

Creative Writing Manuscript:

3er Turno and Other Normal Stories

Short Speculative Fiction

Yzahira R. Valle García

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of:

Master of Arts

Date: May 11, 2023

Department of English

College of Humanities

University of Puerto Rico

Approved by:

Dr. Dannabang Kuwabong
Thesis Committee Member

Dr. Loretta Collins
Thesis Director

Dr. Carmen Haydee Rivera
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Abstract

3er Turno and Other Normal Stories is a collection of short speculative fiction. The seven short stories move from a trilogy of flash fiction about everyday encounters with Puerto Rican legends such as La Llorona and a gargoyle, to a sci-fi tale about multiverse translators of the language of a forcibly relocated race, to the most experimental near-future story of weather warfare using man-made hurricanes. Though differing in narrative style, all the stories explore the blending of the fantastical with the mundane.

“3er Turno” peeks into one night in the life of a janitor at a nearly normal Puerto Rican airport. “Jangeos Folklóricos” gives us three micro-stories about a guy who bumps into a gargoyle, a la Llorona who no longer must just wait and wail by the side of the road, and an eldritch salvage yard worker who has any replacement part you need, for the right price. “Lost in Translation” follows a Puerto Rican and an alien as they work on a universal translator. “Fausta” shows how a demonic sacrifice can be tricky for both the devil and a bargaining woman. “Thick of the Woods” warns about the dangers of making friends with cabin dwellers. “New QuickMemo” recalls the encounter between a passenger and what lurks in the JetBlue terminal. Finally, “The Last Weather War” tells the fragmented story of world empires trying to control the weather.

Meshing the ordinary with the extraordinary, the inviting and subtly ironic stories play out accidental meetings between strangers, unexpected connections between diverse human, supernatural, and otherworldly characters, and geopolitics on both a planetary and intergalactic scale.

3er Turno and Other Normal Tales

Short Speculative Fiction

Yzahira R. Valle García

Acknowledgements

The journey leading to this collection is long, bumpy, and filled with the support of those I have met along the way. I begin by thanking the professors at the University of Puerto Rico. They opened the doors to worlds outside of my school, home, and island. From literature to amateur theater, the knowledge I have acquired paved the way to this work.

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I must also pay tribute to the instructors and professors who have supported my literary growth. Mrs. Ruth, my high school English teacher, took me under her wing and gave me written permission slips to visit the library during class hours. To my Fundamentals of the Medieval Era

professor, whose lesson on utopias inspired me to do a case study of a fictional society of my own making. Ironically, the document has since been lost to time. To my Intermediate English professor, who urged me to work on my creative writing when I was still studying pedagogy. To Dr. Maritza Stanchich, who guided me through my first steps into the master's program.

Now, to my advisor and the members of my thesis committee. To Dr. Loretta Collins Klobah, who poked me throughout the writing of my collection, lovingly pushing me to reach my writing potential. I am eternally grateful to you. To Professor Marian Polhill, for single-handedly reviving my love of myths and monsters. To Professor Dannabang Kuwabong, who opened my Caribbean horizons. And to Dr. Carmen Haydee Rivera, for accepting my invitation and lending her time to be part of the thesis committee.

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I promised you I would get my bachelor's degree.

I hope a master's degree is good, too.

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Introduction

The first book I ever read was *Pedruquito y sus Amigos* (2000) by Puerto Rican author Aníbal Díaz Montero. It is a collection of short stories featuring Pedruquito, a young boy, and his encounters with the animals and people of the forest. Think of it as Puerto Rican *Tarzan*, filled with talking animals, friendly taínos, and curious explorers. The book is old and battered by age. The stories are simple and tend to be marred by excessive dialogue. Its author is so obscure that not even the Internet knows if the man is still alive despite being born in 1911. The book should have been lost to time. And I love this book with every fiber of my being. Despite years of book circulation, *Pedruquito* is a permanent fixture in my collection. I fell in love with the animals and the adventures. Its simplicity instilled a hunger for more books, more stories. The first stone in the road in my journey as a writer.

