

Patricia García, *The Urban Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century European Literature: City Fissures*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham (Switzerland), 2021. ISBN 978-3-030-83775-4.

The modern city is featured as an ideal narrative space to show the spirit of an era that was marked by significant changes in the 19th century European urban and cultural structure. As set out by literary criticism during a long time, it seems that realism is the model genre to elucidate the new urban spaces and their consequent connections with the inhabitants of a time characterized by rationalism. Nevertheless, the impossible always finds a way to introduce itself into reality's small fissures, and into cracks in the city. This is the main reason put forward by Patricia García to develop *The Urban Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century European Literature: City Fissures*, an urban study through the lens of fantastic narrative which exhibits the necessity of exploring the fractures in the modern city fabric. In order to carry it out, the author gathers a total of sixty tales created by Spanish, Francophone, and Anglophone female and male writers. Thus, the fantastic literary critical analysis of Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas, Guy de Maupassant, Jean Lorrain, George Rodenbach, Charles O'squarr, Rhoda Broughton, Sheridan Le Fanu, Charlotte Ridell, Amelia B. Edwards, Charles Dickens, Benito Pérez Galdós, Pedro Antonio de Alarcón and Emilia Pardo

Bazán, is used to begin a set of excellent reflections upon the scenarios, tropes, and metaphors that are characteristic of the fantastic, and that highlighted the urban modifications of European cities during modernity.

The Urban Fantastic raises the challenges to both experience and identity confronted by the citizens cohabiting the major cities of the European continent. Therefore Paris, London and Madrid are—in most of the tales that the author has carefully chosen—the dominant context, where the social conventions and the apparent progress that the industrial model promised will be subverted in order to exemplify the many deficiencies of modernity's great promises, which appeared alongside the urban advancements in western civilization. Thereby, the conceptual and comparative analysis of the literary works reviewed in this book reveal the existence of the urban fantastic in the heart of those literary texts that remained beyond the margins of the 19th century canon.

The three main chapters that form the book are distributed according to the various aspects that relate modern city life and urban structural changes. Part I, «Buildings: Architectural Intruders», examines the eruptions of impossible pheno-

mena on the forms inhabiting the new architectural constructions, so the spaces created by the modern city buildings, and the habit that entails the fact to stay in them, will be the focus of the literary corpus that García explores in this chapter. This first part of the book is divided into two sections: on one hand, «Fantastic Antique Shops» reviews the affinity of supernatural motifs with the antique shops, and the antiquarian themselves. The relics that lie as a nerve center of these spaces, objects that belong to another era and place, generated the crises that would be the critical guides of such stories as «Le Pied de momie» by Théophile Gautier. On the other hand, «The City's Haunted Houses» retrieves one of the most recognizable buildings in the first fantastic narratives—and also in gothic literature. The haunted houses trope extends to urban structures, which will be inhabited by beings trapped in the new relations deployed in the domestic context and will also stay cornered by the difficulty of relocating themselves in overcrowded spaces, in which they will have to reinvent previous ways of life. The author also shows that the haunted houses were built as an ideal critical setting to the second wave of the feminism, which underscored the domestic ways of life roles as a female fantastic main axis. Nonetheless, Patricia García develops this critical range and moves the analysis of voices and characters' inner spaces to the new urban environment that is located in the tales; as a matter of fact, the author had already discussed this

question in previous studies, in which she suggests, indeed, «a feminist geocritical method of reading that transcends domestic interior and engages with other spatial elements, such as character movement, architectural thresholds and physical surroundings» (2020: 2). In this sense the exposition that this book carries out about Rhoda Broughton's (1968) story «The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth» is highly interesting.

