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Review Essay: Race, Latinidad, and Nerd Representations

Brown, Ariana. *We are Owed*. Cleveland: GRVLND, 2020. ISBN 9781-7353-5276-3

Herrera, Cristina. *ChicaNerds in Chicana Young Adult Literature: Brown and Nerdy*. New York: Routledge, 2021. ISBN 9780-3678-6021-9

Ongoing, longstanding, and recent movements to diversify representations of marginalized communities in literature are more important than ever, particularly given recent bans on historically accurate books and calls to “end” Critical Race Theory. As an educator living and working in Florida, I consistently rely on movements such as #DisruptTexts (<https://disrupttexts.org>) and other work by founders and educators Tricia Ebarvia, Lorena Germán, Kimberly Harper, and Julia E. Torres to find ways to expand my teaching practices and debunk misrepresentations of communities of color in and beyond my classroom. Seeking and engaging with these resources is critical, particularly as the media and ongoing political discussions continue erasing and imposing violence on already marginalized communities. The present review essay focuses on two texts that expand representations of Chicanas and Latinas in literature and poetry: Ariana Brown’s *We Are Owed* (2021) and Cristina Herrera’s *ChicaNerds in Chicana Young Adult Literature: Brown and Nerdy* (2021). Both texts aim to break stereotypes about the identities, interests, and capacities of Chicanas, shedding light on the multi-faceted identities and experiences often subsumed under the Chicana/Latina label.

I first encountered Ariana Brown’s *We Are Owed* on Twitter, where Brown shared that she is an Afro-Mexican poet interested in expanding longstanding conceptions about Chicanas and the myths surrounding mestiza identities. In her collection of poetry, Brown demands a new origin story for Mexican Americans, one in which Blackness is celebrated rather than erased. Countering conventional lauding of borderland theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Brown traces her journey and signals how Blackness is consistently erased, ignored, and shamed in mainstream discussions of borderland mestizo identity. “How many times have you heard ‘we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us?’” Brown asks (78). She continues, “The thing is, when Texas was part of México, most Mexicans in Texas were Spaniards. Perhaps you should ask instead: who created the border?” (78). Throughout her collection, Brown outlines how celebrated Mexican icons and some traditions have roots in nationalistic policies that perpetuate white-supremacy and anti-Blackness. Tracing examples ranging from “El Negrito,” a character on the popular game, lotería, to her classrooms filled with white Mexican students and teachers, Brown provides a critical perspective on how conversations about Chicana/Latina/Mestiza labels privilege whiteness. She calls attention to the fact that portrayals of Chicanas in literature and the media, along with calls for increased Chicana representation, often fail to account for Black Chicana experiences.

Cristina Herrera’s *ChicaNerds in Chicana Young Adult Literature: Brown and Nerdy* (2021) also expands representations of Chicanas in young adult literature through Herrera’s theorization and discussion of “ChicaNerds: interesting, sometimes quirky, smart, astute young women who exist outside the white mainstream and on the fringes of the Chicana communities they love *and* critique” (2). Through her analysis of “ChicaNerd” characters: Luz Ríoz in Jo Ann Yolanda Hernández’s *White Bread Competition*, Marisa Moreno in Ashley Hope Pérez’s *What Can(t) Wait*, Lupita in Guadalupe García McCall’s *Under the Mesquite*, Gabi in Isabel Quintero’s *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*, Julia in Erika Sánchez’s *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, and Yolanda in Patricia Santana’s *Ghosts of El Grullo*, Herrera portrays multi-faceted and yet vastly interconnected depictions of Chicana’s who break far away from stereotypes. As Herrera makes

clear in her introduction, “ChicaNerds learn to develop their brown-girl identities around the qualities of feminism, community support, and agency. As first-generation, working-class Chicana teenagers, the young women protagonists maneuver academic settings that have been hostile for women of color” (6).

As a white Bolivian Latina professor and very much a nerd, I really enjoyed Herrera’s analysis of books I love—books in which I saw myself navigating hostile spaces like academia and even, sometimes, my own homes and communities. For example, Herrera’s illustration of Gabi in Isabel Quintero’s *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*, touches on the complexities of grappling with your sexuality, your relationships to your mother and motherhood in general, and your identity as what Gabi self-identifies: a “‘short...plump...and super light-skinned’ Chicana” (106). Herrera traces Gabi’s relationship with her mom, drawing on scholarship about Chicana mother/daughter feminist literature to illustrate how Gabi’s ChicaNerd identity pushed her to use poetry as an avenue for processing her relationship to her mother as well as her own embodiment of feminist principles and aspirations. This portrayal very much resonated with my own experiences and helped me process not only Gabi’s character, but also some of the experiences and challenges I faced in my own familial relationships.

At the core, Herrera’s thorough illustration of the ChicaNerd identity and how it is embraced and embodied by the chicas poderosas across these texts is important and welcomed. At the same time, as a white Latina who constantly benefits from both whiteness and from the white supremacy embedded in Latinidad, when I see myself represented in Latinx-centered texts, I try to ask the question: *Who is not being represented here?* This answer marks where research and spaces such as the Black Latinas Know Collective (<https://www.blacklatinasknow.org>) and the work of Black Latina poets and researchers such as Ariana Brown could inform general analyses of Latinidad and their representations in literature and scholarship. For example, in *We Are Owed*, Brown pushes traditionally accepted conceptions of Latinidad and Chicanidad beyond nationalistic ideals and white-supremacist ideologies. In her poem, “There are Güeros & Then There is Me,” Brown highlights how Black Chicanx experiences are frequently erased from Chicanx identity discussions. Brown states:

Let’s play a game, called
My school so Mexican,
 The entire third grade was required
 to sing & dance a Selena medley for our parents.
My school so Mexican,
 we sold Hot Cheetos
 with nacho cheese at fundraisers.
My school so Mexican,
 principal took my mama to the office,
 told her my hair was ‘outlandish.’
My school so Mexican,
 I’m the only one
 who look like me. (27)

This poem in particular resonates with some of the experiences that Herrera discusses in characters like Gabi, Julia, Marisa, Luz and Yolanda in terms of portraying a young Chicana in school, both appreciating and also rejecting aspects of her Mexican culture. Yet, Brown extends these coming-

of-age stories by focusing not on the quarrels of being light skinned or white and thus still benefitting from white privilege, but on being a Black Chicana dealing with anti-Blackness in her predominantly Mexican school. Brown traces this erasure and the prevalence of anti-Blackness in her experiences throughout high school and college. For example, she notes that “the last summer of college, I studied in Mexico City, where a professor from my university was teaching two classes. It was my first time in Mexico as an adult. Our homestays were arranged in a wealthy neighborhood, with wealthy white Mexicans, and our program included mandatory class field trips. My classmates were mostly bilingual Mexican-American students from my school. I was the only Black person” (51). Thus, Brown emphasizes the fact that Chicana and Latina identity categories frequently erase or try to consume Blackness under a “brown” or “mestizo” label that privileges whiteness. In other words, the defaulting of all Mexican Americans as mestiza or even as “brown” (despite white skin), privileges whiteness while simultaneously erasing Blackness and Black experiences, such as those so clearly represented in Brown’s text.

What about the defaulting of all ChicaNerds as “brown Chicanas?” This is my contention with Herrera’s analysis, particularly in the re-centering of whiteness (or non-Blackness) embedded within the ChicanNerd identity. For example, in her introduction, Herrera nods to the lack of Afro-Latinx representation in Chicana YA literature, ending her introduction by stating, “there is still much work to be done on representations of Afro-Latinidad in YA text [...]. In my study of Chicana young adult protagonists in the six novels, I consider how nerdiness is one way that these young women assert their brown Chicana identities, and in doing such, the texts call for more expansive, creative, and critical expressions of Chicanisma” (18). Furthermore, earlier in the introduction, Herrera provides ample justification for the inclusion of a white author, Ashley Hope Pérez, in her text, explaining that “though not authored by a Chicana writer, as I discussed earlier in the introduction, I classify the [Pérez’s] text as Chicana because of its validating representation of Marisa and the Moreno family.” Thus, in a text about Chicana/ChicaNerd identity, Herrera includes the voice of a white woman to describe “brown” Chicana identities, but there is no inclusion of Black Chicana authors or characters. I think this exclusion speaks to the erasure that Brown highlights in her poetry, expressing how calls for added representation in Chicana communities should also include Black Chicana perspectives.

I want to be clear that I find Herrera and Brown’s work to be critical and important. My critique of Herrera’s work is not so much targeted toward any single author, but is instead intended to support Brown and others’ call for further acknowledgement of how white supremacy permeates even our best attempts to increase diversity in literature. I respect the fact that Herrera was only focusing on six particular novels for her analysis, and I also wonder if this was a missed opportunity to further consider how conceptions of “nerdiness” and Chicana identity could also help Black Chicana characters to further break from stereotypes. Building on the work of Blerds—a media company and lifestyle brand by Black nerds (www.blerd.com/about-us/), for example—I hope that in future publications the ChicaNerd discussion is further extended to experiences of Black Chicanas. Herrera herself mentions that “the novels examined in this study also share concerns with non-Latinx African American YA writers,” and she also nods to Black-led initiatives and interpretations of nerdiness. As this work continues, and as authors take up the important ChicaNerd discussion, it’ll be important to take up Brown’s call to center Black Latina experiences in portrayals of Chicanas (9). As Herrera explains, “an examination of young Chicana womanhood matters, particularly when a combination of racist and patriarchal structures of power that operate on macro levels and familial levels has denied ChicaNerds the privilege of academic exploration and intellectual curiosity” (9). I am grateful for Herrera and Brown’s work, particularly as educators, activists, students, and

researchers continue fighting against longstanding oppressive systems that target marginalized communities. As Brown articulates, it's important to look beyond white Latina/Chicana perceptions when seeking representation in white-dominant literature and media.

Laura Gonzales, University of Florida

Costa Cordella, Ezio. *Por una constitución ecológica. Replanteando la relación entre sociedad y naturaleza*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Catalonia, 2021. 177 p. ISBN 9789-5632-4876-0

El libro de Ezio Costa Cordella: *Por una constitución ecológica. Replanteando la relación entre sociedad y naturaleza*, es un libro dinámico y de lectura ágil, de 177 páginas, y está organizado en 8 capítulos, los que incluyen una introducción y reflexiones finales. Los temas que conforman el trenzado argumental de este libro son, en primer lugar, las motivaciones que sustentan la idea de una “Constitución ecológica”, una constitución, que “ponga a la protección del medio ambiente en el centro de las preocupaciones de la sociedad, donde se armonicen las actividades sociales con las de la naturaleza” (36-37). El segundo tema que destaca se orienta hacia la responsabilidad del Estado frente a la protección del medio ambiente, entendido como el deber del Estado de proteger el clima y adaptarse al cambio climático. El siguiente tema que encontramos en el cuarto capítulo, el más extenso del libro, guarda relación con la distribución del poder y la protección del medio ambiente, “un poder creador, y no solamente una fuente de prohibiciones y mandatos” (88), y donde exista una defensoría de la naturaleza; el cuarto tema, sobre los derechos ambientales, guarda relación con que al momento de redactar la nueva constitución se consagre el derecho al medio ambiente sano y ecológicamente equilibrado, desde una perspectiva antropocéntrica del derecho al medio ambiente hacia una visión más ecocéntrica de protección a la propia naturaleza (104), así como también releva el derecho humano al agua, es decir, “darle al agua un tratamiento diferente, respecto de lo cual la propiedad privada no es aceptable” (110), donde también destaca el planteamiento sobre los derechos de acceso a la información, justicia y participación ciudadana, para “asegurar la participación de las personas en la toma de decisiones ambientales de manera deliberativa, además de ser parte integrante del derecho a vivir en un ambiente sano” (111).

