Annihilation: Homecoming and Hyperviolence in Fernando Vallejo's *Our Lady of the Assassins* and Mario Mendoza's *Satanás*

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Abstract: This article argues that Colombian novels *Our Lady of the Assassins* (1994) by Fernando Vallejo, and *Satanás* (2002) by Mario Mendoza, tend towards the hygienic abolishment of what is arguably an ineffectual order by making their main characters the only (marginal) members of society that are able to challenge their cultural order and subvert it. In addition, it will also focus on various themes that are present in both works: the fragmentation of the self, the loss, search, and replacement of God as "Law", and violence as annihilating act.

Keywords: repatriation – hygienic drive – Vallejo – Mendoza – violence

To arrive again and again, with the same sense of
unreality at the damned horrors of the evening.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
Robert Louis Stevenson

In "A Rather Singular Strike", the first chapter of *Targets of Opportunity*, Samuel Weber describes an intrinsic relationship between Odysseus' repatriation and violence. The author expounds on book XXII of *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus looks for the perfect target to commence his act of vengeance against the men that pursue his wife, his riches, and his kingdom. The hero desires to recuperate, and reintegrate into, his home. Weber explains how the violent scenes in the book accentuate a moral dilemma. In order for Odysseus to return home, to his wife and his son, a great act of violence is required. In this way, the champion will be able to recuperate what is rightfully his, and in the process become who he *really* is (Weber 9). In other words, violence is the imperative of homecoming. It is by returning home, and through violence, that the returning hero is able to show his true self, be reinstated, and assume, again, the role of the patriarch. In *The Odyssey*, the purifying ritual is pushed towards a moral extreme since violence becomes justified even though it

breaks with communal customs and the law. Odysseus, paradoxically, becomes an abject subject in his push for reintegration and justice.

The past meditation on Weber's book lead me to the following questions in the context of late twentieth century Colombian literature while relying on a critical framework based on René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*: What happens to a community when the most abject of its citizens takes upon itself the role of the enforcer of rituals? What happens to a society when the act of "cleansing" itself from malignant violence merges with what Girard calls the "orgy of self-propagation", a concept that explains violence as outcome of the threat of violence itself? Girard understands extreme violence as a "sacrificial crisis" where the norms that regulate citizen's roles in society are bypassed. The sacrificial crisis then becomes "a crisis of distinctions" and also "a crisis affecting the cultural order", but the "order" is nothing more than a "regulated system of distinctions" used to normalize relationships amongst members of one group, to forge a communal identity, and to contain violence. The main characters in the novels studied here trigger the sacrificial crisis, break away from "normalized" relationships, and engage in acts that attempt to disrupt the cultural order and structure of society by sparking the annihilation of the present in favor of an unattainable, melancholy past under the justification of a higher moral standing.

I will argue in this article that Colombian novels *Our Lady of the Assassins* (1994) by Fernando Vallejo and *Satanás* (2002) by Mario Mendoza centralize the function of the pariah (or abject subject). The novels tend towards the hygienic abolishment of what is arguably an ineffectual order. By making their main characters the only (marginal) worthy members of society, they are able to challenge that cultural order and subvert it. I will focus on various themes that are present in both works: the fragmentation of the self, the loss, search, and replacement of God as "Law", and violence as annihilating act. I will show how the main characters are imbued with violence in their desire to repatriate, to come home. This movement from outside to inside of the abandoned society is, as Weber dramatically details, intrinsic to violence.

Satanás is a novel that gives a fictional account of the events that precede, surround, and result in the historical Pozzetto Massacre in Bogotá. I will pay particular attention to Chapter V, "Diary of a future assassin" in which Campo Elías, the main character and "future assassin", writes his most intimate musings: thoughts that the average reader will consider the ramblings of an unstable mind. Fernando Vallejo's novel presents the return to Medellín, Colombia of a somewhat successful writer who moves back to his homeland, has sex with underage boys, and spends his days walking aimlessly around the city visiting churches. In this article, I will concentrate in Fernando's quest to find God. Both Campo Elías and Fernando become fragmented subjects. Campo Elías' psyche becomes fractured and the process of its collapse can be compared to the ruinous relationships between Fernando and his underage teenage lovers in their quest to find God and peace. It is no coincidence that the youths Fernando seeks are hired hitmen involved in the drug trade.

