

CHAPTER

Latin American Narrative in the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries

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Abstract

The Latin American narrative of the twenty-first century has its roots in the 1990s, when globalization, new technologies, and the processes of expansion and consolidation of the Spanish publishing conglomerates impacted on the book market. After 2001, there was a proliferation of many aesthetics and new turns (subjective, documentary, post-memory, neorealism, neofantasy, feminist, queer, nomadic, digital, neoruralism) that appealed to both national and global identities. Of all of them, those that have become the most relevant are feminist and queer literature, since writing by women, feminized bodies, and dissident subjectivities has taken an unprecedented center stage in the Latin American literary field during the last decade. Lastly, the most significant changes that have taken place in the modes of production, circulation, and reception of Latin American narrative concern material culture, including the growth of independent publishing, fairs, and festivals. The chapter also examines the remarkable “spectacularization” of the writer, the increasing precarity of the literary profession, and the professionalization of mediators, and the “Randomization” of Latin American literature.

Keywords: [twenty-first-century Latin American narrative](#), [feminist literature](#), [queer literature](#), [material culture](#), [publishing market](#)

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Latin American narrative of the twenty-first century has its roots in the 1990s, when three global phenomena fully impacted the book market: post-Fordist capitalism, neoliberal globalization, and the development of new technologies. To these we must add three other events that specifically concern Hispanic culture: (i) the Spanish celebration of the quincentenary of the “Discovery” of America in 1992, which promoted a pan-Hispanist ideology based on language and shared tradition; (ii) the demand for a transatlantic publishing market, due to the need of the large Spanish conglomerates (such as Planeta and Alfaguara) to expand economically; and (iii) the 1996 publication of the *McOndo* anthology, edited by the Chileans Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, and the appearance in that same year of the *Crack* manifesto, signed by the Mexicans Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla, Pedro Ángel Palou, Eloy Urroz, and Ricardo Chávez.

The McOndists, on the one hand, defended a (Latin American) individual and urban identity expressed through the global influence of mass media, of a local language and fragmented narrative, with little interest in politics. On the other hand, for the *Crack* signatories, (Latin American) literary identity was based on formal and aesthetic risk, on the cultivation of high culture, on the use of irony, on theoretical and philosophical reflection, and on the historical story. Nevertheless, both groups shared the same literary—and commercial—strategy of opposition to the Eurocentric association of Latin American fiction with the land, violence, political history, magical realism, and exoticism, which had been a burden since the Boom

period. Of course, this aesthetic standpoint is not new, as cosmopolitanism and universalism had been seeded during the twentieth century in Latin America, although they did not enjoy much visibility—that is to say, in terms of marketing interest—beyond national borders. However, what does entail novelty in the Latin American literary system (aside from Borges’s early proposals in “The Argentine Writer and Tradition”) is the unravelling of the idea of a narrative identity tied to national or regional geography, along with the expansion of literary areas beyond the borders of each country. This is mainly the consequence of the new logic of the global market and the neoliberal ideology that underpins it, crystallized in the gradual process of “Alfaguarization” of Latin American literature at the end of the twentieth century, which the members of McOndo and Crack were perfectly adept at gauging. What is this “Alfaguarization”? You may well ask.

In 1993, the publisher Juan Cruz launched the “Alfaguara Global” initiative as part of a cultural and economic project of Hispanist kinship that was driven by Spain through the inauguration of the Casa de América (1990), the Instituto Cervantes (1991), and the numerous celebratory events of the Quincentenary of the “Discovery” of America (1992). The goal of the director of the Alfaguara publishing house at that time was to achieve the simultaneous publication of certain works in the entire geographical area of the Spanish language (Latin America, Spain, and the United States). With this publishing policy, they would be able to form the long-desired common market in Spanish where Spain would act as the mediator between Latin America and Europe, which obviously implied the commercial and (neo-)colonial control of production. Moreover, this market was to challenge the English-speaking market, although this did not entail an equal interchange between Spain and Latin America either—in fact, quite the opposite, since the latter’s share of all books published did not surpass 2.5% of the total (Pohl). This percentage has barely changed today.

Similarly, some Latin American writers began to claim the Spanish language as one homeland or identity, rejecting the existence of a “Latin American literature.” This was argued by those who made up McOndo and Crack, but also other well-known authors, including Rodrigo Fresán, Edmundo Paz Soldán, Roberto Bolaño, Jorge Eduardo Benavides, Fernando Iwasaki, and Andrés Neuman. The fashion was “to define themselves as stateless, perpetual wanderers, citizens of a global world, free from signs or traces of their own identity, nation, or culture ... To substitute an ontology of identity for another of not-belonging” (Becerra 287).¹ Strictly speaking, the fiction of these authors is deterritorialized in virtue of a “sensorium” (Ránciere) that is reasserted in the globalization of culture, in global mobility (most of the writers mentioned live in Spain or the United States) or in what Tim Parks calls the “New Global Novel.”