En el siguiente tema que propone el libro, se cuestiona al pensamiento moderno que ha erigido al ser humano por sobre o fuera de la naturaleza, siendo este además el responsable de los daños y desastres ambientales que vivimos hoy; por lo mismo “reconocer el valor intrínseco de la naturaleza” (121), las vidas no humanas y los ecosistemas es un desafío crucial y “la modificación principal que requiere nuestro derecho y que debiera quedar plasmada en una nueva constitución” (121), en otras palabras no solo reconocer a la naturaleza en su valor instrumental y relacional, sino “reconocer a la naturaleza una calidad de sujeto de derechos y proteger esos derechos” (124), así como el reconocimiento de los animales como seres sintientes con implicancias concretas en las políticas públicas de alimentación sustentable, por ejemplo; también promover la idea de cooperación social, idea de Nussbaum, para extenderse hacia la promoción de vivir juntos y de manera digna con otras especies no humanas, en la idea de desarrollo y florecimiento de humanos y no humanos (131).

En tanto, el capítulo 7 del libro nos conduce hacia el cuestionamiento sobre nuestros modos de vida, y la propuesta de generar cambios en ellos, no a nivel individual sino colectivo, puesto que “el modo de vida y consumo actuales son insostenibles ambientalmente” (151). El autor nos

interpela a empezar a disminuir nuestras ambiciones materiales y a recuperar los ecosistemas. Otra idea valiosa que vale destacar es la del “buen vivir”, como un ejemplo de las posibilidades que tenemos de configurar una nueva forma de vida. Es un concepto proveniente de los pueblos indígenas, en especial de los pueblos indígenas andinos, con sus principios de interconexión, interdependencia, e interrelación. El buen vivir “rescata el valor de los objetos distintos a los materiales, como el conocimiento, las relaciones sociales, entre otros. Para el buen vivir, la riqueza no consiste en tener y acumular la mayor cantidad de bienes posibles, sino que en lograr un equilibrio entre las necesidades fundamentales de la humanidad y los recursos disponibles para satisfacerlas” (155).

El libro prosigue con una aguda crítica al supuesto desarrollo sostenible, sobre todo en términos de decisiones atomizadas, donde las variables efectivas de sustentabilidad son poco viables. “La nueva manera en que se configure la economía tendrá que ser respetuosa de los límites naturales” (163). En la línea de transitar hacia una nueva economía, Costa destaca algunas propuestas que están circulando el día de hoy: el capitalismo o economía verde, y el ecosocialismo, siendo 4 líneas las que revisa y resalta: el desarrollo a escala humana, la economía ecológica, el decrecimiento y la economía de la rosquilla, siendo esta última concebida por la académica de Oxford Kate Raworth, una de las más lúcidas, El problema es que el sistema económico se construye desde la reproducción del capital” (170).

Este libro concluye con una invitación a cada uno de los lectores a convertirnos en activistas por la constitución ecológica para “protegernos y proteger la naturaleza gracias a mejores arreglos normativos” (176), siguiendo la ruta que han trazado economistas que han visto la problemática ambiental con ojos alternativos al sistema patriarcal neoliberal, pero también siguiendo a los poetas y las poetas de Chile desde Elicura Chihuailaf a Daniela Catrileo, pasando por intelectuales como Gaston Soubllette, ecofeministas como Yayo Herrero, artistas, escritores y literatos que nos han ayudado a repensar nuestra relación con el medio ambiente y a cuestionar, y trabajar juntos y juntas, como señala Nicanor Parra, en sus ecopoemas, como ecocompañeros con ecompromiso por una econstitución.

Carolina A. Navarrete G. Universidad de La Frontera

Estrada, Oswaldo, ed. *Fronteras de violencia en México y Estados Unidos*. Valencia: Albatros, 2021. 265 pp. ISBN 9788-4727-4384-7

This critical anthology offers a comprehensive analysis of 21st-century cultural production of Greater Mexico, contributing significantly to a discussion of the representation of violence and its interaction with migration in Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border zone (and more broadly, Latin America). Through fifteen essays that effectively dialogue with one another, this interdisciplinary, albeit certainly literature- and film-focused text goes beyond the characterization of violence to accomplish an implicit goal: to act in itself as a response to violence by exposing hegemonic rhetoric and opening a space for oft-silenced voices.

The first three chapters play cleverly on the section title, “States of Violence,” by deciphering how violence unfolds, paying special attention to official State actions that perpetrate harmful marginalization. Oswaldo Zavala’s study of forced displacement in Tamaulipas outlines the role of neoliberal politics as a force within the phenomenon of migration, a refreshing and necessary shift from an emphasis on drug-related violence as the primary impetus for

displacement. Tomás Regalado López follows Zavala, positioning a proliferation of propaganda videos in Mexico as a venue for institutionalized manipulation. His analysis of Jorge Volpi's autofiction *Una novela criminal* (2018) reveals literature's power to dismantle official rhetoric and humanize those the State labels as enemies, thus counteracting the mythification of criminals in Mexico. In closing, Shelley Garrigan's review of artistic installations in the U.S.-Mexico border space examines how cultural production interacts with politics to shift our perceptions, while also pulling the anthology more firmly into the binational focus it promises.

The next section acknowledges without lingering overlong upon the normalization of gender violence, instead prioritizing the voices of women who describe the devastating impact of systemic violence. Oswaldo Estrada opens this section by pointing astutely to the ominously vague finales of almost all the stories in the anthology *El silencio de los cuerpos* (2015), written by nine Mexican women authors: in so doing, the critic outlines a bleak reality of omnipresent violence, against which efforts of resistance, while essential, are often limited. In a confirmation of Estrada's conclusions, Irma Cantú and Alexandra Márquez study, respectively, poetry by Sara Uribe and Minerva Margarita Villarreal and a novel by Fernanda Melchor to dissect both individual and collective manifestations of violence and responses to it. Together, the articles announce the difficulty of altering deep-set patterns in the face of State indifference and the community's (passive or active) support of binarily-oriented brutality.

The anthology's third section, titled "Desigualdades (neo)liberales," turns its gaze to cinematography to investigate symbolic violence that is perpetrated via the erasure or alteration of marginalized identities for consumption by a particular elite audience. Pedro Ángel Palou and Adela Pineda Franco's contributions offer a comprehensive overview of Mexican film since the 1970s and analyze three recent films, including, in Pineda Franco's article, Alfonso Cuarón's critically-acclaimed *Roma* (2018), to show that despite minor strides in the campaign for social change through cultural production, the representation of indigenous and marginalized identities continues to be problematically simplistic and abstract. Through a close study of the Netflix series *La casa de las flores* (2018-present), Jhonn Guerra Banda identifies this superficial and frequently whitewashed characterization of Mexicans (and also the deliberate nonappearance of certain representatives of this heterogeneous population) as a problem that reflects a prioritization of the desires of a global market in lieu of a local one, which, of course, represents a smaller-scale version of neoliberalism's impact on Mexico and other Latin American countries.

The fourth section of the text continues a critical focus on filmography to examine the portrayal of conflicts typically resulting in migrant death in the U.S.-Mexico border zone. Saldarriaga analyzes *Savageland* (2015) as a representation of U.S. necropolitics that perpetuate discriminatory approaches to Latinx migration and manipulate the context of migrants' deaths for political benefit. She also points to the film's place as part of a shift of the zombie genre, which mirrors Verónica Garibotto's astute suggestion, via a discussion of Gael García Bernal's role in *¿Quién es Dayani Cristal?*, produced in 2013, that the documentary-versus-fiction binary in film interpretation should be read more fluidly, in order to instead prioritize this ability of this production to make sense of the suffering that migrants face and promote actions to improve their conditions. Meanwhile, Vinodh Venkatesh's analysis in the twelfth chapter of the volume echoes criticisms posited in Section III: he acknowledges the symbolic power of *el luchador* in Mexican culture and cinematography, but denounces this genre's portrayal of migration for its tendency of fetishizing physical violence and migrant death.

Fronteras de violencia closes, appropriately, with a selection of articles that reflect on the nature of resistance. Ryan Long presents a survey of four Mexican texts, which work in unison to

foster a collective recognition of the powerful role that borders both physical and symbolic play, and a mindful reorientation into the present experience of grief. Via an analysis of Ana Castillo's novel *The Guardians* (2007), Anna M. Nogar reminds us of the lasting impressions that borders make, but warns us of the danger of leaning so far into oppression's ubiquity that we forget the essential value of contextualization in our responses to power. Finally, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez's closing reflections reassert the myriad of personal approaches to the sociopolitical reality and import of the border zone. The conclusion of the text thereby reaffirms the message that is woven across the anthology: in a context that complicates traditional modes of resistance, what we can and must do is speak out, and thereby enable silenced voices to be heard.

Adrienne Erazo, Appalachian State University

Genova, Thomas. *Imperial Educación: Race and Republican Motherhood in the Nineteenth-Century Americas*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2021. 342 pp. ISBN: 9780-8139-4624-5

Imperial Educación is a well-researched examination of the ambivalent representations of the “allegory of the national family” produced and circulated in the Americas and the debates surrounding the racially-heterogeneous populations' role in various national projects. In this manuscript, Genova shows why governing reformers from Argentina, Cuba, and the United States promoted the use of public *educación* (childrearing and character molding) and the image of “white republican mothers” and “mother-teachers.” He also provides a compelling argument for the relationship between nation-building in Latin America and US imperialism through a novel hemispheric study of Argentina and Cuba and their entangled histories with the United States during the long nineteenth century. Most significantly, Genova's book affirms that at the root of most, if not all, American nationalistic discourses and eugenic practices—childrearing, education, genocide, reproduction control, settler racism—was the control of Afro-descendants and their systemic exclusion from citizenship, power, and the national body-politic.

After a comprehensive introduction, Thomas Genova lays the foundation for his manuscript in the first chapter. He historicizes the development of a racialized republican mother figure in nineteenth-century literary and nonfictional texts from Argentina, Cuba, the United States, and as a point of comparison, Haiti. Genova also explains how and why women of color were discursively eliminated from republican motherhood and how *educación* was mobilized in the Americas as a “corrective for the supposed shortcomings of mothers of color” (47). Then, in “Mothers, Moors, Mohicans, and Mulattas,” Genova elaborates on the impact that James Fenimore Cooper's historical romance *The Last of the Mohicans* and Jacksonian views on racial mixing had on Domingo Sarmiento and the exclusionary form of citizenship he endorsed. Specifically, Genova demonstrates how Sarmiento's *Facundo* directly dialogues with Cooper's novel and how Sarmiento found a republican and modern culture model in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Sarmiento's fascination with Cooper's text and paradigms of white settler colonialism should come as no surprise to readers since it is well-known that Sarmiento sought to “domesticate” the largely unsettled pampas and removed indigenous peoples from their lands. In this second chapter, Genova also underscores the importance of works that challenged North American models and Argentina's “official whitening paradigms” (48). Such texts include Eduarda Mansilla's *Lucía Miranda*, a narrative Genova contends is a counter-discourse to Cooper's novel because its protagonist is the

Moorish-descended Lucía, a “hybrid”/symbolic mother of the Argentine nation who rejects notions of racial purity.

