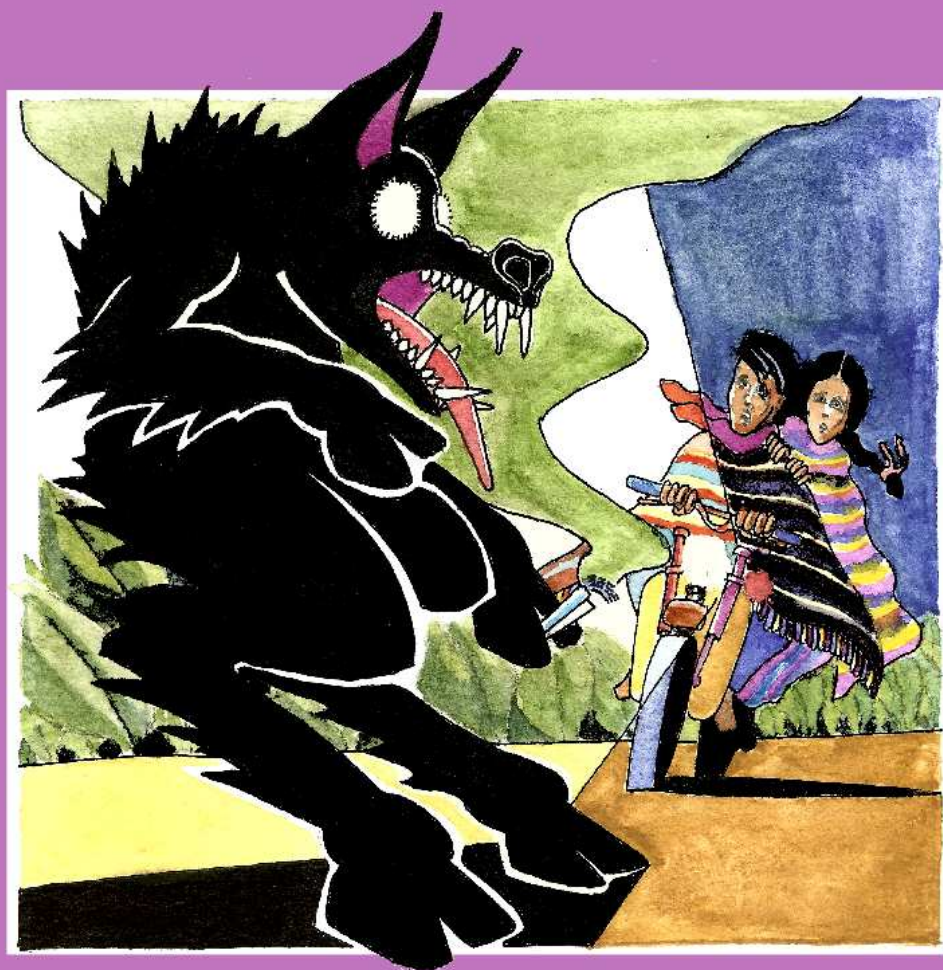


Phantom Black Dogs

in Latin America



Simon Burchell

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Heart of Albion

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Simon Burchell

Illustrations and cover illustration by Ian Brown.

ISBN 978-1-905646-01-2

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Published by:

Heart of Albion Press
113 High Street, Avebury
Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 1RF

albion@indigogroup.co.uk

Visit our Web site: www.hoap.co.uk

Acknowledgements

I would especially like to thank Margarita Hernández and Martha Isabel Arana for supplying me with additional details regarding Black Dog encounters in Mexico and Nicaragua respectively. I would also like to thank my long-suffering wife, Priscila Rodriguez Herrera de Burchell, for putting up with an avalanche of books and papers, long silences and occasional bizarre questions on the finer points of the interpretation of obscure Spanish words.

A note on geography and language

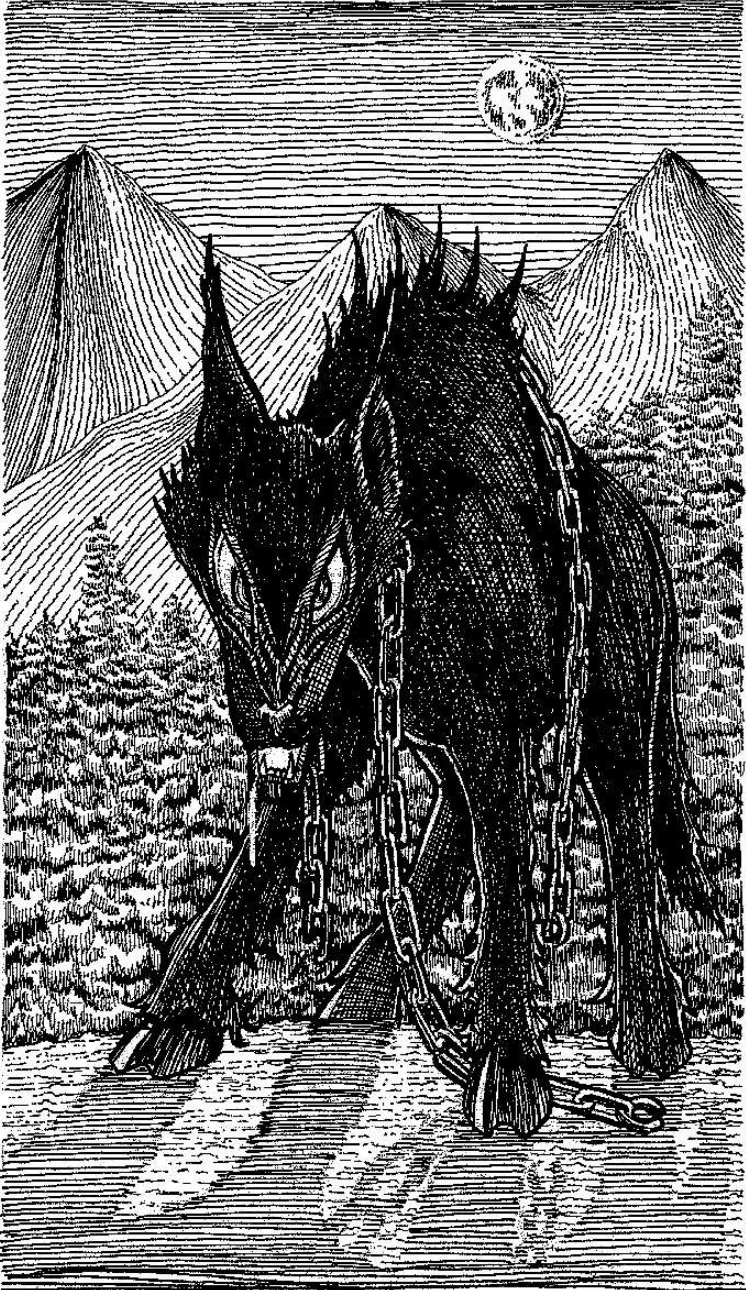
Since Latin American geography is seen as rather obscure in Britain, it might be useful to clarify a few terms. Mexico is the only Latin country located on the North American continent, notwithstanding the fact that many English speakers would place it in Central America, or even in South America. Central America includes everything from Guatemala south and east to Panama, also including Belize (a non-Latin country not covered in this work), Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. South America includes everything else: Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname and Brazil are also in South America but do not have Spanish as their principal language.

Spanish is the most widely spoken language in the New World. It is the official language of sixteen countries on the mainland (of which I briefly touch on about two-thirds) and several Caribbean states. Large Spanish speaking communities live in Canada, the US, Belize and other non-Spanish speaking countries.

There is an enormous amount of folklore that has never been translated into English. In fact, there are many indigenous groups that have been poorly studied even in Spanish, and some languages that are improperly recorded. For a brief time, I studied K'iche' (a Maya language) at the University of San Carlos in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, and scholars were still arguing about how it should be written down. This is leaving aside those countries in Central and South America that were colonised by other European powers; the Dutch, French and Portuguese. To put it simply, the language barriers are enormous, but for anyone with the right language skills, Latin America is a gold mine for folklorists and fortune tellers alike.

A note on translations

All the material here is based on original Spanish-language sources using my own translations into English. On the rare occasion when an alternative English language text has been available, I have preferred my own translation of the original Spanish. The Spanish of Latin America is very diverse, and the same word may vary significantly in meaning from one country to another. Any errors or misinterpretations are therefore my own.



Phantom Black Dogs in Latin America

The cobbled streets are deserted, and night has drawn a veil over the surrounding volcanoes. The Spanish Colonial architecture is lit here and there by isolated street lamps. The air is warm, heavy with the scent of flowers, with just a hint of the chill to come in the early hours of the morning. A lone person returns home along the street, staggering just slightly under the influence of alcohol. He hears a clatter of hooves from a nearby alley and looks up in surprise. Two fiery red disks glare at him malevolently from the shadows, and the darkness seems to congeal into a black mass that slinks forward into the dim light of the nearest street lamp. It is revealed as an enormous black dog with long shaggy fur hanging in matted tangles, its legs terminating in the cloven hooves of a goat. Its eyes burn furiously like the fires of Hell, and flames flicker from its muzzle as it draws nearer. A heavy chain drags over the cobbles, hanging from the unnatural beast's neck. The lonely traveller is not so drunk as to forget what his grandfather told him, he draws his dagger from his belt and carves the sign of the cross into the air whilst uttering a quick prayer. The sinister shape lets out an angry, blood-chilling howl and dissolves into the shadows from whence it came.

This is the typical black dog in Latin American folklore, and the description above would be recognised as either an incarnation of the Devil or a shape-changing sorcerer from Mexico to Argentina, although it would be called by widely differing names. In Mexico it would be the *Nahual* or *Huay Chivo*, in most of Central America it would be the *Cadejo*. In Colombia it is the *Carbunco*, in Ecuador *Allcusacra*, in Argentina it may be the *Familiar* or the *Lobisón*. In many places it is simply the *Perro Negro*, the Black Dog, but it is almost universally regarded as evil.

On my first visit to Guatemala early in 1999, I soon became aware of the more well-known supernatural beings that are said to haunt the streets and

fields of the small republic (Guatemala is roughly two-thirds the size of England). I was delighted to learn that the Black Dog that is so familiar from British folklore had a closely-related Latin American cousin.

