

Moraña, Mabel. *El monstruo como máquina de guerra*. Madrid, Spain: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2017. 468 pp. Paper. ISBN 978-84-16922-17-8. €29.80.

Throughout the monstrosity of her extensive 400-page book, Mabel Moraña offers an all-encompassing study on the monster and its universal applications and representations. Led by the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's famed "nomadic war machine," the Uruguayan-born Moraña views the monster as one fantastic being imbued not only with a relativistic trait but one possessing a polyvalent attribute as well, for as Moraña suggests, the monster dwells in the gray space of "construction and deconstruction" ["la construcción y la deconstrucción."] (15). That is to say that in a binary world, the monster problematizes dichotomy structures and evades an absolute definition.

*El monstruo como máquina de guerra* consists of seven chapters (and a Coda) that analyze the monster from distinct themes and rigorous theoretical frameworks. Given the magnitude of theoretical concepts employed in the book, it is more than obvious that it is intended for established scholars of the science fiction and fantastic genres. She aims her book specifically at those who can understand the ideological and political epistemologies of Marxism and post-Marxism as well as abstract and relativistic concepts conceived by post-structuralist and postmodernist lines of thought and aesthetics. In this regard, the reader should expect close examinations of the monster from concepts relevant to Marxism such as Ideology, State, Modes of Production, and Capitalism. She also positions the monster against the politics of State and Power structures, where the monster's inherent "negative aesthetic" ["estética negativa"] (15) is assessed and observed in combination with Foucauldian biopolitics and Derridean poetics of hauntology and other conceptualizations and terminologies from the post-structuralist and post-modernist arsenal. It is worth noting that in the introduction in general, and in the ensuing chapters of *El monstruo como máquina de guerra* in particular, there is a persistent urgency and tone stemming from Moraña's intellectual prowess, which I reckon is nothing short of a generous scholarship commitment to offer the reader a plural hermeneutics capable of deciphering the vast aesthetic and political nuances of monster poetics, which have been bestowed on the monster by the symbolic and allegorical representations through the millennia of human culture and society.

In the second chapter, titled "El monstruo en la historia," Moraña offers a panoramic view of the representation of the monster through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque. She views the monster in relation to religion and the onto-theological, for the monster functions as a reminder of "the omnipresent faith (the constant threat of sin and fear of divine punishment)," ["la omnipresencia de la fe (la constante amenaza del

pecado y el temor a castigo divino”] (55), and whose monstrosity equally defies the notion of divine creation. In my view, the most notable section of this chapter is “Monstruosidad y colonialismo.” Here, Moraña’s thought leaves the religious dimension and delivers an analysis of the monster both as a supplemental trope and imaginary being employed by the chroniclers and cartographers of the New World. By assessing the monster as a colonial and postcolonial *dispositif*, the writer expands into a historiography of the monster’s biopolitical genealogy in Latin America. However, this promising section is abruptly interrupted and gives way to other more familiar postwar monsters like King Kong and Godzilla. In including these notorious monsters, Moraña transverses from the Latin American realm towards the Anglo and Asian worlds. This shifting of geography offers a complicated comparative analysis; however, it also sets in motion the possibility of further monster studies at a transatlantic level.

In chapter 3, *Los monstruos y la crítica del capitalismo*, Moraña reflects on the gothic forms and tropology present in Karl Marx’s monumental writings such as the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. In highlighting the presence of monsters, vampires, and cyborgs in the materialist thinking of Marx, Moraña offers a new mode of reading Marx’s works. By focusing on Marx’s use of gothic forms to configure the critique of capital, the reader is able to observe the degree to which the poetics of the monster is supplemental to materialist politics and psycho-ideology:

it is convenient to point out that in the case of Marx’s utilization of the monstrous in his writings the gothic elements establish an undoubtable connection between the world of political economy and that of the realm of emotions and senses [conviene señalar en el caso de la utilización de lo monstruoso en los escritos de Marx es que los elementos góticos establecen una una conexión indudable entre el mundo de la economía política y el de los sentimientos.] (146)

Additionally, Moraña furthers the relevance of gothic forms in the dialogue between Marxism and post-Marxism, which she provides via close readings of Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* and Deleuze and Guattari’s *One Thousand Plateaus*. Moraña analyzes the tropes of the ghost, zombie, and vampire which appear in the writings of these philosophers.

