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Title: Different but the Same: Landscape and the Gothic as Transnational story space in Jane Campion's *Sweetie* (1989) and Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga* (*The Swamp*) (2001)

Abstract:

This paper considers the work of the Argentinian filmmaker Lucrecia Martel and the Australian filmmaker Jane Campion in a transnational context. In doing so it focuses on landscape and the elements of the Gothic in their work to explore notions of universal cinematic storytelling that are essential to the exploration of the transnational film. Transnational Film theory directs the focus away from the National Cinema paradigm towards a more expansive cinema in which locally specific stories reach global audiences (Ezra and Rowden, 2006).

Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga/The Swamp* (2001) has been discussed through the lens of feminist film (Peluffo, 2011; Andermann, 2012); social and cultural history (Oubina, 2007) and as a site for the exploration of class and ethnicity (Peluffo, 2011; Andermann, 2012). Jane Campion's *Sweetie* (1989) has been discussed in terms of mise en scene and female space (Gillet, 2004), the suburban and insights into national identity (Simmons, 2009) and the Gothic and Post-Colonial (Reuschmann, 2005). This paper considers intersections in these works and the filmmakers' deployment of the narrative and formal elements of film in a universal storytelling context informed by landscape and the Gothic, making their films both locally specific and globally relevant.

Key words: Transnational Film, National Cinema, Landscape, Gothic, Lucrecia Martel, Jane Campion

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Introduction

In 2015 I visited Argentina en route to the Screenwriting Research Network International Conference on Transnational Storytelling. I was immediately struck by the similarities between Argentina and Australia, particularly in their landscapes. Both Australia and Argentina are crossed by the same Meridians of latitude. Both are ancient countries of magnificent and contrasting landscapes - imposing and mystical mountain ranges, vast swathes of fertile plains, deep and intriguing lakes and wild and ferocious rivers, and both are surrounded by sea. But while both countries are today the occupied lands of the descendants of indigenous peoples and immigrants whose cultures have shaped by migration, politically both countries are different. Australia has maintained a stable democracy in its rule-of-law inherited from Britain, while Argentina has weathered political and economic uncertainty under periods of short democracy alternating with periods of military and dictatorial rule which has resulted in "strong institutional, social and economic crises" (Caporossi 2017).

In preparation for this trip I had viewed as many South American films as I could. One of the first films I saw was Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga* (The Swamp) (2001). At the time I did not realize that this had been the breakout early film of one of the New Argentine Cinema's most famous filmmakers. This film with its story contrived around the literal and metaphorical filmic landscape of a "swamp" with its steamy overtones of entrapment and statis, spoke to me about gender and family. But more so Lucrecia Martel's innovative narrative and aesthetic style intrigued me, and reminded me of *Sweetie* (1989) the breakout early film of one of Australia's key filmmakers, Jane Campion, who also explored gender and family in the context of the Australian urban landscape. In addition, I was impressed by the way in which both filmmakers in their use of the techniques of cinematic storytelling engendered feelings of entrapment and a threat of impending doom, key hallmarks of the female Gothic (Hanson 2007; Duong 2014; Davies 2016).

When the inaugural *Cinema at the End of the World* conference 2015 called for a "South-South approach to the study of visual culture in transnational" contexts, I decided to explore these landscape and filmic connections via the lens of Transnational Film Theory which is characterized by an investigation of the connections between the local and the 'global', and is "less concerned about film stories being representative of a particular country but rather representative of issues and themes that may be regarded as transnational" (McVeigh, 2017: 51).

It is worthy to note that in exploring the means by which national films may be understood in a transnational context, family and relationship narratives serve as a sound starting point. In *Global Scriptwriting*, respected screenwriting theorist Ken Dancyger suggests that "there are basic universal elements that transcend national boundaries: relationships, the individual in society, the influence of politics on the individual, and the family" (2001: 218). This paper therefore investigates the links between the cinemas of Australia and Argentina within a transnational context by considering how the narrative and themes explored in Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga* and Jane

Campion's *Sweetie* explore issues around the individual in society via a narrative exploring family and relationships. In particular, it will consider how the place of the key protagonists in these films - the female individual in society - is shaped by and expressed via landscape and the female Gothic.

