Gustavo Subero, *Gender and Sexuality in Latin American Horror Cinema: Embodiments of Evil*
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Gustavo Subero's 2016 book *Gender and Sexuality in Latin American Horror Cinema: Embodiments of Evil* is a stimulating work that forces the reader to approach it cautiously due to the dense, multifaceted, and erudite nature of its arguments, which centre on the intersections between 'sexual and gender identities' and between 'gendered bodies and socio-sexual paradigms' (p. vii). The text includes a preface, five chapters, a filmography of ninety-five films, a bibliography, and an index.

In the preface, '*Santa Sangre* and the Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Latin American Horror Cinema', Subero explains how he is using Latin-American horror films to question the stability of gender identity and the socio-sexual roles that are traditionally associated with men and women in Latin America (p. viii). Horror films are indeed suitable testing grounds for his investigation, due to their vastly complex and contradictory portrayals of gender, and Latin-American horror films in particular are apt, due to South America's continually evolving views on the 'fixity' of gender identity. Here, Subero analyses Alejandro Jodorowosky's 1989 film *Santa Sangre*, a 'seminal film of the Latin American canon' (p. ix) that challenges the socio-sexual norms and expectations of Latin-American society and culture. *Santa Sangre* presents a world in which the controlling powers that manage and regulate the socio-sexual facets of life have decayed. Unlike numerous horror films that may be interpreted as ending well because of their return to normalcy, *Santa Sangre* ends badly because the film's characters were never 'normal' in the first place – perhaps a reflection of what lies beneath expected Latin-American socio-sexual norms.[1] Subero is quite convincing in his suggestion that *Santa Sangre* is utterly dystopic and offers a different paradigm for an examination of filmic horror and the Latin-America psyche. His analysis of the film is comprehensive and demonstrates the thorough approach that the author takes throughout the rest of the book.

It should be noted that Subero bases some of his analyses on the terminology developed by Evelyn Stevens and Jane F. Collier, most notably 'machismo' and

[1] Although Subero does not mention films such William Friedkin's 1973 *The Exorcist* and James Wan's 2013 *The Conjuring* and its 2016 sequel, these films tend to re-establish the original state of the victims and their families – in the former, Regan is no longer possessed, but at the cost of Fr Karras's death, and in the latter films, the families are freed from the attacks of the evil presences. Films that do not return to normalcy include Rob Zombie's 2012 *The Lords of Salem*, Robert Egger's 2015 *The Witch*, and Ari Aster's 2018 *Hereditary*.

'marianismo'.[2] Subero defines machismo as a 'template and driving force of all male sexuality in Latin America […] based on the externalisation of hypermasculine behaviour and the conscious avoidance of any feminine traits that could call into question the *hombría* of a macho man' (p. 150).[3] Marianismo, meanwhile, is a 'hybrid, complex and idealised notion of femininity' offered 'through a series of beliefs about women's spiritual and moral superiority to men that have served to legitimise their subordinate, domestic and social roles' (p. 111). In other words, although women may be considered in this culture to be superior in moral and spiritual terms, they still are burdened with domestic and social duties and responsibilities that in all spheres are secondary or subordinate to those of men. One of the achievements of *Santa Sangre* is a complete displacement of this machismo/marianismo paradigm.

Chapter One, 'Challenging Patriarchy in the Gothic Horror Mexican Cinema', is essentially divided into three sections. Firstly, Subero provides an overview of a number of gothic films (from the 1930s to the 1960s) that are uniquely Mexican in nature and that are identified usually as belonging to the 'Mexican Golden Age of Horror'. Secondly, the films are analysed as characterising the struggle between Mexico's 'aboriginal ancestry and its post-colonial past' (p. 5). Lastly, Subero explores and analyses the presence of mariana identity in these selected films. In this last section, he considers the movie stereotypes/folkloric figures of La Malinche, La Llorona, and La Bruja, among others, questioning how and if they fit into the development or negation of mariana identity, and whether they offer an alternative to this identity 'as the sole form of female subjectivity accepted within Mexican culture' (p. 38). Once again, Subero is very detailed in his analysis and relies heavily on the work of other scholars in this field to support his suggestions. There is nothing controversial in the author's review and analysis of the films or some of their female characters; Subero clearly frames his argument and supplies enough data to convince the reader of the function of the 'female' and her roles in these films.

Chapter Two, 'Zé de Caixão and the Queering of Monstrosity in Brazil', shifts the focus to the Zé de Caixão character that appears in the well-known Brazilian *Zé de Caixão* cult-horror series by José Mojica Morin. 'Coffin Joe' (as he is known in English), Subero writes, is 'the most horrific, monstrous and anti-normative character ever to emerge from the Brazilian horror film canon' (p. 39). The character is so monstrous, his deeds so repugnant,

[2] See Evelyn Stevens, 'Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America', in *Female and Male in Latin America*, ed. by A. Pescatello (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), pp. 89-102; and Jane F. Collier, 'From Mary to Modern Woman: The Material Basis of Marianismo and its Transformation in a Spanish Village', *American Ethnologist*, 13.1 (1986), 100-07.
[3] *Hombría* may be defined as 'manliness' or 'manhood'.

his character so depraved and subversive that few were willing to play the role, and Mojica Morin would end up being Zé de Caixão in all three movies. Subero argues, in a lengthy and detailed evaluation of the films, that the 'anti-normative' nature of Zé de Caixão and the character's desire to find the 'perfect woman to bear his offspring and continue his blood line' (p. 40) were truly shocking for what is widely accepted as Brazil's first horror film. Subero returns to the book's overall focus on gender and sexuality by declaring that Zé de Caixão is thoroughly macho but still queer in nature, and that we must consider his queer machismo and the transgression of the parameters that define traditional, hegemonic, normative, and non-normative behaviours if we are fully to comprehend the socio-sexual dynamics in the horror series.[4] Subero presents his theories and suggestions strongly and persuasively and makes a compelling case for a close, or at least clos*er*, examination of the blurring of the gender identities found in this trilogy, which was so ground-breaking for Brazilian cinema. Subero's work on the Zé de Caixão phenomenon is fresh and innovative, and will likely serve as the foundation for future research on Mojica Morin and his films.

