

Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature

Volume 3
Number 2 Fall 2002

Article 9

Fall 2002

Review of *The Space In-Between: Essays on Latin American Culture*. Edited by Ana Lúcia Gazzola

Eva-Lyn Alicia Jagoe
University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/bmrcl>
[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Jagoe, Eva-Lyn Alicia (2002). Review of "Review of *The Space In-Between: Essays on Latin American Culture*. Edited by Ana Lúcia Gazzola," *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature*: Vol. 3 : No. 2
Available at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/bmrcl/vol3/iss2/9>

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/bmrcl/vol3/iss2/9>

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

Silviano Santiago, *The Space In-Between: Essays on Latin American Culture*. Edited by Ana Lúcia Gazzola Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001. 187 pp. ISBN 082232749X (paper).

Reviewed by Eva-Lynn Alicia Jago, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

It is in this intersection of discourses, since it is impossible to erase the European discourse and it is no longer possible to forget the popular discourse, it is in this intersection of discourses that the silence of the intellectual narrator is imposed and the battle of parody and sarcasm is begun, it is there that the conflict between the discourse of the dominator and the dominated is made to be heard. It is in this not very pacific space in-between that the Brazilian intellectual finds today the volcanic soil where he may unpress all of the values destroyed by the culture of the conquerors.

— Silviano Santiago, "Worth Its Weight: Brazilian Modernist Fiction"

The notion of "the space in-between" (an awkward translation of the Portuguese "Entre-lugar") is fundamental to an understanding of postcolonial literature and culture, where a dominated culture tries to find its voice through, not in spite of, the domination it has endured. For Silviano Santiago, the correlatives of this notion are fundamental to his analyses of Latin American (mostly Brazilian) culture, and, according to the editor, Ana Lúcia Gazzola, he is the creator of this term. For a reader who is looking for an easy definition of the term "the space in-between," the closest that Santiago comes to it is in the above quotation. In fact, this is the only place where he even uses the term in an essay, though he does name another essay "Latin American Discourse: The Space In-Between." But for a reader who is interested in the intersections between culture and colonization, between metropolis and periphery and in the art that emerges from this kind of violent transculturation, the publication of *The Space In-Between* is fortuitous. The volume consists of a translation into English of essays that span thirty years of Santiago's critical writings and presentations. It brings together the key articles of Santiago that have influenced thinkers of postmodernism, Brazilian culture, Latin American culture, and globalization. Perhaps most interestingly for readers of this review, Santiago grapples with the approaches and assumptions of comparative literature, and asks us to revisit our traditional methodologies in the face of the complexities of colonial legacies.

Silviano Santiago is a film critic, novelist, poet, professor of French and Brazilian literature, and a cultural critic. As Gazzola and Wander Melo Miranda say in their introduction to the book, "the movement among theory, fiction, criticism, and poetry also confers on his work the discursive mobility that characterizes the traveling intellectual in postmodernity" (1). And, indeed, Santiago has taught in France, Canada, Brazil, and many different universities in the United States. He introduced poststructuralist thought to Brazil, and published *Glossário de Derrida* in 1976. Traces of Santiago's reading of Derrida can be found in many of his essays, as can repeated allusions to Jorge Luis Borges, Walter Benjamin, and Antonio Candido.

Because of the breadth of his critical inquiry, Santiago is writing for a larger audience than a purely academic one, and his writing reflects both an adherence to the difficulty of his ideas and to a belief that many people should understand and react to what he says or writes. One example of his style should suffice to give the reader a sense of his dense, yet conversational style: "America is the excess that marks its own presence. As excess, it is supplementary. The supplement is already more meaningful than the whole (Europe) it supplements--a hypothesis" (23). This combination of a forceful statement with an appended (modest) hypothetical is the

kind of prose that makes Santiago's book so different from most Anglo writing, and so pleasurable to read. Some of this comes from the fact that many of these papers were given first as speeches and presentations, but it also, I think, points to Santiago's position as a Brazilian intellectual who engages in a variety of forums, styles, and debates.

Santiago is a highly literary critic, and many of his articles perform brilliant close readings of canonical nineteenth-century, modernist, or contemporary Brazilian texts that articulate questions of universality, dependency, tradition, source, influence, purity, and mass culture. However, because of the large claims that his essays make, a familiarity with the literary texts he analyzes is not necessary. There are moments, nevertheless, when a knowledge of key Brazilian thinkers and writers is useful. Though the editors do add footnotes to explain certain historical moments, there are certain assumptions made about the readership's familiarity with Brazilian culture.

