Conjoining aspects of the local and global transformations I have mentioned, and with a symbolic import I explore below, this crisis is of special relevance in considering the cyberpunk inflections of the developing SF "genre" discourse on the island, given that modality's focus on peripheral "postmetropolitan" environments, precarity, and social unravelling, as Christophe Den Tandt proposes (97). Other aspects of the history of this "colonial, protectionist system" and its progressive collapse help further contextualize, as well, the question of SF's scarcity, and some of the reasons behind its emergence at this point. The two pivotal texts at the vanguard of modern SF exploration in the country—Eliseo Colón Zayas's

6 Toro wonders, specifically: "¿Cómo vamos a estar acostumbrados a imaginarnos las soluciones a los problemas si nunca ha estado legal y políticamente en nuestras manos tomar acción sobre ellos?... ¿Está también colonizada nuestra capacidad de crear?" (100) Her questions point to key aspects and broader contexts behind the issue of SF's absence from the island, namely, not just the psychic effects of the colonial "condition," but more specifically, of its material ones, like the lack of truly integrated bases of economic development and scientific and technological infrastructure beyond the contrived and ultimately exploitative booms and grafts that, just to focus on one critical period, Operation Bootstrap facilitated, as discussed below. Though engagement with this issue in broader terms is beyond the scope of my analysis, the strangely superficial or "ersartz" character of Lloréns' SF narrations, their displaced Cold War anxieties and fifties pop-culture influences reflect precisely, as I will argue, the friable and decentered character of the Puerto Rican development "miracle."

Archivo Catalina: Memorias Online (2000), and Acevedo's *Exquisito cadáver* (2001)—have precisely rendered, directly or indirectly, these transformations, transitions and breakdowns. Before approaching them, however, I would like to turn to Lloréns' collection, and to previous stages of this history.

The financial crisis I have alluded to has added new facets to the trope of the "showcase of democracy"—often referred to as "broken" in recent social commentary[7]—, one of special consequence in Puerto Rican history, with suggestive connections to the Cold War's rhetoric of containment, and to momentous political, social, and economic developments. In this context, it evokes, more precisely, the ambitious programs of "Operación Manos a la Obra" that, starting around 1947 and under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín and his Popular Democratic Party (PPD), aimed to quickly modernize the country, unleashing those accelerated "efectos del desarrollo tecnológico y capitalista" invoked by Rivera at the beginning. Coupled with other strategic initiatives and an "imaginative new 'Commonwealth' relationship to Washington" ("The Bard" 32) embodied in the *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA) in 1952, they materially transformed Puerto Rico in ways that, for long, consolidated the mystique of the "showcase island." In Arcadio Díaz Quiñones' critical recollection of this other "foundational" period, "Aquella utopía inspiró… grandes transformaciones materiales y llevó a cambios sociales y modernizaciones muy concretas… para amplios sectores de la población puertorriqueña" (*Memoria* 20).[8]

Muñoz Marín's welcoming remarks at the opening of the Governor's Conference held in San Juan in 1959 highlight some important aspects of the "creative statesmanship" (3) behind the ELA, of its geopolitical angles, and what could be called its "futuristic" bent:

> We stand on the verge of the conquest of space, and at the same time… on the brink of self-destruction…. The old nationalistic formulae… are increasingly inadequate to deal with the political realities of the missile age and production by automation. Today geography has lost its function as a shield of nationalistic concepts…. The people of Puerto Rico… began to discern that not only was colonialism obsolete, but so was nationalism—an increasingly obvious anachronism in the nuclear age. The destiny for Puerto Rico, as for many other lands in the future, lay in development of new forms of federalism. ("Remarks" 2, 4)[9]

These remarks also provide a framework for the important role a specific variety of cultural nationalism would play within this political project, particularly of its integration "into the PPD's modernizing ideology of development to form a rhetoric for effecting social change, development, and progress" (Dávila 33). At the other end, per the metropolitan perspective expressed in

7 A selection of popular articles and books referencing the trope of the "broken showcase" include Julio A. Muriente Pérez's "La exvitrina de la democracia" (*El Nuevo Día*, June 9, 2015), Carlos Pérez Morales' "Puerto Rico: Se rompe la vitrina de la democracia" (*El Post Antillano*, March 15, 2015), Francisco José Ramos, "Puerto Rico: El naufragio insular" (Kaosenlared, 24 November 2017), Silverio Pérez's *La vitrina rota o ¿qué carajo pasó aquí?* (2016), A. W. Maldonado's *La prensa y la política en Puerto Rico: Por qué la vitrina de la democracia cayó a "chatarra"* (2015). See also García Pantojas (2015) for a more extended reflection.

8 For an analysis of state cultural politics in the context of the Cold War, see Rodríguez Cancel (2007), and Urrutia (1993) for the relation between the PPD and U.S. foreign policy. For a historical overview of *Muñocismo*, the PPD and the creation of the ELA, see Ayala and Bernabe (2007), chapters 8-10.

