


The body as a symbol of violence and monstrosity in “*Sacrificios humanos*”, by María Fernanda Ampuero

El cuerpo como símbolo de violencia y monstruosidad en “Sacrificios humanos” de María Fernanda Ampuero

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ABSTRACT

This essay delves into the literary fiction of "Sacrificios Humanos" by Ecuadorian author María Fernanda Ampuero, exploring the impact of violence, pain, and monstrosity on her protagonists, especially the female ones. The purpose is to analyze the characteristics that amplify the prejudices surrounding the protagonists, unraveling the narrative complexity of Ampuero's work. This complexity also allows us to address the treatment of the body in the author's writing. To achieve this objective, the study inventories the conception of the female body from Western philosophy, drawing on authors such as Plato, Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Luc Nancy. With this theoretical framework, the analysis proceeds to examine the stories in Ampuero's book to understand how, through denunciation and a highly personal poetics, the author portrays the city itself as a failed promise of modernity.

Keywords: complexity, Ecuadorian narrative, monstrosity, violence, body, modernity.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo se sumerge en la ficción literaria de “Sacrificios humanos” de la autora ecuatoriana María Fernanda Ampuero, explorando el impacto de la violencia, el dolor y la monstruosidad en sus protagonistas, sobre todo femeninas. El propósito es analizar las características que acrecientan los prejuicios que envuelven a las protagonistas, desentrañando la complejidad narrativa de Ampuero, lo cual nos permite, además, abordar el tratamiento del cuerpo en la obra de la autora. Para alcanzar este objetivo, el presente estudio realiza un inventario de la concepción del cuerpo femenino desde la filosofía occidental a través de autores como Platón, Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche y Jean-Luc Nancy. Con este marco teórico, se procede a analizar los relatos que componen el libro de Ampuero para comprender cómo, a través de la denuncia y la poética personalísima, la autora da cuenta de la ciudad en sí misma como una promesa fallida de la modernidad.

Palabras clave: complejidad, narrativa ecuatoriana, monstruosidad, violencia, cuerpo, modernidad.

INTRODUCTION

To analyze the stories in Ampuero's (1976) book "Sacrificios Humanos," published by Páginas de Espuma in 2021, it is fitting to consider the statement by Aníbal Fernando Bonilla (2022): "It is an autofictional compendium questioning the dominant system, with passages of the oppressed history of the deep Guayaquil, or, in turn, with hyperbolic, brutal, vehement events, engendered in any other geographical environment." Bonilla is correct in asserting that "Sacrificios Humanos" combines, on one hand, the macro reality (geographical environment) and, on the other, the author's individual reality (autofictional compendium) and her problematic relationship with her father. This relationship, in a way, sheds light on the dark masculine representation that loves and kills—a form of unhealthy love that deforms and then kills. However, this is not the focus of the present study, despite it being a theme that inevitably intersects the analysis. Our focus is on the body as a symbol of violence and monstrosity.

Initially, the study proposed examining the body as a metaphor rather than a symbol, but this was ultimately discarded. This is because a metaphor is a figure of speech that represents a certain reality through another, whereas Ampuero's narrative in "Sacrificios Humanos" does not metaphorize reality but represents it starkly and without embellishment. Although she uses metaphor and other literary devices, it is different in essence. "Euphemisms and metaphors are not enough, because in Ampuero's stories everything is disconsolate and is enunciated from the most purulent wounds" (Rodríguez, 2021).

In short, violence in Ampuero's stories is presented starkly, exposing in the harsh light of noon the practices of a sexist, xenophobic, and misogynistic society—violent in its living conditions and in its responses. Narratively, this allows the mutilated, beaten, and, in the best cases (sadly), injured body to become a symbol of a sort of internal revolution that her female characters often fail to carry out. When this revolution does occur, it is only possible through violence itself.

