

in multiple sites and political contexts: from the old world to the new, and from there, out again. New studies should evidence that transit through time and space.

All in all, this is a theoretically and methodologically rich collection of essays, one that will be looked back on as having prompted a much desired change of direction in the field of Latin American Jewish Studies (or Jewish Latin American Studies).

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VICTORIA CARPENTER (ed.): *A World Torn Apart: Representations of Violence in Latin American Narrative*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.

This collection of essays is the result of a conference on Violence, Culture and Identity held in 2003 at the University of St. Andrews. It seeks to contribute to the “understanding of representations of violence in Latin American narrative,” mainly, but not at all exclusively, in literary works. Due to the protean and pervasive nature of its subject, this is a vast undertaking that can only be addressed in a fragmentary fashion. The book thus comprises a number of case studies that are diverse in focus, approach, and scope, ranging from vast surveys of literary and cultural national traditions to close readings of particular novels and films, from analyses grounded in history to those grounded in philosophy and epistemology, from examination of Colonial writing to examination of contemporary cultural products.

The diversity implied in the genre “conference proceedings” entails risk as well as opportunity. The editor, Victoria Carpenter, Reader in Latin American Studies at the University of Derby, has held the project together as a coherent intellectual enterprise rather than a disparate collection of articles. She has achieved this task by organizing the volume in five parts: “The Violent Other”; “Psychology of Violence”; “Dictatorial Violence – Forgive and Forget”; “Violence, Marginalization and Myths”; and “Women and Violence.”

Part one focuses on the “creation” of a “violent other” in the colonial and postcolonial history of three Latin American countries: Colombia, Brazil, and Peru. The article by Margarita Serje, “Violence as Context: Colonial Landscapes and Frontier Narratives in the Interpretation of Conflict in Colombia,” is devoted to the history (from the colony to the present) of the cultural construction of “landscapes of fear” (such as jungles and rural frontiers), that Serje interprets as crucial to the self-perception and self-interpretation of Colombia as a violent society. In “‘Hatreds of an Almost Spanish American Crudity’: Brazilian Interpretations of the Tumultuous First Republic, 1889-1898,” Ori Preuss analyzes

how leading monarchist intellectuals, such as Joaquim Nabuco and Eduardo Prado, expressed their misgivings about the downfall of the Brazilian Empire and the coming of the Republic by using the Spanish American experience as a cautionary tale, thus erecting it as the feared “other” of the Brazilian experience. Sarah Barrow, in her article, “Violence, Nation and Peruvian Cinema,” analyzes the important film *Bajo la piel*, directed by Francisco Lombardi. She shows how Lombardi, instead of focusing narrowly on the historical events of the political and armed struggle between Sendero Luminoso and the Peruvian State as he had done in his previous films, takes rather a broader approach and addresses violence as a constant, inherent feature of Peruvian or Andean society, from the pre-Columbian Moches to the present.

Part two “focuses on the study of violence in the context of psychological theories, which allow violence to be viewed as an intrinsic component of the Latin American psyche” (p. 13). Christopher Harris, in his article, “Hegemonic masculinity and violence,” analyzes the ways in which the short stories by Juan Rulfo construct, through various performances of violence, a changing and contested definition of hegemonic masculinity. Gabriel Inzaurrealde’s “Letters from Hell: The Theme of Violence in *La pesquisa* by Juan José Saer,” discusses the representation of violence at the end of the century in Saer’s novel, in close dialogue with other instances in Argentine literature (Cortázar, Borges) and Western philosophical thought.

Part three, “Dictatorial Violence – Forgive and Forget,” delves into two national cultural traditions: Paraguay and Chile. The essay, “Violence in Paraguayan Literature,” by Mar Langa Pizarro and Jennifer French, “aims to introduce Paraguay literature of violence to an international readership, while at the same time offering an explanation of the historical role violence itself has played in the delayed and diasporic development of Paraguayan narrative” (pp. 156-157). The article thus encompasses an examination of the role of violence in Paraguayan history and writings from colonial times to the present, with some emphasis on the presentation of the post-Stroessner narrative, and how it deals with the trauma of his protracted tyranny. In a similar fashion, but without attempting Pizarro and French’s historical survey, Gilda Walman, in “Fiction and Politics: Dictatorial Violence in Contemporary Chilean Literature,” focuses “on the dual literary resonance of Chilean dictatorial violence” (p. 180) by examining the role played by the new historical novel and the *noir* detective novel in recent Chilean literature. The article presents “an overview of the characters of recent novels who could serve as metaphors for the symbolic fracture in Chilean history due to the coup and the consequent reorganization of the country on the basis of silence and forgetting” (p. 180).

Part four, “Violence, Marginalization and Myths,” comprises two articles. Victoria Carpenter, in “*La sangre en el cemento: Violence, Fantasy and Myth in Poetic Accounts of the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre*,” examines poetic works written in the wake of Tlatelolco, analyzing in detail how the artists tried to come to terms with the event through diverse poetic strategies, such as collage narrative, zoom, direct transcription of other voices, temporal discrepancies, and so forth, in order not to reduce it or incorporate it into a macro narrative, but to preserve its incomprehensible, traumatic nature. In “The *Favela*’s Revenge: Portrayals of Life in the Shantytowns in Recent Brazilian Fiction,” Claire Williams explores recent works in which writers and artists try to portray this conspicuous, and yet somehow invisible, aspect of Brazilian urban social life, from different ethical standpoints and political and aesthetic premises.

