CLASSIQUES GARNIER

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Jhumpa Lahiri, *Translating Myself and Others*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022. 198 p. ISBN 978 0691231167.

Translating Myself and Others is a collection of ten essays by novelist and translator Jhumpa Lahiri plus an appendix containing Italian versions of two of them: "Where I Find Myself. On Self-Translation" and "Calvino Abroad". Lahiri was a successful fiction writer in English before embarking on her adventures in Italian, publishing in Italian, translating Domenico Starnone into English, and finally translating her own Italian critical essays into English. The essays range over interlinked topics: self-translation, writing one's own work versus translating others, and kindred spirits – Starnone, Calvino, Gramsci – who embody bilingualism, transnationalism, and open-endedness. Ovid is a tutelary spirit throughout and the ongoing work of translating his *Metamorphoses* with her colleague Yelena Baraz provides startling insights into questions of translation, self-translation and transformation.

What drives a person to translate? The book opens and closes with limpid and moving reflections on Lahiri's relationship with her mother, an immigrant into the U.S. From birth there were always two languages for Lahiri: Bengali, her home and parental language, and U.S. English, the language of school. The act of writing inevitably meant using the other language, English, while Bengali was only known through orality. (In an intriguing aside, Lahiri mentions a Masters project that she undertook, translating Bengali short stories. She asked her mother to record herself reading the stories aloud because she herself could not read Bengali.) Translation comes naturally to one who lives between, and later on among, languages. Another motivation behind the translating is the hurt and sense of exclusion induced by the monolingual nationalism of Italian. In "Why Italian?", she describes how some Italians regard her activities as freakish or unnatural. In "Lingua/Language", using the pronoun "our" in "nostra lingua" closes off the language to outsiders. She celebrates those who write in languages that they were not "born into" because they are free of the blindness and over-familiarity fostered

by monolingualism. As she puts it in "In Praise of Echo", "to immigrate is to observe carefully and copy certain cues. Perhaps total assimilation is not possible, nor even desirable". For Lahiri, writing and translating in Italian is both a homecoming and a space where she works hard to make a new home.

Translators are careful readers as well as writers, "responsible" for the texts they produce. Lahiri studied Latin and Greek at college and the classics demand a particularly engaged form of reading, "dynamic and double, more active than passive". Here we have a hermeneutic and philological approach to translation, rather than a linguistic or social-scientific one. Lahiri's humanism begins in praxis: a close attention to language and a focus on process rather than results, based on metaphors and myths. But she takes in politics to defend complex identities and encounters, to take a stand against nationalism and linguistic imperialism. Finally, her dialogic approach is an ethical one: in "An Ode to the Mighty Optative", she argues that writing and translating must remain at a remove from politics: "Things are seldom as they should be, which is why we spend so much time and energy wishing they could be different … While the shock of change is often a catalyst for art, art is not – should not – be an instrument for change of any kind. Once art weds itself to a social or political purpose, it is bled of its true purpose, which is not to change the world but to explore the phenomenon and consequences of change itself". Lahiri does not merely situate herself in relation to her critical practice but binds autobiographical writing into the essays, imparting a refreshingly grounded work-in-progress quality to the hybrid genre of academic memoir that has emerged from the pandemic years.

It is this quality of open-endedness that draws Lahiri to Domenico Starnone, a Neapolitan writer who is her creative twin. Three essays discuss how she translated his fictions *Ties, Trick* and *Trust*, underpinning and triangulating the experience of translating *Trust* with examples from her own work on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The excitement of translating is likened to turning over cards in a game to see what will be revealed, to the back-and-forth movement of a tennis ball. Self-translation is for Lahiri a logical continuation of translating others. "Where I Find Myself" presents her thoughts and notes as she translates *Dove mi trovo* (2015), a novel that she wrote in Italian, into English, under the title

Whereabouts. Many who comment on self-translation consider it as separate from ordinary translation, a case apart, but Lahiri sees it as a more demanding, more exhilarating extension of her apprenticeship translating Starnone: "Self-translation led to a deep awareness of the book I'd written, and therefore, to one of my past selves".