9 See Ramón-Soto Crespo's *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* (2009) for a controversial though suggestive interpretation of the ELA as a local adaptation to "global encroachment," in line with Walter Mignolo's "borderland" theorization. Other relevant geopolitical angles informing Muñoz's peculiar vision of a "futuristic federation" are briefly sketched out in his *Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*, pp. 68-70, among many other mentions in his copious speeches and writings.

a 1958 *Time* cover article devoted to Muñoz—titled, incidentally, "The Bard of Bootstrap"—, the island was presented as gifting the world, at a time of "anxiously watching Algeria and Cyprus, a shining example of an experimental colonial policy that turned out well" ("The Bard" 32). A similar outlook, echoed by Harold Underhill in a 1961 article for *The Diplomat*, mused on how Puerto Rico's rapid transformation from "poorhouse of the Caribbean" to development "showcase" must "confound the Kremlin" (16), and celebrated the jets

> bringing 450,000 tourists a year to the island; 660 Fomento-promoted factories .... traffic jams clog San Juan and the big suburbs that fan out from the city. *Supermercado* is a new word in the dictionary, and a rising middle class has money to spare for drive-in movies, bowling alleys, a night of dancing at the "Rock and Roll".... Literally thousands of $7,000 to $14,000 homes are springing up in and around San Juan, Bayamon, Arecibo and other cities. (36)

Acevedo, whose *Exquisito Cadáver* spearheaded the advance into SF exploration, has also acted as one of the genre's earliest historians and most effective and generous promoters on the island.[10] Speaking on these topics during a 2014 podcast, he reflected on the potent yet flawed "utopian" imaginary—what Díaz Quiñones called the "realización modesta de la utopía" (*Memoria* 42)—behind the ELA's design and the *Muñocista* rhetoric, arguing that "si [se asume] el discurso del ELA como una especie de propuesta hacia el futuro, el fracaso de esa utopía … nos da material para ubicarlo no en el futuro sino a partir de ese fracaso" (Acevedo, "Puerto"). As a "dispositivo administrativo moderno," Acevedo suggested, the ELA represents "una máquina que secreta este discurso de progreso y ese discurso fracasa," leaving in its wake a graveyard of aberrant or inoperative devices, a rich "roadside picnic" for the SF/dystopian gaze his novel expressed. As I suggested, the increasingly distressed conditions of the "showcase," and of the economic and political underpinnings of this "practical utopian" project have become especially patent in the wake of the collapse described by García Pantojas, and particularly, in the catastrophic aftermath of Hurricane María of 2017. Some jarring disparities, not new but now sharpened by those recent events conjure, in fact, a species of warped space-time continuum, where so-called bitcoin billionaires capered next to the old carcass of the CORCO petrochemical complex that Acevedo so timely recalled, while subdivisions heir to the "$7,000 to $14,000 homes" droned for almost a year with the sounds of emergency generators.[11] These images also evoke Jameson's observations regarding the old, triumphalist SF visions of gleaming tomorrowlands that have now turned into "the future of one moment of what is now our own past," a moment that signals, in his view, a change in the genre's historical function ("Progress" 151).

It is the absence of such self-confident, optimistic visions of "gleaming tomorrowlands," I should note, that perhaps especially stumps observers, the unmet expectation that the vast social and material transformations consigned in the earlier descriptions would have found more laudatory—or maybe critical—literary expression, especially in their heyday, through forms so closely linked to the imaginary of technology and social transformation. In a sense they did, in a very restricted though intriguing way I will examine shortly. Acevedo has, in addition, advanced

10 The impact of Acevedo's novel comes through in appreciations such as José Liboy's "Autores como tales [de ficción científica] no existen sino hasta la novela de Acevedo" ("La ciencia ficción"), and Rivera, "en el caso de Puerto Rico… la ciencia ficción es un género apenas cultivado… hasta la publicación de la novela de Rafael Acevedo" ("Comunidades 93). I discuss below also the case of Colón Zayas's text.

11 Hurricane María's devastations have also sparked a great number of local grassroots initiatives aiming to overcome or sidestep the official forms of response (or rather, neglect) in the hurricane's aftermath. For an overview and contextualization of what she calls "battling utopias," see Klein (2018).

the names of some SF precursors in Puerto Rico, including Pablo Morales Cabrera, whose *Cuentos populares* from 1914 used "analogías y explicaciones científicas que intentan resolver enigmas" ("Divagaciones") and would eventually play a leading role in José "Pepe" Liboy's 2009 Gothic SF novel, *El informe Cabrera*. Other important figures are Alfredo Collado Martel, the late *Modernista* author of the *Cuentos absurdos,* posthumously published 1931, and even Muñoz Marín himself who, as Acevedo indicates, reviewed Karel Čapek 1920's *R.U.R*., which introduced the word *robot*—derived from the Czech for "statute" or forced labor (Stableford at als., "Robot")—into the SF vernacular (Acevedo, "Divagaciones"). Though other equally important names are invoked in Acevedo's list—in itself, an important document in the process of configuring a local SF tradition[12]—, I would like to pause on the collection *La rebelión de los átomos* by Wáshington Lloréns (1899-1989) to more closely examine these questions. This volumen has been generally regarded as "el primer libro de cuentos de ciencia ficción puertorriqueña," (Acevedo "Divagaciones"), and its author as the initiator of a "cuentística de asunto científico... en nuestras letras" (Rivera de Álvarez 430).

Lloréns who, along with his activities as writer, critic, journalist, and lexicographer, was a distinguished pharmacist and chemist by training and trade, published on a variety of topics throughout a long, fruitful career in the humanities and the sciences (Rivera de Álvarez 350, 430, 473-474, Rivera 53). This dual track of interests and pursuits adds, I believe, an interesting dimension to his role as initiator of this "cuentística" on the island. In addition to various short story collections and studies on linguistics, literary criticism, and lexicography, his tales, articles, and essays appeared in newspapers such as *El Mundo, El Imparcial,* and *El Día*, and magazines like *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, *Rumbos*, *Hélices*, and *Alma Latina*, among many others. His collection *La rebelión de los átomos*, which appeared in 1960, contained tales published in these and other media over the previous decade, and was divided into two main sections: the first included four (out of seven) stories in the SF mode; the second, titled "Cuentos de mi tierra," comprises three stories and a "coda." Rivera, who has pioneered the analysis of the SF tales included in this volume, identifies in them a critical stance towards modernity, specifically "la presencia y confluencia entre lo monstruoso y la ciencia en diálogo con un discurso filosófico para establecer un espacio donde se piense críticamente la modernidad y los procesos de modernización" (Rivera, *La ciencia ficción* 55). Mixed with that critique Rivera foregrounds are also the stories' strangely disparate materials, however, including allusions to world and Spanish classics, jests, technical terms, and some questionable gender politics whose juxtaposition I would like to explore, together with the volume's curious internal division.

