THE GOTHIC FICTION OF ADELAIDA GARCÍA MORALES
HAUNTING WORDS

Abigail Lee Six
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This first in-depth and holistic study of Adelaida García Morales’s fiction approaches her works as a contemporary incursion into the Gothic mode. In order to highlight features common to García Morales’s texts and the Gothic classics, each of the novels studied is paired with an English-language Gothic text and then read in the light of it. The focus of each chapter ranges from psychological aspects, such as fear of decay or otherness, or the pressures linked to managing secrets, to more concrete elements such as mountains and frightening buildings, and to key figures such as vampires, ghosts, or monsters. The usefulness of such an approach is that new light is shed on how García Morales achieves probably the most distinguishing feature of her novels: their harrowing atmosphere.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Texts by Adelaida García Morales
A El accidente
B Bene
B/tr Bene (English translation)
HP Una historia perversa
LV La lógica del vampiro
MH Las mujeres de Héctor
N Nasmia
SM La señora Medina
SS El silencio de las sirenas
S El Sur
S/tr El Sur (English translation)
TÁ La tía Águeda

Gothic Novels in English
CO Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto
D Bram Stoker, Dracula
F Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus
JH Robert Louis Stevenson, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
MU Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho
PDG Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray
R Daphne du Maurier, Rebecca
TS Henry James, The Turn of the Screw
WW Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White

Other Abbreviations
CUP Cambridge University Press
MUP Manchester University Press
OUP Oxford University Press
UP University Press
Introduction

This book has twin aims: one is to offer a deepened understanding of Adelaida García Morales’s fiction through reading her texts as Gothic, for it is my contention that such a reading can shed new light on how she achieves the extraordinary haunting effect of her narratives. The second aim depends on the success of the first: it is to demonstrate by this example of one writer the usefulness of the Gothic label to Hispanic Studies generally and as such, the present monograph is the first in a larger research project which hopes to put the term Gothic on the Hispanic map, beyond its current very occasional or limited uses.

The notion of Gothic is well established in English studies and yet there is no critical consensus on a precise definition of it. Different criteria have been

1 The adjective has been used to refer to single texts, such as Elizabeth J. Ordóñez’s reading of El Sur (Voices of Their Own: Contemporary Spanish Narrative by Women (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1991), pp. 180-81), the article by Kathleen Glenn, ‘Gothic Vision in García Morales and Erice’s El sur’ (Letras peninsulares (spring 1994), 239-50) or the jacket notes for La tía Águeda, and a comparative Ph.D. dissertation by Shoshannah Holdom (Manchester University, 2003 unpublished) uses the term in its title: ‘Gothic Theatricality and Performance in the Work of Adelaida García Morales, Cristina Fernández Cubas and Pilar Pedroza’; but the full implications have not yet been explored in the light of García Morales’s oeuvre as a whole and considered in its own right.


3 Fred Botting opens the Preface to his edited collection of essays with the words: ‘These days it seems increasingly difficult to speak of “the Gothic” with any assurance.
proposed and different strands of criticism can be discerned, all of them valuable in their way, but none completely reliable or self-sufficient. These include the historical approach, which regards Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) as the seminal Gothic work, with a cluster of followers in the late eighteenth century, including works by Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. In this period, which prided itself on its enlightenment, espousing neoclassical values, but which also was a time of social upheaval and increased class mobility, the concept of Gothic represented medieval barbarism and superstition but also the allure of a nostalgically idealized representation of chivalry and the clear-cut hierarchy of feudalism. Linked to this positively perceived aspect of pre-enlightenment values, there was a new attitude to aesthetic criteria in the eighteenth century, which no longer accorded a monopoly of approval to the classical ideals of proportion, balance and symmetry, but which discovered the sublime in rugged landscapes and huge mountain panoramas as well as rambling medieval architecture.

