Becoming grammatically isolated as an alternative and unnoticed way of being dead in horror fiction

Quedar gramaticalmente aislado como un modo alternativo e inadvertido de estar muerto en la ficción de horror

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Abstract: In this paper, I present a kind of philosophical horror in which the main character becomes grammatically isolated from their environment after having lost a basic certainty. I start by explaining the notion of 'certainty' developed by Wittgenstein. Subsequently, I show that, even though some characters in horror fiction conclude that they are dead on diverse grounds, such grounds are incongruous because they cannot support certainties. Lastly, I take this incongruence as a reference to show that it allows us to outline the basic lines of the philosophical horror that arises when an individual loses their certainty of being alive.

Key words: death, horror, fiction, alienation, Wittgenstein, certainty

Resumen: En este artículo presento un tipo de horror filosófico en el que el protagonista queda gramaticalmente aislado de su entorno tras haber perdido una certeza básica. Empiezo por explicar la noción de 'certeza' desarrollada por Wittgenstein. Posteriormente muestro que, aunque algunos personajes en la ficción de horror concluyan de que están muertos basándose en diversas razones, dichas razones son incongruentes porque no pueden fundamentar certezas. Finalmente, tomo como referencia esta incongruencia para mostrar que nos permite discernir las líneas básicas del horror filosófico que surge cuando un sujeto pierde su certeza de estar vivo.

Palabras clave: muerte, horror, ficción, alienación, Wittgenstein, certeza

1. Introduction

Lovecraft (2016, p. 17) sharply criticized that the novelist Ann Radcliffe, despite having raised new and higher standards in the realm of macabre and fear-inspiring atmosphere, destroyed "her own phantoms at the last through laboured mechanical explanations". I agree that, in a manner similar to how a magician would ruin the stunning effect of their performance

by describing the trick they had used, mechanical explanations may spoil the striking effect achieved by the novelist in horror fiction. This paper, however, is intended as an interpretive essay in philosophical aesthetics in which I present a kind of horror that arises from the careful consideration of philosophical explanations and arguments. Specifically, I will focus on the case in which someone becomes grammatically isolated from their environment when losing the basic certainty of being alive, which, according to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, would prevent the individual from distinguishing between true and false. In order to clarify what this type of horror consists of, I will start by exposing through simple and easy examples —related to Oscar Wilde's (1906) *The Canterville Ghost*— the notion of 'certainty' that Ludwig Wittgenstein (1969) presented in his posthumous work *On Certainty*. Subsequently, I show that, even though some characters in horror fiction conclude and even become certain —an adjective that I will use henceforth to refer not to mere stubbornness but to certainty in Wittgenstein's sense— that they are dead on diverse grounds, such grounds are incongruous because they cannot support certainties. Lastly, I take this incongruence as a reference to show that, if it is not overlooked, it allows us to outline the basic lines of the philosophical horror that arises when an individual loses their certainty of being alive. To shed light on this type of philosophical horror, I focus on three aspects that are also carefully illustrated with examples. Firstly, the individual cannot avoid at will their grammatical isolation. Secondly, grounds make it impossible for them either to explain such isolation or to escape from it. Thirdly, whatever the concerned individual says will not make sense, so that they will become alienated from their environment and even from themselves. To illustrate these three aspects, and keeping in mind that I will pay particular attention to the moment in which the alleged dead character becomes aware that they are dead, I will focus above all on the film 'The Sixth Sense'. In this way, I will explain why grammatical isolation turns out to be more frightening than the case of the character who, despite concluding that they are dead, seems to remain grammatically connected to their environment, thus talking and acting as if they were still alive.

2. Certainties in Wittgenstein's sense

Oscar Wilde's *The Canterville Ghost* begins with a conversation between the seller and the buyer of Canterville Chase, that is, between Lord Canterville and the American minister Mr. Hiram B. Otis. Throughout this conversation, they show many certainties —in Wittgenstein's sense— so basic that it would have been absurd for Wilde to make explicit reference to them.