I will build on Lan Duong's work regarding landscape as "an affective site for a gendered portrayal and construction of nationalism" (Duong 2014: 258) in her discussion of how gender and affect are projected onto landscape in the context of Vietnamese filmmaking. I will also build on Eva Rueschmann's specific work on landscape and the Gothic in her *Out of place: reading (post) colonial landscapes as Gothic space in Jane Campion's films* (2005). Rueschman's work provides a considered schematic, which in conjunction with Duong's discussion of landscape and affect provides a useful tool to draw narrative, thematic and formal connections between these films in a South-South and Transnational Film studies context.

My discussion is therefore framed by the questions:

- How may Transnational Film Theory provide a lens to consider similarities between the cinemas of South America and Australia?
- How may the use of the landscape as metaphor be considered in the representations of women and the dysfunctional family in Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga* and Jane Campion's *Sweetie*?
- How may notions of the female Gothic be considered as a means by which Lucrecia Martel and Jane Campion use the language of film - cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing and sound - to convey meaning in *La Ciénaga* and *Sweetie*?

National Film Theory and Transnational Film Theory

If one is to consider both the similarities and differences between the cinemas of Australia and Argentina, one may consider how they reflect national cultural and societal traditions and issues, but also how these reflections may also transcend national borders to create common insights regarding for example, the contentions of this paper, explorations of gender and family via the Gothic mode. To this end Transnational Cinema Theory provides an effective theory lens as it "directs the focus away from clearly delineated national cinemas toward a more expansive system of cinema, in which locally specific stories can cross national borders" (Yeates, McVeigh and Van Hermert 2011: 80–81).

National Film theory has been used to "describe a series of industrial and artistic practices that are seen as confined to a particular territory" whereas Transnational Film Theory is "structured around the notion of flows ... movements across borders" and "seeks to illuminate the processes of exchange and interpenetration that ... often obscured under the national paradigm" (DiLuog and Dapena 2001: 16 in Oliet-Aldea et al. 2015: xviii). Ezra and Rowden in *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* (2006) canvas the relevant key debates around the then-emerging field Transnational Film Theory. Ezra and Rowden are not so concerned about the 'national' lurking within the term 'transnational' but define transnational cinema as that which "transcends the national as autonomous cultural particularity while respecting it as a powerful symbolic force" (2006: 2). Therefore, Transnational Film Theory with its focus on what "connects" peoples from across the globe rather than what sets them apart, can be seen as building on the precepts of National Cinema

Theory (Higson, 1989; Crofts, 2000) wherein “films and film stories are defined both by country of origin and by factors including cultural and critical discourses” (McVeigh, 2017: 51).

To this end when discussing the cinema of one nation and comparing it with another it is still useful to use the precepts of national film theory at the level of the discussion of discourse and aesthetics. Both *La Ciénaga* and *Sweetie* explore the role of the female in the family in a distinctly national context. Both are films that may be identified as being a film of a distinct national cinema in their language, settings, characters and concerns. The language of *La Ciénaga* is Spanish and the film is set in the rural backblocks of Salta in Argentina with characters making forays into a Latin American city. Likewise, the language of *Sweetie* is English with characters speaking in heavy Australian accents. *Sweetie* is set in an ordinary Australian suburb and characters travel to the Australian beach or outback. As will be discussed in this paper while the landscapes and traditions portrayed in these films may be local, the readings of the place of women and representation of gender, class and sexuality via the use of the female Gothic and the family narrative are universal and may be considered in a global context where similarities as well as differences may be remarked. However, in a discussion and understanding of how the local can have global resonance, as Oliet et al. argue in their discussion of the transnational dimensions of Spanish cinema, the National and Transnational are “both part of the same political, social and cultural environment and thus interdependent, where the one cannot function without the other” (Oliet-Aldea et al. 2015: xix).