As I cycled through elementary and middle school, I devoured books by the dozens. I read all my textbooks, regardless of subject, ahead of time. When my mother started working in a local university in Bayamón, she would let me loose in their library. I had spent so much time and read so many books, I was informally allowed to use my mom's library card to check out books. My parents and I visited Borders bookstores every Sunday, just to sit down and read. My high school teacher, Mrs. Ruth, encouraged me to read as much as possible. She gave me permission to visit the school's library during class hours after I finished my assignments. Then I discovered anime, manga, and teen-focused novels. Paired with the advent of the Internet as a source of information, I was flooded with literary inspiration. But I hadn't really written anything...yet.

The last sentence is technically a lie. I had been writing essays and projects all through middle and high school. Occasionally, some assignments allowed me to write a story or two, but

nothing truly impactful or inspiring. That is, until I started to study at the University of Puerto Rico. Having enrolled myself in the College of Education, one of my first courses was the Fundamentals of the Medieval Era. As part of a lesson on Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, we were assigned to creatively write about a fictional utopia of our making. I went all out. A wandering researcher that wrote about the Montshadow community that migrated up and down the Rocky Mountains. He wrote about their culture, religion, food sources, crimes, punishments, and laws. The researcher wrote it all as part of his mission to immortalize the new societies that had been formed at the end of the global nuclear war. The original document has been lost to time, but Montshadow was my true first step into creative writing.

My desire to write grew. I started to practice my writing with my friend Sharif El Gammal-Ortiz, creating small works to experiment with stories and poetry. My Intermediate English professor further supported me, helping me verify my work and pushing me to participate in local competitions. After that, I won two awards and at the behest of her friend Ivelisse, my mother supported my transfer to the College of Humanities. In the English department, I obtained my bachelor's degree in English literature and stayed to acquire my master's.

Originally, I had the lofty idea of writing a novel for my thesis. Something about imaginary friends made real or of a man turning into a talking lion. However, as I participated in Prof. Loretta Collins's Independent Study class, I decided to write this collection. Succeeding in this thesis will hopefully pave the way for bigger, longer creative writing projects.

The remainder of this introduction will be divided into two parts. Part One focuses on the writers that I wish to emulate and how they impacted my writing. Part Two will present a brief summary of the stories, followed by citations of the works that directly inspired them.

I

To trace the works that have influenced my collection, we must start close to my beginnings as a reader. Since a young age, I have been a fan of the fantasy genre. I point again to *Pedruquito y sus Amigos* as one of the reasons. Though the book lacks complexity and style, Aníbal Díaz Montero created an enviable fantasy. A young boy becomes friends with talking animals and wilderness explorers. He doesn't have to go to school and goes on amazing adventures at his leisure. It's an escapist story with wish fulfillment at its heart. The name Marcela, which occasionally pops up in the collection, is my nickname, often invoked to pull me out of the daydreams of my stories.

With time, my taste in fantasy started to include fictional creatures. The *House of Night* and *Twilight* series, written by P. C Cast & Kristin Cast and Stephanie Meyer respectively, dominated my high school years. Both vampire-focused novels, *House of Night: Marked* is a coming-of-age adventure with real-life inspired mythology, while *Twilight* is a dramatic teen romance. Both protagonists are girls who lived ordinary lives until their encounters with the supernatural broadened their world and granted them powers, a trope that can be found in my stories. Also present in these novels is the idea of the supernatural existing in the real world, not secretly so.

The notion of the strange walking together with the mundane is best seen in Joseph Fink and Jeffrey Cranor's *Welcome to Night Vale*. Narrated by the omniscient radio host Cecil Palmer, it explores the happenings of a small desert community. The presence of angels, strange lights, and glowing clouds are treated with the same dryness as looking at the community calendar or noting a slowdown in traffic.

Whereas *Night Vale* focuses on the elements of American monsters, Breanne McIvor's *Where There Are Monsters* centers around the creatures of the Caribbean. We are presented with the lives and struggles of Caribbean people, alongside (and, occasionally, intervened by) physical and metaphysical monsters. Another subtle inspiration is Tiphane Yanique's *Land of Love and Drowning*. Following the entangled lives of three families in St. Thomas, elements of Caribbean monsters and folklore are seamlessly woven into its people's struggles. Anansi men entrap women, Duenne swim the sea, and Obeah women bless and curse the people around them. The myths and legends are as real as the characters' strife.

