

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Violence and Endurance: Representations of War and Peace in Post-War Central American Narratives**

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The main importance of this volume is that it updates, critically and conceptually, the places of enunciation of contemporary Central American literature. As the introduction notes, in general, the literature conceived in this region has been marginalized from academic circles. Even though some novels have enjoyed commercial success (for example, the novels by Gioconda Belli or Sergio Ramírez), serious criticism regarding them has been minimal. In an attempt to fill that gap, this volume aims to assess the recent developments in Central American literature through a series of articles written by eminent scholars.

One of the main points of the book is to address the rupture between the 'guerrilla period' (1970s and 1980s) – as Arturo Arias has called it – and the post-war period (1990s onwards), and how that break up has shaped narratives. That is, the different ways in which neoliberal societies are being narrated and recreated in the fictional space, especially after the demise of the revolutionary dream, the disenchantment with the democratic processes that have not fully addressed social inequalities, impunity, hegemonic and patriarchal practices. In this sense, the scholars' contributions to this volume bifurcate into different approaches that deeply enrich the discussion regarding the issue at stake, opening up questions and attempting to outline and define the state of affairs. Nevertheless, that aforementioned rupture is not simplified. As the articles note, there is a continuous line. For example, the theme of violence appears in both periods, and although its presence remains, changes are identified in the treatment conferred to it by a new generation of authors. Indeed, nuanced representations of the issues of the past coexist with new elements that reflect a deep connection with contemporaneity. Therefore, this book underlines concerns that are significant to fully grasp the changes that have taken place in Central American literature over the past four decades. In other words, the articles offer innovative insights into the development of both literary content and aesthetic quality.

Summarizing its contents, the reader will encounter literary references that allow reflections on: formal and thematic tendencies in the Central American narrative at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; writings that correspond to a neoliberal phase and, thus, depict its consequences and document alternatives that are permeating social imaginaries; a new critical reading of Central American testimony; how contemporary Mayan authors are rewriting modernity by recording it with an indigenous memory; to what extent literature has shown that the post-war period represents a failed process of mourning; how literature addresses trauma, but with different results, due to the tension between personal memory and collective memory; skepticism and the distrust of political ideology; the relationship between violence, testimony and aesthetics in order to question if there is really an abrupt rupture or rather a period of transition; how democracy is portrayed as a somewhat abstract ideal in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Tirana memoria*; the emergence of 'crime narratives' in several Central American post-war novels, positioning them as a privileged space to read the remains of trauma and anxieties left by the civil wars; sexuality and violence, where erotic utopia can become a way to remodel post-war subjectivity; the representation of masculinity in post-war Central American literature by contrasting it with the paradigmatic myth of the heroic guerrilla fighter; and the use of the figure of the clandestine *guerrillera* which recalls the mythical features of the 'woman warrior'.

In synthesis, this volume maps how Central American literature mirrors the complex reality that the region has had to overcome and is still dealing with, but also how it has broadened its gaze to incorporate new readings, agendas and questions, including the 'art of fictionalising', using novelist Horacio Castellanos Moya's words. Without a doubt, this book contributes considerably to articulate a richer, more complex, serious discourse on the region's literature. I am sure it will stimulate other scholars and readers to embark on the study of these fascinating narratives.

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