



**Carolyn Wolfenzon. *Nuevos fantasmas recorren México. Lo espectral en la literatura mexicana del siglo XXI*. Madrid: Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert, 2020. 340 pp.**

Carolyn Wolfenzon's monograph *Nuevos fantasmas recorren México. Lo espectral en la literatura mexicana del siglo XXI* represents the newest voice in the field of Spectral Studies.

While most books that have analyzed spectrality within a Latin American context focus on twentieth-century literature, her innovative book examines works that have not been necessarily analyzed under a spectral lens. Wolfenzon focuses on books published from 1999–2016 by eight contemporary Mexican authors, including such figures as Carmen Boullosa, Julián Herbert, Yuri Herrera, Valeria Luiselli, Élmer Mendoza, Emiliano Monge, Guadalupe Nettel, and Daniel Sada.

Her book consists of an introduction and seven chapters. In the book's introduction, she begins by evoking two canonical texts: Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and Carlos Fuentes's *Aura* (1962). Any study that treats hauntings and specters within a Mexican context would be obliged to mention such literary giants; however, she surprises readers by also highlighting Francisco Tario's collection of short stories *La Noche* (1943). Tario's exquisite short stories have been overlooked for the most part by literary critics and the mere mentioning of Tario's enchanting text, alongside Rulfo and Fuentes, brings attention to an understudied author. Wolfenzon is correct to assert that Tario has been *afantasmado*, or ghosted, by critics and her book resurrects Tario's fiction from the cemetery of underappreciated authors. This notion of *anfastamar*, or to make ghostly, is the unifying theme that connects all the chapters described below.

After acknowledging seminal works, Wolfenzon then describes the theoretical frame that will inform each chapter. In her discussion of spectrality, she cites the leading figures who have advanced the field: Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993), Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (1993), Patricia Keller's *Ghostly Landscapes* (2016), David Punter's "Spectral Criticism" (2002), and Alberto Ribas-Casasayas's "El espectro en teoría" (2019). Inspired by previous critics, Wolfenzon states how the authors she analyzes "reescriben a su manera el tema de la invisibilidad fantásmica para reflexionar sobre una serie de problemas vigentes" (26). She examines multifaceted ways in which ghosts, hauntings, and invisibility permeate narratives; and reveals how these texts comment on immigration, neoliberalism, narcotrafficking, sexism, racism, and political violence, among other themes. As the summary below exemplifies, Wolfenzon analyzes apparitions who appear as conventional ghosts in fiction; she examines colonial legacies that haunt present day México; and she also reveals how contemporary authors are haunted by dominant literary figures of the past.


In the first chapter she analyzes *El huésped* (2006), *El cuerpo en que nació* (2011), and *Después del invierno* (2014) by Guadalupe Nettel. Here Wolfenzon discusses the presence of ghosts and the liminal space between life and death as experienced by the characters. She also underscores how *El día de los muertos* informs characters' mourning process—for some, ghosts can be imagined as part of the material world, which differs from death rituals as observed in Europe and the United States, for example. Chapter two focuses solely on Valeria Luiselli's *Los ingravidos* (2011) in which the ghost of the Mexican poet, Gilberto Owen (1904–1952), appears in a New York City subway. Wolfenzon highlights how certain Mexican Modernist poets of 1920s have been rendered invisible. She also reminds readers how Mexican vanguard poets, who belonged to the literary group *Los contemporáneos*, such as Owen, were avid readers of Modernist authors from Europe and the United States, however, they did not enjoy a reciprocal relationship, and have been, in a sense, ghosted. She then provides several ways in which ghosts and hauntings permeate Luiselli's novel. Chapter three analyzes Emiliano Monge's *Las tierras arrasadas* (2015) and Yuri Herrera's *Señales que precederán el fin del mundo* (2009) in which she explores how colonial ghosts reemerge transfigured in present day México. As Wolfenzon compellingly argues, the main character in Herrera's novel, *Makina*, harkens back to *La Malinche*, an indigenous woman, who was a polyglot and Hernán Cortez's interpreter and mistress. She affirms how *La Malinche*, a complicated historical figure, still haunts the pages of the

contemporary Mexican literary imagination. At the same time, Wolfenzon deftly illustrates how colonial violence reemerges in new ways: just as indigenous bodies were exploited for the benefit of the Spanish crown during the conquest and colonial times, so too are migrant bodies that cross the U.S. border. Migrants through their harrowing travels have become dehumanized and treated as merchandise—becoming a ghost of who they once were. In chapter four, she analyzes Daniel Sada's *Porque parece mentira la verdad se sabe* (1999) and *Cóbraselo caro* (2005) by Élmer Mendoza, whose texts are clearly haunted by Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. Both texts, according to Wolfenzon, are conscious rewritings of *Pedro Páramo* and they both reconstruct the town of *Comala* indicating that there are new ghosts trekking through México (142).

The book concludes with three shorter chapters: chapter five address Julián Herbert's nonfiction works *Canción de tumba* (2011) and *La casa del dolor ajeno* (2015). Wolfenzon analyzes how Herbert's texts reflect upon important architectural spaces in the state of Coahuila: El hospital de Saltillo and El Museo de la Revolución Mexicana. Both these buildings have eclipsed and distorted violent and unsavory events of the past. In El hospital de Saltillo Herbert reveals Mexico's ties with the Nazis during World War II, while El Museo de la Revolución Mexicana obfuscates the massacre of Chinese Mexicans by Madero's army in 1911. This museum has been built upon the site of massacre and this tragic loss of human life has been erased rather than memorialized. Herbert, as Wolfenzon suggests, uncovers ghosts hidden behind walls that bury stories official historiography would rather forget. Finally, in chapter 6, she examines the spectral qualities in Carmen Boullosa's *El complot de los Románticos* (2009). Wolfenzon, following Boullosa's lead, describes how Mexican women writers have been made invisible and illustrates how canonical male figures, the departed ones, haunt and implicitly overshadow remarkable women writers of the present. Arguably, women writers are asked to enter through a different threshold (299). Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, an epilogue, summarizes some of the book's most salient points.

At times, Wolfenzon mentions authors' intentionality and aims. For example, she asserts that the authors in her book primarily intend to make a social critique, unlike gothic writers (21). This statement opens her book to criticism as gothicists might take issue with such a categorical statement. Texts allow for multiple readings and interpretations without having to resort to authorial intent, which might be irrelevant, even unknowable. Albeit, this is a small quibble, compared to her book's overall contribution to the field.

Wolfenzon's analysis invites critics to augment, reaffirm and/or contest the ideas set forth in *Nuevos fantasmas recorren México*. That is, scholars can further deepen the theoretical discussion that she presents. While it is true that there still is a Spectral Studies void within a Latin American context, Wolfenzon, along with Amanda Petersen and Alberto Ribas-Casasaya's *Espectros: Ghostly Hauntings in Contemporary Transhispanic Narratives* (2015) are responding to this lacuna. Indeed, more Latin Americanist scholarship is still needed. All in all, this is a valuable resource for critics interested in Mexican Literature, Colonial Studies, and Spectral Studies.

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