The body, trapped irreparably in a vicious cycle of destruction, validates the phrase of another Ecuadorian writer, Mónica Ojeda: "...never is our body more ours than when it hurts" (2016, p. 81). Since the sexual act is also a small death, Ampuero aptly responds: "Era ese nombre que su amante decía durante el éxtasis y que la penetraba por todos lados. Era esa mujer que se llamaba Edith y por lo tanto existía" (2021, p. 78).

This study is grounded in a qualitative methodological approach, focusing on the analysis of María Fernanda Ampuero's stories in "Sacrificios Humanos" to articulate the body as a symbol of violence and monstrosity. According to Lourdes and Munch (2014), although the qualitative method is generally applied in social sciences to capture and collect information through observation, interviews, and focus groups, its inductive procedure makes the methodology for collecting information more flexible. Furthermore, this research is descriptive in nature, as it describes the characteristics of a situation or phenomenon.

The story "Edith" best represents the body trapped in pain and liberated through pleasure. When the eponymous protagonist is killed, her blood returns to her lover's place, whom she mistakes for God due to his superhuman ability to make love to her. This is a clear biblical allusion to the passage of Sodom and Gomorrah, capitalized by Lot, the fearful of Yahweh, and his "disobedient" wife, Sarah.

Monstrosity also intertwines with physical appearance, embodied in teratological beings who star or co-star in Ampuero's stories. These characters, who do not conform to aesthetic canons, are marginalized by their environment: a quasi-schizophrenic junkie, a hunchbacked girl, a mentally disabled child who loves leeches, and bulimic or overweight teenagers.

Likewise, monstrosity is presented in a second form through physically attractive male characters whose personalities ultimately turn them into demonic creatures, fulfilling the premonitory phrase of Tomás Eloy Martínez: "Isn't the beautiful but the beginning of the terrible?" (1995). As if the customary practice of Evil in capital letters were embedded in the depths of their souls or essence, the male body corrodes and ends up, as in the case of the gringo in the story "Lorena"—a transcript of Lorena Gallo's rapist husband—transforming into human waste. Ampuero seems to suggest that Evil in capital letters crystallizes behind the mask of good manners or promises of love because behind them are people, and for that very reason, the quintessence of everything abject that the world of human beings can exhibit.

Finally, the third form that monstrosity takes is found in nature and the everyday brutality that is its own law. This feature is more atmospheric than an exploration by the author, demonstrating that even domestic animals, which appear affable and tender to the naked eye, can suddenly tear two fingers off a baby's right hand. In short, in the world of "Sacrificios Humanos," there is no possible refuge because Evil is not in others but within us, and it only takes one day for chance to fill anyone with "the white ray of terror," leading them to splash in the waters of individual and collective hysteria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concepts around the body

The conceptions presented here regarding the concept of the body derive from an extensive exploration of Western philosophy. This journey has allowed us to understand the treatment of this concept throughout its narrative.

Definition of body

If we review the Dictionary of the Real Academia Española (RAE, 2014), we find at least twenty-three meanings of the concept "body": *Cuerpo*, (From lat. *corpus*), m. 1. That which has limited extension, perceptible by the senses. || 23. Mil. Set of soldiers with their respective officers.

In all the definitions reviewed, we find a constant: the body has a limit, and as a limit, it must impose its boundaries. These boundaries are eagerly sought by the women in "Sacrificios Humanos": not to be touched without their consent, not to be beaten, not to be killed. Based on the above and the experiences described by Ampuero, we propose a definition of the body: a human or animal component, or

belonging to nature, whose existence is objective and whose extension is limited. Of course, its limits respond to how the legality of human societies is structured. One body cannot, and should not, harm another, but it constantly happens. The body is a presence, a proof that the being exists.

The body as a philosophical concept

Once the general definition has been established, it is time to approach it from the conceptions of the body and corporeality according to some Western philosophers such as Plato, Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Luc Nancy. But first, we propose a concept that we believe encompasses them all: "It is in the body that human existence acquires a spatio-temporal dimension, and it is the body that makes the human being an active part of nature and the process of life" (Gómez and Sastre, 2008, p. 120).

