

Article

# Lucía Puenzo: Readings from the Margins of a Literary Film Universe

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**Abstract:** The writer and director Lucía Puenzo expresses herself in two different languages: literary prose and cinematographic narrative. Her work is characterised by a single ethical and aesthetic commitment. She highlights sensitive contemporary issues such as identity, gender, sexuality, marginality and the family, but also ethical concerns around eugenics, migration, exclusion and dangerous social elements. The paper looks at the differences between the novels *XXY*, *El niño pez* (*The Fish Child*) and *Wakolda* (*The German Doctor*) and their corresponding films, highlighting Puenzo's stylistic and aesthetic constants. The notion of identity, the notion of family and different historical perspectives and their representations are analysed in her literary works and their subsequent adaptations in films. A comparative analysis of the literary and film texts help us to see how plotlines have been transposed, observing the differences and the reasons for these differences. She keeps her two creative sides separate and makes significant changes as she adapts the literary original to the film script. Her audiovisual approach is to reduce the plotlines and issues shown in the originals. The value of Puenzo's artistic production is making visible characters who are on the edges or are socially marginalised, favouring their acceptance and integration in the society.

**Keywords:** Lucía Puenzo; literature; cinema; comparative literature; animality; identity; gender; otherness



**Citation:** García-Reyes, David, and Marta Gallardo. 2022. Lucía Puenzo: Readings from the Margins of a Literary Film Universe. *Humanities* 11: 40. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h11020040>

Received: 27 December 2021

Accepted: 8 March 2022

Published: 11 March 2022

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## 1. Introduction

In the context not only of Latin America but the whole world, the work of the Argentinian writer and director Lucía Puenzo is stimulating. Puenzo has built her own fictional world, developing a dual literary and film career whose two sides feed into one another. Her commitment to a way of storytelling that is different from mainstream cinema provides a perspective as rich as it is intense, showing us conflicts that range from the transition from childhood to maturity to issues around bioethics and gender.

She was born in Buenos Aires in 1976 and is the daughter of the film director Luis Puenzo. Her academic career is related both with cinema and literature: she has a degree in Literature from the University of Buenos Aires and later studied film at the CEC (Centro de Estudios Cinematográficos), part of the National Institute of Cinema & Audiovisual Arts (INCAA). The CEC was subsequently renamed *ENERC* (*Escuela Nacional de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica*). She began her artistic career after the Argentine economic crisis of 2001, and the social and political implications of this situation have influenced her work.

The relationship between Puenzo's work in literature and film, especially in the adaptations of novels written by her, gives us the opportunity to study the mechanisms of adaptation. She makes significant changes aimed at facilitating the cinematographic narrative. It is not new to find writers who are scriptwriters and who adapt their own novels, sometimes even directing these adaptations. Margarite Duras is the major precedent; like Puenzo, she internalises the language of cinema. Both share the ability to refine the plots, eliminating subplots or even some resources or elements to make the filmic narrative

more dynamic. Other examples can be found in Gonzalo Suárez, David Mamet and Paul Auster and, in Latin America, Mario Vargas Llosa and Fernando Vallejo. Curiously, Puenzo is more famous for her films, although her literature has also met with critical and public acclaim, being included in “The List of the Best of Young Spanish-Language Novelists”, by the literary magazine *Granta* (Major 2010).

As a writer and filmmaker, she stands out for giving shape to these unresolved empty spaces, refusing to box the characters into the conventional framework in “a staging of spaces and sensations with a radical political attitude that is made by expropriating the bodies of the main subjects” (Blanco and Petrus 2011, p. 328). Iser’s theory of Roman Ingarden’s formulation (Iser 1987) defines the concept of empty spaces left by literature as chinks, gaps or elements that are suspended or undefined. Her novels and films do not textualise, explain or specify a resolution to social conventions; undefined areas are suggested or subtly depicted and help readers to build the narrative using their imagination and knowledge.

