

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/134159>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2019-05-27 and may be subject to change.

Luis Martín-Cabrera: *Radical Justice: Spain and the Southern Cone Beyond Market and State*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011 (xiii + 255 págs.).

Radical Justice: Spain and the Southern Cone Beyond Market and State by Luis Martín-Cabrera operates both from within and with critical distance to the field known as ‘transatlantic studies’. Although the author is critical of certain neocolonial operations that this field may imply (43–49), he is interested in analyzing how cultural texts dealing with the experience of military dictatorship in Spain and the Southern Cone may describe similar trajectories towards what he calls “radical justice”, that is, a messianic notion of “justice and community yet to come” (21). For Martín-Cabrera, the pursuit of this impending and open-ended notion of justice occurs from the perspective of the “non-place”: a virtual dwelling –with no retrievable textual or material presence– for those traces from the experience of dictatorship that have been excluded from official memory and the media. Parting with the notions of radical justice and the non-place, Martín-Cabrera initiates a stimulating discussion of detective fiction and political documentaries from Spain, Argentina and Chile. On the way, he takes cue from a number of other philosophical references, such as Brett Levinson’s notion of “radical injustice” that addresses the irredeemable pain and suffering inflicted on the victims of dictatorship, Derrida’s notion of hauntology, and Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of historical time, amongst many others.

Martín-Cabrera’s study is divided into four analytical chapters. The first chapter contains a scrupulous reading of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s novel *Galíndez*, which loosely follows the conventions of the detective novel and is based on the historical case of the Basque activist Jesús de Galíndez, who fled to New York during the Francoist regime and wrote a dissertation on Rafael Trujillo at Columbia University, but was then kidnapped and after that tortured and killed by the Trujillo-regime in the Dominican Republic. Martín-Cabrera states that Jesús de Galíndez’s history in many respects inspires the arguments he develops throughout *Radical Justice* (189). Moreover, since in Vázquez Montalbán’s novel all subjects and objects of the investigation are situated in distant geographical and historical contexts, the scholar reads this work, in line with his own project, as a reflection on the “transatlantic circulation of terror” and on the manners in which solidarity and justice may be achieved across national and historical borders (61). Martín-Cabrera’s critical intentions do not merely seek to reproduce the structure of *Galíndez* but also to relate to his own enunciative position as a Spanish academic working in the United States, identifying with foreign memories of dictatorship and pursuing a notion of solidarity that goes beyond geographical and temporal borders (75). Such meta-critical reflection adds significant depth and relevance to his close reading of Vázquez Montalbán’s novel as well.

In the second chapter, Martín-Cabrera analyzes three detective novels: *Los mares del sur* by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (Spain), *Nadie sabe más que los muertos* by Ramón Díaz-Eterovic (Chile), and *Una sombra ya pronto serás* by Osvaldo Soriano (Argentina). In this chapter, the critic frames the detective genre through Giorgio Agamben's work on the state of exception and through a series of psychoanalytical theorizations of melancholy by Sigmund Freud, Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek. If, following Agamben, the state of exception represents "a progressive confusion of the application and transgression of the law", then, according to Martín-Cabrera, detective fiction relates to this concept while it emerges "out of the convoluted relations between the legal order and the new forms of organized crime and capital accumulation", and since it represents "the entanglement and contamination of law and crime" (80–81). For Martín-Cabrera, melancholy reflects the detective's incessant attachment to the specters of the dictatorship and thus holds an antagonistic relation with the oblivious force that pushed forth the progressive confusion of law and crime in the state of exception. He opposes melancholy not only to the state of exception but also the transnational perspective of the first chapter, in the sense that melancholy operates as "a mode of approaching the specters of history from within the nation-state" (79). While not partaking in a transatlantic reflection on memory, the melancholy detective in novels from Spain and the Southern Cone would nonetheless mourn dictatorial violence "in the name of a different notion of justice and a different political community which do not yet have a place" (79).