Lloréns' SF narratives—which Acevedo characterizes as "literatura de serie B" ("Puerto")—come across, as I mentioned, as oddly heterogeneous. His first and third person narrators range over a fairly wide field of reference, from the *Book of Good Love* by the Archipreste de Hita, Nietzsche, Azorín, Amado Nervo, Greek myths and philosophy, to Rutherford, Einstein, Geiger counters, cyclotrons and, as Rivera indicates, American monster films from the 1950's, with cinematic descriptions of a giant, radioactive "masa gelatinosa" in the first story, and a postapocaliptic landscape unfolding "como una cinta cinematográfica" in the second (*La rebelión*, 20).

12 Acevedo has expressed his preference for a capacious, "surrealist" concept of SF—in contrast to the "hard" SF models—, inflected by his reading of Brian Aldiss, and shown in his use of names like "imaginación razonada," "fantaciencia," and "fantasía científica" ("Puerto," "Hacia una definición.") Though I respect this ampler definition, considering fantasy and the Gothic as forms of "distanced fiction," I am especially interested here in developments that more explicitly integrate the "ciencia" of the "fantasía científica" for historical reasons, as my discussion shows. Thus, I have not dwelt here, for instance, on Gustavo Agrait's notable work—more set toward the Gothic-fantastic end of the spectrum—, whom Acevedo considers an important precursor.

Peppered with Peninsular turns of phrase—"periquete," "arte de birlibirloque"—, the tone flips between the facetious and the sentimental, occasionally interspersing graphic descriptions that border the language of Naturalism:

> Lo que antes fue mundo riquísimo, es hoy gigantesco circo donde solo se ven repugnantes mixedemas; escrófulas diabólicas; idiotas con hipertensión de las orejas… grotescos obesos eunucoides… monstruos con la piel del cráneo arrugada… los pómulos grotescamente deformados por la acromegalia. (24-5)

Some indirect glimpses into the "development" boom in progress at their time of publication are arguably also afforded amidst the apocalyptic landscapes: "desaparecieron como por arte de encantamiento los suculentos jamones, los flacos bacalaos, los jugosos 'steaks' traídos del Norte para los grandes hoteles" (11); "Nos metimos en… una lujosa tienda. Parecíamos Robinsones en aquella isla de maravillas, y ni cortos ni perezosos, cambiamos nuestros viejos y raídos uniformes por lujosos trajes de casimir inglés" (21).

The collection's first two stories—"La rebelión de los átomos" and "El último hombre normal sobre la tierra"—render the grotesque-fantastic aftermaths of catastrophic nuclear events, while the third one —"¿Por qué ir a otra estrella?/Diario de un filósofo de la era atómica"—involves time-travel played as a kind of scientific prank. The fifth story, titled "La isla encantada," concerns the sudden "shrinking" of the small island of San Andrés due to the nuclear energy experiments of a Dr. Moran, and follows the same patters of the others. In the first, the author establishes the Caja de Muertos island, off the southern coast of Puerto Rico, as site of the atomic project that unleashes a nuclear cataclysm, framing the setting with a reference to Stevenson's *Treasure Island:* "Caja de Muerto, Isla del Tesoro. Caribe Azul. ¿Sueño de Stevenson? Ya no buscan tesoros ocultos los piratas de Tortuga, ni se oyen en las riberas románticas los gritos de guerra… La isla es hoy santuario de los místicos del átomo" (13). As this suggests, despite their atomic anxieties, all the stories are ultimately conventional adventure yarns injected into SF molds, somewhat Hispanicized through their references, and brought into the fold of a more comforting imaginary through the classic closing device of romantic-erotic rescue. Its rawer visions of disaster ultimately contained in a plot turn focused on the male protagonists' pursuits, "La rebelión del átomo," for example, concludes: "Y Léster sonríe maliciosamente, porque sabe que su adorable compañera no está pensando precisamente en la nueva conquista de la ciencia" (16). Similarly, in "El último hombre normal sobre la tierra," "Yo me fui tras ella con el ardor de mis lejanos abuelos de la selva" (27).[13]

The stories' oddly formulaic character is due, in part, to such devices, recalling popular "space operas" of the time in the mold of E. E. "Doc" Smith's, "space-adventure stories which have a calculatedly romantic element" (Stableford and Langford, "Space Opera"). Though mostly earthbound, their romantic-erotic elements, random expressions of dominant masculinity and sensational descriptions of radiation monsters highlight their entertainment value, which also incorporated, however, current anxieties about nuclear catastrophe. The original publication context of some of these tales, in popular magazines like *Alma Latina*, is suggestive in this sense. One of them, "Montaña en flor," from the second half of the collection, appeared in that magazine on June 5, 1954, amidst advertisements for Revere brand "recorder-radios," modern

13 Likewise, "¿Por qué ir a otra estrella?" ends with: "Regresé a mi Tierra, miré la luz de las estrellas y no di con la que buscaba. Así es que a los pocos días me fui en busca de lo que ya era mío." (38), and in "La isla encantada," "En menos tiempo del que se necesita para contarlo desapareció mi novia microscópica. Y con ella mi gloria científica y el más puro amor de mi vida" (58).

construction materials, cosmetics, detergents, office equipment, social and cultural notes, horoscopes, and a children's section.[14] That issue included also an article on "Desertores del comunismo," reminding the reader of the "great political battle" then being waged between the "free world" and Communism, adding that "En Puerto Rico, la Junta de Planes, la Administración de Fomento Económico, y otras agencias gubernamentales podrían citarse como ejemplos de democracia militante" that would help solve "nuestros problemas de pueblo" (Piñeiro 16). The SF story that opens the volume, "La rebelión de los átomos," appeared on June 26 of the same year, also in *Alma Latina*, incidentally, just a couple of months after the first television signal was broadcast on the island (Colón, "Narratives").