In the ancient world, the term "soma" alludes to the corpse and not directly to the body as a counterpart to the soul, so that "the body is not conceived as a 'unity of harmonic parts,' but as a juxtaposition of separate organs and elements" (Gómez and Sastre, 2008, p. 121). Aristotle, for his part, believed that the soul is a first "entelechy" of a body that has life in potency; this principle of movement unifies life in its totality, including sensibility and understanding. "The soul cannot be without the body since it is the body that is the form of the soul. Thus, the soul is not a separate entity from the body: the soul is 'natural' and is inseparable from the animate compound of living beings" (Páramo, 2012, p. 563).

While Aristotle held that the soul could not subsist without a body, Plato posited a dualism between body and soul so radical in his conception that he believed we could not obtain truth except by getting rid of the body, which he called the prison of the soul. He conceived of the body as guilty of the passions, which attracted war, disease, and decay. This thought was seminal to the Christian worldview, which divided the paradise of God and his archangels from the earth with its sinful men and women.

In time, Plato's idea of the body as a prison for the soul was taken up by an important Christian thinker, Plotinus, who, seeing the soul as an ethereal substance, argued that it should be separated from the body or, better yet, used to achieve spiritual goals. From such an approach came the need for self-inflicted punishment to achieve liberation from the earthly world. Torture and mortification became a Christian tradition aimed at curbing impure desires and viewing masturbation and sex in general with repudiation, labeling them as the "original sin," which consequently made every body impure.

The body, besides being a "trapping" prison, was also considered a kind of "animal" that, with its own instinctive tendencies and spirits, waged war against the ideals and values of the soul, thus hindering its dialectical process of liberation towards truth and goodness. Because of its material origin, the body was considered constitutively evil and adverse to the healthy and spiritual origin of the soul, which came from the world of ideas (Astacio, 2001, p. 1).

The implantation of the Christian worldview with its rigid patriarchal hierarchies relegated women to domestic tasks such as cooking and caring for children, while also curbing human libido. Not only was the body, but also sex incarnated in women, due to the heterosexuality imposed by the conventional Christian family unit, rejected with deep

contempt by the evangelized masses. Any desire that did not aim for communion with God became, irremediably, a shameful desire.

However, the Renaissance transformed theocentrism into anthropocentrism, a time when man placed himself at the center of creation and reclaimed his body and the corporeal, manifesting this change above all in art: painting, sculpture, music, and literature. The nascent field of anatomy, which dissected bodies to show that humans possess an inalienable component called the body, simultaneously encouraged people to mold what was previously considered only God's domain: nature. The idea of individuation progressed slowly, first passing through the privileged layers of society. Before becoming objectified in the social imaginary, it had to be a universal practice (Gómez and Sastre, 2008, p. 125).

When Cartesian rationalism appeared with René Descartes and his essay "The Discourse on Method," the body was separated from consciousness, and reason from the material world. Descartes divorced both entities, believing that, although they are different substances, they can interact with each other. However, English empiricist philosophers, opposing the Cartesian view, claimed that the body is an entity that feels and that knowledge arises from that process. Baruch de Spinoza proposed "a single substance for all attributes," performing a much more subtle and profound intellectual operation: the soul is not dependent on the body, and "an attribute of the body is also a sense of the soul" (Gómez and Sastre, 2008, p. 126).

Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, pointed to Christianity and its values through a furious denunciation of Plato and his system of thought, which has had such an influence on the West. Nietzsche did not devalue Plato's contribution but rather investigated the consequences it has had for humanity. Later, Nietzsche wrote: "Write with blood and you will write with the spirit" (Nietzsche, 2010), implying that not only the body belongs to the human being, but the soul is its effluvium.

