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# Between grieving monsters and macabre scientists: Mexican horror films in the 50s and 60s

Entre monstruos acongojados y científicos macabros: El cine de terror mexicano en los años cincuenta y sesenta

## ABSTRACT:

This article will analyze a series of Mexican films from the horror genre, launched between the 50s and 60s, that exploded the popularity these kinds of productions were accessing by that time, as industrial cinema in that country was experiencing the cease of its massification in the Latin America region. We will start from a comparative study of the characters' structure of *El hombre que logró ser invisible* (Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1958), *La horripilante bestia humana* (René Cardona, 1969) and *La señora Muerte* (Jaime Salvador, 1969), the first two produced by Cinematográfica Calderón, and the third by Filmica Vergara. Through them, we will delineate the interest in manifesting blurred boundaries between the monstrous and the human, by means of the representation of the prototype of the «mad» scientist, and his macabre plans of domination.

## KEY WORDS:

Horror films; Mexican cinema; scientists; monsters.

## RESUMEN:

Este artículo analizará una serie de films mexicanos provenientes del género del terror, que fueron lanzados entre las décadas del 50 y 60 y explotaron la popularidad a la que estaban accediendo por aquel tiempo esta clase de producciones, en tanto el cine industrial de dicho país experimentaba el cese de su masificación en la región latinoamericana. Partiremos de un estudio comparativo de la estructura de personajes de *El hombre que logró ser invisible* (Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1958), *La horripilante bestia humana* (René Cardona, 1969) y *La señora Muerte* (Jaime Salvador, 1969), las dos primeras producidas por Cinematográfica Calderón, y la última por Filmica Vergara. Delinearemos, a través de



ellos, el interés por manifestar los límites difusos entre lo monstruoso y lo humano, por medio de la representación del prototipo del científico «loco», y sus planes macabros de dominación.

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**PALABRAS CLAVE:**

Películas de terror; cine mexicano; científicos; monstruos.

## 1. Introduction

Cinema, as a narrative art, has shown from its beginnings the willingness to implement structures and rules for the development of numerous genres, which served to organize its aesthetics and encourage commercialization. Among them, terror has been one of the most productive, exploited since early times, starting with George Méliès's short *Le manoir du diable* (1896), agreed upon as the first horror film in history. In it, supernatural entities appear and disappear as if by magic, involved in a fight between man and Mephistopheles.

Very soon, Hollywood studios, with their excellent infrastructure capacity to install sets, develop innovative make-up systems and hire specialized stars, would embark on a path that enabled the exponential growth of the genre, highlighting the company Universal Studios, which gave birth to early horror classics. From there would emanate the well-known stories of Frankenstein and Count Dracula, who occupy the podium in the personification of monstrous figures in the cinema, even when both came from literature.<sup>1</sup> The year 1931 was vital in this sense, installing a legacy with *Dracula* (Tod Browning) and *Frankenstein* (James Whale), who generated a large number of descendants in different latitudes and times.

But not only the monsters of these two narratives, today even transmedia, populated the universe of horror in the cinema. We also find early werewolves — *Werewolf of London* (Stuart Walker, 1935)—, invisible men — *The invisible man* (James Whale, 1933)—, mummies — *The mummy* (Karl Freund, 1932)—, beasts — *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (John S. Robertson, 1920)—, specters — *The phantom of the opera* (Rupert Julian, 1925)—, zombies — *White zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932)—, as well as other creatures as mysterious as they are horrifying; namely giant insects<sup>2</sup> — *Tarantula!* (Jack Arnold, 1955)—, monstrous marinos — *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954)— and beings from another planet (although the latter usually make their appearance mostly in films from a neighboring genre, science fiction).

In the tour of horror movies, we can also refer to films outside the Hollywood neighborhood, such as in Scandinavia, with the Swedish classic *The Ghost Wagon* (Körkalen, Victor Sjöström, 1920), which challenges the collective unconscious with the threat of death from a ghostly figure driving the title float. German cinema has also left its mark through expressionist aesthetics, reinforcing the tone of sorrow that terror offers its narrative content.

In this sense, the dominated sleepwalker from *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919), the Nosferatu vampire in *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Graunes* (Friedrich

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1/ We refer to the English novels *Dracula* (*Dracula*, Bram Stoker, 1897) and *Frankenstein*, or the modern Prometheus (*Frankenstein*, or the modern Prometheus, Mary Shelley, 1818).

2/ Regarding the dimension of the monster-insects, the words of Héctor Santiesteban are valid, in his treatise on the ontological quality of the monster: «The monster must have a certain dimension, a certain weight. All insects are a bit monstrous, but they are too small. Although it is necessary to say, in contrast, that the microscope modified this concept, and the smallest beings became monsters» (2000, 98).



