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El retorno del monstruo. Figuraciones de lo monstruoso en la literatura latinoamericana contemporánea. Por Adriana López-Labourdette. Buenos Aires, Ediciones Corregidor, 2023. 410 pages.

El retorno del monstruo represents the crowning achievement of a long research path dedicated to monstrous figurations that populate the contemporary Latin American literary landscape. In this book, Adriana López-Labourdette brings together different lines of investigation—materiality, memory studies, etc.—and succeeds in constructing a space to discuss a topic dear to her heart, giving rise to a complex and comprehensive work.

The last decades have witnessed a true boom of literature haunted by monsters (or a return of such figures to the literary realm), both on the international scene and in Latin America. This proliferation is reflected in the emergence of numerous investigations and research projects on monstrous figurations, a tendency exacerbated by the growing interest in the Nonhuman and Posthuman. It is worth mentioning, for example, the contributions by Gabriel Giorgi (2007; 2009; 2014) and by Mabel Moraña (2017). In this context, this monograph constitutes an essential text for approaching monsters that appear in contemporary literature, as it provides an exhaustive survey of the concepts that have informed their analysis and interpretation. Simultaneously, the numerous case studies examined by López-Labourdette compose a broad spectrum of possibilities, offering new insights on the topic and proving the significance of reflecting on recurring (but ever-new) monsters today.

The monograph is divided into five chapters, three of which are dedicated to the main thematic nuclei associated with narratives of the monstrous: figurations of otherness, figurations of author(ship), and figurations of the political. In the prologue, López-Labourdette introduces her theoretical framework and presents an overview of the scholarship related to monstrous figurations, drawing on ideas of a wide range of philosophers and intellectuals. López-Labourdette embraces Shildrick's (2006) definition of the monster as a being whose body displays an excessive deviation from the norm. Such focus on the materiality of these *extra/ordinary* bodies reaffirms the prominence of monstrous figurations as geographical and cultural cartographies carved into the very skin of the monster, which tangibly bear witness to the dynamics of power, domination, and resistance of an epoch. Nowadays, the monster is to be considered a device, a *signifying body* strongly anchored in context in which it is generated, where it acts as a mirror of the society that gives it life.

In Chapter 1, López-Labourdette explores the monster as a fundamental element in the processes of identity construction, discussing three paradigmatic instances: the monster as the ultimate other, who acts as the subject's counterpart in a dichotomous logic; the (domesticated) monster as the mirror image of the subject; and the monster as an opaque and unassimilable figure that points to-

wards a possible transcendence beyond any relationship with the subject. In Chapter 2, López-Labourdette examines the relation between monstrosity and (literary) creation with a particular emphasis on the figure of the author, illustrating the main ways in which monstrous bodies interact with writing. On the one hand, excessive bodies may eventually replace the writing, leading to an "excarnated" literature shaped on pure somatic experience; on the other hand, the reverse process may occur when the obsessive visibility and performance of the monstrous body is "incarnated" into a poetic project. In Chapter 3, López-Labourdette addresses the emergence of biopolitical monsters on whose bodies the dynamics of power and control are inscribed. These bodies constitute fundamental elements in a biopolitical space, as they stand at the limits of the norm, justifying with their own existence the maintenance or elimination of certain forms of life. In the Epilogue, the author returns to Jeffery Cohen's *Monster Theory* to dwell on the seven postulates proposed as manifesto for the study of the monster, offering a detailed summary of her research.

Of great novelty is the elaboration of four complementary theses, which would complete Cohen's proposal by bringing in some fundamental aspects to contemporary monstrous figurations in Latin American literature. With her thorough analysis, López-Labourdette illustrates how the appearance of monstrous figures within the literary realm is accompanied by a complex dynamic of gazes that generates new realities: this is crucial today, as contemporary monsters and the visual practices associated with them question the Cartesian model underlying modern culture, moving from a unidirectional perspective to a dialogical and interactive one. The continuous changes in the perception of monsters point towards their ambiguity and (un)readability: their opaque, abjected morphology reflects the ways in which monstrosity interacts with language and the creation of meaning. The monster becomes thus the emblem of a new form of literature, paving space for heterogeneous, chaotic, excessive, and resistant discourses. Furthermore, contemporary appropriations of the monster transform it into a profitable body fully integrated into market dynamics and require a problematisation of the interpretation of monstrous figurations, as they can emerge (also simultaneously) as an affirmation, a questioning, or a subversion of the mechanisms of capitalisation. Finally, the multiple position of the monster—situated at the porous boundary between reality and imagination, body and subjectivity, between what is human and what is not—enshrines it as a symbol of (hyper) modernity. Whether they act as spaces of resistance to hegemonic power, exploit its tools or align themselves with it, contemporary monstrous figurations represent epistemological devices to read the divergent, paradoxical dynamics of our time.

This monograph constitutes a noteworthy critical work that reflects the renewed interest in monstrous figures as emblems of our contemporaneity. In addition to the extensive theoretical

framework underpinning the various case studies examined in the book, this proposal is remarkable in that it does not pigeonhole the monster into a specific literary tradition or genre, unlike many other studies. Instead, in a work that does not claim to be conclusive, the author not only demonstrates the inexhaustible potential of monstrous figures as cultural constructs and signifying bodies but also encourages the explorations of new directions that have not been pursued yet.

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