

compleja y matizada que resulta de gran utilidad tanto para especialistas como para lectores interesados en comprender cómo se configuró la España actual.

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HEIDI BACKES. *Spectral Spain: Haunted Houses, Silent Spaces and Traumatic Memories in Post-Franco Gothic Fiction*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2024. 261 pp.

The last few years have witnessed an increasing interest in a country that for a long time was seen as Gothic, with the Inquisition and superstitious beliefs immortalized by Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), rather than as a producer of Gothic material. Still as Xavier Aldana Reyes argues in *Spanish Gothic: National Identity, Collaboration and Cultural Adaptation* (2017), the Gothic has been a fixture of Spain's cultural landscape since the late eighteenth-century, whilst Ann Davies tracks in *Contemporary Spanish Gothic* (2016) the many ways the Gothic mode interacts with contemporary Spanish culture. Other notable publications include *Espectros: Ghostly Hauntings in Contemporary Hispanic Narratives* (2015), an anthology of essays edited by Alberto Ribas-Casayas and Amanda L. Petersen, which also encompasses works from Latin America. *Spectral Spain* is a stimulating addition to the burgeoning field of Spanish Gothic that attests to the Gothic as strong enough to be a transnational phenomenon with its universal tropes and archetypes, yet pliable enough to adapt itself to specific local concerns and circumstances.

In a survey that dissects the narrative of seven contemporary Spanish authors, Heidi Backes successfully shows how the Gothic's haunting motif can unearth historical trauma and repressed memories in post-Franco literature, written as the country came to grips with its transition to democracy after nearly four decades of dictatorship. *Spectral Spain* belongs to a recent and growing fascination with haunting metaphors within the field of literary and cultural criticism in what Roger Luckhurst dubbed the spectral turn, becoming an evocative tool in grasping the political violence of the twentieth century, from the Holocaust to the political persecution and disappearances that marred many regimes during the Cold War period.

This phantasmagoric fascination will be more familiar to mainstream audiences through *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), Guillermo del Toro's first cinematic foray into the haunted landscapes of the Spanish Civil War, followed by his blockbuster *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) that put Spanish Gothic firmly on the international map. *The Devil's Backbone* opens with the

question “What is a ghost?” to which the narrator replies “A tragedy condemned to repeat itself, an instant of pain, something dead that still seems alive, and an emotion suspended in time, like a blurred photograph or an insect trapped in amber” (2:00). Del Toro is one of the many directors that have adopted what Jo Labanyi called “an aesthetics of haunting” and who have turned cinema into a key vehicle for the Spanish Gothic together with other seminal works of the post-Franco era like *The Others* (2001) by Alejandro Amenábar or *The Orphanage* (2007) by J.A. Bayona. However, as Backes points out, less attention has been paid to literary production and, in particular to the output of Spanish women, which has often rendered their contributions as invisible as the ghosts that populate their fiction.

To address this neglect, *Spectral Spain* explores the spectrality that populates the fiction of female authors, with the bulk of the analysis concentrated on such household names as Mercè Rodoreda, Adelaida García Morales, Ana María Matute and Espido Freire as well as male writers like Julio Llamazares or Carlos Ruiz Zafón, whose novel *The Shadow of The Wind* (2001) catapulted him to fame outside Spain’s borders and placed Barcelona firmly in the Gothic imagination. Ruiz Zafón constitutes the only author in this list whose work has been broadly labelled as Gothic since its publication. Yet Backes shows through a close reading of eleven texts that, well before Ruiz Zafón manifested the horrors of the Spanish Civil War and fascism through decaying mansions and mysterious manuscripts. For instance, Julio Llamazares had his protagonist in *The Yellow Rain* (1988) admit that “it is hard to accustom oneself to living with a ghost” (quoted in Backes 135).

The book maps out these hauntings by dividing them into three main gothic motifs: haunted houses, silent spaces, and traumatic memories. Along the way the author covers a rich geography that spans the South of Spain in the works of Adelaida García Morales, the Basque Country of Espido Freire, the Catalonia of Mercè Rodoreda, the Madrid of Ana María Matute and the North of Julio Llamazares. One of the strengths of Backes’ selection lies in showcasing this regional diversity, particularly to readers outside Spain, as she untangles the many strands that make up the discursive tapestry of the country.

Part I focuses on how authors disrupt the domesticity central to Francoism through the haunted house, and for which Backes invokes the “Female Gothic,” defined by Ellen Moers as texts by women for whom “the terrors, the restraints, the dangers of the Gothic novel were not fantasies but the realities of a woman’s life” (quoted in Backes 19). The restrictive gender roles imposed on women that curtailed their autonomy and haunted them long after the demise of the dictatorship are palpable in the stories selected, some written in the twilight of the regime like Rodoreda’s *A Broken Mirror*

(1974) or decades after as García Morales' *Aunt Águeda* and *Bene* (1985) or the subsequent *Elisa's Secret* (1999).

Part II explores a haunting silence that “like a ghost, is the presence of absence” (107), an absence particularly present in Spain's history, from the censorship during the Franco's regime to the 1977 Amnesty Law and Pact of Forgetting that ushered in the Transition and the continued reluctance by some to expose the skeletons in the closet, or in the mass graves that the Civil War left behind. This collective and often unvoiced trauma underlies the work of Julio Llamazares, one of the country's most venerated authors, as Backes demonstrates by filtering his novels *Wolf Moon* (1985) and *The Yellow Rain* (1988) through a Gothic lens. Cristina Fernández Cubas closes section II, an equally lauded writer who, like Llamazares, has not been widely translated and thus remains relatively unknown to international Gothic scholars.

Part III concludes with traumatic memories in the work of Freire, Matute and the inescapable Ruiz Zafón as their protagonists wrestle with recurring images or events, condemned, as was the ghost in *The Devil's Backbone*, “to repeat them like a tragedy” (0:55).

With an agile and engaging prose, *Spectral Spain* is ambitious in its scope covering a vast expanse both in terms of the number of authors introduced and the theoretical frameworks applied. Occasionally this wide approach renders the sources used – from Derrida's hauntology to Kristeva's concept of the abject or Freud's trauma – as an impressive yet superficial methodological catalogue that yields no new angles. Despite these minor hiccups, the author produces some captivating close readings that will appeal to those already familiar with the works analyzed and newcomers alike.

Spectral Spain joins a growing revisionist wave on the Gothic and inserts Spain into a Gothic genealogy traditionally considered the exclusive domain of Anglo-Saxon authors. It also reminds us that Spain has many ghosts yet to be exorcised from the collective imagination.

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MARÍA DOLORES CABRERO RODRÍGUEZ-JALÓN, ED. *Diario de guerra del estudiante de arquitectura Francisco Cabrero Torres-Quevedo*. Madrid: Guillermo Escolar Editor, 2023. 222 pp.

Diario de guerra del estudiante de arquitectura Francisco Cabrero Torres-Quevedo, editado por la profesora M.^a Dolores Cabrero Rodríguez-Jalón, se