By way of example, both characters are certain of what their respective names are, and of who the seller as well as the buyer is; but they are also certain, among many other things, that they are alive, and that they are speaking English. Certainties do not require to be proved or demonstrated. In fact, if Lord Canterville and Mr. Otis had been required to demonstrate that they were alive, they could not have proved it because there are no grounds or evidence more certain than the thing they were supposed to be grounds for (Wittgenstein, 1997, §250). After all, we could not consider as proof thereof the fact that someone assured that they had checked that they were alive: for, if this individual had concluded that they were not alive, such a testimony would have been regarded as absurd. In other words, nothing counts as the discovery of a mistake about a certainty (Wittgenstein, 1997, §32). Admittedly, Lord Canterville could have written in the sales contract that he was the buyer; however, this would not be considered as a proof of the wrongness of the certainty according to which he was the seller, but as a mere lapsus that would not in any way affect the mentioned certainty. Indeed, it might be argued that the discovery of such lapsus would reinforce even further the certainty that Lord Canterville was the seller; yet certainties do not require being endorsed or reconfirmed at all. For certainties are consolidated from the very moment that mistakes about them turn out to be unintelligible. The fact of sharing a certainty can therefore be distinguished from mere stubbornness in two ways. On the one hand, we say that an individual is stubborn inasmuch as they are asserting something obstinately; conversely, certainty does not require to be defended in any way (Ariso, 2025a). As proof of this, if Lord Canterville strived to maintain that he was not selling a mirage by noting not only that physical objects exist, but also that Canterville Chase is a physical object, Mr. Otis would not understand what Lord Canterville meant: for no one could hold the opposite view about this issue. On the other hand, the stubborn individual angrily defends their position just because they are aware —albeit remotely— that they might be wrong. In this case, the exclusion of the possibility of mistake about the certainty is not grammatical —or resulting from certainties— but merely emotional (Ariso, 2023a). Nonetheless, and returning to the example of the sale of Canterville Chase, we cannot even know how we should imagine a mistake about the existence of physical objects being discovered.

Even though it may seem obvious that certainties are true, it should be highlighted that certainties are not true simply because they cannot be false. The whole set of our certainties, which constitutes our world-picture, thus constitutes the background that makes it possible for us to distinguish between true and false (Wittgenstein, 1997, §94). By way of example, if Mr. Otis asked Lord Canterville what time it was, both of them would be certain of many things,

e.g. that the order of numbers is fixed, what numbers appear on the face of clocks, how the time is read, or what the meaning is of the words they were using. These certainties, amongst many others, make up the background that would allow not only Lord Canterville to say what time it was and Mr. Otis to understand him, but also to check subsequently whether Lord Canterville was wrong in reading the time. If the mentioned certainties were true, it would be possible that they became false at some time, in which case we would lack the reliability or certainty that is provided to our judgements by a background so stable that cannot be called into doubt. For even doubts themselves must be supported by certainties (Wittgenstein, 1997, §115). Indeed, if Mr. Otis doubted whether Lord Canterville had read the time correctly, the former should utter his doubt on the basis of many certainties like the ones concerning the meaning of the words he was using.

It should be noted that certainty is not a mental state, but a spontaneous "attitude" (Wittgenstein, 1997, §404) implicit in whatever one says and does (Wittgenstein, 1997, §431). Certainty is thus enacted and can only be meaningfully uttered with heuristic purposes to transmit certainties "(through drill or training) to a child, a disturbed adult, a foreign speaker or an alien; or in philosophical discussion" (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, pp. 94-95). Thus, it was implicit in whatever Oscar Wilde said and did that he was a human being. But if he had suddenly tried to utter "I am a human being" *qua* certainty, in the middle of a conversation, such claim would not make sense; however, if he had written "I am a human being" in *The Canterville Ghost*, it could make sense because in this work ghosts coexist with human beings. Nonetheless, not all certainties are shared by the whole of human beings. Admittedly, all mentally healthy adults share some certainties that turn out to be universal not because they allow us to "participate in relatively complex language games" (Fortney, 2020, p. 973) or due to the fact that all societies have them although such societies "allow some exceptions" to them (Pleasants, 2015, p. 206): instead, the universality of those certainties arises from the fact that there is absolutely no exception to them (Ariso, 2025b). Yet, although some certainties can be considered as universal —e.g. there are physical objects which cannot be passed through as if they were mere mirages— many certainties are characteristic only of specific groups or communities (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004). Therefore, Lord Canterville is certain that ghosts exist, which is clearly implicit in his warning to Mr. Otis that there is a ghost in Canterville Chase. Conversely, Mr. Otis is certain that ghosts do not exist. Yet three days later he and his family ended up admitting that ghosts exist. Indeed, there may be modifications in someone's certainties, so that the individual concerned may end up sharing the world-picture of a different

