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Abstract

Kathryn Everly. *History, Violence, and the Hyperreal: Representing Culture in the Contemporary Spanish Novel* by Nina L. Molinaro

Jill Robbins. *Crossing Through the Chueca: Lesbian Literary Culture in Queer Madrid* by Salvador A. Oropesa

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Aníbal González. *Love and Politics in the Contemporary Spanish American Novel* by Mónica Adriana Agrest

Keywords

Contemporary Spanish novel, History, Violence, Hyperreal, culture, representation of culture, Lesbian Literary Culture, queer, Salvador A. Oropesa, Nina L. Molinaro, Banditry, Literature in Latin America 1816-1929, María Zaldondo, Poetics of Self-Consciousness, Poetics, Self-Consciousness, Carlos Jerez-Farrán, Love, Politics, Contemporary Spanish American Novel, Mónica Adriana Agrest

Book Reviews

Kathryn Everly. *History, Violence, and the Hyperreal: Representing Culture in the Contemporary Spanish Novel*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2010. xiv + 215 pp.

Culture, history, and reality have become standard bearers in many of the critical discourses currently circulating in academia. In Kathryn Everly's book, these terms acquire both urgency and gravity for contemporary Spanish narrative, and particularly as they relate to ten novels and one cinematic adaptation that appeared in Spain between 1994 and 2008. Everly employs a Structuralist-infused model of close reading to examine the postmodern content and style of her selected texts. She leans primarily on Continental theorists popular during the 1970s and 1980s, who include René Girard, Humberto Eco, Hayden White, Wayne Booth and Wolfgang Iser, in order to investigate the complicated echoes, resistances and reflections between and among the narratological flashpoints of author, implied author, narrator and reader. Jean Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality also matters to the overarching conception of the book, as does an inclusive understanding of culture as "a concept that connects all social experiences and bridges seemingly disparate sectors of the population" (vii).

Everly chooses to engage relatively well-known novels by Carme Riera, Dulce Chacón, Javier Cercas, Ray Loriga and José Ángel Mañas, together with lesser-known works by Riera, Cercas, Loriga, Lucía Etxebarria and Mañas. Chapters One, Two, Three, and Six focus on a single novel by one of the aforementioned authors whereas Chapters Four and Seven compare two novels by Cercas and Mañas, respectively. Chapter Five stands apart in that Everly tackles two novels and one filmic adaptation by Loriga; she justifies her temporary turn to film by observing that Loriga "makes the transition

from novel to film seem like a logical and natural way to incorporate doubts about language into narrative technique” (x). Indeed, postmodern ambiguity provides a salient point of departure for Everly’s argument, even as she upholds the representational value of literature and the political dimension of culture.

After the requisite Preface, Acknowledgments and Introduction, *History, Violence and the Hyperreal* is organized into two parts, each of which features a succinct explanatory foreword. In Part 1, titled “History or Creating the Past,” Everly scrutinizes the contemporary historical novel as a contested form of “cultural capital” in Riera’s *Dins el darrer blau* (Chapter One) and *La meitat de l'ànima* (Chapter Two), Chacón’s *La voz dormida* (Chapter Three), and Cercas’s *Soldados de Salamina* and *La velocidad de la luz* (Chapter Four). Throughout the first section, she is particularly interested in the novelistic clash between truth and history, and in the plural meanings and accounts of History. Whether it be the plight of the Mallorcan Jews in the seventeenth century or the testimonies of Republican women prisoners after the Spanish Civil War, the author looks to the current historical novel in Spain as compelling evidence that narrative fiction necessarily exceeds, and therefore unravels, the certainties attributed to historical events and human memory.

In Part 2, dedicated to “Hyperreality or Creating Culture,” Everly interrogates Baudrillardian simulation in two novels and one film by Loriga (Chapter Five), Etxebarria’s *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* (Chapter Six) and Mañas’s *Historias del Kronen* and *La pella* (Chapter Seven). The three writers are regularly associated with Spain’s Generation X, and Everly eloquently defends and explains the characteristics of this increasingly diverse literary generation. She identifies as their most crucial characteristic the ways in which Loriga, Etxebarria, and Mañas link narrative and technology in their conscious attempts to integrate video, music, film, television and the internet into their fictional texts.

