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Review/Reseña

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Negotiating with Censors: Boom Writers and Franco's Spain

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In his *Historia personal del Boom*, José Donoso identifies “internationalization” as one of the most important processes in the development of the Spanish American novel in the second half of the twentieth century.¹ “Al decir ‘internacionalización,’” he states, “no me refiero a la nueva avidez de las editoriales; ni a los diversos premios millonarios; ni a la cantidad de traducciones por casas importantes de París, Milán y Nueva York ... ni a las revistas y películas y agentes literarios

¹ José Donoso, *Historia personal del 'boom'* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998), 19.

de todas las capitales que no esconden su interés ..." (ibid.). Rather, for Donoso, the term means the story of how "la novela hispanoamericana comenzó a hablar un idioma internacional",² that is, how he and fellow Boom writers Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa found their inspiration in the work of modern writers such as Faulkner, Joyce, Kafka, Mann, and Woolf, among others; the term also refers to the Spanish American authors' aspiration to reach audiences outside of their own nations. It is, however, impossible to overlook the role of international publishers, literary prizes, translations, agents, and politics in bringing the Boom to a Western audience. Critics have long noted the key role played by Spanish publishers and agents—most notably, Carlos Barral and Carmen Balcells—in this process. And Mario Santana, in his excellent *Foreigners in the Homeland* (2000), explored the seminal role that Spain and the Spanish reception of Latin American literature played in the dissemination of the Boom during the 1960s and 1970s. In *The Censorship Files: Latin American Writers and Franco's Spain*, Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola adds a new and important dimension to understanding the international nature of the Boom. He meticulously traces several authors' experiences with the censorship process in Spain during the Franco regime as a means of demonstrating the synergy between censorship and the writing and production of literary works, and of further revealing how censorship functioned as a litmus test of Spain's desire in the final years of the Franco dictatorship to become reintegrated in the Western world and, especially, economy.

The Censorship Files studies the publication history in Spain of works by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, García Márquez, Manuel Puig, and Vargas Llosa during the 1960s and 1970s. The rise of Spanish American writers in the West during this period coincided with the years of *apertura* in Spain, when a number of political and economic reforms were implemented in order to break down the nation's isolation and stimulate the growth of its economy. As Herrero-Olaizola details in chapter 1,

² Idem, 20.

“Publishing Matters: The Boom and Its Players,” key among these reforms was the printing and publishing law of 1966, which eased a number of the restrictions previously governing censorship and publishing. The law also opened the door for writers and publishers to negotiate with censors behind the scenes, so that censorship was redefined “as a practice that intervened only following completion of any piece of creative writing” even though it was in fact “part of the production process” (11). The law fundamentally changed the way that censors evaluated manuscripts, allowing economic considerations—namely, the expectation of a work’s market success—to take precedence over negative evaluations of a work’s moral content. As Herrero-Olaizola observes, “censorship worked hand in hand with a certain liberalization required by the desired expansion of the book trade” (4). A central focus of *The Censorship Files*, then, becomes the study of how government-imposed censorship worked both in apparent conflict and complicity with the regime.

The success of the Boom was of great interest to the Franco regime, which viewed Spanish publishers’ control over works by Spanish American writers as playing a critical role in the nation’s efforts to dominate the Spanish American book market. In turn, the prestigious publishing houses of Spain, including the rising star of Seix Barral, offered Boom writers a venue for bringing their work to a Spanish-language market on a scale that was not available in Spanish America, where the mechanisms for international distribution of works were extremely limited. The conjunction of a publishing industry dominated by an authoritarian regime and a literary movement characterized by authors’ support for the Cuban Revolution was, not surprisingly, marked by a number of political and cultural paradoxes: leftist writers actively sought to publish their work under a right-wing dictatorship; in order to support the book industry and stimulate economic growth, the Franco regime condoned the publication of works that were designated by censors as morally reprehensible and antithetical to the cultural and nationalist principles upheld by the regime; and publishers and authors alike collaborated with government censors and

their recommendations in order to ensure publication of their works in Spain (xxii).

Chapter 2, “The Writer in the Barracks: Mario Vargas Llosa Facing Censorship,” examines Spanish censors’ changing views of the Peruvian writer’s work over time, as his reputation—and market success—grew. Vargas Llosa shot to fame in 1962, when his novel, *La ciudad y los perros*, was awarded the Premio Biblioteca Breve. The Premio was Carlos Barral’s brainchild, an annual literary prize that brought its recipients to the attention of publishers in Europe and the U.S., as well as to an international audience; over the years, the award was key in establishing the international success of Boom writers. *La ciudad y los perros* was a tremendous commercial success that launched both Vargas Llosa and Seix Barral internationally. The novel was, however, initially rejected by censors: while their reports note its high literary quality, they nevertheless express strong moral and political reservations about the work. As Herrero-Olaizola shows, Vargas Llosa and Barral negotiated with censors, ultimately agreeing to make a number of the stipulated corrections, which cleared the way for the novel’s publication. Their willingness to compromise their political beliefs by working within a system that they opposed (both men were, at that time, ardent supporters of the Cuban Revolution and vocal critics of censorship) was oddly mirrored by the political expediency of the Franco regime, which turned a blind eye towards the novel’s perceived improprieties and approved its publication in order to reap the profits from its predicted success. And *La ciudad y los perros* was indeed a success, which eased Vargas Llosa’s way with censorship authorities in the following years. Censors’ reports frequently comment on the quality of the Peruvian’s writing, and Herrero-Olaizola observes that this was part of a “balanced” strategy for responding to the works of many Latin American writers: “Often the perception of literary quality ... overrode the censors’ moral, political, or linguistic concerns, and led them to open negotiations with authors and publishers” (41). And with the passage of time, Vargas Llosa’s accumulation of literary prizes and history of commercial success led