Because the essays collected in this volume span such a long time frame, one can see the repetition and refinement of his main arguments through the years. However, the chronology is not easy to ascertain in this book, since the information about the history of each piece comes as an endnote at the back. I admit to thinking of one of the essays as recent until I came across a reference to Barthes's *new* book, *S/Z*, at which point I flipped through and found the surprisingly early date. While this may not reflect well on the presentation of the volume, it does bespeak the originality and relevance of Santiago's work to a contemporary audience. Other than this point, the volume is intellectually solid, and places the works in an order, which, while not chronological, demonstrates a clear trajectory of ideas and formulations that traverse Santiago's work. The translations are clear, and the editorial preface is masterful in its discussion of his oeuvre.

There is a cluster of articles ("Why and For What Purpose Does the European Travel?" [1984], "Latin American Discourse: The Space In-Between" [1971], "Eça, Author of Madame Bovary" [1970], and "Universality in Spite of Dependency [1980]) that analyze the position of Latin America vis-à-vis Europe as a supplementary one that displaces Europe's hegemonic centrality. In these essays, Santiago repeatedly looks at the indigenous past and the displacement of the Indian from his culture, religion, history, and even land by the European. The suppression of autochthonous or black elements by the official culture reveals a narcissistic assimilation of the Other to the conqueror's reflected image. Thus the Brazilian intellectual is trapped in the difficult dilemma of succumbing either to a nativism that naively posits a return to primal roots, or to a discourse of European sources and influences.

In his 1971 "Latin American Discourse: The Space In-Between," Santiago points out how a comparative study of European texts actually analyzes a single European culture. While there is no finer vantage point for studying Latin American national literatures than that of comparative literature, engaging in the paradigmatic study of source and influence is ethnocentric and replicates a center-periphery model between Europe and Latin America. Santiago argues that already in the first centuries of conquest, "America is transformed into a copy, a simulacrum that desires to be increasingly like the original, even though its originality cannot be found in the copy of the original model but rather in an origin that was completely erased by the conquerors" (29). He emphasizes that there is no return to origins possible, that Latin America is always

already imbricated with Europe so that its originality will lie in some form of copy. The emancipatory potential of such a statement may not be at first clear, but Santiago is quite firm in his belief that Latin America contributes to Western culture by destroying concepts of unity and purity. Comparative literature's critical methodology, that of studying texts through the lens of source and influence, is narrow in Santiago's view and actually replicates a neocolonial stance which must delineate a deficient economy that is influenced by a more powerful one.

In this essay he tells us that "the work of the writer becomes a kind of global translation, a pastiche, a parody or a digression rather than a literal translation" (34). Readers conversant with Latin American theory may think of Julio Ramos' *Divergent Modernities* or Ricardo Piglia's work, though Santiago's work is prior to both. These authors, like Santiago, try to map the positionality of the Latin American author who cites but at the same time transgresses or parodies European sources. It is in "Eça, Author of Madame Bovary," with its provocative title that attributes authorship of the French novel to Brazilian writer Eça de Queirós, author of *O primo Basílio*, that Santiago expounds his criticism of the search for sources. He uses Borges's story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quijote*" as an emblem of a repetition that modifies what it repeats, and claims that the repetition of the Madame Bovary story by Eça in fact results in profundity. The wealth and interest of nineteenth-century Brazilian and Portuguese fiction lies not in its originality but rather in its transgression of the model. A similar point is made in this lapidary sentence from "Universality in Spite of Dependency": ". . . the decolonized text is seen paradoxically as the richest of the two precisely because it *contains within itself a representation of the dominant text and a response to that representation within its very fabrication*" (63).

The other articles in this volume deal with questions of modernism, postmodernism, censorship, globalization, and mass culture. The question of the positionality of the Brazilian intellectual is often discussed, and, again, Brazil's relation to Europe emphasizes the need for a space in-between in which a rift is made between model and copy. Often, he bemoans the reduced readership of Brazil which diminished even more under the dictatorial censorship of the 1970's. Under censorship, Santiago says, the literature of the period is no better or worse, but it is in limbo, waiting to be read, waiting for the future. In the final and most recent piece, "Worldly Appeal: Local and Global Politics in the Shaping of Brazilian Culture" (1995), Santiago synthesizes many of his arguments through an analysis of identity and globalization in Brazilian culture from the nineteenth century to the present. The binary between national identity and globalization is deconstructed, and Santiago describes a new form of society that will not embrace nationalist myths or the globalizing force of hegemonic U.S. pop culture.

Because of the breadth of Santiago's criticism, readers may not find all of the articles relevant to their concerns. Nevertheless, one will admire the scope and erudition of such a widely-established scholar. This translation is timely given the spate of criticism on globalization, nationalism, and postcolonialism, and it is especially thought-provoking for comparatists who are moving beyond traditional European literary study into more transcultural perspectives.