Like Starnone, who grew up speaking Neapolitan dialect, Calvino's "Italianness" was "always tilting toward the Other". As an international person who straddled places and languages, he created works in multiple registers, scientific, humorous, philosophical and literary, which are much translated and loved outside Italy. Although he did not translate much himself, he has a translator's outlook, putting into words experiences that the reader may have had but never been able to articulate in language. In "Calvino Abroad", Lahiri singles out his statement that "true literature works along the untranslatable margins of every language". For Lahiri, translation is a paradigm of both writing and being in the world because it simultaneously requires delving into the self and reaching out to encounter others. In the essay "*Traduzione (stra)ordinaria*/(Extra)ordinary Translation. On Gramsci", she presents Gramsci the human being, in prison, living among languages, the Gramsci of the letters home rather than the inward-looking notebooks. "What is pointed inward is vast and global… what is outward is intensely personal". This doubleness underpins the core essay of the book, "In Praise of Echo. Reflections on the Meaning of Translation": like Narcissus, the writer is inward looking, immature, maybe a little self-obsessed, whereas the translator, like Echo, repeats and changes the words of others, but Echo's voice outlasts them all.

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Dobrota Pucherová, *Feminism and Modernity in Anglophone African Women's Writing: A 21st-Century Global Context*. London and New York: Routledge, 2022. 245 p. ISBN: 978 1032187273.

Dobrota Pucherová's new book is a timely contribution to feminism from a comparative and intersectional perspective, focusing on the evolution and latest developments of a powerful feminist discourse in 21st-century Anglophone African women's writing. The author places her discussion of this (so far) insufficiently explored body of literature in the vast context of global feminism, with its diverse focuses on the multiple aspects of female oppression, depending on the concrete circumstances of women in various countries and targeted differently (and yet solidarily) by emancipation movements across the globe, at various points in time.

The argument sets off from a terminological debate: while the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s is shown to create a positive environment for emancipation movements in the world in general, the African women's movement originally feels the need to avoid the F-word (feminism), replacing it by the more neutral term "gender". This is so not only because of feminism's lack of prestige in Africa, but also because it is felt to be insufficiently equipped to voice the concerns of African women. The other, more objective, reason is the memory of colonial oppression that leads to an automatic rejection of all things Western. Instead, as the current study shows, a specific version of womanism takes wings in Africa, with Nigerian critic Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi as its main representative.

Without claiming to offer an exhaustive view of the spectacular 21st-century rise of Anglophone African women's voices in literature, Pucherová analyses a significant selection of female responses to African patriarchy and the traditional denial of all rights to women from across the continent. Such traditions have led to the denial of non-heteronormative identities and systemic violence, such as the millennia-old practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). The book focuses on activists such as

Ugandan feminist Sylvia Tamale, or theorists like Nigerian scholar Mary Modupe Kolawole, but mostly on creative writers such as the reputed US-based Nigerians Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta, the Ugandan organisation FEMRITE as a platform for women's writing, Somali autobiographical writers Soraya Miré and Ayaan Hirsi Ali or writers of the "new South African woman" such as Angela Makholwa and, as we advance through the book, many others (3-6). A rich variety of fictional and memorialistic literary texts are examined in this impressively well-documented study. Yet, the author's voice always succeeds in making itself heard, taking a critical distance further empowered by Pucherová's own investment in her own background: that of Eastern European women's literature and feminism, which took shape as a movement in its own right only after the fall of the communist regime, and also found itself in a complex debate with the second wave of Western feminism (Simone de Beauvoir). Thus, an implicit comparison between two feminist discourses, perceived as marginal in relation to the more visible Western one, and partially borrowing from it while also rejecting it, is maintained throughout the book, allowing Pucherová to develop a complex original approach to an emerging body of feminist writing that requires critical attention.

The book's argument is built around the idea of feminism as transculturation, as a dynamic relational, transnational movement whose aim is to reach out, to establish connections with other feminisms in the world and trace a global feminist solidarity, while being faithful to the specific spatial and temporal situatedness of African women. Thus, this study departs from a tradition of interpreting African literatures in a postcolonial light that would often be reductive in its focus on African reactions to Western colonial practices, and proposes a transnational approach instead. From this perspective, it reflects on the difficult realities faced by African women, such as female circumcision, domestic violence, and homophobia in the context of the emergence of African modernity, traced as a difficult negotiation between the emulation and the rejection of Western models and often facing the racism implicit in the allegedly civilising mission of the colonial enterprise.