Science fiction is also a prevalent genre in my reading. However, it often comes bundled with the horror genre. H.P. Lovecraft's body of work has become a staple of my sci-fi literature. Born in Rhode Island, Lovecraft's traumatic upbringing gave birth to the Great Old Ones and the cosmic horror of our minuscule existence. Yet, the monsters that Lovecraft saw were not as faceless or as indescribable as he claimed. They stood in for the racial horror of the Other, the threat to the 'sanctity' of whiteness. This makes the novel *Lovecraft Country* stand out. Written by Matt Ruff, the horror comes from the rich, racist people of America who consort with unspeakable monsters to subjugate the world, and the innocent black people who only seek to live their lives.

On the other hand, Ted Chiang brings a wider, exploratory view of sci-fi. The exploration of the world according to religious scriptures, the hypothetical implications of metaphysical words and mathematics, and contact with the xeno-alien present science fiction as a genre of infinite possibilities. One that can even break away from traditional style, form, and chronology. *Latin@ Rising: An Anthology of Latin@ Science Fiction and Fantasy* takes the idea to its full potential. Co-written by over 20 authors, *Latin@ Rising* presents the different views and

approaches people of the Caribbean, Latin America, and Latin@ U.S. have to speculative fiction. Aliens, monsters, mythology, and science are as widespread and diverse as the writers that bring them to life.

As I wrote in different genres and styles, I feared that my stories would seem too different from each other. Too disparate to be part of the same collection by one writer. That is, until I read *How Long 'Til Black Future Month*. Like me, N.K. Jemisin didn't believe she could write short stories (Jemisin, ix). Nevertheless, she embraced the challenge at the behest of her fellow colleagues. Writing shorter fiction had been greatly beneficial to her novels. From plot and characters to style and story form, Jemisin experimented in ways longer-form fiction can only dream of (Jemisin, xi). Like her, I wished to write about what inspired me, the what ifs one could grasp if we opened our minds enough. And like N.K. Jemisin, I wish to write novels by using my short stories as my hurdles and steppingstones.

What I discovered as this collection took form, however, is that despite my exploration of various writing and story styles, a common denominator in the stories gathered here is the way the ordinary and the extraordinary co-exist in the world each story creates.

The following sections address each of the stories in the collection as well as the ideas and works that have directly inspired them.

II

“3er Turno”

First in the collection, the story gives us a glimpse into a night in the life of Marcela, a normal janitor in a nearly normal airport. Duties include cleaning, dispelling curses, sending things to the lost and found, and the occasional exorcism.

The inspiration for this story came from my own time as a janitor at the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. I met all sorts of people and handled all manner of ridiculous situations. People could be rowdy, and airlines hardly cared about the strife they caused to both passengers and staff. It was exhausting work but, ultimately, educational and rewarding. Working in the airport was always bizarre, so adding a few monsters and curses felt more fitting than jarring.

The normalization of the supernatural elements borrows heavily from Fink & Cranor's *Welcome to Night Vale*. If glowing clouds can become PTA presidents and weird lights can hover over the Arby's, then in my fictional airport, the manager can be an orc, and werewolves can work at TSA.

Another inspiration is Yanique's *Land of Love and Drowning*, in which Caribbean monsters and elements of folklore are seamlessly woven into normal life. In fact, the 'cleaning' techniques that Marcela uses are inspired by the Obeah character in *Love and Drowning* and validated in Jeffrey E. Anderson's handbook, *Hoodoo, Voodoo, and Conjure*.

“Jangeos Folklóricos”

This story contains three flash fictions. I often thought of trying to write flash fiction, short works typically under 1,500 words. When searching for a theme, I looked at McIvor's *Where There Are Monsters* and Fink & Cranor's *Welcome to Night Vale*. I was intrigued by the idea of encountering cryptids and folklore monsters in accidental, mundane ways. Ironically, I struggled to come up with the title until I wrote “Randy”.

