

## The Repercussions of Femicides in Ciudad Juárez: Say a Prayer to Santa Muerte

In *The Latino Body: Crisis Identities in American Literary and Cultural Memory*, Lázaro Lima points out that a magazine article written by Charles Bowden and published in *Harper's* in 1996 “noted how the NAFTA boom had made Juárez not only the largest industrial zone in Mexico but also the killing field of the new world order” (163). Hundreds of women have disappeared or been found murdered in Juárez since the early 1990s with no signs of stopping up to the present day. According to *The Washington Post*, “violent crimes against women are such a problem in the region one United Nations official declared in 2015 [that] ‘femicides are a pandemic in Mexico.’” Since these horrible crimes don’t show any signs of ending, it is not surprising that they have had a profound impact on the psyches of contemporary Chicanas/Latinas, and the effects of this impact can be seen in both adult and YA fiction.

In this paper I will explore how the femicides have added a layer of insecurity and fear to the lives of young Chicanas and how the specter of death takes a variety of shapes and invades a variety of spaces in Cynthia Pelayo’s YA novel *Santa Muerte*, winner of the 2014 International Latino Book Award for Best Young Adult Fiction. In *Santa Muerte*, death takes on the both threatening and yet somehow comforting shape of the Grim Reaper/Virgin Mary and is not contained in the desert city of Juárez but instead easily crosses the border and travels as far north as Chicago to threaten the teenage Chicana protagonist and make her fear the familiar streets and buildings of the neighborhoods in which she lives, studies, and works. I will argue that the manifestation of death as a female saint is a way of coping with danger in the world and is in line with other re-imaginings of archetypal Chicana female figures such as La Malinche, the Virgen de Guadalupe, and La Llorona.