In both texts, violence is presented as an annihilating act. There is a desire to erase all of society and start anew with the "values" that were lost in the period when the main characters were absent. They believe that there is a correlation between their exclusion from Colombian society and the deterioration of a "moral" compass in their country. Both characters return in order to cleanse their society from violence, poverty, and lawlessness. They return to claim what is "rightfully theirs." The novels use apocalyptic metaphors, and the reader is forced to inhabit the ruin of a certain way of life. This collapse is assumed by Colombian society to showcase how its citizens are the accomplices of iniquity. Girard states that once violence is present in a society, "[t]here is no way of bringing the reprisals to a halt before the community is annihilated" (*Violence* 67).

Mendoza and Vallejo choose abject males as their main characters to showcase the return home of those who were never really "inside" of society, but understand its past, a past that is longed for. They are the perfect *pharmakos*, to use Girard's term, since both are actively committing abhorrent behavior: Fernando, engages in pedophilia in his native Medellín. Campo Elías, massacres scores of innocent people, patrons of an Italian restaurant, in Bogotá. As the main characters return home, they develop a hygienic gaze, where eradication becomes synonymous with morality. Here, though, the *pharmakos* transforms itself into *pharmakon*.

These characters see erasure as the only way to restore a society in crisis. The only perceived response that these characters have to the fragmentation of society —to its disruption— is hyperviolence and its aftermath: annihilation. Therefore, their search for order, for the Law, turns into a destructive force. The search for God becomes an essential part of their hygienic quest. Both Campo Elías and Fernando fail to find God and decide to substitute Him. They want to find order and security in a utopic Colombia. In this way, the characters have to transform themselves into vengeful judges. Fernando and Campo Elías assume —as their stay home becomes permanent— the role of an abject divinity that is insatiable in its thirst for blood, Colombian blood[1].

The mass murderer in *Satanás*, Campo Elías, returns to his country after being a soldier for the American Army in Vietnam. His process of repatriation to his homeland is deferred or "extended" because of the traumas suffered during the war[2]. In *Our Lady of the Assassins*, Fernando, the narrator, returns after many years self-exiled from Colombia and feels the urge to seek the company of a "sicario", an "ángel exterminador" (death angel). When his first "lover", Alexis, is killed, the "Grammarian", as Fernando calls himself, joins another teenage assassin, Wílmar. Fernando does not know that latter is the murderer of the former.

[1] According to Girard, the demystification of the legal system gives way to an exponential increase in violence. (24-25)

[2] I choose to term it "extended repatriation" because Campo Elías has not achieved a complete reintegration into Colombian society.

Satanás is narrated through three intertwining stories that have Campo Elías at their axis: The story of Father Enrique, a Catholic priest that feels the presence of evil, confronts a demonic possession of teenage girl and has an illicit relationship with his maid, Irene[3]. The story of Andrés, Father Enrique's nephew, a young painter who has horrible visions about the future of his models while he paints them. And the story of María, an orphan who, with the complicity of two shadowy figures, steal from wealthy men. They drug their victims and promise a night of base desires and lust in order to commit the crime. The novel concludes with the historical "matanza de Pozzetto" and Campo Elías' suicide.

In *Our Lady of the Assassins*, Fernando struggles with his return to a Medellín in ruins. He stumbles from church to church trying to find benignity, kindness, mercy. Fernando is reaching for a silent, and absent, God. He returns back home to end his days and die. Fernando lives alone, has not one piece of furniture beyond his bed — which accentuates his lack of belonging to the group— and surrounds himself with killer youths. Fernando lives alone, in Colombia but without communion or community. Fernando goes back to a land that is no longer his.