In tune with African scholars such as the Nigerian Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, the author maintains that African ideas on gender and sexuality have always been correlated with Western ones and there have always

been circulations of ideas across borders. In a different, feminist key, this reminds us of an argument inaugurated in 1987 with the publication of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*: that traces of African culture are to be found in classical European civilisation and interconnections across the Mediterranean basin have existed ever since. More than three decades later, the current book, while revealing the recent 21st-century phenomenon of the rise of a fertile wave of literature in Africa, more than half of which is written by women, the ancient intellectual resources of a continent which centuries of colonialism associated with backwardness and barbarity are revealed. While the African traces underlying European civilisation are evidence of ancient negotiations across the Mediterranean, traditional customs and beliefs are shown to have been invoked by patriarchy around the world as a justification for female oppression.

The argument sets off by placing African female writing in the context of debates around the novel form, from Ian Watt's classical definition of the genre as a European product of the bourgeois society of the 18th century (when the ground for modern Western feminism was also being laid). The novel form is adapted to African realities as late as the second half of the 20th century and then travels back to the West, in English, to voice the concerns of African women for the benefit of a global audience. The examples chosen here are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta, whose emancipated, self-aware characters evolve outside Africa and build independent lives as modern women. Then, Pucherová's focus returns to African countries, such as Nigeria and Uganda, in an examination of a body of fiction and memoir engaging with the painful realities of female circumcision, domestic violence, marital and corrective rape, all justified by a perception of the African woman as a possession to be traded off from fathers to husbands. The author bases her argument on Gayle Rubin's theorisation of the exchange of women, following in the line of Lévi-Strauss's concept, pioneered in his 1949 book *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. One of the most important points Pucherová makes is that, despite local differences that we must be aware of, there is a certain universal dimension in patriarchal practices everywhere in the world. Her references to arranged marriage in 17th- and 18th- century Europe (Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood), as well as in Ama Ata Aidoo's 20th-century fiction about Ghanaian women show this.

The second half of the book focuses on African women's sexuality, in particular the outcomes of the century-old African tradition of female genital mutilation (FGM) and its connection to the emergence of representations of African femininity outside the institutions of marriage and family. Chapter 6, in particular, examines the formation of an African lesbian modernity (in terms of which an alternative spelling of the word "women" – "womyn" – is sometimes preferred to avoid any reference to "men"). Same-sex desire is positioned in relation to a tradition of marriage-oriented compulsory heterosexuality that denied even the existence of "women who love women" (167-168), despite historical evidence that they existed centuries before the instauration of the current repressive practices. The author cites sources that document the existence of same-sex marriages in some African regions, with "female husbands" taking on "attributes of male identity" (195).

Finishing on an empowering "African Womyn Write Back" note – which echoes Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's 1989 book on the formation on postcolonial literatures, while also dissenting from postcolonial interpretations – Pucherová's book fills an important gap in the knowledge about African women's writing and enters into a complex theoretical and conceptual dialogue with a number of other critical studies of feminism as a whole or African feminism in particular. Important contributions are made to the work on African female genital mutilation and the emergence of a lesbian consciousness in African women's literature of the kind, extensively conducted by Chantal Zabus.

Pucherová's book ultimately celebrates African women's discovery of their own bodies as sites of knowledge and identity formation, beyond culturally conditioned obedience to an oppressive patriarchal morality that instrumentalises women and denies them access to pleasure and self-affirmation. It makes an engaging read for the academic public interested in Anglophone African women's literature and feminist activism, but also, more generally, in feminism as human rights.

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Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice. Poetry and Natural History.* Introduction David Schenck. Series: NYRB Classics. New York: New York Review Books, 2022 [1960]. 463 p. ISBN: 9781681372181.

Elizabeth Sewell (1919-2001), world traveller, writer, poet, was one of the most complex thinkers in the realm of myth studies. She first published her seminal volume *The Orphic Voice* in 1960. Her specific understanding of the Orpheus figure places her alongside other Orphic *aficionados* "like Walter A. Strauss, Charles Segal, and Ihab Hassan" (vii), as stated by Sewell's literary executor, David Schenck. In this much-needed new edition published in 2022, Schenck authors a most detailed "Introduction" that highlights Sewell's pioneering research, with her radically different position about mythology as an all-encompassing body-mind active process, combining sciences and arts. In Sewell's words: "If you cannot think in mathematics, you have to think in words; but with words comes Orpheus, the poetic and metaphoric power of language operating on the mind" (9); adding: "In the Orpheus story, myth is looking at itself. This is the reflection of myth in its own mirror. It promises to give Orpheus a special significance: for myth as living thought and the very type of thought in action" (41).