Throughout the first section, Everly analyzes the myriad ways in which Riera, Chacón and Cercas convincingly adjust the conventions and conflicts of the historical novel in order to emphasize the ever more porous boundaries of narrative and language. In the second section she discusses how and why Loriga, Etxebarria and Mañas exploit the volatile versions of the hyperreal that derive from a global dependence on technology. She relies consistently on culture as the bridge between the two segments of her argument and reads the literary and filmic texts as innovative cultural artifacts. She also threads all of the chapters through the theme of violence, be it the institutionalized violence of war or the individual violence of emotional trauma. Less obviously, she pursues the ideological twists of gender differences. Chapters One, Two, Three and Six, for example, foreground the psychological, material and narrative realities of the women characters in light of the systematic oppression that they inevitably face and, to a greater or lesser degree, overcome.

Everly's keen analytical skills are at their very best when she evaluates multiple novels by the same author and when she brings together novels by different authors under a common rubric. Although her project might seem, at first glance, to resemble a collection of disparate essays, it is in fact a conceptually coherent and unified whole that methodically progresses through the literary texts in order to refine the nexus between contemporary Peninsular narrative, postmodern skepticism, and the constructedness of culture. *History, Violence, and the Hyperreal* firmly dismisses any homogenous vision of Spanish nationality and instead extends a potential map of the ways in which writers and readers of novels may temporarily create the illusion of truth and completion, even as we are reminded of the costs and fragility of that illusion.

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Jill Robbins. *Crossing through Chueca. Lesbian Literary Culture in Queer Madrid*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011. 176 pp.

Cultural Studies has reached a level of maturity that allows it to help literary studies, putting literature in contact with fields in the social sciences like anthropology. Jill Robbins starts her analysis of the Chueca district in Madrid studying it as a chronotope, a place that has been evolving for years to become the main focus of queer Spanish culture, lesbian literature and the center of the Spanish LGBT community. She starts in July 2005 during the Gay Pride Parade in Madrid when she and her friends get ready to attend the event. This is an excuse for a detailed description and analysis of the surroundings: restaurants, bookstores and clubs that form the microcosm of queer Madrid. Robbins links the beginning of this community to the Movida and the openness and fluidity of bodies this cultural movement brought to Spain. Spanish democracy needed gay visibility to legitimize itself; the Socialist party understood that bringing gay rights to the forefront of public discourse placed Spain among the avant-garde of European democracies. Robbins brings to the attention of the reader a second component of queer culture which is institutionalization, the fact that eventually it became consumerist and sanitized when a democratic state sanctioned queer culture and behavior that conformed to heterosexual patterns of decency, like lesbian chic as a heterosexual fantasy.

In this context lesbian culture as a feminine culture was minimized; safe sex or penetrative sex became hidden from lesbian public spaces like in the

books displayed in Chueca bookstores. Lesbian women, like their heterosexual sisters, should not represent sex or female desire. One more layer to the process of normalization was that lesbian literature in Spain at the end of the millennium followed the lead of heterosexual literature when publishing houses transferred their power from intellectuals and writers to businesspeople and small publishing houses became niches of big conglomerate media.

In the second part of the book Robbins moves to more traditional literary criticism, chapter three analyzes *Plumas de España* (1988) by Ana Rossetti. The critic proposes a new reading of the novel, that of the absence of the Andalusian woman and her unending task of representing quintessential femininity; this is the main reason why drag and transvestitism are central to the novel and to the Movida culture. Robbins notices a curious cultural phenomenon that gay pride parades are based on the model of Holy Week processions. It is also important to notice that if the *copla* was taken over by conservative ideologies, the postmodern, camp, version of the *copla* became a satire of the mores of Francoism and National-Catholicism. Camp also increases the cultural cache of the new version of the *copla* and the Andalusian paraphernalia that surrounds it. The ghost of the missing woman in transvestitism brings historical memory to the debate as women were physically abused by the fascist arm of Francoism, the Falange militias that murdered, raped and tortured thousands of Spanish women, especially Andalusian women. Robbins defends Rossetti's novel from globalized readings that misunderstand the rebellious potential of the absence of the woman and the role of popular Andalusian culture as a defense mechanism against the aggression of patriarchy, fascism and current globalized culture in the sense that businesspeople have substituted intellectuals in publishing decisions.

