Review Essay: Borges: Sexuality, Material Culture, and Philosophy

Benedict, Nora C. *Borges and the Literary Marketplace: How Editorial Practices Shaped Cosmopolitan Reading*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2021. 365 pp. ISBN 9780-3002-5141-8

Dapía, Silvia G. *Jorge Luis Borges, Post-Analytic Philosophy, and Representation*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 217 pp. ISBN 9781-1389-3163-3

De la Fuente, Ariel. *Borges, Desire, and Sex.* Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2018. 225 pp. ISBN 9781-7896-2228-7

Borges and the Literary Marketplace offers a recontextualization of Jorge Luis Borges' relationship to books as physical, historical objects, describing his roles as editor, translator, anthologist, and publisher while drawing from the history of publishing in Buenos Aires between 1930 and 1951. Nora Benedict details the transition from relying on European presses to forming a national book printing industry in Argentina, carefully overlaying this history against Borges' efforts to strategically shape the readership of Buenos Aires in favor of his own personal tastes, influences, and social network. The book is at its strongest when it clearly presents information gathered through archival research and offers new historical accounts of Borges' professional roles and relationships.

Benedict shows how the development of presses in Buenos Aires was connected to Borges' attempts to reach and cultivate new audiences. Presenting the specific histories of different publishing firms and investigating their material in detail leads to insightful observations on both Borges' aesthetic preferences and how elite or mass audiences were targeted. Newspapers, literary magazines, and books are analyzed in a way that emphasizes their mutual influences and overlaps, adding complexity and nuance to our understanding of the social and cultural context for Borges' work. Benedict convincingly argues that Borges engaged in a practice of shaping Argentine reading preferences through his work in magazines, newspapers, and anthologies, with special attention paid to his connections with international writers and the genre of detective fiction. Clear charts show the nationality of the authors that Borges reviewed in *SUR* and *El Hogar*, how the work of these authors overlapped with different book series (Editorial Sudamericana's *Colección Horizonte*, Editorial Losada's *La Pajarita de Papel* series, and Emecé's *Cuadernos de la Quimera* series), and which of Borges' texts in *La Nación* appear later in his books. While some of the author's interventions as a translator of the popular verses in *El compadrito* do not take the unique linguistic context of Lunfardo into account, the analysis of how the book is positioned to appeal to a wider audience is helpful. Borges' work as a translator and prologist is skillfully contextualized in terms of his relationships with different presses, the material descriptions of the books themselves, and their function in terms of promotion and cultural influence.

Benedict also connects her research to readings of Borges' stories, essays, and lectures. This begins with an interpretation of Borges' 1978 lecture "El libro," in which Borges explains that he has thought about writing a history of the book, but not, however, from the point of view of its materiality since he is not interested in the analysis or appreciation of books as physical objects, preferring instead to focus on how they have been valued and imagined across time. Benedict argues that the level of detail Borges used when describing books (and different forms of cataloguing them) belies this statement, which she interprets as a "disdain" for "the physical features of books" (14). Benedict writes that Borges here articulates an "aversion" to the "physical form" of the book. This interpretation makes sense only in the context of bibliophilic appreciation—and not bibliographic knowledge. Pushing back against Roger Chartier's

affirmation that books *as objects* are of "no interest" to Borges (276), Benedict proposes that he engaged rather deeply with the materiality of books and could be considered a bibliographer in his own right.

The book finds evidence of Borges' identity as a bibliographer in a section of *Evaristo Carriego* that describes how someone with "a naively physical idea of what art is" (19) might consider a book to consist principally of formal and physical components—which are listed in great detail. "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*" is offered as an example of fashioning a "diplomatic scholarly edition," as in her reading of the story, Menard has a "profound interest in describing the social and historical moment of Cervantes," and he "strives to recreate this moment in time for perhaps a heightened awareness of the forces placed on this Spaniard's writing process" (29). Benedict asserts that Menard describes the process of attempting to 'become' Cervantes as "extremely difficult," "but he will attempt it nonetheless" (29). However, this is at odds with the text, which states that Menard explicitly rejects this strategy for being 'too easy.' The procedure that he does use involves creatively arriving at the exact text of Cervantes while holding on to his own Identity and cultural influences. Thus, while the words might be the same, to interpret "Menard's" text with an eye to authorial intention, one must open to a very different set of possibilities which are explicitly explored in the story.

Benedict's approach to "La biblioteca de Babel" holds that its "overarching message" is that "every book is rare, and therefore every book should be catalogued and treated with care" (32). Her analysis suggests that the value of the books in the story's Library is related to the "historical, social, and economic" processes that created them, yet does not engage with the idea that each book (according to the narrator) is a unique, divinely created combination of signs and, as such, has no historical, social, or economic context. We are also offered speculation that the bibliographer A.W. Pollard may have had a large influence on Borges, including inspiration for the "man of the book" in this story. Other examples of Borges' fiction are referenced principally for the way that they include examples of book editions, publishing firms, and booksellers with remarkable specificity.

I appreciated how Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares' two publishing houses (Editorial Destiempo and Editorial Oportet & Haereses) are described in detail, with extended analysis of *Dos fantasías memorables* and *Un modelo para la muerte.* Building on the scholarship of Cristina Parodi, Benedict focuses on the political dimension of Borges and Bioy's collaborations, suggesting that they respond to censorship under Juan Perón as well as his ideas regarding the role of education in society. It is worth mentioning that the unidentified illustrations of the 1948 edition of *Un modelo para la muerte* that receive special attention are wood-block illustrations for *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* produced in 1597 during the late Ming dynasty.

The conclusion explains that Borges' writing has been a strong influence in the field of book history, especially in the case of Gérard Genette and Chartier. It argues that approaching Borges through a material studies perspective expands the possibilities for this relationship. This final section also asserts that Borges tended to "use and reuse any old scrap of paper for his compositional practices" (275). For Benedict, this alleged use of scraps "signals how we can also think of the presence of (physical) palimpsests in this writer's life more literally as a reflection on the scarcity of resources that so often affects production processes in the publishing industry and, more generally, arises as a fundamental concern in current book history scholarship" (275). However, the source Benedict provides as evidence does not argue that Borges used or reused scraps of paper in his writing process; scarcity was not an issue for the author, who made use of notebooks for his manuscript compositions.

Benedict's book shows that Borges, despite deciding not to pursue formal bibliography, was deeply interested in books as physical objects, described them frequently with great attention to detail, and was aware of many aspects of bookmaking, marketing, and promotion due to his rich involvement with publishing, editing, translating, and reading. The importance of establishing the details of his concrete interactions with the publishing world—which are well-documented here—is profoundly clear and should make this book a welcome resource, especially given the influence of these experiences on his cultural impact, writing, and thought.

Silvia Dapía suggests that her book, *Jorge Luis Borges, Post-Analytic Philosophy, and Representation*, is designed to create a conversation across the divide between philosophy and fiction. She is mindful of the ways that, at times, literary works can be subsumed by philosophical frameworks and proposes, instead, a mode of interpretation that values the role that fiction can have in reformulating philosophical questions. Specifically, she argues that Borges' fiction operates as a creative context that receives philosophical inputs, through his readings of Bertrand Russell, Alexius Meinong, Hans Vaihinger, Arthur Schopenhauer, Fritz Mauthner and Friedrich Nietzsche, and transforms them in disruptive, generative ways. In this view, Borges' ability to refashion philosophical questions in a fictional mode allows his work to innovate philosophically with the aid of irony, ambiguity, contradiction, and shifting, multiple perspectives. Dapía's task is to read Borges with philosophical attention in order to best draw out his contributions as a precursor of post-analytic philosophers Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Donald Davidson, Nelson Goodman, and Arthur C. Danto. The clarity of Dapía's analysis allows for an invaluable dialogue between the author, Borges, and these philosophers that offers strong literary contributions while charting new directions for philosophical inquiry.

One of the highlights of the book is its careful analysis of "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," which builds on the scholarship of Daniel Balderston and establishes a rich dialogue with the work of Danto and Goodman. Questions regarding the nature of a "text" (an "abstract verbal entity" that can manifest itself physically in different ways) and a "work" (an identity imbued with meaning produced through interpretation) are brought to life with a close reading of the story that explores how contexts of production and interpretation can be understood as generating art objects. Menard's project—to create the text of Cervantes' *Quixote* in the 20th century—allows Dapía to fold in different philosophical approaches to interpretation's connection with authorial intention. While Dapía finds that Menard shifts his position from believing that authorial intention *fixes* the identity of the text to allowing for *different* contexts to come into play (115), I would suggest that it is the narrator, not Menard, who proposes the more flexible arts of purposeful anachronism and erroneous attribution, subtly accusing Madame Henri Bachelier of plagiarism in the process by suggesting we read her book as if she wrote it.

Whether or not Menard changes his beliefs regarding authorial intention seems to hinge on whether we find that his project collapses the processes of writing and reading into one creative, generative act. One could say that Menard decides to become the contemporary author of the *Quixote*—working through imperfect drafts and discarding them until they match the original—precisely because he does not believe in the legitimate possibility of approaching reading through his own idiosyncratic framework. In this view, Menard's *Quixote* is unique because of the rigidity of authorial intent; he, as its new author, determines the new work after a hard-fought creative process. Or, conversely, it is possible to suggest that this writing process (drafts and all) is essentially no different from a reading process, despite, fittingly, his stated intent. The story pushes against the limits of what it means to read or write until the distinction between the two is not easy

to hold on to. Crucially, Dapía includes a necessary discussion of the Anti-Semitic narrator that Borges creates for the story, suggesting that he and his ideas are worthy of skepticism and mistrust. Dapía insightfully highlights this dimension of the story to destabilize the discussed possibilities of textual identity and interpretation in an ironic register, showing how Borges, unlike the cited philosophers, is often interested in leaving the reader off-balance, searching for their own way forward.

The book's treatment of Borges' approach to intersubjectivity is creative and engaging—and is skillfully connected to questions regarding his conception of agency. In her analysis of "Deutches Requiem," Dapía finds that the story evokes Schopenhauer to suggest that the illusory nature of the self creates a problematic pantheism: the narrator (a Nazi named zur Linde) portrays himself as connected to the man he destroys (the Jewish character David Jerusalem) in a way that absolves him of responsibility. Given the skepticism that the Anti-Semitic narrator occasioned in "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote," it would be interesting to consider how this interpretation might change if the Nazi's perspective is not taken at face value. Specifically, one could conclude that zur Linde and David Jerusalem are, in fact, the very same character—in this case, the story would be narrating the insanity of the German Nazi who tries to exteriorize the Jewish part of himself, amputating it and then, finally, killing it so as to believe in the murderous fiction of his constructed purity (and the purity of his cruelty). This possibility (which might compound the culpability of the narrator) is reinforced by Borges' own writing about Nazism, which in part represented it as a horrific act of self-destruction by Germans attempting to deny the Jewishness of their own culture.

One of the principal areas of Dapía's investigation is the relationship between Borges' fiction and the American post-analytic approach to questioning the human capacity to represent reality. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is positioned as a key text, alongside "Blue Tigers," "Emma Zunz," and "Funes el memorioso." In her view, "like Bishop George Berkeley, Tlönians seem to believe that the things of which we are aware are only mental" (30). The "we" in this sentence is especially important, as it shows how Dapía frames Borges' stories as being focused on "*our* capacity to describe 'truly' or 'represent' the world" (20, emphasis mine). This leads to the position that Borges is arguing that "'facts' do not exist, and we are simply cut off from the world as it is" (47). However, there is another possibility that merits consideration: that, at times, Borges is writing about the context of *being-in-fiction*, of literary worlds that, in arising strictly out of text and literary imagination, exceed the limits of a shared everyday reality. His early essay "Después de las imágenes," for example, refers to the literary goal of exploring the specific nature of literature from within, instead of being satisfied with the problematization of the relationship between language and everyday experience. While Dapía describes how Russell and Wittgenstein's logical atomism attempts to "not fall prey to linguistic illusions" to "be able to talk about '*what there is*'" (3, emphasis mine), we can ask how might this apply, philosophically, when "what there is" consists *exclusively* of linguistic illusions. Rorty posits that "our systems and scientific theories are mere constructs rather than accurate representations of the way the world is in itself" (20). Yet the nature of this "accuracy" might change when the "world" is located within the construct of fiction: a nonspatial, successive, temporal reality emerging from a series of independent acts of textual expression.