This concurs with the policy regarding the transnational circulation of book adopted by Alfaguara, and by Planeta, the other great Spanish conglomerate—these publishing houses endeavored to publish and promote these aesthetics and writers now that the Boom was no longer a gold mine for them. Thus, the “global” mode of production has a correlate in Latin American literary creation—which gives rise to the representation of themes and settings that are international, dystopian, gothic, fantasy, and so on—and in the construction of “cosmopolitan” author figures, as well as in the space where the texts are received, both in the mass media and in academia. It is no triviality that in the same period, literary criticism began to coin certain terms and reading frameworks such as “world,” “glocal,” “transnational,” and “transatlantic” literature, which were borrowed from the English-speaking sphere. However, in national spaces of criticism in Latin America, local readings outlined by tradition continued to be completely relevant (e.g., Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Fernando Vallejo, Mario Bellatin, Horacio Castellanos Moya, Cristina Rivera Garza, Martín Kohan), in contrast to the proposals of McOndo and Crack, which hardly caused a ripple.

Likewise, also in the 1990s, a further twist to the problem of Latin American identity occurs with the emergence of Latinx writers from the United States who write in English, such as Julia Álvarez, Junot Díaz, and Daniel Alarcón, which also jeopardized the ontological and epistemological configuration of the Latin American literary object, based on the common use of the Spanish language. This entails a resignification of the literary field as an ambiguous (political) dimension, articulating other forms of belonging linked neither to the land nor to the language, which are increasingly more travelled and widespread.

Few studies with an overview of Latin American narrative published after 2001 can be found to date (Fornet; Montoya and Esteban; Ludmer; Quesada; Gallego Cuiñas; Hoyos; Brescia and Estrada; Premat; González; Guerrero; Valero and Estrada; Corral). In all of these, the names of the writers born in the period from the 1970s to the 1990s are repeated or exchanged, because what is visible for some spaces and schools is not so for others. Furthermore, the overproduction of books makes it very difficult to transcend the case study, which contributes greatly to the difficulty of choosing some authors rather than others and of setting an aesthetic and ideological value that brings together a corpus of texts as a cultural model. Nevertheless, I

believe that it may prove advantageous to make a heuristic effort—despite its reductionist and partial nature—to name the most noteworthy aesthetic “directions” or “turns” taken in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, which affect forms, procedures, and topics of contemporary Latin American narrative. To clarify, I use the concept of aesthetics here not through an idealist approach but in the sense that Rancière gives it: in its “speaking of the real,” in its ethical and political dimension. This is not rendered into new literary techniques, but rather into a new mode of “visibility” or stance “in the face of time” (63). The effectiveness of the following ten representative aesthetic turns comes, therefore, from their adherence to a “community of feeling” (Rancière 37), which means the Latin American social, political, and literary structures of this new century:

