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Detecting the "Specters" of Chicano/a Past in Lucha Corpi's *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*

Introduction

Since its first affirmation at the end of the nineteen century, the detective genre has been highly debated: on the one hand it represented a very popular genre, but on the other hand it has always been considered 'inferior', receiving scant academic attention. Nevertheless, during the 1960s and 1970s, hard-boiled fiction got a phenomenal boost in the American cultural frame, receiving increasing recognition from both a wider audience and critics. It became one of the means through which multicultural writers could explore society and deal with issues such as gender and ethnicity.

The aim of the present article is to show how detective fiction has been rethought from both a multicultural and postfeminist perspective, to give voice to those deprived of it, through an analysis of Lucha Corpi's first detective novel, *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992), and her heroine, detective Gloria Damasco, in which the past and the history of the Chicano/a Movement re-emerges overwhelmingly, in Derrida's words, as a *specter* to resume its fights after an unforgettable disillusion.

I

Amazing, how a lifetime of feelings, actions, and memories could be compressed into a book, like ashes into a small burial urn.
(Lucha Corpi, *Black Widow's Wardrobe*)

At the beginning of the 1970s, in the United States, the hard-boiled detective fiction – inaugurated almost fifty years earlier by Raymond

Chandler and Dashiell Hammett – became a subject of renewed interest, especially among feminist writers and critics. Women authors, such as Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton among others, successfully tried to overcome the stereotypes of the white-man detective, introducing in their novels heroines who are strong, independent, self-reliant, and sexually uninhibited. Furthermore, the detective genre is better explored by numerous writers belonging to the so-called "ethnic minorities." The aim is to "subject to critique dominant cultural and legalistic conceptions of crime and injustice and to forward new conceptions informed by an historical perspective of the racial experience in the US" (Libretti 61). This is precisely the case with Chicano/a writers.

The term "Chicano/a" refers to Mexican-American people – mainly belonging to the second generation of Mexican immigrants in the US – who during the 1960-70s associated themselves with unprecedented social and cultural anti-racist demonstrations. The Chicano Movement became part and parcel of the larger fight for Civil Rights, in which the African American Movement and many other minority groups took part. The epicenter of the Chicano outburst was the UC Berkeley, but the insurrections soon spread all over the country, also conjoining with anti-Vietnam War protests and involving more radical Chicano groups, such as the Brown Berets.[1]

The most symbolic event in the history of the Chicano Movement took place on 29 August 1970 along Whittier Boulevard up to Laguna Park in Los Angeles: it was the Chicano National Moratorium, a march which, conceived as a peaceful demonstration, gathered about thirty thousand Chicano/a and non-Chicano/a people against social repression and the tragic consequences of the Vietnam War (especially due to the high number of deaths among ethnic soldiers who were the first ones to be sacrificed at the war front). However, the march ended in bloodshed because of the violent intervention of the police forces: participants were brutally repressed and some of them, such as Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar, even lost their lives in the attempt to defend their human rights.

The first Chicano authors who approached detective fiction as a means to investigate society and denounce social and cultural injustice, like the one perpetrated during the march, were Rudolfo Anaya, Michael Nava

and Rolando Hinojosa, whose novels became the best-selling Chicano works of all time, even though they were still circulating mostly within the community itself. Nevertheless, women scholars soon realized that Chicano literature "was almost exclusively focused on male experience, and the central role of the family and community in many early Chicano texts left unexamined the gendered aspects of those very structures" (De Soto 45). Therefore, notwithstanding all the limitations imposed by the Movement itself, Chicanas raised their voices from both a social and cultural perspective. As a matter of fact, Chicana feminism was accused of tearing apart the Movement from within, promoting assimilation to (racist) white feminism and jeopardizing all the fights and values that the Movement had struggled to affirm. Besides, Chicana feminism was also considered as a threat to the heart of the Chicano community which was the traditional family: they were called *traidoras*, and even *vendidas*.