Since then, I have spent three years living in the highlands of western Guatemala and have travelled widely in the region. I have learnt a great deal about Central American and Mexican folklore, and heard, firsthand, tales of a variety of supernatural beings such as the Llorona, the Siguanaba, San Simón, ghosts and magical animals. Unfortunately, I have not heard a single account of the Black Dog. The urban population is aware of the legend but it seems more largely confined to the capital and the thoroughly Latinised lowlands of the country rather than the Highlands, where I settled among a healthy mix of *Ladinos* (people who belong to the dominant Latin culture) and *Indígenas* (Indians of various Maya groups).

The Cadejo

Fortunately, the outstanding Guatemalan folklorist Celso A. Lara Figueroa has documented many of the Ladino legends of Guatemala thoroughly. In the words of one of his informants, the Cadejo (pronounced 'cad-EY-ho') 'is an animal in the form of a black dog, shaggy, with goats' hooves and fiery eyes' (*'es un animal en forma de perro negro, lanudo, con casquitos de cabra y ojos de fuego'*; Lara Figueroa 1996 :71). This apparition would not be so out of place in the British Isles, given that in 1780 Samuel Drew 'heard a noise like a clatter of hoofs, and saw an animal like a bear or dog, with glowing eyes' (Harte 2005a: 13).

The word *cadejo* is of Spanish origin, Lara Figueroa suggests that it derives from *cadillo* or *cadejillo* which means 'lock of tangled hair', 'tangle' or 'braiding', presumably referring to its shaggy appearance. It apparently underwent a change of suffix with its base in the naming of animals such as the rabbit (*conejo* in Spanish) (Lara Figueroa 1996: 78). It can be said that *cadejo* is, literally, the Latin American version of the names *shock*, *shuck* and *shag* of England that Jennifer Westwood suggests may be derived from the Black Dog's shaggy hair (Westwood 2005). In fact, a modern Spanish dictionary gives the word *cadejo* a secondary meaning as a 'tangled knot of hair' (anon. 1998: 124). Popular etymology for the word has suggested an alternative origin, that it derives from the chain which sometimes hangs around the creature's neck, *cadena* in Spanish, although this is unlikely.

Lara Figueroa, specifically referring to the Black Dog/Cadejo legend as it exists in Guatemala City, views it as a largely harmless, protective spirit

that watches over those overcome by drunkenness. This is a selective interpretation, however, as it is at odds with some of the accounts that he gives in his books although he does identify three main variants. The aforementioned version is apparently that most commonly told in Guatemala's capital. In another variant it is evil and attacks the people that it follows, while the final version refers to it as a benevolent spirit that protects the defenceless (Lara Figueroa 1996: 73).

An account which has become a classic is that which was related to Lara Figueroa by Rolando Marroquín, a 29-year-old secondary school inspector from the Santa Catarina district of Guatemala City in November 1967 which would probably place the events sometime between 1910 and 1920. It has appeared on numerous Central American Web sites and seems to have taken on a life of its own, often being extended and told in the first person.

Marroquín recounted how one night when he was a student, his grandfather had an encounter with the Cadejo when he was returning home to the Callejón de Huerfanas from the Cerrito del Carmen district of Guatemala City (a neighbourhood which appears to have a strong Black Dog tradition, since it recurs in various other tales of the Cadejo). He and his friends were making their way home, one by one going their different ways. They were passing the paddock of Corona, near the Isabel la Católica park, when an enormous fiery-eyed black dog, with goat's hooves instead of paws, appeared and began to follow them. The boys speeded up their pace but the Black Dog continued hard on their heels, until only his grandfather and one friend remained. When they got to his last remaining friend's house in the Callejón de Dolores they were both exhausted and entered together. The dog tried to force its way under the door until his friend's mother went out and made the sign of the cross with a crucifix, at which the Black Dog disappeared (Lara Figueroa 1996: 136). This Guatemalan Black Dog can hardly be said to be protective, it clearly terrified the boys and the actions of the friend's mother reveal that she believed it to be evil. Indeed, its aversion to the cross *shows* it to be evil. For, in a strongly Christian society, what kind of spirit would flee from the cross?

A torn jacket

Another informant from Guatemala City, a 54-year old archivist named Augusto Caravantes, told Lara Figueroa how one day when he was walking past a cemetery 'a great black shaggy dog' appeared and threw him to the ground. It tore his jacket, which he kept to prove to people that he was not

a liar (Lara Figueroa 1996: 136). This is not the most convincing of cases, is briefly told and may well refer to a vicious street dog rather than the Black Dog of folklore. However, Caravantes clearly believed he had been assaulted by a supernatural being.

Eyes like tortillas

From Palencia, some 15 km east of Guatemala City, comes the story of a man who was returning home one dark night after a heavy downpour. It is undated but the tale should probably be placed in the first half of the twentieth century. He was walking down a hill in order to cross a bridge over a small river. In the middle of the bridge, the Cadejo appeared. At first it was the size of a small dog but when he next looked it had grown to the size of a lion. It opened its huge mouth, revealing enormous fangs and a huge tongue. It seemed to be tobacco-coloured and had eyes the size of tortillas. Since Guatemalan tortillas are roughly 10 cm across, this would be the equivalent of saying it had the classic 'eyes like saucers'. It attacked the informant who fought it off with a machete, striking it three times on its back. During the struggle it suddenly disappeared. When the shaken man calmed down he looked around and saw that the animal had reappeared sitting in a pool of water near the bridge. He continued on his way unmolested by the Black Dog (Lara Figueroa 1997: 62–3).

Cadejo under the bed

From the sugar plantations of Escuintla, Guatemala, comes the following tale that happened on a plantation called Los Tarros, near Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa. This is an area that I know, having hiked across a neighbouring plantation to view some archaeological remains. The plantations are on the sweltering Pacific coastal plain, an area of low foothills rising to the towering mass of the Sierra Madre, dominated by a spectacular chain of volcanoes in various states of activity. The air in the whole area reeks of burnt sugar from the many refineries.

Rafael Paredes, a 45-year old farmer, said that the following events had happened to his colleague when he was a boy, probably placing it in the 1950s or earlier. The lad had been playing with some friends in an area above the fields of a plantation and it was already dark when he went home. On the way, he had to cross a bridge over an irrigation ditch. In the middle of the bridge he saw two great burning lights, like the eyes of an animal. He realised it was the Cadejo looking at him and decided to throw some stones at it. The Cadejo attacked him, so he used his hat to cover its face, gaining enough time to cross the bridge. He ran home with the

Cadejo in pursuit. Afterwards the Cadejo used to appear below the boy's bed after dark, watching him. Rafael finished by saying that the Cadejo is an evil spirit that reads a person's thoughts in order to overcome him (Lara Figueroa 1997: 63–4).

The Cadejo in Guatemalan literature

Perhaps the two most well-known accounts that have most maintained the Cadejo in the public consciousness are those by two Guatemalan authors; Nobel prize winning author Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974) and writer and journalist Francisco Barnoya Gálvez (1906–1975). Asturias wrote a short 'Legend of the Cadejo' that describes it as 'a large animal – twice the size of a ram during the full moon, the size of a weeping willow during the new moon – with a goat's hooves, a rabbit's ears and the face of a bat' (Asturias 1979). Barnoya Gálvez describes it as 'big, with the hairy body of a goat, a bull's horns, eyes like those of a wildcat that spit fire, the tail of a lion, a frothing mouth and it follows you with its thoughts' (Barnoya Gálvez 1999). Neither of these accurately reflect its appearance in the public consciousness as a Black Dog with a goat's hooves.

Hair of the dog

Héctor Gaitán is a well-known Guatemalan broadcaster and writer who produces a regular radio show *La Calle Donde Tú Vives* ('The Street Where You Live') that dramatically relates ghost stories that his listeners have sent in. He has published a series of books with the same title, containing a mixture of ghost stories, folklore and Guatemalan history. Although completely unreferenced, in his first collection he relates the tale of a mule driver who was drinking with his employees in the previously mentioned Cerrito del Carmen area of Guatemala City when he caught one of his workers pretending to drink while secretly pouring the liquor away. The mule driver, named as Ceferino Escobar, furiously reprimanded his subordinate, Tiburcio, who defended himself by claiming that he did not drink because whenever he got drunk he would see the Cadejo. When his boss mocked him, Tiburcio challenged him to get drunk with him. The two became completely inebriated and staggered off to take a siesta. A short distance from the bar they both passed out beneath a palm tree. Night set in and Tiburcio awoke to hear far off the claws of a dog striking the cobbles, gradually getting closer. At the same time he saw two glowing balls of fire that gradually grew in size as they got nearer. Terrified, he tried to awaken his boss without success. The dogs claws striking the ground now sounded like a goat's hooves. There in front of him 'was an animal that looked like a dog with burning eyes, crouched to attack'. Terrified and

with his head still spinning, he passed out. The two awoke early the next morning with their clothes torn to rags. They were beneath a tree beside one of the principal streets of the district without knowing how they had gotten there. Both feeling rather ill, they hit another bar to drink away their hangovers, wondering what had happened in the night. When Ceferino counted his mules, one was missing so they both returned to the Cerrito del Carmen to look for it. They found it tied up nearby and a local man told them 'You should thank me for finding it. Last night a madman was on the loose with his machete attacking anyone he could find. They say that he would have killed two people sleeping under a palm tree if it weren't for their dog guarding them'. After that, we are told, Ceferino Escobar never mocked his workers' beliefs again (Gaitán 1981: 108–12).

Black Dog for sale

Also from the Cerrito del Carmen district of Guatemala City comes the story, told by Hector Gaitán, about Delfino Galicia, who had become an alcoholic and sunken to the status of a beggar, wandering the district in rags trying to collect enough money to buy his next drink. One day in 1925 he staggered to the junction of the Cuarta Calle (Fourth Street) and the Callejón del Fino where he passed out. When he awoke it was nearly midnight and the streets were deserted. Still drunk, he stood up with difficulty and noticed that an enormous shaggy black dog had been sprawled out at his side. The dog followed him as he staggered back to his nearby shack. Although the streets were very dark, the fiery eyes of the Black Dog lit his way like burning torches. The Black Dog accompanied him all the way home, its paws sounding more like a horse's hooves. The Black Dog took to accompanying the beggar regularly, until one day he was so desperate for money to buy a drink that he decided to sell this dog that followed him everywhere. He went to a merchant that bought and sold animals for the plantations and ranches and tried to sell it to him but the merchant could not see it and told him that he was hallucinating. It was only then that Delfino realised that he was the only one that could see the Black Dog. One day the beggar was found dead and the people realised that the invisible dog that he had often called out too must have been the Cadejo (Gaitán 1995: 13–14).

