

Review / Reseña

Eds. Guillermina De Ferrari and Mariano Siskind. *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literary and Cultural Forms*. London: Routledge, 2022. 526 pp.

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Instructors of Latin American literature and culture will find in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Latin American Literary and Cultural Forms* a great resource for stimulating topics and readings for their courses, from the relationship between literature and revolution to that with ecology, animality, the economy, biopolitics, infrastructure, and new media, among many others. It can also be used as a textbook to teach a Latin American critical theory course, as the expert collaborations in this unique volume also provide valuable information on the state of the discipline of Latin American literature and culture, with all its tensions and disagreements. More specifically, they elaborate on the applicability of the most significant, cutting-edge trends and theoretical approaches (postcolonial, decolonial, infrapolitical, sociological, new materialism, sound studies, transpacific studies, ecocriticism, cosmopolitanism, and the affective turn, among others) to the Latin American literature and culture produced over the last 121 years. By addressing and rethinking both traditional and new debates, these forty-nine essays collectively provide an idea of the vitality, instability, complexity, and heterogeneity of our academic field. Likewise, by revealing how these newer theories and methodologies continue to

reshape our discursive field, the reader gets a glimpse of its potential future directions and “turns.”

In the brief introduction, Guillermina De Ferrari and Mariano Siskind set the parameters of their project. To begin with, they problematize the main paradigms through which Latin American literature and culture were analyzed in the twentieth century, which, as they observe, have now become obsolete: their relationships with nation-formation and modernization processes. Instead, they propose to look at Latin American studies as an interdisciplinary (blending literature with the arts, film, dance, mass and digital media, and the social sciences) and cosmopolitan field (Siskind, one of the co-editors, is the author of the often-quoted 2014 study *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America*, and the other co-editor, De Ferrari, also participated in the 2019 volume *World Literature—Cosmopolitanism—Globality*).

Within this reconsideration of Latin America as a porous region in perpetual flux, the focus of the book is precisely how authors, texts, and readers move beyond their respective national borders and literary traditions. Along these lines, in this collection of essays the written literary text loses its privilege as an autonomous entity, becoming just one of the different cultural texts or sites where social tensions meet aesthetic forms. In the coeditors' own words, their book “considers cultural production, circulation, and reception in frameworks created by the emergence of narco-states and narco-economics, new technologies, and mutating forms of socialism and neoliberalism; by the revitalization of Indigenous rights, environmental and social justice, ethics, and human rights; and by the circulation of people, images, and cultural artifacts, whether or not that involves physical displacement” (3).

The volume is divided into four sections. The first one, titled “Not the Way You Remember: Reshuffled Traditions and Historical Formations,” focuses on the historical. It aims to provide new readings of canonical interpretations of cultural production to interpret traumatic historical moments in a new light. By studying landmark moments in Latin American literature and culture (dealing with state and narco violence, displacement, modernization, avant-garde, financial crises, revolution, neoliberalism, populism, etc.), these essays propose alternative genealogies and historiographies from traditionally marginalized viewpoints, including those of indigenous cultures as well as feminist and queer approaches.

The second section, titled “Virtually Anywhere: Dislocated Boundaries and Porous Cartographies,” veers toward the geographical in order to reimagine and

question the traditional geo-cultural boundaries of Latin American literature in the face of displacements, identity-related quandaries, and the permeability of sovereign borders (that of the international border between Mexico and the United States, for example). To the traditional transatlantic perspectives, the new vigor of transpacific studies and the rediscovery of South-South exchanges have opened the door to new and deeper interpretations of the region's culture.

In turn, the third section, titled "A Bigger Toolbox: Thinking Patterns and Contemporary Interrogations," looks at the main contemporary theoretical frameworks and critical agendas, including "ecocriticism and the environmental humanities, biopolitics, petro-art, afrofuturism, Black feminism and epistemological marronage, the ethics of hospitality, queer and trans criticism, masculinity studies, theories of affect, infrapolitics, sound studies, infrastructure studies, and Global South studies" (4). According to De Ferrari and Siskind, this wide variety of theoretical frames and methodologies responds to an epistemic shift in which cultural artifacts (not just literary ones) not only represent but also construct realities.