“Randy”

Written completely in Spanish, in this story, the protagonist recounts a chance meeting with a gargoyle in Barceloneta. By far the shortest of the stories, “Randy” is the product of my fascination with a monster that is as Puerto Rican as it is European. It has been seen all over the island. People have even written songs about the creature, but we hardly know anything about it. “Randy” is also the tone-setter for the rest of the flash fictions, which is about benign encounters between humans and monsters.

Ironically, the length, language, and style were inspired by *Pedruquito y sus Amigos*. It is short and reliant on the words of its protagonist. It is written in the vernacular Spanish of Puerto Rico. The simplicity of the tale accentuates its protagonists.

Additionally, it shares the same absurdity as *Latin@ Rising*'s short story “Uninformed,” written by Pedro Zagitt. The interaction between the protagonists of “Randy” partially mirrors Doña Carmen’s interaction with an invading alien.

“La Uber Llorona”

Unable to reach town, La Llorona acquires a phone and calls an Uber to take her to Coamo. On the way, the driver and the monster form an unexpected connection.

The idea came from a somewhat strange line of thought. I wanted to write about La Llorona, a traditional female spirit who wails at night on the side of lonely roads and bridges for her lost children or because of foul play in how she died, but I wanted to avoid the usual horror/thriller angle. I wanted to write about La Llorona in a more modern time and setting. I thought that, maybe, La Llorona was struggling to get hitchhiking rides nowadays with how crime is rampant in Puerto Rico. It was in the act of coordinating Uber rides for my not-as-tech-savvy dad that it occurred to me that a modern Llorona would try an Uber. When you are a

monster prone to and known for crying, texting and the gig economy of Uber must feel like godsend.

Yanique's novel, *Land of Love and Drowning*, was particularly inspiring for this story. Some of the protagonists that the story follows are distinctly monsters in nature, not unsimilar to La Llorona. They interact and connect with both humans and other monsters, be it in positive or negative ways. Daína Chaviano's "Accursed Lineage" in *Latin@ Rising* shares a similar idea. The reveal of the protagonist's monstrosity paints the interactions with their family and their neighbors in a distinct and terrifying light.

"Aro Incomprehensible"

In the final and longest of the flash fictions, a daughter and her dad willingly go to some very dubious places at the edges of reality in search of a spare tire.

Some of the best story ideas come from the worst real-life circumstances. I had a slashed tire. It was a downright mess. For 4 days, my dad and I were in-and-out of every shop we could find, the workers and places blurring together. While the real story ended with a daylight purchase in Carolina, I imagined that the desperation could have driven us to make deals with unspeakable beings.

Though the junkyard horror does not have a direct inspiration, the story does contain a few references to *The Dunwich Horror*. The junkyard mirrors the rural setting and name of Lovecraft's miserable town. The dad addressing the junker is reminiscent of Old Whateley consorting with eldritch forces. The blurriness that covers the yard worker is comparable to the Dunwich Horror's invisibility. The car in question, a '64 Plymouth Fury, is a nod to the cars prevalent in classic horror shows and movies.

“Lost in Translation”

This story follows Travieso García and the Jubidio alien Lonara as they work on an intergalactic translator and find common ground through their ancestors.

I originally wrote the story as part of an assignment for my Sci-Fi and Fable class back in my third year of the bachelor’s degree. I had invented the Jubidio (also known as the Jesterjacks), an alien species crossed with crickets, Puerto Rican fire beetles, and rhesus macaques. Though intelligent and dexterous, the aliens were forcefully incorporated into the United Empire, lead by the eagle-like Camecians. While some sci-fi stories present sociopolitical conflicts as grounds for war and/or extermination, I wanted to invoke situations more akin to Earth’s political blunders, as in *Babylon 5*.

The linguistic jargon of tonal languages is a remnant of my notes from Ann Albuyeh’s Language Theory course. I also invoked musical terms from an Introduction to Music course. By mixing cricket sounds with human music and linguistics, I created the basis of a language that is comprehensible yet inaccessible to humans.