Surely the Devil took him

Another tale was related to Lara Figueroa by a 60 year old lady, Juana Pérez, who told how her father used to have a friend called Reginaldo. He lived in Ciudad Vieja and used to regularly walk 5 km to Antigua, both towns being old colonial capitals of Guatemala, in order to see his

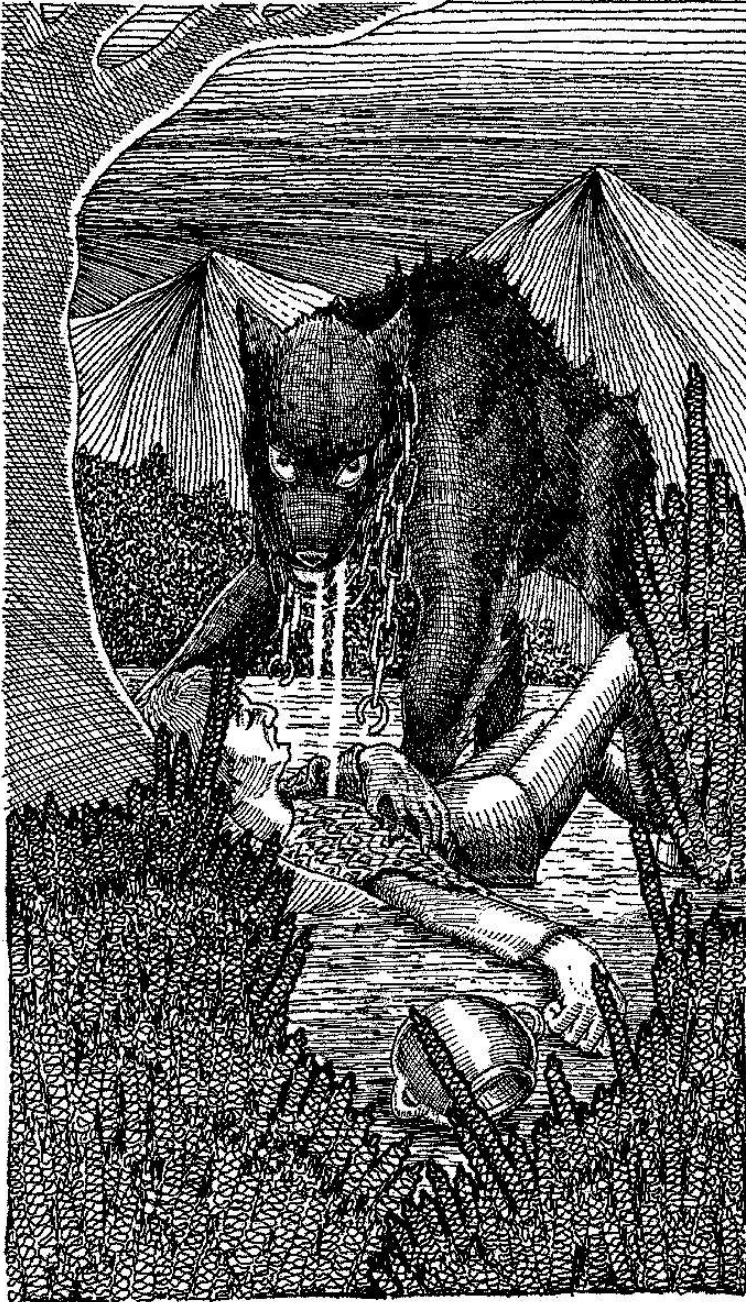
girlfriend. He would frequently come back late at night. The roads were dangerous after dark (and still are), with many murders and robberies. He ignored warnings against travelling so late because a Black Dog always accompanied him, allaying his fears. He used to see many thieves on the road but they rarely did anything because of his supernatural companion. One night three men attacked him but the Black Dog fought them off. Another night he came back very drunk and he collapsed at the roadside but the Black Dog stayed with him and watched over him. Night after night it left him at his house but one day the man died and, in the words of Juana 'surely the Devil took him, because you know as well as I that the Cadejo is the Devil.' (Lara Figueroa 1997: 46–7). This may be compared with tales from Britain of Black Dogs that accompany travellers to protect them from villains on the road (Harte 2005a: 18), although in this case it only saved the nocturnal traveller for its own nefarious ends.

Kiss of death

In some accounts, if the Cadejo finds an unconscious drunk, it licks his mouth, and then follows him for nine days. In this case the drunk never recovers, eventually dying of alcoholism, his soul being taken by the Cadejo, 'the Devil himself'. Returning to Lara Figueroa, a hotdog seller from Guatemala City told how a man identified only as José had been out drinking all night with friends in an area called Cinco Calles (Five Streets) until he passed out beneath a tree. Around dawn he awoke with a terrible hangover to find a goat-hoofed shaggy black dog beside him that licked his mouth. José got up and staggered off with the Black Dog following him. Some men attempted to waylay the recovering drunkard but the Black Dog defended him and followed him to his home, leaving him alive and well at his front door. The Black Dog followed him every night for nine nights and José eventually died from his alcoholism. There is the clear implication that this was due to the Black Dog licking his mouth (Lara Figueroa 1996: 139).

The Cadejo is also invoked in magical practices still common in Guatemala. A 'Prayer of the Cadejo' asks for the Cadejo to convert the petitioner into 'a tree or whatever other object' in order to escape punishment by the authorities for any evils committed by them (Bremmé de Santos 1967: 81).

Lara Figueroa was of the opinion that the Cadejo legend is a *ladino* legend that is only found among the Hispanic population of Guatemala rather than the many indigenous Maya of the Guatemalan highlands. In addition to the preceding accounts, I have found that the legend is recorded as



being found in the Santa Rosa department of lowland Guatemala, in San Juan Tecuaco and in Guazacapán. It is doubtless common throughout the thoroughly Hispanicised lowlands of southern Guatemala, although in my experience, the educated urban Maya of the highlands are certainly aware of the legend, as a result of its ample portrayal in Guatemalan literature.

Devil at the crossroads

Intriguingly, the Black Dog *is* found among the native Maya, although it is not identified as the Cadejo as among the *ladinos*. We leave the stifling Pacific plain for San Sebastian, Tejutla in the shadow of the highest volcano in Central America, Volcan Tajumulco, in the department of San Marcos in the western Guatemalan highlands close to the border with Mexico. In 1975, Virgilia Pojoy, a 19-year old Maya girl who had moved to Guatemala City, told the folklorist Aida Diaz Paniagua the following tale. One evening after nightfall she and her sister were sent on an errand by their mother. When they came to a crossroads a black dog-sized animal with burning eyes appeared and would not let them pass. The two terrified girls decided to return home, walking backwards because they were afraid to turn their backs on the animal. Virgilia fell over and when she got up the animal had disappeared... or rather it had turned into a white mass that 'walked' along beside them. The terrified girl had no memory of what happened next, just that when she came to her senses she was back at home (Lara Figueroa 1997: 52–3).

Her account is particularly fascinating because here we have a Black Dog appearing to a modern Maya girl in a way that closely parallels historical accounts from Britain, such as the account from Uplyme in 1856 of a Black Dog that seemed to 'swell into a large cloud' before vanishing into thin air (McEwan 1986: 134) or the nineteenth century account of Sally Dransfield of Swillington, Yorkshire who saw a dog 'rolling like a pack of wool' and changing its shape, among others (Harte 2005b: 111).

In some of the preceding Guatemalan accounts the fact that the Black Dog appears on a bridge or at a crossroads is particularly interesting, since bridges and crossroads appear frequently as symbolic boundaries between the natural world and the magical otherworld in stories and accounts from throughout history and around the world, and indeed, we will see more of these symbolic boundaries in tales from across Latin America.

Crossing the river of death

Interestingly, my Guatemalan wife assures me that the local Maya near Quetzaltenango, Guatemala's second city, believe that dogs should not be

mistreated because the dead need the help of a dog to cross a river in the afterlife, and that if a person mistreats a dog that help will not be forthcoming. One local shaman told her that the newly deceased needs to grip the tail of the dog as it swims across the river in order to cross. This Mesoamerican belief that a dog is needed to cross a river in the afterlife is ancient, and provides a link to accounts such as that of Virgilia Pojoy:

'Dogs went with the Classic Maya to the underworld, for they appear in tombs and in underworld scenes painted on pottery. The Maya believed the dead needed a dog to cross a body of water. Likewise the Postclassic Nahuatl'

(Read and Gonzalez 2000: 172).

The Classic Maya period equates roughly to 250–900 AD in an area that includes south-eastern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and the westernmost portions of Honduras and El Salvador. The Postclassic Nahuatl relates to the Nahuatl-speaking Toltecs and Aztecs from the tenth century to the Spanish Conquest (1521 AD in Mexico, and 1523–4 in Guatemala). At the time of the Conquest, the Aztec Empire covered much of Mexico but the Nahuatl-speaking Pipil had penetrated deep into Central America, including Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador (Coe 1999).

The belief that a dog helps the dead to cross water appears to be common in Mesoamerica, a cultural region that has varied with time but that includes the area occupied by the advanced cultures of Mexico and Central America such as the Olmecs, Toltecs, Maya and Zapotecs. The Chinanteco Indians of southern Mexico believe that after death, a great black dog or a spider carries the newly dead across the sea in the afterlife (Pardo and Robledo Hernández 2002). The Mixe Indians of Oaxaca, Mexico, also say that when a person dies they have to cross a river or sea, aided by a black dog. Like the modern Maya of Guatemala, if they have treated dogs badly in life then the Black Dog will not help them cross the water in the next life (Torres Cisneros 2004: 12). Later, we will return to this association between dogs, death and water.

The Cadejo and the Church

However, the Cadejo itself does appear to be European in origin and probably arrived with the Spanish Conquistadors in the sixteenth century. The Cadejo was certainly popularised by the Catholic Church which used this legend and others as moralising tales. This may explain why the Black Dog's association with drunkenness is so strong in Guatemala City and the old colonial Guatemalan capitals Antigua Guatemala and Ciudad

Vieja...precisely the places where the Catholic Church had its strongest presence.

