

Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and Carlos Fuentes' *Aura*: the fantastic and the feminine in inter-American dialogue

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Paper presented at the 5th Conference of the International Association of Inter-American Studies, Coimbra (Portugal), March 2018

This paper will pose the hypothesis of the existence of an inter-American dialogue between two key works of short fiction in the fantastic genre pertaining respectively to US and Latin American literature: Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839; translation into Spanish by Julio Cortázar, 1956) and Carlos Fuentes' *Aura* (1962; translation into English by Lysander Kemp, 1987)¹. Both texts construct Gothic elements around a three-way relationship between the respective protagonists (in Poe, two men and a woman; in Fuentes, two women and a man), involving the themes of doubling and metempsychosis and using the convention of the decaying family residence as closed space to generate fantastic effects that reverberate on a symbolic and psychological level. If Poe's tale culminates in what might appear to be the annihilation of the feminine, Fuentes' text, by contrast, can be read as offering a paradigm for women's possible resistance.

'The Fall of the House of Usher' is considered by many to be the ultimate example of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories in the fantastic genre. The Poe scholar Kevin J. Hayes not only calls it 'carefully crafted' but states that 'many consider [it] his finest tale', citing a nineteenth-century critic, John Frost, who saw 'Usher' as 'a noble and imposing picture, such as can be drawn only by a master hand'². First published in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* of Philadelphia in 1839, it was included in Poe's collection of 1840, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, and has been republished endlessly since. *Aura*, considered one of Carlos Fuentes' finest works, and often seen as the most impressive single instance of the fantastic mode in Mexican literature, first appeared as a standalone text in 1962, in the same year as his novel charting the decline of the Mexican revolutionary ideal, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. *Aura* was republished in 2007 in Fuentes' collection *Cuentos sobrenaturales*.

Not only were *Aura* and *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* published in the same year: over time they have established themselves as two of Fuentes' most-read and most-cited fictions, and as standing among the works that launched the transnational literary phenomenon known as the 'Latin American boom' – the process in which, as the critic Peter Standish puts it, 'Latin America was no longer a backwater'³, as its novelists, Fuentes included, produced internationally recognised work of 'complex, difficult and technical sophistication', and 'expected their readers to work hard at deciphering meaning'. The exploration of femininity in *Aura* contrasts with the account in *Artemio Cruz* of a warped masculinity: Fuentes himself

¹ In this paper, all page references to the original of 'Usher' are to Mabbott's edition (Poe, ed. T.O. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol II: Tales and Sketches 1831-1842*, 1978, 394-422), and to the Cortázar translation to the Iwasaki-Volpi edition (Poe tr. Cortázar, ed. Fernando Iwasaki and Jorge Volpi, *Cuentos completos: Edición comentada*, 2008, 317-334). Page references to *Aura* are to the respective Spanish and English versions (in that order) from the Fuentes/Kemp edition (Fuentes, *Aura*, parallel text edition; tr. into English, Lysander Kemp, 1987). All other translations from Spanish (or French) are my own. Page numbers for 'Usher' (Poe) and *Aura* (Fuentes and Kemp) are indicated parenthetically in the text; all others are indicated in the notes.

² Hayes, *Edgar Allan Poe* (2009), 81.

³ Standish, in Davies (ed.), *The Companion to Hispanic Studies* (2002), 124.

stated that if *Aura* signified ‘la vida en la muerte’ [‘life in death’], *Artemio Cruz* by contrast dramatised ‘la muerte en la vida’ [‘death in life’]⁴.

The formal merits of *Aura* were recognised early by Fuentes’ Mexican companion in the ‘boom’, Octavio Paz, who praised it, in an essay on his fellow writer of 1967, as ‘macabra y perfecta a un tiempo’ [‘macabre and perfect simultaneously’]⁵. On Fuentes’ death in 2012, the Colombian writer Darío Jaramillo declared of *Aura*: ‘Es su gran momento. Porque es una historia muy bella con un tono mantenido todo el tiempo’ [‘It’s his great moment. For it’s an extremely fine story whose tone is maintained at all moments’]⁶. The iconic status of *Aura* is indicated by the fact that following Fuentes’ decease, it was chosen to be read out in its entirety at a homage in Madrid’s Casa América⁷. Somewhat longer than ‘Usher’, *Aura* has sometimes been classified as a novella, but here the term used to describe both will be ‘tale’.