When adapting the literary text to the film, these empty spaces are either considered by the scriptwriters or are resolved by them, allowing us to discover the meaning or approach. Puenzo uses aesthetics or the plot to introduce elements that try to explain undefined issues that were conflictive or unclarified in the literary narrative.

There are recurrent themes throughout Puenzo’s literary and cinematographic work. Puenzo’s fictional world describes and reveals scenes from the world of childhood and adolescence. Her novels and films show the complex processes of learning and the traumatic journey from childhood to adulthood. In this search for personal identity, children and juveniles are affected by the imposition of an adult world that refuses to accept difference. The hierarchies created by adults become yet another difficulty in the biological and social development of human beings.

Puenzo also focuses on marginality and shows family and existential conflicts that are embedded in the development of her plotlines, spotlighting a world that is much more complex than the binary structures of fiction. Her characters are on the edges, in their animal condition or in their social or racial exclusion, which gives us a complete and enriching perspective of difference. It shows us the liminality of characters that are susceptible to a marginalisation of their bodies and their sexualities and, as Frohlich (2012) said, a confrontation between nature and culture. For Gerard Imbert, the liminal has a recurring space in post-modern cinema: “the ‘experience of thresholds’ enables [ . . . ] to see with greater clarity invisible, hidden or censured aspects of our relationship with the world and with the other, aspects that hinder our access to the truth and communication with the other” (Imbert 2016, p. 103).

Puenzo’s perspective can be categorised as a queer vision, as she destabilises the normative constructions of sexuality and gender (Peidro 2013, p. 85), tackling several types of conflict: parent–child, adolescent, generational, etc. This is related with Judith Butler’s gender theory, which explains that sex is a cultural characteristic (Butler 1989, p. 98) and disputes the biomedical argument.

This research assesses the study of intermediality, posing a critical examination of Puenzo’s characters, which are located on the edges of the social and the legal, being excluded from social conventions and in precarious emotional and material positions. The study focuses on the analysis of identity, the notion of family and the different historical perspectives that are exposed in three of her literary works and their subsequent film adaptations.

Three adaptations have been analysed:

The film *XXY* (Puenzo 2007) adapts “Cynicism”, a story by the writer Sergio Bizzio (her husband) about Álex, an intersexual teenager who lives with her parents in a town on the Uruguayan coast. The family comes from Buenos Aires but decides to move to an environment less hostile to their daughter’s condition. However, her new place of residence makes it difficult for Álex to relate with the world and to live with the discretion and anonymity that her parents would like. This isolation is interrupted when a married

couple (Ramiro and Erika), friends of the parents, and their son (Álvaro), come to visit from Buenos Aires for a weekend with Álex and her family. The paper by [Inter and Alcántara \(2015\)](#) has made it possible to understand the biological reality, together with the social and cultural difficulties that accompany intersexuality.

*The Fish Child* (El Niño Pez, [Puenzo 2009](#)) is Puenzo's second film, transposing to the screen her homonymous novel, her literary debut in ([Puenzo 2004](#)). Lin Guaiyi, also known as La Guayi, is a migrant woman from Paraguay working as a maid in an upper middle-class family with two teenage children (Nacho and Paula, or 'Lala') in a flat in San Isidro (in the province of Buenos Aires). In the novel, Lala's brother is known as 'Pep', in reference to the marihuana 'pepas' (seeds) that he grows, sells and consumes. La Guayi begins a relationship with Lala and the two girls dream of going to Paraguay. The two young people want to live a new life together and escape from a depressive father and a superficial mother who doesn't care about her children.