The dogs of war

The Conquistadors did not just bring legends of Black Dogs with them on their perilous voyages to the New World. They also brought fearsome war dogs that they used against the natives to terrifying effect. The Spanish Mastiffs were much larger than the dogs already domesticated in the Americas (both for hunting and as a food animal) and were far more vicious. The Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas witnessed firsthand the appalling atrocities committed by his countrymen:

... the Spanish in the Indies have trained savage and ferocious dogs to kill and tear apart the Indians... to maintain the aforementioned dogs they bring many Indians in chains wherever they travel, as if they were herds of pigs and they kill them and butcher them in public and they say to one another, lend me a quarter of one of those slaves to feed my dogs until I kill another, as if they were lending quarters of pork or lamb.

(de las Casas 1552 (1997: 116–17))

The Spaniards hunted the Indians with dogs for sport, and often set them upon their prisoners. Bartolomé de las Casas describes many incidents when defenceless Indians, men, women and children, were thrown to the dogs to be eaten alive for the entertainment of their conquerors. These horrendous actions must have had a great impact on the native population. The Spanish Conquistadors cannot have failed to reinforce any previous association between dogs and death that the natives had.

Something evil

The following account comes from a collection of oral folklore from Mexico, the date and location are not given. A farmer's wife had heard an animal howling near the house but her husband did not believe her until one night he heard it himself. Because it was disturbing his sheep he decided to investigate and heard a terrible noise coming from the corral, as if something was attacking his animals. Although afraid he approached the corral, his lit cigarette seeming to go out while he was smoking it. At first he could see nothing but then saw that there was a dog running around among the livestock. The farmer began to throw sticks and stones at it but nothing seemed to hit it. The dog became furious and started to grow in size, it suddenly appeared behind him and threw him to the ground, then

disappeared. The frightened farmer felt that he was facing something evil and took a crucifix with him as he searched for the dog, his search not being helped by the fact that his candles went out every time that he got close to the animal. After some time pursuing the dog it entered the horse paddock, terrifying the horses, and once again disappeared, this time for good. When daybreak came, the farmer could find no trace of the strange beast (CONAFE 1991: 59–60).

The bulletproof dog

On 8 July 2006, the Spanish-language Dallas and Fort Worth newspaper *La Estrella* published an article by Margarita Hernández, recalling her father's encounter with a Black Dog when he was young. She has very kindly furnished me with further details. The encounter occurred in 1949 in the small village of Abadiano, in Michoacán state, which lies west of Mexico City.

Her father was walking across the flatlands late at night after spending several hours at his godson's vigil in a neighbouring village. He had passed through the centre of the village without problems, walking on 'automatic pilot' along a well-known path. When he was halfway home the flatlands bordered on the local dam, further along there was a cluster of houses, including his own. Seeing that a vehicle was approaching and fearing that it might contain soldiers who would confiscate his pistol, he leapt over the fence beside the road and waited for it to pass. When it had done so he returned to the road.

Suddenly he noticed that a small black dog had appeared in front of him. The dog followed him obstinately, only stopping to stare at him impassively when he tried to chase it off. He did not recognise it and looked around for the owner. When he returned his attention to the dog he saw that it was growing in size. Frightened, he drew his .38 revolver and faced the dog, which stared back at him. He aimed and fired, but the bullet left the gun as if in slow motion and fell intact at his feet. Stunned, he looked at the dog to see that it had grown in size to that of a small horse. Completely terrified, he fired again with the same result and instinctively cried out 'Hail Mary most pure!', at which the Black Dog disappeared instantly. In the words of Margarita Hernández's mother:

When he looked back the dog was growing and growing, and he thought 'What's happening?', it was then that he drew his pistol and it didn't fire. He crouched to pick up the bullet and saw it was intact. He cocked his pistol again and fired, and the same thing

happened again. Again he crouched and picked up the bullet, saying 'Hail Mary Most Pure'. Then the dog disappeared. It was then that he got goose bumps. He began to run as fast as he could and when he was running past the church, all the dogs of Abadiano began to howl. He began to run faster. As soon as he got home, he fainted.

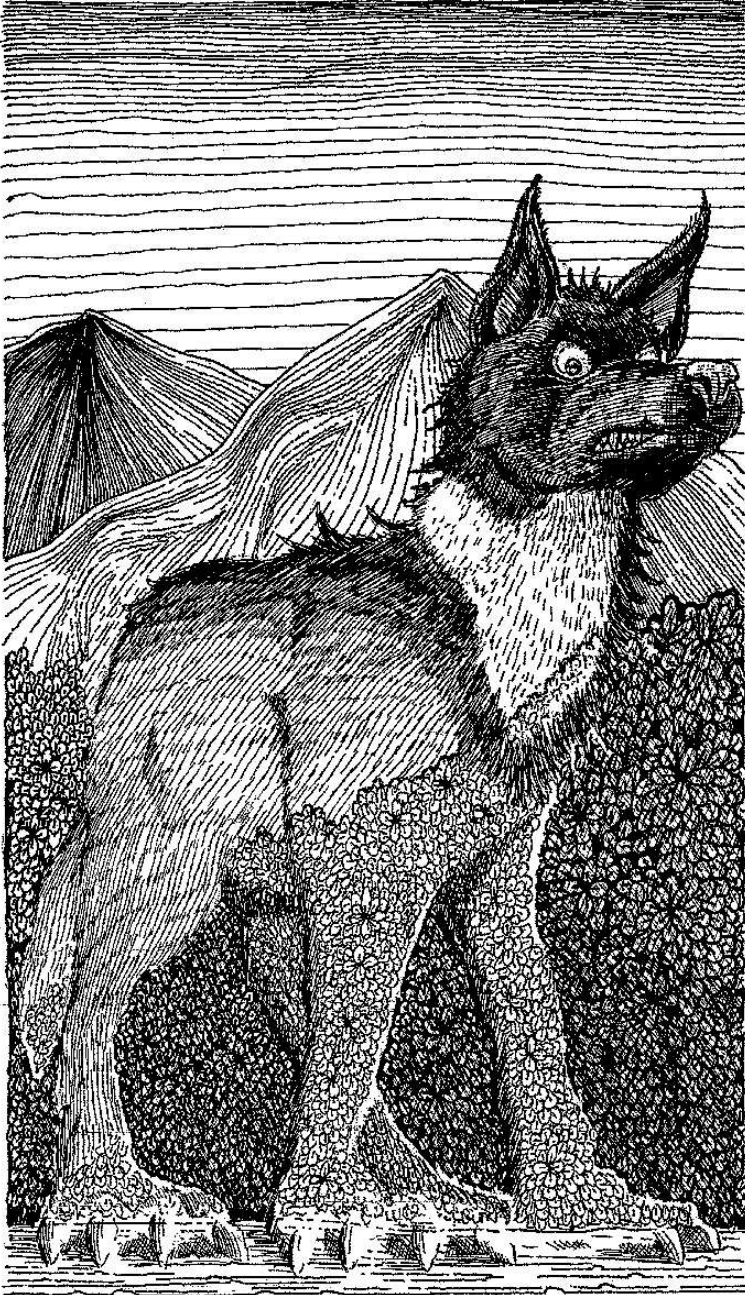
(Hernández 2006 and personal communication).

Again, as with the bridges and crossroads in other Black Dog encounters, we have a physical marker. When Margarita Hernández's father leapt the fence to avoid any unwanted attention, he leapt across the border that separates the known from the unknown, or the 'real' world from the mythological world. Now he was in that parallel world that mirrors our everyday reality but where guns (and cameras) don't fire as they normally would. Perhaps he should have carried a machete instead. The other side of the fence is a familiar place for us, because Black Dogs swell to incredible proportions before disappearing and mortal dogs howl miserably, sensing the unseen presence of their supernatural imitator. Woden never rode across Mexico's skies with the Wild Hunt but his hounds have somehow found their way to the New World.

The Cadejo in the rest of Central America

Travelling south-east to Honduras, the capital city of Tegucigalpa nestles in a deep valley surrounded by rugged hills. Walking the streets of Tegucigalpa is like stepping into a gangster movie, where the street gangs and protection rackets are all too obvious. A filthy river divides the city in two and crossing one of the bridges takes us to Comayagüela, Tegucigalpa's twin on the southwest side of the river. Here we find the Honduran Cadejo has left its tracks. It was said to look like a hyena, a beast which few Hondurans can have seen, or a small goat. It used to appear in the street which led to the cemetery, leaping out on unsuspecting passers-by, or following them with the characteristic clattering of goat's hooves. One day a man passed who had heard that the Cadejo would disappear if a person took out his dagger and thrust it into the ground. Sure enough, the beast leapt out but the man remembered what he had been told, drew his dagger and embedded it in the ground close to where the creature had appeared, causing it to vanish (Rosenfield, Mathews, Vélez and González 2005a).

In neighbouring El Salvador, the Cadejo is a Black Dog with fiery eyes that howls mournfully. Its howl is not that of a natural beast but rather has an



eerie quality found among other supernatural entities in Central American folklore. If a person hears the howl close at hand, then they may relax because this means that the Black Dog is far away. But if a person should hear the distant howl of the Cadejo then they should not look behind them, for the Black Dog is close on their heels, observing them with its burning red eyes. The Salvadorian Black Dog will follow its victim over great distances, howling all the while. If the frightened traveller should attack it then it will swell to the size of a bull and trample them, leaving them paralysed and struck dumb with terror at the side of the road. The befuddled victim needs weeks to recover but only rarely dies from such an encounter.

In Nicaragua, the Cadejo takes on the form of an enormous black dog with a white patch forming a collar around its neck, a feature also found in fairy dogs of Ireland (Evans-Wentz 1911 (1990: 40)). It roams all night, only disappearing at dawn. According to the Nicaraguan Indians it has eyes that burn like candles. If it encounters anyone out late at night, it will attack them and throw them to the ground, although it will not bite them. Anyone attacked in this way is left stunned, dull, stupid and stammering, much like someone fairy-struck in Britain, and will die soon after (Perña Hernández 1968: 124).

On her Nicaraguan Web site, Martha Isabel Arana gives an account by an informant named only as Diana who related how many years ago her father's grandfather had accompanied her great-grandmother to work one night so she would not have to go alone. When he opened the door in order to return home he saw a Black Dog with red eyes. He ran home terrified with the Black Dog following close behind and slammed the door shut behind him. The Black Dog scratched at the foot of the door for several minutes before leaving. When her grandfather heard it trotting away he opened the door in time to see the Black Dog disappear instantaneously. He said that the Black Dog was the Cadejo and after that he never went out alone at night. This account comes from Chinandega department in western Nicaragua and Martha Arana estimates that the events related occurred sometime in the 1930s or 40s (Arana 2006 and personal communication).