The stories contained in the suggestively titled second section of Lloréns' book present well-defined contrasts with the first. The opening one, "Pagarás tus deudas," a kind of "picaresca criolla" in the mold of the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, clearly relays its own, as well as the remaining tales' cultural bearings. The narrative becomes here more uniform, the scientific, literary, and philosophical references and nightmare visions of radiation poisoning discarded in favor of compressed explorations of the "national romance" set within the familiar patterns of Hispanic and *criollista* traditions. In this part, as its title suggests, the tales stage brief dramas of national identity set in the "tierra adentro" scenarios of the coffee plantation and the hacienda. While "Montaña en flor" dwells on the conflicts between traditional life in the mountain versus urban life on the coast, "Luz de Navidad" concerns the clashes between the forces of tradition and Americanization, both stories ultimately resolving in favor of true love, the autochthonous, and the land. In my view, this collection's overall structure and its peculiar style can actually be read somewhat allegorically, in ways that can help frame some important questions about the SF tradition, and broader cultural dynamics in this period.

The tonal variations and motley references of Lloréns' SF stories are not new, somehow combining, despite the great temporal gap, the strains of that "literatura de clase B" with memories of the old habits of *Modernismo*, that "appropriation and partial reorganization of the Library of European culture by Spanish America" (González 10). Per generational classification a *treintista* writer who kept publishing throughout a fairly long career, Lloréns' stories provide a "sampler" of styles and themes, often marked by a curious belatedness, due in part to their publication history.[15] His SF incursions, with their philosophical ruminations, humor, and "future-shock" touches recall Darío's time-travelling phantasmagorias like the "Cuento de Pascuas," Nervo's SF investigations in "La última guerra," or even Quiroga's Gothic-SF cinema stories such as "El vampiro." These were tales, in other words, intended for and first published in popular newspapers and magazines. Lloréns', now inserted within the expanding media field of whirlwind modernization in 1950s Puerto Rico, can be viewed as later, somewhat more conventional ver-

14 Adolfo Jiménez Benítez indicates that *Alma Latina* was founded in 1930, with links to the *Grupo Atalayista,* "en una reunión en el Ateneo Puertorriqueño donde participaron varios escritores de la época.... La revista cumplió un papel importante en la renovación literaria de su tiempo" (80-81). Published until 1965, contributors included writers like Luis Hernández Aquino, Graciani Miranda Archilla, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, and René Marqués. Like the *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, however, it was a mass circulation publication with an "heterogéneo campo receptivo" (García, "Horacio Quiroga"), expressive of a "cultura modernizadora y progresista" (Ludmer 251) like others popular throughout Latin America.

15 In her panoramic essay on twentieth century short story writers and books in Puerto Rico, Paloma Jiménez del Campo makes some crucial points regarding the frequent publication "gaps" between stories and collections, and what this implies for "generational" accounts: "es frecuente que los narradores pertenecientes cronológicamente a una generación publiquen sus libros de cuentos décadas después.... Podríamos decir que existe cierto desajuste cronológico generalizado entre la historiografía literaria y la publicación de libros de cuentos en Puerto Rico, que puede encontrar su explicación en el lento desarrollo de la industria editorial en la Isla" (348). Lloréns' collection *Cazador de imposibles*, containing stories first published in the 1950s', appeared, for example, in 1981.

sions of those narrative responses to modernity, increasingly marked by American pop culture, yet strangely reminiscent of the past. In context, those older narratives would play "the social function of accustoming their readers to rapid innovation, of preparing ... consciousness and... habits for the otherwise demoralizing impact of change itself" (Jameson "Progress" 151), including the conflicts of "peripheral" modernity, as Rivera suggests. This may also have been the case with Lloréns stories, at a time when Cold War anxieties combined with the thrill of still new utopian promises evoking, at one point, "una especie de 'edad de oro', un modelo nuevo de sociedad fundado en el crecimiento económico, la continua elevación del nivel de vida, el 'progreso' y el despegue tecnológico" (Díaz Quiñones, *Memoria* 19).

Lloréns, however, wrote only these few SF tales, which remain the most significant instance of the genre in this period and for several decades. His writing idiosyncrasies aside, I would like to read the structure of Lloréns' book, as I suggested, somewhat allegorically, as a reflection of the dialectics of identity, culture, and nation playing out at this critical point in Puerto Rican history. The "Cuentos de mi tierra," placed at the end of a collection titled *La rebelión de los átomos,* suggest a curious dynamic of inscription and containment. It is as if the upheavals of modernity, and the industrial and scientific advances registered in the stories through visions of transformation and catastrophe, ultimately conjured the soothing embrace of the autochthonous and telluric, the *cafetal* and the *hacienda*, signs not only of an older *criollista* tradition, but central also, with crucial adjustments, to the *Muñocista* project, then furiously at work in shoring the "showcase of democracy." Along with the political and economic transformations wrought by the ELA and "Operación Manos a la Obra," their ideological counterpart, "Operación Serenidad" and its "cultural institutionalization" devices (Marsh 17ff), were also unfolding throughout this period:

> Operation Serenity aimed to provide a sense of spiritual balance to a society threatened by the rapid social change caused by the new economic policies. The idea was to prepare the peasantry for modernity while protecting them from the devastating effects of materialism and consumerism, which were seen as threatening the moral basis on which Puerto Rican nationality was perceived to rest... Operation Serenity marked an important moment in the development of Puerto Rico's cultural nationalism, involving a romanticization and purification of culture by reference to an idealized past. At this time, we see the cultural policies developing an anticapitalist discourse that idealized a precapitalist moral utopia and exalted the very ways of life that were being eradicated by the expansion of capitalist production. (Dávila 34-5)

With related developments already taking place since 1949 with the creation of DivEdCo, but more fully configured in the mid-1950's, the initiatives behind Operation Serenity were instrumental in articulating "La política cultural del estado muñocista, que tenía como base consolidar una versión de la cultura nacional deslindada del status político de la isla" (Marsh 11). The central myth of those projects' "precapitalist utopia," expressed in the floating red *jíbaro*'s head decked in the traditional *pava* that became the symbol of the PPD and its version of national identity, is present too in Lloréns' "Cuentos de mi tierra." As in the case of the larger project, however, modernization and modernity, along with their promises, threats, and transformations, are also centrally, paradoxically inscribed in their companion stories, held at a distance, ironized and contained, yet registering that "futuristic" orientation of *Muñocismo* in the "Atomic Era." They connect, too, to the fund of Western/European culture claimed by that political proj-

ect's complex negotiations, which would modify and reframe the way the national "autochthonous" tradition addressed and mobilized the nation.

Lloréns' collection and its individual stories, set within that complex political and cultural framework, seem to reflect, unintendedly and in miniature scale, the dialectics of those larger, simultaneous crosswise appeals to the "Library of Europe," modern science and industry, and to the "emblemas y rituales del pasado" as sources of consent and legitimation (Rodríguez-Castro 77). They ultimately also recall Homi Bhabha's observation concerning "the disjunctive time of the nation's modernity" (212), and the strange dynamics of the "archaic" emerging on its margins (213). In that context, Lloréns appears as a strange kind of time-traveler, a *treintista* who, perhaps by professional association, was sensitized enough to the more specialized aspects of technological change, scientific development, and their threats to incorporate the SF mode, yet who kept looping everything back into the familiar patterns of romance and *lo criollo,* rendering, in the process, his strangely disjointed, dated yet futuristic narratives. Addressed to a readership that, as María Elena Rodríguez Castro proposes, would begin to develop their own cultural models "a partir del desarrollismo de los años cincuenta con la emergencia de una clase media estable y distintiva y cada vez más vinculada a los modelos norteamericanos" (75-76), his stories' triangulation of the autochthonous, American pop culture, and the "universal" reflects some aspects of this patchwork process.

Within the vast information stream bearing on an expanding middle-middle class in contact, through *Alma Latina, Puerto Rico Ilustrado,* film, radio and T.V., with changing paradigms of consumption, sociality, and behavior, the SF motifs in Lloréns' stories would have expressed something like that social function of "accustoming readers to rapid innovation," though the author's approach and scant production in this mode would negate a lasting impact. The connections between Lloréns' volume and its historical context are, as is the case with all literature, complexly mediated, and my reading does not assume direct broadcasting of official state culture. My aim is rather to consider whether these curious SF stories, read in counterpoint with others from the author's production—even some, like "Plaga de langostas sobre Manhattan" and "Sangre roja en Corea" from 1951, that dealt with major contemporary developments, migration to the U.S., and the Korean War—reflect cultural and political dynamics that would have made the appeal of a form like SF extremely limited or nonexistent.

Aiming to transfer "la cuestión nacional al plano estrictamente cultural, a cambio de obviar las contradicciones sociales y políticas de la colonialidad" (Duchesne "Entrevista" 85), the forms of cultural nationalism fostered by the ELA and the *Muñocista* project would entail a series of complex negotiations between "lo puertorriqueño," "lo universal," and "lo americano," as Dávila suggests. Within the dialectic of affirmation and concealment promoted by that political project, the intermedial space that, in Muñoz's expression, defined the country as "un pueblo hispanoamericano compuesto por buenos ciudadanos de Estados Unidos" (qtd. in Marsh 65), certain aspects of the American "side" of the equation required deft forms of muting or displacement, so that "lo puertorriqueño," understood in the terms of this new political compact, could more effectively flourish and mobilize. A form calling too explicitly on the signs of a still "alien" mass culture would perhaps strike a too cognitively dissonant chord within the palliative symphony of the "official" *criollo*. The work was, at any rate, being systematically carried out in more lasting ways through transformations in the landscape, the new patterns of living, thinking, and consumption, the drive-ins and *supermercados*. In this context, Lloréns' treatment of SF as a kind of curiosity, a form of cultural "sampling" juxtaposed with, but unable to significantly alter more traditional narrative patterns, is telling. Ultimately, however, those stories' weird "surface" fu-

turism, the menacing yet sensational 1950's pop culture-inflected modernity they conjure, aptly evoke Díaz Quiñones' critical reminiscences of a period both exciting and flat, full of suppressions as well as thrilling promises.