Even though Campo Elías does not go back home to die, his return to Colombia marks a sudden shift of identity. He stops being a "warrior" and assumes a civilian role: that of an English teacher obsessed with *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Since he participated in another country's war, he was not received as a hero, and there were not any resources allocated by the state to deal with his combat fatigue. Sociologist Robert S. Laufer explains that:

> when men are sent off to war; their *reintegration* into civilian society is inherently problematic for the general population but particularly difficult and complex for the returning soldier-veteran. The fundamental reality of warfare is that the veteran is systematically stripped of his public identity as a warrior, whereas the experience of war is permanently burned into his psyche (36 italics in the original).

But, what happens when the soldier's "warrior identity" (as public persona) is assumed to the extreme? His identity is fused with that of the executioner. Death and extermination become *just* practices that should be continued. The warrior cannot trust society anymore and becomes the Law.

Psychoanalyst Randolph Parson proposes that the return home of Vietnam veterans implies the "breaking" of a moral contract between society and the soldier. The veteran seeks "sanctuary", and since he cannot find it, he feels betrayed and desolated

[3] This relationship could be read as "incest" since the catholic priest is the "father" of the congregation. This is even more pertinent since his maid is under his "close" care. Girard sees incest as an "extreme form" of violence, one that erases the distinctions of roles in the family (74). In doing so, the incestuous person becomes an outcast.

(*Post-Traumatic* 253). The cure for trauma is impossible without the help of the community to which the soldier wants to reintegrate. The corruption of society clashes with the precepts that the soldier lives by, therefore, the soldier feels a sense of entitlement, he is owed. The soldier in this case, Campo Elías, comes to the conclusion that justice lies solely in his hands.

Perceived "moral indebtedness" is accentuated in Campo Elías by his pride of being a soldier and a warrior. He receives no source of feedback from the people that are around him since they do not know about Colombia's link to the war. Moreover, that he chose to become an English teacher implies his need to be recognized for his links to the United States and its army. This is the character's first readable fragmentation, the dichotomy between scholar and warrior.

In Campo Elías' journal entry for October 31 (Halloween), he describes the dichotomy between the soldier and the teacher. He hints at understanding that his destiny is to erase the civilian part of his life and assume, once and for all, his true nature as a warrior. Campo Elías explains that he received a message from his "spiritual guide" (a fellow soldier) that read: "You are a soldier, remember it well. You are trained for combat; you are a war machine and nothing more[4]" (*Satanás* 142). In order to understand why the "warrior" is transformed into an outcast, we can rely on the explanation that Girard offers in *Violence and the Sacred* regarding the threat of homecoming: "A special sort of impurity clings to the warrior returning to his homeland […] The returning warrior risks carrying the seed of violence into the very heart of the city" (41). That Halloween, Campo Elías decides to deliver the seed of destruction.

Campo Elías makes the choice to take off his mask and accept the monster he sees reflected in the mirror. The "future assassin" will allow his psychotic impulses to run loose. Futurity is the present now. He wants hyperviolence, the seed of destruction, to germinate in an already violent country. His goal is to generate a violence so great, and a horror so complete, as to eliminate the numbness of the general public by eliminating all of them in the process. By embodying hyperviolence, Campo Elías is brought back to his assumed "warrior" identity, now augmented by his hatred for the civilians that do not, and cannot, understand him or trade places with him. Psychoanalyst Robert S. Laufer helps clarify Campo Elías mental state:

> among men who have lost any sense of the world of the living, some soldiers kill simply from habit, to experience or reexperience power, and some for pleasure. We call them psychopaths in the civilian world, but military organizations have found uses for such men over the centuries, and they are part of every war. (43)

[4] I have translated all the quotes taken from *Satanás*.