Wilhelm Murnau, 1921), and the murderer stand out. of children of *M, the vampire* (M, Fritz Lang, 1931), also marked by social roots that have drawn analogies on the environment of the Weimar Republic and the first postwar period.

Latin America was not exempt from this monstrous universe, bringing a wealth of titles from the beginning of its industrialization,<sup>3</sup> reaching a greater impact from the 50s and 60s, which coincided with a reappearance of the genre in American cinema and English, to cite the main examples.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, terror was intermingled with other generic instances such as comedy or suspense,<sup>5</sup> and in the case of Mexico, even with wrestling films, which took advantage of the pregnancy of these athletes – artists,<sup>6</sup> seeking to reach new formulas that would lift the depressed box office, given the changes incorporated by new media in competition with cinema, such as television.

Through this article, we will analyze a series of Mexican films from the horror genre, released between the 50s and 60s, which exploited the popularity that these kinds of productions were gaining at that time, in both the industrial cinema of said country experienced the cessation of its massification in Latin America. We will start with *The Man Who Managed to Be Invisible* (Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1958), *The Horrifying Human Beast* (René Cardona, 1969) and *La Señora Muerte* (Jaime Salvador, 1969), the first two produced by Cinematográfica Calderón, and the third by Vergara film. We will outline, with them, the interest in manifesting the diffuse limits between the monstrous and the human, through the representation of the prototype of the «mad» scientist, and his macabre plans for domination.

## 2. Methodology

These three films were selected based on their inclusion of two characters –the monster and its creator–, being extensive to a generalized corpus: in principle, that of the Mexican horror films that reappeared in the 50s and 60s,<sup>7</sup> and a more specific corpus, linked to the

3 See, for example, *La llorona* (Ramón Peón, 1933; Mexico) and *Una luz en la ventana* (Manuel Romero, 1942, Argentina), to cite cases from two of Latin America's major cinematographies.

4 The United States again had a wave of Universal films, while in England, Terence Fisher's productions for the Hammer, starring Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, stood out, which exploited several variants of Dracula and Frankenstein, as well as other prototypical characters such as the mummies, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We can also cite the case of Spain, with films such as *La noche de Walpurgis* (León Klimovsky, 1971), in co-production with Germany, or Italy, with its famous giallo all'italiana, during the 1960s.

5 Think of the films starring the comedians Abbot and Costello in the 40s and 50s, in which they confronted monstrous beings such as Martians, the invisible man and mummies, in a generic hybridisation that would be imitated by Latin American cinema.

6 For an analysis of the exploitation of horror films in combination with wrestler films, see Syder and Tierney (2005), and Flores (2018).

7 Among them, we will cite *The Magnificent Beast* (Chano Urueta, 1952), *The Resurrected Monster* (Chano Urueta, 1953), *Corpse Thief* (Chano Urueta, 1956), *The Vampire* (Fernando Méndez, 1957), *The House of Terror* (Gilberto Martínez Solares, 1959), *The Baron of Terror* (Chano Urueta, 1962), *The Living Head* (Chano Urueta, 1963) and *The Vampire Invasion* (Miguel Morayta, 1963).



trajectory of their respective producing companies. *The man who managed to be invisible* and *The horrifying human beast* were released by Guillermo Calderón, a prominent Mexican producer who demonstrated a capacity for commercial reproducibility with titles of different generic roots, among which the rumberas or cabareteras films, released together with his brother, Pedro.<sup>8</sup> His career would include several examples of this revival of Mexican horror cinema.

We have some classics directed by Benito Alazraki: *Muñecos infernales* (1961), related to voodoo, *Spiritism* (1962), around the practice alluded to in the title, and, less famously, *Frankenstein, the vampire and company* (1962), which brings together the monsters of horror movies. Likewise, Calderón was a continuator of the trend that since the 50s linked the cinema of wrestlers with the genre that summons us here, through films starring Santo, the silver masked man: first, under the direction of René Cardona, with *Santo in Dracula's Treasure* (1969), *Santo against the Horsemen of Terror* (1970) and *Santo in the Revenge of the Mummy* (1971); and then in productions by Miguel M. Delgado, with *Santo vs. the daughter from Frankenstein* (1972), *Santo and Blue Demon vs. Dracula and the Wolf Man* (1973), *La Llorona's revenge* (1974) and *Santo and Blue Demon against Dr. Frankenstein* (1974).<sup>9</sup>

*La señora Muerte*, for its part, was produced by another firm that frequently released films of the genre, Film Vergara Cinecomisiones, S.A. This firm launched the famous *Witches Attack* (José Díaz Morales, 1969), also starring the wrestler Santo, and would be linked to Cinematographic Calderón, since, in several of his works, namely *The blue demon* (Chano Urueta, 1965), *Blue Demon vs. el poder satánico* (Chano Urueta, 1966), *Pacto diabólico* (Jaime Salvador, 1969) and the film that concerns us here, were executive produced by the brother-in-law of the Calderón brothers, Jorge García Besné.<sup>10</sup>

Taking this contextual framework into account, the objective of this article consists, first of all, in outlining the characteristics that marked the proliferation of horror films in Mexican cinematography in the aforementioned decades, as a phenomenon encouraged by the wear and tear of generic formulas, exploited in its classical-industrial period, which had so successfully identified that nation with ranch comedies and melodramas.