In other words, the Movement was based on a strict moral code, still linked to patriarchal values which reproduced from within the same kind of oppressive and repressive external system they were trying to break down. Therefore, in order to overthrow this standardized structure from both a social and a literary point of view, the most outstanding and well-known voices of the time – such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga who started this feminist wave in the 1980s – were joined by women writers who decided to approach detective fiction to deal with themes related to both ethnicity and gender issues. Besides, it is worth mentioning that all the above constitutes also an opportunity to give academic dignity to detective fiction itself. In short, the revival is triple in that Chicano authors try to give a voice back to the community, as the victim of social oppression, to women, oppressed by a strict patriarchal structure, and to the detective genre, as part of the constitution of a new multicultural literary canon.

This is the context in which Chicana writer Lucha Corpi, "a feminist writer steeped in the Chicano/a activism of the 1960s and 1970s" (Rodríguez 55), was educated and conceived her works. Besides her early collections of poems, it is worth mentioning her first novel, *Delia's Song* (1989), which presents relevant autobiographical references and a first exploration of themes such as the past and the history of the Chicano Movement, Chicana feminism, and the affirmation of individual identity, which will become

central especially in the ensuing detective novels. In *Delia's Song*, in fact, Delia Treviño is a young woman who walks away from her male chauvinist family in order to find her path and to study at Berkeley University, where she will face a very hard situation, confronting with a strict hierarchical system in which she will try to claim her voice both as a woman and a writer, as well as a Chicana activist in the early stages of the Movement.

II

> *We were carrying a layer of dry sweat, teargas and dust on us like a second skin and our souls were burdened with the sediment of the frustration and anger that results from a confrontation with violence.*
> (Lucha Corpi, *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*)

However, it is with her first detective novel, *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992)[2] and her heroine, detective Gloria Damasco, that Lucha Corpi explores more deeply the causes of the general disillusionment about the Movement, a social failure that starts with the crucial episode of the violent outcome of the Chicano Moratorium March. As a matter of fact, the novel is imbued with history since the epigraph, the *corrido* "Garbanzo Beret" written by bilingual poet José Montoya. More precisely, "the rhetoric and the form of the epigraph set up reader expectations associated with the nationalist struggles of the Chicano/a Movement" (Rodríguez 59):

> Por la calle Whittier La Raza marchaba
> En protesta del gobierno.
> Con puños alzados, unidos gritaban
> Que viva el poder del Chicano.
>
> El Parque Lagunas parecía una fiesta
> Un fiesta de colores.
> Quien iba a pensar que esa tarde de amores
> Se convirtiera en horrores.
>
> ***

Down Whittier La Raza marched
To protest against the government.
Fists raised, in one voice
They all chanted: Power to the Chicano!

Laguna Park looked like a fairground,
A celebration of color
Who would have thought that afternoon
Of love would later turn to horror.
(qtd. in Corpi, *Eulogy* 9)

The contraposition between the picnic (almost edenic-like) atmosphere of the March and its outcome emerges also from Gloria's words. In fact, in the opening of the novel it is possible to witness that at the beginning "organizers and other participants shared a feeling of accomplishment and optimism: the impressive gathering seemed to make palpable the Chicano movement goals of unity and pride" (Oropeza 145), but soon enough the event turned into a bloody clash during which people, both adults and children, among shards of glass and rubble, were injured or even killed:

> With our baskets of food, and our children, our poets, musicians, leaders and heroes, we had to celebrate our culture and reaffirm our rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly as Americans of Mexican descent.
> In our idealism, Luisa and I, and others like us, hoped that the police would appreciate our efforts to keep the demonstration peaceful and would help us maintain order with dignity, surely, we thought, they would realize that we would not needlessly risk the lives of our very old and our very young. How foolish we had been.
> (Corpi, *Eulogy* 17-18)

In fact, as already anticipated above, as soon as "few of the marchers became disorderly, they were subdued by police officers in a brutal manner" (18), transforming a "sunny Saturday" into a nightmare "that would be remembered as the National Chicano Moratorium, one of the most violent days in the history of California" (17). Marchers were forced to flee while "hearing the screams and cries of adults and children as they ran from the

gas and the shattering of storewindows" (17). From both inside and outside the Chicano community, the march was the first signal of an evident failure and consequent decline of the Movement, an event that will irremediably affect Chicano consciousness.