The final section, titled "Beyond the Book: Unbound Objects and Unfettered Critical Practices," deals with the field's recent changes in objects of study: since the advent of cultural studies and poststructuralism, we no longer analyze only printed texts but also many other cultural texts, including digital texts, audiobooks, photo albums, postcards, graffiti, and songs.

While I find the vast majority of the chapters extremely insightful, relevant, and well-written, because of space limitations, I will summarize only a selection of them. Chapter 1, "Avant-Gardes in Latin America: A Polemical Intervention on Historical and Neo-Vanguardias," by Fernando J. Rosenberg, defends the relevance of the term *vanguardia* to describe the ways in which experimental art went hand in hand with a desire for social and political change. It then considers the term's adequacy for the present time. Rosenberg addresses first the historical vanguardist movements of the 1920s and 1930s, including *creacionismo*, *ultraísmo*, Brazilian *modernismo*, and Mexican *estridentismo*, and then, the *neo-avant-garde* of the 1960s and 1970s. He emphasizes the recovery of non-Western indigenous and Black perspectives carried out by authors of the historical *vanguardia*, such as Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Nicolás Guillén, César Vallejo, and Alejo Carpentier. In turn, the neo-vanguardias continued in more radical ways their pursuit of continental liberation and strove for the renovation

of artistic languages. Among the authors studied in this second period are Haroldo de Campos, Diamela Eltit, Raúl Zurita, Juan Luis Martínez, and Pedro Lemebel.

In Chapter 2, titled “A Material World: On the Literary Invention of the Latin American Queer Body,” Javier Guerrero studies certain strategies to which queer writers resort to “re-sex and materialize their bodies” (28). As he explains, they offset the rigid norms and anatomic allegories that institutions impose on their bodies to show, through certain exhibitionism, somatic materializations that lead to autonomously altering themselves (using cosmetic or prosthetic transformations) in order to become unrecognizable. Guerrero proposes five issues intervening in this process: “(1) travel and foreignness, (2) visibility and the body’s transformative capacity, (3) controversies and discontents, (4) illness, and (5) archival politics” (20). Among the authors studied in the chapter who use their bodies to challenge the relation between corporality and the state, including binaries and gender norms, are Alejandra Pizarnik, Reinaldo Arenas, Augusto D’Halmar, Severo Sarduy, José Lezama Lima, Salvador Novo, Pedro Lemebel, and Mario Bellatin.

Chapter 3, “Economic Impact: Narrative Traces of Money, Crisis, and Work,” by Alejandra Laera, explores the Latin American novel’s realist representation of the rise of finance capitalism and the ensuing economic crises since the second half of the nineteenth century. She divides these novels into two modalities: fictions of money, impacted by financial crises due to unhinged speculation, and fictions of work, devoted to transformations and crises in the world or workers, whose labor is conceived as just another commodity. Both types of novels, influenced by documentary and autobiographical tendencies, tend to describe social aspirations and offer imaginary solutions. Among the authors studied are Julián Martel, Segundo Villafañe, Manuel Bahamonde, Alfredo de Taunay, Sergio Chejfec, Alan Pauls, Ricardo Piglia, César Aira, Rodolfo Fogwill, Diamela Eltit, Matilde Sánchez, Aníbal Jarkowski, and Mike Wilson.

In Chapter 9, “Literature and Revolution in Latin America,” Juan E. De Castro, the author of *Bread and Beauty: The Cultural Politics of José Carlos Mariátegui* (2021), begins by highlighting Mariátegui’s belief in modernism’s revolutionary potential, which was shared by the authors of the 1960s Latin American Boom. The Boom writers’ reconciliation of cultural and political revolution simultaneously ignored Soviet and Cuban mandates of creating socialist realist novels with working-class, socialist heroes. Mariátegui would also influence two of the main Peruvian

indigenista writers: Ciro Alegría and José María Arguedas. Expanding on his research in *Writing Revolution in Latin America: From Martí to García Márquez to Bolaño* (2019), De Castro also considers the relationship between poetry and revolution in the *oeuvres* of César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda, who proposed a type of avant-garde that embraced Marxism. In the essay's epilogue, we find Patricio Pron's reinterpretation of the lost utopian desires of the 1960s and 1970s, and then, Roberto Bolaño, the prototypical author who ended up rejecting revolution, as he identified the death of socialist utopias in Latin America.