Landscape, The Female Gothic and the Transnational

The role of landscape in film has been extensively discussed in film theory. Film Theorist Martin Lefebvre in his seminal text *Landscape and Film* (2006) outlines the debate around landscape in film as narrative backdrop, versus landscape as an aesthetic and metaphorical component of the “profilmic event” (Lefebvre 2006, 23). He delineates the difference between the role of “setting” and “landscape” in respect to narrative and aesthetics by explaining “the setting is the space of story and its event” while landscape is generally a “space freed from eventhood” (Lefebvre 2006, 21). It can be noted therefore in the context of Lefebvre’s contentions that landscape “as an aesthetic object” (Lefebvre 2006: 23) may function as a metaphor wherein “metaphor, meaning and ideology are appropriated into the landscape” as Duong so aptly proposes in her discussion of the legacy of war in the landscape of Vietnamese war films (Lukinbeal 2005: 13 in Duong 2014: 262). It is clear therefore that while landscape can constitute a place that affords “narrative realism by grounding a film to a particular location’s regional sense of place and history ... landscape in cinema is never a pure or simple reproduction. Rather it is a technical, economic, cultural and semiotic (discursive) production” (Costa 2006: 247 in Duong 2014: 262). Graeme Harper’s work in *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography* (Harper and Rayner 2010: 253-254) also supports the dual role of landscape as backdrop and landscape as meaning. Of relevance to the comparison of the landscape of *La Ciénaga* and *Sweetie*, is Harper’s assertion that any depiction of landscape in film is steeped in cultural and political import and “benefits from some comparative considerations, especially where landscapes can take on aspects of changing historical and cultural conditions” (Harper in Harper and Rayner 2010: 253-254).

To consider the alignment of the Gothic working in tandem with the landscape in *La Ciénaga* and *Sweetie* it is important to consider how the female Gothic may be interpreted in the filmic landscape. While much has been written about the female Gothic in both literary and film theory, it is useful to consider Ann Davies' specific and apt discussion of the Gothic mode in three Spanish films including *The Spirit of the Beehive* (Erice 1973) which draws "upon a sense of exhausted patriarchal repression" (Davies 2016: 116). Davies notes the elements of the Gothic that will be considered in this paper which serve to provide a sound account of the attributes of the Gothic in the cinematic landscape:

The symbolism of the monster in terms of ... patriarchy ... the child as Gothic heroine ... the ruins and landscapes and the sense of imprisonment and entrapment ... the labyrinthine setting, the use of shadows... Gothic monstrosity ... patriarchal or domineering figures who wield power over innocents ... enclosed spaces; the past that haunts the present; and a dark secret that waits to be discovered (Davies 2016: 116-117).

While *La Ciénaga* and *Sweetie* are set in countries with significantly different political histories, it is the Gothic in the landscape that unites them. There is a similar exhaustion with the patriarchic hegemony. In Martel's *La Ciénaga* it is the lost promise of Argentina derailed by waves of political corruption. In the case of Campion's *Sweetie* it is a dysfunctional suburban family who have been derailed by the moral corruption of the father. In both *La Ciénaga* and *Sweetie* the family is emblematic of a society where the landscape is both the rural and the suburban.

In her discussion of the Female Gothic specifically in the work of Jane Campion, Eva Rueschmann notes Campion as being a significant director for the study of landscape and its reflection of culture wherein landscape is both "character and metaphor, setting and "psychic space" expressing the "colonialisation of the land through stories about women who find themselves geographically and psychologically displaced" (Rueschmann 2005: 1-2). While Rueschmann's work is centred around a discussion of the female Gothic in a post-colonial context, in their discussion of the intersection between and the relevance of the Gothic to Post-feminism, Brabon and Genz provide a broader conception of the female Gothic in a patriarchal society. The note that in literary theory the notion of the Female Gothic has been identified as a reflection of the perceived position of powerlessness of women in a patriarchal society. The notion of the Female Gothic is the means by which female writers have given "voice to women's deep rooted fears about their own powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy" (Brabon and Genz 2007: 5).

