VICTORIA CARPENTER (ed.), *A World Torn Apart. Representations of Violence in*

*Latin American Narrative.* Cultural Identity Series no 9. Bern: Peter Lang. 2007. 304 pp.

This volume aims to look anew at violence in Latin American narrative over the last two hundred years or so. ‘Narrative’ is conceived broadly to include historical and

documentary texts, as well as literary and cinematic representations of violence. The

stated remit of the collection is to challenge the ‘complacency’ towards violence in Latin American narrative and history evident in much cultural criticism on the subject (10). The contributors undertake this task from varied theoretical perspectives and cover narratives from the entire Latin American continent, including Brazil and the often overlooked Paraguay. The volume’s editor, Victoria Carpenter, foregrounds the desire to engage with the spectrum of violence on the continent ― political, racial, class-based ― rather than to prioritise gendered violence, which has received the bulk of critical attention so far (10). Thus the heterogeneity of violence in Latin American narrative is fully explored and the expansiveness of the volume is one of its strengths, offset by the specificity of the individual essays in their discussion of selected narratives from selected countries. Uniting these geographically disparate contributions is the underlying theory, posited by Gerald Martin (1989), that violence in Latin America derives from the European conquest, in what has been perceived as ‘an act of cultural rape’(11). The colonizers’ imposition of a civilisation/barbarism framework to justify their violence against the natives, whilst casting themselves as representatives of godliness, underpins much of this discord. The editor sees the ‘civilising’ mission of the colonisers replayed through to the present day with violence enacted by elites against the masses, and the politics of fear instilled by dictatorships (11-12). These ideas are examined in different national and historical contexts by the essays in the volume.

The collection is organised into five thematic sections. Part One focuses on the violent ‘Other’ in narratives of Latin American colonial and postcolonial history. Part Two looks at psychoanalysis as a means to understand violence in selected narratives. Part Three analyses the violence of dictatorships whilst, conversely, Part Four turns to narratives of violence in so called stable societies. The fifth and final section looks at violence directed towards women in Latin America, where the rape motif of the conquest applies most overtly.

Part One comprises three essays, the first of which by Margarita Serje introduces the early twentieth century Colombian concept of *macabrismo,* the othering of the wild, remote and inherently violent spaces outside state control. The ‘Others’ in Ori Preuss’s article on Brazil’s 1889 transition to a republic from a monarchy are her Spanish American neighbours, whose perceived descent into post-republican *caudillismo* and barbarism, is seen as a warning to Brazil. Sarah Barrow analyses a Peruvuan *noir* film, *Bajo la piel* (1996) where a serial killer’s crimes link to the sacrifice practices of ancient Moche culture. The implication is that violence is a central thread through Peruvian history.

Barrow’s essay links more obviously with the next contribution, also focusing on a serial killer ― Gabriel Inzaurralde’s study of *La pesquisa* (1994), a detective novel by the Argentine Juán José Saer, set in Second World War Paris. In fact, this essay is unique in the collection and perhaps out of place in focusing not on Latin American violence but on violence as a universal constant. Meanwhile, Chris Harris focuses on Mexico but applies a theoretical framework from sociological gender studies ― R.W. Connell’s elaboration of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities ― to understand the violence in Rulfo’s *El llano en llamas* (1953).

Hegemonic masculinity rules through violence: actual and threatened, something considered to be a central to dictatorships, examined in contemporary historical novels from Paraguay by Mar Langa Pizarro and Jennifer French and recent Chilean literature by Gilda Waldman. The essay on Paraguay is particularly important in reminding the reader of that often forgotten country’s catastrophic history of war and totalitarian government. The shadow of dictatorship also blights the lives of detectives in the Chilean *noir* novels of the 1990s. These novels serve ‘as a perfect device for tracing and uncovering the criminal nature of the last thirty years’ (185), an analysis which could usefully be explored further.

Uncovering the truth, even in a non-dictatorship, is shown by Victoria Carpenter to be critical to the poets who remembered the Mexico City student massacre of 1968, albeit in often conflicting ways. The desire to take control of the representation of violence is also relevant to Claire Williams’s entertaining account of *favela* literature. Williams explains how one *favelado*, Ferrez, in seeking to offer an alternative to outsiders’ brutal portrayals of *favela* violence, has recently published material about *favela* life written from his community’s perspective.

Marcia Hoppe Navarro’s essay selects narratives by the likes of Carmen Boullosa and Giaconda Belli, inter alia, which give voice to indigenous women violated during the conquest. This is a contrast to the violence against women explored in Argentine captive narratives by Betina Keizman, who develops the term to analyse twentieth-century versions of the genre with the conventions of the nineteenth-century original often inverted.

All of the essays comprising this collection offer insightful interpretations of violence in Latin American narrative, though the links to the continent are more subtle in Inzaurralde’s contribution. There is no complacency in accepting violence as a given, in any of its diverse manifestations. The cultural rape motif serves as a fruitful starting point and does, to a large extent, unite the contributions. If there is one reservation about the volume, it is that the section headings can appear arbitrary. The essay on the *favela* could also have been included in the section on the Other, owing to its mythical reputation as a space outside national control. Similarly, the concentration on the detective novel as a vehicle for representing violence in essays on Peru, Argentina and Chile, surely unifies these pieces as much as any other consideration and requires further investigation. Nonetheless, this in no way vitiates what is an excellent addition to the subject and which will no doubt prove essential reading to scholars of all levels.

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