Whether Borges is using fiction to participate in a philosophical debate regarding representation and everyday reality or whether he is repurposing these philosophical approaches to invite the reader to consider a uniquely provisional, unstable literary reality, Dapía's text provides a fascinating investigation of how Borges' fiction can be applied to the philosophical

examination of the construction of "nature" and "reality." When the focus is maintained on "our" ability to know or represent the world, Dapía suggests that Borges' fiction offers a form of ambiguity that philosophy cannot articulate: his texts, in this reading, oscillate between the possibilities of a "fuzzy, indeterminate world" or a more concrete world that "will remain always an enigma" (21).

I should note that Dapía underscores how reading "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" as a rejection of our ability to describe a shared world undermines any hope to distinguish justice from injustice. She finds that while Borges connects people's desire for the intelligible order of Tlön with the allure of Nazism, he does not offer any way of opposing Nazism that involves convictions regarding reality (47). However, reading the story as an allegory about the nature of fiction and its allures (and not everyday reality) may allow for different responses to this apparent contradiction. In this view, instead of a repudiation of rationality's ability to expand what is knowable about the world (a world that *resists* those efforts at every turn), we might find a warning about how easy it is for fascistic fictions to grab hold of people who are not motivated to push back against them at all. As Dapía notes, to read Borges' stories is to participate in a complex act of meaning-determination that shifts unpredictably within different frameworks, perspectives, and intertextual games; it is necessary to cultivate an active mistrust in the authority of narrators (and independently seek out other texts and perspectives) to participate as a reader and, in the process, develop a skillful, critical approach to interpretation. Perhaps developing disobedient, discerning readers in a time of dangerous fictions is one way that Borges responds in a political register.

Dapía has created a rich, unique conversation between the tradition of post-analytic philosophy and a wide variety of his stories and essays—one that I feel grateful to be allowed to participate in here. Her book is a wonderfully clear, precise, and brilliant exploration of the possibilities of reading Borges in a philosophical framework and should open new conversations for readers from literary or philosophical backgrounds.

Ariel de la Fuente opens his book with the idea that Jorge Luis Borges' struggles with sex and sexuality were a major part in his life. De la Fuente argues further that Borges drew from these experiences of difficulty when he wrote, transforming them in ways that are not easily perceptible given his oblique use of language and intertextual strategies of representation—techniques that responded to both the author's personal reticence and a general cultural aversion to the direct representation of sexual content in Argentina at the time. *Borges, Desire and Sex* is particularly valuable for the way it presents the constellation of poets and Orientalist writers who wrote on erotic themes and may have influenced Borges. It also interprets numerous stories and poems by drawing from characterizations of Borges' sexual life and potentially influential literary and philosophical representations of sex and sexuality. De la Fuente frames his book as the work of a historian using investigative criticism to unearth the "hidden, camouflaged, or riddled" (9) intentions of the author, which he tends to describe in biographical, historical, and psychological terms. To expand his analysis, however, De la Fuente engages with disciplines that he acknowledges less familiarity with, including literary analysis, speech pathology, psychology, and philosophy.

The section of the book dedicated to Borges' textual influences in the context of sexuality and eroticism is particularly strong. Argentine and British poets who write on erotic themes receive valuable extended attention, as does Verlaine. Many of the Orientalist texts that Borges read are shown to exemplify the racism and sexism of imperialist ideologies while simultaneously arguing for a more expansive, intercontinental vision of sex and sexuality in Europe. Richard Burton's

translations *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* and *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui* are analyzed in detail, though the latter example is only briefly referenced directly by Borges. While it is speculative to try and identify sections in these books that Borges may have been drawn to, showing the intersection of their "cosmopolitan" visions of sexuality with the racism and sexism of Orientalism is important and echoes the observations of Sonia Betancort, who has shown how Borges' interest in a cosmopolitan concept of Argentine identity drew from and reframed the exoticizing Orientalism of Europe.

The book's initial portrait of Borges' sexual life details several versions of a well-known experience of trauma in which Borges' father arranged for him to have a sexual encounter with a prostitute as a young man. Estela Canto and Donald Yates have each published accounts that describe how Borges came to believe that his father was sexually involved with the very same woman, which to him suggested an incestuous aspect to his experience and led to a psychological impediment to engaging in sexual activity throughout most of his adult life. De la Fuentes' parallel characterization of Borges' relationship with his mother as "platonic incest" (31) merits a critical response, as the oxymoronic term seems only to refer to the challenging aspects of their idiosyncratic, extremely close bond. De la Fuentes states that it is a technical term used by psychologists to describe the "exclusion" of one parent "from the more common family triangle" of father, mother, and child that results in a strong but "pathological" bond between the remaining parent and child. My review of the term suggests that it is not frequently used and that one of the individuals who attempted to coin it is very active in anti-trans circles. It seems likely that "platonic incest" is jargon designed to pathologize non-conventional family structures; De la Fuente notes in his book that the two cited psychologists believe that this phenomenon "is facilitated by the massive numbers of divorces, that make the absence of the father normal" (32). I would advocate for a word other than incest to describe the challenges that might result from having a difficult, extremely close relationship with one parent.

I also offer caution regarding the speculations connecting stuttering with sexual impotence and suicidal ideations. While there are different perspectives among psychologists and speech pathologists in terms of the possible relationship between stuttering and social anxiety disorders, there seems to be a strong professional consensus regarding the importance of not stigmatizing stuttering by offering speculative links with other conditions. As the sources referenced within the book assert that there is no established link between early childhood stuttering and social anxiety disorders later in life, it would have been useful to have a clearer depiction of the degree to which stuttering was a significant issue at all for Borges, or for how long.

On a related note, I would like to point out a few areas in which the investigative criticism is circumscribed by conventional gender norms. When De la Fuente (like Gregorio Santiago Montes) applies Borges' experiences of sexual trauma as a young man to his interpretation of "La intrusa," his analysis is structured by a strong gender binary. Both authors remind us that Borges stated that his characters were often lightly disguised versions of himself before tracing out parallels between the author and a character—yet they assume that the character promising autobiographical resonance is male. This assumption occurs despite the fact that the main character's name echoes that of the author in terms of etymology and sound ("Juliana Burgos" and "Jorge Luis Borges") and, far more importantly, that she is the only individual in the story who has no choice, agency, or voice, and finds herself caught between two beings with sexual desire uncomfortably linked by family bonds. The same comment applies to the author's approach to "Emma Zunz," whose protagonist is contextualized principally through discourses associated with her gender identity and not, for example, Borges's own experiences with using fiction to represent

his sexual trauma. For approaches that establish connections between Borges' life experiences and his female characters, see my chapter "Sex, Borrowed Bodies, and the Idea of Literary Progeny" in *Borges Beyond the Visible* (2019) and the more recent work of Audrey Harris Fernández.

One of the most enduring parts of *Borges, Desire, and Sex* is its skillful contextualization of how Borges negotiated interpretations that identified echoes of a gay relationship within "La intrusa." While De la Fuente does not interpret the story in the same register, he is able to show how Borges was aware of these possible responses to his work before it was published and included an oblique Biblical reference within its epigraph to (quietly) encourage it as one possibility among many. The author explores the tensions between that choice and Borges' own homophobia, suggesting that he became more open to representations of homosexuality after perceiving shifts in the literary and cultural landscape. De la Fuente then describes how Borges responded when Carlos Hugo Christensen's movie *La intrusa* was targeted by government censors who publicly associated it with homosexuality, publishing an article that critiqued its explicit representations of sexuality, expressed approval regarding its censorship, and communicated that the film should not have carried his name or any identifying features of his story (despite having sold the movie rights to the director). As a conclusion to the book, it is a reminder both of how sexuality can be subtly and powerfully woven into Borges' literary work and, too, how any attempt to pursue the hidden answers to intertextual puzzles in his writing must be open to an intentional project of multiplying meaning across different registers and social contexts.

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Antebi, Susan. *Embodied Archive. Disability in Post-Revolutionary Mexican Cultural Production*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2021. 282 pp. ISBN 9780-4720-3850-3

Gracias a las contribuciones de los *Disability Studies* sabemos que las manifestaciones históricas de la diferencia corporal han sido codificadas de maneras distintas y casi siempre como respuesta a negociaciones epistemológicas y discursivas de variada índole. Los procesos de definición y negociación de la discapacidad —y con ello de la funcionalidad corporal—se encuentran inevitablemente en el encuentro con otras definiciones de categorías sociales como persona, cuerpo, raza, nación, etcétera.

El trabajo de Susan Antebi es bien conocido en el medio académico latinoamericanista por sus estudios sobre los discursos estéticos y políticos que dieron forma a la diferencia corporal y la discapacidad durante las postrimerías del siglo XIX y el siglo XX en Hispanoamérica. Su libro *Carnal Inscriptions. Spanish American Narratives of Corporeal Difference and Disability* (2009) es a la fecha uno de los libros más útiles tanto para el estudio de los procesos discursivos sobre la discapacidad como para la comprensión de las posibilidades críticas de los métodos y enfoques del área.

En el libro que me ocupa, Antebi acota su mirada en cuanto a la extensión geográfica pero la amplía en el corpus de trabajo. Ya no es Hispanoamérica sino México. Ya no son solo expresiones culturales singulares sino que a propósito de estas estudia la nutrida y compleja red de documentos, prácticas y saberes que dieron forma a la discapacidad en los años posteriores al fin de la Revolución mexicana y la formación del estado mexicano moderno.

Como es sabido, gracias en parte a algunos de los estudios que la preceden y con los que dialoga provechosamente —por mencionar algunos, los de Alexandra Stern, Beatriz Urías

Horcasitas o David Dalton—, las primeras décadas de los gobiernos posrevolucionarios estuvieron marcadas por dos esfuerzos biopolíticos de normalización de la población mexicana: la consolidación del mestizaje como la dimensión estético-política de la nación y el proyecto de higiene pública, dirigido sobre todo a las comunidades marginales de las urbes y a las poblaciones indígenas. La convergencia de ambos proyectos de corte eugenésico coincide, y este es uno de los señalamientos más claros del libro, con la formación de un discurso de anormalización de la diferencia mediante la discapacidad. Como señala la autora: "Disability, in my archival and literary readings, is not reducible to particular diagnoses, but appears through the repeated engagement between perceived or experienced human differences, their potential causes and effects, and efforts to describe, limit, or erase them, as well as through an intentional witnessing of these processes and the actual or hypothetical injustices they encompass" (15).

El libro de Antebi, como el título lo adelanta, es un trabajo de profunda lectura del archivo discursivo de la discapacidad hecho mediante la revisión acuciosa de dos archivos documentales: el Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Salud y el Archivo General de la Nación. Los hallazgos documentales sirven para comprender la formación del discurso cultural y discursivo de la discapacidad en su trama ideológica y científica con la consolidación del estado mexicano posrevolucionario. Cada capítulo del libro gira en torno de "a mode of contingency —a dynamic through which difference may be placed in brackets, subsumed to its purported cause, or in which disability acts to rearrange the reader's perceptions and expectations" (22).

En su primer capítulo toma como punto de partida la novela *Eugenia* (1919) del médico y novelista Eduardo Urzáiz. Recientemente, tras permanecer en un cierto olvido entre la crítica, la novela ha ganado interés debido a su combinación de eugenesia y ciencia ficción en hispanoamérica. Antebi recurre también a los dibujos del novelista con los que muestra las diferentes maneras en las que aparecía en estos la diferencia corporal, especialmente étnica. Gracias a las distintas formas, Antebi sostiene su lectura de que el punto de vista del autor es contingente como "a key to the aesthetics and politics of disability and racial difference within an evolving and transnational framework" (67).