1. *The subjective turn*, or autobiographical turn, expressed from the end of the twentieth century through the processes of autofiction, the diary, or epistolary writing, which have been revitalized, exhibiting a new type of subjectivity marked by affect and vulnerability. In this area we can include authors such as Mike Wilson, Jeremías Gamboa, Guadalupe Nettel, Valeria Luiselli, Rodrigo Hasbún, Romina Paula, María Gainza, Mauro Libertella, Margarita García Robayo, Carolina Sanín, Roberto Martínez Bachrich, Alan Mills, and Janette Becerra.
2. *The documentary turn*, which champions the factual story through the use of articles/accounts, opening the door to so-called docu-fiction to show the porosity of the division between documentation and fiction (Eduardo Halfon, Marta Dillon, Selva Almada, Carlos Busqued, Renzo Rosello, Gabriela Wiener, Felipe Restrepo Pombo, Diego Zúñiga, Carlos Manuel Álvarez, Frank Báez, etc.).
3. *The (post)memory turn*, which cultivates the imaginary of the (post)dictatorship, where the “literature of the children” of the Southern Cone is included: Julián López, Laura Alcoba, Patricio Pron, Félix Bruzzone, Raquel Robles, Mariana Eva Pérez, Nona Fernández, Andrea Jeftanovic, Álvaro Bisama, Alejandro Zambra, Alia Trabucco, and Carlos Wynter, et cetera.
4. *The neorealist turn*, in which the following converge: the detective or noir genre (Leonardo Oyola, Mercedes Giuffré, Wilmer Urrelo, Melba Escobar, Juan Manuel Robles), the historical novel, narco-literature, narratives of violence (Yuri Herrera, Daniel Alarcón, Daniel Ferreira, and Mónica Ojeda), and the literature of the poor (Julián Herbert, Verónica Gerber Bicecci, Pedro Mairal, Matías Celedón, Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón). In this area, we can also place the notable progress of that “realismo raro” (“weird realism”) (Harman) that has been likened to Lovecraft (Federico Falco, Hernán Ronsino, Juan Cárdenas, Katya Adaui, etc.) and that could also be linked to the “speculative realism” that philosophers such as Graham Harman or Quentin Meillassoux have developed, in which no pre-existing reality is represented, but, rather, new forms of social logic are invented.
5. *The neofantasy turn*, which encompasses the notable development of science fiction (currently considered an outstanding variant of realism), dystopia, gothic, and the horror genre (Mariana Enríquez, Samanta Schweblin, Luciano Lambertini, Nicolás Mavrikis, Martín Felipe Castagnet, Damián González Bertolino, Gabriela Jauregui, Daniela Tarazona, Giovanna Rivero, Liliana Colanzi, Fedosy Santaella, Karina Sainz Borgo, Erick J. Mota, etc.).
6. *The feminist turn*, which reveals new assemblages and deconstructions of the heteropatriarchal norm through the disruptive imagining of motherhood, family, romantic love, incest, filicide, or violence against women (Mariana Dimópulos, Ariana Harwicz, Inés Acevedo, Fernanda Trías, Fernanda Melchor, Daniela Tarazona, Carolina Sanín, Ena Lucía Portela, Claudia Salazar Jiménez, María José Cano, Lina Meruane, Sol Linares, etc.).
7. *The queer turn*, which sets out non-normative sexualities and dissident LGBTTIQ + processes of subjectivation, with particular development of trans/transvestite narratives over the last decade (Fernanda Laguna, Lucía Puenzo, Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, Camila Sosa Villada, Dani Umpi, Rita Indiana, Giuseppe Campuzano, Giuseppe Caputo, Natalia Berbelagua, Manuel Gerardo Sánchez, Luis Negrón, etc.).
8. *The nomadic turn*, or wandering or diasporic turn, which follows the trail of travel, exile, nomadic or transitory narratives, which were extremely prolific in the nineties and gave rise to the aforementioned debate on the multi- or trans-territorialization of Latin American literature. In this area, the most noteworthy authors are Junot Díaz, Andrés Neuman, Alejandra Costamagna, Nataly

Villena, Raquel Aband, and Juan Pablo Villalobos, among others. We could also include here another aesthetic that has been expanding and gaining more and more notoriety, which is the *border turn*, embodied in stories from the Mexico-US border, as found in texts by Antonio Ortuño, Heriberto Yépez, and Emiliano Monge, among others.

9. *The digital turn*, or technological or electronic turn, which occupies the transmedial and hypertextual, as exemplified by Pola Oloixarac, Carlos Labbé, Ramiro Sanchiz, Doménico Chiappe, and so on.
10. *The neo-ruralist turn*, which returns the countryside to the literary scene, at the mercy of the economic crises that made urban life unsustainable, with the new environmental awareness, care for health and well-being, and even the recent emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, which is also bringing about a return to rural settings. Some examples of writers in this theme are Iosi Havilio, Oliverio Coelho, Magela Baudoin, and Carlos Fonseca, among others.

As we can see, these turns are not new and neither do they occur in a pure state; rather, they appear in the mix not only of aesthetics but also of temporalities (modern, postmodern, metamodern), disciplines, genres, and, of course, politics of literature. Of all these, I argue that the feminist and queer turns are especially relevant, given that writing by women, feminized bodies, and dissident subjectivities have acquired an unprecedented protagonism in the Latin American literary field over the last decade. Never before have so many women writers, nor so many gender-neutral and/or trans/transvestite individuals, been published, and neither have they attained such a degree of legitimacy before, in the academy and in the market, nationally and transnationally. Of course, this is not something that has happened spontaneously. Rather, it is the consequence of the articulation of a literary discourse, transfeminist and dissident in origin, that has been developing in Latin America since the 1970s and 1980s (Rosario Castellanos, Elena Poniatowska, Manuel Puig, Copi, Sylvia Molloy, Luisa Valenzuela, Angélica Gorodischer, María Moreno, Pedro Lemebel, Laura Restrepo, Gioconda Belli), but it has begun to flourish the most over the last decade or so.