As a continuation of his second chapter, in “Una Maestra Norteamericana,” Genova explains how the debates present in the literary works he previously discussed intersected with educational policies and reform in Argentina. Genova makes extensive use of primary documentation to illustrate the collaborative efforts of Sarmiento, Avellaneda, and other liberals with Horace and Mary Mann to replicate the approach taken by US reformers of using New England teachers to establish new “normal schools” in the hopes of transforming the masses into productive citizens. The author also shows how Argentine creoles transplanted the image of the national racialized mother onto female instructors who would serve as “teacher-mothers.” Nevertheless, Genova reveals through quantitative and qualitative data the limited success of this soft diplomacy enterprise and, in the process, contests the dominant myth of Argentina as a nation of “white” European immigrants. Lastly, through a textual analysis of Jennie Howard’s *In Distant Climes and Other Years*, he argues that the influence was not unidirectional but somewhat reciprocal, albeit unequal. Although fascinating, this chapter fails to extensively discuss the racial theories of the era (especially definitions of whiteness) and provide sufficient evidence of Argentina’s role in constructing the US empire.

In “Foundational Frustrations,” Genova defines the late-nineteenth-century novels *Cecilia Valdés*, *Juanita*, and *Sofía* as expressions of anxiety surrounding the role of Afro-Cubans in the years before the Spanish-Cuban-[US]American War of 1898 and the island’s eventual transfer from a Spanish colony to US protectorate. He contends that these three novels, which complicate the trope of the metaphorical family through failed incestual interracial relationships, offer different futures for Cuba: a creole republic, an annexed US colony, or an independent nation. Although Cirilo Villaverde’s *Cecilia Valdés* is a well-known text and has been extensively analyzed by academics, Genova provides an interesting inter-American reading by drawing parallels between Villaverde’s tale and Mary Mann’s *Juanita*. The last section of this chapter, and perhaps the most unique, is the analytical study of Afro-Cuban Martín Delgado’s anti-imperialist *Sofía* and political essays. Here, Genova argues that Delgado’s novel is a rescripting of “Villaverde’s creole and Mann’s imperial allegories,” a work that uses dominant tropes to deconstruct their logic and reveal their racist presuppositions and affirm that race is a construct (159). Genova examines *Sofía* to show how and why “foundational” fictions do not reflect Cuba’s economic, political, or racial realities.

The last chapter of his manuscript elaborates on the triangular socio-political relationship between Cuba, the United States, and Argentina. Genova focuses on the period of the First Occupation of Cuba by US military forces (1898-1902) and discusses how Cuban elites turned to education to produce citizens capable of self-government. A noteworthy aspect of this chapter is Genova’s nuanced analysis of the paradoxical stance that creoles, reformers, and even some Afro-Cubans took when seeking US aid in establishing public education institutions while at the same time rejecting the imperialistic and gendered discourses prevalent in US legal codes, memoirs (including Roosevelt’s *The Rough Riders*), and other documents. Also significant is Genova’s description of the relatively unknown fact that some of the teachers who previously served as *educadoras* in Argentina were also instructors of Cubans who traveled to New Paltz to be trained in US bourgeoisie culture and values. Lastly, through his analysis of “Sección Cubana,” Genova argues that, while Cuban women did espouse the “white” concept of dignity, they did so to challenge gender and racial standards, exercise agency, and “inscribe themselves within the New Woman paradigm” (177).

Overall, *Imperial Educación* is a nuanced book that looks at the cases of Cuba and Argentina during the long nineteenth century to demystify the notion of the Americas as an imperial monolith and corroborate the unquestionable relationship between nation-building processes in Latin America and US imperialism. Furthermore, Genova's interdisciplinary and hemispheric methodology to the study of republican motherhood and its intersections with race, gender, and public education is a significant and much-needed contribution to the scholarship of Latin American culture, history, and literature. It is a work that makes us assess the consequences of American nations' inability to atone for their colonial and slave past and reflect on why inequality, violence, and racist representations of people of color continue to endure in the Americas.

José I. Lara, Bridgewater State University

Marrufo Huchim, Karla. *Inútiles pero indispensables: representantes del dandismo, la vanguardia y el Boom en Hispanoamérica*. México: UNAM, 2021. ISBN 9786-0730-4765-4

Las sociedades, desde todos los tiempos, han creado en su imaginación figuras que reúnen una serie de rasgos en su identidad y que juegan un rol determinado para explicarse actitudes y comportamientos que se salen de las normas establecidas por la convención. Algunas de estas figuras atraviesan los tiempos y se convierten en símbolos, de ahí pasan como personajes literarios a las páginas de novelas en las que afirman sus perfiles como tontos, locos, pícaros, bufones y una enorme variedad de facetas. Es importante destacar que la figura no representa un arquetipo y que, si bien su apariencia varía en cada creación en la que cobran vida, mantienen rasgos constantes en sus actitudes y en sus respuestas a las demandas de la vida, lo que permite identificarlos. Estudiar la literatura desde la presencia de estas figuras puede revelar mucho sobre la imaginación colectiva y la forma en la que se expresa artísticamente. La figura representa un vínculo con el mundo histórico social en el que las obras nacen y viven.

Karla Marrufo parte de un legado teórico para estudiar algunos momentos de la literatura hispanoamericana desde este enfoque: en primer lugar, está Mijaíl Bajtín, quien escribió páginas reveladoras para explicar cómo la presencia de bufones, tontos y pícaros contribuyó enormemente al proceso de conformación del género novelesco en occidente. Luis Beltrán Almería ha hecho estudios de otras figuras, como el hombre de bien, y ha contribuido al conocimiento de algunas de las que han nacido estrechamente ligadas a la esfera de la risa, como el niño, el tonto, el loco, el cínico, el bufón, entre otros. El hombre inútil es una figura que nace en la modernidad y Karla Marrufo elabora una reconstrucción de las facetas que adquirió en la literatura hispanoamericana a partir del modernismo, su paso por las vanguardias y en algunas obras del llamado Boom latinoamericano.

No se había analizado desde esta perspectiva el nacimiento de la modernidad literaria en Hispanoamérica, pues si bien contamos con estudios sobre algunas de las novelas que Karla repasa, pasaba desapercibida la importancia y el sentido que le dan a la totalidad de las obras la aparición de estos personajes inadaptados, fracasados, escépticos, llevando existencias absurdas. ¿Qué es el hombre inútil, qué papeles juega en la cultura moderna y por qué resulta tan constante su presencia en las obras literarias hispanoamericanas? Son estas preguntas las que la estudiosa afronta.

El dandi siempre se ha asociado al mundo europeo, particularmente París. Pero Marrufo nos revela cómo también tuvo importancia en el siglo XIX hispanoamericano que estaba en vías

de modernizarse. El dandi de *De sobremesa* de José Asunción Silva, en su renuncia a la vida práctica, se afirma como un desafío, por la vía de la extravagancia, a la sociedad burguesa, pacata y provinciana de Bogotá. El dandi, en un decidido gesto teatral, decide separarse de los otros, distinguirse por su refinamiento y su gusto exquisito, porque ha perdido el sentido de la vida y está hastiado de todo. Si bien, siempre se ha señalado la constante identificación de varios autores modernistas con la figura del dandi, como Gutiérrez Nájera, Julián del Casal y el propio Asunción Silva, la estudiosa lo saca de esos marcos biográficos y lo presenta en su dimensión social, como una figura irónica que confronta el sistema de valores imperantes.

Se detiene en las distintas formas que asume el hombre inútil en una serie de novelas asociadas a las diferentes vanguardias que se desarrollaron en el continente americano: *El laberinto de sí mismo* de Enrique Labrador, *Ayer* de Juan Emar, *Vida del ahorcado* de Pablo Palacio, *Margarita de niebla* de Torres Bodet y *Libro sin tapas* de Felisberto Hernández. Como puede verse, la mirada es abarcadora, pues va de Cuba a Chile, a Ecuador, pasa por México y llega a Uruguay: en todos los casos aparece la figura ligada al fracaso, a la renuncia, a la incomunicación, a la carencia de sentido. Vale la pena destacar cómo muchos de estos personajes son escritores fallidos que no logran escribir la obra con la que sueñan. Y es que justamente fue la modernidad la que abrió la posibilidad a que el escritor llegara a ser figura pública, con voz propia y casi siempre discordante con los valores dominantes. Sin embargo, la propia literatura pone en entredicho las posibilidades reales de que un escritor pudiera alcanzar el éxito y la notoriedad, por eso estos hombres desdeñan, sienten hastío y no aceptan el reto de intentar triunfar en un mundo deshumanizado y absurdo, a tal punto, que muchos ni siquiera alcanzan a escribir.

Las formas del fracaso se agudizan en el mundo contemporáneo en el que se extreman las desigualdades, la competencia, el mercantilismo, de ahí que proliferen los hombres inútiles en obras emblemáticas del boom latinoamericano. Juan Carlos Onetti, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar y Vargas Llosa trazaron los perfiles de hombres abismados en la reflexión, pero profundamente desesperanzados, sin certezas, alejados de cualquier tipo de heroísmo, porque nada tiene sentido, porque el mundo fastidia.

El lector podría preguntarse por la condición de “indispensables” que le reconoce Karla Marrufo a estos personajes asqueados y renuentes a la acción. Pues bien, la autora nos hace ver cómo en esta condición de inadaptados y marginales, se revelan como una voz de alarma de la deshumanización, de la carencia de sentido en la que el mundo se abismaba, embelesado por los atractivos del pragmatismo, de la falsedad del hombre que se forja a sí mismo y se levanta frente a los demás. Así, el libro *Inútiles pero indispensables* resulta sugerente e invitador a seguir indagando en la presencia de otras figuras y otras formas de expresión del rechazo a las afrentas a la dignidad humana que significó la modernización. La autora sugiere que la semilla de estos hombres vacíos estaba plantada desde la literatura costumbrista con los pícaros que poblaban las páginas de varias novelas importantes en sus facetas de pollos, lagartijos o catrines y todavía no han merecido la atención crítica. A mí me deja resonando una pregunta: ¿por qué no hay mujeres inútiles en la literatura? En todo caso, este libro es una puerta abierta para transitar por caminos no trillados en la búsqueda de explicaciones de cómo se ha ido conformando el proceso histórico de la novela hispanoamericana.

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Mateo del Pino, Ángeles y Nieves Pascual Soler, eds. *Material de derribo. Cuerpo y abyección en América Latina*. Leiden. Holanda: Almenara Press, 2022. ISBN: 9789-4922-6052-9

Poseedoras de una larga tradición investigadora en el ámbito de los estudios culturales y estudios de género, Ángeles Mateo del Pino y Nieves Pascual Soler presentan un nuevo trabajo que complementa esas líneas desde una multiplicidad de miradas hacia el tratamiento abyecto que han sufrido los seres marginales en América Latina. *Material de derribo. Cuerpo y abyección en América Latina* se centra en experiencias de grupos marginados, de un modo u otro, que han sido despreciados, hasta el punto de convertirse en desechos: basura incómoda, pestilente, que es mejor tener alejada, y si es posible eliminar para que sus emanaciones no provoquen arcadas. A nuestro juicio, lo que es el principal elemento valedor de esta obra es, justamente, esa denuncia que se registra a través de todos los trabajos expuestos, ese es su denominador común; una revisión crítica, sin paliativos, a las sociedades, más en concreto a los mecanismos de poder que las sustentan, que han permitido la construcción de esas marginalidades, de esos “escombros que afean las ciudades” y, en consecuencia, hay que despojarse de ellos.