El segundo capítulo parte de la *Ética* de Vasconcelos y estudia la campaña contra el alcohol de las décadas 20 y 30. Analiza el valor contingente de la causalidad y su formación temporal entre el pasado y el futuro en el baile entre las posibilidades y las determinaciones en el consumo de alcohol y la decadencia corporal de los cuerpos mexicanos. La discapacidad aparece no solamente como una condición corporal presente sino como una que se despliega en el tiempo y que debe ser controlada mediante la localización de causas y efectos.

El tercer capítulo estudia el diseño del paisaje urbano mediante el trabajo de Juan O'Gorman en el diseño de escuelas primarias higiénicas para la clase trabajadora mexicana. En este capítulo, la discapacidad está asociada con la contigencia del espacio urbano y su dimensión material. En el encuentro entre el análisis psicopedagógico de los niños mexicanos (y la búsqueda idealizada de la normalidad en ello) y el desarrollo urbano higienista de O'Gorman, Antebi detecta que la discapacidad no es dejada fuera sino que termina siendo la condición que conduce las posibilidades arquitectónicas, que entonces trataban de enfocarse en la técnica y la estética.

El cuarto capítulo estudia la piel como el órgano del tacto y como el marcador de diferencia corporal a través de los trabajos del psiquiatra Gómez Robleda, quien desarrolló un estudio biotipológico de los mexicanos. El uso de datos biopolíoticos en el estudio de Gómez es caracterizado con mucho tino por la autora como "la prosa de las estadísticas". Esta resulta en la discapacidad contingente en relación con las contradicciones del conocimiento científico: la ambición por la mejora humana y la imposibilidad de conocer los cuerpos a todo detalle.

El quinto y último capítulo vuelve a las obras literarias y lee dos novelas fundamentales de Rafael M. Muñoz, *¡Vamonos con Pancho Villa!* y *Se llevaron el cañón para Bachimba*. A diferencia de los capítulos previos, la discapacidad no aparece mediada por contingencias sociales, sino que es esta la que rompe las estructuras establecidas. El origen del estado posrevolucionario, que tuvo entre sus objetivos la conformación de un cuerpo nacional normalizado, es un hecho tan violento que la discapacidad resultante de él es la contingencia mediadora de su proyecto narrativo.

Embodied Archive muestra las suturas de violencia que tejen los esfuerzos de normalización y progreso del estado posrevolucionario en México. Al reconocerlas podemos ver un horizonte histórico más complejo en los discursos; con ello, la historia nacional es también más profunda. Aparece ante nosotros como las nervaduras de un mosaico en el que vemos no sólo la imagen sino también las fuerzas que el marco contiene.

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Chacón, Felipe M. *El feliz ingenio neomexicano.* Edición, traducción y prólogo de Anna M. Nogar y A. Gabriel Meléndez. U of New Mexico P, 2021. 445 pp. ISBN 9780-8263-6327-5

El feliz ingenio neomexicano es la reedición definitiva de *Poesía y prosa* de Felipe M. Chacón (1873-1949). Incluye, además del texto original, su traducción íntegra al inglés y dos textos introductorios de Gabriel Meléndez y de Anna M. Nogar.

Meléndez señala que: "After 1929, Felipe M. Chacón and his book fell into obscurity for the next half century" (3). Su resurgimiento debe entenderse como parte del impulso intelectual que, tras el movimiento chicano, lleva al intento de crear un archivo que explique la genealogía cultural de la herencia hispana en los Estados Unidos. Después de un artículo pionero en 1977, en el arco que lo lleva de autor olvidado a la consagración canónica con este volumen, hay que incluir, de manera destacada el libro del propio Meléndez *All ls Not Lost*.

Además de la información, los puros datos que es posible encontrar en cualquier texto introductorio más o menos bien hecho, hay que subrayar y agradecer el entusiasmo con el que estos dos están escritos. Creo que un crítico verdaderamente se juega no en los textos donde destaza a un libro, sino en aquellos en los que muestra lo que apasiona su atención. Un buen ejemplo son los momentos de la vida periodística y política de Chacón que aparecen con gusto y gracia en el texto de Meléndez.

En el texto de Nogar hay que destacar la manera vigorosa y clara en que crea el contexto local de esta escritura: "Chacón wrote in Spanish and bilingually for readers who were forced to accommodate the English language while their own majority language—Spanish—was being systemically and institutionally erased" (29). Pero sin olvidar cómo precisamente esa escritura también muestra una aguda conciencia de lo que sucedía en el ámbito de la lengua española. Esto es, Chacón es al mismo tiempo un periodista y político en la era en que Nuevo México se convierte finalmente en uno de los estados de la unión (en 1912, el mismo año que se le concede a Arizona) y un autor que en su práctica poética dialoga con el Modernismo que lo alimenta como lector.

Justamente uno de los aspectos más agradecibles de este volumen es que las traducciones al inglés anotan la forma del poema original —serventesio, octava real, quinteto…— lo que ayuda a entender de manera más justa la amplia comprensión de la tradición del verso español que, como el resto de los poetas modernistas, Chacón poseía.

Ahora bien, leídos a cien años de distancia, los poemas y los textos en prosa de Chacón lo colocan como un poeta terciario en el ámbito de la lengua, pero sumamente interesante para revelar las características del periodo en que vivió y, sobre todo, del uso del español en Nuevo México. Pero se debe señalar que su carrera profesional consumió sus mejores horas y que la mayor parte de su talento lo despilfarró en versos de ocasión. Poemas, por otra parte, como los que Martí o Darío se veían obligados a inscribir en los álbumes y abanicos de las señoritas y señoras de sociedad que frecuentaban, poemas que se declamaban en ocasiones cívicas, dardos en verso que servían para aguijonear a sus rivales.

Esto no quiere decir que Chacón no haya dejado versos de interés, hacia los cuáles Nogar y Meléndez llevan a los lectores de manera experta. El libro, insisto, no carece de momentos felices, como los de estos versos:

> Una vieja de Orizaba
> tan sorda que nada oía,
> cuando alguien la interrogaba,
> tan sólo sí respondía
>
> [El marido la aconseja:]
> una vez diles que "sí"
> y otra vez diles que "no" (105).

Hay en estos octosílabos narrativos un aire de eternidad, los recorre el aliento del viejísimo romance, que nunca deja de renovar su gracia. Así, en la zona en que su dicción menos se engola y permite que la atraviese el habla popular, es donde Chacón brilla:

> Dicha plena entre timbales,
> Carritos y caramelos! (132)

Por supuesto es la zona que enmarca el título mismo del libro. Sin duda más que en la persistencia que requiere el genio, sus mejores poemas son frutos de la ligereza del ingenio.
Sin embargo, hay algo más que en ocasiones se esboza aquí:

> perderse el bemol de un de profundis
> que se arrastra en el cieno de la oruga
> suspirando "*Sic tránsit gloria mundis*"… (99)

Por momentos el puro ingenio como vehículo de la pervivencia de lo popular, sin extinguirse, ni impostar una dicción que le venía ancha (o que sabía falsa), Chacón muestra lo que sabe pero sin abandonar su fortuna lúdica.

Poesía y prosa se publicó originalmente en 1924, lo que significa que Chacón podría haber leído *Zozobra*, que había aparecido en 1919, dos años antes de la muerte de Ramón López Velarde. Me pregunto, si las limitaciones e improbabilidades del acceso material le hubieran brindado este modelo, qué más nos hubiera dado.

José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra, University of Houston

Cosentino, Olivia, and Brian Price, eds. *The Lost Cinema of Mexico: From Lucha Libre to Cine Familiar and Other Churros*. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 2022. 243 pp. ISBN 9781-6834-0305-0

To tell the story of Mexican cinema, critics and chroniclers have long relied on a conventional periodization organized around its so-called "Golden Age," a phase covering roughly the mid-1930s through to the early '50s when the still young national film industry achieved at least the outward appearance of creative and commercial solidity. Logically, for such a "Golden Age" to have existed, it must be understood to have come to an end; hence much scholarly work presupposes national cinema's deterioration from the late '50s onwards. This overdetermining account gets further entrenched by commonplace affirmations of the remarkable comeback staged by the industry before the turn of the millennium, which opened a renewed period of sustained growth in Mexican filmmaking. *The Lost Cinema of Mexico*, edited by Olivia Cosentino and Brian Price, constitutes the first comprehensive effort to revise this standard narrative of "birth, boom, death, and rebirth" that underlies much of the field's research (1). The approach entails critical reassessments of "lost" films produced from the late '50s to the late '80s, an era that many Mexican film histories have treated selectively, at best, and disparagingly, at worst.

The collection includes seven investigative essays arranged in loose chronological order, as well as a substantial introduction by the editors, and by way of conclusion, a brief synthesis by Dolores Tierney. In chapter one, Price charts the development of rock and roll films, a genre which accounts for a major proportion of the total national cinema produced during the late '50s and '60s. Despite their ubiquity, rock-themed films were always considered a transient fad and very little research about them exists. Price makes the case for recuperating these underappreciated films for serious study by examining their resonance with Mexico's emergent youth culture. The wrestling genre, or *cine de luchadores*, by contrast, is much better known and often presented as the paradigmatic model of low-budget Mexican film production, replete as it is with stock characters, formulaic narratives, and slapdash special effects. In *The Lost Cinema*'s second chapter, David S. Dalton finds a somewhat original entry point into the popular corpus of *lucha libre* films by exploring the star persona of Lorena Velázquez, who infused her limited roles in these masculinist films with at least a modicum of feminine empowerment.

Chapter three concerns a countercultural movement of independent filmmakers who used the Super 8 format to create political documentaries as well as avant-garde experimental cinema in the '60s and '70s. Iván Eusebio Aguirre Darancou shows how these *superocheros* founded participatory communities of artists and activists during a time of intensified state repression and constituted an important current of resistance outside the mainstream film industry. In chapter four, Christopher Conway argues that violent gunslinger films known as Chili Westerns reward the critical application of sophisticated psychoanalytic reading methods by uncovering the suppressed dimensions of Mexico's master narratives of machismo and the destabilized condition of the masculine ego. Chapter five deals with a somewhat culturally anomalous subset of commercial melodramas dealing with Blackness and racial discrimination. Carolyn Fornoff explains that although race became a salient theme for at least some Mexican filmmakers during the '70s in the context of the transnational Black Power movement, it remained difficult for them to acknowledge the existence of Mexico's own Black communities and the social practices of racism affecting them.

In chapter six, Cosentino offers a detailed look at *cine familiar* as both a formula for film content and an industrial practice in the '80s, paying close attention to youth-oriented movies

produced by members of the Galindo family, several of which featured child actors/pop singers Lucerito and Pedrito Fernández. The seventh chapter, by Ignacio Sánchez Prado, concerns the work of director Felipe Cazals. While his independent films are highly regarded, critics have been less certain what to make of the low-budget commercial cinema he directed in the early '80s when state funding for filmmakers almost totally disappeared. While even Cazals himself disowns the films he made during these years, Sánchez Prado argues that the experience of adapting his style to the exigencies of popular genres and commercial production methods ought to be treated as integral to any full assessment of the director's career.

The editors and contributors recognize that much of the cinema studied in this collection has never been truly "lost." Popular films from these decades routinely appear on television, some have been restored and rereleased on DVD or screened at specialist festivals, and thousands of nostalgic fans maintain informal archives on YouTube where they interact with other enthusiasts in the comment sections. One of the main obstacles to wider investigative interest in the commercial cinema of this era, according to the editors, consists of cultural elitism among certain influential figures in institutional positions in Mexico. They cite the example of Alejandro Pelayo, director of the Cineteca Nacional, who sneered at the idea of showing classic wrestling movies at Mexico's most prestigious film venue (2-6). While Pelayo and others like him will continue to act as petulant guardians of aesthetic distinction in Mexico's cinematic heritage, there is no strong reason why this should hinder serious scholarly and curatorial work that seeks to explore the popular side of Mexican film history beyond the Golden Age.