“Fausta”

Originally written for my Independent Study course in fiction writing, it tells the story of how the demon Mephis deals with Marcela del Valle, his would-be host.

As the title implies, the story takes cues from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*. In the play, Heinrich Faust makes a deal with the demon Mephistopheles, exchanging demonic service for his soul. Though I enjoyed the work, I see the titular Faust as being rather weak-willed, wanting the deal for ‘infinite’ knowledge. Like N. K. Jemisin’s “The Ones Who Stay and

Fight,” which is the author’s response to Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” “Fausta” is my response to *Faust*.

With the power and danger that come with consorting with demons, the deal between the demon and a woman should be a battle of opposite wills reaching an uneasy agreement. But how can a human level the battlefield against a demon? The answer is twofold. One, the human must have as much will as the demon—the drive to live their life. Second, they must wield a weapon, physical or otherwise, to defend themselves from oppression or harm.

I learned this from, strangely enough, Stephenie Meyer’s *The Host*. Despite the alien Wanderer hijacking her body, Melanie keeps a solid grip on her mind and weaponizes her memories against the intruder. They reluctantly begin to work together when their goals converge: to find Melanie’s boyfriend and younger brother.

Thus, my story imagines how a woman might try to hold her own in negotiations with a malevolent being.

“The Thick of the Woods”

First written for my Monsters and Myths class, we follow John Beasley as he attempts to make friends only to fall into monstrous trouble.

The story came about from a creative writing assignment about American monsters. The creatures in the story were summoned from the pages of David D. Gilmore’s *Monsters, Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*. They are terrifying monsters of the northernmost tribes, warnings against cannibalism during winter. Not only are they man-eaters, but they could be born from unassuming yet desperate humans. Virtually unkillable, the best defense against the beasts is the unity of the tribe.

Interestingly, the story shares some DNA with the video game *Until Dawn*. Developed by Supermassive Games, a group of friends are haunted by monsters of the mountain, including Wendigo. Both the story and the videogame pay homage to the creature features and slasher flicks of the horror genre.

“New QuickMemo”

The penultimate story in the collection returns to the airport as a frazzled passenger recalls their meeting with a horrible beast stalking its halls.

The inspiration for this story came from an accident I had while working as a janitor at the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. The passenger was so distracted; they had not noticed me until I kneeled next to them to pick up litter. It was after some leisure reading of Lovecraft that I got the idea to compare how the passenger reacted to me to how Lovecraft reacted to the unknown.

The biggest influence on the story is Lovecraft’s *The Beast in the Cave*. They both have cavernous locales for their settings. Both protagonists are stalked by the monsters. At times, the story alludes to and borrows direct quotes from Lovecraft’s story. Although the physical descriptions of the monsters are different, the idea of the horrifying other is still the same.

The title and style of the story mimic the state of its first draft, which was written up in my phone’s QuickMemo app. As the application had downloadable fonts as well as custom fonts and formatting, I experimented with the story’s font and format to mimic the phone app.

“The Last Weather War”

In the final story of the collection, case file fragments reveal the story of how the United American Nation and the Greater Republic of Korea lost control of their weather machines.

The original idea behind the story was both similar and different from its current form. It used to focus on a woman who could control storms and who lashes out against the megacorp entities that sought to control her. However, that prototype for my story convinced me to try a different approach.

In Jemisin's "Cloud Dragon Skies," the sky had turned red from human neglect and harbored passive cloud dragons. Wanting to 'fix' the Earth, scientists from Mars launch a missile to turn the sky blue again. Instead, the dragons resist and ravage the world in a flurry of storms. In the pursuit of their own wants, men of science invoked the wrath of the weather. In my story, given the rise of fascist America and an ever-hostile North Korea, I chose to focus on the horrifying possibility of new world powers weaponizing the climate for their own gains.