This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that in Latin America the latest Western trans-feminist (Valencia) movements have had a great effect: queer theory (Butler), post-feminism (Haraway), new materialisms (Jane Bennett and Elizabeth Gross), and post-pornography (Paul B. Preciado). At the same time, a spectacular development of Latin American feminist thought has taken place, embodied by international names such as Marcela Lagarde, Rita Segato, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Verónica Gago, who focus their criticism on capitalist violence, neo-colonialism, and the (subordinating) processes of subjectivation of Latin American women.

On the other hand, the institutional politics that promote gender equality and feminism as its own area of knowledge have had an impact, as has the fact that women have been occupying public spaces of legitimacy in Latin America (Michelle Bachelet, Cristina Fernández, Dilma Rousseff, Laura Chinchilla, Mireya Moscoso). This is a social factor that has contributed to expanding their presence in literary discourse as well. This panorama has fostered the growth of Latin American feminist activism, which has had unprecedented global impact, led by women who are mostly related to the sphere of literature and art, as has occurred with the Argentinian movement *Ni Una Menos*. If the year 1959 and the Cuban Revolution brought about the start of the boom in Latin American, Pan-American, and anticolonial literature, then the year 2015 and *Ni Una Menos* (“Not One [Woman] Less”) crystallized the boom of (trans-)feminist, pan-Hispanic, and anti-patriarchal literature. From the organic epic nature of the fiction of the 1960s, their reconstruction of national/continental history, and their struggle against authoritarianism and American imperialism, there is a shift in the twenty-first century to an inorganic narrative of local/communal stories and disobedient subjectivities. These narratives reproduce politics of the common and modes of resistance to represent the crisis of cisgender subjectivities, of the model of the heteropatriarchal family and of normative affective relationships. Thus the dissidence of sex and gender finds, in literature, a path for enunciation and making itself visible, as occurred with the subjectivities of the Latin American left half a century before.

The international impact of the wholly new Latin American feminist narrative is projected onto this emancipatory horizon, which “shatters the old cliché of what women’s writing should be” (Drucaroff 462). In what way? At least two clear mechanisms can be distinguished: first, the reappropriation of resources such as dark humor and violence, which were intrinsic to male writing and to the social role of men; second, the deconstruction and reconstruction of the processes of female subjectivation. It is no longer a question of narrating what women say, but what they do not say. The aim is not only to have access to the word but to

draw back the ideological veil that the hegemonic patriarchal discourse has spread over the female body and its functions: as mother, as lover, as victim of structural violence. Thus, this narrative shows, in a political act, the limits, the gaps, the shadows of femininity (Ludmer 98). With this, they challenge both patriarchal ideology and *feminine* literature, undermining the institution of marriage, the roles of wife and mother, the family, the materiality of the body and identity, in transformation and performance, of women.

However, if we undertake a materialist reading of this extremely novel feminist narrative, it is easy to see that the growth of its importance in the Latin American literary sphere is also accompanied by the expansion of the publishing industry. The ease of access to publication has undoubtedly favored women writers: more is published, and, as a result, more women are published. For the publishing houses, both large and small, backing such valued market sectors as women and emerging authors is currently fundamental for the make-up of their catalogues. However, when we put the spotlight on a larger scale, on what is called “world literature,” women’s writing continues to be invisible. Therefore, if women occupy a lesser place in the transnational circulation of Latin American literature, their condition is doubly subordinate in the space of world literature: because they are Latin American *and* because they are women. The explanation can be found in the fact that the most acclaimed and renowned women writers in the global system have been, up until the end of the twentieth century, those who did not display any great difference in gender terms—in other words, their literature resembled the canon, of patriarchal nature. Otherwise, they were renowned because the gender difference was a product in itself, whether as the story of “feminine” matters or as openly feminist struggle, conveyed as the telling of situations of abuse, violence, and oppression, such as in Margaret Atwood’s bestseller *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985). This assertion can be demonstrated if we look at the themes that have given prominence to the last few female winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature: Svetlana Alexiéevich (military conflict), Herta Müller (totalitarianism), Doris Lessing (racial conflict), Wislawa Szymborska (memory), Nadine Gordimer (economy and corruption), and Olga Tokarczuk (crime novel and historical novel). Since the 1990s, only three feminist writers have won the award: Toni Morrison, Elfriede Jelinek, and Alice Munro.

