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Writing in the Air: Heterogeneity and the Persistence of Oral Tradition in Andean Literatures by Antonio Cornejo Polar (review)

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Santiáñez lo considera una combinación de parada militar y conmemoración ritual fascista que funcionó como una forma de reescribir el paisaje urbano en el nivel de las prácticas materiales espaciales.

La última sección, “Russia: Specters and Paratopos”, es una de las más sugestivas del ensayo; en ella se resalta el carácter espectral de la División Azul y del fascismo español en su conjunto. Después de su regreso de Rusia, los voluntarios falangistas fueron forasteros en su propio país, a la vez que se sintieron traicionados y usados por el régimen. Los divisionarios fueron así las víctimas de la historia que sufrieron la marginalización por el repentino giro del franquismo en su política internacional. En el apartado se examinan la literatura memorialística y novelas de los excombatientes falangistas, resaltando la espectralidad y la alienación espacial. El autor establece el concepto de *paratopos*, “an alienating habitat to its former inhabitants” (256), para definir la exclusión sufrida por los divisionarios a su llegada a España, y sostiene que la cultura de la División Azul en su encuentro con el *paratopos* puede considerarse como una topografía del resentimiento fascista en la década de los cincuenta.

Para terminar, *Topographies of Fascism* es una importante contribución a los estudios de cultura fascista, como la reciente reedición de José Carlos Mainer *Falange y literatura*, originalmente publicada en 1971, o los ensayos de Mónica y Pablo Carbajosa, Mechthild Albert, Dionisio Viscarri o Jordi Gracia. La aportación de Santiáñez estriba en el detallado estudio de la cartografía crítica del fascismo español en sus textos principales, junto con otros que habían permanecido ignorados por la crítica. Este interesante volumen cuenta también con un número sustancial de reproducciones propagandísticas, planos y mapas que sirven para ilustrar su meticuloso análisis. Se trata, en definitiva, de un trabajo de gran rigor académico sobre el fascismo español en sus producciones y representaciones del espacio.

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CORNEJO POLAR, ANTONIO. *Writing in the Air: Heterogeneity and the Persistence of Oral Tradition in Andean Literatures*. Trans. Lynda J. Jentsch. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2013. 212 pp.

The appearance of an English translation of Antonio Cornejo Polar’s seminal *Escribir en el aire: ensayo sobre la heterogeneidad socio-cultural en las literaturas andinas* provides a wonderful opportunity to reencounter this tremendous literary critic, whose influence on contemporary Latin American criticism is immeasurable, and also to reflect on the continued relevance of this text. The work was first

published by the Centro de Estudios Peruanos in 1994, three years before the author's death, with a second edition appearing in 2003 under the imprint of the Centro de Estudios Literarios "Antonio Cornejo Polar" (CELACP), an organization founded to honor his legacy as a teacher and scholar. Those readers who have not had sustained access to his thinking until now, with this first translation of a book-length work (some of his articles had been previously translated into English), will find a scholar of impressive erudition whose pluralist sensibilities offer a powerfully compelling perspective on Andean literature.

One question that arises when contemplating a translation concerns market and audience. What kind of new reader can we foresee? To whom will this work be of interest? Jean Franco, in her brief and insightful foreword to the English translation, frames this book as an "initiation" into a realm beyond the Western literary canon. Franco alludes here not only to the peripheral positioning of Latin American literature vis-à-vis European literature and to the desire by many readers to venture out beyond the Western canon; she also highlights, if elliptically, a major theme of Cornejo Polar's study, namely, the relationship—he calls it a "conflictive dialogue"—between Western and non-Western cultures in the Americas. The newcomer's initiation to this field will be complicated by the fact that some of the texts that Cornejo discusses in *Writing in the Air* lack complete published translations into English. This is a not entirely insignificant problem, considering that Cornejo cites liberally from these, forcing his translator, Lynda Jentsch, to fill in substantive gaps with her own translations. But this is perhaps a minor point. Duke University Press, the publisher, is marketing the book less as an introduction to Andean literatures than as a pointed intervention into Latin American cultural criticism, and as the purveyor of a concept—heterogeneity—that only now, in English, will be able to reach a truly global audience, thereby presumably augmenting the value of this concept for all concerned. To my mind, this understanding of Cornejo's "heterogeneity" runs the risk of reifying it and undermining the spirit of demystification that runs through all his work. In fact, I would urge readers of this work to resist the temptation to be guided by the editorial decision to frame the book as a rebuttal of concepts of hybridity circulating in Latin American cultural criticism. A cynic might wonder if the decision wasn't guided by Duke's recent publication of an English translation of Angel Rama's *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*, the unnamed antagonist in this largely invented polemic that perhaps, not coincidentally, allows the press to market both books at once. Although Cornejo published two late and exceedingly brief articles criticizing Rama's use of "transculturation" as a metaphor for literature, none of this can be found in *Writing in the Air*, whose unspoken antagonist is entirely other: the nationalist ideology of *mestizaje* embraced by the military populists who ruled in 1970s Peru.