Later on, phenomenology and existentialism take on the theme of existence as a whole, with concepts like the body, corporeality, and freedom being superimposed on merely transcendental and ontological versions. In short, life is experienced through the body and all its senses. In this regard, Gómez and Sastre (2008) synthesize the assumptions of thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Mounier, and Michel Foucault. The body is conceived as a limit, becoming a means of approaching fragility and a new understanding of the world's conception. The body is articulated around time and space, but at the same time, the corporeal being can transcend them through its self-understanding and understanding of the environment. Thus, the idea that the body is an instrument becomes obsolete; to be such, it must be beyond our reach, which is not the case with the body. It is thanks to the body that knowledge of the world is attained. Rather, the body is evoked as language, since through the word we carry out a "co-construction" of the world. The idea of the body as presence is configured because of its relationship with "others." Individuality varies between men and women due to their corporeality, but this does not mean they cease to belong to the human gender (Gómez and Sastre, 2008, pp. 127-128).

Finally, Jean-Luc Nancy (1940) and his philosophy on the body maintain that we lack a body, as the human being is exteriority and infinite exposure, "a body turned outward."

The reflection goes beyond biology; it implies stopping thinking of the body as something organized and imagining it as an event, a conception related to the vision of contemporary Ecuadorian writers. They seek to write about the body through the word: to turn the body into an idea, to turn corporeality into individual territory to understand the other, the different, that which until now has been misunderstood. "Writing the body means to make inscriptions on it, to touch it and sculpt it with thought, to develop a somatography, to make the body itself to be read" (Gómez and Sastre, 2008, p. 129).

All the interpretations that Western thinkers have presented share a common question revolving around the role of the body in human existence, and whether the body is an indispensable element to understand human nature. "The body is both an object of knowledge and a target of power" (Prósperi, 2018, p. 171). From this conception, the human being is (de)forming the world.

"Sacrificios humanos": the body seen through violence and monstrosity.

"To write is also to bless a life that has not been blessed," says a phrase by the famous Ukrainian-Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, quoted as an epigraph in "Sacrificios Humanos." Setting an epigraph is indeed an art. The Ecuadorian writer Leonardo Valencia (2021) foresaw the need for an essay on the topic of the epigraph. The function of an epigraph is to serve as a guide for the writer throughout their literary exploration, much like Virgil guiding Dante. Though the epigraph is a premonition for the context to be fulfilled, it is not enough to simply choose one from Homer, Borges, or Faulkner. The writer's talent must ensure that both the book and the epigraph pose "a single question" (Carrión, 2002, p. 12) and formulate it throughout the writing of the book. It is essential for the reader to clearly discern the purpose of the epigraph in relation to the book's content. Only when the book ends will the chosen epigraph become, or not, an organic part of the reading. If the novel is good, an epigraph from Borges, for example, becomes the writer's own, merging into the essence of the work and enriching its meaning, becoming an inseparable part of the reading experience.

Within this framework, the epigraph with which Ampuero begins the book is doubly significant and directly related to the two narrative axes of her stories: violence and monstrosity. First, "the life that has not been blessed" refers to the broken bodies of women who have been raped, murdered, and abused due to dire economic situations and the lack of opportunities. These conditions, combined with the macho imagery derived from religion, politics, and sexual orientation, create a failed social fabric. Through the representation of these broken bodies, reality becomes a monster that spits out women.

The second meaning that Lispector's epigraph achieves is by making these stark and unjust realities visible, realities that have long been submerged in the most shameless silence. In this context, the beauty of a book lies not only in its aesthetics but in its capacity to reveal these hidden truths. This suggests a religious dimension attributed to art: the possibility of transcending the superficial and reaching a deeper understanding of human reality. If the author succeeds in giving form to their narrative matter, exorcising the tutelary

demons of the reality against which they struggle, writing can bless life itself, or better: its prolonged silences.

Violence from the physically monstrous

This section addresses the first of the axes through which Ampuero constructs the concept of violence: beauty. By not conforming to Western aesthetic canons, beauty becomes literal, concrete ugliness, often embodied in teratological beings such as junkies, dwarfs, anorexic, or overweight women. These individuals end up marginalized by the system and are in a constant exchange of roles to decide who will be the executioner and who will be the victim.