Indeed, as the editors acknowledge, retrospective research on commercial cinema has been gaining momentum in recent years with such groundbreaking publications as Seraina Rohrer's *La India María* (2018) and *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America* (2009), a volume edited by Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney in which a majority of chapters deal with Mexican cinema. The important goal of cultural de-hierarchization to which *The Lost Cinema* aspires is not entirely well served by the defensive posture taken by editors when they frame their project's interest in crowd-pleasing genre films as a defiant counterattack against a powerful cohort of Mexican snobs who aggressively turn up their noses at anything other than prizeworthy festival cinema. Engaging in an intellectual turf war of this kind not only risks further reifying the specious boundary between "high" and "low" cultures but also occludes the agenda-setting potential of U.S.-based research and publishing.

A more promising tactic, effectively demonstrated by Sánchez Prado in his chapter on Cazals, entails exposing complex cultural confluences in order to undermine the universalist rules of art and criticism. One of the more dubious claims that arises partly from the editors' antagonistic approach is the suggestion that the value of recovering "lost" cinema derives from its association with working-class as opposed to more affluent audiences (19). Such an assertion is difficult to substantiate without a granular analysis of the available data on reception. Moreover, it is contradicted by the research presented in the volume itself, which clearly shows that many of the era's popular genres (e.g., family films, rock films, melodramas) specifically targeted middle-class consumers. Relatedly, while the importance of transnational spectatorship receives some attention from the editors and authors, more detailed discussion of this topic would have been appropriate given that as much as three quarters of Mexican film revenue was being earned in the U.S. by the beginning of the '80s (150).

Mexican cinema during the decades of the '60s to '80s is undoubtedly overdue for serious critical reconsideration, and *The Lost Cinema of Mexico* is an important volume that opens meaningful paths toward this aim. More work remains to be done before the post-Golden Age

period is likely to shake off the stigma of "crisis" as the editors hope (10). However, one need not be convinced that Mexican filmmaking was entirely healthy during these "lost" years to recognize the relevance of the changes that occurred and to appreciate the cultural significance of what was produced.

Samanta Ordóñez, Wake Forest University

Janzen, Rebecca. *Unholy Trinity: State, Church, and Film in México.* New York: SUNY P, 2021. 174 pp. ISBN 9781-4384-8531-7

In *Unholy Trinity: State, Church, and Film in Mexico,* Rebecca Janzen examines the way that Catholicism is presented in twentieth-century Mexican cinema, from the Golden Age to the early 2000s. Janzen argues that filmmaking produces meaning and ultimately shapes the way people live their lives. Extending this to the examination of Catholicism in film allows Janzen to consider the way film "can help to either uphold or critique social norms, and likewise to support or critique the government, its leaders, or the Church" (6). Through the analytical focus on religious symbols, *Unholy Trinity* considers how the films operate as an avenue of communication with the audience about the importance of religion, and over time, morph into a space of robust critique of Catholicism. To follow this evolution, Janzen studies how the different time periods reveal the changing relationship between the Mexican state and the Catholic Church, as well as the relationship that the state had with filmmaking. In terms of method, Janzen richly contextualizes each film through historical context and political history. Then, through careful close readings of each film, supported by shot analysis, she argues that context is crucial in understanding the original intention of the religious representation and the way that religion is used as a tool to either criticize or to progress foundations of the state.

In the first chapter, Janzen focuses on films that received state funding to understand how the state wanted to shape the composition of the post-revolutionary nation and family. The films under consideration include: *María Candelaria* (1944), *Río Escondido* (1948), and *El Seminarista* (1949). She argues that the religious imagery in these Golden Age films, "was one way that these films communicated the need for revolutionary measures of health and education and the boundaries of acceptable behavior for men and women" (48). In other words, cinema was a tool that was used by the Mexican state to communicate with the audience what was expected of them. The representation of Rosaura in *Rio Escondido* communicates to the audience that an ideal woman is one who places the state goals of modernity before her own health and needs. Similarly, in *El Seminarista,* the protagonist Miguel, performs masculinity in a way that reflects an ideal patriarch. Despite being derailed of his Catholic path as a seminarista, by a woman, Miguel is able to overcome the obstacles with the constraints of Catholicism. These films develop the conceit of the ideal revolutionary family through the use of religious symbols.

In Chapter 2, Janzen moves to the 1960s and 1970s, a period of political turmoil and growing criticism aimed at the Catholic church. In this chapter, Janzen analyzes *El oficio más antiguo* (1970), *Las chicas malas del padre Méndez* (1970), and *Canoa* (1976), which "offer a damning verdict on Mexico's religion, political, and social context, and the possibilities for long-term change" (88). In this trio, Janzen finds the common denominator of these films: religious leaders, and particularly priests to show how the seventies was a period in which the priest character was vigorously critiqued. The differing portrayals of religious leaders in these films

indicate, as Janzen proposes, changing perceptions of the Church especially in comparison with depictions of priests in Golden Age cinema.

The third and last chapter focuses on film adaptations produced during the neoliberal period from the 1990s and early 2000s to establish the acceptable boundaries for gender roles through "troubling religious figures, perverted religious spaces, and frightening religious imagery" (89). These films include *Ángel de fuego* (1992), *Novia que te vea* (1994), and *El crimen del padre Amaro* (Carrera, 2002). This chapter is crucial in the development of Janzen's argument because she expands the scope of consideration beyond Catholicism to look at the cinematic representation of Judaism to reconsider who belongs in Mexico. Produced during a period of economic crisis, these films depict characters whose belonging within the nation is problematized by their economic status or religious beliefs. Religious imagery in these films reveals the difficulty of those who are marginalized to find comfort in traditional conceits of national belonging.

Unholy Trinity makes the case that studying the representation of religion through cinema helps us understand the conflicted relationship that the Mexican audience is undergoing with Catholicism. In the past, cinema not only furthered the Catholic faith that Mexicans had, but throughout time it became a space of critique and reflection. Cinema allows spectators to reflect on their current relationship with religion and the influences that the state wants to impose on them. Janzen's method of analyzing each film included in her study in-depth allows for a greater understanding of the differing ways that Catholic symbols manifest in Mexican cinema and what this representation indicates about not only the relationship between the state and the Catholic Church, but also what religion signifies for the presumed public. Janzen is careful to parse similarities across her considered corpus, but also contradictory representations produced during similar time periods. This book exemplifies the intersectional methodological approach that hones in on the changing relationship between cinema, the Mexican state, and Catholicism. In the future, others can build from Janzen's research to consider how other films in Mexican cinema depict, criticize, and interpret the ongoing relationship with the Catholic Church. This book is a valuable resource for film scholars interested in religion and the way cinema shapes and contests collective values.

Beatriz Jiménez, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Leminski, Paulo. *All Poetry*. Translators Charles Perrone and Ivan Justen Santana. Hanover, CT: New London Librarium. ISBN 9781-9470-7464-4

The release of this translation of Paulo Leminski's collected poems is a major event. Leminski (1944-1989) is that rare case of a hard-core poet who reached a mass audience. A native of the adminstratively admirable but unglamorous Brazilian urb of Curitiba, most of Leminski's books were self-printed in various non-commercial partnerships. But from his early twenties he was recognized and published in journals edited by São Paulo's triumvirate of the concrete movement (*concreto*), the brothers Campos and Décio Pignitari. Leminski was a polyglot, a translator of Beckett, Joyce, Mishima, Petronius' *Satiricon*, and much more, and a biographer of Jesus, Trotsky, the haiku master Matsuo Bashō and the Afro-Brazilian symbolist poet Cruz e Souza. Apart from his vanguardist chops, he was a figure of note in 1970s Brazilian counterculture, as infused by Tropicalism, prog rock and psychedelia, and leftist Francophilia. He was also a judo blackbelt. His kaleidoscopic dexterity is suggested by his many epithets, from "Rimbaud de

Curitiba" to "samurai malandro." Happily, in 2013 the preeminent Brazilian publishing house, Companhia das Letras, launched an edition of his collected poetry, *Toda poesia*, curated by his collaborator and and ex-wife, Alice Ruiz. It sold over 200,000 copies (in Brazil, a watershed). The legend, born earlier under anarcho-bohemian kicks and punches, was now organized and canonical. The book reviewed is the translation of that compendium.

Leminski's oeuvre includes experimental prose and partnerships in song compositions and mixed media, but his signature genre is very short untitled poems which evoke flashes of quotidian perception, leveraged by ludic inventiveness, and moved by metaphoric pearl-strings, euphony or truncated narrative. Perhaps the key structural influence is haiku, both in the juxtaposition of two or three rhetorical units and in the appreciation of playful conceits. (Though Westerners tend to consider haikus as gravely sublime, concrete+abstract scapes, Leminski explains and demonstrates otherwise.)

All this is outlined in the concise and masterful but regrettably short "Afterword" by the translators, Charles Perrone, a retired eminent Brazilianist and foreign collaborator in Brazilian neo-concrete, and the Curitibano, Ivan Justen Santana, an academically trained translator with a thesis on Leminski. In short, an ideal team…faced with a daunting task. Consider, for example, the posthumous book title, *La vie en close* (Brasiliense, 1991), derived from a line in a poem composed in French and entitled, "L'être avant la lettre": the title puns on the homophony of "l'être" and "lettre" and uses the syntagme "avant la lettre" (meaning a neologism, or a practice innovatively implemented before it becomes widespread). "La vie en close" puns firstly on the eponymous Edith Piaf song, "La vie en rose." which describes lovers' idealism. The rest of the 8-line poem pursues an objectivist, thing-centeredness (cf. the French poet, Francis Ponge). "Close," meanwhile, is a Brazilian truncated calc from the Hollywoodian "close-up." Immediately upon launching, the translators' barque hits a sandbar ("life at close"). But this is pedagogically compensated by their notation of the rhyme scheme. Leminski might well have been tickled. The translators deserve our compassion.

Leminski played creatively between languages in his poetry (cf. his neologism, and 1-word poem, "PERHAPPINESS"). Errors (for example, above, the slip in his "qui n'ont pas un autre choix" instead of "qui n'ont pas d'autre choix") are the opposite of the real point which is not the imperfections (incomplete correspondences) of most translations of verbal art, but rather the felicitous accidents of openings afforded by the poetical found objects in the target language and other languages, generally inexistent in the original.

