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Patricia L. Swier and Julia Riordan-Goncalves, eds. Dictatorships in the Hispanic World: Transatlantic and Transnational Perspectives. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2013

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Abstract

Review of Patricia L. Swier and Julia Riordan-Goncalves, eds. *Dictatorships in the Hispanic World: Transatlantic and Transnational Perspectives*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2013.

Keywords

Dictatorship, Hispanic Studies, Cultural Studies, Spain, Latin America, Transatlantic Studies

Patricia L. Swier and Julia Riordan-Goncalves, eds. *Dictatorships in the Hispanic World: Transatlantic and Transnational Perspectives*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2013. 352 pp.

The election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States and the favorable Brexit vote, both of which occurred in 2016, may, in the coming years, inspire Anglo-American scholars to turn their attention to dictatorships, especially in search of their budding causes in culture and literature. Were such a shift to transpire, its practitioners would be well advised to examine the wide body of scholarship produced in Hispanic Studies on the culture of and against dictatorship. The recent volume *Dictatorships in the Hispanic World: Transatlantic and Transnational Perspectives*, edited by Patricia L. Swier and Julia Riordan-Goncalves, is a welcome contribution to the scholarship on dictatorial regimes, especially given its commitment to its subtitle: transatlantic and transnational studies. The volume gathers twelve essays from a range of scholars in order to address how dictatorships have shaped literature and culture from the early-twentieth century Mexican Porfiriato to twenty-first century rewritings of Latin American countries' dictatorial past.

Building on recent work from Luis Martín-Cabrera, the volume deepens our understanding of the specifically transatlantic dimension of dictatorships. Some essays use a comparative framework to grasp the shared struggle of marginalized groups under dictatorship. Swier's essay, for instance, attempts to understand the re-imagination of gender in the face of dictatorships in Spain and the Dominican Republic. Other contributions focus on a single country before exploring the implications of their case study for countries and regions with similar conditions of oppression. Such is the case for Rafael Lara-Martínez and Rick McCallister's chapter, which examines the intellectual silence over the 1932 massacre of thousands of Salvadoran peasants before then placing this disregard within a broader, transnational history of "nearly every major massacre of ethnic minorities, colonized peoples, and workers from after the US Civil War until World War II" (310). Taken together, the essays ultimately center their attention on the shared strategy of dictatorial leaders across the Hispanic world: "the appropriation of a nationalist rhetoric backed by varying degrees of oppression" (4).

Oppression, however, is not the only focus of these essays. Nearly all consider how people resist dictatorial regimes, and this resistance is often both material and metaphorical. As Irene Gómez Castellano writes in her essay on the postwar novels of Carmen Laforet and Mercè Rodoreda, "the theme of food . . . serves as a vivid reminder of an intense physical hunger experienced during the Spanish Civil War, [and] its juxtaposition with elements of the abject points to a residual hunger for freedom both at the individual and collective level" (150). The material realities of dictatorship—including their censorship apparatuses—often

compel writers and artists to exercise the limits of symbolism and metaphor. These practitioners of culture often produce critiques that are attentive to both the obvious questions of political representation and the more ambiguous ones of individual conformity.

In fact, this volume suggests that individual conformity under dictatorships in the Hispanic world had a distinctive impact on gender and sexuality. For example, Rafael Ocasio reflects on Fidel Castro's Cuba in his chapter on Reinaldo Arenas, noting that *Before Night Falls* (1992) "stressed the ways in which [some] gay intellectuals managed to work within the system (mainly as informants). Others had collapsed under the pressures of homophobic regulations" (197). Such accounts point to dictatorships' capacity for absorption and their lasting effects, particularly noticeable for Ocasio in "how difficult it was to find Miami Cuban homosexuals willing to [speak] about their lives" (197). Perhaps surprisingly, the diaspora had reproduced the individual conformity that was given shape by the law on the island. Such individual conformity under dictatorship can also involve generations of trauma, as Swier explains in her chapter on Carmen Laforet and Junot Díaz. Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), she writes, "serves as a documented protest of a toxic hegemonic masculinity that is insinuated into his national past and present" (180), while Laforet's *Nada* (1945) provides "matrilineal bonds and homosocial ties between female protagonists as a form of resistance to a stifling form of patriarchy" in postwar Spain (169). Swier demonstrates that patterns of repetition ("hegemonic masculinity"), which dictatorships often employ to control their subjects, can also be used by those same subjects to give rise to resistance ("matrilineal bonds and homosocial ties") (169). Identitarian patterning, the volume contends, can work both ways.

Finally, one of the broader contributions of the volume is to study the role that artistic genres play in providing vehicles for dissent under dictatorial regimes. Some genres are foundational and well known. Carmen Faccini's essay on Rafael Alberti and Mario Benedetti, for example, challenges long-held beliefs about the artistic inferiority of poetry produced in exile. Their poetry is said to be of a lower quality because exiled writers, it was assumed, often enlisted their work in an ideological cause. Faccini shows how these exiled poets experimented with testimony, ultimately renewing poetic voice to include collective political and emotional experiences. Other genres are marginal and understudied. Yolanda Jurado Rojas's essay on puppetry during the Porfiriato, for instance, examines why puppet shows were able to showcase the astounding class discrepancies of the authoritarian regime, while other genres were not. And still other genres have not yet been sufficiently mined for their specific features. In her essay on the portrayal of children in films from El Salvador and Spain, Niahm Thornton pays special attention to close-ups. She focuses part of her analysis, for instance, on the ways in

which a child's eyes "quite literally reproduced wide-eyed innocence" in the viewing audience (284).

Future scholarship on culture under dictatorship would do well to follow in the footsteps of Swier and Riordan-Goncalves's *Dictatorships in the Hispanic World*, as it delicately balances the need to reassess canonical work from major authors (like Ricardo Piglia and Juan Goytisolo), with the desire to push the field toward new frontiers with studies of non-canonical genres like art books, noir novels, and puppetry. Most importantly, the volume's stated goal—to account for a "dialectics of resistance and a politics of memory" (17)—comes fully into focus thanks to the consistent transatlantic dimension of the scholarship. While studies of national phenomena still have their place today, this volume offers compelling reasons not to adopt a purely nationalistic framework for examining dictatorships, highlighting instead the relevance and productivity of a comparative or transatlantic approach.

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