Campo Elías himself writes in his journal that "Vietnam wasn't a country or a war zone. It was a psychological state", where he developed a "frantic desire to kill" (*Satanás* 137). We can infer that his normal mental state is that of the psychopath and that his impulse to kill is exacerbated by his return home[5]. Once there, he will not be recognized as a warrior. Once he stops being a "warrior" and assumes the teacher "persona", his psyche becomes fragmented just as the main character in *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a book that becomes Campo's obsession.

Elías' mental "distortion" works rather well for the US Army. In his journal entry for October 26, he recalls that he was the perpetrator of a cold-blooded multiple murder. The soldier recounts how he killed an entire family, a grandmother, a girl, and an infant. He killed them by stabbing and slicing their bodies with a knife: "I remember the warm blood pouring out of their necks and gushing down their forearms" (*Satanás* 139). In his memory, the events of war are always present. These memories return as a reminder of his own grotesque abjection. In one occasion, he encounters a Puerto Rican soldier that served with him and admits to him that[6]:

> I miss the action, the ambushes, the gunshots, the blood of those motherfuckers, […] the innumerable bodies that we left on our path. I don't think I can stand a normal job now, a family, friendly neighbors and a check at the end of the month. I would die out of boredom. (*Satanás* 138)

The problem with the character is that he knows beforehand that his repatriation won't allow him a total reintegration into society. He knows that his return will accelerate his demise. But he cannot remain in the army and will not be able to submit to the moral code of a group of citizens that he considers to be inferior and unworthy of life. Moreover, Campo Elías stresses this fact in one of his first entries into the journal, where he comments on his differentiated status *vis a vis*, what he calls the "rules of the herd[7]."

Campo Elías also denounces how society will not accept him because of his "difference." His "anti-pathic" capacity makes him anathema to his community. The murderer struggles with rejection from his community which cannot accept him because he is "different, an undesirable." Campo Elías knows that he is a threat to "them"because they view him "as if [he] was so sick that he could generate a pandemic

[5] Just as the pedophile, the sociopath is an outcast since he seeks the abolition of the common contract that is the cultural order.

[6] It is interesting, in identitarian terms, that the author decided to make the other soldier Puerto Rican since Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States. As such, the other soldier is, as Campo Elías, fighting a war that has no political bearing in the future of his own country.

[7] Notice how the herd is easily considered sacrificial. Society at large becomes his sacrificial surrogate.

illness all on his own" (122). Campo Elías produces a pandemic of violence and annihilates all the patrons of the Upscale Pozzetto Restaurant[8].

In *Our Lady of the Assassins*, Fernando, like Campo Elías, is an abject subject. He is the sole narrator of the novel, shares the author's first name, and does not consider himself a pedophile. By making his main character a writer and naming him as himself, the line between author and narrator is blurred. Soon readers realize that the main character, Fernando, is indeed a pedophile on the margins of society. We get acquainted with Fernando, the writer who returns home, for the first time when he meets his friends in an apartment in the center of the city. There he is introduced to his first "sicario", Alexis, a young boy who is about 14 years old. After they greet each other, they go directly to what is deemed the "butterfly conference", a "private" backroom. Once there, Alexis undresses and his gun falls on the floor. Immediately after, they have sex. The fact that Fernando has sex exclusively with male children makes for a grotesque, predatory character.

The author allegorizes Colombia's collective memory and Fernando becomes its twisted embodiment. Alexis and Wílmar, the underage killers, are the active function of violence against society from within itself. The moral imperative is unveiled as hypocrisy. The children that become "sicarios" are proof that the incestous mind is prevalent in the society that Vallejo, the writer, portrays. The youths degraded by pedophilia, are the victims of social incest and become angels of death. They leave a path of destruction in their wakes[9].