For Sewell, "myth" is by its very nature prophetic, "the activity between mind and language in poetry, whereby the mind invents new models and methods to understand new things" (57). It also "provides, in its narrative, a method by which to pursue its inquiry" (5). Poetry holds the highest status among language activities: "Poetry puts language to full use as a means of thought" (46). It is "the only adequate instrument for thinking about change, process, organisms, and life" (Sewell qtd. by Schenck, x), with Orpheus that "guide[s] as well as elucidate[s] the history of culture and thought" (x).

Myth, for Sewell, is the unifying force for all human undertakings: "Language and mind, poetry and biology meet and bear on one another in the figure of Orpheus. This myth asks a great question

about poetry in the natural world, the central area where language works with and on that most astonishing of biological phenomena, the human mind" (5). "All striving and learning is mythologizing" (28) is a statement that might predict the recent advances in human cognition studies while also referring to the ancient Buddhist understanding of life. Sewell nevertheless focuses exclusively on Orpheus, whose all-inclusive nature is manifested through five types of formal system: (1) dance and ritual; (2) music and rhythm; (3) plastic art and all forms of visual pattern; (4) mathematics; (5) word-language – a concept that has proven rather useful for interpreting contemporary holistic art, for example.

Sewell's principal theoretical views are condensed in her introduction composed of seven sections (Part I, 1-51). It is followed by three large chapters that span over 400 years of Orphic endeavours, establishing a spiral of connections among the selected poets-thinkers who transcend the still prevalent divide between logic and myth through their "postlogical thinking", or rather their "postlogic" (57). The final chapter (before the extensive endnotes and the Index) contains Sewell's poems appearing in the order in which they, and the book, were written.

The two authors presented in Part II ("Postlogical Thinking") are Bacon and Shakespeare, the creators of the English "Renaissance" in the early 1600, both "profoundly prophetic and forward-looking" (55). The postlogical dimensions dealt with in Part II mark Sewell's own approach and her continuation of the Orphic tradition. Her thinking is circular and synthetic, analogical, and synergetic. She often refers to the continuous need, among poets-scientists of all walks of life, to foster inclusive mythologies, which is also her *credo*. In Part III, she continues with Erasmus Darwin and Goethe ("Linnean and Ovidian Taxonomy"). She then dedicates Part IV to Wordsworth and Rilke ("Toward a Biology of Thinking"). As listed by David Schenck, the other Orphic voices in this 463-page monument to body-mind mythological thinking range from Pico to Vico, from Novalis to Hölderlin, with side trips to France for Hugo, Renan, and Mallarmé. In her introduction, Sewell insisted on them all, together with Milton, Hooke, Swedenborg, Coleridge, Shelley, and Emerson.

Possibly a sign of the late fifties, very few women's names appear in Sewell's volume. Lou Andreas-Salomé is only referred to as Rilke's

correspondent. None are integrated within the continuum of the Orphic spiral mentioned above. Yet, Sewell's insistence on body's own intelligence ("the body thinks"; "[t]he human organism thinks as a whole", 35), echoes the ancient yogic principles (after all, Sewell was born in India, to British parents). Her views also foretell the claims by French feminist writers in the 1970s, particularly Hélène Cixous's "écriture feminine" and the recognition of the body as the source of all creative endeavours. The figure of a new Eurydice could have triggered Sewell's additional developments within the Orphic realm, had she been drawn to more recent (and not predominantly English-speaking) authors.

