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Fiction

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The Merciful Women

By Federico Andahazi

Translated from the Spanish by Alberto Manguel

Description:

A scandalous Argentine best-seller published around the world to outstanding acclaim, *The Anatomist* established Federico Andahazi as a writer of wit, verve, and mastery. His new novel, *The Merciful Women*, which sold in eleven countries, mines the same vein of forgotten and invented history, this time in a brilliant retelling of the birth of the Gothic novel.

In the summer of 1816, Percy and Mary Shelley, Mary's sister, and Lord Byron hid themselves inside a Swiss villa, whiling away rainy afternoons with a Gothic novel writing contest. In Andahazi's reimagining, there was fifth competitor, John Polidori, Byron's manservant, a talentless would-be writer resentful of the ease of his master's life. Through a Faustian pact with an unseen intercessant, Polidori obtains the most compelling vampire story ever written, which he will read aloud the night Mary Shelley first unveils *Frankenstein*. But *The Vampyre* has striking similarities to Polidori's benefactor and to what she asks of him in return. Opium, erotica, and decadence meld into a sly and stylish novel about literary ambition, talent, and inspiration.

Praise

"This highly entertaining novel, translated from the Spanish by Alberto Manguel, is a hoot—a parody of Gothic fiction, a fevered, sexy, perverse little sendup of Fanny Hill-style pornography, but most of all a Voltaire-like skewering of the myth of genius."—Richard Wallace, *The Seattle Times*

"[*The Merciful Women*]'s playful, satiric, erotic, sometimes savage, sometimes slapstick account of one man's case of severe literary envy is something completely different, and well worth reading."—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Written entirely in a cleverly modulated mock-Gothic style, encompassing references from Edgar Allen Poe's *The Gold-Bug* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Andahazi's well-researched tale succeeds as an elegant, clever deconstruction of authorship, imagination and the writing process. This is a short, tricky novel, peopled almost exclusively by broadly limned caricatures and with a plot hinging on a few well-placed double-crosses. As a piece of mock-scholarly, wickedly ironic entertainment, it is an utter delight."—*Publishers Weekly*

“Andahazi, Argentina’s most controversial novelist . . . brings his devilish satire to the world of literature. . . . Andahazi’s take on the vagaries of literature is clever and right-on, and his teasing use of a classic male fantasy as a weapon in the war between the sexes is quite a high-wire act.”—*Booklist*

“Andahazi . . . brings his readers another raucous exploration of sensuality and sexuality. . . . Andahazi’s adult tale of literary creation is as darkly humorous and grim as any early 19th-century Gothic novel.”—*Library Journal*

“Andahazi’s sensuous writing lends itself perfectly to this tale of Faustian pacts, opium and erotica, which will appeal to anyone with a taste for the Gothic.”—*The Bookseller* (London)

“With a touch of Angela Carter and Henry James about it, this tale of the unreliability of texts and questions over authorship has all the ingredients of a fairly subversive Gothic horror.”—*The Herald* (Glasgow)

“Taking a hefty slice of Gothic horror, Andahazi creates dark drama from a celebrated nineteenth-century meeting of minds, when Byron and Shelley withdrew to Lake Geneva to concoct their literary masterpieces. Perfectly poised and complete with sinister eroticism.”—*Wallpaper* (London)

“Is Andahazi a writer touched by a magic wand? Has he made a pact with a demon: his soul in exchange from these little pearls?”—*Revista de la Nación*