

Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction: The Impact of Feminism and Postcolonialism

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Helene Carol Weldt-Basson's edited collection *Redefining Latin American Historical Fiction* questions some of the fundamental epistemologies, political implications, aesthetic discourses, and disciplinary histories of Latin American writing from the early twentieth century to the present. The ten essays explore the distinct modes of literary creation that have emerged from so-called historical bases, examining the distinct interpretations of the novel, its aesthetic development, and the use of events and circumstances that have been recognized and institutionalized as historically significant as points of departure in literary creation.

A common thread in the analyses, and a strength of the collection, is a reliance on postmodern approaches, including a close attention to multivariate perceptions and codifications of reality, gender, society, culture, and community; this sensitivity to the multiplicity of reality (and thus historical experience) allows the arguments in the chapters to recognize nontraditional centers of power and meaning. The analytical base in the collection, thus, is one that both diversifies and destabilizes the social prescriptions (including cultural norms, gender roles, economic models, and so on) that are tacitly imbedded in traditional histories.

In Chapter 1 (also the Introduction), Helene Weldt-Basson orients her discussion around the construction of history as a social and cultural referent through the novel; following a discussion of postmodern theoretical approaches, Weldt-Basson's analyses of Laura Esquivel's novel *Malinche* pose some deft reflections on literature and history, and introduce some of the key concepts that appear in later essays. Weldt-Basson is attentive to the nature of memory and history, as demonstrated through Malinalli, a female character in Esquivel's novel. Malinalli observes that "Sin imágenes, no hay memoria" [Without images there is no memory] (27 in Laura

Esquivel's *Malinche* 17) and Weldt-Basson unpacks an examination of how Malinalli "fills in many historical gaps" as her location as an indigenous, colonized woman, who can offer multiple perspectives of reality (15). In this way, Weldt-Basson introduces Malinalli as symbolic of broader trends in theory and criticism, as individuals "cannot be simply grouped" and "do not share a single perspective" (19). These affirmations, then, represent an "alternative national identity" and "plural national identities" (19).

In Chapter 2, Patricia Varas's work (translated into English by Bruce Fox) looks at how female authors employ historical and national discourses as aesthetic devices in order to undo "hierarchies imposed by patriarchal, colonial systems" (47). She argues that Claribel Alegria's novel *Cenizas de Izalco* "recovers a traumatic episode" in which 30,000 peasants were murdered. Varas focuses on multiplicity of vision, of nonsystemic (and thus *nouveau historique*) perspectives, that enable Alegria and other female authors to achieve a form of "postmemory" (52), which gestures toward extricating the female from male structures in order to recover the past.

In Chapter 3, Víctor Figueroa takes on the "production of historical accounts" (67) through an interpretation of the Puerto Rican cultural histories that appear in Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's novels. Figueroa's adroit approach to this corpus of texts departs from the way in which "novels invent order" (70), repositioning nationalism with skepticism. Figueroa offers some particularly insightful reflections on how the codified histories are those permitted in the environment, which lead into his look at how historical fictions and their role in deconstruction of authority can be complicated. In one of the most salient phrases in the book, he notes: "To oppose power is still to be defined by power" (77).

In Chapter 4, Fernando Burgos's argument (translated from Spanish by Tina Kosiorek) hinges on some of the most fundamental components of human condition and cultural manifestations, such as time, the nation, and canonization of ideas. In his analyses of *Ship of Fools* by Cristina Peri Rossi and *Hallucinations* by Reinaldo Arenas, he argues that time itself is an institutional construction built upon whatever "present" is most viable to those in power; history is, in this approach, the canonization of ideas convenient to authority (94). These concepts hinge on how communities are constructed through supposed histories, a notion that is often built on "atavistic perceptions of other nations" (103). The state necessitates these histories and justifies the grotesque by streamlining it into innocuous narratives (109). Burgos looks at questions like: "To whom does history belong?" (111), and expertly describes the production of history as "a social agreement and an infringement" (113), using two novels penned by dissidents in totalitarian regimes.

In Chapter 5, Elda Stanco examines two novels by Ana Teresa Torres (*The Exile of Time* and *Doña Inés Versus Oblivion*), noting the presence of an "enumerated anxiety" that results in "creation of identity" that is, in a sense, more attuned to post-modern realities in the ways that it offers "life and voice to a new subjectivity and its critical consciousness" (133). Stanco elaborates on these sensibilities through the

literary analyses of, in one instance, Paris and Caracas—or, Caracas in Paris—engaging duality in the ancient and new sharing a physical space (125). In these examples, as she deftly explains, the past can be understood as a “mythical world” (131).

In Chapter 6, Marcelo Coddou interprets Tomás Eloy Martínez’s *Santa Evita*, raising the notion of truth as a “figurative discourse” (142), one that is situated in specific sociopolitical contexts; novelists destabilize these official and institutionalized concepts in their work, Coddou argues. Coddou comments that Martínez “harvests” the mythology of Evita in Argentina to “contribute to its re-elaboration, maintaining it alive” (143). Doing so, as Coddou points out, allows Martínez to “make relative the official histories” (143). These spring from a situation in which collective pasts are not derivative of facts or empiricism, but rather, it is myth that “recounts history” (143).

14 In Chapter 7, Fátima Nogueira (translated into English by Bruce Fox) examines Antonio Benítez Rojo’s novel *Mujer en traje de batalla* through the emergence of chaos and order, and simulations of history. Nogueira’s work also engages the multiplicities of reality, noting that “several truths” are co-existent (166) but yet one singularity (the institutionalized history) that is often “superimposed upon the universe” (167). She terms these as impositions as “uneven” stories, incongruent with many lived realities; the novel, then, plays with history as metanarrative (159). These structures appear in the novel through “repetition of historical situations” (164), which causes such examples to be instruments of “reterritorializing and deterritorializing” (171).