In Costa Rica the Black Dog is found in essentially the same form as the rest of the isthmus, although its name has been pluralised to the Cadejos. It is said to once have been a man who was cursed by his father for lack of respect and must now haunt the streets in animal form.

Black and white

In some areas it is believed that there are two types of Cadejo, one white and one black. Jeremy Harte comments with Alice in Wonderland logic, 'Black Dogs can be white' (Harte 2005a: 8). With that in mind I briefly include the white Cadejo here. The white Cadejo is female and is said to be a benevolent, protective spirit, but the black one is male, the evil Cadejo, that protects drunkards so that it may eventually take their souls. This belief in white and black Cadejos is found in various parts of Guatemala, as well as El Salvador and Nicaragua.

This dual belief parallels Black Dogs in Britain, in that the Latin American Black Dog has both protective and malevolent aspects. There is a strong moralising element in some parts of Central America that is lacking in Britain, and the Black Dog has become strongly associated with alcoholism, probably due to its use as a cautionary tale by the Catholic Church. There are enormous regional variations though, even within the borders of such small countries as those in Central America.

Ángel Flores, a school teacher studying law in Guatemala City told Lara Figueroa of a man named Juan Carlos who lived in a shack in the south of the city in the area now occupied by the airport and the zoo. Juan Carlos was often working away from home until quite late. When he returned from work, without fail he used to find a white dog opposite his front door. When it saw him, it used to circle behind the shack and vanish without trace. He was told that this was the white Cadejo that protected his wife and children while he was working (Lara Figueroa 1996: 139).

In Nicaragua, Martha Isabel Arana relates a tale that her nursemaid told her. The lady had a run-in with the white Cadejo in Rivas department when she was a girl in the 1940s. One moonless night she was returning home across the fields after comforting her grandmother as she died. She was very afraid, being out so late on her own, but felt a presence at her side although she could not see anything due to the darkness of the night. A flash of lightning lit up the landscape and she looked to see if anything was really there. She was terrified to see that a white dog walked at her side and she fled blindly through the night. By good fortune, a neighbour on horseback passed her and offered to carry her home (Arana 2005 and personal communication). The dog terrified the lady because she had previously heard ghost stories about the phantom dog, not because it did anything in particular to frighten her, and we could even speculate that it was the spirit of her very recently departed grandmother that was watching

out for her on her long, lonely walk home, in true protective Black Dog fashion.

Moving on to South America, in Argentina in the 1950s, if a white dog was encountered at night, it was a sign that everything would be alright because the white dog was the form taken by a person's guardian angel (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 103).

Black Dogs in South America

Continuing through South America, in Colombia the Black Dog can take on a horrifying appearance. An enormous black dog with glowing eyes, it vomits fire from its mouth, drags chains behind it and possesses a terrifying howl (all features which are commonly found in British Black Dogs). It appears to travellers out on the roads on dark and stormy nights, enveloped in a stench of sulphur that attaches itself to anyone who witnesses it, for the Black Dog is none other than the Devil incarnate (Rosenfield, Mathews, Vélez and González 2005b) and may only be warded off by prayer. Judas is also said to haunt remote places and abandoned houses in the form of a typical Black Dog with burning eyes (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 106).

Intriguingly, a version of the Wild Hunt exists in Venezuela where a phantom huntsman and his shadowy hounds race through the night, the dogs' blood-curdling howls resonating in the darkness (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 107).

In the indigenous folklore of southern Colombia and northern Ecuador, the dog is associated with large bodies of water, which are considered gateways to the otherworld. La Cocha (also known as Lago Guamués) is an enchanted body of water east of the city of Pasto, it is the largest lake in southern Colombia. It was an area once occupied by the Quillasinga Indians and was later conquered by the Quechua-speaking Inca Empire. It remained completely Indian in population until as late as the 1920s when Hispanic missionaries and farmers began to colonise the area which still maintains a strong indigenous identity. La Cocha is haunted by various supernatural beings, including the Carhunco, a Black Dog with a diamond in its forehead that dwells in rivers and streams and is also strongly linked to the earth as well. It is the owner of all subterranean treasures, such as gold veins and mineral deposits, and also protects the forests against charcoal burners who burn too much wood (Torres 2000: 31, 36).

Lake Imbacucha (also known as Laguna San Pablo and Chicapán), in the northern Ecuadorian Andes near the town of Otavalo, is said to be guarded by the 'Allcusacra', apparently a Quechua name meaning 'Witch-Dog'. This supernatural beast is believed to live in the nearby parish of Camuendo and howls mournfully whenever a tragedy is going to occur on the lake. Aucacucha, the Devil, lies on his back at the bottom of the lake with his head towards the village. Aucacucha sometimes emerges from the lake in the form of a creature something between a dog and a tiger, spitting fire from its eyes (Torres 2000: 23-24).

The Devil's guard dog

Chilean miners frequently speak of an enormous motionless black dog that appears at midnight, spitting fire from its eyes and its muzzle. It is said to appear in places where there is buried treasure and will not move from the spot, even when beaten. One such is said to haunt Lebú, a port in southern Chile (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 107). Another example is the Black Dog that haunts the area around Inca de Oro in the northern Atacama region of Chile. It has enormous plate-sized red eyes and around its neck hangs a massive golden chain. It has the curious habit of only appearing once a month and is said to be the guardian of the richest gold vein in the world. Saltpetre workers that witness the sinister apparition view it as a signpost to unimaginable wealth. In order to obtain this fortune they only have to follow the dog and see where it digs. There they must mark the spot by embedding a sharply pointed dagger in the earth and return the next day to unearth the gold, echoing the act needed to dispel the Black Dog in distant El Salvador. However, few people are able to do so due to the overwhelming terror that the beast inspires, for the Black Dog is pure evil. It is the Devil's guard-dog and only obeys its master, who calls his dog with a whistle so penetrating that it resounds through entire villages (anon. 2006a).

From Cañón, a part of Angol village in the indigenous Araucania region of Maule comes the tale of another Black Dog with burning eyes that wears a gold chain around its neck. It appeared to a married couple in their bedroom every night. Night after night, the Black Dog tried to lead the husband out to the patio but he never followed it because he believed that the Black Dog came to announce a burial and if he followed it he would die within a year (SENATUR 2003).

In Argentina, the Black Dog is seen as an incarnation of the Devil. In San Luis and Catamarca it appears in the familiar form of a great black dog dragging chains and shooting fire from its eyes. In Córdoba in the 1930s it

The Devil's guard dog

was said to appear late at night and had to be warded off by making the sign of the cross in the air, preferably with a knife. A great black dog also used to appear at night at Piedra Preñada in La Rioja, on the road from Chilcito to Famatina, in order to frighten mounts into throwing their riders (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 103–4).

In the 1920s, an enormous black dog with burning eyes haunted Costa Brava in Buenos Aires province, on the border between two districts. It was rumoured to be the evil ghost of an man killed in that spot by a rival.

In San Luis, in a place called Las Huertas, a hunter was out on horseback one night on his way to a rhea-hunt. Rheas are large flightless birds, similar to ostriches but smaller, and are commonly called *avestruz* (ostrich) in the local Spanish dialect. He saw an 'ostrich' at the side of the road and bent over to take his bolas out of his saddlebag. When he looked up the bird had transformed into a Black Dog which then transformed again into a round black mass that went under his horse before moving off and disappearing behind a tree (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 105).

The Lobisón

A version of the Black Dog found in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay is the *Lobisón*, described in detail by Rafael Jijena Sánchez in his excellent survey of South American Black Dog lore entitled *El Perro Negro en el Folklore: El Lobisón, el Familiar y otras supersticiones*. It seems to have originated in Brazil, its name deriving from *lobis-homen*, 'wolf-man' in Portuguese. The youngest of seven consecutive brothers is said to be born a Lobison, especially if the brothers are all born out of wedlock. Whatever its origins in European werewolf lore, it has diversified in form and may take on the form of various terrifying animals. Of most interest here is that its most frequent form is that of a huge Black Dog with fiery eyes, shaggy fur, oversized ears and paws like hooves, much like the Cadejo of Central America. Normal dogs react strongly to its passing, howling, sometimes fleeing it and sometimes pursuing it with their tails between their legs. It frequents filthy places such as chicken coops and pigsties, and as befitting a supernatural beast, also cemeteries. It is said to appear especially on Tuesday and Friday nights and feeds upon carrion, excrement and unbaptised children.

There are various ways of warding off the Lobison, such as making the sign of the cross upon the tongue with a pinch of earth. In some areas it may be shot with a bullet marked with a cross. An axe embedded in the front door of a house will prevent the Lobison from entering. In Paraguay and parts of



Argentina, the Lobison is a headless Black Dog that appears to travellers late at night in lonely places. If it manages to pass between the legs of the traveller then it transfers its curse to them, thus freeing itself. On the Argentinean coast it is said that one should never let a dog pass between one's legs for precisely this reason.

In Entre Ríos, Argentina, the man under the curse of the Lobison finds a lonely spot, strips off his clothes and transforms into a Black Dog shortly after midnight, then sets off to follow the planet Mars. When the first cock crows, it returns to its abandoned clothing and turns back into human form (Jijena Sánchez 1952).

The Lobison closely parallels the Mexican *nahual* and *huay chivo* as a human taking on the form of the classic Black Dog under the influence of enchantment in order to afflict its less magically inclined neighbours.

The Familiar

In Argentina, the 'Familiar' is said to be an enormous Black Dog, sometimes headless, that drags a heavy chain behind it. It only haunts industrialised areas and appears as the result of a dark pact between a factory owner and the Devil. The Devil will grant the factory owner a prosperous year in return for the lives of a given number of workers, and lurks in the form of the Familiar among the sugar canes waiting for victims to devour (anon. 2006b). No details are given of how a headless Black Dog manages to eat the hapless factory workers... no doubt in the same way that a headless Black Dog can have glowing eyes (Harte 2005a: 15). Here we see that the traditional Black Dog has adapted itself to a modern setting, perhaps helping to provide an explanation in the minds of the working class for the high number of fatal industrial accidents in an area where safety at work takes second place to the perceived greed of the industrialists.