It is in the middle of this "bloody riot" (18) that Gloria Damasco, together with her friend Luisa, unexpectedly finds the dead body of a little boy abandoned in the middle of the street. Indeed, the novel is about the murder of a four-year-old child, Michael David Cisneros Jr., followed by the killing of a fifteen-year-old Chicano boy, Mando, who is the only one who has witnessed the former crime. She is deeply shocked by both the murders and the outcome of the protest, but – after some unexpected events and the failure of the police investigation – she decides to return to her family in Oakland where she goes on with her life. Eighteen years later – finally free from her family bonds – she is overwhelmed by the memory of those deaths and becomes, with the help of P.I. Justin Escobar, an *amateur* detective who finally finds the murderers and achieves justice. As Gloria Damasco comes closer to the truth, she finds herself struggling more and more against a double, sometimes triple, discrimination as regards: *race*, because of her ethnic origins; *gender*, as a woman who tries to claim her own independence; and *social class*, as a consequence of both the former and the latter. Therefore, "the intersection of ethnicity and gender" (Fischer-Hornung and Mueller 13) inevitably fosters a multilayered reflection of the novel.

The investigation of the crimes is parallel to a larger social exploration: the individual body of the victim – in particular, Michael David's body that has been brutally tortured – becomes the metaphor of a larger collective body, the community itself, which has been and still is likewise politically, socially and culturally violated. Consequently, in *Eulogy* two levels of crime are presented: the actual murder of the child and the one against the ethnic community to which the author belongs. Finding the truth about the former is an essential step towards the resolution of the latter.

In *Eulogy*, however, Corpi analyzes all the events retrospectively, as the investigation is reopened only in 1988. Gloria is helped by both LA police detective Matthew Kenyon, whose death allows her to receive all the police files about the case that had piled up before being dismissed, and Chicano

private detective Justin Escobar. Gloria is now ready to investigate but what she doesn't know yet is that, if she really wants to unveil the truth, her main task is to *detect history*: she has to go back in place and time not only to convict the culprits but also to face a past that has been repressed and resume a conflict that hasn't yet been solved. More precisely, Gloria realizes that:

> One cannot have done with history and that it will continue to erupt in and from the present such that the political models of the past developed to understand experience and resist the conditions of existence defining the experience must not be forgotten. Such a narrative of detection does not only *not* repress history, it calls attention to and continually calls up history. (Libretti 72)

Therefore, going back to Los Angeles, Gloria understands that if every trace of a past crime has been more or less intentionally concealed, then there will never be a concrete possibility to legitimately claim justice:

> Not having been to East LA since the Moratorium March in 1970, I decided to drive through the old barrio. As expected it has changed in some ways. In other instances, is seems as if things have stood still. Except for the fact that the Silver Dollar Café is now only a bar, and a plaque with Rubén Salazar's name is displayed somewhere around Laguna Park, there is little to remind people of the events that at the time we thought would shape our political future in California. (Corpi, *Eulogy* 130)

This is truth about both the murders and the social oppression: there is a moral obligation to remember. Thus, Gloria becomes "the executor of this legacy" (Corpi, *Cactus Blood* 76) of memory, in that not only does shepreserve the past, but also reconstructs it, and that also means to "bear directly on the (re)construction of [Chicano] identity" (Rodríguez 56), which has been lost contextually with the decline of the Movement.

In *Eulogy* the re-appropriation of the past is not an anachronistic attempt to make it live again in the present, nor is it the expression of a will to re-create an idyllic society. Rather, it is the possibility to re-write history from a postmodernist perspective, against a background of very different social and cultural conditions: in fact, it is a past that is gone but that can still

return in a different form. In order to better understand this mechanism of returning to and recalling the past in the present, the novel can be read and interpreted, from a Derridian point of view, through the concept of *specter*.

