

**The Utilization of (Re)Writing in *Death at Solstice* and *Black Widow's Wardrobe* by Lucha Corpi**

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# Agenda

- Inspiration for the project
- Purpose of the investigation
- Research questions
- Biography-Lucha Corpi
- The Novels
  - *Black Widow's Wardrobe*(1999)
  - *Death at Solstice*(2009)
- Literature Review
- Historical Review
- Comparison
  - *Death at Solstice* vs. *Black Widow's Wardrobe*
  - The representation of (re)writing in the novels
- Analysis
- Conclusion
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# Inspiration for the Project

- Wanted to further study a topic related to Chicana literature, specifically one focused on the (re)writing of Mexican historical and cultural figures
- Wanted to know why Lucha Corpi decided to use (re)writing, specifically in her works of fiction (mystery novels)



# Purpose of the Investigation

- The purpose of our project is to investigate and identify the significance of (re)writing in the two novels (*Death at Solstice* and *Black Widow's Wardrobe*) and why it was essential for Lucha Corpi to incorporate this technique and the historical figures of the Virgin Mary, “La Malinche”, and Joaquín Murrieta in her works of detective fiction



# Research Questions

1. Why does Lucha Corpi use (re)writing in her two works of detective fiction, *Death at Solstice* and *Black Widow's Wardrobe* ?
2. What effect does the use of (re)writing have on her work, as well as on Chicanx detective fiction in general?

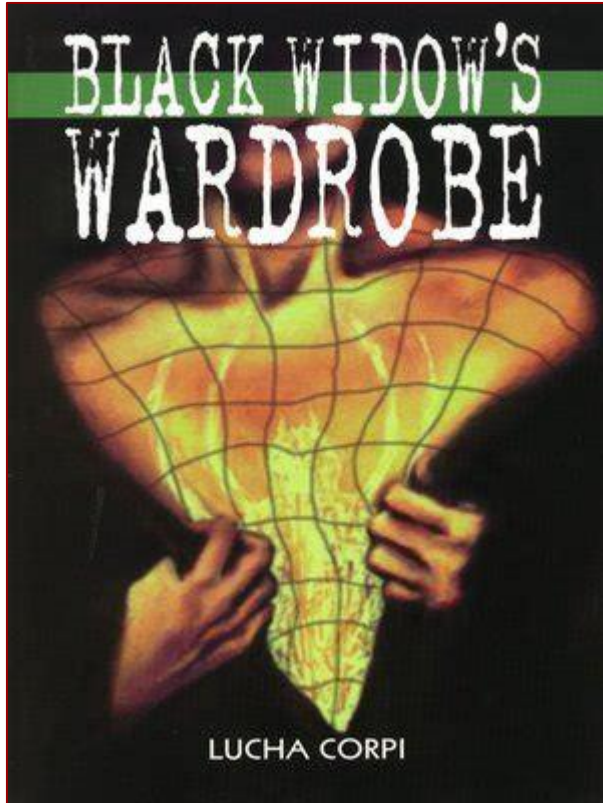


# Biography-Lucha Corpi

- April 13 1945
- Jaltipan, Veracruz, Mexico
- Migrated in 1964
- Known as a Chicana poet and writer of murder mysteries
- Her works vary from children's literature to poetry and mysteries
- B.A. from UC Berkeley
- M.A. from SFSU



# *Black Widow's Wardrobe (1999)*



## Characters

- Gloria Damasco- Detective
- Licia - “La Malinche,” Black Widow

## Location

- City of San Francisco
- Sierra de Tepoztlan

## Summary

- The Chicana detective Gloria Damasco decides to participate in the Day of the Dead celebration in San Francisco, where she witnesses the attempted murder of a woman recently released from prison, known as the Black Widow. In the process of discovering the reason for her attack, Gloria has to immerse herself in the story of the Black Widow.