Como es costumbre en sus ediciones, abre el volumen un texto de las autoras con el título de “Cuerpos indóciles. Ética de la desmesura”. También es costumbre en ellas que este texto sea mucho más que una presentación, para convertirse en una declaración de intenciones, una toma de postura basada en una sólida base teórica. Es obvio el notable basamento ensayístico que utilizan para ir estableciendo los principios sobre los que se articula la obra, desarrollados a través de una secuencia que va explicando desde los principios del canon y el contracanon a la formalización de lo abyecto en esos materiales de derribo. En este sentido, basándose en las ideas de Iris M. Zavala, sobre todo a partir de dos ensayos claves —“El canon, la literatura y las teorías feministas” (1995) y “De la pluralidad de los cánones y de la imposibilidad de lo Uno” (2005)—, las editoras afirman que hablar de canon implica hacer referencia a un proceso de selección y de exclusión, un juego de poder que a la vez pone en evidencia lo *contracanonico* y sus estrategias de rebeldía: “donde hay poder hay resistencia”, Foucault *dixit*. Así, llevadas de estas reflexiones, pero también de lo esbozado por el filósofo francés Michel Foucault en *Vigilar y castigar* (1975) y *Los anormales* (1999) conectan esta idea de la exclusión con aquellos cuerpos “indóciles”, que escapan a la norma y a la normalización, deviniendo inteligibles o abyectos.

Abyección será, pues, el motivo central que concita este volumen y para ello se traerá a colación, en gran parte de los ensayos, las ideas esbozadas al respecto por Julia Kristeva, *Poderes de la perversión* (1980) y por Judith Butler, *Cuerpos que importan. Sobre los límites materiales y discursivos del sexo* (1993). Para estas filósofas, lo abyecto remite a zonas “invivibles”, “inhabitables” de la vida social y determina no solo qué cuerpos importan, sino también los que no importan (canon/contracanon). Otra de las voces que evocan las editoras es la del escritor y crítico Georges Bataille (“La abyección y las formas miserables”, 1974), con él junto con Kristeva se afirma que la abyección es perturbadora y, acaso esto haya actuado de detonador: “Abyección, violencia y exclusión van de la mano y se convierten en un pretexto para repensar la identidad de esos cuerpos diferentes y para abordar, una vez más, la realidad cultural y política de América Latina” (13). Un abordaje que se llevará a cabo a través de diez estudios de diversas índoles. Textos que, tal y como propugna Zavala en el antemencionado “De la pluralidad de los cánones”, interpelan la dimensión ética, pues “leen” *con sospecha*, desde la perspectiva del síntoma, y abren el campo simbólico para explorar las fantasías ideológicas de exclusión que elaboran las sociedades.

María A. Semilla Durán propone, en “Los *vuelos* de Malvinas: construcción cultural y política del cuerpo abyecto. El poder performativo de la denegación”, una revisión en profundidad sobre las

tremendas circunstancias que tuvieron que padecer muchos combatientes de la guerra de las Malvinas al regresar a su país. Aquí fueron marginados, silenciados. La autora perfila con todo detalle ese repudio de los otrora héroes argentinos a través de obras tan representativas de este conflicto como *Las Islas* (1998), de Carlos Gamerro. “La abyección de las presas políticas. Relatos testimoniales como marco re-interpretativo de las vidas reconocibles” es el capítulo de Gara Sentís Roig. La dictadura militar argentina es observada bajo el prisma de la incivildad, de la represión más terrible que lleva a las cárceles a miles de personas. Sentís Roig se centra en las penalidades de las presas políticas, de las insurrectas, que fueron humilladas en centros como el penal de Villa Devoto. Los testimonios carcelarios *Nosotras, las presas políticas* (2012) y *Putas y guerrilleras* (2014) se muestran como un material de primera magnitud a la hora de certificar la abyección padecida.

El mundo del cómic tampoco es ajeno a la marginalidad. Daniel Becerra indaga en *El síndrome Guastavino* (2009) en su trabajo “Guastavino o la personificación de la abyección. La viñeta latinoamericana como estrategia didáctica”. Es una caricatura que, como señala el autor, “viene a simbolizar un tiempo y una forma de gobierno duro, ciego e implacable”. Lo grotesco, lo esperpéntico, se adecua a la perfección con los estragos de la condición marginal, como Becerra advierte en el análisis de estas viñetas. Nieves Pascual Soler se introduce en el universo de Fernando Iwasaki para trabajar la repugnancia como revulsivo social en “La conciencia del asco en *Ajuar funerario* (2004) de Fernando Iwasaki”. Indaga la autora a través de las reacciones de aversión en la obra del escritor peruano los mecanismos de rechazo social. El repudio es un claro bastión contra lo marginal, de ahí que ese asco sea una prueba bastante concluyente. Tal y como destaca Pascual Soler, es imprescindible aquí contar con el empleo hiperbólico del humor que lleva a cabo Iwasaki.

El espacio de la locura se ve reflejado en “Los cuerpos abyectos de La Castañeda vistos por Cristina Rivera Garza”, de Cécile Quintana. Es realmente sobrecogedor este trabajo que tiene como base la novela *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999) de la escritora mexicana Cristina Rivera Garza y que tiene como núcleo el hospital psiquiátrico La Castañeda. Desde un enfoque multidisciplinar entre literatura, historia y sociología, se plantea la abyección y exclusión de los pacientes allí ingresados que van a transitar desde su periferia al centro. En “Mujer sin h/nombre. Figuras y cuerpos abyectos en la pampa rioplatense colonial”, Diego Jarak esgrime la idea de la historia de la colonización de Hispanoamérica como una historia de abyección del cuerpo indígena. Y, más en concreto, entiende la imagen de la mujer como un cuerpo abyecto, resultado de ese tejido colonial.

Otro interesante punto de vista sobre la abyección de los cuerpos es el de Néstor Ponce en “Erotismo, memoria y encierro. *45 días y 30 marineros* (1933) de Norah Lange”. Revisa la autobiografía y el erotismo como los puntales de esta obra que narra una travesía de una mujer rodeada de hombres, y que descubre “el pensamiento femenino, libertario, que anticipa los movimientos de los años 60”. La maternidad como una suerte de abyección es el baluarte del ensayo de Javier Bello, “Maternidad abyecta y alumbramiento de la madre: cuerpo de la creación en *Vagido*, de Verónica Zondek”. Una obra que, publicada originalmente en 1987, ha sido reeditada en varias ocasiones a lo largo del siglo XXI.

En “Contaminados y escritura contaminada: *Distancia de rescate* (2014) de Samanta Schweblin”, Marie Audran investiga cómo muchas familias de campesinos argentinos tuvieron que emigrar tras aplicar grandes compañías los modelos de la producción a gran escala de monocultivos. Esto, además, provocó el uso de biocidas que causan gran daño contaminante: la abyección por medio de la contaminación. Por último, Ángeles Mateo del Pino, en “Pasiones abyectas. Pecado nefando. Narrativa carcelaria de Carlos Montenegro”, lleva a cabo un interesante ensayo sobre la abyección a través del análisis de *Hombres sin mujer* (1938) del escritor cubano

Carlos Montenegro. “Secreto, abyección y exclusión parecen converger cuando de sexualidad se trata”, señala Mateo del Pino, y esto se va desgranando en el estudio pormenorizado que hace de esta novela, en el que el estigma de la homosexualidad es su punto de fuga.

Nos reiteramos en lo comentado al comienzo de esta reseña. *Material de derribo. Cuerpo y abyección en América Latina* demuestra con creces la excelente labor que llevan a cabo desde hace ya largo tiempo sus editoras en la esfera de los estudios culturales y los estudios de género. El compromiso con la literatura está ahí, pero lo está también con los abyectos y las abyectas, cualquiera que sea su condición.

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Paley, Dawn Marie. *Guerra Neoliberal: Desaparición y búsqueda en el norte de México*. Libertad bajo palabra, 2020. 188 pp. libertadbajopalabra.wordpress.com/portfolio/guerra-neoliberal-desaparición-y-búsqueda-en-el-norte-de-mexico

Much as her 2014 *Drug War Capitalism*, Dawn Paley’s latest *Guerra Neoliberal* issues a challenge to contemporary doxa on violence in Mexico, its meaning, and its sources and origins. In *Drug War Capitalism*, Paley provided a detailed history and contemporary theorization of drug-war violence in the service of capitalist accumulation, giving readers a map to understand what often appeared until then as senseless violence. *Guerra Neoliberal* expands Paley’s theorization of drug-war violence into one of neoliberal war and expanded counterinsurgency, while at the same time providing an account of resistance to its aftermaths.

Paley’s title, *Neoliberal War*, serves as the book’s principal periodization laid out in the first chapter. Paley argues that violence has been critical to the establishment and continuity of democratic regimes and that after the end of the ISI period in Mexico, the state shifted from primarily corporatist strategies of political containment to expanded counterinsurgency. Paley pinpoints the end of the Cold War as the signing of the 1996 Acuerdos de Paz in Guatemala. After this moment, a war against drugs and against organized crime comes to replace the war against communism within U.S. and Latin American national security doctrines, and this neoliberal war comes with a mandate to protect global capital at all costs (21-2).

However, neoliberal war is, for Paley, not just a periodization but also a form of war, whose aspects are: 1) confusion and the depoliticization of violence, 2) the militarization of the state, and 3) expanded counterinsurgency (contrainsurgencia ampliada) against any who obstruct capital accumulation. Paley, in a sense, repoliticizes current forms of violence in Mexico, pushing us to see them not as neutral or without meaning, but as targeted and with, if not clear, then understandable ends. Those ends are expanding capital accumulation, but also silencing or removing the presence of any who would resist. Neoliberal war in Mexico, Paley argues, aims at pacification and begins “en medio de grandes flujos de protesta social, organización barrial, disidencia sindical, defensa contra el despojo territorial y defensa de formas generacionales y situadas de gestionar y conservar riqueza material desde lo comunitario popular. Los movimientos populares e indígenas iban en alza después de la alternancia política a nivel federal en el 2000” (36). Paley argues that neoliberal war and expanded counterinsurgency have been the preferred means of social and territorial control in Mexico since the Calderón presidency, and she draws productively on the work of Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar to read practices of *lo comunitario-popular*, which challenge the state and forced dispossession, as important targets of neoliberal war.

In the second chapter, Paley offers a theorization of expanded counterinsurgency to explain the multiple and, at first glance, apparently unconnected forms of violence that have spread across Mexico (59). This chapter also explicates how expanded counterinsurgency, as one aspect of neoliberal war, functions in tandem with the *dispositif* of disappearance. Paley defines expanded counterinsurgency as possessing three aspects: 1) the confusion of perpetrators via a widely reproduced narrative of conflict among “narcos” 2) a broadening of the category of insurgent and 3) a use of a range of violence from spectacularized death to mass forced disappearance (59).

Paley’s account in the second (but also the first) chapter demonstrates how confusion and depoliticization work hand-in-hand. Through the dissemination of narratives framing the deaths and disappearances of the last two decades as a contest between an honorable state and malevolent criminal groups, the Mexican state has succeeded in muddying the waters, absolving itself and its institutions of any role in the ongoing violence (despite cases such as Ayotzinapa where state participation has been clearly demonstrated). This confusion has made it difficult, despite all the evidence to the contrary, to see much of the violence as being paramilitary in nature, that is, supported by the repressive apparatus of the state (65). In the opening chapters, Paley carries on a debate with much existing journalistic and academic work, arguing that it has tended to reproduce the state narrative. For instance, she demonstrates how important theorists, including Rita Segato and Sayak Valencia, fail to center the role of the state in contemporary violence and thus end up reproducing parts of the state’s narrative (50-1).