The futuristic "federation" zone for the "showcase of democracy" required, per its architects' design, the confluence of modern technology and industry, the "Library of Europe," and the array of inputs I have mentioned. It would also entail other dismal commitments—including political repression, militarization, and dependent development—whose consequences would become more evident with the passage of time. Notably, while Lloréns was publishing his stories, writers like José Luis González, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, and Pedro Juan Soto were articulating what Díaz Quiñonez, speaking of another crucial member of this generation, René Marqués, calls "la antiutopía" (*Memoria* 43). Their narratives "Invertía[n] el proyecto y se dedicaba[n] a investigar su fracaso" (43), effectively rendering, as José Luis González' observed, "la oposición intelectual a ese proceso" (Marsh 41). Expressed in keys of realism that integrated, in deeper and more substantive ways, a wide range of modern literary influences (Díaz Quiñones, *Memoria* 43), their austere and often tragic stories contrast with the patchwork and somewhat perfunctory emblems of modernity inscribed in Lloréns' SF references to cyclotrons and time travel. Despite the anxieties about nuclear catastrophe and unchecked scientific advance the stories communicate, their very romance-bound formulas convey a view of modernity that, only in a seeming paradox, those soberer texts, speaking of displacement, war, and precarity, would render more complete.[16] It is within this dialectic, between neutralized culturalist appeals to the *criollo* identity and oppositional nationalism, ironized references to modernity and Americanization and the pull of Hispanic tradition, that the reasons for the lack of a more robust SF tradition during this modernizing process and thereafter may reside.

For it and its fractured promises to be narrated in a self-conscious, explicit SF language that more openly integrated that history into its forms, various substantial changes had to take place. As with my earlier comments, I can only point to some of them here, given their scope, complexity, and the long span that separates the publication of *La rebelión de los átomos,* the shift around the new millennium, and its aftermaths. Besides the broad alterations in national and international economic, political, and social conditions I have mentioned, some significant changes have also had to do with the island's literary field. Without positing linear or "evolutionary" connections, consideration is due to the work of the *setentista* generation, which decidedly reconfigured the country's "casa literaria" and its ways of representing the subject and "narrating" the nation, developments variously linked to another deep period of crisis facing the ELA in the early 1970s. As Luis Felipe Díaz argues, these writers, active since the late sixties and flourishing in the seventies, broke with the "proyecto cultural clasista… del canon y sus apegos al nacionalismo criollista y elitista de herencia treintista" (*La na(rra)ción* 162) that still influenced Lloréns, while also revising the forms of "exaltado dramatismo de protesta anticolonial" that characterized a great part of the production of the 1950s and 1960s (160), among other important changes.

The next "generation" of writers, often classed under the label of "Generación del 80," rep-

16 The case of Marqués, as interpreted by Díaz Quiñones, offers interesting points of comparison with Lloréns. Commenting on the former's conservative "idealización *estética* de la sociedad agrícola" and his immense popularity, Díaz notes that "En una sociedad que atravesó procesos de cambio tan vertiginosos, no debe extrañarnos que encontrara eco un discurso que proponía valores absolutos" ("Desastres" 159). As the author emphasizes, Marqués' exaltation of a "precapitalist utopia" and antipathy to "la máquina, la industrialización, los tecnócratas" was accompanied by a persistent quest for literary modernity and technical innovation (167). Lloréns' conservatism, through deep, seems more ambivalent in some respects; his work incorporates surface signs of modernity and innovation, yet does not tend to break, overall, out of conventional narrative tracks that may have also contributed to his literary marginality.

resents, in Díaz's view, "el desencanto postmoderno," and several authors working with SF and well as other distanced modalities are associated with it. Active on the literary scene since the late 1980's and especially the 1990's, many have established their own critical distance with respect to the work of that previous generation, especially in terms of the *setentistas'* privileged forms of "plebeyismo estético," and the political metanarratives that tended to inform their production (*La na(rra)ción* 160, 220). Néstor Rodríguez, referencing Pedro Cabiya, one of the most prolific members of the "postmodernos" and the author of several SF/Gothic SF texts, writes of a textuality displaying critical changes in the Caribbean "*ethos*," particularly in the areas of social interaction and political culture, under the sway of new global formations (1245). Overall, theirs is a production especially open to and impacted by fluxes beyond the geographic and politico-economic boundaries of the Puerto Rico-United States relation (Díaz, "Escritura"), and marked, in Mario Cancel's description, by "an ironic outlook as a form of resistance and reaffirmation of radical individuality" (qtd. in Pagán Vélez).

Many of these texts betray, in consequence, an itinerant or nomadic disposition, particularly respecting the old notion of the "literary house" of the "gran familia puertorriqueña," central for so long in the Puerto Rican imaginary, as authors like Juan Gelpí (1993) have shown.[17] Some of the more recent are also emerging within an epochal frame Duchesne Winter describes as "la crisis y descomposición del *American Century*" ("Noticias" 32)—now entering new and uncharted waters—, which resonates with the figure of the "broken showcase."[18] Under these conditions, certain long-standing aversions to elements of American popular culture have mutated and changed polarity.[19] Within the postmodern smorgasbord, it has become easier to explore and occupy newer imaginaries, and to wield them in dissecting the many afterlives of the ELA's "practical utopia," or its larger brave new world contexts. As Mercedes López Baralt and other scholars have observed, the figure of the "casa nacional" has undergone various transformations in the later tradition, turning into a motel in Ana Lydia Vega's writing, a car or even "la guagua aérea" in Luis Rafael Sánchez's (38-41). That house, which is also Pedreira's "nave al garete," as Baralt suggests (39), has in these later iterations become a spaceship, as in Acevedo's novel, or even the demented computer of Colón Zayas' *Archivo Catalina*.

In addition to Acevedo, Colón, and Cabiya, other practitioners of the SF modality within this group—a by no means exhaustive list—include José (Pepe) Liboy, Gretchen López, Alexandra Pagán, Luis Othoniel Rosa, Juan Carlos Quiñones, Aravind Enrique Adhantaya, David Caleb Acevedo, and Miguel Agrover.[20] Díaz has added an important caveat regarding discussion of

17 Speaking of the work of José Liboy and the "turning away" from the "house," Acevedo observes: "Y ¿qué nos era familiar hace poco más de tres décadas? La gran familia… incluyendo el retorno de sus secretos bien guardados. Esa frecuencia de la visibilidad en el texto me permite proponer esa angustia, ese síntoma incrustado en la carne, extrapolando la familiaridad del escritor con la Familia nuestra, la de ese gran relato que nos contiene" ("Salto cuántico"). Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia describes this impulse as "narrativas del desalojo, poéticas para el abandono de la casa de la gran familia puertorriqueña que han generado virajes, torsiones en el corpus canónico de la isla" (Quintero 159).