This constructive credo had been theorized and implemented by the scholarly vector of concrete, which, while it sought solidarity with the popular ("Coca Cola… Cloaca…"), never overcame a class-disconnect. Leminski transcends these chasms, Icarus-like. His license is a liberation which reveals how concrete was destined to a John the Baptist role, its officers excluded from the indulgences of its hedonistic inheritors, the 1970s counterculture elite. Leminski fused the utopian aspirations of concrete with an existential incorporation of the quotidian, a *dasein* with a chutzpah that recalls both Oswald de Andrade's cosmopolitan-nationalist performance without the need for hyperbolic manifestos, and Cesar Vallejo's peripheral modernism. The local Brazilian corner-bar becomes Les Deux Magots (the Parisian café of surrealists, existentialists, and ex-pats):

pariso	i parisize
novayorquizo	i newyorkize
moscoviteio	i moscovitate
sem sair do bar	without leaving the bar

(....)	(…)
só meu amor é meu deus	only my love is my god
eu sou o seu profeta	i am its prophet

If life is a jingle-jangle pile of shards of broken poetry, Leminski is a crack treasure hunter:

mira telescópica	telescopic sight
de rifle de precisão	of a precision rifle
ou janela quebrada	or a broken window
onde uma criança se debruça	where a child in convolutions
pra ver as coisas que são	can see the things that are
cenas da revolução russa?	scenes from the russian revolution?
(...)	(…)
cada manhã que nasce	each day that breaks
me nasce	a rose is risen
uma rosa na face	on my face

Caetano Veloso's well-known song version ("Verdura") of an untitled Leminski poem manages in the duration of a mere minute to intensify the vivid original, whose two stanzas counterpoint an aesthetic sublimation with a farcical reminder of third-world sociological blues.

de repente	all of a sudden
me lembro do verde	i recall the green
da cor verde	of the color green
a mais verde que existe	the greenest ever seen
a cor mais alegre	the happiest color
a cor mais triste	the saddest color
o verde que vestes	the green you wear now
o verde que vestiste	the green you were wearing
o dia em que eu te vi	the day i've first seen you
o dia em que me viste	the day you've seen me too
de repente	all of a sudden
vendi meus filhos	i sold my children
a uma família americana	to an american family
eles têm carro	they've got the cars
eles têm grana	they've got the money
eles têm casa	they've got the houses
a grama é bacana	the lawns are so funny
só assim eles podem voltar	only this way they can come back
e pegar um sol em Copacabana	and enjoy copacabana when it's sunny

Not all shards are gems, however, as the reader may have thought to herself in encountering "a rose is risen" above. The English translation of "Verdura" does not mount to the challenge of the euphonic "v" alliteration of the Portuguese. The use of present perfect rather than simple past in the English is ungrammatical and unhelpful. In rendering "bacana" as "funny" in order to preserve

a rhyme scheme (with "sunny"), the semantic loss is greater than the aural win. One infers from such examples that the collaboration between the Anglophone and the Lusophone translators was mismanaged. But even Caetano can miss things—naming the song "Verdura" (vegetal green rather than "greenness"), when it could have been "Verdor" ("greenness," with a relevant pun (verde + dor), or "Verdade" ("Truth"), each of which would straddle the respective rhetorics of both stanzas, would seem a misstep (perhaps unintentionally rectified indirectly in the naming of his tome of memoirs as *Verdade Tropical*), even if "Verdura" contains another pun (dura verdade verde). This translated volume has many missteps and some mistakes. But so what? In translation, as in life, we regret the challenges we failed to even attempt more than the misadventures that we did, and we should recognize found objects more than lost stuff.

Piers Armstrong, Cal Arts.

Leminski, Paulo. *All Poetry*. Translators Charles Perrone and Ivan Justen Santana. Hanover, CT: New London Librarium. ISBN 9781-9470-7464-4

Poetry is always regarded as the most difficult of all literary genres to translate. Not a few have said it is impossible to translate, that the interplay of sound and sense is too closely tied to the poem's original language to allow for its reconstruction in another language system. The loss, it is thought, is just too great.

Still, we do it.

All Poetry, a collection of poems by the great Brazilian poet, Paulo Leminski, and translated into English here by Charles A. Perrone and Ivan Justen Santana, stands, glowingly, as an exception to this rule. Admired in Brazil as a poet who plays with opposites, and as one who allows his language a level of semantically productive free play rarely seen anywhere, Leminski is challenging. He demands a lot of his readers. But as millions of Brazilians will attest, he is also captivating. He tells the truth about our time, the age in which we all live, and he does it with the kind of wit and incisiveness we expect from our great poets. Especially our great Brazilian poets.

Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of his translators, Leminski now lives in English as well. And he does so very much as he lives in *Brasileiro*, his fluid and expressive native tongue. Perrone and Santana have achieved the most elusive form of success a translator of poetry can hope to attain: they have come very close to doing in modern day American English what Leminski does, thematically and stylistically, in his original medium of expression. In other words, the reader of *All Poetry* will come to know Leminski in ways very close to how his readers know him in his native language. This is a rare occurrence in the world of translated poetry, and when it manifests itself, it is reason to rejoice. And so we should in this case.

The poems rendered here into English give the lie to the old adage that translated poetry is inherently inferior to the original. Often it is, but here it is not. Even Leminski's dazzling word play is reconstructed, and without losing even a smidgen (well, maybe a smidgen, but very rarely) of the original's bite and sting. It is a wonder how closely Perrone and Santana match the twists and turns of the original poems. The tone, always shifting, is pitch perfect, and the formal fireworks are delightfully replicated. Comparing Leminski's poetry in the original and in these supple, evocative translations is like watching Pelé and Garrincha play together on the same pitch. What the one does, the other responds to perfectly. The reader of *All Poetry* can be confident that she can now speak not only of Leminski's themes and concerns but of his signature style as well.

If you want to know what the best of late twentieth-century Brazilian poetry is like, you must know the work of Paulo Leminski. Now, thanks to Perrone and Santana, our Brazilian bard sings as lyrically, and as enigmatically, in English as he does in his mellifluous yet tart Brazilian Portuguese.

All Poetry is a major achievement, and it reminds us all that the world of poetry is truly global in nature. But it also reminds us of how important translators are. Without them, we would never know poets like Paulo Leminski.

Earl E. Fitz, Vanderbilt University

Long, Ryan F. *Queer Exposures: Sexuality & Photography in Roberto Bolaño's Fiction & Poetry*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2021. 312 pp. ISBN 9780-8229-4669-4

In *Queer Exposures*, Ryan Long invites us to become promiscuous readers and remain attentive to the interruptions, disorientations, and reinterpretations of Roberto Bolaño's oeuvre. Rather than looking for and desiring certainty of meaning, representation, and interpretation, Long gestures towards the critical potential of the contingency of meaning-making and the "productive uncertainty" generated by unpredictable readings, re-readings, and queer exposures to and of Bolaño's fiction and poetry. For Long, queerness marks less the references to nonnormative desires and its attendant representations in Bolaño, which are certainly important and discussed throughout the book, and more the "points of rupture and potential transformation" as well as the "openness and interrelationality" that he advances not as a description but as a method—a queer method of reading that rejects "totality, teleology, and subjective coherency" (9, 5). Queering Bolaño, then, entails unsettling the desire for narrative control, disrupting the certainty of autobiographical and historical references, and rejecting the linear chronology of the production, publication, and circulation of his texts.

One of the main interventions of *Queer Exposures* is Long's theorization of *intemperie* as an object and method of analysis to critically engage with the contingent spatial and temporal encounters and unexpected returns within and to Bolaño's texts. The book uniquely stages this queer poetics in Chapter 1 with the analysis of "Labyrinth," a short story published after Bolaño's death in the collection *El secreto del mal*, to which Long returns time and again throughout the book. This story helps him to theorize *intemperie* as a "method of reading that foregrounds spatial and temporal exposure; the interconnections among exposure, storytelling, and close reading; and a definition of literature as a 'territory of risk'" (28). With his discussion of *intemperie*, Long asks us to renounce to definite interpretations, coherency, linearity, and authority to focus on moments of repetitions, transformations, and ghostly returns, giving up all together the notion of certainty. Therefore, *intemperie* functions in Long's theorization of Bolaño's work as a form of contingency. After all, the production of meaning is as infinite as the number of readers, readings, and re-readings. Long masterfully demonstrates this premise by dwelling on key moments of exposure, returns to and returns of "Labyrinth" throughout the book and its attendant citations and reappearances of characters, dreams, stories, and photographic negatives, flirting with but also denying a totalizing framing.

As a true *detective*, Long considers autobiographical and historical references, particularly those related to 1968, the Pinochet dictatorship, 1976 (the year the photo described in "Labyrinth" was supposedly taken), or 1977 (the year he left Mexico), to mention a few prominent examples.

And yet, he resists definite interpretations of the significance and ultimate meanings of these encounters. Long ultimately asks his readers to think of returns, unrealized, and future exposures to and encounters with Bolaño as contingent potentialities of that which has not yet been realized. This is how I interpret the queer *espera* and *esperanza* that our exposures to Bolaño generate and that Long thoroughly analyzes: a call to reject the temptation and desire to penetrate and decipher Bolaño's work or, for that matter, any work. Instead, he insists that we allow ourselves to be queerly exposed to it, attentive to the interruptions and interrelations it engenders in order to dwell on the intimate interconnections across spatiotemporal encounters with it. Freed from spatiotemporal boundaries and the imperative to look for a sense of certainty, coherency, and teleology, we can return again to the radical and liberatory potential of literature.

The other chapters return time and again to such spaces of intermediacy and contingency. Chapter 2 centers on Bolaños's poetry through the motifs of immobility and sexuality vis-á-vis photography. It erotically exposes readers to the autobiographical to critique the coherence of lived experience and normative subjectivity. Chapter 3 continues the exploration of gender and sexuality in Bolaño's poetry with attention to the homoerotic and the homosexual and the failed Latin American revolution. It poses poetry as "erotic return," embracing a multiplicity of subject positions, reminding us of the effect produced by exposure to multiple photographic negatives (107). Chapter 4 traces the figure of the detective to illustrate the infinite ways to create meaning. By tracing various "itineraries of *intemperie*" in multiple poems and the short story "Detectives," Long foregrounds once more a photographic analysis to suggest how each re-reading of Bolaño's texts mirrors a potential erotic encounter of returns and repetitions but each time with the introduction of difference—just like we return to observe and be observed by photographs time and again. Chapter 5 centers around a queer critique of violence and patriarchal narratives through ghostly returns centering the work that poetry and the poetic perform in *The Savage Detectives*. Finally, Chapter 6 returns to the figure of textual constellations that Bolaño's oeuvre conjures through queer exposures. Here Long invites readers to contemplate Bolaño's texts, such as *Distant Star*, *Detectives*, *2666*, or *Woes*, in a "constellation-like relationship," highlighting not only our past, present, and future queer exposures to these texts but also the potential erotic encounters of these texts vis-à-vis one another (191).

By rigorously engaging with the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, together with Sarah Pollack, Héctor Hoyos, Celina Manzoni, and Oswaldo Zavala, to mention a few, Long actualizes the critical promise of queer theory and the generative potential it can have in relation to Latin American criticism. But as a bilingual reader, I wanted to find out more about Long's experience reading, rereading, and writing about Bolaño in Spanish and English and his thoughts on how each translation may mediate, intermediate, or remediate our queer exposures to Bolaño. I also began to wonder what a digital *intemperie* would look like to reflect on the queer losses, suspensions, and failures brought about by digital technologies and hypertexts of Bolaño's work. Long's queer reading of Bolaño, however, masterfully illustrates the potential of such future queer exposures as other means to approach the literature of that which has yet to come.

Manuel R. Cuellar, The George Washington University

Mack, Edward. *Acquired Alterity: Migration, Identity, and Literary Nationalism*. Oakland: U of California P, 2022. Edición Kindle. ISBN 9780-5203-8305-0

En este libro Edward Mack presenta un mapa literario de la identidad nipo-brasileña durante las primeras décadas de su formación que arroja luz sobre el desarrollo de un grupo latino-asiático diaspórico poco estudiado en el mundo anglófono. El autor, Edward Mack basa su argumento en un análisis detallado de los factores sociales, económicos, y políticos que influyeron en la formación y el desarrollo de los nipo-brasileños entre los años 1908 y 1941 como grupo étnico sutilmente distinto de la cultura metropolitana de su país natal, y con su propia literatura. Mack también traduce e incluye diez textos primarios representativos de la literatura nipo-brasileña de la primera etapa de su colonia, un recurso tremendamente valioso que nos da la oportunidad de experimentar directamente la perspectiva de los colonos nipo-brasileños sobre sus experiencias en Brasil y su creciente adaptación e hibridación cultural y lingüística para sobrevivir en su nuevo entorno.

