

About This Volume

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With four original introductory articles as well as nine essays on specific Latin American authors that provide critical and descriptive overviews (all previously unpublished) of their oeuvres and careers, this volume revisits the present situation of contemporary Latin American literature. It offers readers a survey of recent Spanish-, Portuguese-, and English-language Latin American and Caribbean fiction writing that may complement larger anthologies, such as Will H. Corral, Juan A. de Castro, and Nicholas Birns's 2013 *The Contemporary Spanish-American Novel. Bolaño and After*. Instead of offering a list of names and asking the critics to choose one, as is often done with this type of anthology, I chose to give the critics the freedom to think of a contemporary Latin American author whom they find relevant and then explain why they think that this writer is representative of today's heterogeneous Latin American belles lettres. As a result, the oeuvres of twelve authors, six female and six male, are analyzed: Costa Rican Anacristina Rossi (1952-), Cuban Daína Chaviano (1957-), Argentine Claudia Piñeiro (1960-), Colombian Juan Gabriel Vázquez (1973-), Peruvian Carlos Yshimito del Valle (1977-), Brazilians Milton Hatoum (1952-) and Bernardo Carvalho (1960-), Chileans Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) and Camila Gutiérrez Berner (1985-), and Mexicans Bárbara Jacobs (1947-), Daniel Sada (1953-2011) and Cristina Rivera Garza (1964-). Except for Roberto Bolaño and Daniel Sada, these authors are still alive, with a chronological span from Bárbara Jacobs, born in 1947, to the youngest author, Camila Gutiérrez Berner, who was born in 1985.

Because of space restraints, the anthology is inevitably limited and fragmented, with numerous absences in terms of both authors and countries. The Further Reading section, however, provides an idea of the wealth and diversity of recent Latin American literature, as well as of the large number of authors who could have been

included, were it not for space limitations. This list includes, besides authors who write in Spanish, Lusophone writers from Brazil as well as English-language Latino writers residing in the United States. Authors such as the Dominican Americans Junot Díaz¹ and Julia Álvarez,² for example, could be framed under different levels: US, Latina/o, Caribbean, and Latin American writing. Indeed, their works deal with both US and Caribbean cultures, as well as with the transculturation or cultural exchanges suffered by Latina/o immigrants in the United States, a prominent topic, for instance, in Álvarez's novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) and Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Among the main topics appearing in their works, we find those of life under the Trujillo dictatorship, male chauvinism, and migration. Interestingly, one could argue that Álvarez and Díaz have achieved more international acclaim than any novelist born in the Dominican Republic.

This volume, as well as similar ones, should help offset the tendency among American critics and presses to essentialize and tropicalize Latin American literature by identifying it almost exclusively with stereotypical magical realism, a literary mode that has been, for the most part, rejected by newer generations of Latin American authors. The variety, diversity, and heterogeneity of today's Latin American fiction should be self-evident in the essays collected in this book and, even more, in the list of authors and works included in the Further Reading section. Moreover, given the renewed interest in the region's literature thanks to the impressive success of Chilean Roberto Bolaño's novels, we hope to provide a guide to prominent names of his generation as well as younger ones.

Opening the volume, Melissa Fitch's chapter addresses how new technology has radically transformed the way we understand notions of text, authorship, and readership within the field of Latin American literature. It provides a historical context for understanding such new developments in light of work done in the last century by writers in the region. It also discusses the pioneering scholarly work done on the topic over the last twenty years. Finally, it traces briefly the work of four notable writers/bloggers: Alberto Chimal (Mexico

1970), Juan B. Gutiérrez (Colombia 1973), Cielo Latini (Argentina 1984), and Daniel Galera (Brazil 1979).

My essay, dealing with critical reception, revisits possible reasons for the amazing success of Bolaño's literature and its sudden entrance into world literature. It also problematizes how the constant publication of the author's posthumous novels without his explicit consent may eventually alter his literary reputation. Finally, it considers the consequences of Bolaño's entrance into the World Republic of Letters for younger generations of Latin American writers.

