



Butler University
Digital Commons @ Butler University

Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

2010

"Del infierno al cuerpo: La otredad en la narrativa y en el cine español contemporáneo," Katarzyna Olga Beoñom

Terri Carney

Butler University, tcarney@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers



Part of the [Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carney, Terri. Review of "Del infierno al cuerpo: La otredad en la narrativa y en el cine español contemporáneo," Katarzyna Olga Beoñom. *Letras peninsulares* 22.1 (2010): 311-313.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

forma de las historias narradas para revelar un reportaje que manifiesta el deseo de conocer los secretos del "Otro". Para Flesler, estas reflexiones testimoniales son mecanismos por los que el inmigrante se sitúa en un espacio distante de otredad. Como arguye, al intentar darles una voz a aquéllos que no la tienen, estos textos refuerzan la asociación del inmigrante con una posición de subalternidad.

En definitiva, *The Return of the Moor* constituye un estudio indispensable para cualquier académico que desee efectuar una aproximación crítica al tema de la inmigración. Tanto el marco teórico utilizado como el historiográfico son materiales excelentes para comprender la complejidad que gira en torno a la frágil e inestable identidad nacional española. Al usar novelas, películas, festivales, noticias periodísticas y discursos de actualidad, Daniela Flesler realiza un brillante estudio de marcada importancia que contribuye a efectuar una reflexión sobre la ansiedad que la presencia del inmigrante marroquí produce en relación a la construcción de la identidad nacional, regional, racial y cultural y cómo la mirada hacia el Otro sirve para establecer una definición de la propia identidad.

Ana Corbalán Vélez
The University of Alabama

Beilin, Katarzyna Olga. *Del infierno al cuerpo: La otredad en la narrativa y en el cine español contemporáneo*. Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 2007. 412 pp.

"¿Cómo es posible abrirse voluntariamente a lo que destruye la integridad y la unidad de uno mismo?" "¿Qué debemos al otro, que necesita nuestra ayuda pero que al mismo tiempo puede hacernos daño?" (19). These provocative questions drive this ambitious study by Beilin, which examines the history of what she calls "el discurso de la otredad," as manifested in a wide selection of Spanish cultural texts from the last two centuries. Through a series of close readings of narratives and films, Beilin examines how writers and filmmakers have engaged alterity in their works. She traces the change in the dominant artistic approach to the Other as antagonistic and threatening (whether sublime, sacred or monstrous) to part of the quotidian landscape of the self and the human body, as a portal to creativity, adventure, and an exciting unknown. This topic is especially pertinent to contemporary Spain, where brutal divisions and centuries of political pendulum swinging beg for a new approach to alterity, one that moves beyond extreme polarization of the self-other relationship.

Her study was inspired by two creative works of the contemporary period, Almodóvar's film *Todo sobre mi madre* and the novel *El silencio*

de las sirenas by Adelaida García Morales, works that clearly engage the ethical question of the self's obligation to the Other. Fundamental to her theoretical approach are Mark Taylor's *Alterity* and works by a parade of thinkers including Levinas, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Bataille and Lacan.

The book is organized chronologically and spans two centuries of cultural movements and literary "-isms." As she moves through the historical and cultural periods, Beilin chooses representative texts to illustrate the dominant paradigm of each stage, analyzing how each text inscribes the self-other relationship. These readings contribute to the larger project of the book, which is to connect the changes in the discourse of alterity to the web of discourses that shape human experience in spheres as seemingly disparate as romantic, ethical, political, social, and aesthetic.

Beilin starts off in the nineteenth century with the romantics, and finds the Other is cast as monstrous and horrifying, projected outside the self and leading to disillusion, death, and existential depression, or what she calls "la muerte en vida." Exemplary of this stage are the canonical writers Larra and Espronceda. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the dominant cultural expression of realism is read by Beilin as an effort to assimilate the romantic monstrous by casting the Other as a victim of society rather than an exotic entity. Galdós' *Misericordia* is the emblematic text of this section, in which the question of the Other is projected onto individual, state, and society.

For the Generation of '98 the discourse of otherness becomes a philosophical problem, one that loses revolutionary character, and whose nostalgia and subjectivism contribute later to fascist discourse. For Beilin, the Other is cast as an "avatar de la psique," creating what for her is "egoísmo, una filosofía amoral," which she connects to Nietzsche's influence. Ortega y Gasset serves as an example of this stage; he is singled out for his lack of compassion for the underprivileged, his affinity for aristocracy and social hierarchy, and his clear influence on the future *falangistas*. She reserves a special spot for Antonio Machado in this chapter of contradictions between personal ethics and aesthetics, casting him as the pacifist hero and citing his poetic project as a rejection of the binary bind that the larger generation is unable to escape.

Beilin notes that during the war and post-war period in film and literature violence and death are featured as sublime, or as a source of happiness, both cases serving as justification for war, which is read as the culminating "reality" of discursive precedents. García Lorca and Max Aub represent this stage of her study. During the post-war period, social realism subverted the discourse of Francoism, but both sides were still trapped in binary battle, each projecting a "maligna otredad" on the other. The winners of the war saw the losers as rejects to be marginalized, while social realism spoke for the losers, creating an ethics of marginality.

The transition period and the nascent democracy bring new versions of the Other as seen in literature and film of figures like Juan Goytisolo, Juan Marsé, Cristina Fernández Cubas, and Pedro Almodóvar. Themes of trauma, sacrifice, vampires, sadomasochism, illness, and mysticism reveal a self who is permanently conditioned by the Other, and faced with the necessity of self-sacrifice. "El realismo inquietante" is the final stage in her book (a term she borrows from Fernández Cubas to indicate a blending of the fantastic and the realist discourse), one that moves us beyond the perilous antagonism of absolutist discourses. Juan Goytisolo's work and the films of Almodóvar represent this group as the work of artists who invite readers to open up to the Other "en el sentido ético y existencial" (31).

This book will be a valuable addition to any university library and of interest to students of twentieth-century Spanish literature and scholars investigating discourses of otherness.

Terri Carney
Butler University

Santos-Rivero, Virginia. *Unamuno y el sueño colonial*. Madrid y Frankfurt: Vervuert Iberoamericana, 2005. 140 pp.

Virginia Santos-Rivero se propone en este ensayo incidir sobre la noción de Hispanidad unamuniana, constituida en tanto que "posible continuidad ontológica de España", así como en función de la incidencia que dicho concepto tuvo "en el imaginario nacional, en el sentimiento de decadencia" (8) que trajo consigo la pérdida de las últimas colonias. Dividido en cuatro capítulos, sólo el primero (dedicado al conocimiento que Unamuno tenía de la realidad americana) y el cuarto (centrado en la idea de Hispanidad) entran de lleno en la relación América-Unamuno, abordando los dos centrales sólo tangencialmente el tema del libro, al ocuparse de cuestiones lingüísticas sobre el vasco y el catalán que para la autora resultan fundamentales de cara a resaltar el valor que la lengua castellana tiene tanto en la definición de la voz Hispanidad como en las derivaciones ideológicas que de la misma se desprenden. Su tesis o "proposición" se condensa en entender el 98 como "un hito fundamental en la transformación del sujeto nacional y moderno español, [que] lo coloca de lleno en el ámbito desterritorializado y fragmentado de la posmodernidad" (13).

No es sino hasta el último capítulo donde se desarrolla en plenitud esta propuesta, que parte de afirmaciones como la de que "la concepción de Hispanidad funciona de manera similar a la concepción de nación en el siglo XIX" (101). Este planteamiento da entrada a una posición problemática que no sólo choca con lo previamente establecido por la autora (España se