Landscape and Ideology: Gender and the Gothic in *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga*

Both *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga* use the Gothic as an expressionist filmic landscape - whether it be the cultural identity of characters as reflected in the rural or suburban landscape. Both *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga* focus on the relationships and vicissitudes of life in a dysfunctional family. Both unfold via unconventional narratives comprising of a number of small stories in an overarching family drama. The narratives of both *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga* drift from one seemingly random event to the other and climax in the unexpected. Both feature strong shooting styles with a complex, carefully orchestrated and metaphorical use of mise-en-scene. Both films showcase dysfunctional family relationships with the narrative playing out in the Gothic mode with the eventual destruction

of the innocent. Forster also draws a parallel between the two films in her article on *La Ciénaga* in *Senses of Cinema*. She notes the “stifling, wet, swamp like mise-en-abyme of brooding provincial family life is loosely based on Martel’s own experience ... is in some ways reminiscent of Jane Campion’s own loosely auto-ethnographical family-as-horror film, *Sweetie* (1989)” (Foster 2011: 2).

Sweetie is Jane Campion’s debut feature and features an idiosyncratic shooting style based around wide angles and static shots with elegant and complex compositions which in the mode of the Gothic, seems to overwhelm and confine a character in the mise-en-scene via techniques such as double framing. *Sweetie* tells the story of a dysfunctional Australian family whose every day landscape is the suburban including the urban back yard and the city beach. The film is narrated by the uptight and proper Kay, sister to the uninhibited, overwhelming and ultimately somewhat childlike Sweetie. Kay is daunted by life and is in a relationship with Louis that has lost its spark. Her passionless life is thrown into chaos by the return of her sexually promiscuous and overweight mentally ill sister, Sweetie. *Sweetie*’s Gothic-like bodice tries to contain her voluptuous body. A single black leather glove encases one of her hands. Kay and Sweetie’s mother Flo, is a downtrodden suburban housewife who takes off to the outback to find herself during the film and leaves her somewhat rudderless husband Gordon to make do with the pre-made meals she has dutifully made him. Gordon on the other hand is the failed father. There are suggestions of incest in his relationship with Sweetie as we see flashbacks of him bathing her in the bath. The child-woman Sweetie gradually destroys the seemingly ordered life of the family in her out-of-control antics. We see her in bed with her drug-addled manager and trying to seduce Kay’s boyfriend Louis when they take Sweetie to the beach for a swim. The ultimate tragedy of the film is that Sweetie is an innocent who is lost.

The story of *Sweetie* is explored through the imagery of the suburban and rural landscape. The use of trees as a motif of the Gothic bears witness to the key narrative events of *Sweetie*. Kay has a fear of trees yet she is surrounded by arboreal imagery - floral carpets, wall paper, cushions and curtains. But undermining the surface of her life, cracking the cement of her stark urban back yard, is an emblem of the Gothic - the dark and insidious roots of trees and in particular the sickly Alder tree that Louis has given her to mark their first anniversary. As Bloustein comments, “On a subconscious level, the baby Alder tree symbolizes Kay’s familial roots that can grow silently and disturb the outwardly firm foundations of normalcy, thus crumbling the facade she has built around herself” (Bloustein 1992: 37). Kay’s emasculated boyfriend is framed off center in the corner of the room, his stature reflected alongside that of a pot plant. In *Sweetie* the surreal and Gothic inspired nightmare sequence is the ultimate metaphor for the invasion of the natural landscape into her dreams and subconscious. This nightmare foreshadows the climax of the movie which sees Sweetie escape to her treehouse to taunt her family. Her tragic death is caused by her falling from this very same treehouse, the place she loved. As Kay mourns Sweetie at her funeral, again a row of trees stand testament to her death.