8 Guillermo Calderón undertook film production in Mexico from the 1940s. His debut occurred precisely with a film that combines comedy and terror, *La posada sangrienta* (Fernando A. Rivero, 1943), produced together with another of his brothers, José Luis Calderón. With a long career, Guillermo would retire from cinema in the 90s, after wearing out the ficheras films and sexy comedies, which he had launched in the 70s, in another of his many attempts to survive in the film market. popular.

9 To these titles we add the trilogy on "the Aztec mummy", which we separate from the rest due to its closer connection with science fiction, although incorporating features of terror with the monstrous leading figure. These films are *The Aztec Mummy* (1957), *The Curse of the Aztec Mummy* (1957) and *The Aztec Mummy Against the Human Robot* (1958), directed by Rafael Portillo.

10 García Besné was also the producer of the films that made Santo's film debut: *Evil Brain* (Joselito Rodríguez, 1958) and *Santo contra "hombres infernales"* (Joselito Rodríguez, 1961), and horror films such as *La venganza de the vampire women* (Federico Curiel, 1970) and *Santo against black magic* (Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1973). Likewise, he was co-producer, together with Fílmica Vergara, of *El satánico* (José Díaz Morales, 1968).

This resurgence will be understood as an update of its first boom in the country during the 1930s, but inserting the attractions of other modalities of representation, based on a postwar ideological contextualization and the liberation of some patterns of censorship. In the second instance, this text tries to analyze the three reference titles based on the configuration of two prototypical characters of certain narratives of horror literature and cinema: the monster (in these cases call it an invisible man, a man transmuted into a gorilla and a woman suffering from cellular degeneration that makes her age) and her creator (in all cases, a scientist who works from his clandestine laboratory, stripping his work of any kind of ethics).

The monster is recreated as a victim of unfavorable circumstances that lead it to the desperate act of submitting to that ambitious scientist, who is also guided by the urgency of his research and/or by the affective bond with his victims.

The analysis of these distinctive characteristics will be carried out through a comparative methodology between the selected films, which will highlight the generic features of terror in terms of its treatment of monstrosity on both sides of this binomial of characters. We will establish this genre as an aesthetic-narrative discourse based on the effect that defines its name —terror, horror, fear—, with the different intensities of that feeling. This has its origin in literature, particularly in the English Gothic novel and in the French crime novel developed three centuries ago (Carroll, 2005), dedicating itself from then on to cause an emotional effect of fear, or even sometimes filth in the characters that pass through his narrative, and of course, in the target audience. According to Margarita Cuellar Barona (2018), this sensation provoked in the story should be called «terror», while the term «horror», considered synonymous, could be applied more specifically to all content of a film that alludes to the monstrous, to the atrocious or the intangible, as will be the case in the titles that we will analyze.

The monstrosity is installed from a place of otherness, associated with that which is far from the social norm (Torrano, 2015), emerging as a kind of different-dangerous, either due to its supernaturality (ghost, alien, zombie, beast, vampire), for constituting a threat to society (murderer, rapist, psychopath) or for presenting some kind of deformity or physical defect. This also implies an appearance that encourages flight, a need to protect oneself, or the impossibility of locating the monster knowing that it is present and it is not possible to see it, a condition consistent with the ancestral fear of the dark, and of that intangible danger that we have no way to prevent.

As Moore and Wolkowicz (2005) establish, horror cinema has usually been configured around the distinctive struggle between two antithetical instances: Good and Evil, with the monster representing the second of these terms. The Good, for its part, is represented by the pattern of what is considered «normal», established by the convention of the status quo, or by what is desired to be enshrined as a desirable experience of social reality. As Velázquez-Zvierkova (2018) corroborates, Mexican horror cinema has assimilated this threatening figure to elements of national tradition, such as the myth of La Llorona, but it also included legends of universal roots, present in European literature, or typical of the mythical Hollywood, in a cultural hybridity that will be characteristic of its different forays into the genre. Thus, mummies, werewolves and vampires regularly pass through their screens, coming across, for example, avenging specters or ancient caciques who come to life from their dark Mexica tombs.