In part five, “Women and Violence,” we also find two articles. The first, by Marcia Hoppe Navarro, “Indigenous Women and Forms of Violence in Recent Latin American Literature,” presents a number of recent and relatively recent literary works, by Lucía Guerra, Laura Esquivel, and Ariel Dorfman, among others, with the goal of examining the way these authors denounce and subvert the quasi complete invisibility of indigenous women in Latin American “official stories” and “canonical literature,” as well as the violence exerted upon them. Finally in “The Others’ Shame,” Betina Bettina Keizman explores the continuity of the “classical figure” of the captive woman—classical for Argentine literature, that is—and the abduction narrative in recent Argentine fiction

This book has two great virtues. First, Carpenter and the editors at Peter Lang have evidently, and successfully, striven to provide stylistic and structural unity for the essays. This is a highly legible, reader-friendly volume, which is not a minor accomplishment. The essays, perhaps with one or two exceptions, clearly state their purpose, follow a discernible argument, and draw a number of conclusions pertinent to the problem analyzed. Readers will decide on their own about both the relevance and the validity of some of the premises and conclusions of several of the articles, but it is clear that there is a legitimate and sustained effort to present them to the reader. Because of that, no reader will fail to learn something from each article in the book, or realize (perhaps for the first time) the importance of some of the topics discussed. And even when in disagreement, the reader will always feel that the disagreement can lead to productive dialogue, as should always be the case in Academia.

The second great virtue of the book is that, unlike many books on similar subjects, this is not a theory-driven book. Each article engages theoretical issues in varying degrees, or uses theoretical tools and notions with different degrees of deft or relevance, but never departs from its particular object of inquiry. Again,

in this day and age, when many scholarly endeavors address literature just as an excuse for theory, this is no minor virtue.

There are three main criticisms that can be directed at the book. At the very opening, Carpenter states that “this work offers glimpses into a tantalizingly dangerous world of violence and cruelty of such proportions that, until recently, relatively tranquil Western society has found it difficult to comprehend them” (p. 9). Aside from the fact that this takes us to the thorny issue of how to measure and compare forms of violence, Western society has experienced or caused World War I, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the Nazi extermination camps, the bombing of Dresden and Hiroshima, the Gulags, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War. This mere enumeration belies the assumption of Latin America as a somehow particularly violent continent. “Latin America as the land of violence” is itself a narrative, perhaps one of the oldest—since it goes back to the Conquest and the demon/cannibal trope—best established and most internalized by Latin Americans themselves. An examination of that very narrative should have had a place in this book. But let’s assume for a moment that Latin America is indeed an incredibly violent continent. It does not follow that narratives on violence are a product of violent “realities.” In fact, quite the opposite may be true: social violence, if experienced as social trauma—which is not always the case—engenders symptom and repetition, but the *form* of that symptom is never transparent, as seems to be assumed in this volume. The idea that literature mirrors reality, and that a violent reality necessarily engenders narratives devoted to violence (and a violence that can be immediately connected to that reality), is, at the least, problematic, and merits more detailed discussion.

Connected to this is the problematic idea that, by definition, violence is a traumatic event, or, at least, something that society (as different from individuals within that society) *suffers*. As has been elaborated at least since the works of Emile Durkheim, violence brings the social fabric together, as the title of the volume implies, as much as it “tears [it] apart”—produces as much as it destroys.

These problems conceivably stem from the fact that the volume never puts forward or discusses a concept of violence (or as Hobsbawm reminds us, “violences”), relevant for the Latin American case. For a book devoted to reflecting on violence, this lack is not irrelevant. Although, as I said before, the fact that this is not a theory driven book is a virtue, it also causes the book to fall unconsciously upon what Eric Hobsbawm, in “The Rules of Violence,” called “the liberal notion of violence”: violence not as a defining—and necessarily productive—feature of the social fabric, but as a mere negative, destructive reverse of the social, a “bad” phenomenon, that has to be suppressed for a “real” society (based on exchange and language) to emerge. Also problematic is the lack of any effort to integrate this volume into the rather vibrant scholarship (in

literary criticism, cultural studies, political science, anthropology, and so forth) devoted to violence in Latin America. Neither the introduction nor the book in general discuss in an organic fashion current or recent scholarship on violence developed in the field of Latin American studies

In spite of these perceived shortcomings, very difficult to avoid in a collective enterprise of this nature, the book is a significant contribution that will be of interest to literary scholars, both those interested in the topic of violence and on the individual topics addressed by the book.

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TOBIAS HECHT: *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

In 1998, Tobias Hecht published the highly acclaimed book, “At Home in the Street: Street Children of Northeast Brazil” (Cambridge University Press), based on fieldwork he conducted for his dissertation in 1992 in the city of Recife. The book caused a stir in the academic world because it challenged much of what we believed we knew about street children in Brazil and the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in addressing their situation.

In 1999 Hecht returned to Recife, only to find that most of the street children he had been familiar with had either died tragically or been incarcerated in less than humane conditions in local jails or psychiatric institutions. And while Hecht makes clear from the start that, for personal and ethical reasons, he had no intention of revisiting the plight of street children, or poor children who chose to stay and endure conditions at home for that matter, he literally stumbles across an acquaintance from his past who subsequently becomes the subject of this bold and very different book.

Bruna Veríssimo (obviously not her real name) is a young, dark-skinned transgendered prostitute whose “short but frighteningly eventful life,” according to Hecht, “was one of the only sources on the scores of her peers who never lived to become adults” (p. 4). Hecht’s initial intent was to collaborate with Brunna to write an ethnographic biography, along the lines of Michael Herzfeld’s excellent “Portrait of a Greek Imagination: An Ethnographic Biography of Andreas Nenedakis” (University of Chicago Press, 1997). According to this approach, Brunna’s life would become a means by which to know and interpret a much broader set of social institutions and circumstances. With this goal in mind, Hecht began interviewing his subject and, when he left the field a few months later, encouraged her to record her thoughts and observations on her own.