

Carmen A. Serrano, *Gothic Imagination in Latin American Fiction and Film*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2019. ISBN 9780826360441.

Unlike the undead monsters it investigates, gothic criticism is more alive than ever. A discipline which once focused mainly on the study of Anglo-American fictions, it has now adapted to global cultural movements to become a wide-ranging, inclusive, and international academic field. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a growing body of published works that engage with global and transnational forms of gothic fiction. Some examples include the analyses of Global Gothic (Glennis Byron), Asian Gothic (Katarzyna Ancuta), South African Gothic (Rebecca Duncan), and Tropical Gothic (Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez; Justin D. Edwards and Sandra Vasconcelos), among others. This development has also reached the field of Hispanic and Latin American Studies, with the publication of works on Spanish Gothic (Abigail Lee Six; Ann Davies; Xavier Aldana-Reyes), Southern Cone Gothic (Nadia Olmedo), Cuban Gothic (Ivonne M. García), and Latin American Gothic (Persephone Braham; Sandra Casanova-Vizcaíno and Inés Ordiz). Carmen A. Serrano's *Gothic Imagination in Latin American Fiction and Film* is, therefore, one of the latest additions to a flourishing body of criticism that explores the possibility of the Gothic in Latin American fictions.

Serrano theorizes the presence of this mode in Latin American 19th, 20th and 21st centuries in her introductory chapter. The author argues that many Latin American writers were acquainted with gothic literature and film created in Europe and the United States. This familiarity, according to the author, permeates many of their fictions and explains the reproduction and transgression of gothic conventions in the territory. The introduction clearly establishes the purpose of the book: to reread canonical works through the lens of the Gothic with the aim of illuminating themes which previous analyses had overlooked. The introduction also announces the gothic tropes that Serrano's corpus is built around: vampires, doubles, and live burials. In opposition to other critics' perceptions of the Gothic—which define it as more than a series of tropes—Serrano's understanding of the genre seems mostly delimited by the presence of a number of paradigmatic features, which include its characters (the persecuted female, the sensitive hero, the tyrannical villain, the doppelgänger); its spaces (abbeys, castles, crypts); and its plot devices (a secret buried in the past, transgressive sexual relations). The author situates the appropriation of the gothic mode by Latin

American writers at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th-century and, more specifically, associates it with *modernismo* and Surrealism —two evident connections that have often been overlooked by criticism, but that Serrano brilliantly explores. Finally, the author briefly discusses the relationship of the Gothic to other genres of fantasy which have had much more prominence in critical readings of Latin American fictions, such as the fantastic and magical realism. Serrano ultimately reaches similar conclusions to those presented by other studies on Latin American Gothic: it is, in essence, a hybrid and subversive mode that combines transnational forms with local anxieties and myths, and which has been largely overlooked due to the prominence of fantastic and magical-realist interpretations.

Chapter 1, «Vampires: The First Bat-Men are from the Americas», connects the figure of the vampire bat in European gothic fiction to its alleged American origins. According to Serrano's fascinating theory, the association of the vampire monster with the bat owes its prominence to the European imagination's reaction to Bernal Díaz del Castillo's chronicles of the Mexican conquest, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's memoirs, and Charles Darwin's taxonomy. The chapter also analyzes the presence and meaning of the vampire in *modernista* fiction, particularly in Rubén Darío's «Thanatopia» (1893), Leopoldo Lugones's «La vampira» (1897), Clemente Palma's «Vampiras» (1906) and Floylán Turcios's *El vampiro* (1910). The author ar-

gues that these writers' deployment of the vampire figure characterizes the consequences of modernity in Latin America as monstrous. Other examples of vampire fiction in Latin American Gothic, such as Horacio Quiroga's «El almohadón de plumas» (1907) and «El vampiro» (1927), as well as Julio Cortázar's «El hijo del vampiro» (1937), are also explored here through a gothic lens.

In chapter 2, «Films Love Monsters: Film's Arrival in Latin America», Serrano skillfully traces the introduction of a gothic imagery into the Latin American imagination through filmic fictions coming from Europe. According to the author, classic films such as Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligary* (1920), Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and its Spanish version, George Melford's *Drácula* (1931), greatly inspired gothic artistic production in the territory. Serrano explores this influence in Vicente Huidobro's novel *Cagliostro* (1934) and Horacio Quiroga's stories «El espectro» (1921) and «El vampiro».