In Chapter 8, Ester Gimbernat González (translated into English by Javier González) highlights “complex and multiple identities” in her reading of Ángela Hernández’s *Charamicos* (181). She situates the text as a form of “cultural memory” that informed readers can navigate through knowledge of the novel’s historical circumstances (182). The historical significance of the text, together with some grammatical interventions—that of second-person singular, in particular—allows the plot to reach a “multiple historical presence” (196). One of the more interesting reflections in the article involves discussion of the novel as a “dissident space” in which emancipation and authority interplay (199).

In Chapter 9, Maria Josele Bucco Coelho examines *Um defeito de cor* by Ana Maria Gonçalves with sensitivity to the women, seeking “to reclaim the role of the feminine” (209). She notes that novels like this one, employ “history as a narrative discourse that represents reality and seeks to explain it” (213). Her insightful contextual commentary organizes the historical narrative genre as one with many texts that “share the same ideas and preoccupations” (213). Bucco Coelho’s argument posits history as a “resignification of the past” (225) that can be reappropriated through “agency of female opposition” (225). These emerge in literature, Bucco Coelho adroitly argues, through reinvention of “forgotten temporalities” (210).

In Chapter 10, Helene Carol Weldt-Basson reads Vargas Llosa’s *El sueño del celta* as an example of multiplicity and diversity amalgamated into one personage. She argues that the protagonist is a “postcolonial contradiction” and “colonizer and colonized” (232). Weldt-Basson’s concluding text also reflects on Latin American historical fic-

tion as a genre, noting that the novels have “been influenced and shaped by the ideas and concerns developed by postcolonial theoretical discourse” (232).

As the volume deals with so-called historical tracts and/or fictionalizations thereof, the overarching tone is counterintuitive in a sense—as the deconstruction and destabilization of traditional centers of meaning also re-institutionalizes the historical myths (albeit unintentionally), which is an inherent shortcoming not to these analyses but to the extant theoretical vocabularies. This circumstance is captured by Víctor Figueroa’s comment: “To oppose power is still to be defined by power” (77). Many of the chapters reinterpret literary texts as agents of relational thinking, modeling current postcolonial spatial modes of reading toward the uncertainty of paradigmatic historical accounts.

Given these theoretical cues, a minor quibble with the collection is the perpetuation of the nation or transnation as a center of interpretation. This is a critical tendency which (again, unintentionally) elides a move toward postnational mores and a more atomized form of cultural reading that would be more sensitive to individual agency. Sometimes the nuancing of national prescriptions as a theoretical aim, often toward more representative and democratic (but yet still *national*) ideals, can result in re-collectivization based on new (but often just as unstable) myths, which disallows conceptualization of a non-culturally-grouped person or text. These theoretical tendencies restrict the latitude of existence (and interpretation thereof) to the limits of the *a priori* categorization—albeit from it an hybrid, multiple, and/or diverse cultural register.

Including these very minor issues, these essays are outstanding literary analyses. The readings challenge structural norms and are provocative takes on institutionalized prescriptions about community, gender, imperialism, authority, authorship, and literary creation. The novels treated are from a broad scope of traditions and authors, and the interpretations are informed and sophisticated; my reading and note-taking has left me with many new ideas and avenues of thinking about history, literature, and Latin American aesthetics.

Post colonialism literature is the literature by people from formerly colonized countries. It exists on all continents except Antarctica. Postcolonial literature often addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonization of a country, especially questions relating to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people, and themes such as racialism and colonialism. A range of literary theory has evolved around the subject. It addresses the role of literature in perpetuating Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera. *European journal of American studies* 1 (2011) *Varia*. Jeffrey Herlihy *Reflections on Social Engineering and Settler-American Literature*. "Once these fantasies expire, contents of those tombs might also become historical and translated to museums. 14 2. *Social Manipulation of Space : Constructing Settler-American Cultural Identity*. "Which culture is that?" 15 In popular culture and historical documents America tends to be portrayed as a settler society. This collective identity was built on a historiographic framework presenting the myths of primordial settlers as fact; a process which defines rights for certain peoples and expels, ignores, or otherwise eliminates others.

Description: The *American Historical Review* (AHR) is the official publication of the American Historical Association (AHA). The AHA was founded in 1884 and chartered by Congress in 1889 to serve the interests of the entire discipline of history. Aligning with the AHA's mission, the AHR has been the journal of record for the historical profession in the United States since 1895—the only journal that brings together scholarship from every major field of historical study. The AHR is unparalleled in its efforts to choose articles that are new in content and interpretation and that make a contribution. Following 9/11, Elliott suggests, feminist fiction has lost its allegorical impact as the vector of national progress within the American imagination, but it served as the vehicle for this symbolic function from the 1970s through to the 1990s. It is a thesis she does little to substantiate. To make the shift to the wider cultural impact of being an allegory for or of a country's imagination would need both to address the issue of how widely they were read and how indicative they were since nine texts across three decades seems a thin claim for such a status. Since then, multiculturalism and postcolonialism, and latterly world literature, have taken center stage in discussions of current literature. The *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* is a double-blind-peer-reviewed journal providing a forum for scholars engaged in the study of literature from both an international and an interdisciplinary point of view. We publish articles and book reviews on the international history of literature, theory of literature, methods of literary scholarship, and the relation of literature with other areas of human expression. published by. *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*. viewing issue. Volume 42, Issue 3,