

Abigail Lee Six, *Spanish Vampire Fiction since 1900: Blood Relations*, Routledge, New York; Abingdon, 2019. ISBN 978-1138303836.

Professor Abigail Lee Six (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK) is one of the leading British academics in the study of the Spanish Gothic. Her new book underscores once more the importance of this field of study, this time by placing the focus on the figure of the vampire in Spanish fiction.

The analysed corpus of short stories and novels ranges from 1900 to present, with a gap from the post-Civil war until the 60s which she justifies in the introduction. The argument is displayed in what might seem an unusual structure, with text-by-text analysis followed by a comparative perspective on the main themes; two approaches that are not frequently combined and that, as she demonstrates, are in fact complementary.

Part I is composed by independent, self-contained chapters dedicated to twenty-six texts arranged in chronological order. Abigail Lee Six explains why each of them is a landmark in the development of Spanish vampire fiction and emphasises the structural or thematic innovations they provide in their use of the vampire character. Canonical Spanish authors (that the reader might not necessarily associate with the fantastic) such as Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Emilia Pardo Ba-

zán or Carmen de Burgos are juxtaposed with more obscure voices of contemporary Spanish fiction. Particularly remarkable is the (uncommon) inclusion of a significant number of female authors, outlining their important contributions to vampire fiction in Spain.

Lee Six shows how this corpus dialogues with Gothic works that established the conventions of vampire fiction, such as Polidori's «The Vampire», Gautier's «La morte amoureuse», Le Fanu's «Carmilla» and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In her readings, Lee Six also notes how the Spanish texts problematise or challenge vampire conventions set up by these preceding texts, leading to the development of a distinct Spanish vampire paradigm. These traits include different narrative strategies, such as refocusing the gaze on the strength of the vampire and not on the weakness of the victim (in Emilia Pardo Bazán's «Vampiro»), blurring the black and white distinction of the vampire-victim dichotomy (in Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent's «Una hora de amor» and «El señor Cadáver y la señorita Vampiro») or parodying the vampire figure (in Juan G. Atienza's «Sangre fresca para el muerto»). They also offer unusual characterisations, for example the «pitiable vampire» (42) in

Carmen de Burgos's *La mujer fría*, the fake Byronic vampire (in Edgar Segá's «Los dos mundos de Lord Barrymore») and the financial predator, a figure that recurs in many of the texts. Lee Six demonstrates that the vampire metaphor in the studied Spanish works surpasses the transgressive sexual desire that predominates in English Gothic texts. It serves as a form of critique of several socio-political and social dimensions, including the institution of marriage in (Pardo Bazán's and de Burgos's texts), issues of class (in Alfonso Sastre's «Las noches del Espíritu Santo»), the rise of voracious tourism (in Atienza's short story), conflictive family relations (in Mercedes Abad's *Sangre*) and sexual performativity in the post-modern context (in Segá's short story). Each text, as Lee Six convincingly argues, contributes to the development of the vampire paradigm in Spanish culture. This is the most important point of her argument: while this paradigm nurtures from non-Spanish vampire imports, it has distinctive features, which she then develops in Part II.

In the second part, Lee Six presents a comparative analysis which gives further cohesion to her corpus. In the first section, she discusses the relation between the vampire paradigm and popular creatures of Spanish folktales, such as the Galician *meiga xuxona* and overall the attributes and superstitions associated with the figure of the witch. The protagonist role of religion is also one of the running threads of the studied corpus. The analysis then moves on to two of the key themes

in vampire fiction beyond Spanish borders: contagion and transmission. This section reiterates one of Lee Six's main observations: the vampire as sexual predator is not so prevalent in the Spanish corpus. Instead, she identifies other types of transmission, in particular heredity or family bloodlines, hence the subtitle of this book. While generalisation and abstraction are the goals of Part II, Lee Six argument resists the simplistic dichotomy «Spanish versus Anglophone» vampire fiction by providing a great deal of textual examples and historical references.

Lee Six's readings also highlight and clarify cultural aspects of texts that might seem unfamiliar to the English-speaking reader. This is perhaps why the occasional mention of a «non-Spaniard» or «non-Hispanist» reader should instead be more accurately captured in the term «Anglophone».

One of the achievements of Lee Six's book is the diversity of approaches. Her text-by-text and comparative readings are multidimensional. She points to cultural-specific references within the Spanish context, identifies the intertextual matrix of the vampire paradigm, manages to bridge local with transnational representations of vampire fiction and includes astute gendered insights into the studied texts.

Her elegant prose and perceptive analysis render this work an important piece of academic research but also an enjoyable read on the evolution of the figure of the vampire in Spanish popular literary culture.

Lee Six fulfils the aims that she outlines in the introduction. She brings these texts closer to the English-speaking reader, enabling the immersion into a tradition that had remained to this date rather invisible. She demonstrates the continuity and versatility of the vampire figure in Spanish fiction and brings to light texts and perspectives that a Spanish audience might surely find interesting and enriching. The studied corpus is by no means complete. When finishing this book, further contemporary vampire retellings might spring to the reader's mind, such as

«El relevo» (2014) by José María Merino and some characters in *Arcano trece: cuentos crueles* (2000) by Pilar Pedraza. This is precisely the important point that Lee Six's study makes, namely the vitality of a vampire paradigm within Spanish fiction with a complex multilayer of meanings deserving academic attention.

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