



Pablo Valdivia, *Spanish Literature, Crisis and Spectrality: Notes on a Haunted Canon*, Lit Verlag, Hispanic Transnational Studies, Vol. 2, 2018, 184 págs.

The way in which Pablo Valdivia structures this essay, *Spanish Literature, Crisis and Spectrality: Notes on a Haunted Canon*, speaks for itself. It avoids classifications of any kind, being a hybrid book whose content is both in English and Spanish, which makes me hesitate as to what language I should write this review in –should I keep writing in English or switch to Spanish? Would it be a better option, given the nature of Valdivia’s book, to follow his example and write it in both English and

Spanish? English is the final answer. After writing in Catalan and Spanish, English will be the third language I will have used today, which causes me a sense of slight displacement. This displacement, which affects me in terms of national and personal identity, has allowed me to connect with the discourse that Valdivia adopts in his new work.

This book is not what a philologist would expect from an essay on Spanish literature and its canon. The exercise that Valdivia undertakes in this essay is to link literature to a broader context, beyond the philological field and, in a way, also beyond the literary itself. In doing so, he tries to study literature out of the comfort zone it is usually linked to, with the aim to put into question the conventional categories (nationalistic, linguistic, etc) through which literature and its authors have traditionally been organized. Cervantes’ *El coloquio de los perros* is one of the works that Valdivia explores in his essay, in particular the chapter titled “La habitación de Cervantes: hacia un género espectral”. Due to its content, it is difficult to relate Cervantes’ book to the Spanish literary production of his respective period. The reader, not being able to find clear references that help them place it in the Spanish canon, feels disoriented. The same is the case of *Intemperie* by Jesús Carrasco, which, as Valdivia analyzes in the chapter “La habitación de Carrasco: el espectro a la intemperie”, also challenges the cultural critics and scholars’ need to link literary works to already known categories. It is not my aim here to name each author that Valdivia studies, but to stress the fact that each of them is associated with the word *habitación*, whose meaning will help us understand key notions in this essay such as “crisis”, “exile”, “spectrality” and “transnational”.

We have been accustomed to thinking in terms of inclusion and exclusion –even to identify ourselves as an individual within a specific national, social and cultural frame involves an exercise of inclusion and exclusion, as we are bound to choose what defines us and what not– and this has characterized the selection process of the authors that inform the Spanish canon. In

light of such selection process, how can it be defined the case of an author such as José Ricardo Morales who lived between two worlds (the Chilean and the Spanish) as a result of his exile, and whose work is thus multi-layered? Morales, who was aware of the particularity of his literary condition, in being at once in and out of two different literary systems, accepted it and refused to be defined and enclosed within the strict limits that constitute a literary canon. Therefore, he preferred to build his own literary place, his room, and blended the Chilean and Spanish identity into a new one.

In his essay, Valdivia also creates his own room, jumping over the barriers meant to keep every academic field separated from the other, and thus challenging this notion of otherness that usually informs the relationships between disciplines. He does so by bringing together different perspectives in order to tackle the Spanish literature from an interdisciplinary ground. Valdivia says that the work of professor Esther Peeren, who expands Derrida's notion of the *visible invisible* by relating it to other contemporary fields, gave him "the analytical key" he was missing to interpret the Spanish exile and the challenge that it presents for the official criteria on which is based the Spanish canon. For him, Peeren's notion of spectrality can be used in historiographic terms, as it foregrounds the "dialectics of being and not being" in a literary canon, which is the result of the fact of "having and not having" the basics that constitute the acceptable literary status that allows an author to be included in a national canon. The spectre, representing the aforementioned dialectical tension, accepts the absence of an author in its own literary tradition as part of their identity—"their escaping notice remains part of their signification"—, which is thus no longer national, but transnational, as it is proved in Morales' case.

"There is no Peruvian, or Spanish, or English, or French literature", says Valdivia at the beginning of his essay, after recalling an occasion in which he, while being in Peru, was asked about his specialization within Peruvian literature. This is a statement difficult

to accept, especially if one doesn't take off the lenses through which David T. Giles considers Spanish literature to be the only category in which the Spanish-Iberian literature can be inserted in, and, as a result of this, "the discomfort of exclusion"¹ has to be accepted. What authors such as Morales or Lorca—the latter also has his own "room" in Valdivia's essay—demonstrate is that not everything can be conformed to a unidimensional and essentialist discourse. And Furthermore, as Borges highlights in his article "El escritor argentino y la tradición", we shouldn't always consider literature closely related to a national identity, but rather as an independent body that can be universal and thus navigate and sympathize with different publics around the world—this is the sense of universality that Valdivia sees intrinsically connected to the globalized world where the internet-of-all-things and technology are proving "nation-based principles" not to be as functional as they used to in the past.

Literature is not isolated in a room, but also takes part in this globalized world. Conscious of the challenge that the presence of literature in such a world constitutes, Valdivia poses some key questions to start thinking about the role of technology related to literature and, by extension, culture: "Is it possible to develop an artificial consciousness? What is the role of national canonicity in the era of the-internet-of-all things? How can a machine learning spot or deal with differences cultural and universal? How can we emotionally cope with the new world of social relations emerging under the Globalization process?" This way of thinking literature and culture, which is more related to the brainstorming process so common in technological labs where ideas and possibilities to create apps are examined, stresses the need to build bridges between literature and technology, to create *shared rooms* where both can interact and enrich from each other, and ultimately to open the field of the humanities to new horizons.

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