Amidst this confusion, violence has become depoliticized, Paley argues. Whereas once state and parastate violence were directed at clearly defined “enemies” (students, trade unionists, indigenous organizers, revolutionaries, et alia), now violence seems confusingly directed at potentially anyone. The targets of this parastate violence have expanded from the classical Marxist-Leninists insurgents of the 1970s to be a person “que se encuentra transitando las carreteras en condición de migrante, un joven que participa en actividades o se auto-organiza...o simplemente viv[e] en una zona urbana popular o campesina donde brota lo popular” (69). Paley puts her notion of expanded counterinsurgency in dialogue with prison abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore to make sense of why this is. Mexico did not opt for mass incarceration to produce the social control needed by neoliberalism; instead it turned to violence.

In the second half of chapter 2, Paley takes up forced disappearance as “la forma dominante de represión en la Guerra Neoliberal” (105). As Paley notes, we do not have reliable figures on the number of disappearances in Mexico in the last decades, but we know that the government count of 35,000 is terribly inaccurate (95). Paley presents a genealogy of forced disappearance from the dictatorships to the present in order to theorize *desaparición neoliberal*: “aparece en la mayoría de los casos como un crimen llevado a cabo por grupos armados (estatal o no estatal) contra jóvenes, la mayoría de ellos hombres, seleccionados a raíz de su edad, su clase social y el lugar geográfico donde se encuentren al momento de desaparecer” (71). As mentioned above, in the Cold War, and under Latin American dictatorships disappearance was primarily political and aimed at certain groups. This historical understanding of disappearance Paley argues is an obstacle to seeing how disappearance functions in the present (91). No longer is disappearance carried out against militants or activists but rather is a renovated modality of control aimed at a much broader swath of the population. As Paley writes, “destrucción social es resultado de la desaparición forzada, sea quien sea el victimario o la víctima directa” (92).

Chapters 3 and 4 use the theoretical frame of neoliberal war and expanded counterinsurgency to make sense of historical and contemporary forms of violence in the La Laguna region of Mexico (centered around the city of Torreón in the state of Coahuila). Chapter 3

offers a history of disappearance in the region, moving through four moments: indigenous displacement and death during colonization and after, the massacre of Chinese inhabitants in 1911, the drying up of the river Nazas due to intensification of capitalist development in the 20th century, and the present of expanded counterinsurgency. Through this historical genealogy, Paley positions disappearance as a tactic of governance from colonization onward. In the final section of the chapter, Paley offers a detailed account of neoliberal disappearance in La Laguna. After the decline of the region as a site of jeans production, unemployment and surplus populations have expanded. Expanded counterinsurgency, Paley argues, has served as a form of social containment of these surplus populations. In Torreón, the number of homicides increased from 26 in 2007 to 792 in 2012 and Paley shows how disappearances and killings increased, not decreased, after each arrival of state forces in the region.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed account and theorization of Grupo Vida, an organization based in Torreón and created by individuals affected by disappearance. What makes Grupo Vida unique among such organizations is that they will investigate cases of disappearance even of those with supposed criminal connections (153), meaning they refuse what Jackie Wang has called the “the politics of innocence.” Grupo Vida carries out many different activities, engaging in dialogue with authorities, serving as a support group, and, mostly importantly for Paley’s account, engaging in *búsquedas terrestres*. The group searches not for *fosas clandestinas* (unmarked graves), but rather for small pieces of bone scattered in the desert-like landscape surrounding Torreon which they then turn over to government labs for DNA testing. In La Laguna, the violence took a particularly brutal form, aiming to completely eliminate any trace of disappeared individuals and make impossible their identification. The *búsquedas* of Grupo Vida are thus a form of resistance to and making visible the violence of expanded counterinsurgency.

In the final sections of this chapter, Paley theorizes potential of the *búsqueda* as a political act and argues that are five key dimensions: 1) The recuperation of remains and their identification; 2) Acts of memory created through media attention; 3) The pressure exerted on government agencies; 4) The communal work that creates networks of social relations; and 5) The power of ritual contained in the practice of the search itself. Throughout the chapter, Paley reads the combination of Grupo Vida’s activities as giving the group a *popular-comunitario* character (161). In the discussion of the potentials of the search, Paley uses the work of theorist Gladys Tzul Tzul to read the activity of the search as a way of constructing social relations through the device of communal labor.

Guerra neoliberal is a singular, clarifying work that overflows with useful theorizations and detailed analysis of contemporary violence in Mexico and emergent forms of resistance. It makes an exceptional contribution to ongoing conversations in Latin American studies reevaluating the centrality of coercion and violence, and not just consent, as a form of social control under democratic regimes. Much like Paley’s earlier work, this text should find wide adoption in undergraduate and graduate level courses and will become a reference point for future work in the field.

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Patteson, Joseph. *Drugs, Violence and Latin America: Global Psychotropy and Culture*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 249 pp. ISBN 9783-0306-8924-7

In *Drugs, Violence and Latin America: Global Psychotropy and Culture* Joseph Patteson makes a forceful argument for a new approach to literary portrayals of drugs and drug trafficking in Latin America through intoxication (or psychotropy), rather than through the dichotomy of intoxication/sobriety that tends to reify the roles of producers and consumers. Beginning from the supposition that there is no subjectivity outside of intoxication, a human universal that can be instantiated by many things besides drugs, Patteson argues that psychotropy can best be understood as a dialectic between two types of intoxication: “narcossism” and “xenotropy.” The former, a term borrowed from Avital Ronell, refers to modes of intoxication that shore up a solipsistic sense of self closed off to identification with the other and oriented towards consumption and domination. In this reading, narcossism is virtually synonymous with addiction, a constituent element of subjectivity in late capitalism that is expressed through various forms of compulsive behavior and consumption and that in the Global South often finds expression in the construction of what Sayak Valencia calls the violent “monstrous subjects” of drug trafficking. Patteson’s key example of narcossism is the Western addiction to cocaine, in which the reification of the self provided by consumption of the drug eventually collapses in a horrific parody of capitalism. “Xenotropy,” which in its Greek etymology suggests a “turn towards the other,” refers to experiences that may break open that solipsism and allow a refiguring of the self in terms of a radical openness to otherness and change. Substances more likely to be able to provide this sort of experience include the psychedelics, though Patteson reminds us that there is no panacea for the ills of modernity, that xenotropy and narcossism are part of a dialectic, and that even xenotropic experiences can become calcified into narcossistic practices (indeed, this is exactly what happened with the Western appropriation of coca). The productive employment of xenotropy, in other words, depends upon a self-conscious perspective that Patteson tries to model in his reading of certain cultural products, yet another thing that affects our brain chemistry.

The theoretical approach that I summarize above is set out in chapters 1 and 2, in which the author gives an exhaustive review of contemporary theories of intoxication and addiction, ranging from the above cited Ronell and Valencia to B. Preciado, Eve Sedgwick, Hermann Herlinghaus and many others. Despite the varying approaches to the topics at hand, Patteson is able to consolidate his readings into a coherent lens that underlies all of his literary analyses. In chapter 3 he begins by engaging texts by Antonin Artaud and William Burroughs, writers whose critical views of Western culture famously led them to search for xenotropic experiences in Indigenous American entheogens (peyote and ayahuasca, respectively), but whose works on the subject nevertheless exemplify the difficulty in overcoming the narcossism central to modern subjectivities. In chapter 4, Patteson looks at novels by the main figures of the Mexican *Onda* generation of writers, Parménides García Saldaña and José Agustín, whose work dialogued with counterculture writers from the Global North like Artaud and Burroughs. As the 60s hippie culture centered in the US grew out of the Northern appropriation of Mexican Indigeneity, including, among other things, “magic mushrooms,” the *Onda* writers positioned themselves as cosmopolitan consumers of rock music and international youth culture and as critics of both traditional Mexican culture as well as the economic and political imperialism of the Global North. For Patteson, the works of these two writers illustrate the limitations of the narcossist tendencies in the counterculture as absorbed by subjects in the Global South as well as the explosive, xenotropic possibilities offered by the radical art, music and literature of the long 1960s.

Chapter 5 engages with the Zurdo Mendieta series of detective novels by the northern Mexican writer Élder Mendoza. Reading against common criticisms of Mendoza's novels as subpar works that exploit the misery caused by drug trafficking by providing facile, realistic portrayals that don't challenge the status quo, Patteson argues convincingly that these books actually contain highly significant portrayals of a "psychotropic economy" that involves many of the activities portrayed in them--gaining money and power, drinking, smoking, eating, solving mysteries--as well as the very act of reading the books themselves. In Patteson's view, then, these books should not be dismissed as simplistic bestsellers but rather read as representations of how the entire system of late capitalism is based on psychotropy. Chapter 6 makes a similarly original argument about the use of children's subjectivity in the novels *Fiesta en la madriguera* (Juan Pablo Villalobos) and *Prayers for the Stolen* (Jennifer Clement). In both of these works, children intimately affected by drug trafficking in Mexico provide defamiliarizing perspectives whose radicality is similar to that of xenotropic intoxication and may even be, Patteson argues, the ultimate model for such mind-expanding drug use among adults. Finally, Chapter 7 examines two works by Mexican writer Julián Herbert that center addicted/intoxicated subjectivity: *Cocaína: manual del usuario* and *Canción de tumba*. In these works, the solipsism of cocaine addiction, perhaps the very model for modern individualized, consumer subjectivity, is challenged by a radical empathy and openness, and the poetic language of the texts offers a possibility for a xenotropic reconstitution of subjectivity on the part of the reader.

In sum, Patteson's work makes a highly original and suggestive contribution to the study of drugs, intoxication, addiction and trafficking in Latin America. In particular, his work is a much-needed answer to the critical current, exemplified by Osvaldo Zavala and others, that is quick to discount works that supposedly do little to oppose narco-culture. At the same time, Patteson provides an important counterpoint to Herlinghaus's insistence on the "humiliating sobriety" of Latin American narratives on drug trafficking, a perspective that ultimately tends to reify the highly problematic dichotomy of intoxication and sobriety and often results in the exclusion of Latin Americans from discourses of intoxicated subjectivity. Patteson's productive readings overcome this dichotomy by showing how the "dialectic of psychotropy" operates in all (post)modern societies and how different types of texts on drugs from Latin America can be read in a productive manner. The only significant weakness in the study is one recognized by the author himself near the end of the book: a comparative lack of attention to Indigenous epistemologies of psychotropy, which should clearly be considered for their comparative approach to psychoactive substances, especially since the Western appropriation of coca is a central example in Patteson's argument. This does not diminish the value of the book, however, and it will certainly be required reading for anyone studying drugs, intoxication or drug trafficking going forward.