According to Cuéllar Barona (2018), it will be the presence of the monster that will be able to identify that we are facing a horror movie, and not a mere thriller. And it is that said figure who will provide the feeling of horror typical of the genre, much more intense than the effect of suspense, of estrangement or otherness, or of psychological speculation, that other twin genres such as the fantastic, science-fiction can offer. and *film noir*. The monster, the author affirms, reflects the social anxieties of its different times of appearance, and offers the genre its *raison d'être*: to face that «symbolic threat» (2018, 230) that implies the presence of the monster, which each era will be able to assign an identity.

Following the elaborations of Robin Wood (2003) regarding the monstrous, we understand that this figure causes the breakdown of a normality (in the social institutions and the dominant ideologies, being, in the 70s that he analyzes, one of the cinematographic genres that demonstrate more progressive roots). The monster threatens the state of things, the anxieties of Western culture are deposited in it, provoking that horror that associates it, in its difference, with «abnormality.» This disturbance of the natural order (Carroll, 2005) will be the kick of the narratives, leading its protagonists to fight for restoration, emerging the monster-hero duality. However, we will strip the monstrous of that Manichean duality in order to locate its features in different classes of individuals.

In the cases to be analyzed, the scientist produces the monster (having Dr. Frankenstein as a certain antecedent), but he will also become a figure that is as much or more threatening than the monster itself, the distinction being that he will have a normal appearance, which intensifies his dangerousness and threat. The monstrosity will then be a mobile state, capable of exerting feedback between the monster and the one that caused its existence.

To complete this preliminary identification between the creator and his creature, it is important to delimit the figure of the father of the monster, who from literature and cinema encouraged the stereotype of the «mad» scientist. Said madness is associated with genius, with an ability to invent medical devices or treatments that are above traditional science, and for this reason relegates him to marginality, which enables him to continue in his research. This very particular scientist is someone who has been in academia, who holds a degree that allowed him to practice his profession, and is driven by a passionate interest in achieving results, whether it be to dominate the world or to vindicate himself in the face of his displaced singularity.

For that, he spares no method, being able to cross limits. He is a solitary being, accompanied only by servants who fell into his hands by their own misfortune or by diminished will through procedures such as hypnosis. Although some «mad» movie scientists use their misunderstood genius for noble reasons, the truth is that a large part of them responds to what Garlaschelli and Carrer (2019) call the «evil genius», characterized by megalomania and its objectives. shady. Based on these dispositions, we will comparatively analyze the selected corpus, distinguishing the configuration of the monstrosity and the ways of implanting the feeling of horror and disgust of the genre through the interlinking of its two main characters: the scientist, in his macabre aspect and/or or outlaw, and his monster, provocative of that fear, but deeply distressed by an inevitable fate of which the first has made him a victim.

## 3. Analysis

### 3.1. THE MONSTER CREATOR AND THE MONSTROUS CREATOR: A PATH OF DUALITIES

Horror movies will show at least two kinds of dualities in the aforementioned pairing of characters. In the first place, the one that distinguishes the «mad» scientist from his creature, which we will call «monster», knowing that the first, as we anticipated, assumes characteristics similar to those of the second, but with an appearance of normality. For this reason, Santiesteban (2000) unfailingly considers the monster as a mirror of the human: «man has created it, has come out of it, from its entrails; now in a literal sense, now in a figurative sense. We will be participants in that horror and that monstrosity. Man shares the monstrous with the monster itself» (2000, 100). In turn, man is transformed in this case into a simile of the divine, by installing himself in the place of the creator, but in a «defective» figure.

In its other aspect, duality is found in the very figure of the monster, since a double nature is installed in it, which will become evident in the plot of these films, where the human is combined with the supernatural, the hybrid or the mutant. Teratology, that is, the study of the monstrous, or of everything considered abnormal due to its strange physiology, offers a great diversity of positions regarding the ontological quality of these characters. Among them, we find the stigma of its existence, which will always be related to its otherness, whether it is presented as a random error of nature, as the result of a brilliant but malicious and perverse mind, or as a punishment of the order of the divine. The monster is distinguished, in this «abnormality», by its differentiated condition from the common pattern of man, even when it has traits of humanity (whether deformed or transmuted, or mixed with animality), or even, as Wood (2003) affirms), manifests more human feelings than those to whom normality is assigned.