To extend the use of the Gothic and the landscape as metaphor, one may consider the sense of entrapment engendered in the cinematography of the urban interiors inhabited by Sweetie and the family she holds at ransom through her inopportune behaviors. Rueschmann notes that the

landscape contextualized as Gothic in post-colonial theory, can be seen to convey “Elements of the fantastic, grotesque and supernatural that symbolically represent the Gothic fear of Otherness ... associated with the horror film”. She notes the Gothic tradition with its characteristic scenes of terror and abuse, enclosure and entrapment, madness, death and emotional or sexual excess set in a variety of classically sinister locations ... emphasized ... the irrational, uninhibited desires and passions, the dark unconscious of the human psyche” (Rueschmann 2005: 2). In the Gothic tradition *Sweetie* and her family are trapped, the mise-en-scene is overwhelming with its detail, the atmosphere is claustrophobic. Campion uses canted angles suggesting the world is off-center or skewed, as well as double framing or the frame within the frame to confine characters framed in doorways or in like dark tunnel-like corridors. As Johnson notes Campion’s “use of cramped space forces large doses of claustrophobia. Space becomes a tool of emotional manipulation, generating an atmosphere of privacy [and] sexual tension” (Johnson 1991: 136) which is for example underlined in the confined flashback scenes of *Sweetie* being inappropriately bathed by her father.

The insidious role of the landscape represented by the tree and nature in Jane Campion’s *Sweetie*, can be likened to the insidious role of the landscape and the actual swamp in Lucrecia Martel’s eponymous movie. Like *Sweetie*, *La Ciénaga* is the story of a dysfunctional family, its narrative a chronicle of elliptical story fragments that build to create a tapestry that presents a day in the life of the key character - Mecha and her family and extended family. Whilst in *Sweetie* the sisters are framed in an oppressive suburban house, in *La Ciénaga* a coterie of characters is framed in a rambling and oppressive Gothic-inspired mansion.

Mecha and her family are staying in their holiday home, La Mandragora which is located near the imaginary town of La Ciénaga in Martel’s home province of Salta. La Mandragora is a decaying mansion surrounded by a dense humid forest overshadowed by a towering cloud-covered distant mountain. From the opening scene the Gothic pervades this film. In the style of the Gothic the house is remote and isolated in the riverine landscape. In the opening sequences the ominous, disturbing and incessant sounds of cicadas and an impending storm are simmering in the background as Mecha, her husband Gregorio and their out-of-shape friends spend their days in a drunken stupor around a rank and fetid pool. Everything in their lives reeks of stupor and decay. As Oubina notes La Mandragora (The Mandrake) itself is emblematic of their lassitude - it is a plant “historically used as both an anesthetic and aphrodisiac. Stupefied by alcohol and heat, the adults are always on the verge of exhaustion; the children on the other hand overflow with energy ... constantly courting disaster” (Oubina 2001: 2).

Martel’s cinematography underlines the claustrophobia and thus Gothic sense of entrapment of their world. The film opens in close-up on red peppers and cuts to a mid close-up of the bellies and thighs of a Mecha and her friends clothed in their bathers. They are drinking brightly coloured red drinks. They seem to rise in slow motion to scrape their chairs in unison on the concrete around the pool adding to the ominous off-screen sounds of the thunderstorm and general uneasiness that pervades the scene. To extend the metaphor of the dark underground world of the Gothic, the pool around which they lounge is a virtual swamp - fetid, dank, green and slimy. It is the central metaphor of the film and the pervading metaphor for their lives - gothic in its darkness, sense of entrapment and the threat of the monstrous.

This opening sequence is intercut with the film titles in a Daliesque font that further suggest the Gothic in the conjuring of dripping blood and horror. We see Mecha trip and cut herself badly on the chest with a broken wine glass as the others continue to laze in their sun chairs disregarding her plight. This arresting sequence with its unconventional use of close shots as establishing shots sets up the key narrative and metaphorical concerns of the film including the symbolic use of the Gothic in the landscape. Martel captures the lassitude, the decay, the festering omnipresence of the landscape as both threat and lost potential. The intimate hand-held cinematography of the mid-shots of bodies, an enclosed room and the overhead shots of the pool suggest the family is pinned down, static, unable to move past the transgressions which will unfold. As David Oubina in his essay, "What's outside the frame" (2001) accompanying the Criterion DVD release of the film notes: "Without calling this a horror film, we can say that *La Ciénaga* uses the genre mechanisms that foreshadow the emergence of the monstrous. Something terrible waits crouched outside the frame, and, at any moment, catastrophe could burst in" (2001: 3).

