

Abstracts

The Trope of Nature in Latin American Literature: Some Examples Becky Boling

The article examines the trope of nature through selected texts from Latin American literature, from the writings of Christopher Columbus to more contemporary narratives such as those by Luis Sepúlveda and Mayra Montero. It focuses on the transition in the manner in which writers conceive of the “natural” world within their particular ideological contexts. From early manifestations of utopian writing to texts extolling urbanization and development, the trope of nature undergoes several permutations which say a great deal about the ideological contexts of the writers and their conceptualization of the place of humans in the scheme of things. Late 20th century narratives mark a departure from earlier conceptualizations of nature. Nature is re-imagined under the urgency of ecology and globalization. In the writings of Sepúlveda, nature is both habitat and resource. In *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* ‘*The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*,’ we have the reworking and resemanticization of the Sarmiento theme of civilization and barbarism whereas Montero in *Tú, la oscuridad* ‘*In the Palm of Darkness*,’ documents in an apocalyptic style impending ecological disaster. The article surveys the trope of nature in order to underscore the current rise of an ecologically oriented literature. (BB)

The Rewriting of History in Amin Maalouf’s *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* Carine Bourget

This paper analyzes the narrative strategies that shape Maalouf’s rewriting of the history of the Crusades, examines why considerations of the problems inherent to the historiographical act are relegated to the background, and how Maalouf links his text to politics contemporary to its writing. I argue that while Maalouf brilliantly deconstructs the Western image of the Crusades as a heroic time by documenting the barbarity of the Crusaders without falling into the pitfall of simply inverting the terms of the dichotomy, the agenda driving his rewriting of this historical period leads him to partially repeat what his book is supposed to undo, witness the erasure of women in a book whose goal is to unearth a neglected perspective. Moreover, I contend that while most of the book painstakingly details the power play between and among the Crusaders and the Arabs that debunks the ideology of clash of religions and civilizations, the very brief epilogue, which draws parallels between the past and contemporary Middle Eastern politics but omits to mention key events of the nineteenth and twentieth century, tends to fall back in the very essentialism that the main narrative opposes. (CB)

Real Estate and Stating the Real in Jean Echenoz’s *L’Occupation des sols* Philip G. Hadlock

Through its extremely minimal account of the aftermath of an apartment fire, Jean Echenoz’s *L’Occupation des sols* raises intriguing questions about the grounding of property—its *occupation des sols*—in Western consciousness. The narrative situation allegorizes the longstanding convention in which man is associated with property ownership while woman is associated with property itself. Though seeming to uphold this paradigm, Echenoz presents a challenging perspective of the functions that gendered scenarios of property perform in sustaining symbolic relations and anchoring the “real” in Western thought. (PGH)

Dead Center: Berlin, the Postmodern Gothic, and Norman Ohler’s *Mitte* Steffen H. Hantke

Cultural critics often frame present-day Berlin as a space of historical discontinuities, a nexus of modernity and postmodernity that, in its orientation toward the future, represents post-reunification Germany in all its complexity. However, this framing tends to suppress Gothic imagery, of which traces can be found in the critical discourse on the city. Recuperating such Gothic tropes from critical discourse, and then consciously and strategically re-deploying them, can be a valuable strategy for opening up new venues of thinking about the lingering presence of the past, the high cost of

modernization, and the uncanny emotional and affective dimensions of urban space. While this project of recuperation has been taken on in some critical analyses of Berlin, most notably among them Brian Ladd's *The Ghosts of Berlin* (1997), it is the new German literature on Berlin that proceeds more boldly into the terrain of the Gothic. Among this new "Berlin literature," Norman Ohler's critically acclaimed Gothic novel *Mitte* (2001) stands out as a cogent analysis of the new Berlin and of the problems of inhabiting a decentralized urban space and reconnecting it to authentic historical experience. (SH)

