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From the Selected Works of Cheyla Samuelson

October, 2016

[Review of] **La estética de lo mínimo: Ensayos sobre microrrelatos mexicanos, ed. Pablo Brescia**

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muestra la habilidad de Lame para aprender la lengua dominante pero para hacer de ella medio que le permite introducir una dura crítica al sistema colonial de explotación de la tierra y rescatar la concepción indígena del “conferenciar” con la naturaleza, aprendiendo de ella (204). “Castigo, sacrificio y duelo. El trabajo de la memoria en la trilogía muisca de Fernando González Cajiao” de Luis Fernando Restrepo vuelve sobre un esfuerzo contemporáneo de recuperar la memoria indígena en el teatro propuesto por González Cajiao en la década de 1970, el cual busca reconstruir una “memoria nacional que se ve incompleta sin los muiscas” (236).

Finalmente, dos ensayos de la colección exploran la literatura escrita por mujeres durante en siglo XX y XXI. En “Bogotá del medio siglo y tres mujeres que sufren. *Cadenas... y silencio* de María Restrepo de Thiede (1951)” Ángela Inés Robledo explora el conflicto entre tradición y progreso en una novela que “demuestra la imposibilidad de las mujeres de romper con su destino, de quebrar el círculo del maltrato, el silenciamiento y la exclusión” (255). En contraste, en “María Teresa Ramírez, Mary Grueso y María de los Ángeles Popov: voces poéticas con rastros de africana”, María Mercedes Jaramillo explora la reivindicación poética de la diáspora africana, esto es, su libertad, sus tradiciones y su corporalidad en tres poetisas provenientes del litoral pacífico colombiano que “despliegan las tradiciones de su pueblo, el paisaje y la conciencia de ser mujeres negras descendientes de esclavos, condición que asumen con orgullo y que las lleva a defender su herencia cultural” (293).

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Brescia, Pablo, ed. *La estética de lo mínimo: Ensayos sobre microrrelatos mexicanos*. Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2013. 166 pp.

Pablo Brescia's collection of essays on the contemporary form of the *microrrelato* in Mexico is a welcome contribution to the study of a genre that has particular resonance in today's world, and has demonstrated an exceptional vitality in Mexico. The brevity of digital forms like Twitter have given rise to an increased focus on understanding the form and function of the *microrrelato* as it relates to contemporary forms of communication. The succinct nature of much of social media and interpersonal communications resonates with the focused power of the *microrrelato*. Perhaps, without even knowing of the existence of the genre, many individuals are daily engaged in crafting what looks like *microrrelatos*. Faced with the overwhelming, and often underwhelming, textual production of the current age, with the democratization of textual creation posed by the internet and the ubiquity of ephemeral texts that may or may not be literature, a book like *La estética de lo mínimo: Ensayos sobre microrrelatos mexicanos* is particularly welcome.

As the coordinator of the project, Pablo Brescia has intelligently divided the collection of twelve articles into meaningful sections, separating those articles that attempt to define and analyze the genre of the *microrrelato* into the first section, entitled “Macromicro: perspectivas plurales,” leaving one text by María Guadalupe Sánchez Robles on the work of Julio Torri to stand on its own in “Un mini: el precursor,” creating a space for the concentrated study of specific authors and texts

in “Minimexicanos: escritores y escritoras de minificción,” and closing with an exhaustive register of the genre in Mexico entitled “Sea breve: cien años de microrrelatos mexicanos.” Brescia is well-qualified to oversee such a project; his book on the short story in Hispanic America *Modelos y prácticas en el cuento hispanoamericano: Arreola, Borges, Cortázar* (2011) demonstrates the profundity of his engagement with the short written form in Latin America, as does his other creative and critical work.

The largest section of *Estética*, entitled “Macromicro: perspectivas plurales,” appropriately gives a helpful overview of the ongoing critical effort to describe some general contours of the *microrrelato*, an effort that is still vigorous in its debates and focus. Even the name “microrrelato” is up for scrutiny, with some critics preferring “microrrelato,” “minirelato,” “cuento hiperbreve” or “minicuento.” Brescia’s solution to this critical disparity is to avoid the temptation to pick sides or act as a final arbiter of nomenclature for the genre; instead he seeks to open up the dialogue, to encourage multiple perspectives and modes of analysis. The three articles in this first section orient the *microrrelato* in a larger cultural and artistic context, including Gerardo Cruz’s essay on the relationship between the “ephemera” of the web publishing and the consecrated artifact of the printed book and Cándida Elizabeth Vivero Marín’s study on the particular resonance of the ominous in the feminine production of the *microrrelato* in Mexico. The final article in this section is authored by Lauro Zavala, a recognized theoretician of the genre, which he calls here “minificción.” Zavala’s article focuses on the work of five contemporary writers, and attempts to define the unique personal “philosophy” expressed in the *microrrelatos* of each. These articles serve to ground the collection, and give the reader new to the genre a helpful introduction to some of its central characteristics.