Chapter 10, Benjamin Loy's "The Reactionary Genealogies of Latin American Literature," offers a panorama of the important yet neglected literary tradition of reactionary and rightist thinking in Latin America. According to Loy, the first reactionary movements, many of them admirers of Benito Mussolini, blended traditional right-wing, antidemocratic politics with populist ideals of mass mobilization and nationalist labor policies. Promoting Catholicism and patriarchal discourse, they based their discourse on modern race theories and fascist aesthetics. The diversity of their writing is exemplified by works by Colombian, Chilean, Argentinean, and Brazilian authors, including Roberto Bolaño, Menotti del Picchia, Eliseo Arango, Miguel Serrano, Jorge Luis Borges, Enrique Campos Menéndez, Gonzalo Vidal, Álvaro Puga Cappa, Fernando Emmerich, Ignacio Valente, Mariana Callejas, Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa, Nicolás Gómez, and Fernando Vallejo.

In Chapter 12, "Decolonizing Indigenous Literatures," Arturo Arias, author of the two volumes of *Recovering Lost Footprints: Contemporary Maya Narratives* (2017-2018), provides a brief history of Mesoamerican writing from pre-Columbian times to the present, focusing on the works of two contemporary Mexican indigenous authors, Javier Castellanos and Marisol Ceh Moo, as case studies proving the decolonizing goals of this literature. Arias then points out the recurrent problems with the translation of indigenous literatures, which render the texts incomplete because of the different ways in which indigenous cultures conceive of "creative acts as means for recording knowledge" (120). For this reason, he claims that we must accept diverse paradigms when dealing with non-Western cultural production.

The title of Rosario Hubert's Chapter 17, "The Orient, The Rim, and The World," reflects two of the organizing principles of her essay on the emergent subfield of Asia and Latin America: the transpacific and world literature. As she explains, the transpacific shift demands interdisciplinary expertise and privileges hemispheric

considerations as opposed to the traditional transatlantic ones based on colonial affiliation. Away from the cultural politics of *mestizaje*, the transpacific looks at the history and cultural production of Asians and their descendants in Latin America from alternative chronologies and geographies to those offered by US area studies. In turn, other critics take a world-literary and cosmopolitan turn informed by a global modernism that crosses cultural boundaries. Among the literary and cultural critics listed in the first section, looking for connections between the Pacific Rim and the Orient, are Araceli Tinajero, Ignacio López-Calvo, Ana Paulina Li, Paula Park, Laura Torres-Rodríguez, Koichi Hagimoto, and Jungwong Verónica Kim. Among the critics focusing on world literature and global modernism, Hubert cites Pedro Erber, Christopher Bush, Seth Jacobowitz, and Andrea Bachner.

Chapter 18, “Rethinking South-South Globalities: The Indian Connection,” by Alexandra Ortiz Wallner—co-editor, along with Susanne Klengel, of *Sur/South: Poetics and Politics of Thinking Latin America-India* (2016)—, looks at South-South cultural exchanges with an emphasis on Indian thought and the heterogenous Latin American lettered city of the 1920s and 1930s. In her own words, the Theosophical Society propagated “a certain image of India in which ideas of oriental wisdom converge with the supposedly rationalized knowledge of world religions” (189). In particular, Ortiz Wallner reveals Theosophy’s role in the popularization of Indian thought, as well as religious and philosophical writing. She also argues that a Latin Americanist perspective can provide different perspectives of Western esotericism. Among the Latin American writers considered, José Vasconcelos and Vicente Fatone receive particular attention. On the Indian side, the article revisits the influence of Indian thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore and J. Krishnamurti. All of them shared an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist stance.