Finally, *The German Doctor* (Wakolda, [Puenzo 2013](#)) is the filmic interpretation of Puenzo's fifth novel, published in 2011. The film, as distributed globally, is titled *The German doctor*. To distinguish easily between the two while reading this paper, the novel will be referred to as *Wakolda* and the film as *The German Doctor*. Of all her artistic output, this film takes the greatest risks, switching between highly ambiguous situations and components. The film ponders existential questions and deep ethical considerations. Novel and film both fictionalise the escape of the Nazi scientist and criminal Josef Mengele to the Patagonia region. When Mengele meets the couple Eva and Enzo during the summer of 1960, he establishes a strange relationship with the family. Eva and Enzo leave Buenos Aires to reopen a hotel in Bariloche that she has inherited. Eva, with her German roots, spent her childhood there. The couple want to make a life in the southern part of the country with their two children, Tomás and Lilith. Lilith is twelve and has problems with her physical development, seeming "tiny for her age" ([Press Kit 2013](#)). Lilith's growth and Eva's pregnancy with twins arouse the Nazi doctor's scientific interest.

The subjects that crop up in the literary texts and the films range from the nature of animals, social control, the human body as a conflict zone, sexuality, marginality and the family. In addition, Puenzo reflects in her work on ethical concerns around eugenics, migration, exclusion and dangerous social elements. The repressive social control in Puenzo's fiction is reminiscent of Michel Foucault's description of how behaviours that run contrary to the heteronormative structures of disciplinary societies are isolated and repressed.

The approach is taken by the literary texts in the process of identifying Puenzo's authorial action as a director. The different terms used for the techniques to transfer literary into film language include concepts such as "adaptations, transpositions, re-creations, versions, comments, variations, or any number of expressions for the processes through which one artistic medium becomes another, inspires it, develops it, comments on it, etc." ([Sánchez Noriega 2000](#), p. 23). It is important, here, to point out that in the transposition of literature to film there is an act of reading, because "imagery re-invents words, it makes one read again" ([Gimferrer 1999](#), p. 23). Reading the literary text therefore becomes a re-reading, producing a new text in which material has been condensed, content has been lost, sub-plots have been eliminated, characters have been written out and themes omitted, a motivated procedure with the intention of making the film a success.

This research applies a comparative methodology based on preceding theoretical works that are useful to understand the processes involved in adapting literary text to film text. It uses the methodology for the comparative analysis of literature and film drawn up by Carmen [Peña Ardid \(1999\)](#); José Luis [Sánchez Noriega \(2000\)](#); Lauro [Zavala \(2007\)](#); José Antonio [Pérez Bowie \(2008\)](#) and David [García-Reyes \(2019\)](#). These authors belong to the Hispanic American sphere and the research focuses on Latin America in its approach, without wishing to exclude excellent theorists such as André Bazin and Morris Beja. The work identifies differences that allow for a double reading. In this way, we can get to know

the processes of rewriting from literature to cinema and point out the authorial approach of Puenzo.

## 2. *Cynicism and XXY*

In her first feature film, Puenzo describes two family conflicts. The relationship between Álvaro and Álex as adolescents, and the relationships between the parents and their children. *XXY* denounces how sexual difference is considered an anomalous circumstance.

Álex (15 years old) in the film and Rocío (12 years old) in the story are described as injured animals. Rocío, the pre-adolescent girl in Bizzio's tale, is presented as a cynical Lolita with a "very troubling" physical defect (Bizzio 2004, p. 8). Her surname is Kraken, as the giant octopus of Nordic sagas, giving her animal-like connotations. In the book, the father is a sociologist and the mother a homeopathic practitioner; in the film, Álex's father is a biologist who works in a specialist turtle conservation reserve. They want to take Rocío/Álex away from society's ignorance and conservative thinking, but this protectiveness is a double-edged sword, determining Rocío/Álex's ability to interact with the others.

In the adult world of *XXY*, Álex not only lives through the traumas of adolescence. The main character has a marginal status in society, lives in the working-class outskirts of town and is questioned and judged socially for her condition and difference.

In the film, Puenzo uses a more complex fictional space and intensifies the subject of intersexuality and animality. Álex is portrayed as a character with animalistic, monstrous and even mythological characteristics. However, her primary instincts, her erratic behaviour and her ambivalent temperament are to be unsurprising in an adolescent. In this sense, Ana Moraña (2018, p. 34) points out that the characters in the story and in the film share the need to "investigate within themselves, rebel, defend themselves from one another".