Chapter Three, 'Monstrous Machos: Horror and the Crisis of Latin American Masculinity', continues the investigation of machismo/*hombría* that can be understood to be part of what constitutes the male monster figure, which in Latin-American horror films 'also operates as the embodiment of the primal uncanny, as he [the monster] regulates and utilises machismo as a male force' (p. 75). Subero credibly argues that the macho/monster can create terror, 'chastise and objectify women', 'use excessive force to overpower others', and 'kill indiscriminately' (p. 76). Using Jorge Michel Grau's 2010 film *Somos lo que Hay*, Subero notes that this macho/monster permutation found throughout the Latin-American continent ceases to exist when both male protagonists in the film die, as they do in Grau's film. The film is partially centred on a journey of queer self-discovery for one of the male protagonists, Alfredo, who is challenged by and challenges the machismo of his brother Julián. Alfredo's realisation causes his transformation into an embodiment of queer masculinity, which allows him to serve as the patriarch of his family and which is conflated with the monstrous and cannibalistic acts that he and his family perform. Subero notes that the new, monstrous Alfredo dismantles machismo 'as the only socially accepted male force within Mexican

[4] In the subchapter titled 'Towards a Conceptualisation of Queer Machismo in Latin America', Subero examines the terms for 'new' types of masculinity that are '(re)surfacing' in Latin America (p. 41). These types are understood as the externalisation of specific behaviors that most 'people would associate with a very specific identity that is deemed "intrinsically natural"' (p. 42). Of special importance is the author's observation that 'queerness' is supposed to challenge both 'normative and non-normative identities that may not even be directly related to gender and sexuality' (p. 45).

society, because it obliterates the notion of monsters as intrinsically feminine […] or quintessentially homosexual and queer' (p. 90).

Jaime Osorio Marquez' *El Páramo* (2010) is also used in this chapter to refer to the dissolution of machismo, but only in arenas in which homosocial behaviour is accepted, as long as it does not cross over into overtly homosexual behaviour. Subero suggests the latent, hidden, or inner queer macho monstrosity in this film makes itself known in some of the soldiers who can no longer repress the homosexual desires that are normally concealed within expected homosocial attitudes and activities. Interestingly, the catalyst for the appearance of the macho monster is the presence of the only female character in the film (who can be seen as the monstrous feminine). According to Subero, she is introduced to counter the shift away from the homosocial to the homosexual. Subero presents a clear and compelling argument for his interpretation of the female character, and in his interpretation of the film as including clear markers that aim to absolve the soldiers from any obvious transgressions between the homosocial and homosexual.

In Chapter Four, 'Bloody Femininities: The Horrors of Marianismo and Maternity in Recent Latin American Cinema', two of the analyses (of Pablo Illanes' *Baby Shower* (2011) and Adrián García Bogliano's *Habitaciones para Turistas* (2004)) again return to marianismo as an idealised notion of femininity. In both films, the female characters have committed anti-marianista acts such as engaging in sex outside of marriage, rebuffing the protection of their male partners, and contemplating or having abortions. Subero's in-depth exploration of the films unambiguously establishes that all of these deeds can be interpreted as undermining patriarchal authority and domination: the women are punished because they do not value the mariana requirements of 'abnegation and servitude towards men' (p. 116).

Subero's analyses of gender and sexuality in horror film end with the last chapter, 'Bromance, Homosociality and the Crisis of Masculinity in the Latin American Zombie Movie', which centres on zombie movies without heterosexual couples as the main protagonists. In the *Plaga Zombie* trilogy by Pablo Parés and Hernán Saéz (1997; 2001; 2011) we once again see Subero's homosocial-homosexual paradigm at work, here in the form of a 'bond between seemingly heterosexual male characters' that operates 'at the border of hetero- and homosexuality'. It is 'tested, retested', and usually 'constitutes a turning point within the narrative' (p. 150). Alejandro Brugués' 2011 *Juan de los Muertos* similarly uses the zombie apocalypse as the 'perfect smokescreen' for the 'bromance and homosocial

anxieties' that are central to the film. Although both films test the fluidity of gender and sexual norms, the films do not cross these norms in any remarkable or permanent manner.

Gender and Sexuality is a valuable work of scholarship. Subero builds successfully upon the work of many other scholars throughout his text; his interpretations are constructed well and are easily followed; and his line of argumentation does not stray from the main goal of his book, which is to examine gender identity and socio-sexual roles in Latin-American horror films. There is, however, one minor flaw in the text. Subero often tends to repeat the same propositions and arguments in different chapters, which makes it seem as if the chapters were written not as part of a cohesive book but as several individual and separate scholarly essays. Yet overall, Subero makes a persuasive case. This book will appeal to anyone interested in the film-horror genre, gender and sexuality, and particularly to readers interested in these subjects within a Latin-American context.

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