Walter Benjamin affirms in "The destructive character" that "[t]he destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age; it cheers because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication, of his own condition" (*Reflections* 301).
The total contempt that the narrator feels against misery, poverty and reproduction, gives the reader his ideological position, Fernando can only fall in love with killer boys because of their destructive character, the impossibility of reproduction, and their will to exterminate other Colombians.

When Fernando declares "I am the memory of Colombia and its conscience and after me comes nothing. When I die here that's the end of it, total loss of control[10]" (*Our Lady* 18) Fernando establishes himself as the ultimate judge that decides over life and death because he is the keeper of the mnemonic flame. Fernando is the fascist, pedophilic embodiment of his society's most hidden and atrocious desires. Fernando is

[8] Girard expounds on the contagious aspect of violence. If the "impure" or "contaminated" agent "mingles with the pure", all distinctions are erased creating a sacrificial crisis and endless violence. (34, 55)

[9] What I deemed "social incest" is the total disregard of the government to enact laws and procedures to protect and treat children that were forced to engage in contracted killing in Colombia during this period.

[10] I have translated all quotes taken from *Our Lady of the Assassins*

Medellín's warped sense of conscience. Furthermore, the death angel, the "sicario", becomes the armed hand of that "conscience." This synecdoche establishes, in turn, a symbiotic relation between law, order, and execution. Thus, as Benjamin declares, the destructive personality has to be represented, paradoxically, by a child. Throughout the story Fernando calls his underage lovers: "Exterminating Angel" (55) and "my amazing killing machine" (32). These descriptors showcase the divine quality of the sicarios' actions.

Justice is molded by the new divine. And it is satisfied now, not by the State but by the fracture and the breaking of boundaries in Fernando's thoughts. We can read the main character as one that gets symbolically fragmented and needs and loves "sicarios" because he sees his reflection in them, his completion. Girard explains the link between desire and violence in his chapter: "From Mimetic Desire to the Monstrous Double" where he states that "at the very height of the [sacrificial] crisis violence becomes simultaneously the instrument, object, and all-inclusive subject of desire." (144) *Our Lady of the Assassins* marks the undoing of ritual violence (which is productive), and the advent of reciprocal violence that leads to annihilation.

Fernando, as "Grammarian" is in control of all the rules, he enunciates "sentences" that are judicial, linguistic, and esoteric. Then "sicarios" impose the lethal sentences without questions. The narrator becomes the voice of a god hell-bent on annihilation. Fernando transforms himself in the voice and the desire of eradication of a Colombia *always already* violent, even though the country seems to be impervious to violence while simultaneously being drowned by it.

The symbiosis occurring between Fernando and his "sicarios" is also evident in his description of the city of Medellín. Fernando describes the city in dichotomic terms: "it is two in one" (*La Virgen* 84). According to the narrator, the city is really two cities juxtaposed in the same space. The one on top is poor and is the place where that the "others" inhabit. As "they" (the "others", the poor Colombians) cross its "sacrificial" space, they move "down" and in the crossing, violence occurs. It is in this flow of people and in their interactions that guilty parties, criminals, and witnesses cannot be separated. All are angels and demons. All are accomplices. All are guilty.

Another example in *Satanás* is how Campo Elías' psyche is completely fractured to mirror Colombian society. The main character has a constant need to quote or read Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He is self-aware and identifies himself, to himself, as a warrior, instead of what he really is, an underpaid teacher that at one point was part of the United States Army. It is no surprise that he believes that both angels and demons inhabit every Colombian citizen simultaneously. Elías' pupil points out, while commenting *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*'s content, that "we are angels and demons at the same time. We are not one person, but a contradiction. A complexity of forces that fights within us" (*Satanás* 134). By embracing the literary example, Campo Elías removes guilt from his mental breakdown.