censors to become even more lenient, approving the publication of *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1974) in record time, despite the novel's sexual explicitness and antimilitarism (both of which were downplayed because the novel was set in Peru and therefore, according to the censors, could not be interpreted as having any bearing on Spain).

In chapter 3, "Cuban Nights Falling: The Revolutionary Silences of Guillermo Cabrera Infante," Herrero-Olaizola's emphasis is twofold. On the one hand, he traces the evolution of Cabrera Infante's "Vista del amanecer en el trópico" from its beginnings as a 105-page manuscript in 1964 through its revisions and publication as *Tres Tristes Tigres* in 1967, and then through its later metamorphosis into a second book, *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* (1974)—what Herrero-Olaizola deems "the most compelling case of productive censorship experienced by any Boom writer in Franco's Spain" (71). *The Censorship Files* also explores how the development and publication history of "Vista," as well as Cabrera Infante's experiences under censorship in both Cuba and Spain, were directly inflected by the author's politics—both his initial support for the Cuban Revolution and his later rejection of it. "Vista del amanecer en el trópico" was awarded the Biblioteca Breve prize in 1964. At the time, Cabrera Infante was a supporter of the Cuban Revolution, and his politics and connections to Cuba, in conjunction with the manuscript's positive representation of Castro's revolutionary uprising, led Spanish censors to refuse to authorize publication. Carlos Barral spent several months negotiating with censors, to no avail. In the meantime, however, Cabrera Infante had begun to distance himself from the Revolution, and felt that the opportunity to rework the manuscript would give him the chance to produce a novel that better reflected his political beliefs. The product of these revisions, *Tres Tristes Tigres*, deemphasized the politics that had so troubled the censors of "Vista"; the novel also reflected a radical stylistic transformation that emphasized virtuosity and play. Cabrera Infante's repudiation of the Revolution made it easier for censors to approve his work (although he was still viewed with suspicion by the Spanish government), which they did in

late 1966. But if the Cuban's distancing of himself from the Revolution eased the path of his work through the Spanish publishing system, it also put him at odds with Carlos Barral, who felt betrayed by Cabrera Infante's defection from a cause that he himself embraced. As a result, Seix Barral was sluggish in its distribution of *Tres Tristes Tigres*, and refused to accede to Cabrera Infante's request to publish an uncensored edition of the novel. In 1974, Cabrera Infante returned to the original manuscript, publishing *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, in which he elaborated and wove together leftover cuttings from his eponymous manuscript, reframing them as a critique of the Revolution. (Ironically, the use of the earlier title brought the author into conflict with censors, who initially refused to authorize publication of the work until they realized that this was not the original manuscript.) Herrero-Olaizola's observation that "More than any other Boom writer, Guillermo's dealings with the censors were caught between the polarized ideologies of two nations on each side of the Cold War" (86) rings quite true. And yet, these experiences had a paradoxically productive effect on Cabrera Infante's writing.

Rather than an overview of run-ins with Franco's literary police, Chapter 4, "From Melquíades to Vernet: How Gabriel García Márquez Escaped Spanish Censorship," offers a history of the one who got away, that is, of the near-misses that resulted in García Márquez's decision not to publish *Cien años de soledad* in Spain, and his consequently limited experience with censorship there. As Herrero-Olaizola details, the Colombian author sent Carlos Barral a telegram in 1965 or 1966 offering him an opportunity to read *Cien años*, but Barral never responded; ultimately, García Márquez published his novel with Editorial Sudamericana in Argentina. Herrero-Olaizola speculates that internal tensions at Seix Barral at this time had raised concerns about Barral's clashes with censorship authorities, prompting the editor to forego an opportunity to publish a writer whose politics would doubtless have required intervention with the censors. The phenomenal success of *Cien años*, however, and the numerous requests from publishers for permission

to import the novel left both Seix Barral and the Spanish authorities regretting the lost opportunity. The novel was approved for importation in 1967 and immediately became a success in Spain. As Herrero-Olaizola observes, García Márquez “never had to go through the same kind of scrutiny most Latin American authors experienced in Franco’s Spain. He appeared on the literary scene as an already consecrated, acclaimed, and economically profitable author ... His meteoric publishing career after 1967 made him immune to the Spanish censorship authorities” (131). And, indeed, when EDHASA, a Barcelona publisher with ties to Sudamericana, requested permission to reprint the novel, censors seem to have gone out of their way to be blind to the novel’s ideology and political and sexual content in order to justify their (rather speedy) approval of the request.