In *The man who managed to be invisible*, we find the man-spectre duality in the character of Carlos Gil, a man whose plans are cut short due to an unjust accusation of murder, which confines him to a prison from which he can only escape thanks to the abilities of his brother Luis, the scientist in question, who manages to make him invisible after tireless chemical experiments with animals. Due to this, Carlos causes the unsuspecting on whom he wishes to take revenge to believe that they are in front of a ghost. On the other hand, and in keeping with *The Horrifying Human Beast*, the film makes a comparison between the protagonist and the animal condition: Carlos is put in a cage to receive his sentence, a cage that his brother also uses in the laboratory to carry out experiments with monkeys. On the other hand, the protagonist's depressive state before his cruel fate also installs an inhumanity that is highlighted by his surroundings, and in particular before the examination by his prison doctor. It will be the hope that invisibility offers him to escape, which will make him look like a «man» again.

Secondly, the duality of the monster in *The Horrifying Human Beast* pits us against a gorilla-man, created after a failed experiment in a doctor's fight, Dr. Krauman, to try to save the life of his young son, Julio, given up due to acute leukemia. The transplant with which he exchanges the heart of the ape with that of his son, in order for it to resist the blood transfusion





that could reconstitute his organism, causes a transmutation, which fuses the human with the animal-bestial. The man-beast duality has its reminiscences again in English literature, with stories such as *The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Robert Louis Stevenson, 1886), although in this case we are faced with the myth of the hybridity between man and animal, or that of the fabulous animal, without the psychiatric implications or the misanthropic features that were the center of said novel.

However, the antithesis between Good and Evil existing in this narrative, as two feasible values to be found within the same person, is reflected in the contrast between Julio (harmless, childish, in need of protection, immaculate in appearance) and the gorilla (which constitutes a danger to society in its ferocity, violence, and devastating force, and in its bestial aspect). The monstrosity of this horrifying human beast is part of the idea that a normal being is an indivisible entity (Santiesteban, 2000); that hybridity does not allow it to establish itself as a being in its completeness; which prevents you from being considered an individual.

Finally, the duality in the monster also makes its appearance in *La señora Muerte*, through the misadventures of Marlene, a fashion businesswoman, desperate to save the life of her husband, also in a state of terminal illness. To do this, he resorts to the treatment of Dr. Favel, a scientist fired from the Academy of Medicine, who, by perpetrating his experiments on blood, causes a degenerative disease in Marlene that ages her and disfigures her face, transforming her into a misshapen woman. At the same time that youth is assimilated with beauty and the possibility of being loved —values that move Marlene to commit a series of crimes—, that is also contrasted with the ugliness caused by deformity, and an undesirable old age, which condemns her to loneliness.



As we deduce from the plot content of these films, the figure of the scientist-creator is closely linked to that of the monster (whether in these cases the man-ghost, the man-beast and the woman-deformed), and sometimes not only will both roles complement each other, but also reverse each other. The man who managed to be invisible offers a particularity with respect to the other titles. Luis Gil, the protagonist's brother, is immersed in his research on the luminosity and invisibility of bodies; his motivations are less evil than those of his colleagues in the other films; he will covertly use his science to help his brother get out of that unfair situation.

Maliciousness is replaced here by lawlessness, for which compensation will be made to him, as was often the case in melodramas in his parade of redeemed sinners, through his death at the end of the film. Luis's ambition, intensified by despair over his brother's situation, is not comparable to the paradigm of the «mad» scientist in the macabre nuance that the horror narrative has given it. However, he does transfer that madness to his creation, since Carlos will progressively manifest symptoms of madness as a consequence of the effect of the drug that Luis subsequently injected him with. In this way, the megalomaniac attitudes usually attributed to the scientist are projected onto this «invisible man», who believes he is sent by God to fight against the injustice of the world.

In the case of *The Horrifying Human Beast*, this time we find a prestigious doctor, who is part of a health institution, but who owns a clandestine laboratory where he perpetrates the scientific searches with which he tries to save his son. Following the pattern of the scientist-resuscitator, the doctor in question admits having violated the will of God by awarding himself the power to intervene in the decision of life and death, becoming a successor to Victor



Frankenstein, moved by the pain of the separation that generates death. The company will encourage him to commit criminal acts, such as the theft of an animal at the zoo, with which he begins his experiment, and the murder of a wrestling athlete to transplant a human heart to Julio,<sup>11</sup> after the transmutation that they had triggered the gorilla cells in his brain.

Although Dr. Krauman did not intentionally create his monster, we can refer the result of his failed experiments to the attempts of an early 20th century Russian scientist named Ilya Ivanov, who sought to create a hybrid between humans and primates, attempts that also failed.<sup>12</sup> That fantasy of relating these two species, with so much tradition from dissimilar areas such as biology, history and the narrative arts, is anchored in hybridity, going through different positions that cross aspects such as the binary and the interstitial.