"Edith" is a story about a woman who rediscovers herself through becoming the lover of an older man. The moral problem of the story lies in the fact that, while the woman has sex with her lover, her husband rapes her daughters. One night she tells her lover, who dresses her with maternal affection and leaves. She never sees him again. One night, the woman sees her husband attempting to rape the girls, and he attacks her, angrily throwing her to the ground. When the woman regains consciousness, she finds herself on a donkey, with a gag in her mouth, heading back to the village where she lives. Her husband tells her not to turn around, but she doesn't listen and ends up murdered. Her blood, however, seeks to return to her lover. At the end, the narrator states: "the blood from all over her body was going down the hill, returning, returning."

Both this story and "Lorena" explore sex as a reunion with the maternal womb, pre-consciousness, the pure pleasure of not knowing oneself to be mortal and imbecile. Sex is described as a house of one's own where geraniums bloom (Ampuero, 2021, p. 78). In other words, sex is a maternal conscience that is not solely the property of women nor a concept emptied by some imbecile man, but a purified form of love: attention to the other and, therefore, to oneself.

In this way, "sex" in "Sacrificios Humanos" becomes a battle against the outside world and the one behind closed doors. This implies that sex, like literature, needs to perpetuate the image of the loved one to create another reality in which we can be fully happy, even if only momentarily imagined. Ampuero writes: "El sexo como todas las palabras que alguna vez quisimos decir y nos faltó el lenguaje" (Ampuero, 2021, p. 78).

Sex is thus configured as a way of reclaiming the body. The answer to existence is pleasure, and by finding it, the human being becomes more tied to his own life and that of the loved one. This happens because, only through sex in "Sacrificios Humanos," do the characters stop being the roles imposed on them by society, managing to be, for a moment, a cry of ecstasy, a prolonged, ephemeral, but infinite orgasm.

In orgasm he said her name: Edith. He was the only one who named and renamed her with his tongue, with his sex, with his moan. Edith, Edith, Edith. She was no longer "the woman of" or "the mother of" or "the daughter of." It was that name that her lover said during ecstasy and that penetrated her everywhere. She was that woman who was called Edith and therefore existed (Ampuero, 2021, p. 78).

Towards the middle of the story it is discovered that Edith's wife's husband rapes the girls. Meanwhile, the woman's lover understands her and does not judge her, but abandons her. In the end the husband tries to rape the girls

again and in her attempt to stop him she is brutally attacked. The end of the story raises a whole poetics: the woman who through her screams found a new form of herself, freer and more definitive, has a gag in her mouth. She is riding an old donkey, going towards death.

This narrative brings together the myth of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, where God would not allow men and women, and especially same-sex couples, to enjoy themselves without restraint. This myth suggests that perhaps they might have discovered that God can be a wet orgasm, a furious attack that satisfies an animal will. The flier tells Edith's wife not to look back, not to see God, "the only living thing among so much death," but she, brave like Sarah, does not heed this warning. She looks back, sees, and is killed. However, her blood flows down the hill, "returning, returning," to the place where she loved and where life took on meaning.

'Violence' from the monstrous interiority

In this second section, Ampuero addresses the literary treatment of violence, shifting the focus from physical ugliness according to conventional aesthetic canons to the values that emphasize the denunciation of violence and oppression. She also explores identity and authenticity within a Latin American social context, highlighting empathy and solidarity as key elements for social transformation. Through these values, an individual is constructed—one whose integrity, dignity, and authenticity are defined not by external standards but by the acceptance and appreciation of oneself and others.

Ampuero delves into the latent drives within the human psyche, such as violence, sadism, and submission, through narratives that unravel the complexities of human behavior in extreme contexts. She uses an introspective and descriptive approach to examine these drives from a sociopsychological perspective, offering a raw and uncompromising view of the human condition. Her characters, always on the brink of explosion, embody these drives.