Mariano Siskind’s somewhat surprising title in Chapter 19, “Liberian Signifiers and the Crisis of Latin American Cosmopolitan Imaginaries,” refers to the Latin American cultural inscriptions beyond its traditional borders and beyond subaltern exceptionalism and identitarianism. Within a Global South studies approach, the word “Liberian” provides a hint of his focus on Latin American literature’s engagement with African imaginaries, led by authors such as Domingo F. Sarmiento, Roberto Arlt, María Luisa Puga, Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Alberto Ruy Sánchez, and Ignacio Padilla. Developing some of the concepts presented in his 2014 *Cosmopolitan Desires*, and focusing on works by Roberto Bolaño, Martín Caparrós, and Juan Pablo Villalobos, Siskind argues that the Liberian signifier represents the means by which they “delve

into the current crisis of the Latin American cosmopolitan imagination that, *in the past*, could have connected Latin America and Africa against the background of a redemptive discourse on universal justice and inclusion” (195). In his view, these authors signal Latin American literature’s cosmopolitan failure in the face of widespread hunger, violence, and suffering in these times of neoliberalism and the erosion of welfare protections.

Gabriel Giorgi’s brilliant Chapter 27, “The Afterlives of Biopolitics,” is, in my view, one of the highlights in the volume. The author of *Formas comunes: animalidad, cultura y biopolítica* (2014) reviews the “Foucault effect” in Latin America. In particular, he focuses on the productivity of the concepts of biopolitics (“power articulated around the management of life” [286]) and biopower to address the region’s archives and realities from the colonial period to the advent of neoliberalism in Pinochet’s Chile and its aftermath in the rest of the continent. According to Giorgi, the initial debates in Latin America revolved around the construction of the modern nation-state after independence in relation to race and sexuality, which, in turn, propitiated the emergence of Latin American cultural studies. As he explains, Latin American interpretations of biopolitics soon revealed two major blind spots in this theoretical discourse: the lack of attention to the nonhuman and the neglect of the colonial matrix. Concomitantly, both disclosed the anthropocentric and Eurocentric leanings of Foucault’s thought. From this perspective, the chapter evaluates the following in different sections: the nonhuman (monster, machine, cyborg, animal, specter, the impersonal, displacing distinctions between the cultural and the natural); the friction between *bios* and *geos* (extractivism, the geological turn, the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene, cosmopolitics); and the intimate relationship between neoliberalism on the one hand, and war, genocide, coloniality, necropolitics, gore capitalism, and new fascisms, on the other, as interpreted by feminist, Indigenous, and anti-racist thinking.

Chapter 28, “Infrastructure Studies and Literature in Latin America and the Caribbean,” by Nicole Fadellin offers a panorama of the origins of this theoretical approach in the social sciences and its development in postcolonial studies. It then outlines the uses of infrastructure studies to analyze Latin American literature and culture, from the social construction of natural disasters to coloniality, community organizing, sovereignty, and the common good. As evidence, she analyzes two Puerto Rican novels from this perspective. First, *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*, by Luis Rafael Sánchez, shows how the presence of both functional and dysfunctional infrastructure links historical processes to

individual experiences, suggests a critique of modernity, and affects the narrative form. Secondly, we learn how in *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya*, by Mayra Santos-Febres, each character's relation to electricity provides clues about historical inequalities.

Chapter 31, "A Horizontal Hospitality," by Guillermina De Ferrari, proposes, through the interpretation of two interactive artworks by Tania Bruguera dealing with the topic of sharing the shelter with immigrant and refugee others, what the author terms a "horizontal hospitality" for Latin America. Revisiting thinkers who have participated in a debate with Jacques Derrida's theory of hospitality developed in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, including Pheng Cheah, Mireille Rosello, Nan Goodman, Walter D. Mignolo, Ana Paula Penchaszadeh, and Thomas Hylland Eriksen, De Ferrari proposes an alternative path from that of a hierarchical model of citizens and States with rights and immigrants without them; instead, she proposes a type of Latin American hospitality that "builds alliances on multiple axes of power, fracturing the status quo and revealing the fissures in an inadequate social contract. Simple social practices that provide safety and welfare without the help of the state are the building blocks of a civil society" (326). These practices include the art of hospitality such as Bruguera's, which accepts the fate of others as one's own and contingency as a common human condition.