Sewell mainly worked on this major volume in the late fifties, when she benefited from a grant in Manchester and from her close collaboration with Michael Polanyi, a man deeply interested in the philosophy of biology, to whom the book is dedicated. With today's major advancements in all the disciplines related to biology, such as the new geoscience, biotechnology, and especially all branches of ecology, Sewell would be happy to see the realisation of her plea for complete body-mind approaches ("the observer [being] part of the whole which he observes", 11). Yet, if "Orpheus is alive and stirring among the sciences", as stated by Schenck in his Introduction, "what about poetry?" – as he also wonders (xviii). He suggests possible developments by D.H. Lawrence and H.D., especially for the "Eurydice portion of the myth" (xviii). Indeed, while humanity has started to see the connections between our bodies and the universe, literary criticism, for example, has become subject to "logic" in its attempt to be more "scientific" – something that, for Sewell, might even lead to "dogmatism" (8). Mythological studies, forced to integrate, at least to a certain degree, analogical developments and circular types of thinking embedded in myths, may thus bear the mark of a possible non-scientific heresy. No wonder Sewell's understanding of language as a whole, of the cognitive processes at the core of mythmaking since the early periods of human existence, and her all-encompassing definitions of myths, especially of the Orphic tradition, may still appear as controversial in a world where over sixty years after the first edition of *The Orphic Voice* "[th]e word 'myth' is used [...] almost exclusively in a negative or even a disapproving way" (15). That is exactly why the new edition, prophetic in more than one way, is crucial – and a welcome

sign that our collective way of thinking may be changing – for the benefit of us all.

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Martin Puchner, *Literature for a Changing Planet*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022. 145 p. ISBN: 978 0691213750.

This topical volume's "Preamble" summarises the history of the Earth's natural environment from the time an asteroid hit water and land 66 million years ago, causing the collapse of the planet's equilibrium and the disappearance of many species. Although the global ecosystem adjusted to its new conditions, today the balance is once more imperilled by mankind, whose exploding population's needs generate the occupation and exploitation of increasingly large areas of land, and whose behaviour causes pollution and the deterioration of water, air and soil. The author, Martin Puchner, argues that, since literature has always had a powerful impact in the ways in which it tells stories, it can be "harnessed to a new purpose: mitigating climate change" (9). For him, literary studies (in particular, ecocriticism and world literature), working alongside other scientific fields, can contribute to the comprehension and expression of the facts, feelings, and possible solutions related to the current environmental crisis.

The first chapter, "Reading in a Warming World", proposes to read and discuss prose and poetry works in light of climate change, starting from ancient texts. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* illustrates the belief that the

wilderness must be kept separate from cities. Shaping the environment, men build walls to fend off what is perceived as chaotic and therefore dangerous, a widespread motif also found in Homer's *Odyssey*, in the episode of the Cyclopes who live isolated and don't work the soil according to conventional practice. Ulysses, a partisan of trade and city dwelling, brutally eliminates them. But Homer's text contains elements that contradict the negative view of the Cyclopes – their hard and careful work provides abundantly for their community – thus allowing an environmental reading to disapprove of Ulysses' actions. Although Puchner blames literary texts for their role in justifying the advantages (and consequences) of sedentary lifestyle, he sees world literature as a document of climate change, tracking our evolution in terms of thinking and living, which can be read from a fresh environmental perspective.

In chapter two, "A Revolution in Accounting", Puchner shows he is aware that the environmental mode of reading he promotes is necessarily biased, since literature is not an impartial observer. To illustrate the fact that it is deeply connected with resource-extracting technology, he recaps on the history of written literature and reminds us that it started with political and territorial interests. After its appearance in Mesopotamia, the first developed form of writing, the clay tablet, spread to developed cultures. Unbeknownst to the Eurasian continent until Cortés landed there, a similar evolution had taken place in the Americas, as Maya literature testifies. *Popol Vuh* is the epic that Puchner selects to show that local resources dictate the possibilities of both human sustenance, construction, and artistic creation (in this case, maize is used). According to him, the history of writing helps us understand the types of thinking and storytelling that led us to where we are now. (Re)reading environmentally the literature of the past four thousand years may give us an additional means of redefining our relation to the environment.

In chapter three, "The Two Faces of World Literature", Puchner encourages reading that allows an overview of the patterns revealing the progression of writers' awareness of the impact of man on the environment. World literature offers that necessary non-nationalistic, large-scale thinking. While much of this chapter is dedicated to the history of world literature, which takes us off the immediate topic at hand, it makes the point that, from early on, world literature embraced fields such as botany and geology. However, as with Goethe's approach,

alongside those of Humboldt and Darwin, proved to be a double-edged sword, as it opened up the world to colonialists and industrialists. Puchner himself, who sees globalisation and ecology as the two faces of world literature, bringing the study of different cultures and different ecosystems together, clearly identifies the complicity of world literature with resource exploitation, but he opts to use this flaw as a tool for the study of the very mechanisms under criticism.