Brandon P. Bisbey, Northeastern Illinois University

Pettway, Matthew. *Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection: Manzano, Plácido and Afro-Latino Religion*. Jackson: Mississippi UP, 2020. 309 pp. ISBN 9781-4968-2591-8

Pettway's book offers an insightful, delightfully complex, and clearly written study that analyzes both Manzano and Plácido's works as "transcultured colonial literature." By that term he means intercultural texts that emerged as an aesthetic response to the discursive prohibitions of the Catholic Church and the censorship administration that existed in Cuba during the 1800s under

Spanish rule. Pettway shows how Plácido and Manzano created poetry and other writings that were legible to those firmly situated in the ideological limits created by official, hegemonic Spanish colonial rule as well as those familiar with the silenced, and at times illegal African cultural practices. Both writers straddle the written, canonical, Spanish tradition as well as the oral, African traditions. In this way, their writings created a third, transcultural space within the architecture of a society created by Spanish colonialism, that disrupted the hierarchical colonial order. Spanish colonialism perceived humans through a fixed binary lens permitting and even justifying the enslavement of people who were perceived as racially different and therefore inferior. At the same time Plácido and Manzano's "transcultural" works were undoing colonial ideology that enslaved or otherwise limited them, their words also shielded them, for the most part, from punishment. Their "transcultural colonial" writing allowed them to speak both traditions at the same time, subverting the dominant tradition in a way that was invisible to the authorities. If their readers were not cognizant of African traditions, the more subversive aspects of their texts would escape understanding. Their knowledge of both African and European traditions allowed Manzano and Plácido to publish their works largely evading censorship—though not always—and to create a literary canon that was distinct from the one supportive of Spanish or white criollo dominance. As a result, they were able to create a community of readers, listeners, and thinkers who sought a way to free themselves from Spanish hegemony. Pettway shows how Cuban society, supported by and supportive of slavery, created a difficult if not impossible situation for writers such as Manzano and Plácido who were of African descent. For them to speak against slavery and to articulate their own selfhood or subjectivity free of the limits of Cuban and Spanish colonial society was not only difficult, but it was also risky.

A major, non-literary event that both writers participated in was the 1844 rebellion sometimes called the "ladder conspiracy," which is too complex for me to go into in the limited space allotted for this review. Both poets were caught and imprisoned for their involvement in the plot to overthrow Spanish colonial authority and the attendant system of slavery. Manzano, suspiciously, escaped execution while Plácido, unfortunately, did not. Suffice it to say that the central question is why Plácido was put to death and Manzano was not. Did Manzano in some way betray or otherwise renounce his association with Plácido and other members of the rebellion? While the answer to these questions is important, Pettway's emphasis throughout the book is on the way both authors forged a discursive space for themselves negotiating the slavery regime by using a type of "transculturalism" that allowed them to write against Spain and slavery in particular. Writing in this way, they were able to forge a space that was independent and yet capable of avoiding censorship. As Pettway shows, Plácido believed in the intrinsic power of language, the power to change the immediate outcome of events and to present himself as the prophet against empire. Both Plácido and Manzano, through their involvement in efforts to overthrow the government, show their commitment to *armas*, but their belief in the political importance and the transformative potential of *letras* is what concerns them and Pettway.

Added to the in-depth study of the two poets' writings and their involvement in the 1844 rebellion is the fact that Pettway's work, in some respects, exemplifies that of the poets he studies. Pettway reads the archive from the periphery, privileging the language, actions and epistemology of African descendants. The "transcultural" and revolutionary nature of the works he studies leads him to a revolutionary and revelatory transculturation in his own writing. His work adeptly and gracefully combines analysis of history, religion, literature, and politics to provide a rich, profound, and unique study that is as informative as it is a pleasure to read. His work is as deep as it is broad. The complex picture he presents of the two poets and the time they lived is belied by

the ease with which he presents the information and his own thought-provoking analysis. He takes into consideration the criticism that exists about both poets, showing how his own perspective adds new and important information based on archival work that supports the viewpoint he offers. He analyzes Catholic and African religious traditions and then shows how the poets combined them to form a “transcultural” episteme in which the poets and their contemporaries functioned, which in turn shaped their thought and work. Ideas from important theoreticians in the field of Latin American studies and beyond shape his lens. However, while theory is important to his analysis, it forms almost silent framework; it is there for those who want it, but without obstructing the argument for those who do not. One of the many things that fascinated me as I read this book was how Pettway so deftly combines profound knowledge of many disciplines to create his own work. Like the work of the poets he studies, his creates a space that exceeds the disciplinary boundaries that shape academia to create something exciting, informative, and unique. The complexity of his work makes it important for even the most astute scholar in the field, yet the ease with which he discusses intricate matters will make it accessible to undergraduates and perhaps even anyone with an interest in Cuba, Latin America or issues concerning constructions of race.

John V Waldron, University of Vermont

Reis, Maria Firmina dos. *Ursula*. Trans. Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey. Dartmouth: Tagus P, 2022. 180 pp. ISBN 9781-9514-7009-8

In the opening pages of *Ursula*, readers witness the rescue and resuscitation of the wounded Tancredo by a stranger. When asked who he is, the Good Samaritan introduces himself as Tulio, lamenting that he is enslaved and exclaiming, “Haven’t you already noticed, haven’t you realized the distance that separates us? Ah! The slave is so miserable!” (12). Naming and narrowing the distance between free Brazilians and their enslaved counterparts is a guiding theme throughout *Ursula*, which summons readers to recognize the humanity of enslaved individuals and advocate for abolition. Thanks to Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey’s skillful translation, Maria Firmina dos Reis’s 1859 novel is available in English for the first time, thus broadening the reach of Brazil’s pioneering female Afro-Brazilian novelist.

Born in the northeastern state of Maranhão to a free black father and a previously enslaved mother, Reis worked as a teacher and opened Brazil’s first free, mixed-race school in 1881. She also wrote poetry, short stories, and two novels. *Ursula* is significant for many reasons, not least of which is its status as one of the first novels to be published by a Brazilian woman—and the very first to be authored by an Afro-Brazilian woman. Though it disappeared from public memory not long after its publication, since being rediscovered in the 1960s *Ursula* has been increasingly studied and acknowledged as a precursor to contemporary Afro-Brazilian literature. Its English translation is a welcome sign of the novel’s expanding influence beyond the Portuguese-speaking world.

The fruit of more than a decade of scholarly engagement and several academic articles focused on Reis’s oeuvre, this translation is a timely and indispensable addition to the growing corpus of Afro-Brazilian works available in English, such as Marcelo D’Saete’s *Angola Janga* and Conceição Evaristo’s *Ponciá Vicêncio*.

This text is a welcome resource for Reis scholars and first-time readers alike, who will benefit from Pinto-Bailey’s instructive introduction, careful translation, and judicious footnotes. In her introduction, the translator provides context about Reis and 19th-century Brazilian society,

situating *Ursula* in relation to other texts and explaining how it stands apart from better-known but less empowering works like Bernardo Guimarães's *A escrava Isaura* (1875) and José de Alencar's *O demônio familiar* (1858). Though *Ursula*'s main plot is the ill-fated love story of Tancredo and Ursula (both white), it contains moving descriptions of the plight and protagonism of enslaved and free black persons in Brazil. Significantly, and as Pinto-Bailey observes, the novel's construction is such that each of the principal black characters "tells his or her story in his or her own voice"—a feature that positions Reis "light-years ahead of her Brazilian peers" (xix). Pinto-Bailey also links the novel with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its attempts to effect "a revision of models of behavior and social relations," often through appeals to Christian imperatives (xiv).

Pinto-Bailey's insight is also helpful in justifying her decision to periodically alter Reis's syntax and punctuation. Though this at times obscures the emotional richness of the original prose, the constant goal of promoting readability for a 21st-century audience remains evident. To that end, Pinto-Bailey includes footnotes that add context without distracting readers—there are just sixteen sprinkled throughout the novel's 163 pages, with one more in "The Slave Woman," Reis's 1887 short story included at the end of the book. In other instances, the translator deftly inserts clarifying words into the prose—as when we read of the "*noitibó* hawk's sad screech" and the "*acauã* falcon's ominous cry" (15). Spelling out "hawk" and "falcon" (neither of which appears in the original) educates readers while eliminating the need for footnotes that might interrupt readers' progress through the novel.

In a further effort to orient readers, Pinto-Bailey explains that dramatic descriptions of nature, gothic elements, and intense emotions clearly mark *Ursula* as a Romantic text. Her translation renders this prose consistently, with no more than the occasional word straying from this 19th-century linguistic register. The translator's commitment to preserving the feeling of the original generates a reading experience that mirrors that of those reading in Portuguese: while at times the language seems antiquated, in other moments—especially when black characters discuss slavery and freedom—it is strikingly modern. The latter is visible when "Black Susana" describes her experience in the Middle Passage: "How horrible to think that people could treat other human beings that way. To think they were willing to let other human beings die like that, starving and asphyxiated, and their conscience didn't bother them at all!" (76-77). Such passages showcase how forward-thinking Reis's writing was and reflect the translator's sensitivity to current social issues as she finds ways to render convincingly slaveholding characters' merciless insults and epithets while (as she explains in the introduction) avoiding terms offensive to 21st-century readers.

Such sensitivity is characteristic of Pinto-Bailey's approach and reflects a commitment to social responsibility. This project's completion is a welcome development that will benefit a wide community of readers and allow *Ursula* to be increasingly recognized as the landmark literary text that it is. Published more than a century and a half ago, it remains a touchstone for those wishing to familiarize themselves with the beginnings of abolitionist literature and with the long tradition of Afro-Brazilian literary and cultural production. With this translation, Pinto-Bailey has helped expand the reach of this powerful author—a wonderful step forward in promoting the study of Brazilian literature throughout the world.

Jordan B. Jones, Brigham Young University

Rogers, Geraldine. *Raúl G. Tuñón, poesía y reportaje. Incluye crónicas viajeras del escritor 1932-1936*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2020. 327 pp. ISBN: 9786-0730-3900-0

En la primera mitad de los años treinta, el escritor argentino Raúl González Tuñón (1905-1974) redactó cuatro series periodísticas para publicaciones porteñas: “Vidas truncas”, sobre los inmigrantes desocupados que deambulaban por el puerto de Buenos Aires; “El lejano sur”, escrito a partir de su estancia en una Patagonia que corría el riesgo de quedarse aislada del resto del país; “*Crítica en el infierno del Chaco*”, acerca de la guerra entre Bolivia y Paraguay; y “Redescubrimiento de España”, que recoge la miseria y el clima prebélico que asolaba la península en 1935. Los viajes que permitieron la composición de estos textos fueron decisivos en la vida y obra del autor; no obstante, ninguno de los reportajes fue reeditado con posterioridad. Los lectores e investigadores de Tuñón, así pues, aunque conocedores del impacto de estas vivencias en el periodista, no tenían acceso a su testimonio directo.

El último libro de Geraldine Rogers resarce esta situación, ya que alberga, en su segunda parte, las transcripciones de las notas que conformaron estas series. Gran estudiosa de aquel al que bautizó como “el Tuñón desencuadrado”, la investigadora del CONICET siempre ha defendido la imperiosa necesidad de difundir la obra del porteño aparecida en publicaciones periódicas, y que por tanto no goza de los privilegios que otorga el prestigioso soporte del libro.

En la primera parte, que propiamente contiene el estudio, Rogers se adentra en el contexto que hizo posibles las crónicas viajeras: tanto el general, un tiempo en que el periodismo vio nacer, gracias a los avances técnicos, el género del reportaje; como el particular, dado que muestra los inicios de González Tuñón en la poesía y sus primeras salidas como enviado especial. A la hora de analizar los textos, la profesora de literatura argentina de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata pone especial énfasis en el diálogo que establecen con los poemarios que el autor publicó coetáneamente: *La calle del agujero en la media* (1930), *Todos bailan* (1935) y *La rosa blindada* (1936).

De esta forma, entre las tapas de *Raúl G. Tuñón, poesía y reportaje* se aúnan las voces de migrantes de sueños rotos, de obreros explotados en la Patagonia, de paraguayos heridos que tocan música en los hospitales de la sangre, de la Pasionaria, de Miguel Hernández, pero por encima de ellas retumba la voz del escritor, de pulsión lírica pero desprovista de pureza, salpicada de referencias literarias y cinematográficas, así como también la de Geraldine Rogers, encargada de explorarlas todas.