group or community. This happens, for instance, when an individual loses the certainty that God exists before becoming certain that God does not exist, or vice versa (Ariso, 2020). And this also happens when someone persuades another individual by contributing to the latter's acquisition of new certainties (Ariso, 2022), as was the case of missionaries converting natives (Wittgenstein, 1997, §612). However, when a universal certainty —like one's having a body— is lost, there is no alternative world-picture that can be acquired by such individual. As a result, they remain grammatically isolated, which means that we cannot communicate with them because there is not any mutual world-picture that allows us to understand them. For we cannot even know what it would be like to share a world-picture with people who were certain of lacking a body (Ariso, 2015a).

To clarify this point, let us suppose for a while that Lord Canterville regretted lacking a body. What could Mr. Otis say if Lord Canterville seriously insisted on this? Since Lord Canterville keeps using syntactically well-formed phrases, there seems to be no problem at all. This is what surface grammar may lead us to think, for it concerns features that "can be taken in by the ear" (Wittgenstein, 2009, §664) inasmuch as they make possible for a phrase to sound like a phrase of a specific language (Wittgenstein, 2009, §134). Conversely, depth grammar concerns linguistic features which do not manifest themselves in such an immediate way, so that we become aware of them only after analyzing our use of language (Martin, 2016; McGinn, 2011). With this in mind, and strictly speaking, Mr. Otis could not even understand Lord Canterville if the latter invited the former to walk along Canterville Chase, or simply to shake his hand. Of course, it is necessary to have a body to do such things, so that Lord Canterville would seem to be flagrantly contradicting himself. Yet Lord Canterville would contradict himself regardless of what he said and did. For, in order to say something, he needs a body to articulate words, and, most importantly, whatever he says can only be understood if he is basing it on certainties as elemental as having a body. Moreover, he will also need a body to do something, and, even if he decides to do nothing at all, such decision will entail keeping his body at rest. In short, if Lord Canterville held that he lacks a body, he would become grammatically isolated from his environment because certainties support each other (Wittgenstein, 1997, §144). Hence, if Lord Canterville lost the certainty of having a body, his world-picture would collapse like a house of cards.

3. The traditional human-like state of being dead in horror fiction

Keeping in mind what I have said above, we should find it strange that readers and spectators are not surprised that some basic certainties are drastically breached in the works they are reading or watching without this having any consequence. By way of example, when Dante Alighieri (2012, p. 7) addresses a stranger in the *The Divine Comedy* adding "Whatever you are, a real man or a ghost!", Virgil answers "Not a man, though I was once". Virgil appears in this context as a symbolic representation of Aristotelian prudence (Borovjak, 2021); however, the fact that Virgil accompanies Dante in *The Divine Comedy* has not been regarded as an anomaly that ruins this work, but as one of the many points that contributed to turning *The Divine Comedy* into a key work of universal literature. This example suffices to show that fiction admits many breaches of certainties. In fact, if someone had an attitude as critical as the one I showed in the previous section, to the extent of concluding that *The Divine Comedy* is unintelligible, they should be told that they cannot read works of fiction. Nonetheless, it should be noted that these works must have some limits for violations of certainties. If not, the plot might become chaotic. This would be the case, for instance, if characters transformed continuously into each other; or if they all acted randomly, in such a way that no aim could be discerned in what they did and said. In this vein, it is of outmost importance that those characters who are regarded as dead seem living human beings to some extent. Yet, admittedly, the more human the character seems to be —particularly in those aspects that make them appear more vulnerable— the less they will surprise or frighten. A clear example of this can be found just in the ghost that appears in Wilde's (1906) *The Canterville Ghost*. Indeed, the Otises communicate fluently with him because they contemplate him almost as if he were a living human being, which has as a consequence that the ghost loses the aura of sinister power that authors confer on ghosts in horror fictions. Proof of this is that the ghost is often disappointed because he is not able to instill terror within the Otis family, which regards him as a friendly housemate. As a result, the ghost ends up admitting to the Otises' daughter that he would like to die, with which he is somehow recognizing that he is still alive.