This Gothic threat of catastrophe and loss of innocence is carefully alluded to from the opening sequence and credit montage which is also intercut with a sequence of dark, wet forests which Mecha's out of control children and their friends hack through with their machetes and guns to taunt a cow who is stuck in a literal muddy swamp. The scene is reminiscent of *Lord of the Flies* in its portending of savagery and death. Indeed, it is the contrast between Mecha's children who run amok and their innocent and usually carefully supervised young cousin, Luchino which is the greatest irony of the film.

The narrative of the film is constructed of an elliptical collection of vignettes collating the lives of Mecha and Tali (her cousin) and their families. Mecha although a functioning alcoholic, is the head of her family. As the film progresses we see of Tali and her children who live in La Ciénaga visiting Mecha who is confined to her bedroom where she spends much of her time drinking. We also see Mecha's emasculated and inept husband Grigorio eventually banished from the bedroom. Indeed, many of the scenes in *La Mandragora* are filmed in beds and suggest the sexual impropriety characteristic of the Gothic as noted by Reuschman above (2005: 2). The opening sequence is also intercut with shots of Mecha's daughter Momi lying on her bed spooned by the maid Isabel whom Mecha detests. Mecha's adult son Jose lives in Buenos Aires with his father's ex-mistress, Mercedes. But Mecha is trapped in the world she has created with no way out. In contrast in her cousin Tali's family we see Rafael, a strong and supportive husband but he also controls her life with his subtle and paternalistic final says. When Mecha and Tali plan to take a trip to Bolivia - a mini escape to a promised land to purchase cheaper supplies for the children's schooling, the trip is curtailed by Rafael's refusal to condone it.

To a certain extent the similarity of innocence destroyed we see in *Sweetie* is also a key theme in *La Ciénaga* where the children are the real victims of the life of entrapment lived by their parents. While on the one hand we see the children almost without morals acting like savages in the jungle taunting the cow stuck in the swamp, we also see them living an aimless life where they are quick to act violently and seek random sexual gratification. In a telling comment on the endless cycle of corruption and ineptitude that is the family's life, in the end it is the children who are frolicking

around the swamp pool. Martel notes of her use of the family as the starting point for her storytelling in *La Ciénaga*:

All of the films are more or less memories. You know, family is like a swimming pool too. If you want to understand things that you see in the spread of social life, if you focus on the family, you can see it immediately (Martel in Wisniewski 2009: 1).

It's all in the Family - Sex, Ideology and the Transnational

Sweetie and *La Ciénaga* explore these basic universal elements of cinematic storytelling in their narrative scenarios of family relationships and sexuality as expressed in landscape and the Gothic. While *Sweetie* explores the individual in society in a dysfunctional family scenario, *La Ciénaga* explores the implications of the Argentine political system's failure to advance reflected by the relationships of a dysfunctional family.

Both *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga* draw upon sexuality as "a Gothic idea that transcends national boundaries, rendering secrecy and corrupt power as matters of sexuality as much as history" (Davies 2016: 123). In *La Ciénaga* as noted Mecha's young adult son is sleeping with his father's mistress and in the dark yet beautiful shower scene where he washes the mud of the swamp from his legs there is a suggestion of incest in his intrusion into his sister's privacy while she bathes. The use of the Gothic in *Sweetie* explores the contrast between Kay's repressed attitude to sex and her sublimated desires as contrasted with Sweetie's unrelenting libido which is the emotional baggage of the suggestion of father and daughter incest. In *La Ciénaga* the final scene sees the two girls seem to assume the parents' lassitude and as noted there are suggestions of incestuous relations between siblings and parents and children.