The last decade has also seen an authentic boom in Latin American queer/trans/transvestite literature, which has become one of the most prominent in the Spanish language due to the significance that certain trans artists, intellectuals, and activists have attained by presenting politics and aesthetics with immense dissident potential (Batato Barea, Lohana Berkins, Marlene Wayar, Mauro Cabral, Effy Beth, Claudia Rodríguez, and Frau Diamanda). One of their literary precursors was Severo Sarduy, who was a forerunner to the appearance in Latin America of a neo-baroque transvestite narrative (parodic, hyperbolic, fragmented, experimental), transnational, transsexual, and transcultural in nature, which would confront the binarism and univocality of the sex/nation/high-culture triad that defined the boom. His work as a translator, critic, and publisher made him the consummate mediator—he lived in Paris—of Latin American literature on sexual disobedience, which from the eighties and nineties expanded with the emergence of the likes of Néstor Perlongher, Luis Zapata, Reinaldo Arenas, Joaquín Hurtado, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Diamela Eltit. In the twenty-first century, they have been joined by Mayra Santos-Febres, Mario Bellatin, Dani Umpi, Giuseppe Campuzano, Ena Lucía Portela, Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, Naty Menstrual, and Camila Sosa Villada, among others. In the works of these authors, three traits recur that denote the articulation of politics of the common—of an alternative social trans-community—and of aesthetic dissidence: the queer use of the literary chronicle and of the neo-baroque, the presence of the body, the monstrous and the animal, and the literary enunciation of a “precarious” subjectivity (Butler).

However, the greatest transformation that Latin American narrative has undergone between the 1990s and the second decade of the twenty-first century does not involve the formulation of new aesthetics or the emergence of women writers of queer, trans, or transvestite subjectivities; rather, it concerns the changes that have occurred in the book market on a global scale. Latin American literature is not the combination of a language and a cultural way of thinking in abstract; it is a commodity, which in the twenty-first century is subordinated to a neoliberal logic intersected by two variables: the already mentioned globalization, which accelerated the modes of production and circulation of cultural assets (Bourdieu), and the economic crises of the new millennium that have affected the methods of publishing access and distribution. Both circumstances have, in turn, given rise to two material changes that cannot be omitted from this analysis because they have a clear symbolic effect: first, the expansion, rationalization, concentration, and hyper-segmentation of the Latin American publishing sector; second, the multiplication of “gatekeepers” (Marling) who have an influence on the processes of creation and circulation of Latin American literature in the global system—that is, on perception, the formation of taste and on the processes of recognition and canonization established. Traditionally, the crucial role—both positive and negative—that these mediators

play in the literary scene has been ignored. Today, however, we cannot disregard the function of this “new breed of managers, agents of market forces” (Bauman 109), in the filtering process and in the deterritorialization of the symbolic capital of Latin American writers. Good examples of this are the Frankfurt Book Fair; the Hay Festival and its Bogotá39 list (2007/2017); the “The Best of Young Spanish-Language Novelists” in *Granta* 113 (2010); literary agents (most of whom are located in Barcelona and Madrid); translators, scholarships, and residencies (e.g., The International Writing Program at the University of Iowa); the expansion of creative teaching spaces; creative writing workshops and MAs such as that at NYU; and so on. All of these are builders of “world literature,” and they take place far from Latin America, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Spain.

However, local “gatekeepers” do exist, who act in and out of Latin America, such as certain independent publishers in Mexico and the Southern Cone (e.g., Eterna Cadencia, Sexto Piso, Hueders); book fairs in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil; and prizes such as the Premio García Márquez, Premio Bial de Novela Mario Vargas Llosa, Premio Roberto Bolaño a la Creación Literaria Joven, Premio Iberoamericano de Letras José Donoso, and Concurso Literario Juan Carlos Onetti, among others. These awards on occasion give more visibility and symbolic and financial return than the sale of books, which implies a hidden mode of acting that affects the (re)production and reception of recent Latin American narrative. Thus we can identify four material “events” (Agamben) that mark the consumption of Latin American literary culture in the twenty-first century: (i) independent publishing, book fairs, and festivals; (ii) the “spectacularization” of the writer and the increasing precariousness of the literary occupation; (iii) the professionalization, growth and increasing visibility of the mediators of literature, who now act as assessors of literary worth; and (iv) the “Randomization” of Latin American literature. I will briefly explain each of these below.

Independent publishers, fairs and festivals. Firstly, in the twenty-first century there has been a notable increase in small and medium-sized publishers—called “independent” (Gallego Cuiñas “Las editoriales independientes” [“Independent Publishers”])). On the one hand, they promote bibliodiversity with the publication of “minor” genres (Deleuze and Guattari) (e.g., poetry, short stories, essays, drama) that are neglected by the large corporations. On the other hand, they revive a kind of “material counterculture” (Gallego Cuiñas, *Novísimas*) through alternative means of production to standardized industrial goods—that is, artisan or handcraft such as the *cartonera* publishers, *cordel* books (chapbooks), and so on. This material dissent also has its symbolic correlate in certain imprints (e.g., Mansalva, Rosa Iceberg, Laurel, Almadía, Libros del Pez Espiral) that have become true drivers of experimental methods of production and commercialization. They are deeply anchored in local/national tradition, to the extent of being “anachronistic” (Didi-Huberman), and tend to be subsequently swallowed up by large publishing houses such as Anagrama or Literatura Random House. They thus act as laboratories of literary value, which reveals them as gatekeepers of world (Latin American) literature (Gallego Cuiñas 2018).

