



2018

## Interview with Karen Dollinger: "Divergences and convergences of the fantastic"

Karen Dollinger

University of Pikeville, KarenDollinger@upike.edu

Kiersty Lemon-Rogers

University of Kentucky, kiersty.lemon@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/naeh>

 Part of the Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature Commons

Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.

### Recommended Citation

Dollinger, Karen and Lemon-Rogers, Kiersty (2018) "Interview with Karen Dollinger: "Divergences and convergences of the fantastic", *Nomenclatura: aproximaciones a los estudios hispánicos*: Vol. 6 , Article 7.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/naeh.2018.07>

Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/naeh/vol6/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Hispanic Studies at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Nomenclatura: aproximaciones a los estudios hispánicos* by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact [UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu](mailto:UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu).

*Nomenclatura: aproximaciones a los estudios hispánicos* 6 (2018)  
Issue on Divergences and Convergences of the Fantastic /  
Divergencias y Convergencias de lo Fantástico  
Eds. Patricia María Gamboa, M.A. and Kiersty Lemon-Rogers, M.A.

---

## Interview with Karen Dollinger

### Divergences and convergences of the fantastic

Kiersty Lemon-Rogers

---

**Kiersty Lemon-Rogers (KLR):** Hello Karen, we would love to know what inspired you to include the fantastic in your area of research?

**Karen Dollinger (KD):** I've been interested in fantastic literature (fantasy, science fiction, and horror) for as long as I've been reading. As a child, I loved stories of magic and space travel, and never really grew out of it.

When I studied Hispanic literature in college, my favorite stories dealt with the fantastic, such as Carlos Fuentes' *Aura*, Borges' "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," and Julio Cortázar's "La casa tomada."

What draws me to literature in general is its ability to allow me to see from another point of view and to experience places I've never been. Fantastic literature, by being several removes from our reality, stretches the imagination, engenders empathy for others and shows what might be possible. It takes us out of the everyday and allows us to ponder philosophical questions we might not otherwise have considered.

My doctoral area study had little ostensibly to do with the fantastic, focusing on the Inquisition in colonial Mexico. However, even that had elements of the fantastic, especially when considering the Conquest, which can be read as a clash between different worlds. Many authors have approached this historical period through the lens of the fantastic, such as Laura Esquivel in her science fiction novel *La ley del amor* and her fantasy novel *Malinche*.

When I saw the call for papers on the theme of “Fantastic Empires” at the International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts, it occurred to me that I could combine my doctoral research and my love of the fantastic and submitted an abstract for a paper to be presented entitled “Re-writing the Conquest in a Mexican Science Fiction Novel,” which was accepted. Since then, I’ve been trying to create a research agenda around the Latin American fantastic.

**KLR:** What attracted you to the fantastic in Mexico, in “Fear the Walking Dead”, and in Cuba?

**KD:** My interest in the fantastic in Mexico goes back a long way. I wrote a (very bad) historical fantasy novella set in 17<sup>th</sup> century Mexico for my undergraduate senior project, and looked at women of discord in Aztec mythology as portrayed in Mexican literature for my master's thesis.

My paper on *Fear the Walking Dead* was a bit of a sidestep for me. I'd been watching the show as a fan, and was looking forward to seeing what the writers would do with Mexico. When I saw the portrayal of Celia's compound, I became increasingly convinced that the show was influenced by the folkloric figure of la Santa Muerte, which led to an unusual approach to zombies. And so I decided to research it, even though I'd never formally analyzed a television show before.

I'd read a few short stories by Cuban author Daína Chaviano, but had never read one of her novels. When I picked up *Gata encerrada* I was fascinated by Chaviano's approach to magic, and decided to write about that.

**KLR:** What projects are you working on?

**KD:** Currently I'm finishing up revisions on a paper entitled “Laura Esquivel Conquers the Conquest: The Role of Heroines in Two Speculative Fiction Novels” which I plan to submit to a journal. After that, I hope to write a paper on the second book in Daína Chaviano's trilogy *Havana Oculta*, called *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*.

**KLR:** Has it been difficult to study the fantastic in the academy?

**KD:** As an undergraduate, I was able to take several courses in American science fiction, but never saw a course on the Hispanic fantastic as such, although I was able to study individual works of the fantastic. I was, however, able to teach a course on Latin American fantasy and science fiction as a special topics Spanish course.

**KLR:** Who is your favorite author? What theorists do you consider indispensable in your work?

**KD:** It's very difficult narrowing down a favorite author, but if I have to choose, I'll go with Isabel Allende. She is a consummate storyteller, and many of her works deal with the fantastic.

When it comes to theorists, I would recommend to anyone interested in Hispanic fantastic literature to read the introduction to *Cosmos Latinos* by Andrea Bell and Yolanda Molina-Gavilán. It's an excellent history of Spanish and Latin American science fiction. I've also found Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* very useful for understanding different types of fantasy narratives, including magical realism.

**KLR:** Thank you, Karen.

Karen Dollinger

PhD, Latin American Literatures and Cultures, the Ohio State University

Assistant Professor of Spanish, University of Pikeville, Kentucky