

***El encuentro imposible. La conformación del fantástico ambiguo en la narrativa breve argentina (1862-1910).* By Andrea Castro. Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2002. 202 pp. \$37.**

The interest for the fantastic literature has resulted in a considerable amount of publications during the last twenty years. It is indeed an impressive bibliography mainly concentrated in the most well-known practitioners and developers of the genre, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo and Julio Cortázar. However, little has been done in order to study the construction of the fantastic as a literary genre in nineteenth-century Latin American literature. This book studies the fantastic literature written in the Río de la Plata area as an example of the construction of the ambiguously fantastic in short fiction from 1862 to 1910. Andrea Castro's research covers some of these gaps by analysing the construction of the ambiguously fantastic in five stories: Juana Manuela Gorriti's "Quien escucha su mal oye" (1865), Eduardo L. Homberg's "El ruiseñor y el artista" (1876), Eduarda Mansilla de García's "El ramito de romero" (1877), Atilio Chiappori's "La corbata azul" (1904), and Leopoldo Lugones' "Un fenómeno inexplicable" (1906).

Andrea Castro understands the construction of the ambiguously fantastic in relation to the context in which the stories were published, and also in relation to other fantastic short stories and different texts from the press of the period. As a starting point, this book assumes that the fantastic is a genre that originates in European gothic romanticism. It is characterised by the juxtaposition of events belonging to incompatible epistemological systems. The five short stories analysed in this book were chosen on the basis that they all present a coexistence of a natural and a supernatural domain. These domains are incompatible according to the rationalistic premises proposed by the text and thus coexist in an unresolved conflict. This is what Andrea Castro labels as the "ambiguously fantastic". The objectives of this analysis can be divided in particular, textual, general and contextual areas since the author believes that it is impossible to separate a work of literature from its moment of production. However, the accent is put on the textual analysis of the five stories. The study of motifs, figures, themes, the historical-social context, and other particular areas serve to enhance the possibilities of the textual analyses. The first chapter of this book establishes the framework and objectives of this scholarly research. It is followed by a second chapter where we can find the theoretical points of departure. Andrea Castro revises the different standpoints critics have taken on the issues of the "fantastic" and of the "reader", and continues to explain her concept of "ambiguity". The third chapter is a reconstruction of the sociocultural context and the position of the three publications in which four of the stories were published. When read in their social, cultural and political context, the stories appear as a challenge to the hegemony of science and empirical reason as

instruments to interpret the world. They also appear as a challenge to the rhetoric of the binary oppositions that guide the description of Argentina in the leading – liberal- discourses of the period. The main focus of the following chapter is put on the study of the narrative techniques utilized in the stories to create and confront the natural and the supernatural domains. The last chapter of the book studies the same domains through the motifs, figures and themes included in the stories. The motif of the threshold appears as a fundamental element in the structuring of the the textual space. The analysis is approached from two perspectives: the structure of the story within the story and the relations that are established between the voices in the story.

Andrea Castro's book is an important contribution to the literature published in Argentina in the *fin-de-siècle*, particularly to the subgenre of fantastic literature. This study shows that the concept of genre used in this book enables the visualization of the fact that in spite of the variations in the employment of narrative techniques and the topics that situate them within the tradition of the fantastic in literature, the five stories keep clear differences with each other, refusing to be pigeonholed, and reminding us that the inscription in a certain literary genre in no way rules out other genres. Finally, readers of this book interested in this period will find a well-documented appendix of periodicals from the Biblioteca Nacional in Buenos Aires. Even though it is not a comprehensive list, it can be useful to see a big part of what scholars can count on for the period between 1870 and 1910. The bibliography used for this research is also comprehensive and offers a great deal of information and sources to scholars and interested readers.

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