Como una extraña flor, este libro brota del barro en que hundi6 Tuñ6n sus viejas botas de reportero. Lo atestiguan estas palabras escritas durante su estancia en la guerra del Chaco (“Los campos trágicos de Boquer6n”): “Desde all6 saldr6, a pie, a conocer todo el terreno del Boquer6n, acompa6ado por alguien que lo conoce perfectamente, y entonces recoger6 documentaci6n para una cr6nica que dar6 idea de lo que fue la dura batalla. ¡Qu6 calor, Dios santo! Con mis botas embarradas, mi amplio sombrero, mi cara barbuda y sucia, mis ojos doloridos, mi oscura camisa abierta, debo [de] parecer tambi6n un gitano.”

Y brota, tambi6n, del pesado polvo de los archivos, que termina por sepultarlo todo. Rogers ha narrado as6 su proceso de recopilaci6n de los documentos: “El diario y la revista donde [las series periodísticas] se publicaron hace poco menos de un siglo no est6n digitalizados, varios ejemplares son casi inhallables y hubo que rastrearlos en varios lugares. Fueron emergiendo de p6ginas en precario estado, algunas casi al borde de la desaparici6n f6sica, o de pantallas de obsoletos microfilms. Trabajar con archivos argentinos no suele ser una tarea f6cil pero apasiona recuperar fragmentos poco o nada conocidos de nuestra historia cultural y literaria.”

En conclusión, son dos los movimientos cruzados que han posibilitado esta obra: en primer lugar, las travesías del poeta como enviado especial y, casi cien años después, las visitas de la investigadora al archivo. Nos encontramos entonces ante un libro que es, en realidad, un viaje de ida y vuelta, un rescate del rescate. Ambos desplazamientos, a pesar de sus distintas naturalezas, estuvieron inspirados por un mismo entusiasmo y, sobre todo, por un designio común: favorecer en el panorama cultural la circulación y conservación de voces indispensables para la comprensión de un tiempo apasionante. Salvar, en otras palabras, del barro el testimonio.

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Whitener, Brian. *Crisis Cultures: The rise of finance in Mexico and Brazil*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2019. 232 pp. ISBN 9780-8229-6586-2

Crisis Cultures works as a powerful prism. A prism works by diffracting, or differentiating, the various wavelengths of incoming white light into its constituent parts. If the prism is turned at a certain angle with respect to the incoming ray of light, only certain constituent wavelengths, or colors of light, are highlighted. Following this analogy, which Whitener suggests to the reader in the introduction to the book, there are five primary “colors,” or constituent relations, that the book illuminates: finance, culture, racialization, state violence, and populations rendered in “excess” or “redundant” to state and capital—what Marx calls “surplus populations.” In this sense, *Crisis Cultures* is an ambitious book. But Whitener focuses the approach by angling the prism as to highlight more intensely two constituent relations—finance and culture—and invites the reader to consider other relations not considered in the book.

The invitation *Crisis Cultures* makes to cultural critics is to decipher the hieroglyphics of finance capital, and, at the same time, how cultural forms have made sense of and mediated the rise of finance. Although *finance* itself is taken to be a moving target throughout the book, following the work of heterodox marxist cultural critics Annie McClanahan and Joshua Clover, Whitener helpfully defines finance as “a form of temporal arbitrage or as a means of attempting to realize future surplus value in the present” (13). Whitener’s approach, focused on the relation between finance and capital’s crises of production, therefore both diverges from and is in conversation with other recent approaches to finance, such as David Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5,000 years* and Maurizio Lazzarato’s work on the credit-debit relation. Furthermore, Whitener’s dynamic approach to finance allows for a tracing of its imprints beyond its immediate sphere. Therefore, *Crisis Culture*’s prismatic effect illuminates not only the constitutively entwined relations of culture and finance but also the differential effects of this entwinement in a geographically comparative perspective that extends beyond its case studies and could be read alongside Luci Cavallero’s and Verónica Gago’s *Una lectura feminista de la deuda* (2019) and Rocío Zambrana’s *Colonial Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico* (2021).

The book is divided in two. Each part takes up cultural forms in light of a specific periodization of the rise of finance. The first half focuses on the period opened up by the 1982 debt crisis (1982-2001) and the multiple subsequent financial crises that profoundly shaped cultural production in both Mexico (Chapter 1) and Brazil (Chapter 2). The second half, periodized from 2001 to 2015, focuses on how both state and capital in Brazil and Mexico followed divergent paths in administering the crisis (Chapter 3 and 4, respectively).

The first half of the book takes up the destabilization of the developmentalist state racial ideology of the national popular (*mestizaje*) alongside the rise of finance. The first chapter undertakes a close reading of Jorge Volpi's 1999 novel *En busca de Klingsor*. The novel, Whitener argues, reconstitutes a "racial imaginary of the national popular" by turning to ontology. This ontology bears the imprint of the indeterminacy and instability of financial crises and also closely tracks the emergence of the similarly unstable and mobile figure of the "delincuente" in social discourse. The indeterminacy or uncertainty produced by the *saltos* of finance therefore resonate in Volpi's ontology, which is appropriated from early 20th-century ideas produced by two pillars of contemporary physics: the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. Volpi's "overinterpretation" of rigorous scientific notions is read by Whitener as resonant with finance capital's instability (35). More generally, Volpi's novel is read as a paradigmatic example of an "ontology of indeterminacy" (50) also at work in contemporary "philosophical marxism" (57). At this point, this ambitious book makes some *saltos* of its own in suggesting that the "ontological turn" in social theory is directly proportional to a receding concern with political economy. Considering different examples of heterodox marxist philosophical approaches to political economy puts pressure on Whitener's suggestion (e.g. Althusser's epistemological attempt to uphold the scientificity of Marx's critique of political economy and Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*'s machinic ontology in which desire is productive and is entangled with the flows of political economy). Despite this *salto*, which might work if it carefully considered counter-examples, the broader argument holds for the cases Whitener considers in both Mexico and Brazil. In the latter, a similar imprint of finance is found in discourses surrounding the favelas in films such as *Tropa de Elite*.

The second half of the book periodizes the recomposition of finance. While in Mexico the crisis turned to "circulation," the Brazilian governments of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* instead turned to personal credit—what Whitener calls "financial para-corporatism." Whitener takes up the 2012 telenovela *Cheias de charme* as exemplary of how the dominant social discourse of Brazilian "racial democracy" had tendentially shifted towards a "credit democracy." During this period the Brazilian state sought to administer the crisis by an expansion of personal credit which greatly increased the consumption capacity of lower classes and produced a "new middle class." Whitener carefully challenges this precarious narrative by focusing on how finance produces a rather fragile expectation of "upward mobility" (97) by producing a temporary effect of "equality" in the sphere of consumption. Therefore, finance impresses its form on social relations through what Whitener calls a "projective structure of feeling," one which rapidly leads to disillusion and revolt as seen in the 2013 uprisings (109). Finance also secretes an "anti-subject": a subject hollowed-out of any interiority. So rather than an indebted subject filled with guilt (as in Lazzarato), the "anti-subject of credit" is but a mere passageway to another "asset or income stream" (115). Lastly, although Mexico turned instead to circulation—what Whitener calls "drug logistics" and the policing of territories through violence (124)—a similar subject is found imprinted in Mexican cultural forms of the same period. Here Whitener focuses on the work of the Mexican poet Dolores Dorantes as well as in "surplus population films" on migration such as *Norteado* and *La jaula de oro* (138).

Crisis Cultures is an ambitious attempt to bring the analysis of the crises of capital back into cultural theory. Its main theoretical contribution is to reactivate a heterodox marxist analysis of cultural forms to illuminate how both short and long-term mutations in capital cycles of accumulation closely track cultural transformations in both Mexico and Brazil in the past four decades. In the wake of the global 2007-08 financial crisis, the turn to a heterodox reading of Marx

and to a critical account of political economy is not a nostalgic return to a forgotten past, but rather, a necessary reactivation of one of the sharpest tools still available to understand and transform the recurring crises of the present.

Alejo Stark, University of Michigan

FILM REVIEWS

El cazador. Dir. Marco Berger. Argentina, 2020. Dur. 101 min.

El cazador (translated to *Young Hunter* in English), the latest film by Argentinian director Marco Berger, begins with scenes of what at first seem to represent intense studies of adolescent gaydar. Teenage protagonist Ezequiel is a high school student who hangs out at a skate park and, as demonstrated by his intense gaze, is clearly a healthy adolescent male interested in exploring his sexuality. In an attempt to realize his homoerotic impulses, he invites other young men home with him to look at pornographic magazines, only to find out that they are not gay.

Of interest at this early moment in the film is how Berger handles their reactions. In an early scene fundamental to establishing the protagonist's relative naivety, Ezequiel is alone with a male classmate who, when invited to masturbate together, reacts with an almost homoaffective air. It is as if he is flattered and tempted, but then quickly decides that "No me gustan los pibes" [I'm not into guys] and leaves quietly. David William Foster's insistence that homosociality often leads to homoaffectivity, with the ever-present potentiality of homoeroticism, is underscored by the boy's lack of a violent reaction and signals how Berger continually queers Argentinian society by challenging stereotypical notions of heteronormalization. Indeed, the lack of expected homophobic violence is one of several Bergerian tropes showcased in this film, ones that include sidelong glances, pensive gazing, camera angles that capture voyeuristic scenes through glass or mirrors, and dissonant music and sound, all of which are techniques Berger has historically used to signal the *potentiality* for homoaffectivity or even homoeroticism.

Another important Berger leitmotif in this film is the absence of a parental presence, and therefore, a heteronormalizing gaze. Ezequiel's parents are conveniently away for a couple of weeks and the teen is able to invite "friends" over unimpeded. They will later return and, while they prove to be very caring parents for the boy, the issue of homosexuality is never discussed.

Berger's use of the gaze in *El cazador* begins as we expect from one of his films, not only through the protagonist's heartfelt yet scrutinous gaze made even more exceptional by his striking unibrow, but also by focalizing our own gaze as spectators upon intense homoeroticism, contemplation, and later in the film, longing, jealousy, angst, remorse, and regret. However, while Berger's showcasing of dissonant music and sounds continues to signal homoeroticism in this film, the implied referent to this audial sign is quite different this time. Here, the dissonance signals a decidedly intense shift to actual foreboding, and as such, *El cazador* marks a point of departure for Berger, who both wrote and directed this film.

Foreboding necessarily comes to the fore because the plot addresses a serious social and moral problem: the world of child pornography, pedophilia, pederasty, and the even larger encompassing problem of a significant market interested in purchasing imagery of it, thereby fueling the local demand for its production. While this is a world-wide problem, it is also one that is relevant within Argentina, as documented by the various investigations regarding child

pornography rings—both inside and outside of the country—particularly throughout the 2010s up to the present day. Such investigations range from articles in periodicals such as *Infobae*, academic articles in journals including the *International Journal of Children's Rights*, and monographs analyzing themes of child pornography and the promotion of pedophilia, both of which are readily accessible on the internet, and especially dangerously, on the dark web.

The film also utilizes scenic tropes we expect from Berger's films, those that focalize the gaze as a sign to the spectator that it is alright to view scenes of homoeroticism. This is reminiscent of many of his earlier films, most notably *Ausente* (*Absent*, 2011) and *Sexual Tension: Volátil* (*Sexual Tension: Volatile*, 2012), in which Berger successfully edges the spectator within prolonged homoerotic potentiality. Berger has historically, and quite famously, not allowed his protagonists to explicitly consummate their relationship, something Foster called the lack of a "money shot."