18 For a more detailed characterization of the "novísimos," see Pagán Vélez ("Literatura en los albores").

19 SF is by no means, of course, exclusively or primarily the province of American popular culture, and the case of Cuba and the influences of Soviet SF, for instance, presents an interesting point of comparison—a very important context in the case of more recent writers, open to a vast range of international influences. In the earlier political and cultural contexts I have described, I believe these associations were for long, however, inescapable.

20 The above list comprises authors with a relatively longer or more consistent SF/Gothic SF production, but could be expanded to include writers with stories or novels in this or closely associated modalities, such as Francisco Font Acevedo, José E. Santos, Alejandra Reuhel, Pabsi Livmar, Ana María Fuster, Juan López Bauzá, Ángel M. Encarnación, José Borges, Raúl Soto, Ángel Rivera, Juan Duchesne (whose SF story-essay "Ensayo de evasión" in *Fugas incomunistas* (2005) and interviews with "Dora Ricardo" represent especially interesting developments), and others within the "muy variada producción" described by Acevedo ("Puerto"). Some *setentista* writers, like Ana Lydia Vega and Manuel Ramos Otero, have also produced stories in what could be called the SF modality. I should

this group, as it includes authors of various ages and diverging aesthetics, noting how appeals to the generational model can be misleading, as some of members may share "una perspectiva cultural distinta y de mayor avanzada cultural que un sujeto más joven. También un escritor puede rendir una producción atravesada por varias épocas" (*La na(rra)ción* 216). Conversely, the work of some of the younger authors—the "novísimos"—would require some periodization adjustment and contextualization within newer production frameworks, as Alexandra Pagán Veléz indicates.[21]

As I mentioned, other factors may have contributed to the development of a growing SF community on the island, including the explosion of internet use since the mid-nineties.[22] The vast digital landscape, mediatic omnipresence, and interconnective capabilities now commonly available have greatly expanded the zones of contact and exchange between writers and aficionados, an element Samuel R. Delany considers critical in the formation of SF communities (152). This includes also inter-Caribbean exchanges, which have found in Puerto Rico, through Acevedo's labors as creator and cultural promoter in this field, a key agent. These phenomena, including their bleaker dimensions, stand at the center of a novel that, along with Acevedo's, marked the emergence of a contemporary, self-conscious SF practice on the island. I will briefly turn, by way of conclusion, to these two pivotal texts.

Written by the former director of the University of Puerto Rico's School of Communications, a researcher specializing in semiotics, cultural studies, and mass media, *Archivo Catalina: Memorias Online* appeared in the year 2000. In a short 2004 article, its author, Eliseo Colón Zayas, profiled the kind of "information society" taking shape on the island, underpinned by what he describes as the state's renewed embrace of neoliberal programs in a quest for peripheral "inserción en el mercado mundial" during the last decades of the twentieth century (Colón, "De la plantación"). As a result, and in combination with the country's peculiar politico-legal constitution, "en plena época de la SI y de economía neoliberal, los residuos de una cultura de plantación subsisten en Puerto Rico, a pesar del flujo de computadoras, faxes, correos electrónicos, bancas electrónicas, telefonía móvil" ("De la plantación"). These questions organize and "explode" the narrative of *Archivo Catalina* which, in Silvia Álvarez Curbelo's description, combines "los lenguajes de la cibernética y del melodrama, tanto histórico como del corazón" ("Review" 403).

The novel posits a kind of transtemporal "matrix"—evoking the Wachowski's influential film, if not Bioy Casares' *La invención de Morel*—, embodied in a mega-computer program named Catalina Guerrero that becomes sentient and stands as a figure for the digital universe, and for possibilities of "neural interconnectivity" that much exercise the narrative. In this dense text, the sentimental and clichéd, exchanged through disembodied voices and personal letters, appears juxtaposed with complex historical processes and events, from sugar cane cultivation to international conflicts, viewed as varying but parallel iterations of knowledge-power networks. A couple of *roués* called Donato and Andrés aim to create "Catalina" as a "máquina de sueños" that will absorb and later project those complex networks through images that "corresponderían a

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mention here the interesting case of James Stevens Arce, who writes, however, primarily in English, with long sojourns in the U.S., and whose production falls more fully within the "pure" genre mode. An entry in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* describes him as "perhaps the first Puerto Rican to publish sf, and the most prolific" (Toledano "Stevens-Arce"), though his work has developed through alternate channels, with a very different audience and project, and would require separate consideration.

21 Among these, Pagán Vélez includes the pervasiveness of new digital formats, like blogs and electronic journals, as spaces for publication and circulation of literature, the institutionalization of creative writing programs, and the surge of print on demand services ("Literatura en los albores").

22 For a brief overview of this history, see Colón Zayas ("De la plantación").

los sentimientos que bullen en el fondo de las personas… Por ejemplo, los negros, los colonos y los agregados pensarán que han sido liberados de los hacendados y comerciantes cuando finalice este siglo y Estados Unidos se anexione todo el Caribe español. ¡Se imaginarán que controlan sus vidas!" (Colón, *Archivo* 94-95). This is, in other words, the machine of ideology, born from historical dynamics and reproduced in the vast virtual reality of the "Catalina program" that eventually explodes and takes over, thus cementing this virtual "domain of dreams" as the ultimate reality.

