

UCLA

Mester

Title

Introduction

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/63t5k7d8>

Journal

Mester, 50(0)

Author

Giménez, Isaac

Publication Date

2021

DOI

10.5070/M350055621

Copyright Information

Copyright 2021 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

INTRODUCTION

I am honored to introduce the 50th issue of *Mester*, the academic journal of the graduate students of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California, Los Angeles. This year we welcomed articles, reviews, and interviews on the general topic of Poetry and Poetics, with particular emphasis on Lusophone and Hispanic literatures and linguistics, as well as Iberian, Latin-American, Chicanx and Latinx studies. We have also included a special section devoted to Luso/Afro/Brazilian Poetry.

To commemorate Mester's 50th anniversary, issue L has been conceived, first and foremost, as a celebration, a space where scholars from different parts of the world reflect on the potential of poems and poets to activate the living memory of societies, which is to say, to recollect what we already know but have forgotten.¹ Impacted by times of unprecedented political and ecological unrest, we aimed to revive poetic practices and scholarship predicated upon and proponent of new collectivities. In a context of hyper-digitalization, constant interconnectivity and social isolation, we assert the pleasure of playing poetry² as both a counterfactual means that defies logic and as a relational expressive platform that comes to terms with the absence of sense.

The variety of research methodologies, topics, hermeneutical strategies and theories engaging with the "verbal technologies"³ proposed in the poetic works discussed below underline the growing demand in the fields of literary and cultural critique for disentangling the often strained (and contradictory) relation between poetic representation, meaning (including what is socially meaningful), sense and interpretation. The result has been a dialogical issue which includes eleven articles, one interview and four reviews divided into the following

thematic sections: Public Curations and Performative Readings; Memory, History and Violence; Identities; Practicum, Interviews; and Reviews.

The first section opens with “Poesia (de) Agora: arquivamento como processo criativo a partir de uma exposição de poesia contemporânea” by Jobim, Almeida, Barandier and Ribeiro. The 2015 exhibition of Brazilian poetry at the Museum of the Portuguese Language in São Paulo, and its subsequent editions in 2017, serve as point of departure to connect the conceptual fields of archive studies, museology and literature. The authors examine the transference of meaning that occurs between the creative gesture of writing and the technical process of curating and archiving texts, arguing for the need to understand scholarship as an agora, in the most classical sense. The same would be valid for oral, written and visual contemporary Brazilian literature.

Antía Monteagudo’s text “Aluguer a turistas”: la poesía como resistencia ante la violencia turística en el espacio urbano portugués” discusses various forms of non-lyrical and intermedial poetry that respond to the phenomenon of gentrification in Portugal. The author subscribes to Baltrusch’s approach to non-lyrical poetic expressions – considered as sociopolitical translation practices regaining public spheres– to examine graffiti, stickers, posters, songs and music videos that respond to “ingenierías imaginables” (Hiernaux; González) and marketing strategies in the light of growing “tourism-phobia”.

Exploring the link between poetry and music further, Dênis Augusto Souza’s “Clássico agora: diálogos possíveis entre *Os Lusíadas* e o álbum *Eles não sabem a minha língua*, de Vinícius Terra”, closely analyzes this rap reinterpretation of Luís de Camões’ foundational epic poems. According to Sousa, Vinicius Terra’s repurposing of *Os Lusíadas* not only presents Camões as being highly critical of his own time, but also stimulates discussions of his work in broader Lusophone contexts, including Brazilian post-colonial readings.

The second section, Memory, History and Violence, opens with Isabel Balseiro’s article “Mistress of her own silences”: The transatlantic poetry of María Acuña”. The editor of *Poesia descalza* (2021)

and literary scholar presents this speculative biographical approach to Acuña's unapologetic life and introduces her recently published work. Originally from Extremadura, Spain, the poet lived through Franco's dictatorship and witnessed two violent insurgencies in Central America – the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua (1979–1990) and the Salvadorian Civil War (1979–1992) – before meeting an early death in 1994. Along with the biographical research, Balseiro reflects on the implications of posthumously editing Acuña's private papers as she identifies critical possibilities to situate her work.

Changing the geographical axis, Valentina Figuera's "Medo, violência e regime estético em "Sítio" e "Em Sarajevo", de Claudia Roquette-Pinto", examines two poems included in *Margem de manobra* (2005) that problematize the constant violence experienced by female bodies, especially those living in Brazil's urban peripheries. The author observes a juxtaposing aesthetic relation between the grotesque and what she refers to as the principle of bizarre beauty in an analysis that critically engages with concepts such as "state of exception" (Agamben) and "the distribution of the sensible" (Rancière).

In a similar vein, Benoît Santini engages with representations of violence, this time establishing a dialogue between the works of Mario Benedetti and Juan Gelman, two of the twentieth century's most renowned authors from the Southern Cone. "Barras oblicuas en la poesía de Juan Gelman y Mario Benedetti: herramientas para combatir la violencia / preservar la memoria" adopts a rather formal approach to cross-examine the communicative functions of the two authors' respective use of slashes, suggesting a rupture marked by their experiences in exile, both in their poems about love and in those that are more openly political.

The first four articles included in the section Afro/Luso/Brazilian Poetry: Identities present cross-readings of poems directly addressing racial, gender, sexual, class, and regional dynamics in Brazil. Firstly, Cristian Souza de Sales takes us on a literary journey in search of self-definition in "Poesia negra brasileira de autoria feminina: assentamentos de resistência". After setting the context, the author identifies common traces in the writings of Esmeralda Ribeiro, Miriam

Alves, Lélia González, Conceição Evaristo, and Livia Natália in order to suggest a distinctive lineage of black diasporic female voices. Apart from being instructive, this article seeks to highlight the contributions of black female authors to Latin American historiography, theory and literary critique.