Puenzo presents children in opposition to the adult world. Álex lives her intersexuality naturally, as opposed to the anxiety it provokes in her parents. Alex's father is tortured by his daughter's condition and does not believe the system can accept her. When Álex is beaten up by a group of bullies, he decides not to report it because he perceives that law-and-order bodies are accomplices of the authoritarian power and they perpetuate the dominant heteropatriarchal system (Moraña 2018, p. 47).

This is how she presents the idea of marginality, a space of exclusion that existed since adolescence and was amplified by her exceptional genetic circumstances. The filmmaker exposes how puberty can be a cruel period when you don't fit in with the heteronormative context's expectations, giving rise to situations of harassment. Within normative categories, certain clinical pathologies tend to be classified as monstrous. In this sense, Michel Foucault notes that "the monster is something that combines the impossible with the prohibited" (Foucault 2000, p. 61). The perception of some pathologies and the fear of the other contributes to prejudice and ignorance in the collective imagination, so values such as education and respect are necessary in order to trigger a paradigm shift of the heteropatriarchal canons, exploring acceptance and tolerance issues.

Moreover, Fradinger finds that *XXY* gives visibility to crucial aspects about de-pathologising trans- and intersexual people, a situation which has been legislated in Argentina by the Gender Identity law in 2012. Puenzo describes how *XXY* highlights identity issues, considerations that go beyond gender or the binary concepts of the "exo or ectoentity, amphibious nature, amphibian entity" (Fradinger 2016, p. 35). Retrospectively, the film has contributed to the debate and the recognition of intersexual people (Bañuelos Marco 2016).

The natural environment is very present in the film. The seaside resort town in the Uruguayan coast, where the Kraken family lives is a metaphor for isolation and lack of communication, characteristic landscapes in Puenzo's writings and cinema. As Fradinger (2016, p. 360) points out, in the film we see the confrontation between the "biodiversity and extinction of non-human animals on the Uruguayan coast, with the sexual biodiversity of

human animals and their extinction". This concern for environmental abuses is also shown in the TV series *Cromo* (Canal 7, [Puenzo et al. 2015](#)), directed by Nicolás Puenzo, Pablo Fendrik and Lucia Puenzo.

The film's title moves away from the symbolic charge of the idea of cynicism but, like Bizzio's story, takes on the radical thinking of Cynic philosophy, rejecting and questioning conventions and traditional morality and advocating a life closer to nature. Álex lives with Klinefelter syndrome, and the XXY title refers to the intersexual chromosome sequence, introducing the genetics perspective that was only implicit in Bizzio's narrative.

### 3. *The Fish Child*

The encounter between human and non-human animals is explored in *The Fish Child*. Puenzo opts to make the family dog Serafín the narrator of the novel, as was made before by Miguel de [Cervantes \(2016\)](#) in *El coloquio de los perros* (1613) and in *Cecil* by Manuel [Mujica Lainez \(1972\)](#). In this sense, Puenzo assigns human faculties, feelings and thoughts to the animal, as he tells us the story. These human qualities are lost in the film as there is no narrator. In addition, Lala's dog has a supporting role in the audiovisual version, despite its importance at the end of the novel and also of the film.

This relation between human and animals can be seen in the hybrid condition of *The Fish Child*, the new-born son of Guayi, the protagonist. In the novel and in the film, she confesses to Lala that she drowns him in the lake because he was at death's door; she hoped that he would survive thanks to the divinity of the lake, also mitigating her guilt for his murder. This is how the *Fish Child* becomes mythological, having an animal and human duality.