To link and compare these two tales, in both their similarities and their differences, is not arbitrary. Both centre on a darkly decaying family mansion with two residents (Roderick Usher and his sister Madeline; Doña Consuelo and her niece Aura), and a third person in the role of visitor (Poe’s unnamed narrator, a childhood friend of Usher’s; the young historian Felipe Montero), invited or engaged for intellectual purposes (to accompany Usher in reading and creative arts; to edit the memoirs of General Llorente, Consuelo’s deceased husband). In both texts, the real gradually morphs into the fantastic, as the tale spirals upward towards a climactic conclusion. On the formal level, if ‘Usher’ employs a first-person narrator who is also a participant in the story, *Aura* breaks with convention by deploying a second-person addressee who is neither quite the reader nor quite Felipe, with Fuentes thus strongly differentiating his narrational technique from Poe’s.

The presence in these tales’ intertextual relation of an inter-American dimension fits with Fuentes’ long-standing interest in US/Mexican interaction, as expressed in a work such as his volume of linked stories of 1995, *La Frontera de Cristal*. More generally, Poe has long since been seen by many in Latin America as virtually an adopted Hispanoamerican writer, his acolytes ranging from Nicaragua’s Rubén Darío to Argentina’s Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar and his fame consolidated by Cortázar’s highly prestigious mid-20th-century translations into Spanish - including of course ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’, as ‘La caída de la casa Usher’. The influence of Poe on both Borges and Cortázar is profound, and has been charted by critics – for Borges in a book-length study of 2016 by Emron Esplin⁸, for Cortázar in an article of 1999 by Mary G. Berg⁹. *Aura* was offered to the anglophone world with the publication in 1975 of a bilingual parallel text edition with, on facing pages, Fuentes’ original and a translation by Lysander Kemp, a US poet and translator possessed of a certain cachet, having also been responsible for rendering into English such major Latin American writers as Darío, Paz and Mexico’s Juan Rulfo¹⁰.

Carlos Fuentes was a long-term admirer of Edgar Allan Poe, praising him in 1984 as an exponent not of Gothic sensation but of psychological depth: ‘Poe descubrió que el corazón delator - el corazón del miedo - está en nuestra carne y no en los castillos góticos’ (‘Poe

⁴ Fuentes, quoted in Lavín, ‘*Aura* revisitada’ (2002).

⁵ Paz, *Corriente alterna* (1967), 44.

⁶ Quoted in: [unsigned], ‘Adiós a uno de los pilares del “boom” latinoamericano’, *El País*, 15 May 2012.

⁷ See: <http://www.europapress.es/latam/mexico/noticia-alfaguara-publicara-federico-balcon-personas-titulos-ineditos-carlos-fuentes-20120517161153.html>, 17 May 2012.

⁸ Esplin, *Borges’ Poe* (2016).

⁹ Berg, ‘Julio Cortázar’, in Vines (ed.), *Poe Abroad* (1999).

¹⁰ See Basnett, ‘Latin American Poetry in Spanish’ (2000), 431.

discovered that the tell-tale heart – the heart of fear - is within our flesh and not in Gothic castles’)¹¹. In his introduction to a 2008 reprint of Poe’s tales translated by Cortázar, he further clarifies: ‘Poe sustrae la tradición gótica de los escenarios externos y la instala en el interior de cada uno de nosotros’ (‘Poe removes the Gothic tradition from external scenery and installs it within each of us’)¹². The presence of a strain of allusion to Poe’s works across Fuentes’ oeuvre has been demonstrated in an article of 1999 by the Poe scholars Susan F. Levine and Stuart Levine, who speak of a ‘dialogue with Poe’ on the part of a fellow writer who ‘feels for him both a spiritual and a technical affinity’. In particular, they connect *Aura*, albeit not to ‘Usher’, to two tales by Poe that evoke metempsychosis, ‘Ligeia’ (1838)¹³ and ‘Morella’ (1835)¹⁴, stressing the themes of ‘the merging of past and present and the efficacy of the human will’¹⁵. We may note here that ‘Morella’ is also visibly recast in a later text by Fuentes, the story of 2010 ‘Brillante’, included in the volume *Carolina Grau*.

