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## Reviewed Work(s): Antonio Skármeta and the Post Boom by Donald Shaw

Salvador Oropesa

*Clemson University*, oropesa@clemson.edu

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Review

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Review by: Salvador A. Oropesa

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proposes instead to embrace the apparent contradictions in Martínez Moreno's message suggesting that the story's own protagonist, Julio Calodoro, is presented with two contradictory and undesirable options (Cuba's style of revolution or Uruguay's decaying democracy) and decides to choose neither. Stone believes that to read one choice or the other as the "good" or "bad" choice is to interpret things that are not present in the text. According to Stone, leaving key textual questions unresolved is what eventually takes Martínez Moreno's work toward postmodernism.

The last two novels analyzed round out Stone's thesis that Martínez Moreno's work goes through the "boom" and reaches beyond into the "post boom" or *post deca*. *Tierra en la boca* (A Mouthful of Dirt), published in 1974 after the military coup seized power in Montevideo, represents a big shift for Martínez Moreno. His professional circumstances change drastically. The position he held for 25 years as Public Defender in Criminal Court in Montevideo is terminated. The journal *Marcha* that he had been associated with since its inception 30 years prior is shut down. His prose demonstrates an equally dramatic change, more linear and chronological—characteristics that Stone is quick to point out as belonging to the "post boom" novel. *El color que el infierno me escondiera* (1981), a documentary novel outlining the Southern Cone's "dirty wars," received favorable reviews in the *New York Times* when it was translated posthumously into English in 1988. It is part documentary novel and part memoir and cannot for these and more reasons, Stone argues, be considered as other than "post boom."

In general, *Utopia Undone* is well organized and easy to follow even for the reader who is not as intimately acquainted with Martínez Moreno's work as is Stone. Stone states his argument clearly and demonstrates by way of example and critical analysis how Martínez Moreno's novelistic career can be seen to parallel Uruguay's political decadence from democracy to military regime. Although the text could have benefited from closer proof reading, Stone's clear definitions and relatively jargon-free style make this book (and thus Carlos Martínez Moreno's novels) very accessible to North American readers.

Anna J. Gemrich, Alma College

Shaw, Donald. *Antonio Skármeta and the Post Boom*. Hanover, N.H.: Ediciones del Norte. 1994. 238 pp.

*Antonio Skármeta* comienza con una excelente cronología, que es muy útil para seguir la trayectoria del escritor chileno. El primer capítulo, "Context and Literary Outlook", explica la posición de Skármeta en el contexto de la literatura latinoamericana del siglo XX y su relación con el realismo, las vanguardias, el boom y el post boom. Este capítulo es un buen resumen de las posiciones y evolución del escritor, utilizando, obviamente, sus obras, pero simultáneamente se hace un uso muy inteligente de la información que el escritor ha ido disseminando en numerosas entrevistas; y lo que es más importante, esta información se sistematiza, se le da forma, y se

convierte en una útil herramienta para el lector crítico de la obra de Skármeta. El segundo capítulo se llama significativamente "Short Stories". En primer lugar se amplía lo dicho anteriormente al explicar la diferencia entre superrealistas (boom) e hiperrealistas (post), a los que pertenece el mismo Skármeta, y a partir de ahí se hace una lectura esencialmente contenidista de los cuentos del autor. Esta lectura es de alta calidad, pero adolece de teoría. Por ejemplo, se detalla muy bien el proceso narrativo con el que Skármeta desarrolla el tema del amor, pero el lector moderno echa de menos una referencia a los estudios sobre género que se han realizado en los últimos 25 años, que forman parte ya del canon, y que han traído mucha luz sobre el fenómeno sexual. Lo mismo ocurre con términos como "narrator", "reader", que se usan con frecuencia. Términos como "implied author" ['autor implícito'], "narratee" ['narratario'], son del común de la crítica y podrían haber ayudado en el análisis, siempre útil, de Shaw. Se nota el mismo problema en el capítulo dedicado a *Soné que la nieve ardía*, el *close reading* del texto es excelente, y las observaciones son valiosísimas, lo que es muy de agradecer en una novela que no ha sido estudiada con la suficiente atención, pero se echa de menos una problematización del discurso viril que Shaw percibe en la novela. La siguiente que se analiza es *No pasó nada*, en la que el crítico sigue con su misma técnica. Dado que la novela vuelve a incidir en el tema de la sexualidad Shaw hace una referencia a Freud, pero el crítico no continúa en esta veta psicoanalítica. El siguiente texto es *La insurrección*. En este capítulo se añade una estadística sobre analfabetismo en Nicaragua, lo cual vuelve a poner de manifiesto el problema del *close reading*, que si bien es muy efectivo en cuanto que sirve para explorar las ideas principales del texto literario, puede resultar insuficiente; el crítico se mueve en este caso en los márgenes del *New Historicism* pero sin adentrar en él. En este capítulo Shaw pone de manifiesto que Skármeta introduce el feminismo en su novelística, pero no se analiza la novela desde esta perspectiva, sólo se constata el fenómeno. La penúltima novela es *Ardiente paciencia*; hay que destacar de nuevo el análisis de la sexualidad y su relación y paralelismo para con la situación política. Y la última novela que se critica es *Match Ball* en la que la sexualidad ocupa un lugar relevante ya que trata de la relación entre un hombre maduro y una joven de quince años. En el capítulo de conclusiones Shaw afirma: "It is, in our view unnecessary and confusing to attempt to relate the Post-Boom in Spanish American fiction with the vague and sometimes contradictory concept of Post-modernism in North American and European writing" (223). Mi visión es de que el libro de Shaw demuestra lo contrario, la postmodernidad de Skármeta, y me parece peligroso el querer separar la literatura latinoamericana del resto de la cultura occidental, resucitando la dicotomía norte/sur.

