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Reseñas / *Book reviews*

Visitors from beyond the Grave: Ghosts in the World Literature (Dámaris Romero-González, Israel Muñoz-Gallarte, Gabriel Laguna-Mariscal, eds.), Coimbra: Coimbra University Press, 2019, 300 pages. ISBN 978-989-26-1763-3. 20,76€ Reviewed by Diana Nastasescu, *Universitat Jaume I*. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3980-157X>.

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Supernatural creatures and beings have been recorded in written testimonies since Ancient Rome. However, the Romans' perception of reality placed them within the framework of a "world of enchantment" (to use a concept coined by Max Weber), in which trees, beasts and natural phenomena were animated beings with souls, were part of an organic whole, and held the keys to existence and to the human condition. As a result, the "beyond" that they represented meant "beyond here", and those beings were merely a codification of their fears and anxieties, their desires and their hopes for the most immediate future. In contrast, in contemporary society the supernatural realm belongs to a region that is detached from everyday life. It has become something which is represented symbolically or in literature (Fontana Elboj, 2021: 16-23), but has no decisive or mysterious role to play in human life. Contemporary society in its entirety

considers any mention of extrasensory perception, no matter how minimal, to be the result of a mental disorder or an attempt at fraud.

However, if we move away from the Western world, there are different ways of relating to the supernatural in the present day. For example, the Polish journalist Jacek Hugo-Bader, the heir to Kapucinski's school of reporting, has recently published *The Shaman's Evil* (2022), a book in which he talks about his journey to the most remote regions of Siberia and his interviews with the different shamans who live there. The author's initially ironic and critical tone changes as his research progresses. Apart from the experiences that he witnesses, he also shares surprising details such as the fact that there are five hundred thousand doctors in Russia, compared to more than eight hundred thousand registered extrasensory workers (Hugo-Bader, 2022: 63). This is a revealing statistic highlighting their perception of the supernatural.

The book reviewed here, entitled *Visitors from beyond the Grave. Ghosts in the World Literature*, co-edited by Dámaris Romero-González, Israel Muñoz-Gallarte and Gabriel Laguna-Mariscal, undertakes a journey through universal literature, from its beginnings to the present day. On this journey, it considers the manifestations of the souls of the dead from the afterlife, and their social interpretations in different cultures. It studies, adopting a multi-faceted perspective, how ghostly beings are represented in literature and the translation of the works in which they are present. Its seventeen chapters cover works in classical Greek and Latin, Spanish, Italian and English, including authors from various centuries and relying to different literary movements. Among them are Homer, Seneca, Plutarch, Petrarch, Socrates, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Descartes, Hegel, King, Lovecraft, Lope de Barrientos, Calderón de la Barca, Luis Martín de Plaza, Jaime Gil de Biedma and Luis Alberto de Cuenca.

The first section returns to the origins of literature, with the use of ghosts in the Greek novels of the Hellenistic period (Ruiz-Montero); the appearance of spectres in three dreams narrated by Plutarch (Romero); the journey to the afterlife by the philosopher Mennipus (Gómez) and the transfer of three ghost stories from Greek and Latin literature to the early Christian corpus (Ogden). After these first three studies, we come to what could be interpreted as a second thematic section, which is linked to the use of ghosts as philosophical storylines. It describes the vision of three philosophers, Socrates, Descartes and Hegel, based on a concept common to the work of all three, the *daimon* (Vazquez); it discusses atomistic premises against the existence of spirits, from Democritus to Lucretius (Traver Vera); and characterises the ghostly apparitions in Seneca's tragedies (Rodríguez-Pantoja).

Before moving on to the third section, there is first a chapter that provides a diachronic panoramic perspective from Ancient Rome to the present (Laguna Mariscal), followed by a study of the work of Boccaccio and its importance in terms of the subject of ghosts (Rodríguez Mesa). The following section focuses on Spanish literature, and more specifically on the idea of the ghost in the scholastic and didactic works of Lope de Barrientos (Risque Madrid) and on the variations of the concepts of the "phantom lady" and the "ghost gentleman" in the works of Calderón de la Barca (Zapatero Molinuevo).

However, the literature of ghosts is not limited to the Hispanic realm, and for this reason, the fourth section compares the ghosts of guilt that torment the protagonists of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Tomorrow in the battle think on me* by Javier Marías (Martínez Sariego); analyses the traditional Gothic novel of H.P. Lovecraft (Pérez-de-Luque); considers the influence of Gothic literature on *The Shining* by Stephen King (Huertas Abril); discusses the postcolonial literature of Jean Rhys (López); and examines the Islamic *jinn* in Moroccan culture (Porrás Sánchez). Finally, the volume concludes by reflecting on songs of unknown origin that are still sung in some towns in northern Andalusia (Alcalde). The book's final bibliography makes it unified and cohesive, while the place, name and subject indexes facilitate consultation and the search for information.

Ghost stories persist and remain part of the twenty-first century world, in which ghosts from the past coexist with more contemporary ones. According to Colin Dickey (2016), these types of stories persist in the popular imagination (regardless of whether or not individuals believe in supernatural beings) because they satisfy a number of basic cultural needs. For example, they allow us to contemplate one of humanity's greatest fears - death (both our own and that of our loved ones) and they give us tools to cope with tragedies and make the boundary between life and death

less frightening. In short, ghost stories allow us to face the unknown, and to fill in the gaps in the narrative. This volume, with its multifaceted approach to the appearance of ghosts in universal literature, highlights how they have survived since classical culture and how they have been used over time to show (or

blur) the boundaries between two levels of existence - that of the living and that of the dead. Anyone interested in Western literature and the influence of Greco-Roman literature on Hispanic, English and Italian cultures (of both the past and the present) will find this volume stimulating and thought-provoking.

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