From an ethnographic perspective, Carlos Nogueira and John Rex Amuzu Gadzekpo focus on “literatura de cordel”⁴ to address specifically elaborations on race in male poetic confrontations. “Para cantador valente/ tenho um chicote de aço”: homens em confronto na peleja brasileira” considers these “pelejas” as stylizing events that aim to tackle creatively personal and social conflicts. Yet, based on the ambivalent mobilization of race in these poetic male confrontations, the authors seem to suggest that race is mobilized both to perpetuate and challenge the distribution of power and prejudices in various levels of social organizations, including nation, work, and family.

Brenda Sarai Jaramillo and Ícaro Carvalho’s articles both offer an original take on the work of the Brazilian poet Angelica. Firstly, in “Os poemas ficam nonsense”: Canonical Gender in Angélica Freitas’ *Um útero é do tamanho de um punho*” Jaramillo focuses on the tensions generated by the two quotes included in the epigraph of Freitas’ most popular anthology, a line from the Bertolt Brecht/Kurt Weill composition “Seeräuber Jenny” and the satirical phrase “i piri qui” [“e para que” – literally, “and for what”]. This point of departure leads Jaramillo to reveal a history of mockery and to unpack Freitas’ sophisticated double critique: that of the Western male-centric literary canon, and that of canonical constructions of gender. Secondly, “O fim do fundo: o sul da América do Sul por Angélica Freitas” takes a geographical stance when examining specific references to *gaucho* culture and particular representations of the South of the Southern Cone. In dialogue with Vitor Ramil’s *A estética do frio*, Carvalho argues for a reading of Freitas’ works that also takes into account a sense of remoteness and foreignism resulting from the understanding of regional specificities.

The section called Practicum includes José Pinto’s text “Um país para a língua: A partir do projeto txon-poesia”. Moving away from

conventional academic writing, Pinto flirts with the formal conventions of the chronicle, the essay, and poetry to reflect on Txon-Poesia Project, founded in Cape Verde in 2018. In dialogue with the fields of psychology and performance studies, the author narrates in the first person the process of activating Cape Verde's literary scene while speculating on the potential of what he refers to as a "poetic of hope". The article ends with a sort of manifesto – "Um país para a língua" – which can also be read as a manual/call for action to foster literary practices that bring communities together.

The following section comprises Isaac Gimenez's interview with the multifaceted Brazilian translator, poet, literary scholar, editor, professor and performer, Guilherme Gontijo Flores. Among the wide variety of objects, topics and methods discussed in his plural work, "Revolta, erro e maravilha no poema como promessa de partilha" touches on the relation between translation, orality, and poetry; the limitations and challenges of literary traditions; the role played by failures/errors in writing and interpretation; the "revolt" of the poem; and general considerations about the Luso-Brazilian poetic scene today.

Our final section includes four book reviews: Aline Leal Fernandes Barbosa writes about the literary supplement *Dossiê Poética das margens no espaço literário e cultural franco-brasileiro / Poétique des marges dans l'espace littéraire et culturel franco-brésilien* published by *Revue Silène: Centre de recherches en littérature et poétique comparées da Universidade Paris 10*; Esther Claudio focuses on *Encrucijadas gráfico-narrativas: Novela gráfica y álbum ilustrado*, edited by José Manuel Trabado Cabado; Carla Juárez Pinto discusses *Poesía descalza* by Maria Acuña, an author previously introduced by Isabel Balseiro as the "mistress of her own silence"; and, finally, Madison Felman-Panagotacos reviews *Feminism for the Americas: The making of an international rights movement* by Katherine Marino.

In closing, I would like to extend my gratitude to the authors who enthusiastically contributed to this issue. I am also deeply thankful to this year's Editorial Board, comprised of Ícaro Carvalho, Esther Claudio, Pedro Cuevas, Madison Felman-Panagotacos, Julia González,

Leandro Hernández, Verónica Moreno, Cristina Vázquez, as well as to the guest contributing editors, Kristal Bivona, Milena Britto, Benjamin Burt, Elizabeth Landers, Bárbara Galindo, Jonas Leite, Rogério Mendes, Ludmila Mota de Figueiredo Porto, Marta Rosen, and Jacob Wilder-Smith. I would also like to give special thanks to Barbara Galindo, the previous Editor-in-Chief of *Mester*, and to Leandro Hernández, the current Editor-in-Chief, for their support throughout the editorial process. I am very grateful to *Mester* L's Faculty Advisor Professor Patricia Lino, and also for the support received from Professor José Luiz Passos, our former Chair Rosina Becerra, the current Chair, Maarten Van Delden, and the Vice Chair, Barbara Fuchs. I would also like to thank the staff members of the GSA Publication Office and the staff and student body of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Lastly, I wish to express my recognition of the indispensable creative work of our layout editor and cover designer, Nando Vivas.

Isaac Giménez
Editor-in-Chief, *Mester* L
University of California, Los Angeles

1 In reference to Plato and his dialogue with Meno, 80e-82a.

2 In reference to José Paulo Paes' poem "Convite."

3 Term borrowed from Luis Alegre' *El lugar de los poetas. Un ensayo sobre estética y política* (2017).

4 "Cordel literature" commonly refers to popular unexpensive prints containing folk novels, poems and songs that are typical of Northeastern Brazil.