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Abstract

Review of Judith Nantell, *The Poetics of Epiphany in the Spanish Lyric of Today*. Bucknell UP, 2019. ix + 275 pp.

Keywords

Spanish Poetry, Epiphany, Metaphor, Luis Muñoz, Abraham Gragera, Ada Salas, Josep M. Rodríguez

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The Poetics of Epiphany in the Spanish Lyric of Today offers an enthusiastic celebration of the work of four contemporary Spanish poets. The unique structure of the book makes it difficult to classify; although Judith Nantell explains that the book is not an anthology, nor is it a traditional academic study. Even though its in-between position ultimately limits its ability to provide a fully contextualized study of the work of Ada Salas (1965), Luis Muñoz (1966), Abraham Gragera (1973), and Josep M. Rodríguez (1976), this book does offer a unique point of entry for readers interested in exploring a specific subset of work produced by Spanish poets today.

Each chapter of *The Poetics of Epiphany* includes the same type of materials and revolves around a central conceptual focus that distinguishes the work of each poet. Readings of each poet's work follow a photograph and biographical statement authored by the poet at Nantell's request, and each chapter closes with a poem selected and analyzed by the poet, as well as an appendix of sorts made up of the full versions of the poems discussed in the chapter. Clear and accurate translations into English accompany all of these materials. Beyond the materials solicited by Nantell, each poet's voice also appears by way of the systematic inclusion of excerpts from different poetics published throughout their career. In addition to a common focus on foundational poetic elements like metaphor, each chapter also includes an intertextual dialogue with poetics from important Latin American poets like Vicente Huidobro, Roberto Juarroz, Octavio Paz, and Aldo Pellegrini.

The book's first chapter explores the work that Luis Muñoz's poetry does with the concept of the instant and the attention paid to everyday objects and actions in his speakers' observation(s) of them, concluding that his work "meticulously separates out the distinguishing constituents comprising the instant in order to solder them back together, to consolidate them, to affirm them as the most essential elements joined within, even if only briefly, the moment" (36). Nantell's readings of poems from *Correspondencias* ('Correspondences') and *Querido silencio* ('Dear Silence') flesh out the role that everyday experiences play in a larger human and existential context by way of epiphany. These readings are framed by Muñoz's explicit poetics published in anthologies as well as a focus on the metapoetic elements that appear in his work.

The next chapter in Nantell's book traces the relationship between word and metaphor in Abraham Gragera's work as a "transferring, . . . [a] shifting of ideas [that] stimulates the poetics of the word as a generative force occurring during the activity of creating, what must be called in this case, the cognitive metaphor" (56). These readings focus on his three published collections to date,

Adiós a la época de los grandes caracteres ('Farewell to the Era of Grand Letters'), *El tiempo menos solo* ('The Least Lonely Time'), and *O Futuro* ('The Future') and seek to show how the poems in these collections articulate poetry's ability to move beyond conventional uses of language in the form of "an epiphanic act of voicing the nature of poetic creation by releasing the power of the word to express" (69).

Using an essay by Ezra Pound as an anchor and focusing primarily on collections like *Raíz* ('Root'), *Arquitectura yo* ('Architecture I'), and *Ecosistema* ('Ecosystem'), Nantell's discussion of the poetry of Josep M. Rodríguez takes the concept of the image as its focus. The readings in this chapter trace the role images play in exploring the concept of being in the world and the construction of identity. Beyond Western influences like Pound, the chapter also devotes attention to the dialogue between Rodríguez's work and the haiku. Her discussion of Rodríguez's anthology *Ecosistema* represents an especially intriguing moment in this chapter. For Nantell, *Ecosistema* "is not a gathering of what Rodríguez might consider to be his favorite poems. Instead, in this work, he exhibits a perceptive and self-reflexive thematic and stylistic reconsideration of his own poetry" (146).

The key concept that anchors Nantell's engagement with Ada Salas's work in the book's final chapter is one that comes from Salas herself—"Orogenesis" 'Orogenesis'—and leads to a focus on metaphor that uses prose explorations of poetics like *Alguien aquí* ('Someone Here') and *El margen, el error, la tachadura* ('The Margin, the Error, the Scratch Mark'), and poetry—most notably *Esto no es el silencio* ('This Is Not Silence')—to flesh out the work Salas's writing does. Using artist Lucio Fontana as a key example, a particularly striking part of Nantell's discussion of Salas's work appears in her exploration of the interartistic dialogue between poem and image. This dialogue has its continuation in Salas's collaborations with Jesús Placencia and her ekphrastic engagement with Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent From the Cross*.

Even though the introduction states clearly that this book's purpose "is not to establish the most recent history of the development of Spanish poetry" (4), it nonetheless could have benefited from a more thorough contextualization of the different approaches to poetry in circulation in Spain during this period. For those readers not already familiar with the wide range of aesthetic paths traced by contemporary Spanish poets, it will be difficult to situate the importance and meaning of what these four poets are doing and situate their work in a larger temporal framework and establish dialogues between this work and that of earlier poets.

Depending upon what readers are looking for, *The Poetics of Epiphany in the Spanish Lyric of Today* may be either a great resource or fall short of their expectations. Those seeking a traditional study of the work of contemporary Spanish poets within a thoroughly developed critical and theoretical context that

considers and creates space for the wide range of aesthetic practices in circulation in Spain might find this book to be lacking. Those in search of an introduction to the work of four poets that highlights each poet's voice through the inclusion and discussion of biographical statements, poetics, poems, and auto-analyses, though, will undoubtedly find this book to be a valuable resource and point of entry into the work of these four poets.

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