*Writing in the Air* grapples with what Cornejo terms the “destabilizing hybridity of Latin American literature” (4). What makes heterogeneity forceful as a concept is its emphasis on the modifier “destabilizing.” In this, as in his previous work, Cornejo seeks to demonstrate that the continuing legacy of colonial injustice produces a disjuncture within modern Andean nations, which are marked by the “conflictive co-existence” of Western and indigenous cultures. However, the destabilizing force of heterogeneity is not so strong as to disable the idea of “nation” or “national literature” entirely; it is just that Cornejo refuses to view these as internally uniform or coherent. Fractious and divided, Andean nations—most particularly Peru, the focus of the book—must respect the culture(s) of their indigenous majorities, Cornejo affirms, and thereby come to terms with the existence of unbridgeable internal differences and “multivalent plurality.” For Cornejo, this means accepting that the modern nation remains irremediably traumatized by colonial violence. Paradoxically, in Cornejo’s thought, to overcome the colonial legacy, it is necessary to *stop* trying to overcome it; that is, it is necessary to stop trying to forget it.

There is more than a hint of national melancholy here. Indeed, the use of “trauma” as a frame of reference is one element of *Writing in the Air* that differentiates it from Cornejo’s older works, which relied on structuralist accounts of literary systems. Likewise his related interest in questions of the subject and subjectivity, a topic on which he reflects for several pages in the introduction and which reappears throughout this book. It is by way of a critique of the Romantic subject as a stable “I” that he anchors his critique of *mestizo* nationalism, lending heterogeneity a psychological edge it had previously lacked, and making it possible for him to recast celebrated “*mestizo* subjects,” such as el Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and José María Arguedas, as “heterogeneous subjects” whose failures to bring indigenous and Western cultural expressions into aesthetic harmony represent an inescapable truth of Andean identity.

Despite these important transformations in Cornejo’s thinking on heterogeneity, one element remains constant: namely, the primacy he affords to the conflict between orality and writing. For him, this is the fundamental disjuncture of heterogeneity to which literature in particular can testify. Indeed, in altering the book’s subtitle the translation highlights this theme: “Heterogeneity and the Persistence of Oral Tradition in Andean Literatures,” a neat encapsulation of one of the book’s central points. Yet this is an element of Cornejo’s thinking that survives less well in the scholarly landscape that has emerged since the first publication of the book. Undoubtedly the antagonism existed in stark terms at the moment of Conquest so eloquently discussed in Cornejo’s first chapter, which analyzes how colonial chronicles depict Atahualpa’s response to the breviary proffered by Father Valverde. Cornejo attributes enormous symbolic importance to this famous scene—perhaps

too much. As sympathetic critics such as William Rowe have pointed out, Cornejo's formulation is too neatly dualistic to adequately account for the dense web of textual forms that mark Andean aesthetics, or writing itself for that matter, whose relationship to orality need not be seen as inherently oppressive.

Returning again to the question of translation, Lynda Jentsch offers an accurate and functional rendition of Cornejo's prose. The drawbacks are that it is at times nonidiomatic or overly literal. This is a problem when we encounter Cornejo's many mixed metaphors, which work well in Spanish but for some mysterious reason not so well in English (compare "an image of our literature as a boiling pot of blurred systems" to "una imagen de nuestra literatura como hervidero de sistemas algo borrosos"). There is also the question of scholarly style and the fact that sentences that read well in Spanish may, when translated with too much fidelity, sound turgid or flat in English. In other respects Jentsch does a superlative job of responding to the challenges presented by this text. As I mentioned above, she has had to confront the problem of primary sources that have no published English translations, leaving her with the task, with some knock-out results. The translations of the "Tragedia del fin de Atahualpa" and of Gregorio Reynolds's "Redención" are beautiful. This edition also has a significant advantage over Spanish editions: it contains an index, an invaluable addition.

*Writing in the Air* rewards the reader with its wealth of insights into individual works and offers a supremely useful perspective on the past forty years of Latin American literary criticism. Cornejo uses the book's introduction to reflect on his own evolution as a critic and put some distance between himself and the ambitions of his formidable intellectual cohort, who came to prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s with the "great epistemological project" of naming Latin American identity through its literature, a project that, he tells us, failed. Yet he does not repudiate these attempts. Rather he deftly incorporates them into a "progressive and organic" account of literary criticism and frames them, ultimately, as necessary steps to the present. Whether or not one agrees with this "progressive and organic" account, Cornejo's impressive honesty and the scope, elegance, and illuminating power of his work remain unsurpassed.

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SCOLIERI, PAUL A. *Dancing the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards, and the Choreography of Conquest*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2013. xii + 205 pp.

Paul A. Scolieri's *Dancing the New World: Aztecs, Spaniards and the Choreography of Conquest* is a richly nuanced and well-researched study of indigenous dance

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