Then scholars adopting a historical approach recognize a resurgence of the Gothic towards the end of the nineteenth century with a group of texts that include Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, among others. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* earlier in the century can be viewed as a late member of the first wave, or a precursor, of the second in this historical approach. Such renewed interest in Gothic themes at the Victorian fin de siècle is explained by Glennis Byron: ‘the discourse of degeneration [national, social, and human] articulates much the same fears and anxieties as those traditionally found in the Gothic novel.’

Twenty-first-century Gothic studies in this historical approach tend to emphasize the new life breathed into the Gothic by cinema, often centring on famous film versions of nineteenth-century Gothic novels. The disadvantage with the historical treatment of the


This is summarized in Botting, ‘In Gothic Darkly’, in Punter (ed.), pp. 10–12. The sublime will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 below.


For an example of a historical treatment of the Gothic, see Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘The Gothic at Our Turn of the Century: Our Culture of Simulation and the Return of the Body’, in Botting (ed.), pp. 153–79, in which the popularity of Gothic works in the 1980s and
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Gothic is that it tends to imply a downgrading of the authenticity of post-eighteenth-century works, so that, for example, twentieth-century Gothic classics are overlooked or treated as modern copies, rather like reproduction antiques. It also creates problems for texts that pre-date Walpole and yet have much in common with the Gothic that in this approach he is credited with having created.8

This can be partially overcome by balancing the historical approach with parameters based on certain recurrent features of Gothic texts and tracing their evolution over the past three centuries. Thus the semi-ruined medieval castles of Otranto or Radcliffe’s Udolpho, for example, evolve into isolated country houses like Wilkie Collins’s Blackwater Park in The Woman in White, Daphne du Maurier’s Manderley in Rebecca or Henry James’s Bly in The Turn of the Screw;9 wild and foreign mountain scenery in The Mysteries of Udolpho or Frankenstein, for example, shades into equally frightening dark and/or foggy streets in London’s dingier neighbourhoods such as Stevenson’s Soho, where Mr Hyde lodges, or Wilde’s opium dens in the docklands, frequented by Dorian Gray; indeed, the transition from one to the other is actually part of the narrative of Dracula, where the Count travels from the Carpathians to England in the course of the story.10 The drawback with such catalogues of features is that it remains unclear how many are needed or in what way they need to be used to constitute grounds for considering a text Gothic. Agatha Christie often sets her novels in isolated country houses, but that does not make them Gothic, for example.

Then again, there are those who focus on the characterization of the key figures in a Gothic text, particularly the heroine, who is expected to be unfortunate, rather passive, and often orphaned, set against the Gothic villain,

1990s is related to its earlier highpoints, also at turns of centuries. Twentieth-century film versions of Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, and Dracula are the subject of Heidi Kaye, ‘Gothic Film’, in Punter (ed.), pp. 180–92.

8 Although Walpole himself acknowledges his debt to Shakespeare and so this is recognized by critics, I am surprised as a Hispanist to note the conspicuous absence of parallels with the Quixote in Gothic criticism. The story of Bluebeard is another important pre-Walpole text, which is disregarded by this strand of criticism (though not by others).

9 For example, Susan Wolstenholme states: ‘Readers of Gothic novels have long noted the recurrence of the Gothic habitation – the castle or convent or church or abbey, sometimes more than one of these, and often presented in ruined form’ (Gothic (Re)Visions: Writing Women as Readers (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 113). Cornwall is one of many who notes the evolution from castle to rural mansion. See ‘European Gothic’, in Punter (ed.), p. 28.