In Chapter 33, "The Affective Turn According to Latin America, and Vice-Versa," Cecilia Macón offers definitions of both the term "affect" ("the capacity to affect and be affected" [339]) and the affective turn, and then provides its specific characteristics in Latin America. She explores the role of affects in the way in which the relationship between present and past is problematized, focusing first on Andrés Di Tella's film *Ficción privada*, and then on its place in the artistic interventions connected to activism in the 2019 Chilean protests. Macón explains how the intergenerational historicity of emotions can be reconstructed to study the affective dimension in sociopolitical and cultural processes. The affective turn, she adds, has also been used to discuss the affective dimension of trauma, melancholy, and post-memory. It is also an efficient tool to investigate the role of affect in emancipatory movements, such as the protests against femicide in Mexico or for the legalization of abortion in Argentina.

Chapter 34, "Sound Studies and Literature in Latin America," by Anke Birkenmaier delves into the 1990s emergence of sound studies, the main topics in this approach, and how it expands our theoretical understanding of Latin

American literature. The article points out how music in Latin America has been associated with cultural fusion and the consolidation of national cultures. Along these lines, sound studies facilitate the understanding of how cultural techniques work at both visual and auditory levels. Likewise, we learn that critics are now paying attention to how people's voices, popular music, ambient noise, and other soundscapes shape the public, which can be traced in recorded archives. The chapter also ventures to predict the future of the study of sound in literature. In Birkenmaier's words,

Sound studies has indeed taught us to be suspicious of the notion that there is an essential opposition between "the voice of the vanquished" and the written culture that supposedly replaced it in Latin America, between "traditional" oral cultures and "modern" literate cultures and the value systems associated with them. If we accept that sound, just like the printed word, comes to us mediated by complex, encoded technologies, as a record or mark of what was and is there, then the study of sound in literature becomes a way to build a truly comprehensive archive of Latin American Literature. (352)

Chapter 37, "Él No Es: Infrapolitics and the Experience of Tragedy," by Gareth Williams, the author of *Infrapolitical Passages: Global Turmoil, Narco-Accumulation, and the Post-Sovereign State* (2020), applies an infrapolitical approach to Eduardo Ruiz Sosa's short story "El dolor los vuelve ciegos" to address the ontological status of the disappeared and what it means to survive the disappearance of the beloved other. The short story "situates itself on the ontological limit between life and death, between being and non-being, between the part object and the social bond, as well as between grief and reproduction" (381). This infrapolitical register, Williams explains, challenges humanism to restore the dignity of human beings and to guard human truth in an age of commodity fetishism and total subsumption to the nihilistic realm of global techno-capitalism in which humans become mere commodities.

The ambitious Chapter 38, "Distorting Latinamericanism," by Erin Graff Zivin, proposes a different approach for the discipline of Latin American literary studies in these times of generalized distraction and the "death of reading": true interdisciplinarity (with philosophy, comparative literature, media theory, Black and feminist thought) and "distorting" the objects of study with other genres, other media, and other objects, including film, music, and art. The second part of the essay studies formal experimentation in multimedia: the experimental short film *Come Out*, by Narcisa Hirsch, in which "a German-Argentinian filmmaker

adapts a Jewish-American composer's sound piece, which in turn distorts the voice of Harlem resident Daniel Hamm, whose story was documented by James Baldwin" (396).

In Chapter 40, "Nature and Labor in Literary Form," Héctor Hoyos returns to the application of what he terms "transcultural materialism" (based on new materialism and transculturation theories) to literary criticism, which he defended in his 2019 *Things with a History: Transcultural Materialism and the Literatures of Extraction in Contemporary Latin America*. Using the continuity of language and nature in Sergio Chejfec's *cartonera* booklet *El mes de las moscas* (2016) as a case study, he proposes the task of politicizing (through natureculture and political ecology) new materialism in Latin America, particularly in opposition to extractivism. Hoyos's transcultural materialism blends historical materialism, which centers the human and focuses on power, and new materialism, which decenters the human, to engage both natural and political history in literary criticism. In his own words, it is "a political ecological intervention that potentiates an implicit trait of literary language—namely, the exploration of the limits of the sayable in order to resituate ourselves in the continuum of human nonhuman history" (416).