Acquired Alterity incluye una introducción amplia y estilísticamente accesible de la historia política, económica y social de Japón y Brasil en las últimas décadas del siglo XIX y las primeras del siglo XX. Ahí se explica cómo los nipo-brasileños se beneficiaron de la situación singular de recibir subsidios tanto del gobierno de su país de origen como de su país de destino para emigrar. Mack explica que este subsidio bilateral, motivado por el deseo del gobierno de Japón de expandir su influencia, y por el gobierno de Brasil de adquirir más trabajadores agrícolas, hace que la experiencia de los nipo-brasileños sea única entre grupos emigrantes. Aunque este contexto histórico enfatiza los aspectos singulares de la experiencia migratoria de los nipo-brasileños, también deja claro que su comunidad compartía muchas de las mismas experiencias y ansiedades de otros grupos emigrantes, particularmente el miedo a la pérdida de su idioma, algo que motivaba la gran producción y consumo de literatura escrita en japonés dentro de la comunidad.

El marco retórico utilizado en *Acquired Alterity* se basa en la "holy quadrinity" o la santa cuadrinidad de Estado, cultura, etnicidad y lengua postulada por Komori Yōichi para definir la literatura nacional japonesa. Mack estructura *Acquired Alterity* como una discusión de estos cuatro elementos. Los capítulos dos y tres se centran en la discusión del Estado y de la cultura japonesa en relación con la producción literaria de los nipo-brasileños. Los capítulos cuatro y cinco se enfocan directamente en la discusión de etnicidad y lengua. La discusión de la complejidad del deseo general de los nipo-brasileños de volver a Japón aunque muy pocos lo lograron, las complejidades de la doble ciudadanía producida por las leyes de Brasil y de Japón, y los fuertes esfuerzos de los nipo-brasileños por mantener un japonés "puro" a la vez que estaban introduciendo más palabras portuguesas en su lengua hablada y en su idioma escrito, son algunos de los temas que se discuten en estos capítulos. Para Mack, estas paradojas producen la alteridad adquirida de los nipo-brasileños

Entre los capítulos tres y cuatro, hallamos una sección titulada "Ten Stories from Brazil", escogidas porque representan los textos más populares y distribuidos producidos por la comunidad nipo-brasileña durante las primeras tres décadas de su existencia. La decisión de Mack de traducir estos textos escritos originalmente en japonés al inglés expande por mucho el número de posibles lectores de estos textos. Además, la decisión de incluir los textos enteros dentro *Acquired Alterity* en vez de ponerlos en un libro separado da a los lectores la oportunidad de leer los textos a los cuáles Mack se refiere a lo largo de *Acquired Alterity*.

Los textos de "Ten Stories from Brazil" recogen trozos de la vida cotidiana y las experiencias y los sufrimientos de las primeras generaciones de los nipo-brasileños. Una de las

más interesantes es "An Age of Speculative Farming" de Sonobe Takeo, que cuenta la historia de un triángulo amoroso entre una prostituta medio japonesa llamada Hanaoka Ruriko, un granjero de tomates nipo-brasileño, y un joven obrero recién llegado de Japón. La historia muestra cómo los nipo-brasileños crearon su propia estructura social con dinámicas de poder muy distintas a las del Japón metropolitano. Además, la historia "Ashes" de Takemoto Yoshio, cuenta el lado más oscuro de la emigración japonesa a Brasil, describiendo una historia de enfermedad, muerte, violencia y borrachera, y los sueños rotos de dos hermanos nipo-brasileños.

Estas historias ofrecen una lectura interesante y accesible, y los intentos de Mack por mantener aspectos estilísticos del idioma japonés en su traducción conservan mucho del tono original. Además de la diversión que estas historias ofrecen al lector también sirven un propósito importante al demostrar los cambios lingüísticos que producen una alteridad adquirida para los nipo-brasileños, mostrando el uso de una gran cantidad de palabras de origen portugués en vez de sus equivalentes japoneses como *lotería*, *lata* y *botequim.*

Visto en su totalidad, *Acquired Alterity: Migration, Identity, and Literary Nationalism* es un libro que logra compartir no solo una historia detallada de la primera etapa del pueblo nipo-brasileño, sino que también abre el camino, a través de sus traducciones de diez relatos, al estudio más amplio de la literatura nipo-brasileña en el mundo anglófono. Cierto es que algunas secciones de la introducción contienen una cantidad excesiva de palabras técnicas que dificultan la lectura, pero este fallo se corrige a lo largo del resto de libro, escrito con un estilo accesible e intelectualmente estimulante, que servirá, sin lugar a dudas, como un referente clave en los estudios en torno a la literatura nipo-brasileña.

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Negrín, Edith. *Letras sobre un dios mineral: el petróleo mexicano en la narrativa*. El Colegio de México, UNAM, 2017. 391 pp. ISBN 9786-0762-8228-1

Con este libro publicado en 2017, Edith Negrín retoma el estudio de las *petronovelas* a manera de reseña cronológica. El término *petronovela* se originó a partir del ensayo *La novela mexicana entre el petróleo, la homosexualidad y la política* de Luis Schneider en 1989. Aunque para su análisis Negrín considera las primeras menciones del petróleo en textos de Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, así como los estudios del hidrocarburo en tesis de maestría, la autora parte principalmente del compendio narrativo de la propuesta de Schneider para abordar las representaciones de la industria del petróleo en México.

Bajo los sellos editoriales del Colegio de México y la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), el estudio descriptivo de Negrín se esboza desde una perspectiva sociológica que atañe a la especialización de la autora, quien posee un doctorado en sociología y actualmente se desempeña como investigadora del Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas de la UNAM en México. A partir de esta postura social, Negrín aborda un compendio narrativo que comprende principalmente novelas y un par de obras de teatro para analizar temáticas sociales e históricas sobre el petróleo desde principios de siglo XX hasta el siglo XXI.

La autora amplía el estudio de Schneider incluyendo un conjunto literario que abarca alrededor de 20 novelas. A través de una descripción detallada, Negrín plantea el análisis de algunos de los personajes de estas narrativas para mostrar las conexiones con el contexto histórico y social en el que los autores escribieron las obras. Este estudio se acompaña del detalle biográfico

de los autores de la narrativa, haciendo especial énfasis en sus posturas políticas y sociales que influyen en el mensaje difundido en sus obras. A lo largo del libro, la temática de análisis posee un enfoque de crónica que proporciona las opiniones de Negrín sobre la narrativa. En esta misma línea de análisis, la propuesta del libro ofrece una cuidadosa historia intelectual de las diversas posturas hacía la industria del petróleo que involucran sectores sociales que van desde los obreros hasta los dueños de las empresas petroleras.

El recorrido literario que propone *Letras sobre un dios mineral* se traza en seis secciones, caracterizadas por un orden sucesivo de acuerdo con el desarrollo de la industria del petróleo a partir del siglo XX hasta la actualidad. Esta sucesión contempla desde la llegada de la industria del petróleo a México, su posterior nacionalización y culmina con la época contemporánea al abordar de manera breve la novela *Pioneros* (2010) de Mario Román del Valle. Bajo este contexto social, la propuesta de Negrín funciona para considerar a las petronovelas como objetos de estudio que permiten abordar temáticas de representación del petróleo principalmente en la configuración de ideologías de raza, clase y género. En ese sentido, el libro de Negrín funciona como punto de partida para realizar un estudio interdisciplinario que contemple la intersección de la narrativa con otros objetos culturales. Al mismo tiempo, en su análisis, Edith Negrín también plantea que la narrativa en torno al petróleo conlleva un acercamiento geográfico hacia la industria de este hidrocarburo en regiones como Veracruz y Tampico.

El análisis en *Letras sobre un dios mineral* comienza abordando la obra de escritores estadounidense como Joseph Hergesheimer e Isabel Egenton Ostrander, quienes radicaron en México y a través del género detectivesco representan las implicaciones sociales en cuestiones de intereses económicos derivados de la explotación del hidrocarburo. Posteriormente, para abordar la segunda década del siglo XX, Negrín propone a un grupo de petronovelas escritas por autores mexicanos, dentro de las cuales se destacan las primeras problemáticas del control extranjero sobre la petro-industria. Siguiendo este orden cronológico, en la cuarta y quinta sección del libro, Negrín describe otro conjunto narrativo en el que se muestra la relación de la Revolución mexicana con la industria del petróleo y su posterior nacionalización en 1938. En los últimos apartados del libro, la autora propone que la narrativa en torno al petróleo involucra temáticas políticas esbozadas a partir de una añoranza constante hacia el cardenismo.

Letras sobre un dios mineral es un destacable recurso para acercarse de manera enciclopédica a un compendio narrativo sobre las temáticas del petróleo en México. Este libro permite al lector indagar sobre los posibles nexos entre alrededor de 32 autoras y autores, proponiendo que las petronovelas mexicanas deben incluir la participación extranjera. Igualmente, esta propuesta de Negrín posibilita contemplar la manera en que las petronovelas rastrean ideologías nacionalistas y moralistas que siguen perpetuando en la sociedad mexicana. Sin duda, con esta propuesta se abre espacio para considerar las temáticas del petróleo no solo como parte significativa de la economía, sino también como un eje vertebrador que ha influenciado la manera de concebir ideologías de clase y raza.

La principal contribución del texto de Negrín radica en el panorama histórico-social que ofrece para que la lectora o el lector contextualice las representaciones de la industria del petróleo a través de la narrativa. Asimismo, *Letras sobre un dios mineral* funciona como una destacable herramienta cronológica para comprender el desarrollo de la petro-industria en México. La propuesta de Edith Negrín contribuye a un eje de análisis interdisciplinario que considera al petróleo como punto determinante en la configuración de las sociedades mexicanas.

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Ordóñez, Samanta. *Mexico Unmanned: The Cultural Politics of Masculinity in Mexican Cinema*. Albany: State University of New York P, 2021. 227 pp. ISBN 9781-4384-8630-7

Mexico Unmanned will be of interest to anyone studying 20th- and 21st-century Mexican film and culture, gender and sexuality, constructions of masculinity, and especially the relationship between culture and neoliberal politics. As Sergio de la Mora's iconic *Cinemachismo* was published over fifteen years ago, Ordóñez's book is a welcomed study of myths and representations of masculinity in contemporary Mexican cinema. Through an engaging preface, introduction, four body chapters, and an afterword, *Mexico Unmanned* draws case studies from films released between 2001 and 2015. Not unlike Elena Lahr-Vivaz's *Mexican Melodrama*, Ordóñez's discussions of 21st-century Mexican cinema frequently return to seminal tropes of the macho and masculinity within Golden Age Mexican cinema. Ordóñez proposes the transhistorical paradigm of the "malformed male," a "socially dysfunctional, unintegrated, primitive, criminal, immoral" individual that functions as a foil to the ordinary macho (32). A figure generated during the postrevolutionary period, the malformed man is inextricably tied to the "racializing project of mestizaje," most frequently taking form as a brown-skinned, working-class mestizo (48). These defective, malformed masculinities are understood to be a symbolic threat to modernity.

Ordóñez contends that cinema is "among the most potent cultural mediums" for establishing and circulating the myth of "the mestizo's flawed masculine development" (2). Her main argument is that the naturalization of these myths of deficient masculinity serves to justify, legitimate, and authorize state-organized violence, control, repression, and exclusion of certain male bodies. As opposed to a categorical "typology of differentiated masculinities," the case studies in *Mexico Unmanned* link aspects of malformed men to "neoliberal processes of segregation, affective realignment, state violence, and systematic enforcement of social, material, and political inequalities" (16).

The first chapter pairs *Y tu mamá también* (2001) with *Rudo y Cursi* (2008). Ordóñez provides a fresh reading of *Y tu mamá también* via its "allusions to the Golden Age archive" (37). The extensive discussion of the Charolastra manifesto demonstrates its interrelation with tropes of homosocial bonds and friendship pacts typical of buddy movies. Ordóñez concludes that *Y tu mamá también* "reproduce[es] and naturaliz[es] elements of the same cultural logic that structures the ideals of Mexican masculinity in relation to malformed otherness in Golden Age cinema" (40). The focus on characters Julio and Tenoch largely overshadow a brief, but fascinating reading of the character Chuy that I wish had been expanded (62). However, this focus allows for Ordóñez to contrast Julio/Tenoch with Tato/Beto in Carlos Cuarón's *Rudo y Cursi*. While Julio and Tenoch as educated urban (white) men are capable of self-reformation and eventually adapt, Tato and Beto as poor, rural men cannot for they are "legitimately excludible from the social order" (42).

