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Crónicas travestis: El periodismo transgresor de Alfonsina Storni, Clarice Lispector y María Moreno by Mariela Méndez
(review)

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Gonzalez's book seems to me, at times, both too specialized—as it almost philologically tries to prove the crucial but hidden role of European theory in Rama's concepts—to fully function as a first overview of Rama's work in English, and not specialized enough—as it fails to consider Latin American sources as theory or the key contributions of *The Lettered City* in theorizing the *letrado* and the *cultura letrada* as objects of study—to do justice to both Rama's thought and the significant amount of critical work, mostly done in Spanish, on his oeuvre.

An example of the latter is the inexplicable absence, in a book that deals centrally with the development of narrative transculturation, of any reference to the compilation of José María Arguedas's anthropological studies that Rama edited in 1975. Had González considered it, it would have been harder for him to credit only Benjamin with being the decisive origin of Rama's concept. Another inexplicable absence, especially for a book that devotes a full chapter to Rama's concept of Modernismo, is that of Rama's posthumously published second full book on Modernismo (*Las Máscaras democráticas del modernismo*) which is not even included in the bibliography.

Despite these flaws, *Appropriating Theory. Ángel Rama's Critical Work* is an important and very useful English-based engagement with the theoretical work of an influential critic who deserves a wider audience beyond Spanish and Portuguese.

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Méndez, Mariela. *Crónicas travestis: El periodismo transgresor de Alfonsina Storni, Clarice Lispector y María Moreno*. Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2017. 312 pp.

Crónicas travestis traces a novel genealogy between the journalism of Alfonsina Storni (Argentina, 1892-1938), Clarice Lispector (Brazil, 1920-77), and María Moreno (Argentina, 1947-), focusing on the subversive engagement of all three writers with the conventions of the women's column and drawing connections between this body of work and Moreno's post-dictatorship journals *alfonsina* and *El Teje*. Méndez argues that, by introducing the genre-bending fluidity of the *crónica*, writing under multiple (sometimes gender-crossing) pseudonyms, and subtly parodying the prescriptions of the rigidly normative genre of the *columna femenina*, Storni, Lispector, and Moreno each destabilize gender binaries while laying bare the constructedness of gendered identity. In this way, Méndez reads these key figures in twentieth-century Latin American proto-feminist and feminist journalism as anticipating theories of gender performativity (Judith Butler), cross-dressing (Marjorie Garber), and queer temporality (J. Jack Halberstam).

Méndez is not the first to associate these trailblazing women writers with a subversively feminist political project; she acknowledges a debt, for example, to the work of Gwen Kirkpatrick and Francine Masiello. The originality of Méndez's study lies in its engagement with contemporary queer theory as well as in its comparative nature. The connection between the two Argentine writers is well-established

(Moreno invokes Storni in calling the feminist journal she launches in 1983 *alfonsina*), but as Méndez points out, Storni's journalism receives far less critical attention than does her poetry. Clarice Lispector's journalism has been similarly overshadowed by her renowned fiction. Moreover, reading the Brazilian author alongside her Spanish American counterparts remains a rare comparative move.

It is one that proves fruitful for Méndez, whose study not only moves between Argentine and Brazil but also unites several distinct historical moments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Méndez's analysis encompasses Storni's columns "Feminidades" and "Bocetos Femeninos" (in *La Nota* and *La Nación*, respectively, 1919-21), Lispector's columns "Correio Feminino-Feira de Utilidades" and "Só para Mulheres" (in *Correio da Manhã* and *Diário da Noite*, respectively, 1959-61), and Moreno's columns "La Mujer" and "Señores" (in *Tiempo Argentino*, 1982-86), as well as Moreno's writing in the journals *alfonsina* (1983-84) and *El Teje* (2006-10).

Diligently attending to the historical and cultural specificities that make the context in which each author worked distinct, Méndez identifies compelling commonalities between them. She points, for example, to how all three writers entered the public space of journalism at times when the prevailing ideology (often linked to the state) sought to usher women back into domestic roles and regulate their bodies. This reactionary ideology rears its head not only in moments associated with conservative politics, such as during the last dictatorship in Argentina, but also in moments of rapid modernization and progressivism, such as the 1920s in Argentina, the late 1950s in Brazil, and Argentina's return to democracy in the 1980s.