In these cases, the living dead or ghost appears as such from the beginning of the work. It is thus a status granted by the author without the character putting it into question. But now I would like to focus on those cases in which a specific circumstance leads a character to conclude —with astonishing ease— that they are dead or, at least, not alive. Thus, Kafka (1971, p. 89) writes at the very beginning of *The Metamorphosis* that one morning, as Gregor Samsa awoke from uneasy dreams, 'he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect'. In principle, this is not something that Gregor Samsa concludes, but an absurd and inexplicable

event that he simply encounters —which also contributes to a new meaning-making of his self (Sangwook, 2013)— thus symbolizing how absurd and inexplicable human existence was for Kafka. Yet this is why Kafka decides that Gregor Samsa, far from questioning whether he has actually transformed into an insect, accepts it without further ado. Regarding the novel *Mist*, the author, Miguel de Unamuno (2014), invites to his own office the main character, Augusto, to inform him that he is not alive because he is a fictional character. Augusto asks for a compelling reason for this —although certainties, like the one of being alive, are not grounded on any reason— to which Unamuno answers by telling Augusto some of Augusto's most intimate secrets. This leads Augusto to end up accepting that he is a fictional character, without questioning at any time the possibility that Unamuno had guessed such secrets, or that he had accessed this information —e.g. reading a private diary or even hearing what Augusto said in his sleep. In *On the Brighton Road*, written by Richard Middleton (2023), a boy meets a tramp along a road and tells him that he has died four times, to which he adds that the tramp is also dead. At the end of the story, the boy says he had died again in the morning, which terrifies the tramp. Of course, the boy cannot provide any compelling reason beyond the argument that the dead must wander the road without being allowed to rest. Yet the story would lack charm if the tramp did not take the boy's account seriously.

As we can see, there is a lack of substantive arguments in written works, like novels and stories, to avoid that picky readers have the feeling that a specific character has admitted to being dead too easily. Although this lack of argumentative load seems to be partially hidden in films with diverse resources, such as the gestures of characters or loud music, in films it is not possible to conclude that one is dead —or rather, not alive— either. To give some examples, in 'Beetlejuice', the horror comedy directed by Tim Burton (1988), the couple formed by Adam (Alec Baldwin) and Barbara (Geena Davis) realizes that they are ghosts after discovering a *Handbook for the Recently Deceased* and noticing they have no reflections in a mirror. In this case, it might appear that a carefully plotted joke could suffice to convince someone that they are dead; but, regardless of how skillfully the joke has been planned, and as I will show in greater detail in the next section, there can be no grounds for someone to conclude that they are dead. It could also be said that a joke would have led Lara (Ellen Parren) to conclude in 'I'm not a robot', a short science-fiction drama directed by Victoria Warmerdam (2023), that she is a robot, so that she would no longer be alive. Specifically, Lara starts by repeatedly failing some CAPTCHA tests at work although she had input the correct answers. Tech support then suggests that Lara is a robot, which is later repeated by a test according to which her parents most likely

never existed —i.e. the test breaches another certainty. As if this were not enough, a woman called Pam (Thekla Reuten) informs her later that she is a robot chosen by his boyfriend to be his girlfriend. Finally, Lara despairs and jumps from the roof despite the fact that, in my view, all this could have been a prank, for no one gives her —indeed, no one can give her— compelling arguments proving that she is a robot or that she is not alive. In 'Ghost', the supernatural romance film directed by Jerry Zucker (1990), Sam (Patrick Swayze) concludes that he is dead when seeing how Molly (Demi Moore) tries to revive his inert body, after which she walks through him as if he were a mere mirage. This case allows us to realize with particular clarity how easily spectators may admit that a fiction character who seems to be suffering from a perceptual or a thought disorder is dead. This may be due, at least partially, to the fact that the figure of the living dead appears very attractive in horror fiction, so that there is a very favourable predisposition to admit the participation of this kind of characters in the plot. Nonetheless, if it were true that all those people who seem to be suffering from a perceptual or a thought disorder are dead, then there would be no patients with perceptual or thought disorders, in addition to which mental institutions would be full of living dead. Admittedly, this critical attitude is not appropriate to enjoy horror fiction. In the next section, however, I hope to show that such attitude may help us to outline an alternative way of being dead in horror fiction.