Chapter 3, «Live Burials and Death-Defying Beauties», centers around one of the quintessential narrative devices of the Gothic: claustrophobic entombments. After tracing this trope in Latin American fictions not openly belonging to the gothic tradition, such as Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949), Serrano offers an in-depth analysis of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and María Luisa Bombal's *La amortajada* (1938). The gothic qualities of these two works, albeit being apparent, have often been disre-

garded by critics more in favor of fantastic or magical-realist interpretations. This does not mean that Serrano's approach is novel, however: Rulfo's novel had already been analyzed through a gothic lens by other academics (see, for instance, Antonio Alcalá González's chapter in the edited collection *Latin American Gothic in Literature and Culture*, 2017). The ending of Bombal's work is, in Serrano's reading, an example of criticism to patriarchal structures because it suggests that living within these claustrophobic constructions is a worse fate than death. The novel is analyzed using the concept of the Female Gothic. This term, famously coined by Ellen Moers in 1976 and simply defined as the work that women writers have done in the Gothic, has been contested and reformulated by critics during the past forty years, particularly in lieu of the contentious association that Moers established between the gender of the writer and the use of certain narrative devices. Serrano's use of the term, surprisingly, seems to abide by its original meaning.

In Chapter 4, «Vampires Cloaked in Metaphor», Serrano returns to the figure of the blood-sucking undead to explore the different ways in which this archetypal gothic monster is used as a metaphor for oppression and violence. The author's expertise shines through her analysis of the vampire, so it is not surprising that this is one of her most successful chapters. The two works that Serrano examines are Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el supremo* (1974) and Carlos Fuentes's *Vlad* (2010). Bram Stok-

er's novel *Dracula* (1897) is used as a lens through which to unveil the gothic qualities of Roa Bastos's text. On the other hand, Serrano's interpretation of Fuentes's novella focuses on the metaphorical connections between its female characters and the female figures at the epicenter of Mexican national identity: La Malinche, The Virgin of Guadalupe, and La Llorona. This innovative approach makes Serrano's reading of *Vlad* one of the most fascinating and original sections in the monograph.

Chapter 5, «The Doppelgänger: Split-Selves, Animal-Doubles, and Spectral Couples» offers a thought-provoking study of the gothic trope of the double by considering literary intertextuality a sort of «doubling» of an existing tradition. To do so, the author examines texts that, according to her analyses, reproduce or challenge doubles and doppelgängers as found in 18th and 19th-century gothic fiction. These include Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949), Julio Cortázar's «Axolotl», and Carlos Fuentes's «Chac Mool» (1954) and *Aura* (1962).

The last chapter, «Globalized Current Monsters», aims to work both as an epilogue to the monograph and as an invitation to continue exploring the presence of the Gothic in Latin American fictions of the 21st century. Perhaps because of this ambitious endeavor, it seems fairly disconnected to the rest of the book. The chapter briefly discusses a number of Mexican vampire films and the relevance of Guillermo del Toro's works both in Latin America and in other international con-

texts. It concludes with a passing mention to the zombie phenomenon in contemporary Latin American cultural productions. The book ends without a concluding chapter which, I believe, would have been crucial to connect the different sections together, summarize the author's theses, and offer a delimitation of the specific particularities of Latin American Gothic.

Apart from this absence of a succinct conclusion, the book's argument could have been more successful if it included a stronger engagement with previous criticism of Latin American Gothic. The absence of a review of the work of academics such as Nadina Olmedo (who defined the Southern Cone Gothic), Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez (who applied the term Tropical Gothic to Carlos Fuentes's fiction) or Antonio Alcalá González (who has published both on *Pedro Páramo* and «Vlad»), among others, is surprising. Moreover, the corpus of analysis could have benefited from attention to a higher number of female authors: canonical writ-

ers such as Amparo Dávila, Elena Garro, Silvina Ocampo, Rosario Ferré, or Guadalupe Dueñas, among others, would have made relevant additions.

Ultimately, the monograph becomes an indispensable addition to existing criticism. Its success lies in its effective elucidation of significant aspects of Latin American texts which had been overshadowed (or willingly disregarded) by magical-realist and fantastic readings. Thus, Serrano's arguments attest to the ability of the gothic mode to deepen and enhance academic approaches to international fictions and, particularly, Latin American literature and film. Overall, the book is an extremely valuable publication which will enrich both Gothic and Latin American critical theory.

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