who should be unscrupulous, cruel, and predatory and who evolves from the lord of the afore-mentioned castle or the crazed monk into the mad scientist, taking the Gothic mode into the realms of science fiction.\textsuperscript{11} Recurrent extras noted by critics include mother substitutes,\textsuperscript{12} loquacious servants, and heroes of a somewhat watery nature,\textsuperscript{13} relative to the villain. Some scholars make a distinction between female and male Gothic features (meaning written by and mainly for women, or by and mainly for men), with the emphasis on the heroine’s plight being associated with the female and an oedipal pattern of a son’s battle against authority tending to be more in the spotlight in the male Gothic.\textsuperscript{14} These are useful pointers, but not all Gothic texts utilize all of these characterizations. There is no heroine in \emph{Jekyll and Hyde}, for example, but who would want to impugn its status as a Gothic classic? Finally, there is the approach that regards these elements as inessential and variable over the centuries, and seeks to uncover the constants of the Gothic mode at a deeper psychological level.\textsuperscript{15} Here are found ideas such as nightmare,\textsuperscript{16} claustrophobia, entrapment, the surging out of what is repressed in normal life,\textsuperscript{17} such as mad or monstrous aspects of the self, often represented by split or doubled characters or, at the level of plot, guilty secrets pertaining to sexuality.\textsuperscript{18} Again, these are illuminating, but still cannot serve

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} For Nora Crook, Victor Frankenstein’s characterization is a direct transformation of the cloistered monk figure and by the same token, his laboratory descends from ‘the mouldering abbey’. See \textit{Mary Shelley, Author of Frankenstein}, in Punter (ed.), pp. 58–69 (p. 58).
\item \textsuperscript{12} Tania Modleski, \textit{Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women} (New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 68–70.
\item \textsuperscript{13} For Modleski, the opposition between the villain and the hero in the female Gothic parallels the male tendency to polarize women into whore (evil) and mother (good) (\textit{Loving with a Vengeance}, p. 79). Traces of this pattern can be discerned in \textit{La lógica del vampiro} with Alfonso and Pablo; in \textit{Una historia perversa} with Octavio and Juan; but the issue is problematized in \textit{El accidente}, as we shall see in Chapter 7.
\item \textsuperscript{15} For a good survey of the history of psychoanalytical criticism of the Gothic, see Michelle A. Massé, ‘Psychoanalysis and the Gothic’, in Punter (ed.), pp. 229–41.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Wolstenholme, for example, discusses the relationship between nightmare and woman-authored Gothic in Gothic (Re)Visions; see especially, pp. 3–13. Matthew C. Brennan devotes a whole book to a Jungian interpretation of Gothic novels based on dream and nightmare elements. See \textit{The Gothic Psyche: Disintegration and Growth in Nineteenth-Century English Literature} (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997).
\item \textsuperscript{17} For claustrophobia and entrapment, see for example Punter, ‘Introduction’, in Punter (ed.), pp. viii–xiv (p. viii) and for the return of the repressed, p. ix.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Miles calls family secrets ‘a theme central to the Gothic’ and discusses this, chiefly with reference to Radcliffe, in ‘Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis’, in Punter (ed.), pp. 45–50.
\end{itemize}
as defining features, because there are so many other types of fiction that use at least some of them too without seeming Gothic at all.19 Particularly helpful is the notion of transgression of taboos and boundaries,20 especially as one such boundary is the very one critics would dearly love to have to circumscribe the Gothic itself. As Cyndy Hendershot puts it: ‘The Gothic’s disruptive potential is partly predicated upon its lack of respect for generic boundaries.’21 Like the joke about an elephant, though, much Gothic criticism decides ultimately to take a pragmatic line by relying on the fact that despite the apparent impossibility of a watertight definition we know a Gothic text when we see one.

A concept without a straightforward definition poses a methodological challenge: how to show that García Morales is a Gothic writer when there are no set criteria? The solution adopted here has been to pair each of her novels studied with a text that critics agree is Gothic and to read the Spanish text in the light of it. This is not intended to suggest that García Morales’s novels derive from the English-language texts selected; indeed, it would have been possible to choose others that could have worked equally well as comparators or to pair the ones used with different novels by García Morales. The idea is rather to highlight some of the features that her texts and the Gothic classics have in common. As the chapter titles show, the focus of each ranges across the different types of criterion critics have identified as pertaining to – if not sufficient to define what is – Gothic, from psychological concepts such as fear of decay or otherness, or the pressures linked to managing secrets (Chapters 1, 6, 7, and 8), to the more concrete elements such as the use of mountains and frightening buildings as settings (Chapters 2 and 5), to key figures such as vampires, ghosts, or monsters (Chapters 3, 4, and 9). It is hoped that this approach will not only provide a fresh reading of each of García Morales’s best known novels for those who are studying a single text by this author, but also, that taken together, the chapters will add up to a new perspective on her as a writer.22