The trope of encounters with strangers is the key element of part II, «Encounters: Urban Revenants and Other Fantastic Acquaintances», which is intended to approach the new ways of inhabiting the modern city that incorporate, in the complexity of modern urbanism, several beings that are doomed to deal with strange transience and anonymous spaces. The second chapter includes the «Female Spirits of Place» section, which reveals how the female phantom's emergence in the urban environment is introduced as an expression of city life depravities, and how these female spirits configure themselves as representatives of immorality, causing the transgression of the emphasized order and reason characteristic of the spirit of the era. In the final section of the second chapter, «Fantastic Exhibitions of the Self», the discussion of several tales, such as «L'Ami des Miroirs» (1899) by Georges Rodenbach or «La máscara» (1897) by Emilia Pardo Bazán, will show the confusing establishment of the subject's identity, which was a reflection of their experiences within the

metropolis, an urban structure that is quickly shaped and that will be, at the same time, witness of intense industrialization. In short, this section gives a glimpse of the fragmented and distorted nature of the subject's social location, facing a multitudinous city which is impossible to join. The masquerade balls, the mirrors, and the doll showcases, all of them inserted in the center of the urban setting, reflect the huge challenges upon the creation of the modern «I».

The sounds that invade the metropolis together with the comparison between the urban experience and modern city expression underlie part III, «Rhythms: The Fantastic on the Move», which exposes a kind of fantastic that transgresses the ordinariness arising from the urban rhythms over the spatiotemporal framework. The progress of the interurban mobility infrastructure, such as the railway, the migratory movements, and the different ways of circulation in the city are the most unmistakable sign, altogether, of the transformations of rhythms that take place in both human and business relationships. Urban mobility is, thus, the main feature of the section «The Ghosts of Public Transportation», in which literary texts such as «La novela en el tranvía» (1871), by Benito Pérez Galdós, will venture dynamic alterations in transportation and the displacement between spaces, which are no longer guarantors of regularity. Similarly, «Cacophony and Asynchrony» shows the change that the modern era experiments about the conception of time. In the same

way as the previous section the deflection of movement was noted, this section starts a journey that begins with the standardization of time and is brought to its alteration. This way, the characters of the tales that are discussed in this section, such as «La Nuit» (1887) by Guy de Maupassant or «L'Heure» (1894) by George Rodenbach, stop—in the same way as time will—in front of the estrangement produced by both inordinate urban space and excessive sounds.

In short, this study probes the description and the confrontation between two types of cities that will end up being diluted one into another: the modern city, which is the source of new urban activities, and the fantastic city, which is the origin of the impossible events that invade the rational territory. So, beyond the three main chapters of this book, the previous consideration is also addressed in the introduction «The Modern Fantastic—A Tale of Two Cities». It is also important to highlight the epilogue, «Contemporary Revisitations», in which is evidenced the current redistribution of the tropes that have been analyzed in the urban expressions of the fantastic during the modern era. In this section, the author focuses on both audiovisual fictions and narrations, such as the literary work by José María Merino, to show that the urban changes that have taken place during the last decades of our period have also been involved in the conformation of the fantastic motif in these fictional works. Lastly, this study concludes with a *timeline* that connects the most notable publications in urban fantas-

tic with the most relevant urban innovations throughout each decade of the 19th century, and in all the European cities that have been reviewed.

It is relevant to highlight Patricia Garcías' contribution to the field of the fantastic and geocriticism, which shows a way to address the fantastic genre that she had already explored in other academic works such as «The Fantastic hole: Towards a Theorisation of the Fantastic Transgression as a Phenomenon of Space» (2013) or *Space and Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary Literature. The Architectural Void* (2015). As the author puts forward, «in "the fantastic of space", the impossible element instead of taking place *in space* is an event *of space*» (2013: 16), which is the same experience that has been introduced along the whole book, in which the beings and supernatural phenomena of urban literature are not distinguished by the space that they take in the modern metropolis, but by the fact of they appear because of the city. The fissures in the fabric of the real, which have always been the

condition of possibility for the fantastic, are materialized when they begin to break up the city map.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GARCÍA, Patricia (2013): «The Fantastic Hole: Towards a Theorisation of the Fantastic Transgression as a Phenomenon of Space», *Brumal*, vol. 1, nº 1, pp. 15-35. <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/brumal.37>>

GARCÍA, Patricia (2015): *Space and Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary Literature: The Architectural Void*, Routledge, New York and London. <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315740829>>

GARCÍA, Patricia (2020): «A Geocritical Perspective on the Female Fantastic: Rethinking the Domestic», *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 22, nº 4, pp. 1-11. <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3689>>

ALESSANDRA MASSONI CAMPILLO
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
alessandra.massoni@uab.cat