Chapter four, "How to Anthologize the World", promotes world literature anthologies as the necessary critical apparatus. Here again, the subject at stake loses focus somewhat in Puchner's personal reflections. However, he does offer "A Reading Protocol" bringing together ecocriticism and world literature: readers must 1) remember that literature is complicit with settled life and associated forms of resource extraction; 2) relate the material base of literature to its environmental costs and implications; 3) bring the correlation between writing and orality (less complicit with settled life) into consideration; 4) focus on how texts create such oppositions as city/country or human/animal; 5) observe how agriculture is depicted; 6) relate specific environment-related accounts to larger questions of human environmental behaviour over time; 7) use world literature in studies considering how we have arrived at this critical moment in human history.

In chapter five, "Stories for the Future", Puchner advocates narratives that encourage action and don't convey despair in readers. He champions a type of readers-response approach – rather than empirical ecocriticism – and distinguishes as crucial a category of storytelling, that of agency, which suits the problem of human-made climate change as it prompts two questions: "Who is to blame, and who suffers the most?" (92). Depending on perspectives, the answers of course vary. Stories of settlers and nomads, whose use of the land is diametrically opposed, ought to be examined as describing figures that hold power over environmental discourse. The nomadic figure has been the exile, the migrant or the political refugee; soon, with the arrival of climate refugees, literature will depict an even more profound change in the life of settled communities. Here, Puchner advocates for the manifesto, a genre that could speak as "we", a collective agent, as it did for the proletariat in Marx's and Engels's day, and he finally makes a case for collective storytelling – aptly encouraged nowadays by storytelling

websites that allow the production of worldwide stories (possibly a new era for world literature). Those tales may be disturbing as they help readers and listeners face hard choices.

Puchner's literary examples, surprisingly, tend to be of canonical rather than recent works. As his demonstration doesn't provide new tools for reading today's writers, readers who may have hoped to gain an outlook on today's literary response to the climate crisis (which the title of the book tends to suggest) will be disappointed, all the more so that international criticism on the subject, currently widely developing, is not mentioned, and major thinkers are not acknowledged. The choice of world literature also seems a little outdated, so many eminent critics having demonstrated the limitations of the field. A new paradigm may still be needed to read and study literature in/on our rapidly changing planet.

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Patricia García, *The Urban Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century European Literature: City Fissures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, 239 p. ISBN: 978 3030837754. E-book ISBN: 978 3030837761.

García's book falls into the category of studies meant to provide us with a fresh perspective on literature read through the lens of the highly interdisciplinary "spatial turn" approach. More specifically, it scrutinises the relationship between the 19th-century short fiction of the fantastic and urban lived experience in a comparative manner, which is one of the fortes of this volume. The author is not interested in

city-specific monographs, but aims to mount a theme-based argument supported by a selection of Anglophone, Francophone and Spanish texts exploring uncanny city settings. In fact, the core of García's argument is to delve into "the European city" as "a comparative episteme" (vii), a transnational approach apt to rethink modern cityscape in tandem with fantastic narratives penned by writers from different cultural traditions. In doing so, García sets out to analyse a variety of tropes and metaphors that abound in 19th-century fantastic fiction, such as revenants, doppelgangers, spirits of the place, agoraphobia, phonophobia, etc. All of them are "specters" which the book "wishes to make visible" (viii) and ultimately to categorise as "an *urban fantastic* within and across the European traditions considered here" (6). However, the "across" part of the endeavour still needs improvement, since García's main goal is to find a common denominator between over fifty English, French and Spanish fantastic narratives set against the backdrop of 19th-century Europe.

Suggestively entitled "The Modern Fantastic – A Tale of Two Cities", the Introduction clarifies the conceptual framework and provides a historical account of the fantastic which, inextricably linked to the rise of the modern city, accounts for a paradigmatic shift in themes and motives of the supernatural at a time when "there was an increasing fatigue with traditional Gothic tropes" (212). Deemed as an alternative – *qua* anti-canonical – aesthetic form that gained popularity due to low printing costs and cheap periodicals in which fantastic narratives were published, the fantastic, a subcategory of the supernatural, is explored – and exploited – as a middle-class genre which repudiates the rationalist or positivist discourse promoted by the realist novel. García underlines the role of the city in generating and promoting the fantastic in different European cultures and, concurrently, focuses on non-canonical literary productions that have in common what she terms as "the urban dominant" (7). Importantly enough, the author maintains that the fantastic occurs in realistic settings, gaining momentum in parallel with the rapid scientific, industrial and technological development of the urban environment. Consequently, argues García, speaking about the modern fantastic is "a tautology", since "it is a product of the rise of urbanism during the nineteenth century", which "engaged directly with urban anxieties, phobias and fears concerning overcrowding and isolation, plagues, movement and migration, class fragmentation and

