

## Book Reviews

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**García, Patricia and Teresa López-Pellisa, eds. *Fantastic Short Stories by Women Authors from Spain and Latin America: A Critical Anthology*. U of Wales P, 2019. 158 pp.**

Reading the fantastic, whether for academic purposes or purely for pleasure, has been popular for centuries. As the genre developed within its global cultural context, so too did the analytical and social responses to it. Yet, in critical studies there has been scant application of feminist theory and inclusion of texts by women authors, particularly those from Spanish-speaking areas. The compilation *Fantastic Short Stories by Women Authors from Spain and Latin America: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Patricia García and Teresa López-Pellisa, addresses this situation.

The editors organize their volume chronologically, focusing on five key authors and five short stories from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to contemporary times [Emilia Pardo Bazán (Spain), Amparo Dávila (Mexico), Rosario Ferré (Puerto Rico), Cristina Fernández Cubas (Spain), and Ana María Shua (Argentina)]; the stories were published from 1912 to 2000. The book consists of an introductory chapter that traces the definition of the fantastic, develops the connection between feminist and fantastic theories, delineates the editors' approach to their topic, and outlines the scope of the work. The latter is a valuable menu tool that allows the reader to grasp both the overall book theme and individual chapter foci.

Each of the ensuing chapters includes a critical overview of an author and her writings, an analytical examination of the short story, a list of the author's works (in some cases shortened, with a weblink to the full catalog), and a "Selected Works" section that highlights references pertinent to the author and/or her production. These content chapters are complemented by a final "General Bibliography" consisting of primary sources as well as critical resources (in English, Spanish, French, and German), a list of thirteen "Temas de debate y discusión," a "Selected Vocabulary" Spanish/English glossary, and an "Index."

The initial chapter, "The Fantastic: Towards a Feminist Perspective," written by García, provides a thorough treatise on the fantastic, from the origins of the word itself to ensuing analytical approaches. The technique of including various dictionary definitions in a comparative manner combined with historical, social, and cultural contexts as well as academic theories is valuable given that it offers something for both novice and seasoned readers. Complex concepts are well-examined and there is a frequent use of examples to highlight key ideas; this is particularly helpful to distinguish the two main academic approaches to the fantastic. The exploration of the theme is both broad and detailed: the former since it includes the key global figures associated with fantastic literature and the latter due to the inclusion of woman authors from Spanish-speaking areas and their historical and artistic contextualization.

The editors affirm that their theoretical approach to the fantastic short stories included in their book is based on the consideration that "the supernatural itself is not integrated into reality as a natural law" (7); a clear parallel emerges between the liminal nature of the fantastic and women, as evidenced in the content chapters. From Pardo Bazán, the editors select "La resucitada" (1912) in which the tale of a wife and mother who returns, with limited success, to her family home from the crypt serves as a reflection of strict and limiting gender roles. "El huésped" (1959), by Dávila, is next and, while the story echoes the motif of

patriarchal power, the theme of the female as active agent emerges within the plot centered on the unification of an unnamed wife and female servant pitted against an intrusive, unnatural guest. In the ensuing chapter, the themes of gender roles and subjectivity/objectivity are blended with the power of fantastic creation/birth and doubles, as illustrated by Ferré's "La muñeca menor" (1976). Fernández Cubas develops, in the narrative time-jumping "El ángulo del horror" (1990), topics related not just to family dynamics and the locus of "home/house," but also to uncanny bildungsroman and journeys, both literal and figurative. Finally, with Shua's "Vida de perros" (2000), the definition of family and family roles takes a fantastic turn, as one member is not quite entirely human and through his/its struggles (and ironic observations) society itself is questioned and parodied. As outlined, thematic ties between and among each of the short stories are abundant; yet, each new story also brings in a new feminist/fantastic analytical approach as well, such as, but not limited to, voice and agency, class differentiation, ecofeminism, the gaze, myth, religion, and humor as critique.

There is a well-organized linear arch between each of the chapters as presented in the volume as well as multiple metanarrative cross-references, which connote a very organic whole. Yet, each individual chapter functions perfectly well as a comprehensive stand-alone unit too. This provides a certain level of convenience and flexibility for the reader. Furthermore, scholar-teachers will note how the work could be used as a basis for courses. The supernatural is, once again, quite popular in a variety of media, particularly among this cohort of students, and this volume would lend itself to an undergraduate course (in Spanish or English, with the addition of translations of the short stories) and serve as a key initial resource for a graduate course. The preliminary chapter and the content chapters are well-annotated: informative footnotes and detailed endnotes teem with a variety of critical materials, explanations, translations of key passages, possible interpretations, and explanations of vocabulary, all of which provide ample fodder for additional research. To wit, while the editors provide a short list of discussion topics, more questions, comparisons, and contrasts can be raised, and many themes and critical examinations can be elaborated from within both the introductory analytical overview and the five content chapters.

The female authors and texts selected for a close reading in this volume represent but a fraction of the Spanish-speaking women authors of fantastic texts available that have been generally excluded from anthologies and academic consideration. García and López-Pellisa state that their purpose is "to contribute to this process of restoring and reclaiming a history of excellent women writers of the fantastic" (19) in a "gender-balanced" manner (8). They have fulfilled this goal by crafting a well-developed book that combines deep and contextualized readings of five representative authors/short stories with multiple comprehensive overviews and lists of additional resources, authors, and texts.

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