The figure of the mad and macabre scientist is present in the third film in question, *La señora Muerte*. It is about the «evil Dr. Favel», as he is described in the prologue, narrated by the actor who plays him, the American John Carradine.<sup>13</sup> Favel, a subject submerged in complete illegality and a crossing of limits in his professional ethics, seeks to open a new path of science, which he specifically calls «my science», following the prototype of the «resuscitator» scientist, of one who seeks to create eternal life outside of divine domains. As in the previous case, he is an obvious heir, regarding his aspirations, of Dr. Frankenstein, as well as of others who from then on will be the future creators of modern Prometheus. That promise of a return to life is what settles Marlene, in the face of the pain of her husband that condemns him to an imminent end. The specter of death is the fear that drives both of them to resort to the unconventional treatments of that scientist, the one who most identifies, in the aforementioned cases, with the stereotype of the megalomaniac, seeking recognition and submission from the world. At his feet. Marlene's monstrosity, —caused by an error in the calculations that will later be shown to be intentional—, is the projection of Favel's monstrosity: she is forced to murder young women to provide blood for her degenerating body,<sup>14</sup> and to supply the scientist with raw material, becoming, as established at the end of the film, «the instrument of a criminal mind».

As Carroll (2005) affirms, the monster is not only the one that instills the sensation of fear or horror in the characters, and in symmetry, in the spectator, but also provokes other feelings such as disgust. The invisible man does not seem to hold up to this description. It is rather an

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11/ It is worth clarifying that said crime is carried out with the exception that that athlete was evicted by science, after suffering a skull fracture that condemned her to a state of irreversible brain contusion.

12/ For further references on this case, see chapter 2 of Garlaschelli and Carrer (2019).

13/ In imitation of Alfred Hitchcock's prologues in which he introduced his mystery television series Alfred Hitchcock Presents (1955-1965), in this film, as well as in another title by Fílmica Vergara of the same year, Enigma of Death (Federico Curiel, 1969), Carradine's foreignness is exploited to encourage the film's international prestige, speaking to the viewer to initiate them into the narrative plot. This second film relates its plot to neo-Nazism: the Nazi is equated to the figure of the monster, masked behind a falsified identity that transits in this case between science and circus entertainment, in an effort to relate the genre to the social circumstances of the second postwar period.

14/ Marlene is learning to hunt to survive. For this reason, in her transformation, a visual analogy is established between her preparing to go looking for her first victim and the image of a lion cub in a bed in her mansion, which refers to that incipient bestial force that will strip her of his humanity. Robin Wood (2003) highlights, in fact, that horror movies usually associate female sexuality with felines.



emblematic situation that is manifested in him: he is not monstrous due to his appearance, since he is not in sight, but he does generate a feeling of estrangement in those close to him—before the new form of relationship that they must maintain with him—, and a fear of the ghostly in those who are unaware of their condition. This is how the police investigator who tries to find the ex-con describes it: «it is not what is seen that is to be feared, but what is not seen», thus giving the invisible man a status of terror.

However, there are two instances where disgust makes its place for its characterization as a monster, both linked to visibility strategies. The first occurs with the use of a substance that allows Carlos to be seen by his girlfriend. She responds to the experience by expressing: «it has been horrible», since «it is him, but it is not him, as if it were his shadow». Secondly, as an invisible man, Carlos runs with his clothes on, showing a figure without a head, which offers an image of the monstrous-supernatural, also instilling a sense of terror.

*The Horrifying Human Beast* alludes from its very title to this repulsion of the monster, through the duality of the man-gorilla, in particular with the contrast between Julio and the beast which he becomes: while the former is elaborated from the profile of delicacy and justified childishness in the illness caused by his father's overprotection, the latter shows a bestial and criminal force, representing a danger reinforced by his simian appearance.<sup>15</sup> In *La señora Muerte*, for his part, disgust is expressed in Marlene's appearance after Favel's intervention on her body: she perceives her monstrosity identified with ugliness and old age as undesirable circumstances, which will make it impossible for her to be loved, a fear that is introduced from the beginning due to the proximity of her husband's death. The physical condition that afflicts Marlene causes the series of crimes that she will star in, because to survive she will have to look for young blood. The monstrous is then related to «a horrifying old age without love», as Favel spits at him to encourage the wave of crimes, thereby showing a perverse ideology. There will appear here an abjection rooted in an ideology that can be read as heir to the state of a post-war world, with the stigma of reminiscences of Nazism (to which we can associate Dr. Favel) and with the transformations caused by war wounds (based on the deformation of Marlene) and the loss of life (manifested in the victims of both).