A fair and thorough treatment of this complex text would fall outside the scope of these pages. For my present purposes, I will just note that Colón's novel articulates some of the paradigmatic changes I have been describing, in terms of the impacts digital technologies have had in the development of SF in Puerto Rico, the new forms of the "technological imagination," and the boundaries of the fantastic itself. The novel also indirectly renders the "split," addressed in Colón's 2004 essay, between the remnants of a neocolonial "plantation culture," sustained by federal subsidies, and the profusion of hi-tech media and communication devices on the island. Among other themes, *Archivo Catalina* explores the production of social dreams and collective imaginaries, central elements in the configuration of the "showcase" model and its breakdown, as discussed earlier. In that sense, it traces part of the "map"—digital, historical, neural—that new SF imaginaries explore, suggesting the national, even Caribbean lay of the land that authors such as Acevedo investigate by following what could be called diverse political "líneas de fuga."

Acevedo's text explored some aspects of these and of an alternative range of matters in his 2001 novel, *Exquisito Cadáver*. While *Archivo Catalina* has received insufficient critical attention, Acevedo's novel has been credited, as I indicated, as a pivotal event in the development of a modern SF body of work on the island, expanded through his vital interventions as cultural promoter in this field. Active in Puerto Rican letters since the 1980s, Acevedo has published several volumes of poetry, plays, two *novellas*, and three other novels besides *Exquisito cadáver*—including *Al otro lado del muro hay carne fresca* (2014), also in the SF mode—in addition to his activities as an editor, and as a literature professor at the University of Puerto Rico. For reasons of space, I can also only schematically broach here Acevedo's dense text, which was awarded an honorable mention by the Premio Casa de las Américas, and expresses, in Guillermo Irizarry's reading, "una jerarquía de valores alternativa en la que lo nacional se posterga para dar cabida a nuevos modos de considerar la inserción de lo literario en la esfera cultural y política" (214). Set at an angle from the "metaphorical space of the nation," *Exquisito cadáver* explores, in Irizarry's view, the matter of alterity and the revolutionary potential of residual sovereignty (214). It also comes across, despite its postmodern humors, as a tale of great political melancholy.

Articulated through a dense web of SF tropes and motifs, Acevedo's novel delivered, among other things, a temporally-warped Caribbean report—a response from the "showcase"—on the aftermaths of the supposed "end of history," the ensuing neoliberal rampage throughout the late eighties and nineties, and the various resultant lacks and cravings. The novel's opening set a virtual spacetime loop for its cold, lovelorn, and hungry protagonist, a nameless Sam Spade drifting down a digital Duke Ellington Boulevard, musing on time and the void, ostensibly indifferent to the news of the fall of the Berlin Wall—"Ha caído el Muro de Berlín y no te importa" (7)—and the protests in Tiananmen Square coming over the electronic transom. The SF and noir tropes meld, prefacing the nostalgia of a "caminante perdido de una tribu de gente sin un sueldo del que vivir" (12-13) pushed into detective work after the privatization of state services due to "la transformación del mundo a final del siglo pasado" (13). By turns lyrical and satiric,

this slipstreaming tale cannibalized a vast library of cultural, philosophical, and political materials, including films like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, The Wife, and Her Lover*, and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, which inspire some of its structuring metaphors. Ultimately, a symbolic constellation comprised of hunger, consumption, and desire comes together, echoed in numerous references to food, cooking, and several recipes.

Acevedo's is a story of information glut, precarity and political bereavement born of that epochal "transformación del mundo," a postmodern pastiche infused, however, by some intractable nostalgias. As Ayala and Bernabé note, there are throughout "subtle references to a sense of loss … amidst a 'system' that… looks 'like a net' but is in fact a 'hierarchy'" (*Puerto Rico*). Ricardo Vega shrewdly observed that the novel "se podría clasificar… como un romance. Un largo poema que de vez en cuando se entretiene en reflexiones sociales y científicas… pero que en el fondo no es más que una declaración de amor" ("*Exquisito*"). It is such a declaration, refracted, nevertheless, through those epochal events, and displaying, through its self-conscious, compulsive references and wordplay, the conditions that haunt it and make it possible, as well as those of that frangible "showcase" that cracks under its onslaughts. Partly structured as a tale of detection aiming to solve the ultimately irrelevant murder of "el Administrador… ese burócrata cuya única function era ser árbitro entre un aparato administrativo… y el capital privado" (Acevedo, *Exquisito* 49) referenced in its title, the novel also addressed the ELA's various necrosis, reclaiming the language of SF in its quest for possible futures.

The image of the "broken showcase," of the ELA as historical artifact, appears redimensioned in these two novels, not just of in terms of utopian, but even more modern SF imaginaries, such as cyberpunk. Viewed as figures of systemic failure, such imaginaries of warped spatiotemporal continuums, broken machinery, and faulty experiments—portending changes in plot in so many SF films and narratives—, provide rousing changes in perspective, in new keys responding to new conditions. Fredric Jameson has argued that the specific function of SF is "not to give us 'images' of the future … but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization" ("Progress"151). Suvin had suggested, earlier, that SF "sees the norms of any age… as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to *cognitive* view," its forms of "environmental neutrality" positing phenomena "as problems and explor[ing] where they lead" (*Metamorphoses* 7), away from mythological overdetermination. It is perhaps at this level that SF, hybridizing with Gothic, fantasy, or *noir* fiction, contributes to sharpening that "lateral gaze" Jameson argues is concealed, as a critical "payload," within certain genres. Such forms of "distraction… from our own defense mechanisms" against the present forms of history ("Progress" 152) can be especially suggestive in the hands of capable practitioners who appeal to distancing modalities within more expansive literary frameworks. Since the turn of the century and the apparition of these novels, many other SF texts have expanded and reframe the territories of the brave new world, and even the ventures and misadventures of the Caribbean "vitrina."

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