The binary system to understand Colombian society is further developed in *Our Lady of the Assassins*, filtered through the God/Devil dichotomy. For example, Fernando tells, with utmost sarcasm, how "Two thousand years ago the Antichrist roamed this earth and it was all the same guy: God is the Devil. The Two are one, the thesis and its antithesis. It's certain God exists, I encounter signs of his wickedness everywhere" (*Our Lady* 79). When Fernando comes to his blurred Cartesian realization that God is a wicked entity, all structures are subverted and his moral distortion becomes his imperative. Fernando is not satisfied to know about God's wickedness yet still keeps looking for Him in all the churches that he visits.

The most revealing visit occurs when he arrives at the Church of San Antonio. Some time passes after a "sicario" kills Alexis, Fernando's first underage lover once he is back in Medellín. Fernando is traumatized by his murder. It is in this state of stress that Fernando dreams that he enters a church, and as he walks in, he realizes that "it is a graveyard" filled with "tomb after tomb, after tomb, all moss covered." (89). The description of his uneasiness continues as a strong sense of solitude washes over him, it is the solitude of death. When he finally visits the church in person, he perceives it as a dream as well. Fernando feels as amongst "a dense fog" (89). But that fog was cut by all the "whispers of the souls in mourning" (92). Then, he affirms that the church is clearly "the graveyard in my delirium" (92). This graveyard accentuates the absence and death of God.

Another example of God's absence is showcased in one of the most dramatic episodes of the novel, when Alexis and Fernando find a dog that has been hit by a car. Its hind legs have been broken. The dog is badly wounded. The narrative describes in detail the animal's suffering. God is blamed and described as "the most monstrous and cowardly Being, that kills and maims by surrogate, by man's hand, His plaything, His sicario" (77) then the narrator adds "I'm a bit of human filth. God doesn't exist and, if he does, he's the big gonorrhea" (78). If this is so, God deserves the worst cuss word that a "sicario" can utter. The murder of people becomes a necessary event to access a higher order than that of the divine law, the imposition of hyperviolence. This is a valid reaction (according to Fernando) to the ruin of Colombian society, where all are guilty, and all are murderers and victims.

Fernando's metaphor, which equates God to a sexually transmitted disease, serves as evidence of the moral wounding of the narrator. The animal's innocence functions as a counter-discourse to an all too-human and all too-monstrous god. This god does not serve as standard of justice for the healing of the community. As he points to shoot and kill the dog, Fernando decides that he also has to die by suicide. Before taking the revolver to his heart, the narrator commands Alexis to "keep killing on your own […] I don't want to live anymore" (78). Alexis' mission is Fernando's imperative. The "Law", as the dog, is mortally wounded. "Thou shalt not kill" stops being a commandment and its opposite becomes a cause of action, a call to arms. The murder of human beings cannot be immoral; it becomes a necessary event conducive to access

an order that was never attained: divine law. The imposition of hyperviolence, where all are guilty, is a valid reaction, in Fernando's judgment, to the ruinic state of Colombian society.

On the other hand, in *Satanás*, God's absence is tied to both the moral decay of society and linked to childhood trauma stemming from a combination of self-inflicted violence and communal perception. Young Campo witnesses his father's inert body after he commits suicide in the public space of "la plaza." One of the witnesses that are around the body comments that "We cannot bury him in the cemetery. God doesn't forgive suicides." (130) Readers of the novel can easily equate the loss of the father to that of God. Campo lacks a figure of authority in his life and turns away from the Church. He subverts the guiding role of the institution of the church and their discourse and turns to the military. Campo stops believing. The new soldier starts blaming his mother for his father's violent death. The loss of the father implies the loss of God[11].

Elías writes down in his journal the memory of his last time stepping into a church. It was Father Ernesto's congregation and he approaches the priest for an impromptu confession. The murderer speaks of his desire for violence, his hatred towards his mother and for people in general. Bitter feelings of alterity dominate his discourse. The prelate can only reply "we have lost God" (*Satanás* 144) to Campo Elías without giving him significant support or guidance. Later, Father Enrique debates with a fellow priest if Campo Elías is a psychopath or if the reason for "the malignant presence" (145) that surrounds him is the extreme solitude in which the soldier lives day by day in a city and a country where the simplest contact with fellow citizens has disappeared (159).