19 To name just one example, William Golding’s The Lord of the Flies deals with children trapped on an island, where what is repressed in normal life surges out leaving certain characters frightened and victimized. Yet it is not a text that anyone would like to label as Gothic.

20 For example, Fred Botting maintains that ‘From its beginnings Gothic writing has [...] blurr[ed] sexual boundaries and disturb[ed] aesthetic and moral categories’ (‘Candygothic’ in Botting (ed.), pp. 133–51 (p. 134). Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik regard this concern ‘with boundaries and their instabilities’ as one of the only safe claims to make about the Gothic’ (‘Comic Gothic’, in Punter (ed.), pp. 242–54 (p. 243)) and DeLamotte in Perils of the Night builds her argument on the concept of boundaries of the self as fundamental to the Gothic.


22 Not all of García Morales’s published texts are covered in the following chapters, due to space and time limitations combined with the present unavailability of certain works.
Existing criticism of Adelaida García Morales falls into three categories. She is often (but not often enough) included in lists of, and research on, Spanish contemporary writers—sometimes women writers specifically—considered as a group. It is of course valuable to understand where she fits into the sociocultural framework of post-Franco Spain and she is bound to reflect this in ways which are comparable with others of her literary generation and nationality. She has also been studied illuminatingly as part of a chronological line of Spanish women writers, by Elizabeth J. Ordóñez, where the diachronic and gender-conscious approach places her within an evolutionary process as she adopts and adapts what Ordóñez calls her foremothers' writing practices. Lastly, there have been some articles about single texts, chiefly _El Sur_ and _El silencio de las sirenas_, the former often incorporating comparison with, and overshadowed by, criticism of Erice’s film version. At their micro-level, such close studies are valuable. However, the present monograph hopes to address a gap in criticism on this writer, as it attempts on the one hand to locate Adelaida García Morales in a larger, transnational literary sphere and on the other, to articulate what makes her writing a coherent and unique whole. *Haunting Words* will argue that in both cases, this resides in her utilization of the Gothic tradition.

**Note**

With the exception of the translation of quotations from _El Sur_, seguido de Bene, for which a professional translation is readily available (see Bibliography), all other translations are my own.

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24 For example, she receives a brief descriptive mention in José María Martínez Cachero, *La novela española entre 1936 y el fin de siglo: historia de una aventura* (Madrid: Castalia, 1997) (p. 601). Similarly, in Chris Perriam et al., *A New History of Spanish Writing: 1939 to the 1990s* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), _El silencio de las sirenas_ receives half a sentence and the author is included in a list of those published in a series designed ‘to promote contemporary Spanish writing’ (pp. 176 and 215, respectively).

25 For example, Glenn, ‘Gothic Vision’.
El Sur, seguido de Bene (1985) and Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890/1891):¹
Physical and Moral Decay

El Sur [The South] and Bene, two short texts published in one volume, launched Adelaida García Morales on her very successful career. Despite their brevity (El Sur is only 52 pages long and Bene 58), they already contain much of what would come to be identifiable as this author’s hallmarks, many of which this study is arguing can be subsumed under the umbrella term of Gothic features.² Whether it was for the convenience of the publishers or in obedience to a desire on the author’s part to present the texts as linked, the result is that El Sur, seguido de Bene comes to the reader with a built-in suggestion of some kind of twinning of the two stories. Accordingly, this chapter will take their single-volume publication as a signal that they are - figuratively as well as literally - bound up with one another.³

¹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1913). The first version of the text was published in Lipincott’s Magazine in July 1890. A revised and expanded version, the one generally known today and used in the present chapter, was published in book form the following year. Future references will relate to the above edition and be given parenthetically in the text. For a discussion of the main differences between the two versions, see Peter Raby, Oscar Wilde (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 67-8.