In particular Martel uses the Gothic and its sense of confinement to test the constraints civilized society imposes in marking the border between civilization and savagery. The children of the families of *La Ciénaga* demonstrate in their savagery and bloodlust, for example in their previously mentioned taunting of the trapped cow in the swamp and their becoming involved in fights in the city, that they are uninhibited by the mores of civilized society. Moreover, it is the lack of parental control and their promiscuity that in the Gothic mode, may be seen to reflect the inadequacies of the system. Davies observations of this scenario in her discussion of Spanish Gothic cinema are also relevant here in her observation that "the universal decadence of an older generation is the core Gothic motif" (Davies 2016: 124), is also relevant to *La Ciénaga*.

In the Gothic mode sexuality may also be seen "as a rebellious force" (Davies 2016: 123). Characters in a film using the Gothic mode are often unaware of the social and political undercurrents of their lives but "they are nonetheless well tuned to the sexual undercurrents that run through their society" (Davies 2016: 123). Rueschmann discusses how Campion builds on the classic portrayal of women as the persecuted female victim entrapped by a male in a labyrinthine space to explore "questions of identity and the transgressions of social and sexual taboos traditionally reserved for male Gothic protagonists" (Rueschmann 2005: 4). As noted above, Sweetie, Kay and Dot are continuously framed in confining interiors and they all attempt in some way to escape their own lives. Kay is on a continual quest against her sublimated sexuality and the

confines of her life even though she may not know it, Dot escapes to the country and Sweetie in her uninhibited sexuality defies the repression of middle class mores. In *Sweetie* therefore it may be seen that the “female Gothic films’ shifting and dynamic landscapes and the interplay between symbolic interiors” show where “these struggles for self-definition, agency and sexual identity are waged, where power relations are at play, and where the ambivalent and haunted sense of belonging (or non-belonging) ... is articulated” (Rueschmann 2005: 4).

The imagery of water is also used to develop the treatment of sexuality in both films. It suggests a sense of depravity at the heart of the family. Deborah Martin argues that in her study of Martel’s work that in her “aesthetic innovation with sound and haptic aesthetics” and focus on “aquatic imagery and watery locales, wet, damp or swampy images”, that Martel aims “to create an embodied response in the spectator, a poetics of film which has strong political relevance” (Martin in Martin and Shaw 2017: 23). In *Sweetie*, the innocent yet precocious Sweetie is often seen in a bathing suit. A libidinous Sweetie flirts on the beach with her sister’s boyfriend and has loud and wild sex next door to the kitchen in her family home.

In both *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga* the treatment of sexuality is also supported by a focus on the place and props associated with sex. Not only do we see characters in bedrooms, on beds experimenting with sex, we see them in nighties, together on the bed. But the bedroom is also a place of female power. The family gather around Mecha’s bed in numerous scenes in *La Mandragora* and Mecha banishes Gregorio her wastrel husband to the spare bedroom.

The colour red reflects and directs the sexual forces underlying relationships and interactions in the families of *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga*. Red is for life spawned by the sexual act but it is also the colour of blood spilled in violence and it is this Gothic sense of violence that permeates the film. The red of the peppers seen in the opening montages of *La Ciénaga* is highlighted in the colour of the cocktails that Mecha and her husband share with their friends as they lie in a drunken stupor around the “swampool”. Red is the colour of the blood and scratches of their children as they either become involved in thuggish fights at the carnival or resort to almost savage like behaviour in their hunting games - with real guns - in the forests surrounding *La Mandragora*. The imagery of the violence that can be associated with death is always on the periphery. One son Jose is punched in the nose. Another son Joaquin loses an eye. Red is also the colour of a violent death. In *Sweetie* the final tragedy is the death of *Sweetie*, her blood and the sins of the father stain her face as she lies ironically impaled by the roots of the tree which hosted her one place of refuge, her treehouse.