Another aspect to take into account, in relation to the duality between the macabre or illegal «mad» scientist and his monstrous creation, is the appearance of a character who mediates between them: the scientist's assistant, which occurs in two of the titles studied. One is the servant of Dr. Kauman, the only person aware of the family tragedy, who suffers from a notorious limp. The narration establishes that he had received in the past a treatment from the doctor that saved his life, thus showing the reason for his unconditional support. The other is Laor, a servant of Dr. Favel, a hunchback submerged by his master's domination, which has turned him, due to his marginality and freak condition, into a kind of automaton. Both will claim to know the technical procedures used by the scientist, and will assimilate themselves to the monstrosity of both the creator and the creature.

In relation to the scientist, they acquire this status for being accomplices in his plans, and as for the monster in question, they are similar to him for having physical defects that associate him with the trait of disgust attributed to terror. In the specific case of Laor, the identification

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15/ There is evidence of the existence of an export version of this film, titled *Horror and sex*, which included scenes of sadomasochism, starring the man-beast and the women who became his victims.

with Marlene is imprinted in a duality: there is initially an estrangement and then a rejection by her, associated with the notion of disgust and filth, since the hunchback seeks to go too far. As the story progresses, however, that disgust will transform into identification, since Marlene will realize that she is serving Favel's purposes with the same submission as Laor.

### 3.2. SCIENTISTS AND MONSTERS IN THE LABORATORY OF TERROR

Terror, as a cinematographic genre, has a series of narrative and aesthetic procedures that allow it to be clearly identified: its topics (oriented towards confronting natural or supernatural forces that threaten the physical and/or psychological integrity of its characters), its motives (the blood, the threat of death, the diabolical, fear of the unknown, monstrosity itself) and a specific audiovisual language that exploits the visual and sound out of field, chiaroscuro and music as ways of setting or anticipating the exhibition to danger.

The three films we are studying make use of some of these distinctive features. One of their common aspects is the staging of the laboratory from which the scientists carry out their experiments. The man who managed to be invisible begins his credits with strident music that links him to an atmosphere of terror and mystery, which will be coupled with visual motifs of scientific experimentation, including a skull next to a test tube. The importance of his chemical experiments then becomes a visual motif. Likewise, the film establishes clues from its first scenes around the topic of invisibility, which will be the object of their investigations. The leading couple is presented dreaming of their future matrimonial home, imagining each of the spaces in the house, in an effort to see what is absent in reality. The scientist also reveals to his brother a preliminary result of his work. His question about whether he can see what he is doing is a preview of the situation that Carlos will experience first-hand.

On the other hand, the scenarios in which Dr. Kauman performs interventions on his son are at night, and his operating room is in a secret place in the house, unlike his legal activity, done in full view of everyone. The credits of the film use the motif of dripping blood, in order to establish an identification with the genre. On the other hand, both in his case and in the case of the scientists in the other films, there is a display of advanced technology that allows them to perform complex operations, be it heart transplants or blood transfusions, an aspect that resembles iconography of science fiction. As Garlaschelli and Carrer establish, the «stereotype of the mad scientist [...] corresponds to a highly intelligent man who uses futuristic technologies and sometimes forgets the ethical and social implications of his research» (2019, 105). This is highly applicable to the figure of Dr. Favel, who also has his lair in hiding, set in the underworld and at night, and making use of an effect typical of classic horror movies: the sound of creaking doors, accompanied by the presence of the hunchback Laor, who erect the place as a house of terror.

That is accompanied by a continuous sound of bubbles in his laboratory that alludes to potions in composition, but mainly to the bubbling of blood. It is precisely blood, that fluid linked to the possibility of life, the motive par excellence, that runs through the narrative of terror, centralized in the legend of the vampire. This precious asset that gives life to the body becomes a «symbol of drama, death and pain when it is outside of it» (Grupo Imago, 2003, 154). For this reason, these films will typify the game between life and death in his journey to





collect that blood to consolidate the investigations of the macabre scientist and to breathe life into the monster.

The awarding of monstrous characteristics to the scientist responds to a procedure that Carroll (2005) relates to fusion or contiguity. This terrifying metonymy, as the author describes this trope, seeks to associate those beings that do not respond to the physical description of the horrific and impure, “with objects and entities that are already repulsive: parts of the body, vermin, skeletons and all the forms of filth” (2005, 121). The appearance of these scientists is normal, even traits of genius are imposed on them, giving the characters hope to get out of their problems (whether legal, in the case of *The Man Who Managed to Be Invisible*, or health, with the two other films). In this way, that reckless environment will allow the malice and criminality of the acts of these scientists to be built. *La Señora Muerte* adds to this aesthetic setting a sequence that takes place in a horror museum, inserting the monster Marlene together with wax figures that represent the classic monsters of horror literature and movies, such as Frankenstein and the werewolf.