Chapter Four examines *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998) by Lucía Etxebarria, *Donde comienza tu nombre* (2004) by Mabel Galán and *Una palabra tuya* (2005) by Elvira Lindo, prize winning novels that represent the packaged cultural products of today. These novels contain lesbian themes, and were written with a liberal, middle class in mind. Robbins uses the label "lesbian chic" to explain these novels; it is a semi-pornographic lesbianism, inoffensive and produced to calm the heterosexual anxiety regarding lesbian sexuality. Lesbian chic reaffirms traditional values and bridges the distance between heteronormative society and queer territory. Robbins thinks *Beatriz* accomplishes this lesbian chic through a false postmodernism, pretending it introduces innovative literary techniques with a ludic element when in reality is just withholding information in order to provide a traditional closure at the end. Robbins notices the voyeuristic nature of the narrator toward a butch/femme dynamic and how the author misses the class component of this kind of lesbian couple, as it is typical of the working class. Chapter Five analyzes *Cenicienta en Chueca* (2003) a collection of short stories by Argentinean exile

María Felicitas. The critic uses the concept of cyborg—the hybrid of person and machine—to analyze the interconnectedness of communication, technology, globalization, and identities. Chapter Six analyzes lesbian popular culture, concretely the romances *Amores prohibidos* (2002) by Marta Fagés, *Un amor bajo sospecha* (2001) by Marosa Gómez Pereira and *A por todas* (2005) by Libertad Morán. Robbins states that the LGBT battle was more for acceptance and normalization than equality. Romance lesbian novels are about lesbian women being able to become a family, raise children, have a happy ending and eliminate the stigma of homosexuality.

Robbins's book is about the difficulty of representing lesbianism, primarily because it inherits the same difficulties of representing womanhood without falling in all the epistemological traps centuries of patriarchy have created. It also shares with heterosexual women the difficulty of representing sexuality and desire. Lesbianism is also a secondary act in gay culture where males dominate the agenda. But Chueca, the laws that protect homosexuality and give rights to the LGBT community, as well as these novels with their flaws and successes represent an extraordinary advance in basic human rights and cultural production. There is more to be done and impeccable books like *Crossing through Chueca* help because they give academic legitimacy to the discussion and help to bring visibility, teaching the writers and the readers how to overcome the flaws of our cultural heritage and better use the artistic tools that we already have, like Rossetti's *pluma*, a non-phallogentric queer pen.

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Juan Pablo Dabove. *Nightmares of the Lettered City: Banditry and Literature in Latin America 1816-1929*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 2007. 381 pp.

Latin American exegetical practice is often informed by prevailing ideas concatenated through time and space that become part of its intellectual history. One such idea reaching across time (nineteenth century) is Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's now famous analysis of political society as emerging from a series of social and historical dynamics that occur in tension with one another or "civilization and barbarism." Juan Pablo Dabove's study is partly a reformulation and contemplation of Sarmiento's dichotomy. Dabove, as the title suggests, also engages Angel Ramas's treatise on the important role of the *letrado* as the arbiter of civil society. Dabove re-signifies bandits as "monsters"

who can be understood as “identities differing from the man of letters (*letrado*) who is masculine—literate—‘white’ proprietor-urban-Europeanized” (and, I might add, heterosexual) in the new republics (2). More to the point, Dabove emphasizes the role of the bandit as the quintessential Other, contending that the “rural rebel labeled a bandit by the state was among the foremost cultural Others of Latin American modernity” (3).

Dabove’s argument is meticulously and ambitiously sustained in the investigation of texts spanning the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. His study includes such diverse narratives as *El periquillo sarniento* (Colonial Mexico), *Astucia* (Imperial Mexico), *Martín Fierro* (Argentina), *Os sertões* (Brazil), *Los de abajo* (Revolutionary Mexico), and *Zárate* (Venezuela), to name a few. With copiously documented references (including primary as well as secondary sources) and chapter notes, Dabove earns the admiration of serious researchers on the topic of banditry. His initial gesture of proposing a cultural teratology for the study of banditry is quite brilliant as he references Frederic Jameson’s political unconscious and Ernesto Laclau’s “floating signifiers” (1) to propose a genealogy of the nation “that will trace the piecemeal cultural conflicts of which national imagined communities are an effect, not a *primum mobile*” (1). Consequently Dabove contends that the bandit was the “secret dynamo” that helped solidify and refine the *letrado* identity so key to establishing national imagined communities. It is an argument that recalls Foucault but Dabove establishes the complexity of shift in identities noting the instability in both representational signs “bandit” and “*letrado*” (his discussion of Relumbrón from *Los bandidos de Río Frío* is perhaps the best example).