In chapter 3 Martín-Cabrera hones in on three independent political documentaries from Spain, Chile and Argentina: *Santa Cruz...por ejemplo* (2005) by Günter Schwaiger and Hermann Peseckas, *H.I.J.O.S., el alma en dos* (2002) by Carmen Guarini and Marcelo Céspedes, and *El astuto mono Pinochet contra La Moneda de los cerdos* (2004) by Bettina Perut and Iván Osnovikoff. Here the critic is concerned with the intergenerational transmission of trauma, among other issues, and he further develops the notions of radical justice and the non-place from a psychoanalytical viewpoint. Departing from Lacan, he argues that "these documentaries articulate a notion of justice that emerges beyond the symbolic and the imaginary and therefore beyond the workings of the law and the state" (128). Specifically, the interest of political documentaries as an artistic form resides for Martín-Cabrera in their potential to challenge hegemonic accounts of history, to operate in the gap between historical reality and representation, and to approach trauma through visual language (141). He offers meticulous readings of the three documentary films with delicate attention to their contextual specificities. In each reading, he also loosely redefines the initial meaning of the non-place: for instance, the interruptions of testimonial language through spectral noises and voices in *Astuto mono* are related to a "non-place of signification"

(155), while the intergenerational transmissions of trauma in *Santa Cruz...por ejemplo* would point to the existence of a “non-place of testimony”, where “those who cannot speak and those who can speak but do not have anything significant to say about the original trauma” (158) may plea for a notion of justice yet-to-come.

In the concluding chapter, a final meditation on the notions of radical justice and the non-place is offered, by means of a careful analysis of Patricio Guzmán’s documentary film *El caso Pinochet*. Martín-Cabrera convincingly relates his conceptual apparatus to the main actors in the prosecution of Pinochet and the victims of state violence in Chile. For instance, Baltasar Garzón, the Spanish judge who prosecuted Pinochet, embodies “the emergent power of international law and universal justice” (208); the exception granted to Pinochet to return to Chile for medical reasons during his prosecution, shows how the state of exception manifests itself globally (209); and the testimonies by the victims of the Chilean dictatorship in Guzmán’s film would reflect an instance of what is dubbed “transnational solidarity”, recalling the fact that these victims had to travel to Spain in order to be heard (206). In this stimulating reading of *El caso Pinochet*, the critic once more reflects an exceptional ability to interlace detailed textual analysis with critical discussions of the historical and ethical questions at stake in the films and novels under scrutiny.

When overviewing *Radical Justice*, it should be noticed that Martín-Cabrera’s ambitious theoretical framework, while being almost in its entirety appealing, does not remain free from certain conceptual ambiguities. For example, although the critic goes to great lengths to define the exact relation that radical justice holds with the non-place, the reader will at times have difficulties identifying said relation in the complex lines of argument that are pursued throughout the book. In this regard, it is interesting that both terms are said not to be interchangeable (21, 227), while a typographic slippage on page 35 seems to account for their as yet not entirely definitive relation: here the title of the book (*Radical Justice*) is printed, with italics, as *The Non-Place*.

Finally, one may identify a slight contradiction in the complex relation that Martín-Cabrera’s study holds with theory. With regard to the non-place, the critic states the following in the introduction: “Far from being a hermeneutical and theoretical apparatus –in other words, a teleology– that I impose on these novels and films, the non-place as a concept is the result of my readings and interpretations of them” (22). However, another statement from chapter 1 seems to propose the contrary: “[...] the non-place should be understood as a hermeneutical device (a tool to interpret cultural artifacts) that interrupts the geopolitical categories that organize our process of thinking” (58). These and other moments, while not entirely prejudicial to the argumentative strength of the book as a whole,

engender certain inconsistencies that could have been avoided. The reader who is willing to offer a certain openness towards these moments of ambiguity, will nonetheless find Martín-Cabrera's study to be an inspired contribution to the field of Hispanic cultural studies, and especially to scholarship on memory and violence, detective fiction, documentary film, political philosophy and psycho-analysis.

Carlos van Tongeren: Radboud University Nijmegen, Departamento de Lenguas y Culturas Románicas, Postbus 9103, NL - 6500 HD Nijmegen, E-Mail: c.vantongeren@let.ru.nl