access to living spaces" (11). This view is also endorsed by women writers identified by the author, such as Charlotte Riddell, Amelia Edwards, Rhoda Broughton and Emilia Pardo Bazán, who offer gender-based readings of urban space that are interpreted by García from a feminist angle as well.

The volume is divided into three parts, each of them devoted to "city fissures" understood as dichotomies between rationalist explanations of phenomena and spiritualism or paranormal beliefs. Part 1, "Buildings: Architectural Intruders", discusses the importance of habitation as both lived space and use of space. The argument is informed by Philippe Hamon's theory of architecture, which transgresses its symbolic, political or moral power, enabling "daily life to take place" (37). García elaborates on two literary tropes and *topoi*, the antique shop portrayed by Théophile Gautier in "The Mummy's Foot" (1834) and the haunted apartment described by Rhoda Broughton's "The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth" (1868), in order to show how the fantastic unexpectedly appears in everyday urban life.

Part 2, "Encounters: Urban Revenants and Other Fantastic Acquaintances", is set against the background of massive urbanization, which allows for encounters with strangers, spirits of the place, ghostly dwellers, all of them revenants "migrating from their distant and solitary Gothic *locus amoenus* to the city" (28) where their identity is fully reshaped as modern gentlemen or gentlewomen. We read very cogent chapters about revenants in the modern city in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Ritter Gluck" (1809), female spirits of the place who undermine gender roles in society ("The Tall Woman" by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, 1882) and the guillotined woman in post-revolutionary France foregrounded by Washington Irving's "The Adventure of a German Student" (1824) and Alexandre Dumas in *Les mille et un fantômes* (1849). The final chapter of this section expounds on the motif of the mask, the mirror and the showcase in a number of short stories by Jean Lorrain, Guy de Maupassant and Benito Pérez Galdós, with the purpose of pointing out "the dangerous games of staging identity in the modern city" (29).

The last part, "Rhythms: The Fantastic on the Move", addresses the question of movement and patterns of motion that underlie fantastic narratives, which interpret "city rhythms as the axis to articulate a dissonance between familiar and unfamiliar space" (29). I find this section

extremely captivating and innovative, all the more so that García treats bridges, trams and trains as new sites pervaded by the presence of the supernatural, on the one hand, and brings to light phonophobias and other obsessions provoked by the hustle and bustle of the city. The author's analysis concentrates on authors such as John Hollingshead, Charles Dickens, Amelia Edwards, Guy de Maupassant, Georges Rodenbach and Benito Pérez Galdós.

The Epilogue, "Contemporary Revisitations", is a very useful section which speaks volumes of the unstinting impact of the fantastic on postmodern short narratives and film, as is the Timeline that provides an outline of major urban transformations and urban fantastic publications. Also, the Epilogue has the potential to open up new avenues of research.

The whole book is a fascinating read for those interested in representations of the city in literature. Not only is it well documented, it is also the result of the author's previous work on narrative space and the influence of 19th-century fantastic fiction on later texts, particularly on postmodern fiction. At the same time, by choosing to examine short stories, rather than novels, García brings her own original contribution to urban literary studies by shedding light on "little histories" of the fantastic. As well as digging into periodicals, such as *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, edited by Charles Dickens, and *Dublin University Magazine*, edited by Sheridan Le Fanu, she has consulted anthologies, indexes and an annotated bibliography of Anglophone ghost stories. Although the fantastic sometimes seems to be a volatile concept rendered in either symbolic or allegorical terms, García's book is an example of excellent practice of urban theory applied to 19th-century literature, which attests to what Edward Soja has called "the thirdspace" (Soja, 1996), that is, the connection between physical and mental, cultural constructions of space. Read as such, the fantastic modern city investigated by García brings the rational and the irrational together.

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