4. An alternative way of being dead in horror fiction

The kind of philosophical horror I will outline in this section arises when someone loses the certainty of being alive. By this, I do not mean that such individual automatically acquires the certainty of being dead (Ariso, 2015b), for a certainty is not a mental state that someone can reach regardless of whether it is shared by other people (Wittgenstein, 1997, §42). Far from such a thing, a certainty is an implicit assumption shared at least by a group of people, so that there is a series of linguistic practices in which there is no room for doubt or error concerning that certainty. It is thus this tacit agreement that confers objectivity to certainty. This objectivity is due to the fact that, as noted in section 2, certainties cannot be justified or demonstrated because nothing would count within our shared language-games as the discovery of a mistake about a certainty. It is in our epistemic practices where our objective certainties are manifest, so that the establishment of "an alternative objective certainty would require a description of an alternative epistemic practice that I take part in" (Bellaar, 2023, p. 1375). Nevertheless, it is to

some extent understandable that someone who loses the certainty of being alive —which is diagnosed in Psychiatry with 'Cotard syndrome' (Berrios and Luque, 1995)— tends to conclude that they are dead. But such conclusion has no room within any language-game, thus giving rise to grammatical isolation. To illustrate this case, in this section I will take as a reference the psychological thriller film 'The Sixth Sense', written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan (1999), to comment on three characteristics of the situation of the individual who becomes grammatically isolated by losing the certainty of being alive, which constitutes a kind of philosophical horror that readers or spectators would notice if the characters expressed doubts and reflections like the ones I will refer to hereunder.

4.1 The impossibility of leaving grammatical isolation at will

I start by considering this characteristic because fleeing seems to be the simplest solution when someone finds themselves under serious pressure. Hence, as soon as Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) begins to glimpse at the end of 'The Sixth Sense' that he has died, he is expected to attempt to move away from such an idea. But after only a few seconds of strain, he placidly assumes to be dead. The fact that he does not even try to call this into doubt suggests that he maybe found it pleasant and comfortable to have died; but he admits that he still loves his wife Anna (Olivia Williams) as well as maintaining his vocation for child psychology, so that there are reasons to think that he would like to continue to live. Therefore, he would be expected to avoid this situation if it depended on his will. Yet he does not try to do so because he seems to be convinced —or better, certain— that he cannot do it, for he has already lost the certainty of being alive. Anyone can check that certainties are neither lost (Ariso, 2023b) nor acquired (Ariso, 2025c) at will, from which it follows that their acquisition as well as their loss simply happen to us. By way of example, we might try to abandon the certainty according to which we have a body; but, in such a case, we could not even know what we should do in order to fake that we lack a body (Ariso, 2024): and even if in this case we tried to pretend something, whatever it were, that would not entail the loss of such certainty. Likewise, we can make an effort to adopt the certainty that our main problems will disappear very soon, so that our life will become wonderful. Yet, if it were possible to acquire at will such a certainty, neither stress nor depression would then exist. As said above, certainty does not consist of a mental state: for certainties are spontaneously reflected on whatever we say and do, as a result of which the same certainty can be shown with many different mental states. We can thus end up acquiring or

losing some certainty regardless of our will: concerning 'The Sixth Sense', Night Shyamalan decided that the loss of the certainty of being alive happened to Malcolm. I do not exclude the possibility that an experience as traumatic as being shot might cause the loss of the certainty of being alive (Ariso, 2019); but this loss would be outside one's control. Indeed, such losses can happen even without a specific trigger. In my view, it would be interesting to reflect this constant vulnerability in horror fiction: from this perspective, a character could become terrified because, despite being seemingly free and in no danger, the mentioned vulnerability may turn out to be distressing. For the loss of certainty may concern any certainty of any individual, at any moment, and regardless of any circumstance (Le Roy Finch, 1977).