If "New QuickMemo" was the dip of the toe into the experimental pool, "The Last Weather War" was the plunge. Taking inspiration from Jemisin's "The Evaluators" and "Too Many Yesterdays, Not Enough Tomorrows," "Weather War" uses various types of documentation to tell a grand tale of the repercussions of rampaging weather machines. Flyers, official government documents, post-its, newspapers, and even transcribed video give us fragmented windows into the magnitude of the conflict, showing new angles to view the storm.

Ted Chiang's "Stories of Your Life" and Jemisin's "Henosis" have a distinct style of storytelling. Rather than the traditional narrative chronology, parts of the texts are switched around. This plays with the chronology of the stories in a way that puts emphasis on the

individual entries in the story with the minimum amount of confusion about the story's timeline.

"The Last Weather War" similarly plays with chronology.

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NEW QUICKMEMO OPENED

Whatthefuck

What the actual fuck?!?!?!?

Im fucking freaking out rn!!!!

Don't know or understand WTF happened!

Im writing shit down.

The back of my head burns just thinking about it.

Sososo im in jetblue terminal in sju.

Waiting for Florida flight. Help sis with the move.

After midnight.

Bored.

Flight is delayed.

Phone's at 30 already.

Ragged mother fussing over her fussing child.

A scowling suit glued to his phone.

Young couple sleeping in a pile, soft and unwieldy.

Granny *tik-tik* knitting something wooly and scratchy.

Terminal is all dirty, brown, and beige with fake plants.

I pull my Lovecraft out of my bag.

Obsessed with it.

Im reading *Beast in the Cave*.

**'I WAS LOST, COMPLETELY, HOPELESSLY LOST IN THE VAST AND LABYRINTHINE
RECESSES OF THE MAMMOTH CAVE'.**

Dunc-dunc-dunc

Hear clacking(?) on tile behind me.

Breeze on my neck.

I turn my head.

Nothing.

Weird.

**'...MY ATTENTION WAS FIXED WITH A START AS I FANCIED THAT I HEARD THE SOUND OF
SOFT APPROACHING STEPS ON THE ROCKY FLOOR OF THE CAVERN...THESE FOOTFALLS WERE
NOT LIKE THOSE OF ANY MORTAL MAN.'**

Hear the *Dunc-dunc-dunc* again.

A shadow passes.

Something black in the eye's corner.

Huff. Grrr. Who the fuck?!

I jam my finger on the page and close the book.

Lift my head.

Nothing.

Stupid big echoing terminal.

‘...THE TREAD SEEMED TO BE THAT OF A QUADRUPED, WALKING WITH A SINGULAR *LACK OF*

UNISON’

Wait no it's-

‘...I SHOULD NEVER BEHOLD ITS FORM...’

Clik-clik-clik.

Shade. A shadow on the page.

It smells damp.

I look up.

Crane up.

And up.

And up.

HAIR

FUR

PITCH

BIG

DRAGGING

LEGS

LEGS

LEGS

SEGMENTS

THIN, AND LONG

CLAWS

EYES EYES EYES

LOOMS

STARING

Arms lock.

Spine snaps.

No air.

Can't scream.

Cantscream.

LEANS

ARM REACHES

Cantmovecantmovecantmove.



Legs kick up on their own.

Im sweating.

Heart beating so fast, it stops.

Throat closing like a noose.

Can't breathe.

REACHES UNDER SEAT

GRABS BOTTLE?!

PULLS BACK

HOLDS OUT

YOURS?

My head swivels shaking.

It isn't.

OK

PRESSES BOTTLE INTO ITSELF

SWALLOWED IN

CRAWLS**DRAGS AWAY**

Gasp. Air.

The second it slips from sight,

I search among confused faces.

It's gone.

Granny walks over worried looking.

Do you have asthma?

Did you see **It**?

Confused she says only the janitor walked by.

The janitor???

He's curt but mild.

Eavesdroppers settle back.

I cave inwards.

Must be tired.

Nothing that big can just come and go.

Yeah. Yeah.

Tired.

Granny stays.

Talks.

I pretend to listen.

Drag myself into my planeseat.

Im writing 35000 feet in the air.

Can't sleep.

I keep seeing it

Behind my eyes.

I saw it right?

Right???