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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
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RESOURCES

DESPERATE LITERATURE

CAPABILITY

including short fiction by
Jo Lindsay Walton

expectations

translated by
Elizabeth Stainforth
Ana Baeza Ruiz

NEEDS

JUANA Y LA CIBERNÉTICA

ELENA ALDUNATE

"la Dama Chilena de la ciencia ficción"

JUANA ... Y LA CIBERNÉTICA

Introduction

Elizabeth Stainforth

'La Dama de la Ciencia Ficción'. This is the title bestowed upon the Chilean author Elena Aldunate (1925-2005) in a collected edition of her stories, published by Cuarto Propio in 2011. An early pioneer of science fiction writing in Chile, Aldunate was one of the first women authors to become associated with the genre through her story anthologies, including *El señor de las mariposas* and *Angélica y el delfín*, published during the 1960s and 1970s.

Aldunate was born María Elena Aldunate Bezanilla in Santiago, the daughter of the mathematician and engineer Arturo Aldunate Phillips, who was also a published author. She worked as a writer of stories, articles and radio scripts, from the 1950s onwards. With Ilda Cádiz, Hugo Correa, Antonio Montero, Roberto Pliscoff and Andrés Rojas, Aldunate was also involved in the founding of the Club Chileno de Ciencia Ficción, which began in the 1970s.

As critics have noted, Aldunate's stories consistently explore psychological themes, such as loneliness, repressed desire and existential crisis, from the perspective of women protagonists. In a biographical essay on Aldunate by Barbara Loach, she quotes the author as saying that 'one is constantly being filled with experiences and one has to know how to take advantage of what one sees, hears, lives [...] Only with this foundation can the imagination be given wings: that is, make fantasy with a foot in reality, and with elements that will be difficult to refute'. Aldunate's literary influences include Jules Verne, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Chilean authors Hugo Correa, María Luisa Bombal, Marta Brunet and María Elena Gertner.

Reflecting on the emerging legacy of Aldunate, Andrea Bell observes that, although she was 'occasionally profiled and her books reviewed in the Chilean press, her work has only recently come to the attention of literary historians'. During the last decade, the re-publication of Aldunate's stories in collections such as *Cuentos de Elena Aldunate: La dama de la ciencia ficción* has helped to remedy this situation, and introduced the author to a

new generation of readers. However, little of Aldunate's writing has been translated into English, an oversight we have sought address through the production of this new bilingual edition of the short story *Juana y la cibernética* (1963). Among the most remarkable and disturbing of Aldunate's stories, it narrates an ambiguously erotic encounter between the character Juana and her factory work station.

The idea for this publication, co-produced with Desperate Literature, Madrid, emerged from a series of events at the University of Leeds, UK on the 'Transcultural Fantastic', during the period 2018-2019. The joint aims of the series were to open up the traditions of the Fantastic from a transcultural and interdisciplinary perspective, investigating utopian and dystopian thought in art, fiction and film, as well as science fiction, folktales and fantasy literature. A workshop on 'Publishing the Transcultural Fantastic', which took place on 15 March 2019, featured insights from Terry Craven, co-owner of Desperate Literature; researcher Ruth Kelly from the University of York, who has worked on publishing projects in Bangladesh and Uganda; and Sarah Dodd from the University of Leeds, who is co-editor of the online magazine of speculative fiction in translation *Samovar*. The workshop discussed methods for contributing to a body of scholarship that has concerned itself with recuperating the Fantastic from contexts beyond the Anglo-American tradition, as well as alternative approaches to publishing, through small presses, short editions and print on demand, which offer more responsive and dynamic publishing routes.

This edition of *Juana y la cibernética* features a short work of creative fiction by the writer and editor Jo Lindsay Walton, 'OH GOD, THE DOGS!' Walton is interested in the intersection of culture, technology, and economics in his literary and academic work, and explained that his story is 'a re-staging of the frenetic and fractured solitude of Aldunate's story, the theme of the blurred boundaries of the (post-)human and our interpenetration with machines, and the theme of machine desire'. Of his creative response to *Juana*, he commented, 'mostly I think it's trying to answer the way Aldunate pushes at aloneness until it unfolds something else, responding to the kind of disaster socialism aspect of her story […] So the chances folded within catastrophe to reject the value-system which has constructed you up until this point, and to create your own new immanent/transcendent way of being, while still being the unfolding, embodied, entangled being you always were'. This is perhaps a fitting thought upon which to close the introduction and give way to the 'unfolding, embodied, entangled' beings of the stories that follow.

Endnotes:

1. See *Cuentos de Elena Aldunate: La dama de la ciencia ficción*, ed. Macarena C. Cortés and Jaque H. Javiera. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2011.

2.Barbara Loach, 'María Elena Aldunate', in *Escritoras chilenas v. 3*, ed. Patricia Rubio. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2011.

3. Andrea Bell, 'Elena Aldunate', in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (third edition)*, eds. John Clute et al: http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/

4.This publication received funding from the University of Leeds Sadler Seminar series 'The Transcultural Fantastic' in 2018-2019. The series organisers Professor Ingo Cornils, Dr Sarah Dodd and Dr Elizabeth Stainforth are researchers based at the University of Leeds, whose interests include German science fiction, theories of utopia and visual culture, and Chinese science fiction and fantasy literature.