Next, Shigeko Mato examines the unveiling of the unconscious desire for cultural Westernization in contemporary Lima through the short story "Rizoma" ("Rhizome," 2013), by Peruvian writer Carlos Yushimito del Valle (1977-). The story depicts the feverish climate of a gourmet boom in Lima, in which the upper classes have a constant urge to be mindlessly entertained by new cutting-edge dishes. An ambitious entrepreneurial French gourmet chef tries to discover "something marvelous," using Peruvian indigenous culture and food through "techno-cooking" techniques imported from Europe, attracting clients through the exoticization of indigenous culture and food. Both the chef and his clients are too absorbed in their entertainment to be aware of the meanings as well as the traditional, regional, and communal values of the foods that they are co-opting. Because of the lack of critical consciousness, they eventually turn into rabid cannibalistic zombies. Setting up a mindless consumer society, Yushimito portrays the gruesome outcome of the nonstop fetishization of Europeanized gourmet food. That is, he describes the decomposition of human society into a cynocephalic (dog-headed and human-bodied) dystopia. Mato's study, therefore, analyzes how and why this futuristic dystopian story can serve, not only as a warning sign of the degradation of society caused by the incessant pursuit of entertainment and consumerism, but also, perhaps more importantly, as a criticism against the manipulation of the masses by a long-lasting repetition of the colonial global power system that Aníbal Quijano calls the "coloniality of power."

Closing the Critical Contexts section, Gene H. Bell-Villada offers a comparative study of *Historia secreta de Costaguana* (2007; *The Secret History of Costaguana* 2011), by Colombian author Juan Gabriel Vásquez (1973-), and *Nostramo* (1904), by Polish-English Joseph Conrad. *Historia secreta de Costaguana* is a complex novel that seamlessly integrates three different plots. It tells first of all about some key events in nineteenth-century Colombia's Department of Panama: the construction of the trans-Isthmian railroad, the vast but failed French Canal project, the civil wars and secessionist rumblings, and the US intervention that led promptly to Panamanian separation and to the beginnings of the American Canal venture. The entire history in turn is narrated (and partly lived) by one José Altamirano, whose father Miguel was posted as a journalist on the Isthmus; José for his part ends up marrying Charlotte, the widow of a French engineer who had died of yellow fever. (The couple will have and raise a Panamanian daughter named Eloísa.) Finally, as the book title implies, the novel references and relates to Joseph Conrad, whose seafaring cum literary biography serves as a third plotline, and who figures as a character-interlocutor to whom the anguished narrator José, exiled in London, will pour out the unfortunate history of Colombia. The Polish-English writer then shamelessly appropriates this hearsay material for his *Nostramo*, a novel set in a conflict-ridden republic that he calls *Costaguana*. Vásquez's *Secret History*, a sophisticated work of intertextual artifice, thus qualifies as a kind of historiographic metafiction.

Opening the Critical Readings section, Rudyard Alcocer looks at the fiction of Costa Rican author Anacristina Rossi (1952-), who has consistently sought to expose and challenge her country's social norms. These norms (or contradictions), we learn, have varied in substance and focus, ranging from issues of gender, environmentalism, and political corruption, to ones of race and ethnicity. Oftentimes, her fiction is able to syncretize several of these issues simultaneously. While challenging both societal norms and narrative conventions, her novels never lack courage and occasionally unlock pronounced and rare societal responses that have led to practical changes in how Costa Rica is governed. As

such, Rossi's oeuvre sheds important light on the variable dynamics that can exist between fictions and their readers. More to the point, Alcocer argues that this oeuvre demonstrates that in the 1990s, at least, politically oriented fiction could still effect transformative change in a society. The essay undertakes a critical examination of Rossi's most important novels; never far from the surface throughout is the basic contention that Rossi and her fiction deserve our attention and interest.

In turn, Paula C. Park examines how the novels and short stories that Daína Chaviano published in the 1980s in Cuba secured her a spot as one of the most important science-fiction writers within the Spanish-speaking world. The chapter, however, analyzes the works Chaviano produced after leaving Cuba in 1991, especially her highly acclaimed and commercially successful novel *La isla de los amores infinitos* (*The Island of Eternal Love*, 2006), a family saga that pays homage to the symbolic union of the Spanish, the African, and the Chinese in Cuba. Although *La isla de los amores infinitos* responds to market demands for mainstream fantasy and love stories between "exotic" multicultural characters, Park argues that Chaviano employs a distinct archival style through which she inserts historical documentation on the Chinese in Cuba, the repression and hunger suffered by Cubans in Havana in the 1980s (as evident also in her 1998 novel *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* (*Man, Woman, and Hunger*), and the psychological dilemma of those who, like the author, left Cuba after 1991. In doing so, Park demonstrates that although Chaviano has become a mainstream writer, she is still committed to developing an intimate relationship with her readers, whether science-fiction fans or completely alien to Cuban history.

David William Foster turns to a feminist view of recent Argentine history as represented in Claudia Piñeiro's opus. As he explains, Piñeiro has established a solid inventory of feminist interpretations of Argentine social history since that country's return to constitutional democracy in 1983. Against the backdrop of neoliberal economic policy and its fissures and ultimate collapse in 2001, Piñeiro's highly successful works of fiction provide an interpretation of the instability and moral relativism carried along

with a process not always willing or successful in dealing with its often monstrous collective imaginaries. As Foster points out, while not all of Piñeiro's fiction privileges female characters, it does privilege women's consciousness in the face of a society that remains intransigently masculinist.