This search and loss of God should be interpreted as a loss of the Law. A commentary made by Slavoj Žižek on a Chesterton short story could clarify what the loss means to people:

> they will lose their transcendent God. This is the God who guarantees the meaning of the universe, the God who is a hidden master pulling all strings. Instead, […] God abandons this transcendent position and throws himself into his own creation. This man-God fully engages with the world, even dies. We humans are left with no higher power watching over us, only the terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation, and thus for God himself (*Violence* 185)

Žižek explains that if God dies, humans are left with total freedom, but also with the responsibility of creation while simultaneously the meaning of life would lose its significance.

[11] Here Vallejo accelerates the Nietzschean conception of "Death of God" to further indicate the state of hyperviolence in Colombia.

In both novels, the responsibility of total freedom requires a new Law. Both main characters feel like they were bestowed with this endeavor. They will become judges and will impose their justice. Thus, annihilation is the only sentence. In God's absence there is no crime. Fernando, in one of his sarcastic outbursts emphasizes, "the law should punish the crime'. But which law, which crime? My own crime of having been born" (*Our Lady* 17). As Fernando is born, he is afflicted with a humanity that is contaminated by overpowering violence.

I want to expand on the hygienic[12] aspects of annihilation that the main characters of both texts require. In order to do this, it is important to mention how they see the society to which they returned. In *Satanás*, Campo Elías' narrative releases all his scorn to the groups he hates the most. For example, his hatred towards homeless people and beggars is centered in what he sees as their "grotesque" features: "those good for nothing […] go about showing their stumps, their scars, their malnourished and hungry children, they can only produce in me disgust and the desire to strangle them" (121). These mutilated bodies are congruous to a "dismembered" society that is unable to become "whole."

In his first written account, Elías remembers an altercation with a neighbor who collected money for the victims of the war against drugs and people displaced by violence in Colombia. The impossibility for Campo Elías to feel affect towards other human beings is obvious. He is desensitized. Nevertheless, Campo Elías sees the people affected by guerrilla warfare as being just like him, "survivors" in the clinical sense of the word. There is no empathy that he can show. His mantra seems to be the comment that he directed towards the volunteer: "If they can't survive it would be better if they died" (*Satanás* 120).

In *Our Lady of the Assassins*, there are also instances where Fernando harshly criticizes Colombian society. Fernando shows how his fellow citizens suffer from chronic "evilness" since birth. The only solution (and we can hear a trace of the Nazi final solution here) to criminality and impunity is to "Exterminate them in the cradle" (*Our Lady* 28). Later on, as he comments on the department of Antioquia, he points out that it "has to be emptied of bad Antioquians and repopulated with good Antioquians, however much of an ontological contradiction that is" (43). For Fernando to be able to "cleanse" his state, he needs to annihilate. In order to start anew he has to destroy. He is also disgusted by the poor whom he calls "the never-stopping asshole and the insatiable vagina" (68), which assumes the resistance to control births in the working classes of the country and the inescapability of a base eschatology.

[12] Anthropologist Michael Taussig takes the term "limpieza" to reaffirm the ambiguity of violence in Colombia. The ritual aspect of the word in olden traditions seems to dissolve in the social "cleansing" that is currently happening. See *Law in a Lawless Land.* (xiii)

Fernando is also a greatly preoccupied with pollution in general, and noise pollution in particular[13]. Fernando always complains about the music coming out of Alexis' radio, the music being played in the taxis they ride, or the music that the neighbors listened to, in particular the "hippie" neighbor's music. Both a taxi driver and the hippie neighbor were murdered because of noise level and musical preference. Fernando, in order to elucidate why kill because of certain tastes in music, explains that "the torment of hell is noise. Noise is the inferno of our souls." (59). Fernando is forceful in his assertion that Medellín is hell; hence music, loud stereo speakers, and the radio become ways in which poor populations get desensitized.