The specter, or ghost, is an immaterial thing that is there in the moment of its apparition but that at the same time recalls something that no longer exists and that will never return as it was. In Derrida's words, the specter is "a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. [...] there is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed" (Derrida 5). It is a *non-present presence*: it is there only in its absence. In fact, in *Eulogy*, the ghost refers to a moment of the Chicano history that is dead but still burns in the heart of those who lived it and still believe in its lasting values.

Besides, Derrida's specter, as is well known, is a deconstructive concept breaking the traditional dichotomies of "the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present" (Gordon 24). Its presence entails the perception that something – either positively or negatively – suddenly re-emerges and *haunts* the present; related to the novel, this is the cause of a double re-emergence: the Chicano/a Movement, with its fights, history and culture, and the truth about the murders.

In *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* another important implication of the concept of ghost emerges, that is the question of repetition: "a specter is always a *revenant* [and] one cannot control its comings and goings" (Derrida 11). On the one hand, Gloria is gifted with a powerful ability, *clairvoyance,* that allows her to see into both the past and the future. In fact, on the one hand, she has the moral obligation to "investigate," but on the other hand she is gifted with the ability and capability to do it: this gift "takes a certain kind of talent, a great gift to see how the past will become the future" (Corpi, *Cactus Blood* 94). As a matter of fact, Gloria is initially unable to control her mojo, it is more like a *dark gift* (see Ramírez) that she refuses because she cannot control it. As her words reveal: "Something over which I didn't seem to have any control was working in me or around me" (Corpi, *Eulogy* 29): it seems that "Gloria is not completely at ease with this gift, this awareness, this way of coming to knowledge" (Bickford 100).

However, as the investigation goes on, she becomes more aware of her power and clairvoyance ends up being the key to the resolution of the

case. The way she uses visions and dreams to solve the case, apparently in contrast with the logical and scientific assumptions of the detecting process, can be seen in the frame of poststructuralist and deconstructive theories, according to which there is no such thing as an absolute, directly and objectively accessible truth. Consequently, it is possible to acknowledge that reality must be submitted to a process of interpretation, which is enacted by the detective fiction epistemology itself. As a matter of fact, Lucha Corpi seems to demonstrate that "truths are contextual": "Theorists point out that objectivity is virtually impossible: the knowledges we acquire and produce are filtered through our own social locations, histories, and national narratives whether we are conscious of those filters or not" (Bickford 97, 99).

Gloria Damasco's investigation embodies the impossibility of finding an objective truth and of applying an infallible scientific method. Therefore, "she moves beyond the polarization of rationality and emotionality to consider still another path to knowledge: intuition and psychic knowledge"; this allows her to construct alternative "ways of creating knowledge [and] a reconsideration of Western epistemologies" (99). As during a psychoanalytical session, Gloria explores the darkest sides of her being and, simultaneously, she explores all the contradictions of the past. Reliving the past is like reliving a trauma which is connected to both the unnatural end of a child's life and the decay of the ideals of a community. This makes her perceive that the past is still there and it is still possible to achieve justice. In order to do so, she needs to go back to that past, both ideally and physically, moving again to LA, talking to all the people involved, studying the documents she has on the case, but especially acting as if she were travelling back in time, recalling all the events that led to the crime and to its discovery. A mechanism similar to that related to psychoanalysis is enacted: in order to cope with a trauma, it is necessary to relive it over and over again.

One way to understand this process is precisely the explicit connection between detective fiction and psychoanalysis. As Colin Davis points out, both detective fiction and psychoanalysis rose in the late nineteenth century and "it is now almost commonplace to compare the detective and the psychoanalyst. Both search out the relevant clues that point to a hidden

truth" (294). Gloria, in fact, as a detective resembles a therapist because she uses her abilities as a key to collect, put together, and interpret all the pieces of evidence, so that the truth and all that has been concealed can eventually come out again. Interestingly, Gloria was formerly a speech therapist and she has expertise in traumas that affect the use of language. We can only cope with trauma and evil if we are able to articulate them: this is exactly what fiction, and especially detective fiction, does. More precisely, "the reconstructive core of detective fiction [is the] restatement of the past in the language of the present [...], which provides it with new meaning and coherence" (Hutter 200). But it is not an easy job. Gloria almost panics when the crucial moment arrives: while she is about to reveal the murderer's identity, "the words were pouring out of her mouth" (Corpi, *Eulogy* 162) as a flow that cannot be interrupted and that promptly erupts as a latent truth from the bottom of her unconscious.