Antonio Luciano Tosta looks at the opus of Milton Hatoum, one of Brazil's major contemporary authors, discussing his four novels, his *crônica* collection, and his short story collection. The chapter explores Hatoum's narrative plots, protagonists, most common themes, and the ways in which his work serves as a reflection on the relationship between locality and globality.

In her essay, Sandra Sousa explains that while Bernardo Carvalho acknowledges the ubiquity of violence in Brazilian daily life, he resists the tendency to reduce literature to a mechanically mimetic function, claiming that literature is not an exercise in sociology. He also distances himself from the social and aesthetic values of postmodernism, affirming instead much of the legacy of Western modernity, including core aspects of modernist aesthetic practice, such as art's ability to bring about truths in the world. Carvalho's literary project has largely been based on the idea of traveling to write, which is more complex than simply taking a trip to other regions in Brazil or to other countries in order to find inspiration for writing. Since Carvalho's fictional geographies are biographically unfamiliar to him, his experiences of them arise as much from his imagination as from practical encounters. In the end, Carvalho is interested in the truth that can only be known through fiction.

Moisés Park's essay focuses on theodicy through the writings of Chilean writer Camila Gutiérrez Berner (1985-), whose social media writings were turned into a film and later adapted into an autobiographic book, *Joven y alocada* (2013), and a second novel, *No te ama* (2015). In spite of the first novel being an out-of-religion coming of age, containing more religious content, the second novel, about a bisexual love triangle, tackles the topic in its more traditional form, reformulating the theodical form. Sororal (sisterly) apostasy

is highlighted as a means of finding freedom and love outside the closed religious circle.

Traci Roberts-Camps's chapter examines the writings of Bárbara Jacobs, including *Florencia y Ruiseñor* (*Florencia and Ruiseñor*, 2006), *La dueña del Hotel Poe* (*The Owner of Hotel Poe*, 2014), and *Hacia el valle del sueño* (*Toward the Valley of Sleep*, 2014). This analysis focuses on the following topics: multiple languages, linguistic analysis and wordplay, literary theory, the world of publishing, self-awareness, and self-analysis. Gérard Genette's concepts of narrative discourse complement Jacobs's emphasis on language, literature, and the writing process. According to Roberts-Camps, Jacobs's attentiveness to the formal aspects of writing is at once playful and earnest.

Mark Anderson focuses on Daniel Sada, renowned as one of Mexico's most innovative writers of the turn of the twenty-first century. His chapter examines Sada's trajectory beginning with his first novel, *Lampa vida* (1980), up through *Albedrio* (1989), *Porque parece mentira la verdad nunca se sabe* (1999), and his final, posthumously published novel, *El lenguaje del juego* (2012). It analyzes three key recurrent themes in Sada's works: migration, the unknowability of the other, and violence. It also takes a close look at Sada's distinctive writing style, which has often been compared to a "baroque" aesthetics.

Closing the volume, Laura J. Torres-Rodríguez's chapter explores the contributions of Mexican writer Cristina Rivera Garza (1964-) to the understanding of literature as a contemporary writing practice. It argues that her fiction proposes writing and reading as forms of collective production—not organized solely by the figure of the individual author or reader—that entail in turn other forms of social labor. Moreover, the attention that Rivera Garza's work devotes to the collective conditions of reproduction inscribes it within a broader feminist tradition. The chapter thus analyzes three specific aspects of Rivera Garza's vast literary work: the historical novel and the revision of Mexican history, the critique of crime fiction as a genre that pretends to represent contemporary violence, and the practice of rewriting important figures and moments of the

Mexican literary history through the perspective of the present. Finally, the chapter concludes with the assertion that the complexity of her experimental literary work is not an obstacle to the practice of pedagogy, but rather offers a vantage point from which students can engage with literature as a collective form of understanding and producing an alternative present.

Notes

1. Besides the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), Díaz has published the short story collections *Drown* (1996) and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012).
2. Álvarez has received numerous awards and has published the following novels: *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), *¡YO!* (1997), *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), *How Tía Lola Came to Visit Stay* (2001), *When We Were Free* (2002), and *Saving the World* (2006). She is also the author of several collections of poems: *Homecoming* (1984), *The Housekeeping Book* (1994), *The Other Side/El otro lado* (1995), *Homecoming: New and Collected Poems* (1996), and *Seven Trees* (1999), and has edited the collection of poems *Old Age Ain't for Sissies*.