In the second chapter, Ordóñez takes two films from Carlos Reygadas, *Batalla en el cielo* (2005) and *Post tenebras lux* (2012) to comment upon the self-reflexive and metacinematic strategies that depict "the regulatory functions of masculinity as a classificatory system designed to uphold uneven power relations" and film itself as a "principal representational mechanism through which this system is deployed and reproduced" (75-76). Analysis focuses heavily on the malformed mestizo, Marcos, in *Batalla en el cielo*, connecting his portrayal as failed macho to the "ongoing oppressive consequences of the postrevolutionary state's modernizing gender system for racialized, lower-class Mexicans" (112). On the other hand, *Post tenebras lux* centers upon the privileged white male protagonist, Juan (not entirely dissimilar to Reygadas himself) and his relationship to "subordinate male subjects" who work in his household (76). Ordóñez praises

Reygadas for representing working-class mestizos in a manner that exposes "the contours of masculinity as a hidden system of power" (105).

The third and strongest chapter considers Amat Escalante's *Heli* (2013) and its formal strategies that expose "a paradoxical feedback loop that recycles"—and creates—"distorted representations of malformed Mexican men as monstrous criminals" (113). In an excellent rereading of the infamous torture sequence, Ordóñez draws attention to the "mediating mechanisms," namely the violent videogame on the television and the smartphone that records the torture, as a reflexive gesture toward the mediatic devices that transform rural young men into "potential threats" (124, 118). The bodies of malformed men become "detachable signifiers" that are, in turn, "used to manufacture the 'reality' of the drug war" and justify the "aggressive expansion of the neoliberal state's agendas" (133).

The last chapter, on *Te prometo anarquía* (2015), underscores the romantic and affective appeals that "critically expos[e] the concealed underside of neoliberal cinema's prevailing emotional economy" (164). Cutting across genre lines, this dystopian late capitalist film explores how "cultural meanings of love, intimacy, sexuality, and desire in Mexico under neoliberalism are indissolubly bound up with the racialized class system, economic precarity, power differentials, and social violence" (164). The main protagonists' blood-trafficking endeavors allow the director to launch a critique not only of hyper-commoditization, but also the "unforgiving conditions of advanced capitalism" that limit options for Mexican men, "inducing them toward socially destructive trajectories" (171).

While *Mexico Unmanned* is well-argued, I question the author's choice of corpus, which reinforces tired narratives of post-Golden Age decline/crisis and likewise privileges independent and auteur cinema over commercial fare. A chapter on mainstream films like *Hazlo como hombre* (2017) (mentioned briefly in the afterword), *Macho* (2016), or *Que pena tu vida* (2016) would help to balance the case studies, especially given the parallels between Golden Age cinema and neoliberal (romantic) comedies. I believe this book to be more suited for graduate rather than undergraduate students given the dense theorizations and lit reviews within the introduction that, at times, make it difficult to find Ordóñez's voice. That said, *Mexico Unmanned* is a must-read for any Mexicanist or Mexican film specialist.

Olivia Cosentino, Tulane University

Ponce de León, Jennifer. *Another Aesthetics is Possible: Arts of Rebellion in the Fourth World War*. Durham: Duke UP, 2021. 328 pp. ISBN 9781-4780-1020-3

In *Another Aesthetics is Possible: Arts of Rebellion in the Fourth World War* (2021) Jennifer Ponce de León constructs a contemporary internationalist militant visual archive based on organizing practices that deploy aesthetic strategies in Argentina, Mexico, and the United States. The militancy of the archive is established through its explicit attempt to challenge the ways of seeing determined by the ruling class, which, drawing from a Marxist framework, Ponce de León points out, aims to ensure the reproduction of class interest. To do so, the book focuses on projects defined by their ability to expose in a "single field" the contradictions embedded and erased in hegemonic historical narratives. Rather than taking refuge in a repeatedly debunked yet still pervasive ideology of objectivity that afflicts archival work, Ponce de León's research is guided

by the principle—both in her writing and in her method—that not only is all archival production biased, but that it should be dealt with as a field of struggle.

Influenced by a Brechtian conception of cultural production, Ponce de León's intervention starts from a clear motivation: culture can contribute to the creation of an egalitarian society, which calls for an academic research practice that, like the socially engaged art projects she analyzes, does not separate or disavow the political role of academic intellectual work. To achieve this task, Ponce de León defends the importance of aesthetic analysis in ideology critique. However, the book seems to rely on a certain indistinction between ideology and political imagination that, at times, especially through the interviews with the artists themselves and in gauging the social impact of their interventions, artistic practices cannot but appear to have a limited capacity to affect change, which leaves us wondering what function can they exactly have in changing the capitalist social relations of production.

Perception is as important as discourse when it comes to ideology, claims Ponce de León, and each one of the book's four chapters develops a conceptual framework through the analysis of artistic and activist projects attempting to denaturalize perception by rendering it a critical apparatus with political potential. The first chapter is centered on a multi-format artistic project by Mexican artist Fran Ilich that develops around the restitution of the Penacho de Moctezuma in 2013, currently housed in the Ethnology Museum in Vienna. The project included an Alternate Reality Game (ARGs), a Change.org petition to demand the reinstatement of the Penacho to the Mexican people, and collaborations with Zapatista farmers, among others. "Stereoscopic aesthetics," a category inspired in optics—stereoscopic refers to how binocular vision allows for depth perception—that Ponce de León inflects it with political meaning to name the capacity to see the many contradictory layers that make up colonial ideologies, both on a global and on a domestic level, with the goal of opening up the possibility of "decolonial imagination". The Change.org petition offers an example of how this imagination is galvanized. In the derailment of the petition, which was never intended to be delivered to the Austrian president, Ponce de León demonstrates how Ilich provokes his audience to question the absurdity of confining anti-colonial struggles to the legal mechanisms made available by the same liberal and colonial states against which the struggle is directed—including the Mexican state, in this case, for its hypocritical defense of the Penacho, while continuing to discriminate indigenous peoples.

In the second chapter, the book moves to Chicanx art practices in Los Angeles to study the case of the "semifictionalized and wholly unofficial historical society" The Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History (PRS) (81), which intervenes in state narratives of immigration that affect Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States, through the deployment of direct-action strategies that target public history. In this chapter, Ponce de León advances the category of "aesthetics of history" "to emphasize that history shapes perception and formats subjects" (85); a critical understanding that would then allow communities to engage in the construction of alternative epistemologies in the production of historical narratives that can counter the status of history's hegemonic aesthetics and its mechanisms of invisibilizing certain histories.

The last two chapters are dedicated to the militant artistic practices of the Argentine groups Grupo de Arte Callejero (GAC) and Etcétera…between the 1990s and early 2000s—strongly influenced by Zapatismo—which function as standpoints from where Ponce de León reads the social and political history of Argentina from the 1960s to the emergence of these groups, which formed partly as a response to a crisis within the Left regarding parliamentary politics that culminated in early 2000s as a result of *el corralito*. Reconstructing this historical arch in chapter

three, she is able to explain the degree to which the problematic ideology of human rights politics with respect to the disappearance of thousands of civilians during the dictatorship, sweeping away the anti-capitalist connotations of revolutionary politics in the country, are at the origin of the types of tensions that shape cultural politics in Argentina in the 21st century.

In chapter four, Ponce de León turns to close readings of these group's practices, such as GAC's "interventionist guerrilla performance" *Segurí$imo* (2003) through which the group situates ideologies of security proper to liberal democratic states within recent histories of state terrorism. One intervention included handing out flyers of a weapon catalogue with models titled "Escopeta Ítaca, desde 1976: la que usa Gendarmería, muchas veces probada en manifestaciones y piquetes" (222). In her readings of GAC's half-artistic, half-activist interventions, she unravels how these actions trigger a debate about who gets to decide what counts as violence in a neoliberal state that, to this date, carries a still largely unpunished genocidal immediate past.

A very well-researched and unique example of how to engage in robust materialist readings of socially engaged art, *Another Aesthetics is Possible* will be of interest to anyone drawn to debates around the question about culture's role—and perception as a socially fabricated apparatus—in political and anti-colonial struggles. Ponce de León's volume is an important addition to how intellectual work can significantly contribute to the construction of what we may call an anti-capitalist *counter-perception*, the forms of seeing necessary for an emancipatory project.

Katryn Evinson, Columbia University

Rivera Mir, Sebastián. *Edición y comunismo: Cultura impresa, educación militante y prácticas políticas (México, 1930–1940)*. Raleigh: Editorial A Contracorriente, 2020. 286 pp. ISBN 9781-9452-3478-1

Edición y comunismo offers a history of communist publishing efforts in Mexico in the 1930s, a decade that saw the repressive Maximato transition into the progressive presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. In seven chapters, Sebastián Rivera Mir gives international and national context for the editorial projects studied, draws out the work of two communist presses of the era, describes the opposition they met on the right and left, and calls attention to US–Mexico editorial collaborations. The balance of breadth and detail in *Edición y comunismo* is admirable, but what makes the book most impressive is the sheer difficulty of writing such a history; as Rivera Mir notes in the introduction, "a diferencia de otros lugares, donde las posibilidades de recuperar esta historia se vinculan a la existencia de acervos ordenados y coherentes de las empresas de la edición, hasta el momento no he encontrado nada que se parezca a ellos" (7). His sources are archives of state repression, memoirs and biographies of Party members, and the printed materials that remain of the era (often not found in libraries but instead in antiquarian bookstores).

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the historical context for the emergence of the two presses studied in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 1 gives a panoramic view of Latin American communist publishing throughout the 1930s, describing a collaborative and transnational network where shared translations, editions, and rights, as well as relationships of mutual distribution, "permitieron que empresas débiles localmente se fortalecieran gracias a sus nexos externos" (17). Chapter 2 covers 1929–1934, years of anti-communist persecution in Mexico that affected publishing efforts of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) through mail restrictions, arrests and expulsions, and other

forms of State censorship. Throughout these years, "las oleadas represivas se sucedieron una tras otra, al menos hasta finales de 1934" (67). This break recurs throughout the book, as the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas brought a significant shift in the PCM's visibility and forms of operation.

Chapter 3 tells the story of Ediciones Frente Cultural (EFC), a press whose mission was to publish central texts of Marxist theory while maintaining a reputation as "una editorial 'no tan roja'," without official links to the PCM. The founding of EFC—by Daniel and Enrique Navarro Orejel, brothers who also ran the Librería Navarro—is difficult to date, which Rivera Mir explains in pages as unclear as the subject they treat. (A table tracks the press's slogans from 1928 through 1938, as gleaned from an advertisement, but the uneasy suggestion on the next page is that the press "comenzó a publicar en 1934, aunque sobre ello no hay certeza" [81].) Whenever it began its work, Rivera Mir describes EFC as widely distributed and commercially aggressive, with regular advertisement in the PCM's official periodical *El Machete* and on the back covers of its own books. The texts it published were selected to: 1) fill "un vacío bibliográfico" that usually existed because of a lack of translations to Spanish (88), 2) make accessible quality texts by esteemed authors, 3) address a political opportunity (e.g., join anti-imperialist discussions), 4) meet reader demand, and 5) avoid "egoísmos partidistas" (89).

Chapter 4 discusses Editorial Popular (EP), an official publishing arm of the PCM founded in 1937, during the period of "unidad a toda costa" (105) that characterized the Party throughout the Cárdenas presidency. Established to strengthen the PCM's production and dissemination of propaganda in a time of exponential growth, EP was seen as a solution to two Party problems: the failure to retain older members and the need to quickly assimilate thousands of new members. Alexander Trachtenberg, a US Communist in Mexico and Director of International Publishers, played a part in the press's early definition; his belief that "la gente solamente lee lo que le cuesta algo" brought about the decision to give all EP texts a price, though these were significantly lower than those of other presses (115). EP chose not to publish theoretical texts, preferring works on distinct political problems like agrarian reform. The press wished to be "realmente popular, no sólo en sus precios, sino en su contenido" (125). In its three years of existence, EP published 65 books and pamphlets, a volume that "no tenía antecedentes en el plano de las publicaciones comunistas" (118).