The domestic space occupied by Guayi and her grandfather in the novel is next to a lake. In contrast to this, Guayi's house in the film is surrounded by humble homes far from the natural environment. The book places it on the banks of the famous blue lake of Ypacarai, an allusion to the Guaraní myth of *The Fish Child* (*mita'i pira* in Guaraní), instead of Ypoá lake, where the film is shot. This myth refers to a *mita'i pira* who, as [Frohlich \(2012\)](#) points out, takes drowned children to the bottom of the lake. This fact does not appear as a myth in the film, indicating an important difference with the novel. However, Lala dreams about finding herself in the lake with *the fish child*, an oneiric evocation of loss related with the absence of Guayi.

Practical changes and simplifications make the film's narration more conventional and predictable than the book. However, the narrative is structured as a transposition of the original with successive flashbacks, in contrast with the novel's linear storyline.

The main difference between the novel and the film is related to the indigenous identity. Issues around Guaraní culture in the novel (the lake house, songs, the language . . . ) and also the animal nature of literary characters ([González 2011](#), p. 198) are suppressed in the film, giving us an uniform vision of Paraguay. This topic is very noticeable because, in the novel, the Guaranís have an outstanding presence.

What doesn't change is the way in which Lala and Guayi form their own family: stealing a number of objects from the house and selling them. Guayi and Lala, apparently strong characters, are actually very vulnerable: both come from broken homes and have suffered a number of traumatic events in their lives. Their social backgrounds are very different, but both aspire to make their way in a hostile world or at least create a world for themselves that is unfettered by rules. The two young women's dream is to share a house near a lake, in Paraguay. On screen, the romantic relationship between Lala and Guayi is as complicated as it is unbelievable because of the lack of chemistry between the two actresses playing the leading parts. In this sense, the homosexual love in the novel is more harmonious.

In the novel, Guayi starts a relationship with Pancho and they are given the chance to become actors, but the only one to accept is Pancho, who leaves the village and becomes Sócrates Espina, a leading man in soap operas. In the film, Sócrates Espina is Guayi's father, who gets her pregnant. On the other hand, Lala feels that she is competing with Brontë,

Lala's father (a writer in the book and a judge in the film), for Guayi's affection. In the film, the ambiguity around the death of Brontë is a moral condemnation of the protagonist. He had sex with Guayi, so Lala poisons him. In the novel, Lala's father is obese, and both in the novel and in the film he is a depressive man, despised by his family. He has a sexual interest in Guayi, but in the novel what Brontë is really seeking is his own death, or at least to put an end to the boredom and frustration he complains about. In the film, this father/daughter face-off is more important, related with the chase of and love for Guayi.

From all the above, it can be said that the film is a reductive adaptation that eliminates some of the greatest creative virtues and revelations of the literary original, and it seems that Puenzo censors herself creatively when she transposes it onto the screen.

#### 4. *Wakolda and The German Doctor*

*Wakolda* (Puenzo 2011) also deals with animal themes and family conflicts. These are the main topics of the fifth novel published by Puenzo and of its adaptation.

The story tells us about an Argentinian family that migrates from Buenos Aires to Bariloche in 1960 and their meeting with the Nazi criminal Josef Mengele, who has been hiding out in South America for decades. He lived as a fugitive in South America, dying by drowning off a Brazilian beach in 1979. His death was not acknowledged until several years later.

In *Wakolda*, Puenzo describes family conflicts deriving from the pressure of external characters: a strange and seductive man, Helmut Grigor, who changes the status quo of the family relationship, and the Mapuche family who seeks Lilith's doll.

Lilith is a girl with growth problems who arouses the curiosity of the veterinarian Grigor, a sociopath, megalomaniac and egomaniac who hides behind Mengele's identity. Here the Nazi supremacism has an analogy with Argentine's national construction (Hogan 2018, p. 246); just as Mengele and the Third Reich (1933–1945) sought Aryan racial purity through genocide, the Argentinian military campaigns of the Conquest of the Desert (1878–1885) were colonising expeditions that massacred tens of thousands of natives.

Lilith is 12 years old, but she looks 8, and he wants to turn her into a "standard" child. To do so, he gives her animal growth hormones as if he were playing God, like Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein. Her mother, Eva, allows Mengele to experiment on her body, in her search for social approval (Heffes and Bertone 2015, p. 134).