The question of language is crucial in *Eulogy* since literature and story-telling are the main means through which trauma is analyzed from a social and cultural point of view, and used as a starting point in the process of both individual and collective healing. The story-telling reveals "past exclusions telling new stories, correcting the official records" (Gordon 20) and, as becomes evident in Lucha Corpi's work, literature can make the trauma emerge as "a history of repeated gaps and ruptures" (Schönfelder 27). The return of the trauma is a topical theme in the novel under many respects. In addition to this, the detective fiction epistemology allows, especially when written by multicultural writers, to enact a process of revision and investigation of the past aimed at re-writing and re-telling a story and a history that has been written and told from a standardized dominant western perspective. This is exactly what Lucha Corpi does in her novels: as Carmen Flys-Junquera points out, in order to enhance Chicano/a history, "Lucha Corpi appropriates the American hard-boiled detective tradition with the purpose of transgressing a number of its conventions as a deliberate aesthetic strategy to portray alternative worldviews to the dominant Anglo-American one" (117), which is responsible for Chicano/a long cultural and social repression.

In other words, it allows the exploration of "issues of guilt, the relations between victims and perpetrators, as well as the ethical complexities of

narrating and sharing trauma" (Schönfelder 38). In this respect, Lucha Corpi demonstrates that trauma can both divide and reunite: it divides as was the case with Chicano/a activists, but it also reunites, both in the present, through shared grief, and in the future, in the possibility of restoring both the Cisneros family and Chicano/a activism by punishing the culprits and achieving justice.

In this web, the role of the detective is to make sense of the meaningless and to give order to an incoherent world. Where reality seems to be "out of joint" (Derrida 22), Gloria's task is to gather all the fragments to restore temporal and historical linearity, "to set right a time that walks crook," to make it right again, and therefore to achieve justice; in short, Gloria has "to do justice, to put things back in order, to put history, the world, the age, the time *upright*, on the right path, [...] following the law (le droit)" (23). Indeed, one might say that in *Eulogy*, no less than in *Hamlet*, the specters of the past reappear "under the name or in the name of justice" (27).

However, Gloria's "desire to make sense of things" (Corpi, *Eulogy* 71), and "to restore the order" (181) is impossible to completely fulfill. That's because, on the one hand, she is aware that "goodness, like justice, [is] only a relative notion, depending on who interpreted or administered it" (61). On the other hand, she cannot give Michael David back to his family, nor can she reanimate the Chicano/a fight as it was: under no circumstances can things be again what they were. As Libretti points out, in the novel "the restoration of innocence is reversed" (71). As a matter of fact, at the end of the novel, Lucha Corpi seems to reverse the guilt: while the Chicano/a community was the innocent side throughout the story, the neat opposition between good and evil is questioned when we learn that the murderer of the child is not only a Chicano, but he is actually part of little Michael's family. As Benjamin claims, "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256): this is exactly what Corpi seems to demonstrate. More precisely, in Viet Thanh Nguyen's words, in order to actually make justice, we need "an art that celebrates the humanity of all sides and acknowledges the inhumanity of all sides, including our own. We need an art that enacts powerful memory, an art that speaks truth to power even when our side exercises and abuses that power" (267).

In conclusion, the writer expresses the will to expose the *humanity* and *inhumanity* of both sides when she shows the good side of American institutions, embodied by detective Kenyon, and unveiling Chicano contradictions and evils by identifying not one but two Chicano murderers, the one who killed the child and the other one who killed Mando, the only witness of the crime.