In Moraña’s quest to supplement the materialist strain of the previous chapter, chapter 4 is dedicated to *Los monstruos y la filosofía*. Here, she analyzes the monster in terms of psychoanalytic theory and western philosophy. I particularly found the inclusion of Julia Kristeva’s abject theory and John Baudrillard’s thought as a refreshing examination of the monster. Moraña furthers her monster theorization by bringing to the table the concepts of the

Freudian uncanny, the Kantian sublime via Žižek, and anomaly as understood by Foucault. In addition to the abovementioned reflections, Moraña finishes her monster analysis under the lens of posthuman thinking through fruitful dialogues with Braidotti and Haraway.

In comparison to the rest of the book, chapter 5 offers the reader a less condensed and a much more direct argument. She examines the monster under the lens of Biopolitics, Immunity (Esposito), and Multitude (Hardt-Negri). Moraña observes the use of the monster both as a function of the State and as “monster multitude” [“monstruo-multitud”] (242), a counter-hegemonic resistance against hegemonic power (242). In the culminating paragraphs of the chapter, Moraña focuses on one of the most notorious monsters of all time, the Wolfman. By employing the works of Agamben on the figures of the wolf and animals as intrinsic traits of human ontology, Moraña strengthens the theoretical grounding for lycanthropy studies as a way for political critique against the State and Power: “The Wolf-Man is conceived as a pure potency [...] against the stability of the political” [“El hombre-lobo es concebido como pura potencia [...] en contra de la estabilidad de lo político.”] (251).

The study offered in chapter 6 posits the monster under the scope of the camp and kitsch; Moraña analyzes the monster as a mere performance. “It is a visual construct, a flamboyant event, melodramatic performance” [“Es un hecho visual, un evento aparatoso, performance melodramático”] (264). This chapter will appeal to readers with an interest in the music videos of Michael Jackson, the films of George Romero, and the cultural works of Sam Bowie.

Chapter 7, “Monstruos al margen,” starts with a reflection on the mythologies and biopolitics of the monster in Latin American culture, and it focuses specifically on the region’s colonial legacy. Moraña addresses the colonial discourse of the Empire in its use of monster tropes to justify the colonization of the indigenous people of the continent: “Their natural monstrosity [...] not only functioned as justification of their conquest, but it also warranted the conquest as necessary” [“Su naturaleza monstruosa [...] no solo funcionó como una justificación de la conquista, sino que pareció hacerla necesaria.”] (294). This colonization theme echoes her brief assessment on the ideological intentions of the chroniclers and cartographers, a topic she first broaches in the second chapter. However, in this section she offers the view of marginal texts. As Moraña states, “The monstruos subsumed in mythic tales, beliefs, practices and popular interpretations of the social, constitutes a document of the *barbarie*, which warns of the vulnerability of the Nation-State’s civilizing projects” [“Lo monstruoso subsumido en relatos míticos, creencias, practicas e interpretaciones populares de lo social, constituye un ‘documento de barbarie’ que alerta sobre la extrema vulnerabilidad de los proyectos civilizatorios y de la nación-Estado.”] (299). In the subsequent sections of the chapter, Moraña

probes the monster under the scope of hybridity and mestizo theory, where she discerns its transgressive makings. Eventually, in the concluding pages, Moraña summarizes an archive of sf and fantasy texts produced in Latin America. Although she summarizes some important texts, the summaries in themselves bring to light the different contexts and functions on which Latin American writers use their monsters, cyborgs, vampires, and zombies. Thus, Moraña leaves room for the non-Latin American reader to explore the differences of monsters across distinct traditions, countries, and languages.

The Latin American scholar Mabel Moraña delivers a highly complex study of the monster in *El monstruo como máquina de guerra* (2017). The scope of analyses varies from across distinct theoretical and philosophical approximations. As it is, *El monstruo como máquina de guerra* is written in the code of the academia tribe. The vast terminology of concepts and dialogues between different strains of critical theory rigorously employed by Moraña serves to affirm that the poetics of the Monster cannot ever be apprehended nor defined, and yet the monster leaves a trace of its own constructive and deconstructive qualities behind.

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## Contributors

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