Campo Elías, in the same way, mirrors the sentiment that noise pollution must be "cleansed." After he wakes up from a nightmare, Elías hears his mother's "bear snores" and expresses that he does not know why "I don't have the sufficient courage to shoot her in the head." (*Satanás* 141) Even though he passionately hates his mother, it is the effect of noise upon him that drives him to commit an atrocious act of violence: Campo Elías murders his mother by shooting her in the head after all.

No child is safe either. In *Our Lady of the Assassins* there is another episode that appears to be sudden, unexpected, and hyperviolent. Fernando and Alexis come out of "la Catedral Mayor" (the main cathedral) where in the posterior benches teenage boys prostitute themselves. As they go by the plaza, the "Grammarian" and his "Angel of Death" encounter a scene where a young policeman, "one of those ultra-young rookies" that go unarmed as Fernando indicates, is arguing with a little boy of about seven years of age, apparently a thief, and three of his "defenders." The child cannot stop calling the policeman "gonorrhea." Alexis, the "Exterminating Angel" decides to put an end to the whole situation:

> The policeman, […] didn't know what to say or what to do. And the three enraged defenders, taking the part of the tiny delinquent and gesticulating wildly, protected by the cowardly boldness of the mob, apparently ready to apparently let themselves be killed, if it were apparently necessary, by a man who carried no weapons. But they got what they wanted from a man who did: the Exterminating Angel unsheathed his sword of fire, his "rod", his "piece", his plaything, and like lightning did for each one in the forehead. The three of them? No my idiot friend, all four. The little street Arab as well, obviously, of course, too right, *hombre*. On this tender "gonorrhea" he also placed his ashen cross […] curing him forever of the curse of an existence that afflicts so many round here (57).

[13] "Contamination" as said before in Girardian terms, is a mark of the threat of violence for a community because it leads to "infection" (28).

This episode is interesting in various levels. Notice that the jargon used is oral and not literary and is similar to that used by the "sicarios" that Fernando comes in contact with. The use and repetition of the adverb "apparently" by Fernando, turns him, at that specific moment, in another one of the "sicarios," but also their lawyer. Another element that surprises us as readers is the speed of the killing of three adults and a child. Was asking for death their mistake? The mistake committed by the child was not questioning authority, but his arrogance and the hatred that he expressed. Fernando justifies his actions by stating that he is doing all of them a favor by "curing them" of the illness of being alive in Medellín, Colombia. In Fernando's world, everyone is a witness, a victim, an accomplice, but not all are survivors.

The slaughter at Pozzetto, as described in *Satanás*, is equally horrific. The murderer decides to "act [...] with the knowledge that he, himself, has to become an Exterminating Angel…" (253). the soldier closes his bank account and goes directly to the apartment shared by his student, Maribel, and her mother, "Doña Matilde." It is at this specific moment that the narrative turns hyperviolent. Elías hits the mother and leaves her unconscious, then goes on to rape and, as he did in Vietnam, stab and slice the girl a number of times. He returns to his own apartment, shoots his own mother on the face, and sets her on fire. After finishing dinner at the Pozzetto restaurant, the "warrior" commences the killing of all the patrons of the establishment, amongst them the other main characters in the novel. His final two phrases are "The end of the world has arrived, Sergeant" and right before he commits suicide by shooting himself on the temple "Welcome to Hell" (279-280). The "end of the world" is annihilation.

Neither Campo Elías nor Fernando will be able to fully return home. Odysseus had permission from the gods to attack violently, to seek vengeance and at the end, to find solace and sanctuary. Fernando and Campo did not have a god to pray, Divinity forsakes them in the immense solitude of trauma, tormented by memories between angels and demons. They are ghosts condemned to live amongst the ruins of a world that they annihilated.

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