Regarding the Cortázar translations, their importance to Fuentes may be deduced from the way he legitimates them by mentioning them in a short story of 2007, ‘Un fantasma tropical’ (published alongside *Aura* in *Cuentos sobrenaturales*). The story’s narrator states: ‘Ya había leído en la escuela el cuento de Poe traducido por Cortázar, el de la carta robada’ (‘I had already read at school Poe’s story translated by Cortázar, the one about the purloined letter’)¹⁶. Fuentes’ educational and diplomatic background gifted him with an excellent command of English (and French), but we may nonetheless conclude that he had two roads of access to the House of Usher, one via Poe’s original and the other via Cortázar’s translation. If *Aura* revisits ‘Usher’, it is not for the first time in Latin America, for Cortázar’s story of 1946, ‘Casa tomada’, is a tale of a mysteriously animated house undeniably presided by the ghost of Poe.¹⁷ In 1982 Fuentes published an article explaining how he came to write ‘*Aura*’. This is a key essay, but he does not mention Poe or ‘Usher’ among his sources (those he does cite include the 17th-century Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo, an 18th-century Japanese story by Ueda Akinari, Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, Henry James’ *The Aspern Papers*, Alexander Pushkin’s *The Queen of Spades*, and a meeting with Maria Callas)¹⁸. Nonetheless, the non-mention of Poe in the essay may be a case like that of Poe’s purloined letter, what Borges called ‘lo tan evidente que no se ve’ [‘what is so obvious that it is not seen’]¹⁹. Fuentes does admit being an intimate of Usher’s doomed mansion when he evokes the film version of 1928, ‘La chute de la Maison Usher’ by Jean Epstein, in an essay paying tribute to the doyen of Spanish cinema Luis Buñuel (who happened to be Epstein’s assistant in the making of that film)²⁰; and in a *New York Times* piece published in 1976, he is quoted as referring to Roderick Usher, declaring that what matters in Poe’s character is ‘what he produces - the reality of passion and fear’²¹.

¹¹ Fuentes, ‘La última frontera’ (1984), 110. The reference is of course to Poe’s celebrated story of 1843, ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ (Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol III: Tales and Sketches 1843-1849* (1978), 789-97).

¹² Fuentes, ‘Presentación’ to Poe tr. Cortázar, *Cuentos completos* (2008), 16.

¹³ Poe, ‘Ligeia’ (1838), in Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol II: Tales and Sketches 1831-1842* (1978), 310-330.

¹⁴ Poe, ‘Morella’ (1835), in Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol II: Tales and Sketches 1831-1842* (1978), 221-236.

¹⁵ Levine and Levine, ‘Carlos Fuentes’, in Vines (ed.), *Poe Abroad* (1999), 234.

¹⁶ Fuentes, ‘Un fantasma tropical’, in *Cuentos sobrenaturales* (2007), 121-127 (126). The reference is to Poe’s famous tale of 1844, ‘The Purloined Letter’ (in Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol III: Tales and Sketches 1843-1849* (1978), 974-993).

¹⁷ In Cortázar, *Los Relatos*, 3: *Pasajes* (1976), 7-12; see Berg, ‘Julio Cortázar’ (1999), 230.

¹⁸ Fuentes, ‘Leyendo y escribiendo sobre mí mismo: Cómo escribí *Aura*’ (1982).

¹⁹ Borges, ‘El poeta del regreso’ (1980), 131.

²⁰ Fuentes, ‘Luis Buñuel. Cineasta de las dos orillas’ (2001).