En resumen, Shaw hace un excelente trabajo de crítica que podríamos llamar del sentido común, y cualquier persona que trabaje con Skármeta tendrá que consultar este libro, sobre todo los estudiantes, porque encontrarán en él un buen resumen de la acción y los temas principales. Pero uno no puede dejar de echar de menos el libro, que alguien de la reconocida valía de Donald Shaw y su vasto conocimiento de la literatura, hubiera podido hacer de haber incorporado un mayor nivel de teorización a su texto crítico. *Antonio Skármeta* es un experimento crítico: usar casi exclusivamente las entrevistas al autor (para desmentir muy inteligentemente sus opiniones en varias ocasiones) y una lectura atenta del texto. Shaw demuestra dos cosas, una que se puede

hacer un buen libro de crítica literaria con sólo estas herramientas, pero también demuestra las limitaciones que este método tiene.

Salvador A. Oropesa, Kansas State University

Soto, Francisco. *Reinaldo Arenas: The Pentagonia*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994. 193 pp.

Francisco Soto's provocative interpretation of Arenas's pentalogy on Cuban history does have a special appeal to all interested in re-examining this corpus of novels within the tradition of the Cuban documentary novel.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of two chapters and the second one has five. In chapter one, Soto offers a detailed account of the cultural policies which were instituted in Cuba after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959 and how they paved the way for the flourishing of the documentary genre. Of the five forms in which the genre expresses itself (chronicles, memoirs, professional investigation, diaries and documentary novels), Soto pays special attention to the last one since in his own words it "is a specific literary manifestation within the general testimonio category," a new narrative form whose principal objective was to develop the social and political consciousness of the people. He points out a list of characteristics that are displayed in this kind of novel: in particular the presence of a first person narrator who is representative of a group and, in many instances, gives voice to the voiceless.

Delving into the features of the documentary model allows Soto to prepare the reader for a better understanding of how Arenas consciously or subconsciously subverts the genre while utilizing some of its narrative techniques for the construction of his novelistic world. Fortunato, Hector, La tetrica mofeta, just to mention a few characters of Arenas's pentalogy, represent marginal members of Cuban society completely forgotten by the government. In other words, by giving voice to a free thinker, a homosexual or a dissident "Arenas—remarks the author—reveals the revolutionary system's societal double standard while remaining faithful to the genre's fundamental outlining principle."

In chapter II the author analyzes each text within the general structure of what he calls *testigo-testar-testamento*, which is a writer-witness who testifies of the horror and life of the people by leaving a valuable testimony, one that is personal and collective at the same time.

Soto focuses on some particularities of each text to convincingly demonstrate that while the documentary novel is presented as a network of determined significations, the pentalogy makes no attempt to establish such a correspondence.

For this reason, these texts are to be considered not as a documentary record of something that exists or has existed but as a reformulation of an already formulated reality which brings into the world something that did not exist before. Soto calls it "pure fiction" because of its poetic and