Dabove’s study intersperses texts from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela in three parts, with Argentinian works comprising the bulk of the material (seven out of sixteen) studied. Indeed, it is with the Argentinian texts that Dabove most displays his critical acumen and scholarly rigor. He even takes issue with Josefina Ludmer’s representation of the bandit Juan Moreira as a popular hero, arguing instead for a version of the “unpopular nature of Moreira” as evidenced from his reading of the perspective of the *paysanos* who did “not share his alliances and hatred” (182). Instead, Dabove finds in the gaucho Contreras (Eugenio Cambaceres’s *Sin rumbo*, 1885) a “true hero of the resistance against the modernizing leap” (189). These observations will make for spirited debates in graduate seminars, where the book will be an important addition to literature courses on banditry, criminology, national literatures, and the study of peasant insurgency, among others.

For the Mexican case, we find that it is difficult to find portrayals of bandit-heroes in nineteenth-century novels (the popular *corridos*, of course, are another matter). Dabove makes a case for the memorable character *Astucia*, the homonym of the novel *Astucia el Gefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja, o Los Charros*

Contrabandistas de la Rama (1865-66). His study appears in the section entitled “the bandit as an instrument of social critique” and it was a surprise for this reader that it was included as a “bandit novel” (as well as Mariano Azuela’s *Los de abajo*). Astucia is, after all, the leader of a band of tobacco smugglers. In his community he is never seen as a “criminal” (130) and in the introduction to the novel Inclán takes great pains to distinguish the leader as one who chased and severely punished bandits. Dabove includes him, however, because the state considers Astucia an outlaw and because his definition of banditry is quite broad.

Indeed, for Dabove the usual definition for bandit of “highwayman/road robber” is deemed inadequate and other nouns are enlisted as synonymous such as smuggler, *cimarrón* (a word associated with a runaway slave), and *cabra* “goat.” Although Dabove asserts that under the rubric “brigandage” all these activities can be counted, Mexicanists might take issue with this characterization of Astucia as a bandit because his crime is to undermine the state in the sale of tobacco. This is not a major offense in the popular mindset, despite the state’s position. Yet Astucia is a kind of “social bandit,” or rather “social outlaw,” and it is this distinction that sets him apart from the other Mexican outlaws that Dabove studies. It is no coincidence that Astucia has to operate outside of the law to imagine a utopia; yet Inclán’s novel intrigues because neither the members of the Brotherhood of the Leaf nor the social landscape he portrays are homogenous. Dabove mistakenly counts the nickname of Alejo Delgado, el Charro Acambareño, as another member of the Brotherhood and oddly omits mention of one of the most memorable of the Brothers, Chepe Botas (he appears in part II, published in 1866). The oldest of the gang of five, Chepe Botas is referred to as “negrito” and discussions about his *raza* ‘race’ suggests that he is of African descent, thwarting the idea that the Brothers are an ethnically homogeneous gang.

The conclusion of the study provides a useful synopsis of some of the representational paradigms that differ from Hobsbawm’s motifs and suggests that these are particularly pertinent to the Latin American context such as “Banditry is not considered a social phenomena but a natural event” and “Bandits are monsters or wild beasts” (287-88). Another paradigm, “Bandit narratives are male narratives that function as the reverse of the national romance” might find its challenge in Mexican writer Refugio Barragán de Toscano’s novel *La hija del bandido o los subterráneos del Nevado* (Guadalajara, 1887). *La hija*, written about a bandit named Colombo and his daughter María, is unique in that it presents a young woman surrounded by bandits who has tremendous personal agency and willpower. She plots and plans to undo her father’s crimes and carves out a decent life for herself. Her decision to become a nun instead of marrying her suitor definitely thwarts the national romance paradigm. The novel, through imagination, articulates the effects of banditry on the women

who were often the victims of their violence. In Dabove's masculinist study of bandits perhaps Barragán de Toscano's narrative is considered superfluous. Nonetheless, Dabove's study is intellectually stimulating, well-researched, imaginative, and, at times, provocative. It is a must for nineteenth-century scholars seeking to traverse the intellectual roadways that are the studies of nation formation, *letrado* identity, and its constitutive Others.