The role that “independent” publishers play in the current Latin American literary space is similar to the pioneering artistic actions typical of the most pugnacious avant-garde of the early twentieth century. Then it was magazines and journals that published manifestos; now this is done—out of activism—by the small publishers, which have been the great revitalizers of an alternative literary culture (Vanoli 84–85), out of which systems of association and collaboration have arisen for the creation and distribution of books (e.g., the independent and alternative/self-organized book fairs). These have brought about the formation of subcontinental and transatlantic networks of publishing sociality networks, because contemporary Latin American narrative is also published by “independent” imprints in (Western) non-Spanish-speaking countries, such as La Nuova Frontiera (Italy), Métailié (France), Klaus Wagenbach (Germany), and Sudaquia (USA). All of this marks out a counter-hegemonic circuit of the Latin American book, an alternative to the Spanish and German publishing industries that control the majority of its literary market. Hence we can even talk of “decolonial materialism” (Gallego Cuiñas, “Independent Publishers”) to characterize the work that the small and medium-sized Latin American publishers carry out today.

However, at the same time that the production and commercialization of books is being digitalized, the live experiences of literary fairs and festivals are increasing in Latin America, in which “communities” (Nancy) of writers and readers participate that make a literary use of life. They are defined by the “communitization” of the symbolic and material experience of literature as a “residual sociolect” (Brouillette 288) that is shared in spaces of the “non-state public sphere” (Virno 14). They may, however, be state spaces, because the most important literary festivals are, in part, sponsored by state institutions and/or corporate foundations (e.g., HAY, FILBA), which invest in cultural events as a policy of self-promotion and even as an investment in tourism. In general, they function as “systems of patronage”

(Vanoli 46), but also as political dispositifs in which, paradoxically, reflection on the literary comes before the consumption of books (even in the fairs, which have also been “festivalized” in recent years). In these spaces, there is an intellectual atmosphere that gives rise to the continuous and self-legitimizing (re-)view of the contemporary meanings and future possibilities of literature, under the premise and acceptance of its social functionality—of its use value. Paradoxically, in both festivals and fairs, we witness a return to the sublime, to the utopia of an “autonomous” literary world, full of hope, that shares one same “structure of feeling,” as Raymond Williams would say. In the shared experience of the “learned community” of the twenty-first century (Gallego Cuiñas 2021), new subjectivities are produced, “forms of life” (Agamben) and sociabilities that create needs both in the production and in the consumption of “literary culture” (the socialized experience of the *performance* of the literary), which is displacing “literature” (the solitary experience of reading) more and more.

Therefore, what it is ultimately about is keeping alive that faith or literary credit, not to gain more readers but to generate more producers/consumers of literature. This brings about the proliferation of versatile figures who are simultaneously readers-writers-publishers (Washington Cucurto, Félix Bruzzone, Diego Zúñiga, Daniel Tabarovsky, Tamara Tenembaun, among others). In these cases, which are burgeoning above all in the Southern Cone, intellect (theory), work (poiesis or production), and action (political praxis) (Virno 104) are interwoven in pursuit of a collective project (*Belleza y Felicidad* [Beauty and Happiness], *Furia del Libro* [Book Fury], etc.) of bibliodiverse, egalitarian, sustainable, and inclusive intellectual life—in other words, committed.

The spectacularization of the writer and increasing precariousness of the literary occupation. Writers have gone from being the producers of literary objects to becoming products themselves, based on the notable “spectacularization” (Sibilia) and commercialization of the “public image” (Groys) that the market demands. With this exercise in self-exhibition, the “aura” (Benjamin) shifts from the book to the author, the guarantee of the authenticity of the creative work, to be judged, in a neoromantic drive, as a kind of tragic hero, bearer of aesthetic transcendence and politics of art, who despises neoliberal capitalism. In this way, writers assemble their biography according to a particular literary identity (Arfuch): as the epic/anti-expression of a creative genius, whose mediatic paradigm in the Iberian-American space is Jorge Luis Borges. Thus, the three basic manifestations of learned Latin American culture of the twentieth century (publishing houses, fairs, and festivals) are articulated around the body and the writer’s discourse, which is the true literary work. These spaces undeniably fetishize the author and live off their “festivalization,” but also off the image or public performance of the rest of the mediators (publishers, translators, agents), who had hitherto remained unseen but who increasingly participate in fairs and festivals, because the consumers of “literary culture,” as I noted above, are also increasingly producers: writers, publishers, translators, and so on. The same happens in the sphere of criticism, where the author—once they have overcome their Barthesian death—is once again at the center of certain methodological movements whose main tool for analysis is the archive (papers, manuscripts, etc.) of the writer and/or of the agents of literature.