Among the farmers of northern Argentina, especially in Tucuman, the Familiar is said to be the most common form taken by the Devil. It is particularly said to haunt the sugar refineries. In Argentina in the late nineteenth century the sugar industry became very successful, usually under foreign ownership. The refinery owners were seen to rapidly become very rich, while the labourers in their fields and factories, many of whom had travelled great distances to find work, were left just as poor as ever. The sudden enrichment of the refinery owners at the expense of their workers was seen as the result of a pact with the Devil signed, of course, in blood. The cruel industrialist's poor excuse for a soul was offered up in

exchange for sudden wealth and personal protection. In Catamarca, the Devil left riches in the form of a great book filled with blank pages with a ten peso note left between each page. The Familiar, at the end of the owner's life, devours him as it devoured his hapless workers. Sometimes, as his allotted hour of death draws near, the industrialist is overcome by remorse for his greed and cruelty. He may then call upon God's mercy to save his worthless soul from the clutches of the Devil. If his remorse is genuine then God may have pity, in which case He will cast down the repentant industrialist's riches and the furious Black Dog will flee into the night (Jijena Sánchez 1952).

In Tucuman, Salta and Jujuy, every refinery is rumoured to have its Familiar, which, like the Lobison, may take many different animal forms but is most commonly encountered as a Black Dog which only appears at night. It is of huge size, drags an enormous chain and has fiery eyes, wandering in silence around the refinery which it protects, roaming as far as the surrounding peasant farms to see if they have stolen anything from the refinery.

During the day it makes its lair in the cellars of the refinery, feeding upon hapless workers offered to it at given intervals by the factory's evil owner, according to the terms of his pact with the Devil. If he fails in his side of the bargain, the Familiar will turn on its 'master' and devour him. The Familiar is immune to bullets but may be warded off by a dagger 'without sin' (i.e. new), using the cross formed by the hilt and the blade.

The refineries that Jijena Sánchez particularly named as being haunted by the Black Dog in the first half of the twentieth century were Bella Vista, Lastenia and Los Ralos in Tucuman province and Invernada in Graneros department.

In the 1930s near the Bella Vista refinery, a drunken local man named Eufrasio Lescano was returning home on horseback after spending the night drinking with some friends. He came to a bridge over a stream where his horse suddenly refused to move. In the middle of the bridge he saw a black mass as big as a calf, like a black dog with burning eyes. He dismounted from his horse and three times asked it for permission to pass. After the third time, it left the bridge for the streambed and he was allowed to cross. The black dog was said to be the Familiar that dwelt inside the main chimney of the refinery. This encounter bears a remarkable similarity to the Black Dog encounter in Palencia, in far away Guatemala, including the triple action taken before crossing the bridge (striking it three times in Guatemala, requesting passage three times in Argentina).

Another local man, Ignacio Monteros, claimed to have seen the Bella Vista black dog one night on the road near his house (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 83–9).

In the Invernada refinery in Graneros department, the Familiar dwelled in the cellar beneath the owner's house. It took the form of the customary enormous black dog with fiery eyes and devoured one worker every month, until one desperate worker who was tricked into the cellar by the owner managed to ward off the demonic beast with the cross of his dagger until dawn came and his companions could rescue him. Since the beast failed to devour its meal, the Devil's pact was broken and the owner's fortune began to drain away (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 85–7).

The Familiar of the Santa Ana Refinery used to accompany the refinery owner on his rounds, surrounded by a pack of forty or fifty normal dogs. On the 26th and 27th of December no worker would arrive to collect his pay, because on these dates the owner would sacrifice a worker to the Familiar to fulfil his pact at the end of each year. According to Jijena Sánchez, when the railway from the refinery to Rio Chico was opened, an enormous Black Dog appeared and blocked the path of the train (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 88–9).

My own feeling is that the Familiar has its origin in the predominantly European nineteenth century industrialists buying large black purebred dogs to protect their refineries, these very expensive dogs receiving a class of care which the labourers were unable to associate with a mortal dog. The owners perhaps chained these vicious dogs up in their cellars during the day to be let loose at night, protecting the refinery and the master's house from intruders. The fear in which the labourers held these guard dogs, combined with pre-existing beliefs concerning Black Dogs and the Devil, gave birth to the legend of the Familiar.

Sorcerers and cigarettes

Trawling the Spanish language newspapers on the Internet, although tedious, can occasionally throw up some interesting results. On 1 March 2006, the Mexican local newspaper *Diario de Yucatán* reported a frightening encounter during a period of paranoia about the activities of an unidentified sorcerer. Mr Dzib Pech was with his wife, María Luciana Tuz Aceo, on his motorcycle returning home to Tizimín after visiting their parents in Pocoboch, in Yucatán state in the southeast of the country. It was 8.30 in the evening and they were just coming up to the junction with the Valladolid-Tizimín main road when Dzib Pech noticed something

beside the road. He shone the light of his motorbike on it to reveal a black dog, hunched over at the side of the road and smoking a cigarette! It appeared to hurl itself at them but faded away, giving them the fright of their lives. This apparition was attributed to the activities of the *huay chivo*, a shape-shifting Maya sorcerer (*huay* or *wáay* in Yucatec Maya) that may take on the form of a he-goat (*chivo* in Spanish) and other animals. As Dzib Pech told the newspaper reporter, 'I didn't use to believe in the *huay chivo*, but I believe now.' An editorial in the newspaper described the *huay chivo* in terms which portray a close resemblance to the Central American Cadejo: an agile dog, the size of a lion, with the white hooves of a cow (*Diario de Yucatán* 2006).

Huay Chivo, literally 'Witch-Goat', may be related to the *Huay Pek* (from *Wáay Peek'* in Yucatec Maya, meaning 'Witch-Dog'), a supernatural black dog which attacks whoever it meets and may sometimes be heard howling mournfully. The *Huay Pek* is an incarnation the *Kakasbal*, the Yucatec Mayan spirit of evil (Jijena Sánchez 1952: 108). In another version, the *Huay Pek* is an evil sorcerer much like the *Huay Chivo*, again taking the form of a demonic Black Dog.

This belief that sorcerers can transform themselves into the form of a black dog is also held much further south, in the Colombian Andes. An undated account from the Sierra Nevada de Cocuy region tells of a man who was accompanied by a black dog while walking along a path in the region, and was surprised when the dog disappeared instantaneously. The man could find no one who knew anything about such a black dog and was convinced that it was a sorcerer who had transformed himself. The same source states that when a traditional healer tries to lift a curse that has been placed upon someone by another shaman, the two sorcerers must fight to the death in the form of animals, one in the form of a dog and the other in the form of a bird of prey (Faust 2006).

The *nahual*

The belief that a sorcerer can turn into an animal is closely linked to a common Indian belief in the Americas. This is the idea of the *nahual*, a protective spirit, often in the form of an animal, that everyone has. Among the Aztecs, Maya and other Mesoamerican peoples, this spirit was determined by the day they were born. Perhaps due to this, the various indigenous groups believe that ghosts of people can appear in the form of an animal. This may seem strange at first sight but the belief that people could return as a ghostly animal was also common in Britain up to relatively recent times in rural areas. One day in the sacred Mesoamerican

calendar bears the name dog; *tz'í'* in the K'iche' Maya language, *oc* in Yucatec Maya, *itzcuintli* in Nahuatl. Among the Mixtecs of Oaxaca its place was taken by *ua*, the coyote. Among the Aztecs, the day of the dog *itzcuintli* was ruled by the grim god Mictlantecuhtli, Lord of Mictlán. Mictlán was the Aztec commoners' land of the dead, reached only after four years wandering beneath the earth accompanied by a dog companion that was cremated with the deceased. The dog helped the deceased to cross the river Apanoayán, the river of the dead. The close relation between Mesoamerican cultures means equivalent beliefs probably existed among neighbouring peoples, and we have already seen how other Mesoamerican groups such as the Mayas, Mixes and Chinantecos need the aid of a dog to cross water in the afterlife.

The idea that a Black Dog helps the deceased to cross the River of the Dead exists as far south as the Andes and is strong enough that some South American indigenous groups sacrifice dogs in order to accompany the dead on their journey in the afterlife. Among the Quechua, the River of the Dead is called *Yawar Mayu*, the River of Blood, and in one source two black dogs are said to wait on the shore to help the souls of good people to cross. This closely parallels ancient Mesoamerican beliefs. It is difficult to determine just how old this Andean belief is; certainly many Mexican and Central American Indian allies came with the Spanish Conquistadors when they conquered the Inca Empire, some of these must have settled and may have passed on their own beliefs. On the other hand, this idea of dogs helping the souls of the dead to cross the water may be an extremely ancient pan-American belief common to many different indigenous groups. The recent find of a large number of mummified dogs buried with food and blankets by the Chiribaya people of Peru between AD 900 and 1350 would suggest that the latter may be the case.

Hunting the Black Dog

In Mexico, this pre-Columbian belief in the *nahual* as a guardian spirit has been transformed into the modern belief that the *nahual* is an evil sorcerer who can change himself into an animal. A folktale from the semi-arid Tlaxcala state in central Mexico tells how many years ago a *nahual* haunted the area near Chiautempan. One night, three hunters saw an enormous Black Dog. They decided that it would make a fine hunting dog and pursued it. Since it fled when approached, one of the hunters shot at it, wounding it in one of its legs. They followed the blood trail to a clearing where they found a peasant hut that they entered in order to ask the owner if he had seen the dog. They were surprised to see that the owner had

many riches and much livestock. They noticed that, strangely, he was tending a wound in the same place where they had shot the dog. They were unable to track the dog any further, or catch any prey, and finally they gave up and headed for the nearest village, where they related their adventure.

The locals listened to their story then told them that they had come across a *nahual*, an evil sorcerer who served the Devil in order to steal riches and livestock. He could convert himself into an animal at night by saying the Lord's Prayer backwards. The sorcerer must also leave a mantel in his house, and hang it up back to front in order to turn back into human form. If someone should manage to lift the mantel while the sorcerer was in animal form then he would be trapped in that form forever. They were told that they were very lucky to get away alive. In order to defend themselves against the *nahual* they were instructed to always wear a crucifix and use a snakeskin belt. If they should come across the Black Dog again they should strike it with the belt buckle and say the Lord's Prayer. The *nahual* would then be rendered defenceless and change back into human form. The hunters mocked the locals' beliefs but afterwards they always wore crucifixes and snakeskin belts when they went hunting near Chiautempan (Valadez Azúa and Téllez Estrada 2001).