Expressionism, Futurism, and the Dream of Mass Democracy

Douglas Brent McBride

This essay throws new light on a radical tendency in cultural modernism by analyzing the role of a single metaphor—the figure of politics as a stage—in political debates among German Expressionists and Italian Futurists before World War I. As the essay argues, this trope was used to critique liberalism's limited notion of popular rule and envision how disenfranchised masses might develop the political subjectivity needed to create a truly mass democracy. While the essay demonstrates that Futurists and Expressionists failed to develop a clear vision of what form mass democracy might take, it concludes that they agreed on one point. It would have to entail a qualitative transformation of the democratic ideal of popular sovereignty, rather than a quantitative extension of voting rights. This conclusion throws new light on the political character of cultural modernism before 1914. Whereas recent research has focused on proto-fascist tendencies in modernist ideology, this analysis shows that Expressionism and Futurism initially shared a commitment to the democratic ideal of popular sovereignty that was incommensurable with fascist methods of orchestrating popular consent for authoritarian rule. (DBM)

Expressions of National Crisis: Diamela Eltit's *E. Luminata* and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*

Gisela Norat

Diamela Eltit emerged as a writer during the 1980s when Chile was ruled by the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973 -1989). The obscurity of her first book, *Lumpérica* (trans. *E. Luminata*) reflects that period of national repression. Despite the negligible attention she received for her first novel, Eltit has since published six other novels and managed to carve out a place for herself within Chile's predominantly male literary establishment. Her writing challenges its mainstream cultural apparatus with a female-centered postmodern writing very different from that of compatriots like best selling authors Isabel Allende in the United States and Marcela Serrano in Chile.

Given the symbolic elements of Eltit's text and the difficulty it poses for readers, I propose using Pablo Picasso's widely known *Guernica* as a visual aid in understanding the fragmented and abstract nature of Eltit's first novel, a text that the reader should not expect to understand entirely. This study draws historical and artistic parallels with Picasso's well-known mural, a painting that has come to symbolize an anti-war cry in its depiction of man's inhumanity to man, woman, and child—a recurrent theme in Eltit's writing. (GN)

Going Under: The Metro and the Search for Oneself in Julio Cortázar's "The Pursuer"

Patricia E. Reagan

Johnny's metaphysical experience on the metro in Julio Cortázar's "The Pursuer" catalyzes his perception. The metro incident and the ensuing commentary propel all the elements of the narrative. The metro facilitates the development of Johnny's character; relates his character to Charlie Parker; aids our comprehension of the relationship between the metro and Johnny's music; and establishes the metaphysical difference between Johnny and Bruno. The subway is also physical space in which Cortázar reveals a view of time perception in which chronological time succumbs to subjective time. Johnny's metacognitive search for the *yonder* marks a change in Cortázar's narrative preoccupations and anticipates *Rayuela* in both technique and content. The function of the metro in "The Pursuer" is related to travel in literature as well as in other Cortázar stories. The underground journey represented by the metro prompts the reader to join Cortázar's difficult search for heightened perception which begins below the surface. This search leads him to the postulation that art can open doors that lead to the *más allá*. (PER)

Texts of Light and Shadow: Dickens and Lautréamont in Alejandra Pizarnik's *Sombra* Poems

In her poetry, the Argentinean Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-72) persistently explores the transformations that the poetic subject undergoes in language. She articulates a cycle wherein the subject's desire to (re)create herself as a presence in language is followed by the desire for death, the absence of the self, when her desire becomes frustrated by language's inadequacies. As yet, the importance of the theme of the fluctuating self in language as developed by Pizarnik in a series of poems protagonized by Sombra, has not been analyzed. The character Sombra appears in six fragment-like poems published posthumously in *Textos de Sombra* (1982) and written during the last two years of her life. Pizarnik shows the nature of Sombra's being and non-being in language by implementing two techniques—the palimpsestic technique and the psychological structure of the phantasm. The palimpsestic text is the product of a mode of writing in which a “hypertext,” is created through the imitation and/or transformation of an original text, a “hypotext,” following the terminology of Gérard Genette. Pizarnik uses short passages from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) as hypotexts for the hypertexts of her Sombra poems. She also employs a scene from *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1866), by the Count of Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), as an additional hypotext to the Sombra poems. The dynamic of the present and absent self plays a central role in both the palimpsestic technique and the structure of the phantasm. For this reason the two techniques serve Pizarnik to develop the character of Sombra as a representation of the fluctuating subject in language. (EZ)