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## ***Broken Souths: Latina/o Poetic Responses to Neoliberalism and Globalization***

BY MICHAEL DOWDY. TUCSON: UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA PRESS, 2013. 296 PP.  
ISBN 978-0816530298

*Broken Souths: Latina/o Poetic Response to Neoliberalism and Globalization*, by scholar and poet Michael Dowdy, is a tightly-woven, well-researched map of neoliberalism, as told through the poetry literature of Latina/o and Latin American writers. The core of the study comes from Dowdy's multifaceted concept of "broken" or "to break." The most obvious interpretation is the idea of broken borders and the resulting broken family and national ties, but Dowdy argues that, especially in terms of neoliberalism, there are "breaks," or actions, that take place in political movements or in literature that represent resistance to corporate fascism and pervasive capitalism. Dowdy also examines the concept of multiple "souths" within Latina/o and Latin American literature. Instead of focusing on the stereotypical South, which implies Mexico or the U.S. South, he maps the interaction between various souths, such as Chile and Colombia, and a variety of norths, such as Appalachia. These spaces and places are viewed through an ecocritical lens in the works of authors like Víctor Hernández Cruz, Martín Espada, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Jack Agüeros, Marjorie Agosin, Roberto Bolaño and José Emilio Pacheco, among many others.

In the Introduction, Dowdy acknowledges that the concepts of "north" and "south" are ceasing to exist (3) and that he has a desire to expand the concept of where south and north are located in Latina/o and Latin American literature. In terms of geographic location, Mexico is referenced a lot, and Dowdy also references New York, Appalachia, Colombia and Chile. We explore how neoliberal goals have affected those areas in terms of work, access to water, environmental destruction and dehumanization. Dowdy writes, "*Broken Souths* offers 'sustained speculation' on how neoliberalism shapes poetry" (10), and he encourages the use of the word "neoliberalism" in the United States in order to draw connections to related events in Latin America, where the word is used frequently (11). It is troubling to imagine decades of literary cultural production bound to a word that describes very limited aspects of Latina/o and Latin American life, but what emerges under the neoliberal umbrella is a chronicle of complex reactions to the effects

of corporatization and privatization of daily life in the Americas. In Chapter One, Dowdy examines Martín Espada's "Sing Zapatista," where Espada finds a desire to connect the U.S. with Latin America through the Zapatista movement, yet Espada references Lonely Planet as if he were a tourist in Mexico. His correspondence about the poem with intellectual and activist Camilo Pérez-Bustillo, however, counters the tourist identity and creates a bridge between the two countries, subverting concepts of north and south (39).

In Chapter Two, Dowdy uses Juan Felipe Herrera's poem, "How to Enroll in a Chicano Studies Class," to show the two parts to successful revolution: Molotovs (overt action) and subtleties (poetics). This framework, which is polemical, doesn't allow for much subtlety at all, but the chapter does describe how Herrera's poem chronicles the symbolic break of Chicano student movements that went against neoliberal plans for public education. The most exciting part of the chapter is Dowdy's analysis of Herrera's poem, "A Day Without a Mexican" and his claim that the poem undermines the concept that immigrants threaten U.S. prosperity because they so clearly contribute to it by providing low-cost labor (88).

Chapter Three has an emphasis on created spaces—Roberto Bolaño's library as country and Martín Espada's "Republic of Poetry" (91). Dowdy outlines neoliberal goals, as defined in the poems: "State legitimacy is measured by profits ... [and the state] promotes the [consumer-owner] motivated solely by material gain" (94). Bolaño and Espada challenge this world-view by exposing how the state must impose these imperatives using force. Later, Dowdy connects Bolaño, Herrera and Nicanor Parra in their stance on mobilizing the public to find the "unchronicled" persons who have been erased, who have been made "blank pages" by neoliberalism's grip (106).

Chapter Four focuses on Appalachian poetics by Maurice Kilwein Guevara and Marcos McPeck Villatoro. Kilwein Guevara finds parallels between Pittsburgh and Colombia, where he is originally from, and McPeck Villatoro identifies as a "Latino Southerner" with Mexican

family in California (140-141). They both represent a complex connection of spaces that implies there is no “north” or “south” or any brokenness of spaces or people. Indeed, Dowdy claims that Kilwein Guevara’s poetry “shifts the blame for poverty from the hard-working family to those who construct the view” (136). Villatoro’s work focuses on natural landscapes and breaks from the “iconic Latino literary spaces such as the border, barrio and bodega” (149), according to Dowdy, and he emphasizes the idea that no spaces are off-limits to Latinas/os, despite neoliberal goals. Dowdy argues that neoliberalism has created a border-free world, but it could also be argued that Latinas/os have been moving throughout the Americas since well before that concept arrived.

Chapter Five, which analyzes the work of Judith Ortiz Cofer, Víctor Hernández Cruz and Jack Agüeros, begins with Don Feder’s column opposing Puerto Rican statehood. Dowdy states, “Feder’s desire for freedom from Latinos reveals an abiding fear that the relation of dependency actually runs the other way around” (157). Cofer, Dowdy states, creates “a territory of deeply personal exchanges” (165), and then he later highlights, “Cruz’s claim that ‘poetics is the art of stopping the world’” (168). Such assertions would again argue that there is nothing “broken” in *Broken Souths*, if it weren’t for Agüeros’ “Sonnet for Ambiguous Captivity,” which states overtly that the Puerto Rican “captivity” is like “old-time slavery” (181). Agüeros’ claim would, indeed, imply greater ties than Feder admits to.

Chapter Six has an excellent explanation of Mexico City’s fragmented quality (on page 191) and a good chart of neoliberal effects through José Emilio Pacheco’s “Mercado Libre” and “H&C.” Bolaño’s “Godzilla in Mexico” expands on the depiction of Mexico City as a place where a manmade nature, created by neoliberal design, is what creates economic, structural and emotional instability. In the poem, a father and son are the only ones who foresee the devastation of the city; Dowdy explains, “unable to share their understanding with others, ‘social conscience’ becomes impossible” (209). The neoliberal design creates a system that defeats communication, collectivism and the ability to “break.”

The Coda of the book is an extremely brief chapter that explores representations of femicide in Juárez, as depicted in the work of Marjorie Agosín and Valerie Martínez. It is upsetting that so little time was devoted to two of the three female writers in the text, as compared to

the thirteen male authors who were extensively explored in the book. However, the chapter has a great analysis of how buses represent neoliberal goals and dangers (many of the femicides in Juárez take place near bus routes). Later, though, it is a bit unclear why Dowdy decides to examine the blurbs on the backs of the two author’s books; more time with their actual work would have been better spent.

Ultimately, *Broken Souths* is a worthwhile study of Latina/o and Latin American literature that reveals direct resistance to neoliberalism. Some questions remain, though: whether we should equate Latinas/os and Latin Americans with the terms “souths” or “broken,” which the text does on several occasions, and whether enough attention was devoted to Latina authors and scholars, but these issues do not change the fact that *Broken Souths* is a carefully crafted work that highlights Latina/o and Latin American authors and scholars, and the way in which their work has chronicled and challenged the destructive forces of neoliberalism.

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