# Death at Solstice(2009)

## Characters

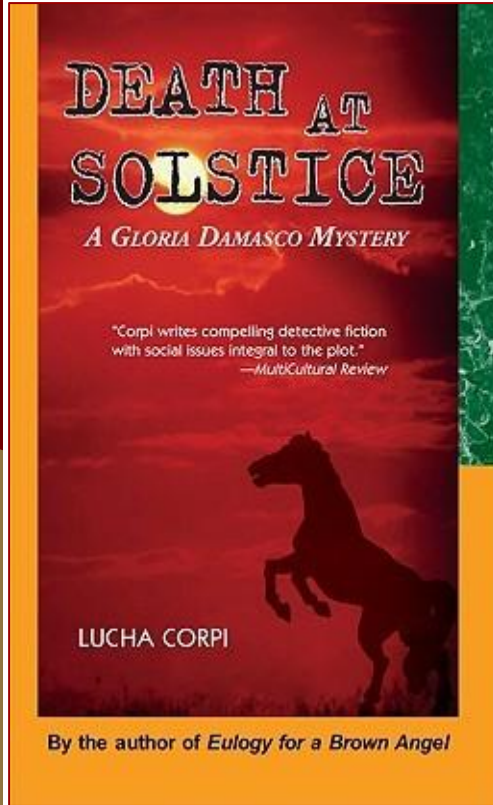
- Gloria Damasco-Detective
- Virginia Moreno- “The Saint”
- Joaquín Murieta-Bandit

## Location

- Legendary Gold Country

## Summary

- The Chicana detective, Gloria Damasco, is in charge of investigating the theft of very valuable jewelry. However, everything begins to get worse when mysterious accidents occur. These include the murder of a nurse, the kidnapping of a woman who is considered a “saint,” and the presence of the ghost of a horse that presumably belongs to Joaquín Murrieta.





# Literature Review

- Chicana Feminist Literature
- Writing and (Re)Writing
- The Tradition of Murder Mystery Writing
- Chicano Murder Mysteries
- Historical Context
- Main Themes
- Examples



# Chicana Feminist Literature

## Historical Context:

- The Chicana movement was a movement within the greater Chicano movement that emerged in the 1960s
- The Chicana movement occurred when women in the movement began to notice that their needs and voices were not heard within the dominant male ideology

## Main Themes:

- Gender role of a woman
- Redefining the meaning of being a woman
- Changing the way women are seen in society

## Examples:

- *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006) - Reyna Grande
- *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) - Gloria Anzaldúa

# Writing and (Re)writing



## Historical Context:

- Began during the Chicana movement in the 1960s
- It is a technique used by Chicana writers
- Rectifies history, adds complexity, or is used to redeem historical figures who have traditionally been judged unfairly or simplistically

## Main Themes:

- Religion
- Feminism
- The change of archetypes of women

## Examples:

- “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess” (1996) – Sandra Cisneros
- *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) – Sandra Cisneros

# Tradition of Murder Mysteries

## Historical Context:

- Introduced in the 18th century
- Began when the prison of Newgate in London was authorized to publish the stories of notorious criminals
- The first type of murder mystery were gothic novels
- From there, the golden age of writing murder mysteries began

## Main Themes:

- Focuses attention on examining evidence
- Murder
- Committed crime
- The process of the detective's work

## Examples:

- *"The Tell-Tale Heart"* (1843) - Edgar Allan Poe
- *"Death and the Compass"* (1942) - Jorge Luis Borges

# Chicano Murder Mysteries

## Example:

- *“Down a dark tunnel, I run after someone, but I can’t tell who. A man’s hand emerges from the darkness, the long, thin fingers and thumb wrapped around the stock of a pistol. An elegant hand. How can such a beautiful hand, more suited for the piano or the guitar, wield an instrument of death? The hand retreats back into the darkness. “Why did you take him from me?” questions a raspy voice—I cannot tell if man or woman. Suddenly I am pursuing the acrobat up a long staircase. A sharp pain stabs at my belly. I fall on my knees, gasping for breath.”*
  - *Black Widow’s Wardrobe (pg.44)*

# Historical Review

**The Virgin Mary**

- History or Biography
- Incorporation within the novels

**La Malinche/ The Damned One**

*Death at Solstice or Black Widow's  
Wardrobe*

**Joaquin Murrieta**



# Virgin of Guadalupe

## History:

- On December 9, 1531, Our Lady of Guadalupe is said to have appeared to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin for the first time on the Tepeyac hill
- On December 12, 1531, "The Guadalupan Event" occurred and Juan Diego showed the Spaniards that the apparition was true