² As we have seen in the Introduction above, Ordóñez and Glenn have observed the Gothic credentials of El Sur (see Voices (1991), pp. 180-81 and ‘Gothic Vision’ (1994), respectively). The aspects which they highlight are entirely valid and relevant to the overall reading of Adelaida García Morales posited in the present study.

³ Robert Saladrigas takes a similar view (if for different reasons) when he refers to El Sur and Bene as ‘un par de historias que en el fondo son una sola’ (La Vanguardia, 25 July 1985, cited in La novela española dentro de España (ed.) Antonio Fernández (Madrid: Heliodoro, 1987), pp. 253–8 (p. 258) [a couple of stories which at bottom are just one]. Ordóñez also treats them as a continuum (Voices, pp. 182-3). When the author was questioned on the common ground between El Sur and Bene, she explained this by saying ‘los dos relatos surgen de la misma fuente: son recuerdos de mi infancia. […] No es literalmente mi vida, pero sí tiene que ver’ ‘Adelaida García Morales: la soledad gozosa’, interview by Milagros Sánchez Arosi, Insula, 472 (1986), 4 [the two narratives arise from the same source: they are recollections of my childhood. It is not literally my life, but that does have something to do with it.]
In El Sur, the narrator, Adriana, addresses her father, Rafael, beyond the grave and gives him her perspective on the events of her childhood and particularly, her relationship with him. She depicts Rafael as a social outsider: he has rejected the central role of the Church in Franco’s Spain, where the story is set and prevents her (at first) from going to school (necessarily entailing religious instruction). Added to this social self-marginalization, his marriage to Adriana’s mother is clearly increasingly unhappy and an extramarital relationship with a certain Gloria Valle – which has produced a son, Miguel – is ended by letter from Gloria in the course of the narrative. Finally, Adriana herself seems to meet with her father’s growing disapproval as she gradually integrates into society and especially, as she begins to meet boys during adolescence. He takes his own life when she is 15, after which she goes to his home town, Seville, ostensibly to visit his sister Delia, of whom she is very fond. Clearly, however, this is an excuse; what she seems to want to do is to acquire a deeper sense of who her father was and this she achieves, partly through staying in his house and talking to the old family servant, Emilia, partly through meeting Gloria and Miguel.

Bene is narrated by Ángela, who was twelve at the time of the action. In a smooth transition from the end of El Sur, it opens as a direct address to her brother, Santiago, another suicide victim, but soon switches into normal first-person narration. The setting is another isolated house in Franco’s Spain, where the narrator lives with Santiago; their father, Enrique, who is often absent; and an aunt, Elisa, who is responsible for the children as their mother is dead. Also in the house are an elderly housekeeper, Catalina; Ángela’s pious governess, Rosaura; and then there is Bene. This is a 19-year-old maid taken into employment at the beginning of the story. The narrator knows something of her half-sister, a child called Juana, and through her, of the family, so we gradually learn that Bene is also motherless and that her father was a gypsy who took her away to work at the age of fourteen, but is now dead. The plot focuses on the multiple effects of Bene upon Ángela and the rest of the household. These include the brother Santiago’s infatuation with her and the consequences of this, culminating in his leaving home with her, only to be brought back by the Civil Guard two weeks later, whereupon he locks himself into the wing of the house they call the “torre” [tower] and lets himself die. Ángela meanwhile suffers from a terrible ambivalence with respect to Bene. On the one hand she likes her and wants to be her friend; but on the other she is frightened by a strange expression which crosses her face from time to time;