In the third section, “Minimexicanos: escritores y escritoras de minificción,” Brescia offers the reader a chance to see what the literary analysis of texts that are often considerably shorter than the critical work devoted to them can achieve. Focusing on the production of the last twenty years, this section also offers the reader an introduction to some of the most interesting writers working in the genre in Mexico today, including Alberto Chimal, Ana Clavel, Óscar de la Borbolla, Cecilia Eudave, Luis Felipe Hernández, Guillermo Samperio, and José Luis Zárate.

In his article on Alberto Chimal, Juan Carlos Gallegos tackles the timely question of the relationship between web publishing and the venerable institution of the published book, as he describes the way in which Chimal’s literary production flows between the always mutable digital world and the seemingly fixed and consecrated world of the book. Francisca Noguero’s masterful chapter on the *minificción* of Cecilia Eudave explores the unique cosmovision of the Eudave’s evocative *microrrelatos* while also demonstrating their relevance to a larger critical debate about the contours of what some would call “postmodern” fiction. Bianca Eunice Castillo Villanueva delves deeply into the workings of one *microrrelato* by Ana Clavel, and vividly demonstrates how an extraordinarily short text can evoke in the reader a myriad of connections, responses, and interpretations. Likewise, Angélica Maciel Rodríguez offers an analysis of the fictional character as a central axis around which a microfiction can revolve, and thus offers a new perspective on the role of

character in the work of José Luis Zárate, in which the prior knowledge of the reader and his or her ability to construct the past and future of seemingly minimal characters leads to the seemingly paradoxical humanization of characters undergoing monstrous transformations. Laura Elisa Vizcaíno Mosqueda and Alejandra Piña offer essays on the work Luis Felipe Hernández and Guillermo Samperio, respectively.

Despite the diversity of the authors and critical approaches offered by *Estética de lo mínimo*, certain common ideas about the genre of the *microrrelato* in Mexico can be extrapolated from this collective effort. Instead of focusing on a minimum or maximum word length, or other technical elements of the form, most authors attempt to describe the discourse of the *microrrelato* in its relation to the experience and collaboration of the reader. Thus in addition to the requisite “briefness,” the characteristics of “intensity,” “enigma,” “metaphor,” “intertextuality,” “fragmentation,” “parody,” “ellipsis,” and “polysemy” are consistently used to describe the form and its relationship to the cognitive effort of its readers. More than perhaps any other literary genre, the *microrrelato* invites and requires the reader to participate in the language game of inference, metaphor, and allusion, and in all these articles, the importance of the reader as co-conspirator and co-creator is underscored and celebrated.

La estética de lo mínimo offers both an enlightening introduction to the genre of microfiction and many outstanding examples of in-depth and insightful studies of specific authors and texts in the genre, and is a truly welcome addition to scholarship on a textual form that resonates strongly with our contemporary lived experience.

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Bush, Matthew. *Pragmatic Passions: Melodrama and Latin American Social Narrative*. Madrid; Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2014. 222 pp.

In *Pragmatic Passions, Melodrama and Latin American Social Narrative*, Matthew Bush seeks to vindicate melodrama as the object of serious scholarly inquiry in the context of Latin Americanist criticism. Bush does not situate his study of the melodramatic mode in Latin American narrative where one might expect—*telenovelas* and other such instances of low mass-media popular cultural production—but rather anchors it firmly within the domain of high literature that indisputably forms part of the Latin American literary canon, corresponding, moreover, not to the nineteenth-century sentimentality, but to the masculinist modernism of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, Bush presents five engaging case studies of melodrama that treat, respectively, the regional novel, *indigenismo*, the Argentine Vanguard, Brazilian modernism, and the Boom, thus giving a sweeping and representative reconstruction of the established topography of early-to-mid-twentieth-century Latin American novelistic narrative, but surveying it through the uncommon interpretive optic of melodramatic analysis.