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Concord University

Federico Bonaddio. *Federico García Lorca. The poetics of Self-Consciousness*. London: Támesis, 2010. 209 pp.

This attractively produced volume is the first book-length study to focus on the process of self-consciousness as a theory from which to read Federico García Lorca's major poetic output. A general introduction is followed by six chapters that study very much in detail a selection of poems from Lorca's output. Chapter one contains a discussion of *Libro de poemas*, the first book of poems Lorca wrote. It is followed by an analysis of *Poema del cante jondo* 'Deep Song Poem' and *Suites*. Chapter three, subtitled "Autonomy and Self" focuses on the poetry Lorca wrote in the late mid-twenties known as *Songs*. The fourth and fifth chapters draw attention to a selection of poems from Lorca's better known *Gypsy Ballads* and *Poet in New York*. The last chapter of the book, entitled "The Late Poetry: The Poet Recognized," comprises the analysis of poems as diverse and heterogeneous as *Tamarit's Divan*, *Elegy for the Death of Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, and the so-called and posthumously published *Dark Love Sonnets*. The work is rounded off by an index of poems and a general index.

To single out specific poems and give some close textual commentaries in the poem-by-poem approach the author has chosen is to accord them undue prominence in a study which aims at studying "the whole of Lorca's poetry," as the blurb states. It is perhaps this approach that is its strength and its weakness, for, in his efforts to provide us with the detailed analysis that eschews trite generalizations, Federico Bonaddio makes it difficult for us to see the wood for the trees. The coverage is spotty and gives the impression of arbitrariness. Close to seven pages are spent analyzing "Preciosa and the Air" while the entire *Tamarit's Divan* is represented and dismissed with the analysis of only two of the twenty one poems that comprise the book. *Sánchez Mejías* is erroneously referred to as a book and numerous contradictions to his approach recur throughout the book.

The interesting question this book poses, at least for me, is whether self-consciousness is an aesthetic approach that can be applied to Lorca, especially when considering that there are hardly any traces in his entire output of a poet who speaks “of the creative process, of the paths and obstacles to creativity, to becoming a poet,” as Bonaddio claims (4). The author’s determination to fit all cases of Lorca’s poetry into rigid theoretical categories illuminates little and ignores much. That Lorca’s poetry resists the misguided approach Bonaddio adopts is demonstrated when he has to admit more than once that “there is little in *Divan* that is self-conscious in the manner of previous or indeed subsequent works” (173). The same contradiction becomes evident in Bonaddio’s rendering of “Chopo muerto” ‘Dead poplar tree’ which to him “is a testimony of the poet’s awareness [...] in which letting go [...] is a necessary condition for renewal” (43). Ironically, the trope of the dry tree in Lorca’s works appears in later poems, as is the case in “Canción del naranjo seco” ‘Song of the Dry Orange Tree’ where the prosopoeic tree is used to deplore the sense of barrenness conveyed in the previous poem. The fact that one of the “Canciones” was reproduced some ten years later as “Casida de las palomas oscuras” in *Tamarit’s Divan*, shows that Lorca did not “let go” as Bonaddio claims.