III

> *"State of the art," said Kenyon, trying to be humorous.*
> *"Just for Chicano women."*
> *"I think I better start your education right now. You have to say Chicanas with an 'a' when you talk about us women. Got it?"*
> (Lucha Corpi, *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*)

As mentioned above, in *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* "it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler 3). Therefore, analyzing the Chicano/a past inevitably means to explore at the same time the feminist implications of the Movement and the way in which these fights affect Gloria's individualization, as both an ethnic and a woman detective. During the 1970s, feminism was strongly hindered by the Movement, and as Corpi underlines "Chicano nationalism and feminism didn't walk hand in hand before or during the summer of 1970" (*Eulogy* 66). However, Chicanas managed to resist claiming a double will: on the one hand, they wanted to subvert the internal machismo, and on the other hand they needed to speak up against a (white) feminism still concentrated on "sexual politics and reductive accounts of female victimhood" (Butler 3). Actually, what happened was that white women "could no more claim to be or to represent women in general than white men could represent humanity as a whole. No women was simply a woman. 'Different' women raised their voices" (Bhavnani and Coulson 74).

The multicultural feminist afterthought was a direct consequence of

the fights for the Civil Rights Movements of those years. Women realized that they no longer felt themselves represented by a feminism that was not inclusive of their own cultural, ethnic and class differences. Consequently, a "shift in direction and emphasis within feminism, with the emergence of postfeminism" (Brooks 5) became necessary:

> Postfeminism as understood from this perspective is about the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference. It is fundamentally about, not a depoliticisation of feminism, but a political shift in feminism's conceptual and theoretical agenda. [It] expresses the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism, and as such represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks. (4)

In fact, in *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*, as the investigation goes on, not only does Gloria unveil the contradictions of Chicano history, but she also discover a new self. Therefore the readers find themselves intrigued by both the resolution of the crime and the (re)construction of Gloria's identity. As Lucha Corpi writes "as in a dream, Gloria felt herself floating" (*Eulogy* 188) because her identity is multiple, fluid and it is the result of an ongoing transformation.

During this long and non-linear process, Gloria finds herself wondering if she is a Chicana first of all, or 'just' a woman. Actually, it is impossible to split her personality, since both ethnicity and gender are fundamental in the process of claiming her own individuality. In *Eulogy*, being a woman *and* Chicana could mean to be in a position of double subordination in the face of a kind of both masculine and socio-political authority. When she calls the police department to notify Michael David's death, she has trouble in denouncing the event not just because she, as a woman, may be judged to be overreacting, but especially because a "Spanish surname always meant a delay of at least an hour in emergencies" (21).

When detective Matthew Kenyon finally arrives on the crime scene, Gloria is incapable of trusting him and, as the inquiry proceeds, Gloria's feelings towards him oscillate from resentment – as he embodies the same institution that has repressed and killed the marchers – to admiration. This is particularly evident in the novel, as Gloria herself points out: "During

the last two and a half days I had resented Matthew Kenyon, then admired him. I had confided in him to distrust him later. Now I was beginning to trust him again" (73).

Gloria's desire to assert herself over the authority is soon expressed through a throbbing anger. This is clear when she confesses: "I was angry at myself for letting him, a man *and* a cop, have that kind of authority over me. Why was I allowing him that power?" (99). If, on the one hand, Kenyon's character is soon rehabilitated – if not as the one who solves the case, but as both a man *and* a good cop – on the other hand, it takes a long struggle to finally impose herself over that kind of authority.

The first information we know about Gloria in the novel is that she is a mother. As a matter of fact, the first image that Michael David's body on the pavement makes her think of is her daughter's safe body at home, asleep in her cradle, under the care of her husband, Darío. Here a reversal is taking place: while Darío is at home, embodying a kind of feminine role in a domestic environment, Gloria is always portrayed in open and public spaces, associated with "ideas of progress, change and masculinity" (McDowell 14) and which will be her main setting throughout the novel, even when she is taking care of her daughter. In addition to this, she is travelling all the time, back and to different places in both time and space, demonstrating that her identity is fluid and hybrid, ready to move from one status to another, inhabiting "a borderland {that} is a vague and undetermined place {in} a constant state of transition" (Anzaldúa 3).

