

Javier Ordiz (ed.), *Estrategías y figuraciones de lo insólito en la narrativa Mexicana (siglos XIX-XXI)*

Resulting from a MINECO supported project led by the editor alongside a group of researchers at the University of León, this volume comprises essays from eight scholars from Spanish Universities as well as a contribution from the Mexican novelist Daniela Tarazona. The thematic focus of 'lo insólito' is broad, and contributors cover a range of genres from terror and Magic Realism to the postmodern Gothic and science fiction. Whilst some authors theorise the parameters of their own literary examples of 'lo insólito' more than others, the reader is assisted by David Roas's chapter, in which he provides a comparative definition of categories in the field. Concise and forthright, Roas draws sharp category boundaries that some may consider a little rigid (taxonomy in this field is notoriously contentious) but his contribution precisely enables that process of reflection through the course of the collection.

Readers with a general or research interest in the subject will find the volume very useful, particularly as the project has been designed to deliver a historical perspective spanning almost two hundred years from the early nineteenth century to the present day. In this regard, one of the most interesting contributions is that of Lola López Martínez who offers a survey of the Mexican terror genre of the nineteenth century. With valuable insights into the significant presence of the esoteric themes in the short fiction of the period, the author draws connections between the supernatural and the emerging psychosexual dimensions of Romanticism and the Gothic. López Martínez's study is perhaps most interesting in its historicisation of the short fiction. This is done, on the one hand, in relation to the immediate context of its production, namely the nation's institutional and cultural Positivism and, on the other, to a longer view of the indigenous-inspired myths of the colonial period that provide contents for the stories. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the latter feature in several essays and, rounding off the collection, José Manuel Trabado Cabado's discussion of the *Popol Vuh*, Tonantzin and La llorona in Beto Hernández's graphic fiction provides a satisfying coherence to the volume's historical thread.

Elsewhere, Francisca Noguerol gives a stimulating overview of the micro-fiction of Cecilia Eudave, a writer whose work attracts considerable attention in the volume. Noguerol draws on Lubomir Doležel's concept of heterocosmica to examine how Eudave creates multiple worlds in order to see our own differently. In an analysis of *Para viajeros improbables* (2011), the author argues how Eudave's construction of multiple realities functions along the lines of the neo-fantastic that Todorov first associates with Kafka. In summary, Noguerol contends that Eudave's neo-fantastic differs from the classical form because, in a similar vein to the heterocosmic, it challenges the notion of a unified perception of reality that the latter must rely on. Referencing, Calvino, Borges, Arreola and Monterroso, Noguerol packs a lot into short space and presents a series of perceptive close readings. The essay is slightly let down by a brief conclusion that might have better tied together the author's take on Eudave in the light of the theoretical apparatus.

Another standout contribution is Javier Ordiz's essay on the science fiction novel in Mexico. Working in a field that he argues is largely unresearched, the author states from the outset that his focus is on 'soft' science fiction, given

that the 'hard' version of the outer-space scenario exists only within Mexican children's literature. Ordiz focuses on novels that present utopian and dystopian images of Mexico and, tracing these through the twentieth century, he offers a revealing overview of tendencies and contexts. He contends that texts from the first half of the twentieth century, such as Eduardo Urzáiz's *Eugenia* (1919) and Diego Cañedo's *Palamás, Echevete y yo o el lago de asfaltado* (1945), demonstrate the optimism of an egalitarian Mexican future. In contrast, novels from the last decades of the century reverse this attitude to paint landscapes of social and environmental chaos. The author argues that this shift is the manifestation of a progressive disillusionment with national politics and economics. Whilst there is a rather large time gap between the utopian and dystopian literature chosen, Ordiz's analysis is convincing. A comparison between these findings and other Latin American science fictions might be of interest to help determine the extent to which trends are dictated by national contexts in isolation from cultural paradigms such as modernism and post-modernism.

The rest of the volume offers a reading of Magic Realism and death in Revueltas and Rulfo, a survey of the post-modern Gothic in a range of contemporary authors, an examination of Alberto Chimal's particular brand of the marvellous and a comparison of the female body as a site of 'lo insólito' in the work of Patricia Laurent Kullick, Cecilia Eudave and Adriana Díaz Enciso. The collection gives a fine presentation of the rich and varied phenomenon of 'lo insólito' in Mexican literature.

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