²¹ Fuentes, quoted [in English] in MacShane, ‘A talk with Carlos Fuentes’ (1976).

Criticism has seen Fuentes' work as deeply marked by cultural hybridity, what is called 'métissage' in French and 'mestizaje' in Spanish,²² and that in its turn implies universality. He has been termed a 'ciudadano del mundo' ('citizen of the world')²³, and may be considered an emblem of world literature, embraced by and embracing, on a basis of equality, the likes of Salman Rushdie (who tells in his memoir of 2012, *Joseph Anton*, how Fuentes received him in Mexico in 1995 and shared a platform with him at the Guadalajara book fair, with the result that 'he [Rushdie] realized that he loved Mexico')²⁴ and José Saramago (whose widow Pilar del Río declared in 2012, on Fuentes' death, 'Desde que a Saramago le presentó a los escritores mexicanos, mi marido se sintió mexicano gracias a él' ['After he introduced Saramago to the Mexican writers, my husband felt Mexican thanks to him'])²⁵.

Cosmopolitan elements inform the writing of both Poe and Fuentes. Poe believed that American literature should be judged on its merits as potentially equal to writing from anywhere. He rejected any 'servile deference to British critical dicta'²⁶, affirming that American writers 'are now strong in our own resources' and 'have arrived at that epoch where our literature may and must stand on its own merits'²⁷. Fuentes, master of a range of subject-matter embracing pre-Columbian, colonial and modern Mexico, sought an identity as Mexican writer that would also be imbued with cosmopolitanism. This tendency notably included a marked French element. *Aura* was written in a Paris café²⁸; its author received a state funeral in Mexico, but chose to be buried in Montparnasse cemetery in Paris (where too rests the long-term Parisian resident Julio Cortázar). Indeed, Octavio Paz described Fuentes and Cortázar in the same breath as exponents of 'el cosmopolitismo hispano-americano' ['Hispano-American cosmopolitanism']²⁹. The Gallic element in Fuentes' cosmopolitanism is strong. A French critic, Karine Berriot, quoted him in 1988 as declaring: 'La Mexique a subi une très importante influence française pendant tout le XIXe siècle et au XXe... [dans la culture française] nous savons trouver .. un contrepoids de diversification culturelle face à .. celle des États-Unis' ['Mexico underwent a very important French influence over the entire 19th century and in the 20th ... [in French culture] we are able to find .. a counterweight of cultural diversification in the face of ... US culture']³⁰. As we will see, there are French traces in both *Aura* and 'Usher'. Nonetheless, the dialogue between the two texts is necessarily also an inter-American one. *Aura* is much more than a rewrite of 'Usher' – these two major fantastic tales speak to each other along the twin axes of similarity and difference - but the textual similarities are multiple and striking, and Fuentes' tale may certainly be read as a reply to Poe's. There is also reason to suppose that Cortázar's translation of 'Usher' underlies

²² See Bonells, *Dictionnaire des littératures hispaniques* (2009), 542.

²³ [unsigned], 'Carlos Fuentes recibe la Gran Cruz de Isabel la Católica', *El País*, 24 March 2009. In a significant cosmopolitan gesture in a pan-Iberian/Iberoamerican context, Fuentes, in 2007 at a conference in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia), advanced the notion of the 'territorio de la Mancha', a common Luso-Hispanic cultural space evolving under the sign of Cervantes (see: Enrique V. Iglesias, 'Carlos Fuentes, territorio de la Mancha', *El País*, 17 May 2012).

²⁴ Rushdie, *Joseph Anton* (2012), 471-72.

²⁵ Quoted in [unsigned], 'El mundo hispanohablante llora al autor de *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*', *El País*, 15 May 2012.

²⁶ Poe, 'Joseph Rodman Drake – Fitz-Greene Halleck', *Southern Literary Messenger*, April 1836; in Poe ed. G.R. Thompson, *Essays and Reviews* (1984), 505-539 (505).

²⁷ Poe, 'John G.C. Brainard', *Graham's Magazine*, February 1842, in Poe ed. Thompson, *Essays and Reviews* (1984), 404-411 (405).