Therefore, if at the beginning of the novel Gloria is essentially a mother and a wife, dropping off the case when her husband asks her to do so, eighteen years later she is 'another' woman. Furthermore, it is not 1970 anymore. When her husband dies and her daughter moves to go to the university, Gloria is finally free from her family bonds and her relation to Justin Escobar is far from being a reproduction of a subordinating structure. Somehow, the opposite is true: Justin is highly feminized as he is recognizable mainly for "his curly hair, his oval face, his small bright eyes and well-shaped mouth" (Corpi, *Eulogy* 137) and, in a crucial scene, while Gloria is working on the case, he is cooking in the kitchen, in his "cozy and {clean} and organized" (156) apartment.

By the ending of the novel, Gloria's individualization is not completed.

She is still in the middle of a journey that involves her throughout the five novels of the series. The first signal of a catharsis arrives throughout the following novels, when her friend Luisa dies, she finally gets her detecting license and manages to cope with all what remains of her past life. In that moment she is devastated but feels herself like a new bud and only when she sees herself under a new light can she look forward, both professionally and personally. Only then, can she: see Justin from a different perspective to later marry him in *Cactus Blood* (1995), as "without looking back, he walked out of the kitchen" (187); resume the roots of her land through the myth of La Malinche in *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999); leaving her job to her fellow woman detective, Dora Saldaña, to work on herself disappearing for a little while in *Crimson Moon* (2005); finally get back, almost eighteen years later than her first literary apparition, in *Death at Solstice* (2009) to help an abused woman to escape from her violent husband.

Conclusions

In *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*, the return *of* and *to* the past is necessary to resume the struggle against the lasting internal colonization of Mexican American people and of all other ethnic communities in the US, which is being perpetrated by capitalism, liberalism and new forms of colonialism and their affirmation at a global level. This has to do with the re-emergence of a social, political, and cultural reality that has been repressed from a racial, historical as well as literary point of view. Moreover, the introduction of a woman detective makes necessary also a reflection on gender implications, underlining the importance of giving voice not just to an ethnic community but also to a doubly repressed reality from a social and gender point of view.

In short, two solutions are needed: to face the repressed and make it *remembered,* make it live again to *haunt* the present, and restore Chicano (but especially Chicana) activism, adjusting it to new circumstances. Notwithstanding the awareness that nothing will ever be the same, there is still hope and the need to gather, remember, and tell the stories of both little Michael David and the Chicano/a fights, not at the moment of their

death but in the prime of their lives, maybe in order to start a *new* life. In one Derridian word, there is an urge to *conjure*:

> "conjuration" [...] designates two things at once [...]. On the one hand, the conspiracy [...] of those who promise solemnly, sometimes secretly, by swearing together an oath[,] to struggle against a superior power. [...] On the other hand, the magical incantation destined to *evoke*, to bring forth with the voice, to *convoke* a charm or a spirit. (Derrida 50)

The urge to conjure is evident also in the moment in which we witness Gloria's double flourishing: she is not just constructing her own individuality, but she is the epicenter of a new community gathering around her, a community in which gender awareness is very high. Throughout the novel, in fact, Gloria is surrounded by numerous strong women, whose help is fundamental to the resolution of the case. Therefore, the return of and to the past is exactly what she needs to raise a collective (woman) voice again.

Notes

[1] The term "Brown Berets" refers to a group of Chicano insurgents who promoted a more radical, sometimes violent, response to US political and social oppression against Chicanos/as, as well as other ethnic communities. The label evoked the Black Panthers and their actions were based on a Marxist ideology. However, the adjective "brown" wanted to challenge the black and white dichotomy on which American history was mainly founded, while the noun "berets" was a reference to the particular headgear they wore.

[2] *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* is a sensational novel which inaugurates the Gloria Damasco's Mysteries Series, after the name of its heroine, made up of four more novels: *Cactus Blood* (2005), *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999), *Crimson Moon* (2005, in which detective Gloria Damasco is temporarily substituted by her former fellow detectives Dora Saldaña and Justin Escobar) and *Death at Solstice* (2009).

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