This tale bears several elements commonly found in Britain: the hunter who wounds an animal which escapes, only for a local person to be found with an identical wound and condemned as a witch. In Britain, however, it is a hare rather than a Black Dog. It also bears a certain similarity to the selkies and mermaids of Ireland and Scotland that shed their skins to take human form, and who may not return to the sea if their skin is stolen.

The terrible screaming of the goats

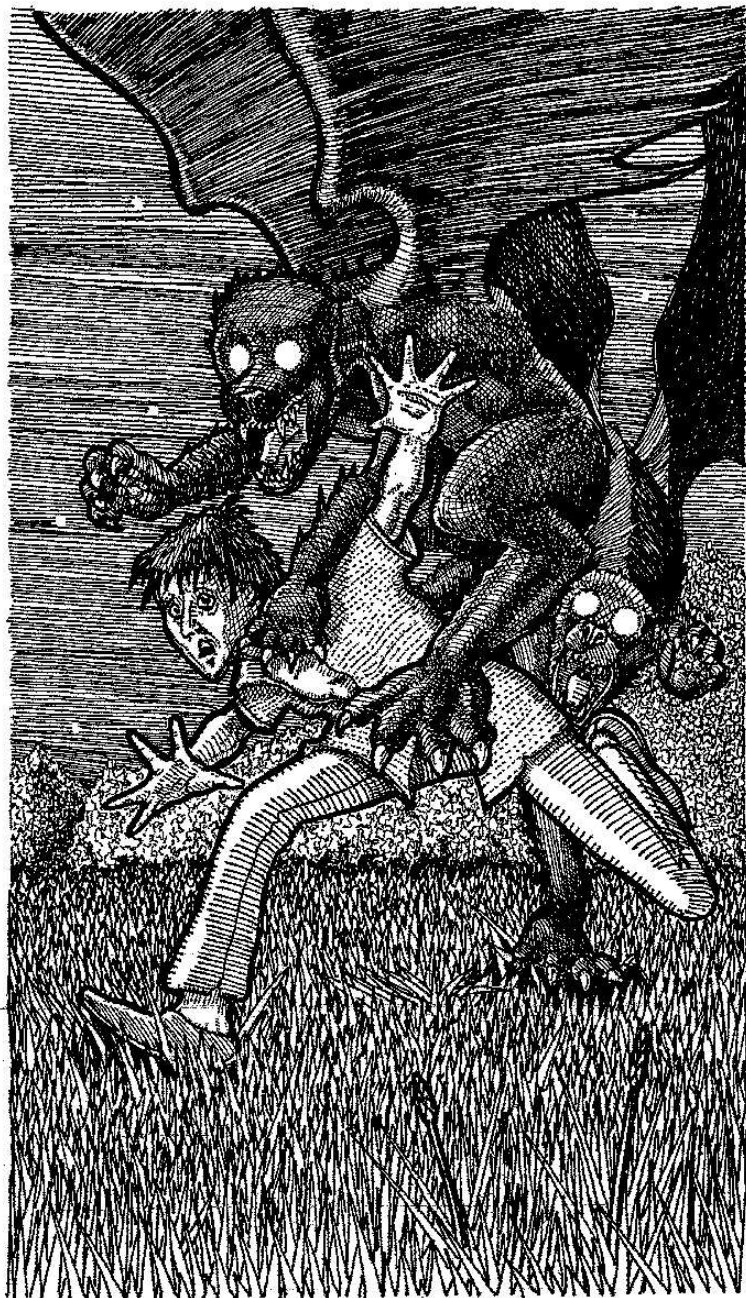
In March 2006, the Mexican newspaper *Noticias: Voz e Imagen de Oaxaca* published a story dealing with the unexplained slaughter of a herd of goats in Teotitlán de Flores Magón in Oaxaca state. Some were found dead in their corral, others outside it and a few had disappeared entirely. The night of the attack the night watchman had heard what sounded like dogs fighting at midnight, this was followed by barking and howling and then by the dogs going quiet as if they had been beaten off. There then followed the terrible screaming of the goats that continued until four in the morning. The valiant watchman was too terrified to investigate and locked himself securely indoors, and who can blame him. Various theories were bandied about, from feral dogs to rustlers and satanic cults. What is of most interest here is that various locals claimed that it was the work of a *nahual*

which the newspaper described as a person who had made a pact with the forces of darkness. This person can convert himself into an animal such as a dog or cat in order to steal livestock, much like the Huay Chivo of Yucatán. More importantly, several people claimed to have seen an enormous black dog with red eyes haunting the locality after dark and frightening the local dogs. One peasant farmer said he had been returning home with his dog after collecting firewood when he came across the Black Dog. Although it was normally fearless, his own dog began to howl in terror at the appearance of the terrifying beast (*Noticias: Voz e Imagen de Oaxaca* 2006). Local people theorised that the Black Dog could have been responsible for the killing of the goats and the unusual howling of the local dogs that night. The *chupacabras* was also mentioned, that strange shape-shifting Latin American monster that crops up from Mexico to Argentina, which provides a nice link to the following bizarre series of events that dominated the regional Chilean newspaper *Diario El Centro* for more than a week in 2004.

Attack of the flying dogs

Parral is most famous as the birthplace of Nobel prize-winning poet Pablo Neruda. It is situated on the wide Pacific coastal plain in the finest winemaking region of Chile, south of the capital Santiago. The first account, which I have been unable to obtain, appeared on 2 or 3 July 2004. That Friday, a local man from the village of Buenos Aires in Parral said he had been disturbed by strange noises and his dog howling. He had seen two beings like winged dogs kill a dozen hens, then fly away and disappear behind the vineyard.

The first detailed account appeared on 5 July 2004 entitled 'Attacked by Two "Winged Dogs"'. Farmer Juan Roberto Acuña Pereira was out after midnight, walking through a paddock near the Fiscal Canal in the area of 2 Calle Sur (2nd South Street) in Parral, Chile, when he was attacked by two strange beings that he described as ear-less winged black dogs, one big and the other smaller. The smaller of the two pounced upon his neck but he covered himself with both arms to protect himself. He was bitten and clawed on both his arms, fell to the ground and was bitten on the chest and legs. He managed to stand up and fled in the direction of the canal, throwing himself into the water. The two dog-like creatures flew over the canal, waiting for him to leave. Every time he tried to do so, the two winged dogs attacked him, forcing him to remain in the water until they decided to leave. Bloodied and frightened, he went to the house of his brother-in-law who accompanied him to hospital to have his wounds



Attack of the flying dogs

tended. He admitted that he had been drinking but claimed that he was not drunk at the time of the attack. He told the reporter:

I went to hospital because I want to know what it is, it could be that the wounds are infected. They were just like dogs, but they didn't have any ears and they were very ferocious. I defended myself as best I could and afterwards I could do nothing more and I ran and I threw myself into the fiscal canal and there they circled around the side and they didn't enter the water and just circled, so I stayed in the water... it was as if they wanted to drink my blood.

After visiting the hospital they spent most of the night in the Reina Luisa police station, giving statements and being interviewed by the duty prosecutor, Ricardo Encina. Accompanied by the prosecutor and police, the witness returned to the site of the attack. Unsurprisingly, in the paddock near the canal they found animal traces that were mixed with goat tracks. The prosecutor commented, 'What I saw is that these people were strongly affected, very shocked. I couldn't say if they were lying or not, because I see that they are very disturbed by the situation... I can't say if it was an animal nor what type of animal inflicted this kind of damage and wounding. But we will try to better identify the wounds with a forensic report.'

Several days later, it emerged that Juan Acuña's brother-in-law, Marcelo Alberto Gajardo, had retraced the victim's path on the night of the attack and was himself set upon by the winged black dogs that disappeared suddenly after attacking him, although he did not see them flying. Juan Acuña himself was left traumatised by his experience, suffering nightmares and even being afraid to go to the toilet after dark.

The winged dogs were also linked by supposition to other animal killings in the area, such as fourteen lambs killed on the Las Cabras ('The Goats') farm near the community hospital. Because of the animal killings, quite early on the local population labelled these winged Black Dogs as *chupacabras*, literally translatable as 'goat-sucker', now a cultural icon in Latin America and applied to any strange beast of apparent paranormal origin, from the Caribbean to Argentina. Juan Acuña later identified his attackers as *chupacabras* after being shown a picture of what the *chupacabras* was supposed to look like that had recently appeared on a Mexican website. It later turned out that this picture had been based on *his* account of what had attacked him. He went on to give another description of one of the animals, 'It didn't have fangs, it was the same as a normal dog

and had very short ears, just like a dog and stands on two legs and has shining eyes.'

It walked on its hind legs

Four days later several reports emerged from Curicó, a town some 150 km to the north of Parral. On Sunday 4 July 2004, a few hours after the attack on Juan Acuña, a lorry driver had been waiting for daybreak outside the fruit company Copefrut, 1 km north of town, so he could unload his lorry. A strange winged creature attacked it, leaving paw prints that were photographed. The managing director of the company, Rodrigo Monje, would not comment on the incident itself but said that he had spoken to the unnamed lorry driver who was deeply shocked by his experience.

In the early hours of the morning on 28 July 2004, a worker at the same company also encountered a winged dog. He was walking from the company bar to his workplace when he encountered the strange beast, which tried to attack him. He fled in terror and arrived in such a state of shock at his workplace that he needed to be treated by the factory nurse. All the witnesses preferred to remain anonymous, and this time the fruit company refused to comment. The creature was described as a fierce flying dog that walked on its hind legs. After this, the winged Black Dog disappears from the newspapers. In July and August the killings of livestock in the region were attributed to the winged dogs but by December when a large amount of livestock were killed the strange beings had been forgotten (*Diario El Centro* 2004). These bizarre encounters with ferocious winged Black Dogs seem to bear little relation to the Black Dog as it exists in Chilean folklore.

The tip of the iceberg

The folklore and newspaper reports that I have collected here are very much the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Black Dogs in Latin America. I have been limited by the Spanish-language sources that I have to hand and also by the enormous amount of time needed to trawl through the available material on the Internet. However, this introduction should give an idea of the kind of material available and show the similarity of some reports to those that have been described in Britain. In fact, most aspects of British Black Dog lore can be found in one form or another among the Black Dog folklore of Latin America, although the Latin American Black Dog appears to be more aggressive than its British cousin. The material summarised here should also highlight the distinct differences in interpretation thrown up by cultures that have a strong living tradition of

shamanism and witchcraft. This fascinating mix of European-derived folklore blended with indigenous beliefs seems to produce a never-ending flow of bizarre reports, going far beyond the Black Dog beliefs and encounters that I have collected here.