Conversely, in *El cazador*, the protagonist does have homosexual relations; Berger just chooses not to film them. The result is that Berger continues to edge his spectators, but the sexual tension experienced in previous films is reduced, and consequently, problematized. Indeed, this is precisely the goal of this film. Sexual tension is replaced by the more serious tensions presented by *el cazador de jóvenes* (the hunter of young boys, not simply the *Young Hunter* as the film's title is translated). Such an uncomfortable pedophilic focus quickly overshadows the scenes of fetishism and sexual potentialities we have grown to expect from Berger's films.

Addressing serious social themes is not new in Berger's oeuvre. In the film *Ausente*, which also ends with intense remorse, Berger challenges the spectator with issues of fetishizing a high school student, queering provider/patient and teacher/student relationships, and student manipulations of a teacher. *El cazador*, in turn, is a study of Argentinian child pornography and how easy it is to become involved with it as a young person, no matter that person's social status, sexual orientation, sexual enculturation, self-awareness, morality, or even the presence or lack of a parental gaze. What is most chilling is the ease by which the exploration of budding sexuality transforms into the ugliness and danger associated with child pornography. Berger's latest film offers pedagogical opportunities for comparative studies with the director's previous work, not only as framed by queer studies, but also by the revelation of these imminently important, ongoing sociocultural themes.

Daniel Holcombe, Georgia College and State University

La odisea de los giles. Dir. Sebastián Borensztein. Argentina, 2019. Dur. 116 min.

Fermín Perlassi, y su esposa, Lidia, deciden invertir en el decadente pueblo del que son residentes mediante la compra de una usina que luego transformarán en una cooperativa. Para lograr tal cometido necesitan involucrar a personajes variopintos de la localidad ficticia de Alsina, ubicada en el Gran Buenos Aires. Perlassi (Ricardo Darín), exjugador profesional de fútbol, y Antonio Fontana (Luis Brandoni), dueño de la gomería del barrio, son los encargados de reunir los 300 mil dólares para la compra de La Metódica. El grupo de autodenominados giles no cuenta con que horas, después de hacer el cuantioso depósito para la transacción de la propiedad, el gobierno argentino congelaría todas las cuentas bancarias y solamente permitiría el retiro de 250 dólares semanales. *La odisea* alude directamente al *corralito*, las medidas financieras que el gobierno de Fernando de la Rúa instauró infructuosamente para evitar una debacle monetaria. Meses después de la hecatombe,

Perlassi y Fontana se enteran que Fortunato Manzi, un conocido abogado de la localidad vecina de Villagrán, y Alvarado, el banquero quien les aconseja hacer el depósito, estaban al tanto de las acciones del gobierno argentino. Y, para salvaguardar sus respectivos futuros económicos, Alvarado decide extender un considerable préstamo a Manzi. Este último personaje retira la cuantiosa suma en efectivo. El abogado, en realidad, está llevándose el dinero que Perlassi y sus secuaces habían recolectado para la cooperativa y los ahorros de otros clientes del banco. Perlassi y Fontana descubren, además, que Manzi esconde la fortuna en una bien protegida bóveda bajo tierra. Para distraer a posibles ladrones, el abogado ha colocado estratégicamente unas decenas de vacas en el terreno superior a la cámara. A través de un plan ejecutado impecablemente e inspirado en el cine, los giles (como dice el film: dícese de una persona lenta a la que le falta viveza y picardía), encabezados por Perlassi y Fontana, logran justicia.

La odisea fue estrenada en el 2019 y en enero del 2020 obtuvo el premio a la mejor película iberoamericana en la edición 34 de los Premios Goya. El film se sirve de varios mecanismos cinematográficos para lograr una estética de colectividad. Mediante el uso de planos generales que exhiben el paisaje rural argentino, la distancia entre Alsina y Villagrán se amplifica creando así un contraste entre los pobres giles que viven en la decaída Alsina y el exitoso Manzi de la más urbana Villagrán. *La odisea*, además, utiliza movimientos de cámara que cumplen la función de humanizar a los personajes. Gracias al seguimiento de la cámara, las emociones de Perlassi son harto evidentes luego de las medidas financieras que toma el gobierno de De La Rúa. A la estética de colectividad también le beneficia la iluminación del film. La gran mayoría de las escenas del conjunto de giles ocurren en ambientes cerrados y hacia el final del día. Estas dos características, las tomas interiores y la limitada luz, generan un ambiente clandestino, propio de las actividades que la asociación está realizando. Al mismo tiempo, las reuniones nocturnas apuntan hacia un calificativo particular del grupo de compinches, pues se trata de trabajadores cuyo tiempo libre es limitado.

La cinta de Borensztein cuenta con dos actuaciones particularmente efectivas. Por un lado, Luis Brandoni como Antonio Fontana realiza un papel muy convincente como el segundo al mando que azuza las acciones del grupo. Por otra parte, Ricardo Darín, quien destaca por una presentación más que satisfactoria, ejecuta un rol muy parecido al de películas anteriores. Similar al estafador Marcos de *Nueve reinas* (2000) o Sosa de *Carancho* (2010), Darín actúa como un personaje al que lo empuja el sentido de la aventura y la ganancia financiera. En *La odisea*, sin embargo, los principios que gobiernan a Perlassi son más altruistas.

La cinta de Sebastián Borensztein es una adaptación de la novela *La noche de la Usina*, ganadora del Premio Alfaguara 2016. Eduardo Sacheri, autor de la novela, co-escribió el guión de *La odisea* con Borensztein. A diferencia de la novela, *La odisea*, incorpora el personaje de Carmen Lorgio, dueña de una compañía de transportes, muy exitosa en Alsina. Ella invierte 100 mil dólares a cambio de que Hernán, hijo suyo, obtenga un empleo en la Metódica una vez que se funde la cooperativa. En la novela, el personaje de Lorgio es un hombre que, al igual que Carmen, siente cierta desesperanza y desconfianza hacia Hernán. Esta alteración, la de tener un personaje femenino en la película, genera una necesitada diversificación de los personajes. Las otras mujeres del film son la señora Llanos, dueña de un vivero, y Florencia, secretaria de Manzi. A diferencia de los dos personajes anteriores, Carmen Lorgio tiene mucho dinero y, por lo tanto, poder dentro las gestiones que ejecutan los giles.

El reconocimiento de los sacrificios que el grupo de giles ha experimentado y la reivindicación por los abusos que los personajes han debido sobrellevar hacen eco en la música de la película. El film inicia con el famosísimo vals de Johann Strauss, *El Danubio Azul*. Gracias al *crescendo*, la escala mayor de la pieza musical y el ritmo alegre de la misma, la audiencia sabe,

desde el comienzo de la película, que habrá un final feliz, mas no libre de obstáculos. Si el tema más relevante de la película es la lucha victoriosa del grupo de giles y la música genera el culmen de la aventura, el humor le inyecta cierta dosis de realismo a los inesperados héroes. Desde la habilidad de Rodrigo Perlassi de matar plantas, hasta la ingenuidad de los hermanos Gómez, los momentos cómicos de *La odisea* crean personajes multidimensionales que no se amilanan ante los obstáculos que enfrentan.

Esta lucha contra el orden establecido es necesaria particularmente al considerar las circunstancias que atraviesa la república argentina. A 20 años del *corralito*, *La odisea de los giles* establece un diálogo relevante con la Argentina actual que continúa pasando tiempos de crisis. Luego de décadas de dificultades financieras que han generado una elevada inflación y un incremento en la pobreza, el film actúa como un recordatorio para toda una generación y advierte que vale la pena luchar por la justicia incluso cuando se enfrenten a autoridades y el desenlace no esté garantizado.

Sandra Chang Raak, Western Michigan University

Vicenta. Dir. Darío Doria. Argentina, 2020. Dur. 69 min.

How do we narrate traumatic situations that involve children? What are the strategies used to tell the stories of poor, working-class women? In which ways can the senseless be described? These are all questions with which Darío Doria grappled in his fourth documentary film, *Vicenta*, released in 2020, made possible by funding from the Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA) and the foundation Arte-Ciné, a Canadian-based organization that promotes documentary making. Narrated by singer Liliana Herrero and using playdoh characters, *Vicenta* tells the story of a single mother of two daughters, Valeria, now married and living with her own family, and Laura, 19, who is mentally challenged. When *Vicenta* discovers that Laura is pregnant, time seems to stop, and as she asks herself, “how many things can you think in a second?” She initiates a candid conversation with Laura explaining how women have children during which she learns the name of the relative who abused her daughter. Thus, *Vicenta*’s journey to secure an abortion for Laura, whose disability keeps her in a permanent state of childhood, starts.

Vicenta’s story is far from simple, a fact that is highlighted by the voice-over who uses the second person singular as a way to separate herself from the facts that she has experienced and analyze them. Laura’s plight unites *Vicenta* and her older daughter Valeria in a tight-knit group as they seek for an abortion as outlined in article 72, section 1 of the Argentine Penal Code. The documentary incorporates two discourses: one of the laws and regulations in place in Argentina and the other of the healthcare professionals. Both appear disconnected from the everyday problems that *Vicenta* faces. For instance, she lives in Guernica but has to lodge her grievance in the courts of La Plata, and for that, she has to go by train to Buenos Aires to take a different one to La Plata, a trip that lasts over 2 hours each way.

The documentary’s tempo alternates between important decisions and long pauses that invite the consideration of the news that *Vicenta* receives. The judiciary system appears labyrinthic and punitive with its recurring delays, inhospitable waiting rooms, and offices and shelves filled up with folders from time immemorial. Without knowing it, *Vicenta* and her daughters battle an inefficient and outdated bureaucracy: it is a David versus Goliath plot, an extensive case with several caveats that are covered in 99 minutes. In this case, the decision of using playdoh

characters, whose inexpressive faces provide a counterpoint to the myriad of legal decisions that arise from reporting the sexual abuse of a minor and the request to grant her with an abortion, serves to emphasize the events that a mother and daughters experience.

At the heart of this documentary lies the issue of the overlapping of class, gender, and disability. As a working-class, illiterate mother Vicenta faces a legal system in which its members mostly ignore her financial insolvency and her disabled daughter's needs. Class seems to trump the legal protections accorded to Laura. In addition, the judicial system's lack of compassion towards a disabled minor objectified her: it seems that lawyers, judges, and journalists seek to achieve their 5 minutes of fame by participating in a case that at times languishes in the uninviting halls of dull court houses. They fail to understand that an adolescent with mental challenges requires her mother's care and attention.

Whereas there is much to improve in Argentina's judiciary system, *Vicenta* also presents the power of female solidarity and support as a group of feminists approach the distressed mother. Together they strengthen Vicenta's resilience, built over decades of hard work and independent management of her single-parent family. It is Vicenta, at once breadwinner, caregiver, and nurturer who transforms losses into opportunities for self-growth. In the process, she finds not only her voice, but also becomes aware of other single, working-class mothers who may experience a similar fate in the future and that realization moves her to go beyond her comfort zone and demand the Argentine state, seeking clear guidelines and attention to times to resolve cases like her daughter's.

Poignant and moving, *Vicenta* is a must-see documentary for those seeking to understand the numerous challenges that a female caregiver of a disabled minor confronted when seeking a remedy to her daughter's sexual abuse. Doria's film shines the light on a courageous woman who, despite her lack of education, had considerable clarity about her complex situation which involved her daughter. Without histrionics, her actions bring to a fore the features of a judiciary system that even though it is tasked with upholding rights, deprives some citizens of their human dignity. Thus, Vicenta should be credited with expanding the scope of human rights, particularly those that pertain to victims of sexual abuse. *Vicenta* is distributed in the United States by the Pragma.

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