Chapter 5, “Betrayed by Censorship: Manuel Puig Declassified,” both analyzes the dynamics involved in Spanish authorities’ willingness to put expectations of profitability from Spanish American writers before concerns about morality and examines Barral’s involvement in the censorship of Puig’s work. According to Herrero-Olaizola, “The dilemma faced by censors became one of moral rectitude (the book [*La traición de Rita Hayworth*] was immoral and obscene) vs. economic profit (the book was published by a competitor). Similarly, the dilemma faced by Barral was one of queer aesthetics (his dislike of Puig’s overt display of ‘faggotry’) vs. publishing competition” (146). In 1965, the Premio Biblioteca Breve committee voted to award the prize to Puig’s *La traición de Rita Hayworth*, but Barral rejected the decision (the prize went to Juan Marsé’s *Últimas tardes con Teresa* instead). The following year, Seix Barral submitted Puig’s manuscript to Spanish authorities, but the censors failed to approve its publication, focusing on its supposed indecency (the censors could not bring themselves to mention the novel’s rejection of heteronormativity, as Herrero-Olaizola observes) and lack of traditional plot, form, and structure. The new censorship law had been implemented by this point, leaving the door open for Barral to negotiate with censors as he did in other cases, but he refused to do so. It was not until 1969, when the French translation of *La*

traición de Rita Hayworth made *Le Monde's* list of the year's best novels and Sudamericana took on *Boquitas Pintadas*, that Puig had a breakthrough, with Spanish authorities approving both the importation and reprint of the latter novel in Spain. Following on the heels of the success of *Boquitas Pintadas* in Spain, Barral decided to present *La traición* to the censors again. This time, the novel's censor was better able to situate its formal qualities within the trajectory of the Boom and to engage with it as a potential bestseller, but he still refused to authorize publication, citing the work's poor literary quality, "mal gusto," and homosociality (153). However, the rejection was overridden by a Special Judge of the Press in Barcelona, which opened the door for the work to be published, no doubt with an eye to the profits that it was expected to generate. In contrast to the cases of Vargas Llosa and García Márquez, however, where predictable market success greased the wheels of the censorship system, Puig continued to encounter difficulties with censors, heightening, as Herrero-Olaizola points out, the "sense of being betrayed by censors [and] publishers" that had begun with his frustrated efforts to publish *La traición* (171).

The Epilogue, "Legends of the Boom: Latin American Publishing Revisited," offers valuable insights into the view of the Boom as a postcolonial movement that emancipated Spanish America once and for all from Spanish colonialism. Through an examination of the role of legendary agent Carmen Balcells in publicizing Spanish American authors during this period, as well as Barral's own role in this process, Herrero-Olaizola argues that while Spanish American writers "colonized" the Spanish book market with their innovative and experimental work during the Boom years, Spanish America nevertheless remained subjugated to the former colonial power as a cash cow whose writers and reading publics alike were used by the expansionist Spanish publishing economy to make a profit.

The value of *The Censorship Files* lies both in the wealth of documentation that it provides about censorship in Spain and in what it says about how writers resist, negotiate with, and accommodate authoritarian forces that they explicitly critique in their work and lives. *The*

Censorship Files also draws a complex portrait of Barral as an agent who was willing to negotiate with censors in order to secure the publication of authors who shared his political beliefs, or, alternatively, to assume a *laissez faire* attitude when a writer's political or sexual identity differed from his own. Barral himself thus emerges in the work as another agent of censorship—one who, like Franco's authorities, also weighed his social and political inclinations against those of his authors and the potential profit that they might bring in. *The Censorship Files* would have benefited from further explanation of why the files studied were "the most significant ones" (xii). The Spanish government's censorship of Fuentes's *Cambio de piel*, for example, received a great deal of publicity (in large measure due to Fuentes's many high-visibility connections in Spain and the U.S.), but goes unmentioned here. This is, however, a minor issue. Herrero-Olaizola has done meticulous archival research that sheds new light on the history of the Boom and the mechanisms through which the field of cultural production and the field of power (to use Bourdieu's terms) interacted during the process of publication and canonization of the movement. Moreover, his discussion of his own experiences growing up under Franco and, in chapter 4, of a citizen reader's critiques of García Márquez, offer valuable insights into the ways that government censorship was not just part of the process of literary production, but internalized by citizens, reflecting how the regime used cultural production to create a certain type of model citizen. Finally, Herrero-Olaizola's historical discussions are interwoven with analyses of literary works that reveal how the issues of censorship and authority are not just the context of publication for the writers, but their very subject matter, a lesson that holds significant implications for future studies of Boom literary production and the publishing and political infrastructure within which the movement rose to prominence.