As with any fortune or folkloric manifestation, the boundaries are fluid. In the case of Latin America, the Black Dog phenomenon merges seamlessly with the chupacabras and with the idea of shape-shifting sorcerers. In fact it is worth noting here that it would be a mistake to separate chupacabras reports and corral them into their own category. The term chupacabras has become so prevalent in Latin America that it is now applied by the Spanish-language press to a wide range of bizarre entities of apparent paranormal origin and would nowadays perhaps be better interpreted as 'monster' rather than the literal translation as 'goatsucker'.

Borderlands

In almost all of the accounts related here, the Black Dog has been encountered in the borderlands, either temporal or physical. These borderlands are the magical place that divides our everyday reality from the invisible realms of magic and myth. As in medieval tales of Arthurian knights, it may be represented by a bridge or a stream or it may be a crossroads. The Black Dog can appear at midnight, the magical no-time between today and tomorrow, or at dawn or dusk, which are neither day nor night. A man returning from a party may leap a fence and find that he has crossed more than a field boundary – he has landed in Faerie, and all bets are off. Size and shape are no longer constant, technology no longer functions as it should, candles flicker and die and guns refuse to fire. The only protection is to resort to time-tested ritual. Dirt under the tongue, a dagger thrust in the ground and the sign of the Cross will ward off harm far more efficiently than bullets or machetes.

An interesting characteristic of many Black Dog reports from Latin America is its ability to change size and shape. Although this characteristic is not usually described with relation to the more rigidly defined Cadejo, Lobison or Familiar, it frequently occurs with relation to one-off Black Dog encounters. The Cadejo in Palencia grew rapidly to the size 'of a lion', the Black Dog causing havoc in a Mexican corral grew in size, as did that encountered by Margarita Hernandez's father in Abadiano, which grew to the size of a small horse. In Guatemala, Virgilia Pojoy saw a Black Dog which turned into a 'white mass' while in Argentina, a rhea turned into a Black Dog which then turned into a round black mass.

This particular characteristic is one found in the Black Dog folklore of Britain but is also common to fairy lore and to modern high strangeness events reported in forteen publications.

Black dogs, goats and conquistadors

One intriguing feature that turned up again and again in various forms was the link between the Black Dog and goats. This association also turns up from time to time in British accounts, from that of the Wild Hunt in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the entry for AD 1127 (Garmonsway 1972 (1992: 258)) to the more modern account of a black dog and a black goat appearing in a poltergeist infested house (Sherwood 2005: 21). Perhaps this frequent association is due to the common identification of the Black Dog with the Devil. The goat is not native to the Americas so this must surely betray the largely European origins of the Black Dog and its probable arrival with the Spanish Conquistadors in the sixteenth century. It would be interesting to know if the Black Dog belief exists in Spain, particularly Andalucía where the majority of the Conquistadors came from, or if the belief exists in other former Spanish colonies such as the Philippines or Equatorial Guinea. However, the Latin American culture is a blend of Indian and Spanish influences and I hope I have shown here that the association between dogs and death existed long before the Spanish arrived in the New World. But the belief in Black Dogs in Latin America is not purely historical. Ordinary people are still reporting frightening encounters with phantom Black Dogs, and several reports emerged in the Latin American press while I was in the process of writing this essay.

Similarities and differences with Black Dogs in the British Isles

The Black Dog in Latin America is obviously very closely related to the British Black Dog, which is all the more astounding when one considers that they are products of very different cultures. Even the Central American association with alcoholism may be found in Britain, for in Scotland the Black Dog of Creag an Ordain was said to appear particularly to foot travellers 'who had been indulging "Not wisely but too well" in the tavern at Lochinver.' This Black Dog, also said to be an incarnation of the Devil, was known to spit sparks (Robertson 1961 (1993: 86)) and the Black Dogs of the Wild Hunt in Cornwall snorted fire (Dean and Shaw 2003: 82).

The Andean Black Dogs which haunt bodies of water have their British counterparts also, for example the monstrous dog of Loch-a-Choin in Scotland (Robertson 1961 (1993: 127)) or the Roy Dog of Portland in Dorset (Waring 1977: 3), among many others.

Similarities and differences with Black Dogs in the British Isles

Black Dogs which guard treasure hoards are not alien to the British Isles either. In Scotland, the Black Dog of Soluschraggy guards an underwater hoard of gold in a small lake (Robertson 1961 (1993: 127)) while in Dorset there is a tale of a phantom Black Dog leading a farmer to hidden treasure (Waring 1977: 7).

There are several examples here of the Black Dog suppressing man-made fire (candles, cigarettes, guns), which may be seen as the precursor to the stalling cars frequently mentioned in UFO lore. Equivalents from Britain are few and far between, in East Anglia there are two accounts of lanterns going out in association with black dogs in Barnby and Debach (Burgess 2005), and there is an account from Worcestershire of a black dog that caused a car to stall and extinguished an electric torch (Turner 1993: 40–1). Yet it seems such an obvious event to associate with a frightening supernatural encounter that its relative scarcity in British black dog folklore is surprising.

If a list is made of the main characteristics of the Latin American Black Dog, the following features are also found in Britain:

- association with drunks
- hoofed
- shaggy
- fiery eyes
- drags a chain
- protects travellers
- attacks travellers
- omen of death
- disappears suddenly
- grows in size
- said to be the Devil
- changes shape
- associated with water, bridges and crossroads
- provokes strong reaction in normal animals
- spits fire
- guards buried treasure
- extinguishes lights.

The Latin American Black Dog is sometimes said to be a cursed or enchanted human. I have not found this last feature in British Black Dog accounts although there is a story from Felixstowe of an 'Italian gentleman', either a sorcerer or the Devil in disguise, who could take on the form of a Black Dog (Westwood and Simpson 2005: 693). The closest

that we come in Britain is that the ghost of a man could return in the form of a Black Dog. For example, in Cornwall, the ghost of a tin miner was said to appear in the form of a classic Black Dog 'with eyes like saucers and a foaming mouth' (Deane and Shaw 2003: 44).

The Black Dog in Latin America is *never* considered to be the ghost of a mortal beast, it is always viewed as either a human (whether alive or dead) in dog form or a manifestation of supernatural evil.

Although the Black Dog may appear at first glance to be a British or north European phenomenon, it exists in essentially the same form across the entire length and breadth of the Americas. Much has been written upon the presumed Germanic, Celtic or Indo-European origin of the legend but such an origin would not explain how a highland Maya girl can meet a typical shape-changing Black Dog at a Guatemalan crossroads. It appears that the Black Dog, much like the poltergeist, is a global phenomenon.

Further reading

Unfortunately, almost none of the material I have used is available in English. For anyone who has a decent knowledge of Spanish, I would recommend anything by Celso Lara Figueroa (see the bibliography for particular titles with reference to the Cadejo/Black Dog). Essential reading is *El Perro Negro en el Folklore: El lobisón, el familiar y otras supersticiones* by Rafael Jijena Sánchez, which is dedicated entirely to Black Dog folklore, concentrating largely upon Argentina but touching on many parts of Latin America.

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Explore Phantom Black Dogs

edited by Bob Trubshaw

Contributors: Jeremy Harte, Simon Sherwood, Alby Stone, Bob Trubshaw and Jennifer Westwood.

The folklore of phantom black dogs is known throughout the British Isles. From the Black Shuck of East Anglia to the Moody Dhoo of the Isle of Man there are tales of huge spectral hounds 'darker than the night sky' with eyes 'glowing red as burning coals'.

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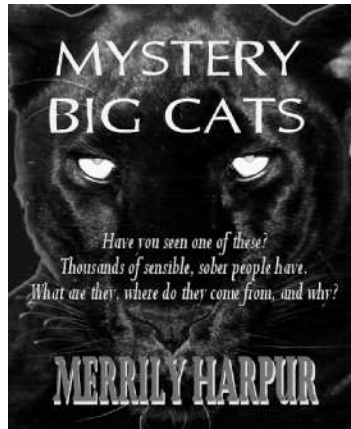


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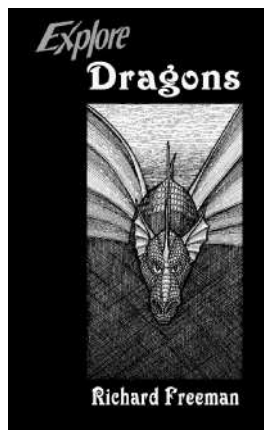
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Richard Freeman is a former zookeeper and has a degree in zoology. He is the zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology in Exeter. A full-time cryptozoologist, he has searched for monsters and mystery animals in Indo-China, Sumatra, and Mongolia as well as in the UK.

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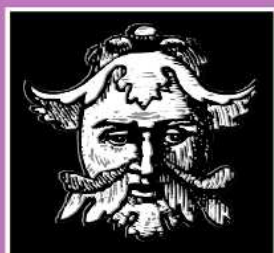
Phantom Black Dogs in Latin America

Simon Burchell

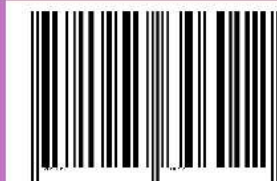
Phantom black dogs are a surprisingly frequent aspect of Latin American folklore. They are called by widely differing names, although often known simply as the *Perro Negro*, the Black Dog. Almost always considered either an incarnation of the Devil or a shape-changing sorcerer, such Black Dogs are invariably regarded as evil. However this rich tradition of phantom black dogs in Latin America has not been available in English until now.

Although phantom black dogs have until now been thought of as a British or north European phenomenon, they exist across the entire length and breadth of the Americas. Much has been written upon the presumed European origin of the legend but such ideas do not explain how a highland Maya girl can meet a typical shape-changing black dog at a Guatemalan crossroads. *Phantom Black Dogs in Latin America* reveals that these apparitions, much like poltergeists, are a global phenomenon. In this short work Simon Burchell raises some profound questions about paranormal experiences and the origins of the folklore which supposedly 'explains' them.

Simon Burchell's interests include fortean phenomena, folklore and an overriding passion for archaeology. He spent three years living in the highlands of western Guatemala, travelling widely in the region, and has dreams of some day returning for good.



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