The shortcomings of Bonaddio’s approach are made evident when he quotes from a letter Lorca wrote to a close friend of his admitting that “everything seems lamentable to me in my poetry in so far as *I have not expressed* nor can I express my own thoughts. I find blurred qualities where I should find transparency and I find in it all a painful absence of *my very own and true self*” (79). Bonaddio’s remark when he admits that “It is not easy to hit on the precise meaning of these words” is paradigmatic of the same lack of understanding of the poetry he attempts to analyze. Lorca is conveying the relationship between public and private, the personal and the social. His ongoing grappling with these fraught binaries reflects in large measure his negotiation of the constraints on speakability traditionally faced by gay writers. It is a known fact that E. M. Forster stopped writing novels once he finished writing *Maurice* (which he considered impossible to publish once it was written because of its explicit gay content) because once he had decided to tell the truth about himself he no longer felt capable of continuing to lie. Lorca’s Spain was not that different, but unlike Forster, he continued to write, unable to free himself from the weight that bears down on those who struggle to conceal a stigmatized identity. Ironically, he produced one of the most moving of poetic outputs, mainly because, contrary to what T. S. Eliot claimed, in Lorca’s case the man that suffers is inextricably twined to the mind that creates. This intensely experienced dichotomy between what can be said in public and what must remain private is a recurrent dilemma in Lorca’s works. And his literary output cannot be explained away by theories that eschew pressing needs to reveal his inner self through reticence as the case with Lorca is. As it has been stated elsewhere, Lorca’s works are self projections

“in those areas of his emotional life which were to do with love and frustration and which caused him great suffering” (Edwards).

Consequently, the need to study Lorca as a self-conscious poet comes at the expense of ignoring hard facts, biographical evidence, and the best of scholarship published on this poet. Bonaddio wants to show his disapproval of recent approaches of historical and biographical contextualization and ideological critique: “We should not confuse this world with the biography of Lorca the man. Just as there is little to be had from applying the facts of his personal life to the sonnets, his poetry in general also resists such an approach. In his introductory words to *Libro de poemas* Lorca did claim that that book was intimately related to his life – that it was an exact image of his adolescence and youth. Yet the claim is somewhat overstated,” he goes on to add (196). Why try to deny this fact offering in its place readings of difficult validity instead? Nowhere is this dislike more evident than when Bonaddio attempts to analyze Lorca’s sonnets, doubting whether they were inspired by real-life relationships. He prefers to think that “it is equally possible to judge the sentiments of these poems, with their reference to love suffered, disdained or misunderstood, to be somewhat clichéd” (188). If the source behind the inspiration of the sonnets is gay love, the reader must be led by the hand away from truth and into darkness, that is, to “self-conscious articulation of the necessity to separate poetry from life” (130), as if self-consciousness in itself were enough to reveal artistic achievement. Ironically, it was Lorca’s close friend and poet Vicente Aleixandre who exclaimed upon reading these clichéd expressions of love enjoyed and betrayed: “Federico, ¡qué corazón! Cuánto has tenido que amar, cuánto que sufrir” (“Federico, what a heart! How much you must have suffered, how much you must have loved!”). Thus, the whole issue of biographical awareness is rendered trivial in a view of aesthetics which celebrates the skill of the artist to the exclusion of any other consideration, even when artistic achievement in Lorca’s case relies very much on his desire to reveal his secret self, to be known by others. What Bonaddio misses, in my view, is the extent to which these pressing concerns are a methodological version of self-awareness, ostensibly his subject, especially when considering that self-consciousness in poetry is not simply the deployment of the traditional devices by which art foregrounds its own procedures of creation. It also involves the writer’s engagement with contemporary issues, broadly cultural when not specifically personal.

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Aníbal González. *Love and Politics in the Contemporary Spanish American Novel*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2010. 177pp.

The “new sentimental novel” studied by Aníbal González attempts to reaffirm love values and individual subjectivity, in contrast to the testimonial literature prevailing from the 1960s, which reflected a period of political violence and gross violations of human rights. His book analyzes the work of ten authors including: Miguel Barnet, Elena Poniatowska, Isabel Allende, Alfredo Bryce Echenique, Gabriel García Márquez, Laura Esquivel, Luis Sepúlveda, Marcela Serrano, Antonio Skármeta and Luis Rafael Sánchez.

González examines this new narrative to explore the link between writing, society and love. To do so, he employs the ideas of the Swiss scholar Denis de Rougemont defined in his book *Love in the Western World*. De Rougemont posits that there are two conceptions of love that also represent two notions of writing and of social relations: writing as eros and writing as agape. While writing as eros views writing as an extremely passionate and egotistical activity associated with pain and suffering, agape regards writing as an act whose goal is simplicity and transparency as well as involving greater communal relationship between author, reader and text. Based on these ideas, the new sentimental narrative oscillates between eros and agape. In all the works examined by González these two visions are present in different proportions and in an interdependent relationship.