The story of Lorena and John exemplifies this exploration. Lorena, a Latina hairdresser in the United States, falls in love with a gringo, thanks to the complicity of her best friend at a discotheque. However, this man, John, gradually reveals his true nature as a brutal rapist and woman beater. Lorena is repeatedly attacked by John, who, in a drunken state, rapes her until she bleeds "from all her orifices." One night, fed up with the situation, she takes a knife from the kitchen. Although the narration is suspended, the reader understands that this mirrors the real-life case of Lorena Bobbitt, who cut off her husband's penis.

Ampuero dedicates the story to Bobbitt, rewriting it in fictional form. The reflection that Lorena's story brings is that, while sex can be an escape valve or a driving force to fight against an unjust reality marked by daily blows, humiliation, and aggression, it can also be idealized to the point of being seen as the only form of human self-realization, leading to absolute abandonment. The same applies to other activities; without proper channels to express personalities and characters, society risks normalizing violence.

John me calienta como nadie en el mundo. Un hambre que se alimenta de hambre. Nuestra vida sexual es nuestra vida entera, nos sobra todo y todos,

dejamos de ver televisión, de salir, de ver a la gente. Nos la pasamos cogiendo. Nunca un hombre me ha hecho sentir lo que me hace sentir mi gringo, mi John, qué bestia, mi sueño americano con verga. (Ampuero, 2021, p. 82)

"Lorena" epitomizes all those women who, to free themselves from submission and abuse, find only violence at their disposal in a time where there is no equality of opportunity. In a world filled with impunity and silence, literature becomes the best medium to ask why she is the way she is. The fact that the story is dedicated to Lorena Gallo, using her maiden name, is the author's way of reclaiming a deeply personal pain and transferring it to us, compelling us to put ourselves in her place and understand her. It is an invitation to become the same person through someone else's pain.

Maria Fernanda Ampuero, writing of the body

Throughout this study, it has become clear that the book of short stories "Sacrificios humanos" makes writing about the body its banner. Through this, it literaturizes, but does not "whitewash," the violent conditions in which women in Latin America find themselves immersed, whether due to their status as immigrants, belonging to poor layers of society, or not conforming to conventional aesthetic canons.

Hence, the idea of sacrifice as a ritual is not only the private fiefdom of pre-Hispanic cultures but is also practiced in contemporary times. This is evident in the accumulation of capital that leads immigrants to surrender themselves to the corrosive arms of the idol-money, or in the daily surrender men and women make of themselves to fit into foreign molds, becoming parasites, puppets, and monsters of others.

The ritual sacrifice of this era involves giving one's life to a handful of people who define the meaning of love, economy, religion, and morality. In response to this, the only way to counter social destiny is to begin inhabiting one's own body. This act implies not only becoming aware of our physical existence but also rejecting the alienation imposed by dominant social structures. By inhabiting our bodies, we empower ourselves to question and resist the norms and values imposed from outside. It is a return to our individuality, a search for authenticity, and an affirmation of our dignity as free human beings.

The battle is arduous because it requires naturalizing even the most intimate passions in a hostile environment. However, in this violent act, the system produces its own enemies: turning women into rebels who have transitioned from quietly occupying the corner of a kitchen to establishing the course of contemporary literature.

For Ampuero, writing about the body has meant exposing the rotten intricacies of urban life, which, as a result of globalization, has accumulated peripheries and violence that she makes visible, concrete, and gives a voice to with such force that she creates her own language. This language pushes her own experiences to the limit, inscribing them on a much broader plane and inevitably posing a profoundly political literature: finding a voice for the historical silences that Ampuero fills with fiction, giving a human face, a woman's face, to what were previously just headlines in crime stories or gossip in the hallways.

Female culture finds its own mechanisms of expression and subsistence, creating a sui generis female writing in which two voices are evident: that of the male tradition and, simultaneously, that of the female tradition, hidden from the mainstream. In this way, the difference in female writing can only be understood in terms of the complex cultural relationship that is rooted in history. The dominant structure, therefore, often determines the silenced structures; however, even through the former, the latter can directly manifest their political, social, and economic experiences (Vivero and Cándida, 2008, p. 69).