4 Adelaida García Morales, Bene, in El Sur, seguido de Bene, 22nd edn (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1997), pp. 53–111. Future references will relate to this edition and be given parenthetically in the text. The translations are taken from The South and Bene (trans.) Thomas G. Deveny (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). The second-person form returns three times subsequently, the last time being the closing section of the text. It is always addressed at Santiago.
Ángela links this to Bene's ongoing relationship with the ghost of the gypsy father who may also be and/or have been her lover. At the end, we learn that Bene has also killed herself. This factual synopsis gives little idea of the power of the story, however, for it derives not from the events themselves, but chiefly from the narrator's incomplete understanding of what is happening around her, so that her anxieties and fantasies melt imperceptibly into the superstitious fears of the aunt and Rosaura (who believe Bene to be an agent of the devil), together with the undecidably proportioned mix of lies and truth coming from the other child, Juana's embroidered and also partial understanding of her sister’s life and character.

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* weaves together two key concerns into a haunting narrative. One is true in real life as well as fiction: the inexorability of the ageing process, emblematized in the novel as the terrible transience of the physical beauty of youth. The second is to do with the nature of corruption, which is to say the terrible transience of youthful purity of ideals, but this is represented via an idea that requires a suspension of disbelief on the reader's part. Within the poetic logic of the story, sins committed are physically detectable, or as Basil Hallward puts it: ‘“Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face”’ (*PDG*, p. 167). The eponymous protagonist personifies the two processes, but by unexplained magic, they are both transferred to a portrait of Dorian painted by Hallward, so that while the years pass for the man and he becomes not only older, but also increasingly depraved, the visible signs of both show only on the picture, while he remains immaculately young and pure in appearance. At the end of the novel, Dorian has reached the point where cohabitation with the picture has become intolerable, but as he attempts to destroy it the act of violence is mysteriously translated to himself, so that the attempted murder of the picture becomes suicide and furthermore, at the same moment the painting returns to its pristine condition, while the dead Dorian takes on the former looks of the picture.

This concept of the transference of the marks which time and one’s own life choices brand upon one’s self to somewhere else – in this case, the painting – is not only fascinating in the context of Wilde’s novel, but has

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5 There is an implicit suggestion that Dorian has sold his soul to the devil to have his wish granted, since he declares “If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!” (*PDG*, p. 33). Critics such as Byron take for granted that a pact with the devil is a straightforward fact in the novel (‘Gothic in the 1890s’, in Punter (ed.), p. 137). However, it is not so clear since the devil makes no appearance to close the deal with Dorian as he does, say, with Ambrosio in Lewis’s *The Monk* (1795). Thus, no one is more surprised than Dorian himself when he realizes this wish has come true. See Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (ed.) Howard Anderson (Oxford: OUP, 1980), pp. 433–8.
richly suggestive implications with regard to García Morales’s twin texts. Both El Sur and Bene have a first-person narrator who has been badly scarred by the events she recounts, but in different ways and for different reasons. As we shall see, Rafael and Adriana of El Sur are in a relationship that can be fruitfully paralleled with that of Dorian and the picture, whereas Bene’s Ángela stands more at the margins of events (much to her annoyance). There, the Dorian figure has to be Bene and the picture that expresses the corruption of her soul takes the form of the gypsy ghost.

This chapter will argue, first, that the cruelty of the ageing process’s inexorability is central to an understanding of El Sur. Certainly, the author seemed to concur with this reading of her treatment of time when she was interviewed on the text:

Creo que el tiempo tiene inevitablemente un lado de destrucción. Es decir, que lo que hay hacia el futuro es más bien muerte, pero también el tiempo tiene ese lado de aprendizaje, de adquirir una experiencia, pero no sé por qué yo veo que es más tremendo lo que tiene de negativo, porque te acerca a la muerte y la destrucción.6