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the challenges EFC, EP, and other Mexican communist publishing projects faced from both the right and the non-communist left. Chapter 5, on the right's editorial efforts during the decade, explains how anti-communist publishers considered their work as a "contra-ataque" against the influence of presses like EFC (134). Rivera Mir notes, however, that the PCM was more concerned by "otras fuerzas políticas de izquierda que pudieran disputarle el espacio que habían conquistado al alero del gobierno cardenista" (149)—the subject of Chapter 6. In 1937, Rodrigo García Treviño—a member of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), ex-Communist, and academic at the Universidad Obrera—was tapped to direct the CTM's new publishing project, Editorial América. This press joined public debates on the left and, Rivera Mir finds, used at least one editorial note to warn readers against an author's suggestion that they join the International Communist Party (156).

Chapter 7 focuses on a matter threaded throughout the earlier chapters: the links between communist publishing projects in the US and Mexico. In the repressive years of the Maximato, US Communists assisted their Mexican counterparts by printing *El Machete*, which was in turn considered "el pan espiritual" of US laborers interested in the Mexican situation (171).

Rivera Mir presents a complex history that relies on sources difficult to find, making *Edición y comunismo* a feat of research and explication. A reader could have been even better

served by the inclusion of a list of abbreviations and an index of names, but the supplementary material that is provided by the appendices—catalogs of the publications of three of the presses studied—will be of great interest to any scholar of leftist publishing in Mexico.

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Rodriguez, Ralph. *Latinx Literature Unbound: Undoing Ethnic Expectations*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018. 181pp. ISBN 9780-8232-7924-1

What is Latinx Literature? What do we mean when we use an ethnic label to describe a body of literary production and criticism? What potential gaps and absences consequently emerge from analyzing a body of literature in light of an ethnic category? These questions anchor Ralph Rodriguez's careful and nuanced book, a welcome contribution to the field of Latinx Literature. Rodriguez begins with a consideration of the umbrella term "Latinx" and offers us fresh insight into the troubling implications of the uncritical use of the term when applied to literary studies. To be clear, questioning the usefulness of Latinx is not a rehashing of a sociological debate. Rather, as Rodriguez notes, scholars in Latinx Studies have been debating the question of terminology since the 1980s. At issue is not the strategic political efficacy of umbrella terminology like Latinx, nor whether such terminology can be fruitful in specific contexts. Rather, Rodriguez's project works to unlink the sociological from the literary, by interrogating what we mean when we call a text Latinx, and indeed whether the term represents a useful paradigm for how we study literature. The short answer to this question is that it does not.

To begin Rodriguez explores the troubling implications of utilizing an ethnic identity as definitional criteria for a body of literature:

> As critics, I maintain, we must unbind such expectations from how we understand what we have heretofore called "Latinx literature" in order to create rich, nuanced, and complex analyses, which returns me to my argument about scale and why I think genre is a more felicitous way than *Latinx* to group and analyze literature. Scale matters because it sets in place the "system of possibilities" for analyzing a text or group of texts. That system of possibilities sets, in other words, the interpretive horizon. It determines what we can know about a given text, and not all systems of scales are created equal. I have been arguing that the grouping of a body of literary texts beneath the label *Latinx* is a flawed scale and that we see that flaw in the inability of scholars to generate the necessary and sufficient criteria to define it. (15)

To unlink the idea of Latinx literature from the rigidity of the ethnic label, Rodriguez suggests that as literary scholars we turn our attention away from the ethnic signifier, and towards a different way of analyzing texts, namely an analysis in light of genre. The argument here for the use of genre as a fruitful analytic tool for comparing and analyzing texts reveals some of Rodriguez's own neo-formalism, in a way that is incredibly useful. As literary scholars, we have the tools of our discipline, particularly the use of genre, to help analyze texts that avoid the problems of reification at play when the ethnic label is used as definitional criteria.

The chapters of *Latinx Literature Unbound: Undoing Ethnic Expectations* showcase Rodriguez's impressive skill as both a close-reader and a nuanced critic, with focuses on authorial

identity, the novel, the short story, and finishing with the lyric. Chapter 1, entitled "Brown Like Me? The Author-function, Proper Names, and the Rise of Fictional Nobodies," tackles the problem of authorial identity by examining the cases of authors whose relationship to Latinidad is complex. By examining the work of Danny Santiago, Brando Skyhorse, and Eduardo Halfon, Rodriguez makes compelling claims that the author-function is not sufficient when determining whether a work is Latinx. In each of the cases examined, the authors and their respective relationship to the texts that they produce call some aspect of the author function into question in terms of authorial ethnic identity. Chapter 2, "Confounding the Mimetic: The Metafictional Challenge of Representation" focuses on Salvador Plascencia's novel *People of Paper.* This chapter argues that the formally complex structures of Plascencia's work create a world that functions to redefine the meaning of Latino. In Rodriguez's reading, the novel, a story about a story, marks a departure from the realist modes of fiction often associated with Latinx literary production. As such, this chapter treats the publication history of the novel, as well as the concerns of form and metafiction within the text. Chapter 3 shifts gears, focusing on the short story, and specifically on the use of the narrative positions of the first-person plural "we" and the second-person singular "you." In analyzing this form of storytelling, Rodriguez examines works by Manuel Muñoz, Patricia Engle, and Ana Menéndez, arguing that the use of these narrative voices creates an interesting intimacy within the work. Finally, in Chapter 4, Rodriguez turns to poetry, specifically the lyric. Here he intentionally moves away from the poetic forms most associated with Latinx literary production—narrative driven poetry like the corrido and spoken word poetry —and turns his attention to writers Eduardo Corral, Rosa Alcalá, and Amanda Calderon whose use of the lyric insists on what he terms a "radical singularity," devoid of the burdens of ethnic representation as such.

Overall Rodriguez's text is compelling and rich. His close readings within the chapters are sophisticated while the text itself threads a tricky needle. On the one hand Rodriguez is attentive to the good work done under the label "Latinx" and pays respect to the vast body of fine scholarship that is attentive to the literary history that exists under the label. On the other hand, he makes a compelling argument for the theoretical and critical limitations of the label, while providing us with a blueprint of how we might read differently, and what other questions we can and should explore.

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Zavala, Oswaldo. *Drug Cartels Do Not Exist. Narco-Trafficking and Culture in the US and Mexico*. Translation by William Savinar. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2022. 193 pp. ISBN 9780-8265-0466-1

As its provocative title suggests, *Drug Cartels Do Not Exist* presents a defiant investigation of the invention of the concept of the "cartel" and its different transformative stages throughout the devastating development of the so-called "War on Drugs" in Mexico. Combining his training and field experience in journalism with critical cultural analysis, Oswaldo Zavala brings to light how much of our understanding—or misunderstanding—of the myth of the *narco* as a great threat stems directly from the official discursive signification of an imagined ruthless, powerful, and pluritentacular figure created largely by the Mexican State.

By deconstructing the feared, hypermasculine, sophisticated and brilliant persona with unlimited economic and political resources commonly associated with the *narco* and replicated by

many highly visible journalists, fiction writers, academics, and political analysts, Zavala demonstrates that such a representation of drug traffickers lacks rigorous, critical, and most importantly, in depth reflection on the politicized true nature of the *narco* and cartels. Precisely one of Zavala's main contributions is breaking down the current state of issues related to national security and geopolitics around drug trafficking, refuting the common theory that cartels have mounted their power and influence by creating a criminal state parallel to the Mexican State. In this way, Zavala's journalistic and investigative work demonstrates the direct influence and support of the US towards "combating" an enemy they have in common with Mexico: the *narco*. From Operation Condor to the Mérida Initiative, as Zavala points out, the United States has given substantial economic and strategical support to Mexico, thereby contributing to the intensification and dissemination of a "crisis" of violence of global dimensions, which after all positions the US as a leading figure in international security policy.

In terms of the violence suffered in the US-Mexico border and throughout Mexico, Zavala presents an incisive critique of the intellectuals, journalists, and writers like Héctor Aguilar Camín, Don Winslow, Elmer Mendoza, Yuri Herrera, and others, who continue to reproduce a depoliticized account of the violence phenomenon, leaving out the role of corrupt business and political classes, the military, and state police and making it seem as if the current state of hyperviolence in Mexico is the result of a "failed state." Demonstrating the opposite by showing how the deployment of the Mexican Navy in states like Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Michoacán, and Jalisco drastically raised the mortality rate, the author shows, basing his arguments on the official mortality statistics, that in fact the military and state police have been successful in terrorizing and killing more civilians than criminals. In the absence of thorough criminal investigations and indictments, as Zavala maintains, the Juárez, Sinaloa, Zetas, Knights of Templar, and the CJNG cartels are no more than a hyperbolic construct imagined by the US and Mexico States aimed to justify the massive killings and forced disappearances of a fifteen-year war.

If the depoliticized myth of the cartels continues to be examined, researched, and reproduced, violence will continue to be understood as a result of the deterioration of the social fabric in Mexico and thus indirectly blaming citizens for the own violence they suffer. Holding the poor and rural classes largely responsible for the violence phenomenon is the desired effect of the myth of the cartel, as the author argues, because the official discursive "combative" strategy is to justify violent biopolitical agendas and land dispossession. Failing to question and dismantle the official discourse, as the author argues, also solidifies a passive intelligentsia that entertains analyzing a myth over producing combative research and journalism against human rights violations. Zavala's critique challenges us to reflect on the ways our inability to engage with the political and business agenda aspects behind the "War on Drugs" is, in a way, complacent with the oppressive systems of the State that have formed a labyrinth-like phenomenon that cannot be intervened only through philosophy and theory. Zavala exhorts professors, journalists, artists, fiction writers, and political analysts to see beyond the cartel myth that leads to superficial conclusions that cartels have amassed incalculable political and social capital and that run sophisticated global trade networks, when the reality is that the possession and control of the so-called "plaza" is nothing more than another concession-like concept birthed by neoliberalism and managed by the military and state police.

Zavala deconstructs the lexicon and grammar of the *narco*, providing us with key concepts to understanding why speaking and writing about the *narco* is by default a way of engaging with a labyrinth-like language that limits the possibilities of seeing beyond the dichotomy of good and

evil. My critique for Zavala is that he misses the opportunity to dismantle the abstract notion of the *campesino*, a word that disenfranchises the experiences and lives of Indigenous communities. Rightly, Zavala points out the violence in rural Mexico is rooted in a ruthless and corrupt transnational business race to acquire lands with hydrocarbon deposits, which in many cases happen to be in the lands of Indigenous communities. Mè'phàà, Nahua, and Mixtec communities of the state of Guerrero, for example, are currently resisting the incursions of violence aimed at their territories, which, as many Indigenous poets have documented in their work, accelerates privatization of communal land holdings, opens the door to mining concessions, and instills panic in the communities forcing them to migrate. Put another way, we should not use *campesino* as a hegemonic concept because we run the risk of erasing the role of Indigenous communities in this violent struggle. Zavala's future investigations can only be enriched by looking into Indigenous literature as another space of signification of the role of the so-called "narco violence" in the environmentalist crisis and crimes against ecosystems situated in Indigenous territories.

Drug Cartels Do Not Exist is a call to an awakening, a rigorous research effort than can be read as an act of hope, as Zavala speaks directly to journalists, professors, artists, filmmakers, intellectuals, sociologists, and critics about the ethical responsibility we should adopt in combating the intellectual and economic backing behind the myth of the cartel and the declaration of an unnecessary war to combat it that has claimed the lives of thousands of people.

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