²⁸ Fuentes, 'Leyendo y escribiendo sobre mí mismo: Cómo escribí *Aura*' (1982).

²⁹ Paz, *Corriente alterna* (1967), 47.

³⁰ Berriot, 'Les Latino-Américains – la liquidation d'un complexe d'infériorité' (1976), 20.

certain lexical choices in *Aura*, as, equally, the original of Poe's 'Usher' seems to be there in the background in Kemp's English version of Fuentes' tale.

Apart from 'Usher', *Aura* contains textual links to other works of Poe. The story begins with Felipe sitting in a café (like his author writing the story in Paris, but here in Mexico City), his eyes riveted on an advertisement in a newspaper – as Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840), itself a tale of doubling, opens with its narrator in a London café, 'with a newspaper in my lap . . . poring over advertisements'³¹. Later, inside the mansion, Felipe makes use of a lamp for which Fuentes' text employs the term 'quinqué', but which Kemp's translation renders as an 'Argand lamp' (a lamp with a circular wick, common in the 19th century) (32, 33), in what may be a deliberate gesture to Poe, since the same term occurs in his essay (also of 1840) 'Philosophy of Furniture'³². General Llorente's surname, too, is linked to Poe by a surprising intertextual twist: Poe's editor, Thomas O. Mabbott, in his notes to Poe's tale of the Inquisition of 1842, 'The Pit and the Pendulum'³³, reveals that one of its sources was a volume of 1812, *Anales de Historia de la Inquisición*, by Juan Antonio . . . Llorente^{34,35}.

There is a strong French dimension in *Aura* which also refers back to Gallic elements in Poe, in 'Usher' and elsewhere. If Paris was the Enlightenment city par excellence for Fuentes and the writers of the 'boom' in general, for Poe too it signified modernity, chosen as the urban setting for his detective tales of ratiocination. In *Aura*, the General's photographs have been taken in a studio in Boulevard Haussmann (134, 135), the avenue named after the 19th century's rebuilders of Paris and epicentre of that Paris as immortalised by Walter Benjamin in his *Arcades Project*³⁶. Llorente's memoirs are in French, corresponding to a political career that took him to military studies in France, campaigning in Mexico in support of the French-backed Emperor Maximilian, and exile and death in Paris. Felipe has studied in Paris at the Sorbonne, and his conversations with Consuelo are laced with intercalations in French.

In Usher, both Roderick and the narrator can be considered cosmopolitan intellectuals (the ancientness of the aristocratic line, the narrator's status as Roderick's childhood friend, and a lexical item like the Scottish-sounding 'tarn' for 'lake' all suggest that both Usher and the narrator hail not from the US but from Britain), and their shared reading includes works in French by the obscure authors Jean Gresset and Marin de la Chambre (408-409)³⁷. Poe's text also on four occasions employs a gallicism and highlights its status by italicising it, the instances being: *ennuyé*, *physique*, *morale* and *abandon* (401, 404, 404, 408)³⁸. The narrator's

³¹ Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840), in Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol II: Tales and Sketches 1831-1842* (1978), 506-515 (507).

³² Poe, 'Philosophy of Furniture' (1840), in Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol II: Tales and Sketches 1831-1842* (1978), 495-503 (503).

³³ Poe, 'The Pit and the Pendulum' (1842), in Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol III: Tales and Sketches 1843-1849* (1978), 681-697.

³⁴ Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol III: Tales and Sketches 1843-1849* (1978), 699.

³⁵ Also, among the photographs discovered by Felipe is one of Aura, 'reclinada sobre [una] columna dórica' ['leaning against a Doric column'] (134, 135), in a neoclassical pose that might recall the ideal woman of Poe's poem 'To Helen' (1831): 'Lo! In yon brilliant window-niche / How statue-like I see thee stand' (Poe ed. Mabbott, *Collected Works vol I: Poems*, 1969).

³⁶ See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1982), the section 'Haussmann, or the Barricades' (11-12), and *passim*.