Literary texts produced by women become inherently political, a burden that society tends to perceive even if the writers do not explicitly recognize it. This peculiarity arises from the fact that, in its very essence, the text becomes a demand for recognition and space within the literary and social landscape. Moreover, this complexity is amplified when considering that the body is imbued with identity markers defined by ethnicity, religion, geopolitics, gender, and age. This intersection of factors highlights the intricate web of individual and collective experiences that shape our narratives and understandings of the world.

The treatment of social reality through literature allows for a very specific relationship with the world by offering a unique window into the understanding of social reality. Through narrative, readers can explore and reflect on different perspectives, experiences, and challenges faced by society, enabling them to deepen their understanding of the world and, in many cases, inspire actions for change and transformation. Ampuero, for her part, views it with terror, and it is through this emotion that she brings to a terrestrial plane the nightmares present not in dreams but in reality. They are there, around the corner or entering right now through the front door. Precisely in this pessimism, Ampuero's literature finds its vitality. Her denunciation is frontal through a word that will never again be silenced.

DISCUSSION

The book "Sacrificios humanos" by María Fernanda Ampuero brings together stories permeated by the concept of the body as a symbol of violence and monstrosity. These stories are led by women who are doubly violated, both due to their condition as women and because of other characteristics marked by prejudice, such as being migrants. Ampuero delves into the exploration of other dissident conditions that surround the body, such as disgust, repugnance, and rejection towards those perceived as "different" due to their appearance or physical conditions. These representations highlight how the body, when it deviates from established social norms, becomes an object of marginalization and exclusion.

To understand the concept of the body, this study has inventoried how it has been conceived, starting from the Platonic view that privileges the soul and despises the flesh, to the rupture caused by Nietzsche's 'hammer-force' philosophy that opens up a whole current of thought around the body as a political entity, up to Jean-Luc Nancy, who sees writing as a kind of body tattoo.

The analysis of machismo in relation to the female body is fundamental to understanding the gender violence present in society. Machismo manifests itself in various ways, from the objectification of the female body to the normalization of

violence against it. This reality is evident in the statements of critics such as Wilfrido Corral, who, when expressing himself in the media, reveals a discourse impregnated with prejudices rooted in the Ecuadorian social imaginary. His comments suggest a devaluation of literature written by women, insinuating that it only achieves international recognition by following trends such as feminism and autofiction, while it would be ignored if published by local publishers. This attitude underscores the persistence of machismo in the literary field and reflects the barriers that women writers face in obtaining recognition and respect in a deeply patriarchal society.

After reviewing important critical studies, it is confirmed that national literature is on the right path due to its ability to address universal themes from diverse and authentic perspectives. These works offer a unique look at the human condition, enriching the global literary panorama with narratives that explore identity, resistance, and social struggles from a critical perspective, using the body as a central message.

The feminine language resulting from the analysis of these literary works, which reflect a harsh reality for women, allows their authors to approach the world without reservation, both in their personality and their voices, thus eliminating social masks. For example, Ampuero represents violence against female bodies in a raw and direct manner, challenging the taboos and norms of silence surrounding this topic in society. This uncensored representation of the violated female body makes visible and confronts the brutality women face in their daily lives, promoting open dialogue about gender violence and its social implications.

This provokes discomfort in the reader, reflecting daily reality. This discomfort is directly proportional to the prejudices of the nation from which this literature emerges, seeking to confront and deconstruct those prejudices in literary terms. The female voice ceases to reproduce a reality that is overused and full of clichés, as demonstrated in contemporary literature by Ecuadorian women such as Mónica Ojeda, Daniela Alcívar Bellolio, Gabriela Ponce, and Natalia García Freire, among others.