Crónicas travestis unfolds over four chapters, the first two building the case for comparison among the women's columns authored by the three writers in question and the last two analyzing Moreno's post-dictatorship journals as the most overt expression of a radical gender politics that has its roots in these earlier columns. The first chapter focuses on the difficulties and discomforts each author faced as a woman occupying public space and the common response of creating a multiplicity of public personas (some of them male) behind which to hide and between which to move. Méndez argues that, for these writers, the mask becomes a political praxis that troubles the possibility of fixing identity and questions notions of authority and authorship (97). Chapter two analyzes how Storni and Lispector queer the genre of the women's column through rhetorical cross-dressing, by which Méndez means not only writing in a male voice (as Storni does as Tao Lao in "Bocetos Femeninos") but also, following Marjorie Garber's theory of transvestism, by disrupting and de-naturalizing the signifiers of gender and sexuality through performance. These columns, argues Méndez, reveal the rigid, artificial, and arbitrary construction of the woman as an artifact produced through recipe-like beauty regimens, diets, and the like.

Chapter three begins by analyzing continuities between these predecessors and Moreno's column "La Mujer," before turning to the feminist journal, *alfonsina*, which Moreno launched shortly after Argentina's return to democracy in 1983. Though much of the content of this "primer periódico para mujeres" is radical in its

own right, Méndez argues that its most transgressive feature is the rhetorical move learned from the women's columns of Storni, Lispector, and Moreno herself: the invocation of the conventions of *revistas femeninas* in order to subvert them and thus challenge artificially constructed notions of gender (207). The final chapter points to *El Teje*, *primer periódico travesti latinoamericano*, co-founded by María Moreno, Paula Viturro, and Marlene Wayer in 2007, as the culmination of the trajectory Méndez has been tracing. In this journal, observes Méndez, denunciations of the multiple forms of violence and precarity to which trans people are subjected meet an aesthetic that is modeled off of the *revista femenina* and plays with its discursive strategies of performing and policing gender (245–46).

In addition to offering new and impressively researched accounts of the journalism of Storni, Lispector, and Moreno, *Crónicas travestis* represents a theoretically sophisticated and historically grounded contribution to the field of Latin American feminist and queer criticism. The only area that feels underdeveloped is Méndez's engagement with queer temporality via Halberstam. Despite repeated references to the idea of challenging heteronormative, reproductive time throughout the work, this claim receives little elaboration until the final chapter. Even at this point, it is not entirely clear how the serial temporality of *El Teje*, drawn on that of the *folletín* and *telenovela*, denaturalizes the linearity of heteronormative time.

In the Coda, Méndez engages with the work of Eve Sedgwick to articulate another—this time quite compelling—understanding of the queer temporality of *El Teje*: that it depends upon reparative reading practices and upon a collectively sustained hope that the present can be re-written, the past re-articulated, and the future re-imagined (287–88). Though this idea could be more fully elaborated (perhaps in dialogue with the work of José Esteban Muñoz, who is mentioned in passing in the introduction), the belated articulation of the queer temporality at play in this project is fittingly performative of that which it describes. Méndez suggests that the feminist politics of the women's columns of Storni, Lispector, and Moreno are only fully recuperated and made legible by reading them retrospectively through the lens of *alfonsina* and *El Teje*. The earlier women's columns, she argues, contain in their digressions, absences, and silences a queer futurity in Halberstam's sense: "abren a su vez una fisura, ¿un desvío *queer*?" (123). Moreno's more overt activism in her post-dictatorship publications comes to belatedly occupy the discursive space opened up by the subtler subversion of gender identity in the earlier columns and *crónicas*, thereby fulfilling the queer utopian promise of the latter. Méndez's recuperative reading of twentieth-century *periodismo femenino* performs a similar and equally valuable gesture: expanding the temporal reach of contemporary conversations surrounding queer theory and gender theory so that they become ways of reclaiming the past and opening the present towards a re-imagined future.