³⁷ For details of these authors, see Mabbott's notes to 'Usher' in *Collected Works vol II: Tales and Sketches 1831-1842*, 419-20. The author referred to in 'Usher' as 'd'Indaginé' might appear to be French but was in fact a German writing in Latin.

³⁸ Cortázar's translation somewhat occludes this, retaining *ennuyé* but rendering the other terms via Spanish cognates. He translates the four terms as: *ennuyé*; *aspecto físico*; *moral*; and *abandono*, keeping the italicisation in all cases (Poe tr. Cortázar, 'La caída de la Casa Usher' (2008), 322, 324, 324, 328).

implied knowledge of French also suggests that when he and Usher read French authors they do so in the original. The French language appears as a vector of sophisticated intellectual discourse – an element present in ‘Usher’ and extended and expanded in *Aura*.

There are close similarities between the houses (though also differences - the House of Usher is located in a remote rural area, that of *Aura* in the historic centre of Mexico’s capital). Both are repeatedly described as spaces of darkness both physical and mental, of Gothicity and of decay, via similar lexical elements: ‘darkness’ in both Poe and Kemp, ‘oscuridad’ in both Cortázar and Fuentes. The corridors of the House of Usher are ‘dark and intricate’, its rooms ‘gloomy apartments’ (400, 410); in that of *Aura* we find ‘la oscuridad permanente’ [translated by Kemp, in a Poesque touch, as ‘perpetual shadows’] (60, 61). Felipe intuitively feels that ‘esta casa siempre se encuentra a oscuras’ [‘this house will always be in darkness’] (34, 35); Usher’s narrator finds in Roderick ‘a mind from which darkness ... poured forth ... in an unceasing radiation of gloom’ (405). Strange phenomena from the vegetable kingdom (medicinal plants in *Aura*, fungi on the walls in Usher) mark both mansions. The masonry of the House of Usher reminds the narrator of the ‘specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for years’ (400); in the house of *Aura*, Felipe observes ‘esa madera crujiente, fofa por la humedad’ [‘the creaking wood, spongy from the dampness’] (12, 13). Usher’s mansion has a ‘Gothic archway’ (400), the interior of *Aura* walls covered in ‘madera oscura labrada al estilo gótico’ [‘dark wood, carved in Gothic style’] (37, 38). Poe’s narrator’s perception of the ‘melancholy House of Usher’ (397; rendered by Cortázar as ‘la melancólica Casa Usher’)³⁹ is echoed in a Felipe overwhelmed by ‘melancolía’ [‘melancholy’] (113, 114).

Both houses become a locus for fantastic events, but neither Poe nor Fuentes uses the supernatural, whether real or imagined within the text, for naïve or sensational purposes. If Poe’s tale is a classic instance of the hesitation between the strange (‘étrange’) and the marvellous (‘merveilleux’) that Tzvetan Todorov defines as constitutive of the fantastic⁴⁰, Fuentes’ text exhibits a certain Mexicanisation of the genre – as he says in his essay on *Aura*, ‘su dimensión específicamente mexicana es que *Aura* es una historia de la vida de la muerte’ (‘its specifically Mexican dimension is that *Aura* is a story of the life of death’)⁴¹, and here we may emphasise such elements as magic, transcendence of death, and the powers of medicinal plants. Within both constructions of the fantastic, the feminine plays a key role, but with markedly different effects, as genre intersects with gender.

Aura, as befits a text written over a century after ‘Usher’, manifests a far greater prioritisation of the female. In ‘Usher’, Madeline appears but twice and never speaks; Consuelo, by contrast, is the mastermind behind the events and appears to have magically created *Aura* as her double. On her first appearance, *Aura* recalls Madeline: the first time Felipe beholds *Aura*, ‘su aparición fue imprevista, sin algún ruido’ [‘her arrival was so unexpected, without the slightest sound’] (24, 25); in ‘Usher’, Madeline ‘passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared’ (404). Thereafter, however, things evolve very differently. Madeline, buried alive by Usher, returns from her vault to claim him, falling on top of him: ‘in her violent and now final death-agonies, [bearing] him to the floor a corpse’ (416-17). *Aura*, by contrast, morphs into Consuelo in the very moment when Felipe believes he is engaging in intimate communion with *Aura*, but is in fact concretising Consuelo’s desire by mutating into her dead husband and thus bringing him back to life. Consuelo’s witchcraft has succeeded in its aim of metempsychosis: having

³⁹ Poe tr. Cortázar, ‘La caída de la Casa Usher’ (2008), 319.