Focusing on the type of philosophical horror to which I am referring in this paper, it would be interesting that the main character, even before losing some certainty, wondered —and also inquired in different ways in order to confer more action to the plot— what could avoid such loss. It could also be enlightening that they wondered what or who would protect them, and what or who might attack them thus causing the loss of the certainty. The answer to both questions would, of course, be negative. This could lead other characters to investigate the same questions despite not having lost any certainty, with which they could become aware of the limits of their will. In this way, they would be compelled to admit that we all are constantly exposed to a risk that cannot be avoided, i.e. the risk of losing a basic certainty, which would bring our world-picture to a standstill. By the way, this risk is closely related to another kind of philosophical horror, but of an existentialist nature. According to Sartre (2018), we all are condemned to be free, to the extent that we must live by continuously making choices. Thus, while certainties cannot be lost or recovered at will, the Sartrean drama hinges on the fact that all we can do is to choose. This might mean a relief for people who fear that our lives must follow a pre-determined path; however, the individual must endure anguish and despair for several reasons. Specifically, they cannot avoid making choices; they create themselves by choosing; they are fully responsible for their choices; and they lack rules about how to live. As a result, the individual may become paralyzed in making decisions. Yet it should be noted that no choice can be made if the individual is no longer certain of being alive. In such a case, the main problem will not be that the individual is no longer alive —for the living dead constantly make decisions in horror fiction— but the fact that they would have lost the background or world-picture which allows us to make meaningful decisions.

4.2. Grounds allow us neither to reach nor to lose certainty

It could be argued that in the previous section I have not given sufficient importance to the fact that Malcolm seems to have lost the certainty of being alive due to specific proofs or grounds. Nevertheless, certainties are ungrounded: hence, they are not mere conclusions derived from proofs or grounds. Let us put ourselves for a while in Malcolm's shoes. When a man is astonished that his wedding ring is not in his ring finger but in his wife's hand, and he also sees how the ring falls from her hand to the ground, it does not follow from this that he is dead. It is true that, in the context of 'The Sixth Sense', this is only the trigger for Malcolm and spectators to become aware of a number of previous circumstances that seemingly must lead him to conclude that he is dead. Yet, in fact, these alleged grounds are no more than the strange game rules that Malcolm hears from his child patient Cole (Haley Joel Osment). Therefore, Malcolm lacked grounds or evidence to conclude that he was dead. The problem, however, was not that those grounds or evidence were weak; instead, the problem was that no ground or evidence can lead us to conclude such a thing. And why one is alive cannot be justified either, for any justification is based on certainties like the one of being alive. Indeed, when someone —as is the case with Malcolm in 'The Sixth Sense'— perceives a gunshot wound and a blood spot on their shirt, this cannot lead them to conclude that they are dead. In any event, this would be evidence of being alive: otherwise, they could have perceived neither the wound nor the spot. Yet certainties are so basic that they do not even require evidence to support them.

If a horror fiction character is distressed when realizing that they could not avoid the loss of a certainty at will, they might be very relieved by knowing the grounds that support such certainty, for they could then have a greater sense of control over this issue. Seemingly, they could then not only know what caused the loss of the certainty, but also how to regain it. Nonetheless, the fact that there are no grounds that support certainties may reinforce the sense of vulnerability. If someone wished to check that they are still alive, they might resort to tests such as seeing whether they appear reflected in a mirror, touching their body, trying to move objects, asking other people, etc. These alleged proofs might involve other characters in order to stimulate the plot; but whatever the testimonies of such characters and the test results, nothing could count as a proof of having died (Ariso, 2017). If the main character of the philosophical horror plot illustrates how neither grounds nor evidence may give rise to changes in our certainties, they will help the reader or spectator to become aware of a view of the human being much less sophisticated, but also much more primitive and vulnerable, than we would presumably like to have (Janik, 1989; Ariso, 2025d).

