**Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Spanish Gothic: National Identity, Collaboration and Cultural Adaptation*** (London: Palgrave, 2017)

Xavier Aldana Reyes's *Spanish Gothic: National Identity, Collaboration, and Cultural Adaptation* is a groundbreaking work in both scope and intent. The first book-length, English-language analysis of Spanish gothic from its earliest guises in the long eighteenth century to modern and contemporary literature and cinema, *Spanish Gothic* provocatively and productively opens up the study of a body of cultural production that has remained largely overlooked in gothic scholarship. In particular, it provides Anglophone students and scholars with a crucial entry point into the fascinating world of Spanish gothic, complementing but also considerably expanding upon recent studies such as Abigail Lee Six's *Gothic Terrors: Incarceration, Duplication, and Bloodlust in Spanish Narrative* (2010), Miriam López Santos's *La novela gótica en España (1788-1833)* (2010), and Ann Davies's *Contemporary Spanish Gothic* (2016).

Published as part of the Palgrave Gothic series, which has fast become *the* place to go for cutting edge gothic scholarship, *Spanish Gothic* begins by challenging the assumption that the gothic was — and continues to be — 'an imported imaginative impossibility' in Spain (p. 1). In an eloquent and informative introduction, Aldana Reyes notes the commonly held belief that the gothic never really took off in Spain, thanks to a number of circumstances — including a long history of governmental and religious censorship — that mitigated against its establishment. Such assumptions regarding the paucity of Spanish gothic, Aldana Reyes contends, have produced — and perhaps also been produced by — a pervasive cultural amnesia that belies the quality, variety, and cultural significance of Spanish gothic over the centuries. The not-inconsiderable catalogue of texts recovered by Aldana Reyes in his study — from the early 'Gothic-inflected' novel, *El Valdemaro* (1792) (p. 53), through Emilia Pardo Bazán's female gothic fiction, to the films of Segundo de Chomón (1871-1929) — demonstrates the success with which the gothic rooted itself in Spanish soil. That many of these texts will be unfamiliar to even the most seasoned gothic scholar underscores the accomplishment of Aldana Reyes' study, and its valuable project of archival exploration and scholarly recuperation.

Over the course of ten accessible chapters, including introduction and conclusion, Aldana Reyes conducts a systematic, chronological study of texts drawn from three phases of Spanish gothic production, beginning with 'first wave' fiction published between 1785 and 1834, moving to Romantic and *fin-de-siècle* literature, and finally considering modern and

contemporary literature and film. His interest, as he outlines in his introduction, is to explore the gothic in Spain as 'a transmedia, transnational and transhistorical "mode"' (p. 5). To this end, he focuses on texts that might be seen to comprise 'an "art of pleasurable fear", or what, in the twentieth century, begins to be called horror fiction' (p. 5). This helps to distinguish gothic literature from earlier forms such as the *novel cortesana* and fantastic literature of the twelfth to seventeenth centuries. As Aldana Reyes argues, these forms might be understood as the prehistory of gothic in Spain, but it's only in the late eighteenth century that Spanish authors embark on 'a serious and sustained artistic project around the notion of pleasant fear' (p. 9).

If this inaugural moment of Spanish gothic is heavily influenced by translations of English- and French-language gothic novels that began to appear in the 1780s, this is not, as Aldana Reyes sees it, proof of the mode's imported or belated status in Spain. Instead, in keeping with López Santos, Aldana Reyes argues that Spanish writers dramatically adapted the models provided by British, European, and American gothic, 'rethink[ing] the Gothic under an intrinsically national, although not necessarily nationalistic, lens that may speak to Spanish readers' (p. 29).[1] *El Valdemaro* thus reflects the influence of contemporary British gothic fiction, at the same time that it gives its characteristic imagery and themes a particularly Spanish twist informed by the country's strict Catholicism. With religious censorship encouraging, if not mandating, didacticism, *El Valdemaro* makes subtle use of gothic devices for specific purposes, in particular the reinforcement of Catholic doctrine, the teaching of related moral lessons, and the construction of the Spanish monarchy as an essential guardian of the faith.