The narrative of the “new sentimental novel” shows a clear tendency to favor writing as agape. Indeed, these writers want to contribute to society with works that would help their readers to begin healing and overcoming the divisions and fears of the era of social and political injustice. González examines one specific work of each of the authors he has selected. Employing Barnet’s *Rachel’s Song* and Poniatowska’s *Dear Diego* as representatives, he argues for what he considers a transition from the testimonial narrative and to the sentimental novel. González asserts that *Rachel’s Song*, exemplifies one of the omnipresent themes in the works of this new genre, that of post-revolutionary fatigue or disillusionment. It implies a return to the exploration of love as a means for social change. It also allows one to one intimacy and interpersonal relations. González claims that in both works there is a tension between the two ways of conceiving the writing process. While there are a lot of elements that suggest agape, a passionate writing as eros still prevails.

In the section devoted to Allende’s *Of Love and Other Shadows*, González explores the particularities of the total novels of the Latin American literary Boom, which not only offered the readers entertainment but also elements that contributed to the knowledge of Latin American reality. He argues that these

works make an effort to comprehend “reality at all levels, from the social to the metaphysical” (41). As with the previous two authors, in Allende’s *Of Love and Shadows* the tension between the two forms of writing is present. The novel’s goal is, according to González, to promote writing based on Christian agape as there is an attempt to alleviate the pain of passionate love while pursuing solidarity and friendship as in the religiosity of the poor and in the everlasting love of the Ranquileo family. There are agape qualities or codes that associate it with that of the *novela rosa* or the *telenovela*.

González’s analysis of Bryce Echenique’s *Tarzan’s Tonsillitis* is focused on “the exploration of love effects upon language and on the writing subject,” (63) while also reflecting on gender roles. In clear opposition to *macho* tradition, Bryce’s male characters express their feelings, and display tenderness and understanding towards women. In this work, as in others, Bryce incorporates the feminine view and its female characters are strong and independent while some male characters are fragile and sensitive. Moreover, the reader can observe numerous quotes of romantic *boleros* and other song genres that clearly serve as sentimental education for they are minute love stories in themselves.

García Márquez’s neo-sentimental story *Del amor y otros demonios* is the third of a trilogy, along with *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *Of Love in the Time of Cholera* that deals with the topic of love and affects. According to González, this “amorous triptych” (81) is an attempt to pay homage and explore the new narrative. In some other novels of the post-Boom period the reader finds fewer erudite allusions, a partial abandonment of writing experimentation and a predilection for a linear narrative, as well as elements that allude to mass culture. González points out that in García Márquez’s trilogy some of these elements are present while it is also clear that he continues to view novels as a medium to impart knowledge. Furthermore, irony is present and there is no language disrupted by passion or filled with common places.

In Chapter 4, *Recipes for Romance*, the author examines three works that favor writing as agape: Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate*, in which through humor and parody, eros abandons its elitist characteristics and passion is expressed through words that are part of a magic kitchen recipe for love. Sepulveda’s *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* treats love ironically. The protagonist, an old man, reads romance novels in order to cope with his nostalgia for his dead wife and the memory of pure love. The third work, Serrano’s *Nosotras que nos queremos tanto*, recounts stories of unhappy loves and examines passion or eros, as an illness of the soul which finds its healing through communion, that is, through agape.

The final chapter is dedicated to Skármeta’s *Love-Fifteen* and Sanchez’s *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos*. In *Love-Fifteen* the reader will find an empathetic attitude towards the other, to the one who is different. The story’s rhetoric of passion favors friendship and understanding between

strangers. González believes this novel can be considered “an example of how the devalued language of eros can still serve as a means to seek and find agape” (135). Finally, he shows that in Sanchez’s work, the sentimental discourse, after being disregarded by the politics and high culture of the latter part of the century, discovered a safe haven in popular forms. *La importancia* is a melodrama centered on the myth of Daniel Santos, a show business character and, through him, an exploration of popular culture.

In making his argument that dominant motifs in the sentimental novel fluctuate between agape and eros, the author asserts the existence of a new type of narrative. In order to accomplish this, he highlights aspects of the novels that support this designation. Elements that reflect previous styles or forms are recognized, but González concludes that these novels reflect enough differences to constitute a new movement. This is an interesting and provocative idea worthy of critical attention.

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