## 4. Conclusions

The scientists and the monsters in our corpus generally acted out of desperation: love and the fear of death as separation has been the kick that drove them through the winding paths of science. In the case of Carlos, the invisible man, it was the impossibility of realizing his happiness plans with his fiancée after his unjust imprisonment that led him to undergo the pilot test of his brother’s experiments. It was the looming possibility of the loss of his son that pushed Dr. Kauman to push the boundaries of professional ethics. Likewise, it was the threat of her husband’s death and the loss of that ideal state of happiness in which they found themselves that made Marlene fall into the trap of the perverse Dr. Favel.

On the other hand, in the three films we find a transmutation effect, that is, all the characters that become monstrous beings do so as a reaction to a chemical treatment that changed the constitution of their organism, either to make it invisible, to turn it into a simian aspect or accelerating its aging. The potential of science coupled with malicious or blinded ambition is what results in the replacement of humanity by bestiality, from the seriousness of science to the madness of illegal experiments.

As Carroll (2005) establishes, the narratives of the horror genre include repetitive plots. These can be synthesized in «gothic horror,<sup>16</sup> the mix of genres and the predominance of themes such as revenge, the commission of a crime, the scientific challenge and the fight against evil or malevolent beings who want to dominate humans» (Cabrera Carreón, 2017, 356). Indeed, Mexican cinematography has deployed these topics, characters, and settings on countless occasions, focusing on certain narrative climaxes that, as we have seen, were present in our corpus. The first is the manifestation of the monster, which captures the most attention, overturning the first great feeling of horror that the genre seeks to consolidate both in

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16/ This horror has its origin in the cinematographic versions of works of English literature that, as we pointed out at the beginning, had their transpositions in European and Hollywood cinema, finally having an impact on horror productions in Latin America.



its characters and in the spectators. Second, acts of criminal transgression, which will involve bloodshed through murder or the exchange of fluids or organs in the experiments of «mad» scientists. In the third instance, we find the creation of a climate of terror, intensified by the play of shadows and lights, and a musical tension in the sound plane. Fourthly, horror manifests itself when discerning a latent danger, which is not evident to the naked eye, framed in the figure of the «mad» scientist. On the surface, he possesses the qualities of a distinguished person, laureate for academic achievements, great talent and above-average intelligence, but who hides, from the underground environment in which his laboratory/operating room is located, illegality and excessive ambition. Finally, the feeling of horror is also elaborated based on the spectator's identification with the monster and his personal tragedy. This is so because the manifestation of the monster happens after its initial presentation in a normal state: *The man who managed to be invisible* introduces Carlos as a man happily in love. Likewise, Julio from *The horrifying human beast* appears in the first instances of the narrative resting weakly in his bed, while he looks compassionately at his long-suffering father. Regarding Marlene, for her part, a feeling of empathy is also introduced, presenting her as a woman in love with her husband, as well as a beautiful and distinguished businesswoman.

Through the narrative of terror and the development of antithetical and complementary characters at the same time, these films are a reflection of the interest of Mexican cinema in encouraging a resurgence of the genre, which had awakened for the first time in the 1930s. Those early years of the Mexican film industry, coinciding with the proliferation of horror movies in Hollywood, had given birth to the first manifestations of the genre in Latin America, although Mexico would immediately identify with melodramas and ranchera comedies. The 50s would mark a new time in universal cinema, characterized, in the specifically Mexican case, by a marked wear of the generic formulas that had distinguished it in Latin American production. Therefore, the horror genre, which was once again gaining ground in international cinema, turned out to be a strategy to attract audiences, which mobilized a series production.

At least two factors can be considered that led to this new approach to horror in Mexico and the world: one of them was the ghost of the postwar period, which urged to represent that fear of death that until recently lurked in every corner and in the newspaper headlines. The war had made science both an enemy and a friend, due to its invention of machinery that allowed mass murder, and its medical treatments that healed or alleviated the consequences of injuries in battle. The malignancy or illegal action of horror film scientists reflects this double standard, capable of implementing technological advances, as well as manufacturing monsters and causing fatalities (the crippled and those killed in war).

The other boon that encouraged the proliferation of horror movies was the loosening of moral standards that movie censorship had held at bay in earlier times. In its search for the deepest fears of the human being, the genre has allowed itself licenses in the representation of evil, allowing the inclusion of characters marked by an ambiguity, in which the values of Good and Evil are confused and overlapping. Likewise, the decades of the 50s and 60s began to make explicit the sexuality of their characters, manifested in these cases in approximations to married life, infidelity and the suggestion of sadomasochism. In short, Mexican horror films would take advantage of the potential of the genre to delve into the fears of the human being in order to exploit the pregnancy that this caused in the public in a period of crisis in cinematography.



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