However, in a manner not identical to, but resonating with Dorian Gray, this is transferred in El Sur from Adriana’s father to Adriana herself, a sort of portrait of him; in other words, one factor that drives him to despair and eventually suicide, is that he cannot arrest the process of her growing up and concomitantly, the changing nature of their relationship. He tries shutting her away, but this does not succeed because in the end he cannot resist the pressure from his wife to allow her to go to school; then he tries shutting himself away, but this too fails because – like Dorian and his picture – he cannot resist the temptation to look at her from time to time and this will eventually prove fatal to him.7

Although the issue of corruption of innocence is relevant to what is meant by growing up, where it really takes centre stage is in Bene. As well as drawing on antique motifs of the demonic woman who lures an innocent young man to perdition, itself linked to vampiric notions of the damned soul

6 Sánchez Arnosi interview. [I believe that time inevitably has a destructive side. That is to say, what there is going towards the future is really death, but time also has a side that is about apprenticeship, acquiring experience, but – I don’t know why – I see as more terrifying the negative side of time, because it brings you closer to death and destruction.] As we shall see, however, Ángela of Bene is trapped by the reverse phenomenon: that of not being old enough.

7 It is clear that Adriana’s growing up is not the only factor that drives Rafael to despair. Nevertheless, her dependence on him seems to have been the key dissuasive factor when she was younger, so his perception of her as no longer needing him can be read as the catalyst. This can be extrapolated from Rafael’s bitter advice to Adriana not to marry or have children, if only to have the freedom to die when you want (S, p. 28; S/tr, p. 27).
sucking the life-blood out of the pure and eventually bringing about the victim’s death and recruitment to the ranks of the undead, García M orales’s story also addresses the issue of corruption of innocence per se and implicitly asks a similar question to that posed by Wilde’s text: how does one person’s immorality corrupt another? And, how much guilt should we shoulder for the impact of our life choices on those around us? Wilde’s text explores – but is careful to provide no easy answers for – these questions in two main ways: one is the effect of Lord Henry Wotton’s ideas on Dorian and the other is Dorian’s effect on the lives of many others, including Sybil Vane and Alan Campbell, both of whom commit suicide for reasons wholly linked to their relations with him. As we shall see, in Bene, a similar domino effect can be discerned as Bene’s father seems to have major responsibility for the way she is by the time she appears in the text and then her influence on Santiago leads to the destruction of his life, which in turn scars his sister, the narrator of the text.

The Gothic effects of Wilde’s novel include some superficial ones, analogous to lighting techniques in a film. Thus, there are murky London streets, an opium den, and the sound of blood dripping onto the threadbare carpet of the disused nursery in the attic where Dorian hides the picture, for example. In like fashion, Gothic devices can be found in García M orales’s texts: the silent, isolated, and semi-ruined house of El Sur and the Udolpho-like tower in which Santiago immures himself to await death in Bene.8 However, this chapter will argue that these effects, although atmospheric, are not so crucial to the texts’ Gothic credentials as the ideas underlying all three, namely, that we can become trapped claustrophobically in a self whose relationships destroy us. As with Jonathan Harker and Dracula’s castle, we appear to walk into them of our own free will, but a complex network of ambivalence interwoven with social pressures then bar our exit on this side of the grave.9

First, it is important to establish the extent to which it can be argued that Adriana is in some sense like a picture of her father and then to assess the implications of considering their relationship in the light of that of Dorian with his picture. As with the painting in Wilde’s text, the physical resemblance is striking: ‘Heredé de ti [ . . .] tu rostro, teñido con los colores de mamá’ (S, p. 6) [‘I inherited [ . . .] your face, shaded with Mama’s coloring’, S/tr p. 4]. This painterly self-description by Adriana as she speaks to her dead father, reminds the reader that as in Wilde’s construct, there is a

8 Raby mentions the blood dripping in a list of Gothic effects in Wilde’s text (Oscar Wilde, p. 76). Glenn notes the Gothic effects of Erice’s gloomy lighting in the film adaptation of El Sur (see ‘Gothic Vision’, 247).

9 Dracula and the implications of Stoker’s treatment of free will among the vampire’s victims, will be discussed in Chapter 3.