In the tradition of the Gothic both films the treat of the monstrous lies outside the frame. In *La Ciénaga* the treat is portended in many ways. In the ominous soundscape. In the grim fairy tale the children tell and retell. In the Shakespearean-like pathetic fallacy of a storm building in the background. Indeed, the story of the unwashed and filthy children who spend their time fascinated by the ghost stories of a phantom “rat dog” or “killing machine” tragically foreshadows the monstrous event of the child, Luciano’s accident that in the Gothic tradition is emblematic of the innocent who resists “the corrupt order that gave rise to the Gothic in the first place” (Davies 2016: 121).

In both *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga* the innocent are destroyed. As Davies asserts, their innocence leaves them vulnerable and inquisitive. The “innocent” Sweetie is impaled by a tree in her desire to escape the world. The little boy Luciano climbs the ladder in search of the rat dog and falls. Our last image of him is splayed on the ground. In the end it is the Gothic in the landscape that has destroyed the innocence of both families.

The Transnational, Landscape and the Gothic in Argentine and Australian Cinema

Despite the fact that *Sweetie* and *La Ciénaga* are films made in two countries which are separated by the vast body of water that is the South Pacific Ocean, both films feature dysfunctional families and explore the portrayal of gender, human relationships and sexuality infected by personal or political malaise as reflected by the Gothic and the filmic landscape. They are as connected in art and narrative as they are disconnected by the tyranny of distance.

In using a Transnational Film Theory lens we may understand the similarities between these films and the connections that may be made between Campion and Martel’s deployment of the aesthetics of film to explore issues via the universal story thematic of the family. We can understand how the use of landscape and the Female Gothic may “overlay, reinforce, destabilize or even challenge the conditions of story, theme and subject presented in film” (Harper in Harper and Rayner 2010: 253-254). Both films explore a brooding and dysfunctional familial environment where relationships are undermined by desperation, isolation, sexual impropriety, and a lack of constraint and in doing so explore the female individual in the family in the context of the nation. Both films portray women in the family in the scenario of an ineffective patriarchy. And both films underline the effects of this corrupt or malfunctioning patriarchy via the use of the Gothic mode and the hallmarks of the Gothic which are evidenced by the use of cinematography, mise-en-scene and sound which suggest entrapment, the threat of the monstrous and sexual impropriety.

Both films showcase the tribulations of a family in decay. Sweetie is a disruptive force and like the arboreal imagery of the film, she undermines the static and fractured relationships between the members of family. Ultimately like the innocent heroine of the Gothic, her innocence is lost. *La Ciénaga* also showcases the tribulations of a family in decay but whilst Martel’s work also employs the Gothic mode as a means of underlining a corrupt and inept patriarchy, its themes, whilst personal also allude to the state of the nation. Overall *La Ciénaga* in its free ranging narrative structure is more about suggestions and impressions rather than overt statements - the lost promise of Argentina after a wave of military rule and democratic rule that has failed to deliver on its promise. We can see in the interactions of the family evidence of depravity and a lack of the controlling mores of a civilized society and the church - two of the children fixate on the maid, Isabel, they are fascinated with the news story of the Virgin Mary - as Foster notes “in the absence of anything else to hold onto, all the characters develop strange obsessions and fascinations” (Foster 2011: 3). For Martel there is no escape into nature. She refuses to see the landscape as a romantic space, rather for her it is a place that reflects the unease of Argentinian society:

All the characters in *La Ciénaga* feel extremely uneasy in the presence of nature. I wanted to film landscapes that had no picturesque qualities. The natural surroundings are neither pleasant nor welcoming ... permeated by a feeling of constant unease. The film depicts a

society that has lost its traditions but which cannot afford the security that could make up for it (Forster 2011: 3).

By using the lens of Transnational Film theory and landscape and the Gothic mode in discussing these films, one may consider how portrayals of landscape and gender and their ideological and cultural implications may open a space for discussion in considering new ways of drawing parallels between the cinemas of Australia and Argentina.

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