In the political realm, the body becomes a terrain of struggle for power and control. The imposition of norms and regulations on the body, whether through restrictive laws or discriminatory policies, exerts structural violence that affects individuals and entire communities. The instrumentalization of the body to perpetuate political agendas contributes to the oppression and marginalization of certain groups, creating divisions and conflicts in society.

In the religious context, the body takes on deep symbolic meaning. Religious practices involving human sacrifice, as portrayed in Ampuero's work, illustrate how faith can be manipulated to justify atrocious acts. The objectification of the body in sacrificial rituals reflects a complex relationship between the sacred and the profane, where veneration of the divine can lead to the degradation and dehumanization of the individual.

In the social sphere, the body becomes a battlefield in the struggle for recognition and inclusion. The beauty standards imposed by society generate unrealistic pressures and expectations that can lead to alienation and impaired self-esteem. Additionally, the objectification of the body, especially of marginalized groups, reinforces unequal power dynamics and perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

Against this background, the analysis of "Sacrificios humanos" finds a thematic division between stories that deal with violence from physically attractive beings, who use their beauty as a mask to carry out their basest impulses, and teratological beings, who, on the other hand, are marginalized.

In both axes of violence and monstrosity, the woman is both a heroine and an antagonist of herself. However, amidst these internal contradictions caused by social configurations based on a patriarchal model, the city stands out as a symbol of the failed promise of modernity. The city becomes a true antagonist for each of the characters, who enter and leave this great theater of the world, howling in pain without knowing if someone will ever answer their cry.

This response is verbalized through Ampuero's writing. Through the denunciation and poeticization of the real material from which she starts, Ampuero conjures the ghosts of her characters and questions the reader. This demonstrates that the *Sacrificios humanos* of contemporary times are before us. Then, the reader, along with the characters, falls with open eyes into the black throat of the deep abyss.

This study does not intend to exhaust the multiple meanings of the concept of the body identified in "Sacrificios humanos" by María Fernanda Ampuero. Instead, it aims to clarify that the thematic axis of the body as a symbol of violence and monstrosity revolves around a political position of the author. This position is not aligned with the left or the right, but with the radicality of what it means to find a voice and, therefore, a place as a woman in the midst, not only of literature but of the Ecuadorian literary world burdened by prejudices.

In this sense, future studies could address the work of other Ecuadorian women writers such as Mónica Ojeda, Daniela Alcívar Bellolio, Gabriela Ponce, and Natalia García Freire, as well as those of past generations such as Sonia Manzano, Lupe Rumazo, and Alicia Yáñez Cossío. These studies would allow us to understand holistically the universe of Ecuadorian women writers and shed light on the country's atavistic sexist prejudices, projecting them into the present to better understand why people are the way they are.

Additionally, the study could inventory the construction of a literary canon almost exclusively produced by a specific social segment and male authors, a topic that could be treated in greater depth in subsequent studies. This would allow us to reflect on the thinking of Ecuadorian critics and under what criteria certain authors were included.

Furthermore, the theme of the body as a symbol of violence and monstrosity not only leaves its mark on this book by Ampuero but also on the general work of contemporary women writers. In short, they use this symbol to reflect on the space occupied by women in their respective societies, highlighting childhood as a realm of horror that precludes impunity and indifference.

Through the serious social conflicts caused by misogyny, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia, Ampuero builds ominous atmospheres and generally portrays female characters who are problematized by the mere fact of existing. These characters, in their attempts to survive in a barbaric world, often find death. The stories, with their perpetually open endings, must be completed by the reader as an exercise against the very reality that allows and reproduces impunity. Imagination also allows us to glimpse where humanity is heading.

In conclusion, Ampuero's work, particularly "Sacrificios humanos," uses the body as a powerful symbol of the violence and monstrosity inherent in society. This symbolism not only questions the brutality to which women are subjected but also invites a broader reflection on the human condition. Ultimately, it is through the body and its representation that Ampuero confronts us with the darkest realities of our existence, proposing a profound and necessary critique of the systems of oppression that continue to prevail.

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