Finally, one cannot omit mention of the increasing precariousness of the literary occupation. In the twenty-first century, writing is still an elite profession (Brouillette 288), although it has become more precarious—if we understand from the perspective of book sales—and more diversified: writers now also publish; make music; perform; write plays, screenplays, television scripts, and subtitles for series and films; participate in commercial advertising; give workshops and classes; and so on. Hernán Vanoli has called this working with all types of cultural materials “aesthetic bioprofessionalization” (41), which also occurs in other creative occupations (artists, designers, web programmers, etc.), based on self-exploitation, flexibility, the breakdown of the differentiation between amateur and professional and with non-existent safety net.

If in the mid-twentieth century, the financial mainstay of the writer was principally journalism (e.g., Arlt, Onetti, Borges, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa), and later, after the boom, it was university teaching (e.g., Piglia, Saer, Rivera Garza, Eltit, Paz Soldán, Kohan, Herrera, Meruane), in the twenty-first century the writer lives off the public construction of their image (including their digital identity, their participation in cultural events, and so on)—they are “entrepreneurs of the self” (Vanoli 42). Similarly, other occupations of literary culture are more precarious (festival workers, publishers, translators, teachers, cultural critics, etc.) and attain neither a living wage nor a stable position. The economy of culture does not manage to integrate itself on a more ideological plane than a material one, in the real economy. This lack of integration also reinforces—in a deceptive way—the idea of art’s autonomy, its irreducibility to a marketing status, or its ability to function inside and outside market-technical logic, hence the belief that literature is a category of artistic expression that needs to be protected by the state and other patrons, which in turn acquire

symbolic capital through their protective attitude. This is due to literature's evident loss of power and influence in the cultural sphere, and the development of the business of the professionalization of the writer and other mediators of the field, which restores part of the profit lost in book sales and expands what the creative industry has to offer. This occurs, for example, with MA writing courses and festivals, many of which are promoted—not by chance—by large and medium-sized publishing companies (e.g., Planeta, Alfaguara, Eterna Cadencia). Both are sides of the same coin, because without the presumption of literature's autonomy, there is no protection (patronage/sponsorship), and without protection there is no (sufficient) business: no professionalization or mediation. Literature has become a spectacle and, as we know, the show must go on.

Professionalization, proliferation of mediators and new ways of legitimization. The professionalization of the writer's occupation through workshops and creative writing courses, and the rest of the agents who intervene in the mediation and dissemination of the literary object, is an effect of the neoliberal restructuring of society. There is a need to regulate, in the global market, the creative work in order to make the most of the meagre financial return provided by both book publishing and literary studies in universities. This has had the evident consequence of deterritorialization, an increased and greater professionalization of the mediators who partake in the business of literature, which has expanded its field of action beyond the publication of the book-object (what I have been calling "literary culture"): there are more agents, scouts, translators, and, as we have already seen, many more fairs and festivals. These last two have, in the twenty-first century, become privileged dispositifs for creating and appraising the worth of what is new, an activity that was formerly carried out by cultural and academic criticism, (national) prizes and anthologies. Today, *Granta* magazine, the Hay Festival Bogotá39 list, or "The 25 best kept secrets of Latin America" of the Guadalajara FIL (Book Fair) act as the authentic canonizers of "Latin American world literature." In these, a jury—usually consisting of established writers—gives legitimacy to a group of writers chosen by virtue of youth, novelty, and lack of visibility, as well as for the (aesthetic) quality of their work by means of anthologies and awards. The international coverage of these lists of writers and their high impact within cultural media and social networks confers value on them, since they are sponsored by extremely popular magazines, fairs, and festivals that are driven by the urge to have an influence on the tastes of local and global reader-consumers. This approach reproduces the symbolic capital that the reviews in literary supplements used to have but which have lost credibility. Additionally, anthologies, such as Diego Trelles Paz's *El futuro no es nuestro: nueva narrativa latinoamericana* (2009) (*The Future Is Not Ours: New Latin American Fiction*, 2012), Salvador Luis's *Asamblea portátil* (Portable Assembly, 2009), and Claudia Apablaza's *Voces 30. Nueva narrativa latinoamericana* (Voices 30: New Latin American Narrativa, 2014), have lost the ability to mediate between authors and consumers. They have been reduced to serving, at best, as business cards for writers who wish to become known beyond their native countries (Mesa Gancedo).