## Incorporation:

- La Virgen is incorporated into the story in *Death at Solstice* through the character of Virginia Moreno who is known as "La Santa"



# La Malinche

## History:

- She was born in 1500 and died before 1529
- She was a slave before she was 'gifted' to Hernan Cortes and worked as an translator, advisor and concubine
- The way that she is viewed by others has changed due to the evolving social perspective and politics of Mexico

## Incorporation:

- She is incorporated within the story of *Black Widow's Wardrobe* through the character of Licia Roman Lecuona, who believes she is the reincarnation of "La Malinche"





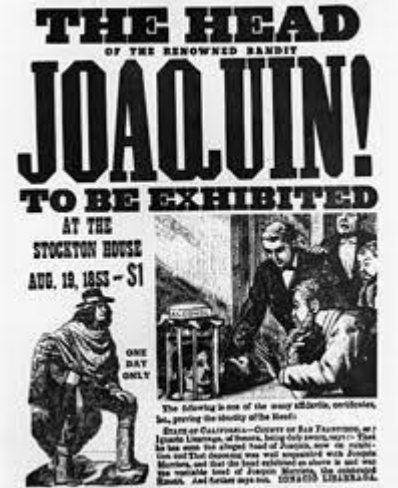
# Joaquin Murrieta

## History:

- It is assumed that he was born in Sonora, Mexico around 1830
- He was about 18 years old when he arrived to California with his wife, Rosa Feliz
- He rewarded people who offered him shelter and helped him keep his identity a secret, which is how he acquired the reputation of “Robin Hood del Dorado”

## Incorporation:

- The ghost of a horse represents the bandit, Joaquin Murrieta, within the story of *Death at Solstice*



# Comparison of the Novels

## Death at Solstice

- Virginia Moreno is known as “La Santa” by the people that surround her and that is the reason why she is kidnapped
- Ex: *“She grants miracles with the help of the Lord and His Blessed Mother. Thank the Lord Jesus, I’m in good health. But people swear all she has to do is look at them or touch them and they’re cured.”* (Death at Solstice 38)

## Black Widow’s Wardrobe

- Licia Roman Lecuona is known as the “Black Widow,” who believes that she is the reincarnation of La Malinche
- Ex: *“As for me , I’ll be going back to the place where I was born, to complete the cycle that began on my birth nearly five hundred years ago...”* “It’s signed ‘Malintzin Tenepal,” Justin added. (Black Widow’s Wardrobe 189-190)



# Analysis of the Novels

## *Black Widow's Wardrobe*

- The (re)writing of La Malinche helps the detective, Gloria Damasco, solve the mystery
- Through the novel, the reader learns about the history of this cultural and historical figure and how it relates to the main character Licia Roman Lecuona



# Analysis of the Novels (cont.)

## *Death at Solstice*

- The (re) writing of La Virgen de Guadalupe is integrated into this novel to demonstrate how she is admired and honored in Mexican culture
- Virginia's character is considered a piece of the puzzle in order to find her nurse's killer



# Incorporation of Joaquin Murrieta

- According to one version of the legend of El Zorro, he is the protector of those who can't or don't know how to defend themselves
- Joaquin Murrieta is thought of as taking the identity of El Zorro, the man
- Joaquin was also part of the California Gold Rush, a historical event that helped California become a state
- He appears in Gloria Damasco's dreams and is also represented by the ghost of a horse

**MURRIETA**



# Conclusion

## *Black Widow's Wardrobe*

- Licia's life is connected to La Malinche's life to discover the similarities between the two but also to show how different they are due to contemporary times
- The effect of (re) writing is used to help integrate culture with detective fiction to raise the intensity and mystery of the cases in both stories, along with challenging the archetypes of women and the way they are seen


## *Death at Solstice*

- The representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the character of Virginia Moreno "La Santa" prove the importance of religion within the Chicanx culture



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