Eva inherits a hotel in Bariloche, so they move there to manage it. On the journey, Lilith gives her porcelain doll (Herlitzka) to Ailín's (in the novel, Yanka), a 15-year old Mapuche girl who is pregnant. In exchange, Ailín/Yanka gives to Lilith her rag doll, *Wakolda*. During the trip she meets the German doctor who, as a geneticist, displays a rather obsessive interest in both the doll and in Lilith's physical growth problem. Grigor has no scruples about using Lilith, but also the twins that Eva is expecting as objects for study, in order to apply genetic experiments and eugenics practices, as Mengele did during his criminal experiments in the Auschwitz II-Birkenau death camp.

Enzo, Lilith's father, makes dolls and Mengele becomes his partner. He wants to create a miniaturised model of serial human production (Heffes and Bertone 2015, p. 133). The dolls are a metaphor of the racial perfection that he seeks; an issue that is not impossible if one considers the current cold technology-driven medical industry of reproductive treatment and fertility centres (Braidotti 2000, p. 100), or even other medicalised intervention procedures; assisted reproduction processes have essentially confirmed that humans' feral nature has been suspended (Agamben 2005, p. 146), a state of exception, ruled by technicality, where reproduction and human nature are modified. This idea of the medicalised or intervened body can also be found in *XXY*, linking the perfect dolls of Enzo and Mengele with the dolls that are mutilated by Álex, a metaphor of the biomedical normalisation of "defective" human beings.

Thus, *Wakolda* raises questions about social control using eugenics and genetic experimentation as a means of achieving racial purity. "It is no small thing that a fanatic like Mengele should end up in a mongrel country, with all sorts of different mixtures in our

blood and our genes. Many of his studies, unbridled and perverse as they were and share points of contact with the principal discoveries of current genetics" (Press Kit 2013).

The film follows the same narrative line as the novel, but Puenzo reduces the racial conflict and confrontation to the native elements, represented by the Mapuche family and Mengele's longing to preserve Arian racial purity. Puenzo's strategy concentrates this polarisation in the person of Enzo, who has Jewish origins. The film focuses solely on Mengele's supremacist obsessions to create a superior race. Therefore, to a large extent, the film suppresses the esoteric nature and inclusion of the Mapuche characters in the book, which are fundamental aspects of the novel but are simplified here in the doll's Mapuche name (Wakolda is the name of the wife of the Mapuche leader Lautaro/Leftraro). The racial characteristics of the doll are not observed in the film and neither is the family Mapuche, making the film more global and preventing the viewer from getting lost in complex issues. However, the genetic dilemma and reflections on eugenics do not vary; they are very present in both book and film, showing the persecution of difference, with a certain link to isolation, as was the case in *XXY*.

Puenzo also uses Biblical nomenclature allusively in names such as Eve, Adam's wife in the Old Testament, and Lilith, Adam's first wife according to Mesopotamian legend, who abandoned Eden to sleep with demons and become one of them; in addition, the name of Josef (Mengele) may even refer to the putative father of Jesus Christ. This fact reflects the Judeo-Christian origin and tradition of the characters (Puenzo 2011, p. 21).

## 5. Common Spaces

We can say that the topics Puenzo deals with include relationships between adolescents and adults, cultural and romantic confrontations and problems within family life. These are in addition to issues such as intersexuality, genetic experimentation, homosexual love and the portrayal of animal qualities as a characterisation of individuals with an ambiguous gender otherness (Álex in *XXY*), actually converted into animals (*The Fish Child*), and human beings treated as cattle in the hands of a perverse Nazi war criminal (*Wakolda*).