4.3 Grammatical isolation does not prevent seemingly coherent speech

It seems counterintuitive that someone, when losing a certainty, becomes grammatically isolated although they still can think and talk in a seemingly coherent way. Ortega y Gasset (2007) noted that it is just the loss of a certainty, due to the urgency of such situation, which leads the individual to focus on the task of thinking with the aim of filling the gap that the lost certainty has opened up in their world-picture. Yet the problem is not that the individual has lost the ability to speak or think in a seemingly coherent way, for they do not become mute, nor do their minds go blank. Far from such a thing, the problem is that the loss of a basic certainty causes that, strictly speaking, the individual's discourse should turn out to be incomprehensible not only to other people, but also to the very individual. Returning to the case of Malcolm, if he loses the certainty of being alive, his world-picture —i.e. the whole set of his certainties— collapses. In this case, he will lack a world-picture or background due to which his discourse makes sense. For, if he cannot even be certain of being alive, what can he be certain of? Let us take as an example the moment in which Malcolm, when he already assumes that he is dead, says to Anna that he has never relegated her. But can Malcolm be certain of this —or of any other thing— without being certain that he is alive? What, then, do 'I', 'dead' and 'alive' mean, to give only some examples? Indeed, if a basic certainty is breached, those concepts lose their semantic muscle.

Philosophical horror, in the way I am considering it in this paper, can thus be experienced by someone only when becoming aware of one's own grammatical isolation. The main character of a philosophical horror plot might become aware of this grammatical isolation not only if they realized that their utterances make no sense, but also if one or several characters insisted on this point. In this way, the grammatical isolation with respect to their environment will be more prominent. Once the certainty of being alive is lost, it must be frightening to admit that one's own discourse makes no sense even when using the pronoun 'I'. I do not at all mean that this leads the character to cross what we might call the threshold of death; in fact, I do not even mean that this entails having reached an interim realm between life and death. The individual, of course, will remain alive. Yet they will remain alive in a situation of grammatical isolation that will alienate them even from themselves, for they will no longer be able to use language even to express the most basic aspects related to themselves: their discourse will not make sense when it shows complex reasoning, but it will not make sense either when they

attempt to express something as basic as sensations, emotions or memories. And even if the individual renounced to use language, they could not be certain of anything. At this point, other character might ask them whether they have the feeling of being certain that the floor that they are seeing beneath their feet exists; but, although they admitted to having such feeling, they could not be certain that the floor exists. After all, if the character is no longar certain of being alive, they cannot be certain of anything, so that we cannot know what they mean when adding that they have some feeling despite not being alive.

5. Conclusion

According to Lovecraft (2016), relatively few people are able to enjoy macabre works, for this requires not only some degree of imagination, but also detachment from every-day life — thus reaching what has often been called 'willing suspension of disbelief' (Coleridge, 1983). I would like to emphasize the second requirement, for its lack would lead readers and spectators to claim that a fiction horror story is incoherent. Yet, returning to the case of 'The Sixth Sense', the public attended the cinemas in large numbers to watch the film without finding it strange that Malcolm assumed that he was dead; the film was nominated for six Oscars, which would not have happened if the members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences were not convinced of the consistency of its particular outcome; and, last but not least, film critics (e.g. Greydanus, 2004) especially valued Night Shyamalan's ability to develop a fully coherent argument in which all loopholes seemed to be carefully closed. Hence, this paper is not intended to scuttle the effect of horror stories: for, leaving aside the breaches of certainties that can be found in their plots, the impact that horror stories have in readers and spectators is undeniable. The philosophical approach I have developed in this paper is thus not appropriate to enjoy horror works; nonetheless, it reveals a series of grammatical breaches in these works which allows us to reflect on the kind of horror that would arise not from overlooking them —as is usually the case in horror fiction— but from recognizing such breaches when a basic certainty is lost. Admittedly, this type of philosophical horror will perhaps bore those who search in horror fiction above all for action, scares and cruel murders. Yet, if someone loses the certainty of being alive in horror fiction, their unsuccessful efforts to regain it or simply to make themselves understood may also generate a striking sensation of horror. And all this without the need to use special effects or supernatural circumstances, which may convey readers and spectators the feeling that this situation is not something that cannot affect them because it

belongs to the supernatural realm, but something that can happen to them at any moment. In this kind of horror there is no longer an enemy on which to focus our attention, either to fight against them or to flee from them: there is simply a grammatical isolation from the environment in addition to an alienation from oneself. For, even though space does not allow me to explain it in this paper, it is reasonable to think that our identity is composed to a great extent of certainties: thus, if someone becomes extricated from such certainties, in a sense they become disengaged even from themselves. As a result, I think that the kind of horror that I have explained in this paper should be considered and further analyzed to better understand the scope as well as the variants that horror can show.

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