Paloma Celis Carbajal, in her Chapter 41, titled "Cartonera Publishers: Of Cardboard Boxes and Cultural Capital," delves into the history of the *cartonera* phenomenon, which began in Buenos Aires at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The co-author, along with Ksenija Biblbija, of *Akademia Cartonera: A Primer of Latin American Cartonera Publishers* (2009) interprets the success of these alternative cardboard-cover book presses first with the trailblazer Eloísa Cartonera, and then in the rest of Latin America and the world. As she explains, quite diverse types of cartonera publishers sought liberation from the globalized models of consumerism of traditional book production, controlled in neo-colonial fashion by Global North publishing giants; instead, the emphasis now became the local. Each book is handmade and uniquely imperfect in such a way that the materials used also communicate an idea. As Celis Carbajal explains, the collective production of these books, which are sold at reduced prices, brings together writers, artists, and community members. In this way, cartonera publishers have contributed, according to Celis Carbajal, to democratizing and desacralizing literature in all areas of production (authored by high school students, psychiatric patients, prison inmates), circulation, and consumption.

Gesine Müller's Chapter 42, "Institutions: Prizes, Presses, and Book Fairs," applies Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theories of art to study how global literary

institutions such as publishing houses, literary prizes, and universities influence the canonization and international selection and circulation of literature. Among other institutions, she locates the Center for Inter-American Relations (CIAR), which promoted the translation of Latin American literature for the U.S. market. Other agents that can increase symbolic capital and canonization of Latin American literature, thus turning it into world literature, are, according to Müller, academies, book reviews in major media outlets, bestseller lists, book fairs, and literary festivals. She also delves into the roles that digitalization, the print-on-demand process, and consumer reviews have had in the literary business in recent years.

Chapter 49, “Experimental Literary Forms in the Digital Age Sampling Quantum Poetics, Hypermedia Narratives, and Robopoetic Hacking”, by Scott Weintraub, the author of *Latin American Technopoetics: Scientific Exploration in New Media* (2018), studies the digital turn in literature. He lists the main trends and provides examples of Latin American interdisciplinary e-lit (electronic literature) and the new cognitive paths it opens, from which we find the emergence of “new forms of conceptualizing intersubjectivity, literature, culture, and science” (500). This digital turn has opened the door to formal innovation, new technological imagery in literature, and major shifts in the way literature is produced, disseminated, and consumed. In particular, Weintraub celebrates the fruitful bidirectional dialogue between the humanities and the sciences, and between virtual and material spaces. Among the authors and artists considered are Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez Ruiz, Santiago Ortiz, and Belén Gache, but other authors are listed as precursors, including Augusto de Campos, Jorge Luis Borges, and Julio Cortázar.

Altogether, the short length of the articles forces their authors to succinctly explain their critical and literary theories and understandings of literary criticism, which may help the reader to get a fuller grasp of the main elucidations in their much more extensive book-length studies. Overall, the essays in this outstanding volume, many of them written by renowned experts in their respective subfields, offer useful heuristic tools and astute inroads into different and variegated literary and cultural theories, critical approaches, and literary traditions. They also provide a basic bibliography to continue learning on these diverse topics, which makes the book particularly valuable for those of us who work on different subfields or those who are interested in exploring other (perhaps relatively newer ones, such as sound, infrastructure, or transpacific studies, cosmopolitanism, world literature) subfields. If nothing else, this essay

collection provides ample evidence of the exciting vitality and intellectual diversity that populates the field of Latin American literary and cultural studies today. This *Companion* is of interest to scholars and advanced students in Latin American literature and culture, Latin American studies, cultural studies, comparative literature, critical theory, and critical race and ethnic studies. It also establishes a connection with Third World studies and Women's studies, among other academic areas.