Puenzo puts on the table the debate around non-heteronormative relationships. She displays human realities without categorising them: love and desire are not expressed in hierarchies based on heteronormative precepts. In *XXY*, Álvaro is driven to a relationship with Álex out of desire and in *The Fish Child* amour fou is what pushes Lala to have a romantic relationship with Guayi. Neither in literature nor in films does Puenzo fall into the trap of reductionist descriptions. The analysis of gender in Puenzo's works call into the question the binary system and the heteropatriarchy. She shows characters that are excluded because of their sexual or physical condition, defending the diversity of desire. This desire arises in childhood and is contrary to educational or medical doctrines that punish difference. On the other hand, most of the male characters show patriarchal structures and social privileges linked to their gender; however, this hegemony is subsequently displaced (Kokalov 2015, p. 182).

From normative and social perspectives, her characters' behaviour may be seen as reprehensible. Puenzo's key characters are removed from the norm. They could be considered as "abnormal" within the nineteenth century definitions described by Foucault. This categorisation influences the degrees of exclusion from the binary mindset (Calafell 2014, p. 56). This is personified in characters such as Ramiro (who in Bizzio's story is called Muhabid Jasan and is an artist), a plastic surgeon and Álvaro's father in *XXY*, and Felicitas, Lala's aunt in *The Fish Child*. Both are narcissists, with little capacity for empathy, with their own agendas and unaware of the situations their nearest and dearest are suffering.

In this way, she shows borderline individuals who are on the social and sexual peripheries. Marginality originates due to their genetic condition or their sexuality but is also derived from the social classes or the criminal activities carried out. From the edges (Frohlich 2012; Donoso and González 2013, p. 723), she represents the identity and sexual multiplicity through its characters (Peidro 2013, p. 88).

In addition, the animal fact is a determining factor. Alex's pathology has a hybrid and mythological character. The dog Serafín in *The Fish Child* has human qualities in the novel, and the legend of the fish child is also a representation of animality. Even Mengele's supremacism is also a way of treating people as cattle or human guinea pigs.

The idea of escape is very present in all the main characters. It allows them to go to a place where they won't be singled out and where they could live their sexuality or their nature freely. It also makes it easier to escape persecutors. In the case of Mengele, this is very significant, since his life is a permanent runaway. In *The Fish Child* the lake is a sort of promised land for Lala and Guayi, as opposed to Buenos Aires, where their sentimental relationship is persecuted. Enzo and his family also look for new opportunities in Bariloche.

What is more, in her novels, Puenzo has shown sensitivity for those in the minority. The writer's literary spectrum has helped her give voice to sexual, social and ethnic minorities. We see this in her novels *The Fish Child* and *Wakolda*, which ask anthropological and linguistic questions. In *The Fish Child*, Guaraní culture and language are very present. Furthermore, we should underline the importance of the Mapuche characters and names in the Mapudungún language in *Wakolda's* version. As previously stated, the novel highlights the Mapuche representation, while the film focuses on the figure of Mengele (Hogan 2018, p. 246). Moreover, in *The Fish Child* (film) the Guaraní component is limited to the anecdotal and even folkloric when Guayi sings the lullaby (Cisneros 2013, p. 57). These gaps are made more noticeable by the elimination of the character of Guayi's grandfather, who educates her in the Guaraní culture and is hugely important in the book. Thus, the writer's creative willingness to show the otherness of South America's original peoples contrasts with the omission in her films, displaying a very superficial ethnicity, although this may be involuntary. However, according to Iser's description, this negation denotes the concealment of a known learning, questioning its validity, dismembering and transforming the material in an interpretation of the "the repertoire's selective norms" (Iser 1987, p. 131), together with the characters and the narrative action. This characteristic in transpositions from book to screen may be due to a symptom of creative insecurity or self-censorship in the search for a more homogeneous on-screen public. It may also be the case that ethnic content is excluded because Puenzo believes that anthropological matters could disrupt the storytelling in her films. Moreover, the visualisation of the scenes allows for the omission of detailed descriptions or characters' inner reflections. She handles the codes of adaptation and economises on means, prioritising a classical and linear narrative over some experimental characteristics of her literary work. Nevertheless, Puenzo retains in the audiovisual version many of the unresolved issues of the literary narrative, preserving, for example, those empty spaces she has created in her novels.