⁴⁰ Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1976).

⁴¹ Fuentes, ‘Leyendo y escribiendo sobre mí mismo: Cómo escribí *Aura*’ (1982).

created *Aura* to attract Felipe, she has turned *Aura* into herself and Felipe into Llorente. The climaxes of both tales are nonetheless linked by the shared image of the moon - in 'Usher', the 'full, setting and blood-red moon' appearing as the house collapses (417), in *Aura* 'la luz de la luna ... la luz plateada' ['a beam of silvery moonlight'] entering through a crack (144, 145). However, the two tales close respectively on a very different emotional note. Poe's tale ends with the disappearance into the tarn of 'the fragments of the "House of Usher"' (417)⁴², of both mansion and lineage; in *Aura*, Consuelo-Aura promises to Felipe-Llorente: 'la haré regresar' ['I'll bring her back'] (144, 145).

The feminine, annihilated in 'Usher', thus triumphs in *Aura*. In Fuentes' essay on his tale, he declares: 'Aura y Consuelo son una ... estas hermosas damas descienden de la bruja ... que reserva para sí ... los secretos de la sabiduría prohibida por la razón moderna ... los secretos de una antigüedad que se proyecta ... en el escándalo de la mujer sin pecado, de la mujer que no incita al pecado como Eva ni abre la caja de las desgracias como Pandora; de la mujer que ... [es] dueña de su voluntad y de su cuerpo' ['Aura and Consuelo are one ... these fine ladies are descendants of the witch ... who reserves for herself ... the secrets of the knowledge prohibited by modern reason ... the secrets of an antiquity that projects itself ... in the scandal of the woman without sin, who neither incites to sin like Eve nor opens up Pandora's box; the woman who ... [is] mistress of her will and body']⁴³. This perspective of female resistance to subordination is confirmed in a recent study of *Aura*, from 2016, by the Mexican critic Cecilia Eudave, who, invoking myth, symbol and ritual, concludes: 'Montero penetra a un universo femenino ... que es el interior de esa casa ... esa oscuridad, ese universo conservado y hecho por mujeres' ['Montero enters a female universe ... which is the inside of this house .. this darkness, this universe preserved and made by women'], adding that on Fuentes' part 'existe una intención progresista y de ruptura al presentar a una mujer [Consuelo-Aura] ... que transgrede algunas normas y costumbres al presentarse activa ... en esa búsqueda del otro' ['there exists a progressive intention, an impetus to change, in the presentation of a woman ... who transgresses certain norms and customs by being active ... in her quest for the other']⁴⁴.

Through Fuentes' dialogue with Poe, *Aura*, a tale of doubling, also challenges a double subordination - that of Mexico and Latin America to the United States, and that of the female to the male. If in Poe Roderick and Madeline are united in death and the narrator flees, in Fuentes Felipe remains, as part of a fusion shared with Consuelo in which age and youth combine as death morphs into life. The visible intertextualities with 'Usher' constitute *Aura* as a reply to Poe's famous tale that can amply sustain the comparison. In his tale written in Paris, Fuentes reconfigures Poe's themes in the framework of a Mexicanness that is also cosmopolitan and tinged by gallicism, marking a key moment in the Latin American 'boom' and in the dissemination and affirmation, in Europe, the US and worldwide, of the literature of a continent.

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⁴² Poe's quotation marks.

⁴³ Fuentes, 'Leyendo y escribiendo sobre mí mismo: Cómo escribí *Aura*' (1982).

⁴⁴ Eudave, 'Aura de Carlos Fuentes: proyección ritual y simbólica' (2016).

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