

CAN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE BE
GLOBAL?

HOYOS, Héctor. *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 2015, 296 pp.

Can Latin American literature be global? And, what can a Latin American novel reveal about a globalized world, while retaining its local specificity? In *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel*, Héctor Hoyos, through a close-reading of texts by authors such as Roberto Bolaño, Diamela Eltit, Mario Bellatín and César Aira, frames these and other questions regarding the place of Latin American literature within the canons and theoretical models of World Literature – or, rather, the ways in which their «global» Latin American novels critique the prevailing ideologies of globalization and World Literature. Hoyos ultimately concludes that this corpus of «Latin American global novels» gestures away from binary center-periphery models and towards more dynamic, «multipolar» relationships between the local and the global.

Beyond Bolaño takes the year 1989, and the dissolution of a world system centered around the geopolitical axes of the United States and the Soviet Union, as its moment of historical departure. The early 1990s marked the emergence of the latest stage of globalization, both as the dominant world system and «a distinctive discursive mode of our time» (5). Because globalization is played

out as much in the realm of language as in the economic of political, fiction, and cultural production in general, becomes a crucial space from which to understand – and challenge – the effects of globalization. For Hoyos, the point is less to determine what globalization *is* (given that it cannot be a single, specific thing or condition that can be understood in one objective way) but rather how it can be read «from the ground up». To do so, Hoyos proposes a methodology of close reading to understand how literature can reveal and transform notions of globalization.

Hoyos's running metaphor, which functions also as his methodological approximation, is Borges's Aleph. The Aleph, from the eponymously titled story and collection, encapsulates the totality of existence in a single small space – a universe-in-singular – that reveals the (im)possibilities of relating the local to the global. For Hoyos, this concept does not «resolve» the contradictions of thinking the relation between Latin America and the globalized world, but generates a constructive excess from where to negotiate the region's place. Each of the five chapters (aside from the Introduction and Conclusion) serves as case study of a small group of authors and their own literary Alephs; through their work, Hoyos considers a larger series of tropes or forms of the global novel, such as escapist fiction or the *narconovela*. Though focused mainly on one author and one text, each chapter generates a mini-corpus of related works that explores the internal logics of

such forms in their local and global articulations.

According to Hoyos, these different authors, and the literary traditions they belong to or challenge, share the Aleph's tension between the total and the particular. In the first chapter, «literary Nazism» becomes a key site to think a global – and commercial – genre within Latin American literature. Bolaño's *La literatura Nazi en América*, according to Hoyos, depicts how art and literature, despite its relative autonomy, can be «an ugly affair», both in the context of Hitler's Germany and Pinochet's Chile. In chapter two, Chico Buarque's *Budapest* repurposes escapist fiction, from a North-South to a South-South trope. In doing so, Hoyos argues, Latin America becomes a site where an Orientalist discourse is *produced* – thus affecting how we read Latin American literature itself. Chapter three considers Eltit's *Mano de obra*, and the representation of the supermarket as an embodiment of a globalized capitalism and its effects on local labor. For Hoyos, this experimental novel can be read as a «work in progress» that generates a political platform based on early 20th-century Chilean labor movements. Chapter four delves into the *narconovela* in Fernando Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* and Homero Aridjis's *La Santa Muerte*, as representations of a globally commercial, and yet regionally-specific genre. Hoyos questions the «narcotization» of literary criticism itself, and challenges critics to read the cultural representations of the *narco* not as kitsch but through the

specific visual and social structures it reveals. Chapter five centers on Aira and Bellatín, whose literary work can be considered performatic and thus go beyond the traditional roles assigned to the novel and the written word. Hoyos posits that, since their work borrows from and modifies the European avant-garde, these artists inhabit, perform and transform world literature as Latin Americans.

In the conclusion, Hoyos turns to Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* installation – a crack running down a Tate Museum's gallery floor – and argues that, just as the world is not one whole, neither is world literature. *Beyond Bolaño* is fundamentally a critique of World Literature as an academic discipline and theoretical turn caused by globalization. According to Hoyos, this model tends to impose a-priori, homogenizing readings of Latin American texts to fit within the theories that define the discipline; instead, he argues for the production of a «Latin American inflected vision» of World Literature (9). His main methodological and conceptual approaches are, therefore, interventions within the theoretical models of the discipline: against Franco Moretti's «distant reading», Hoyos favors the close, and political, reading of literary texts; against Pascale Casanova's Bourdieian understanding of world literature as a struggle between a center and a periphery, he calls for a «rhizomic understanding of literature on a world scale», or what he terms a multipolar approach (14).

Yet, to think Latin American literature in its global context does not

mean foregoing its regional literary and historical contexts. Hoyos frames his text also as an intervention within Latin Americanism as a discipline, arguing that it has much to gain from a closer engagement with World Literature. However, this is where *Beyond Bolaño* might fall short, since it seldom challenges the very idea of Latin America or Latin Americanness that it employs throughout. Though Hoyos acknowledges that Latin America is as much a construct as «world» and «globality» are, it seems fair to wonder whether Hoyos's cross-pollination of disciplines and sites of enunciation focuses overtly on the global over the local. In other words, in challenging the inequalities generated by World Literature criticism, Latin America and Latin Americanism become sites of resistance as opposed to the contested, and contentious, concepts and disciplines they are. This raises other questions, such as if Latin America should be understood here as a construct of literary markets, as a geographic and geopolitical site, or something else.

Beyond Bolaño is most successful when it locates, through textual

analysis, different national configurations that also speak to, and subvert, global economic and academic models. One particular case can serve as summary: in Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes*, Hoyos argues, the poetic movement *real visceralismo* displaces the literary establishment's economy of prestige and replaces it with a sexualized, libidinal economy. In doing so, it creates an excess to Casanova's rigid sociological world literature model based on centers of power and peripheries vying for legitimization. If World Literature criticism flattens regional specificities, examples such as these reveal the Latin American global novel's possibilities for thinking and challenging globalization from local histories and literary traditions. In this sense, *Beyond Bolaño* will serve scholars and students looking to understand the relationship between literature and globalization, and the role of the Latin American novel within – and against– globalized academic disciplines such as World Literature.

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