The Randomization of Latin American Literature. The internationalization of an author continues to be the main variable for measuring literary success, since it is an indispensable requirement for their circulation/globalization (Sapiro). This is attained through publication with large corporations that tend to be the gateway to transnational visibility and translation into hegemonic languages such as English. If in the 1990s Alfaguara, along with Planeta, was the brand that represented contemporary Latin American and global literature, in the second decade of the twenty-first century it is Literatura Random House. This is the great publisher of up-and-coming Latin Americans on the way to recognition and entry into world literature. It was founded in 2014, following the purchase of Santillana by Penguin Random House, part of the German conglomerate Bertelsmann. They have had three publishing policies up until now: 1) recruitment of young talent with certain previous symbolic capital (Monge, Cabezón Cámara, and Fernanda Melchor); 2) giving priority to Latin American writing over that of Spain, since it is a huge market that needed to be given an outlet; and 3) committing to women writers and those with dissident subjectivities (Gabriela Wiener, Selva Almada, Giuseppe Caputo, among others) as representing a fresh and barely tapped market source. Moreover, the publishing house is noteworthy for its use of social media in its promotion targeted at young people ("Me gusta leer" – "I like to read"). This is a commercial approach more frequently used by the "independents" than by the large publishers. Also worthy of mention is the *Mapa de las Lenguas* (Map of Languages) initiative that Literature Random House and Alfaguara launched in 2015 to promote the transnational circulation of specific books from their catalogues. If the strategy of "global Alfaguara" in 1996 did not fully succeed in making the Ibero-American transatlantic market of books a reality, the *Mapa de las Lenguas* series (note that the nomenclature refers to territories in the plural, as opposed to the homogenizing idea of globalization of the nineties) has done so by relaunching outside their areas of origin works by authors who are already established or on the way to becoming so (Osvaldo Lamborghini, María

Moreno, Julián Herbert, etc.). Furthermore, if we look at Literatura Random House's Spanish-language catalogue from the last five years, we can see how, for example, more Argentinian authors have been published in Spain than Spanish authors. Therefore, although there is still a degree of retreat in Latin American national markets, the initiative has enabled some transnational dialogue that was unthinkable a decade ago. Thus, the progressive "Randomization" of literature in the Spanish language has, to date, opened up a significant access route to Spain—and Europe—to Latin American books and narratives by contemporary authors, with Argentinian and Mexican women occupying a prominent position, due to their intense activist work (Moreno, Almada, Enríquez, Cabezón Cámara, and Melchor, among others). It is clear that the large conglomerates absorb any aesthetic effort with certain symbolic capital to convert it not only into a commodity but also into a political marketing act for the brand itself; thus, projecting an image of itself as open, politically committed, and cosmopolitan. This does not invalidate the necessary work of giving visibility to female, queer and gender-fluid authors, feminized bodies and dissident subjectivities carried out by the large publishing groups, which are likewise indispensable to guaranteeing a plural and balanced book ecosystem.

Lastly, I would like to refer briefly to the place Latin American narrative occupies in twenty-first-century world literature. To do so, we need to bear in mind two variables: first, that Latin American literature has a "minor" (in the Deleuzian sense) condition as opposed to that of hegemonic languages such as English, French, and German. Second, its publishing industry, on the whole, is subordinated to the monopoly of the large groups of Spanish and/or German capital that do not allow it to compete autonomously. In most cases, the first step a Latin American writer has to take to be translated or to break into the international circuit is, still, to be published in Spain. Hence the global reception of Latin American narrative in Europe or the United States has barely changed since the 1970s, when, fueled by the Boom, and its exotic and violent stereotypes, a framework of reading and consumption was constructed. This framework is still in place despite the criticism made by groups such as McOndo and the Crack in the 1990s. The processes of appraising the canonical value of "Latin American literature" in world literature is still based on the dominant logic of the Western tradition through which the culture of Latin America is read. A better way of saying this would be that this occurs through a set of universal values that privilege high literature (Casanova) and the most commercial genre, the novel. However, as I have argued throughout this article, twenty-first-century Latin American narrative and its "literary culture" are extremely diverse in their aesthetics, materialities, and subjectivities. It is not difficult, therefore, to conclude that the narrative of the region will continue to expand and mutate until it conquers new forms, both local and global, to express one of the richest and most fertile of literatures in the world.

Translated from the Spanish by James Hayes

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Note

- 1 “ahora se lleva definirse como apátridas, errantes perpetuos, ciudadanos de un mundo globalizado, sin señas ni rastros de identidad, raza, nación o cultura propias [...] Para sustituir una ontología de la identidad por otra de la no-pertenencia” (Becerra 287).