Furthermore, in *XXY* and *The Fish Child*, Puenzo shows us situations without clarifying the political context in which her characters are living, but it can be seen how the "social machinery and its almost imperceptible cogs and wheels" operate (Aguilar 2006, p. 31). For example, in *The Fish Child* (the novel) the character of Rocho, a classmate of Lala's, is the son of the latest Minister of the Economy, who "had brought the nation to its knees".

In this regard, it is noteworthy that Puenzo connects with other contemporary artists. She shares aesthetic, thematic and ethical interests with other Latin American authors, such as Sergio Bizzio. In cinema, the way she shows the otherness is similar to that of directors such as Claudia Llosa and Lucrecia Martel.

## 6. Conclusions

The article offers a panoramic view of three common thematic issues in Puenzo's literature and cinema. Her films and literature manifest a clear concept of resistance, normalising the hybrid, the mongrel and the different. She talks about the family institution and the figure of the father (Punte 2012), but above all emphasises the non-normative. At the same time, she is critical of the past and present of Argentina's history. In the three films, she describes and denounces the violence of patriarchy, a practice exercised over time that expropriated

bodies and territories (Punte 2012). For Puenzo, the human body is an object of permanent conflict, a search for identity that ranges from sexuality to ethnicity. Therefore, mutations or changes that occur in human beings who are outside the norm are recurring themes; a creative strategy that asks questions about evolutionary Darwinism, but also reflects on social Darwinism (Heffes and Bertone 2015, pp. 135–36). Alex’s intersexuality, the cloning in *The Fish Child* (the novel) and Lilith’s growth disorder in *Wakolda* are examples analysed in this work. The conflicts that these situations create and the nature of the characters contribute to the development of the drama in Puenzo’s fictions.

In this context, the value of Puenzo’s artistic production is making visible characters who are on the edges or are socially marginalised, favouring the integration, acceptance and growth of adolescent people who can find themselves in a similar situation (Spivak 2015, p. 838). Puenzo gives voice to difference and denounces the abuses of social conventions, showing how poverty is criminalised and subjectivities persecuted (Punte 2012).

In her production, we can find literary elements in her cinema and filmic elements in her novels. However, the realism of her film work contrast with her literature, which has more experimental concerns and more complex stories. The narrative strategy of Puenzo’s cinema is more conventional than in her literary output. She is aware that she must filter her literary original for her filmic discourse. In her films, Puenzo seeks to enhance silences and glances; this is explained with her words “there is something like a cesspool: what you absorb in life filters the writing. You become a hunter of images and lines of dialogue” (Carbonari 2010). When Puenzo adapts a literary text, she does it with a marked cinematographic sense. Puenzo refines the literary text in the form of a film script. In *XXY*, she increases the content of the narrative and in *The Fish Child* and *Wakolda* she selects what she chooses for the film adaptation, what she considers fundamental in her novels. As a result, her films do not surpass the uniqueness of her novels, which stand out for not conforming to social conventions.

As a filmmaker, Lucía Puenzo moves away from her Latin American writer status and tackles the process of adaptation, whether the works of others or her own, in a transnational context. Even though Puenzo’s literature is part of a globalised culture, at the same time it also belongs to the contemporary trends of Latin American literature. The three films analysed here are coproductions with Europe, a symptom of Argentinian cinema’s need to find financial resources to produce its films and to achieve greater distribution and awareness in the international film market. She makes art films that are free of commercial impositions and are an example of a peripheral approach, showing different ethical and aesthetic proposals without sacrificing having a broad audience, giving a very different look at the complex issues we face today.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualisation, D.G.-R. and M.G.; methodology, D.G.-R.; writing—original draft preparation, D.G.-R. and M.G.; writing—review and editing, D.G.-R. and M.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the Spanish National Research Project “DENSSCE96-11: Desplazamientos, emergencias y nuevos sujetos sociales en el cine español (1996–2011)”.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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