In contrast, the early-nineteenth-century anticlerical works of writers such as Luis Gutiérrez (d. 1809) and José María Blanco Crespo (1775-1841) adapted the anti-Catholicism of Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) and Matthew Lewis (1775-1818) in order to critique what was still a grim reality in Spain — the Inquisition and its particular form of religious tyranny. Gutiérrez's *Cornelia Bororquia, o víctima de la Inquisición*/*Cornelia Bororquia, or Victim of the Inquisition* (1801) and Blanco Crespo's *Vargas: A Tale of Spain* (1822) — both tellingly written and published outside of Spain — replace supernatural evils with those of the Inquisition, and, in so doing, transform the gothic into 'a social vehicle', or a language of resistance (p. 73). While their imagery of perverted, power-hungry religious figures and horrific Inquisition dungeons might seem familiar from a text such as *The Monk* (1796), their

[1] See Miriam López Santos, *La novela gótica en Espanã (1788-1833)* (Pontevedra: Editorial Academia del Hispanismo, 2010).

writers' Catholic backgrounds and familiarity with Inquisitorial power renders the scenes depicted all the more chilling and poignant.

Aldana Reyes's elegantly persuasive assessments of the historically specific, national permutations of gothic produced by Spain's evolving socio-cultural and political contexts are arguably the study's greatest strength. What's more, they ably prove his contention that the gothic both played a central role in the development of Spanish literature and frequently had (and continues to have) radical potential. Some consideration of the potential diversity produced by, for instance, Catalan and Basque variations of gothic literary and cultural production — in both their respective languages, as well as in the Spanish language — would have been welcome. The author's relative inattention to these distinctions is perhaps a victim of his quest for a general picture of Spanish 'national' culture, but they are worth revisiting in future research on Spanish gothic.

A more troubling issue in the book is that of terminology, which Aldana Reyes himself considers in detail in both his introduction and conclusion. Throughout his study, Aldana Reyes observes that certain texts more closely resemble other literary forms or genres than they do the gothic. He also remarks upon the hesitancy of Spanish critics and authors/filmmakers themselves to apply the term 'gothic' to their national cultural production, leading to the idea that, as Aldana Reyes says of Spanish cinema, there is no such thing as 'a self-avowedly Gothic' literary or cultural tradition in Spain (p. 185). But, as is certainly the case in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, gothic literature rarely ever refers to itself as gothic, despite Walpole's subtitle — 'A Gothic Story' — for the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Instead, as Robert Miles has shown, most Romantic-era writers of the works we now think of as 'gothic' used an array of alternative terms to 'market' their texts as what was then called, among other things, 'terror', 'terrorist', and 'Germanic' fiction.[2] The application of the 'gothic' label to these works came much later, and from within academia, so to speak of self-avowedly gothic literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at least, from Britain and elsewhere, is an anachronism. My point here is that more detailed attention to the terminology that authors, filmmakers, and critics themselves have used — in titles, reviews, official documentation, and so on — in referring to the works examined here, and to the reasons for these particular usages, may have helped further tease out and nuance both the lack of this term in Spanish cultural production and its applicability to these texts.

[2] Robert Miles, 'The 1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 41-62 (p. 41).

This is especially the case for the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century fictions that Aldana Reyes analyses. Given the unfamiliarity of most of these texts, Aldana Reyes understandably devotes a significant amount of space to plot summary. While this is necessary, it also means there is little room left for a discussion of production and reception — elements that have the potential to address some of the 'terminological complications' Aldana Reyes identifies (p. 9). Similarly, in the case of later fictions and films, Aldana Reyes draws attention to Spanish cultural reluctance to apply the term 'gothic' to works that appear to deploy recognisable gothic conventions. Yet he never fully fleshes out why this has been the case. Chapter 8 contains an illustrative example. Here, Aldana Reyes begins his discussion of Spanish gothic cinema by commenting that films such as *La residencia*/*The House that Screamed* (1969), *El día de la bestia*/*The Day of the Beast* (1995), and *Las brujas de Zugarramurdi*/*Witching and Bitching* (2013), are, for various reasons, labelled 'fantastic' or 'supernatural', rather than gothic, and considered to be, among other things, 'thrillers', or 'comedies' (p. 185). Perhaps it is a consequence of a lack of space or the broad readership catered to by the Palgrave Gothic series, but Aldana Reyes references little marketing material or evidence of the critical and popular reception of these films to sketch exactly why or how they've been constructed as 'not-gothic'. This curious lack of contextual detail detracts from his otherwise convincing arguments for recuperating 'gothic' as an appropriate label for these works.

These minor reservations aside, *Spanish Gothic* is an exemplary piece of scholarship that will assuredly become the cornerstone of future studies of gothic cultural production in Spain. It will, moreover, undoubtedly contribute to new transnational histories of gothic as it developed on a global scale from the eighteenth century to today.

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