Work Cited

Corral, Will H., Juan A. de Castro, and Nicholas Birns. *The Contemporary Spanish-American Novel. Bolaño and After*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

Anacristina Rossi and the Uses of Literature in Costa Rica

Rudyard J. Alcocer

“So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.”

(Abraham Lincoln, upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1862)

The fiction of Anacristina Rossi (Costa Rica, 1952-) encompasses many of the virtues and tensions associated with modern Latin American literature; as such, though relatively unknown in the United States, it deserves careful reading and assessment. Rossi’s fiction can be both new and old, current and dated, conventional and cutting edge. While registering the cultural diversity, cosmopolitanism, and bilingualism of her native Costa Rica—indeed, this country’s many complexities—her fiction simultaneously traffics perilously close to caricatured racial and gender roles. Her treatment of these topics, on its own, might have yielded at most very specialized, scattered acclaim. When, however, she merged these topics with her passion for particular political concerns—concerns that found an eager audience in Costa Rica—the results were transformative. This was the case with *La loca de Gandoca* (*The Madwoman of Gandoca*, 1992), a novel that attained rare success in bringing about political change in her country. That stated, we shall see that *La loca de Gandoca* does not stand alone among Rossi’s fictional works in testing and transgressing social boundaries. One could argue, in fact, that Rossi is masterful and courageous in identifying delicate social topics within Costa Rica and then pushing the boundaries of those topics to their breaking point; in so doing, at times she has found a broad readership but occasionally her experiments in pushing the boundaries have been met with resistance and criticism. Ultimately, while Rossi’s oeuvre speaks to many issues characteristic of Latin America and its literature, it is at heart an oeuvre that must be read in light of Costa Rica’s national debates.

Rossi's fiction registers, in the first instance, the variable functions literary texts can have: variations often informed by regional and cultural elements. Counterintuitively, perhaps, literary texts remain capable of wielding societal power in Latin America in ways that seem to have been lost elsewhere. In the United States, for example, gone are the days when a novel like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) could help start a war. The reasons for such a shift in the United States are undoubtedly highly complex and perhaps even impossible to ascertain with any precision, but they could involve the rise (and competition from) other media, the atomization of society, and so on. In addition, as Rita Felski (2008) has argued, in the North American academy, literary studies have become characterized by a "hermeneutics of suspicion" hesitant to ascribe meaning to literary texts, let alone any societal impact. In contrast, literary texts in Costa Rica enjoy comparatively lower levels of internal competition from the other media, not to mention lower levels of competition from other literary texts.¹ One could argue further that—through a number of factors—literary texts are better positioned to make their mark in a Costa Rican society that is relatively small in population, relatively homogenous in demographic terms (more on this below), and relatively literate (97 percent compared to 86 percent in the United States).² As concerns Rossi's fiction in its broad relations to Costa Rican society, make its mark it very much has.

Lest we forget, Rossi too deserves plenty of credit for the success of her fiction. Generally speaking, Rossi's Costa Rican readership is simultaneously able to recognize itself in her fiction *while* also seeing the country's societal flaws and contradictions. It is, perhaps, this distinctive double maneuver that helps explain her success. In the pages ahead, I shall examine three of Rossi's four novels to date while paying close attention in two of these novels, especially *La loca de Gandoca*, to several features of Costa Rican society that surface and resurface in varying ways across her fiction. These societal features include the country's gender relations, racial and class divisions, governmental corruption, and grassroots environmentalism. In this panorama of Rossi's fiction,

my aim will be evenhandedness, recognizing both its strengths and its weaknesses.

María la noche: A New Voice Emerges

Rossi studied in London, Paris (a degree in translation and interpretation), and The Hague (a degree in women's issues and development). This experience abroad undoubtedly inspired her first novel, *María la noche* (Maria the Night, 1985), which was awarded her country's Aquileo J. Echeverría Prize for best novel in 1985. Although the focus of this chapter will lie in her later novels, we can nonetheless detect in *María la noche* many of the features that would reappear later, including shifting narrative perspectives, an emphasis on gender relations and issues of sensuality, eroticism, and mutual incomprehension between men and women: features that would also characterize her collection of short stories *Situaciones conyugales* (Conjugal Situations, 1993). One might, additionally, describe *María la noche* as Rossi's bohemian novel, set primarily in the smoke-filled pubs and damp libraries of London, and in which characters compete to assert and flaunt their cultural capital. In this respect, one could argue that despite some commonalities, there is a fundamental break between *María la noche* and her later novels because these are set in and explore a Costa Rican cultural context, whereas the former explores, in broad terms, the Hispanic *émigré* experience in a non-Hispanic region of the world.

As is the case in her later fiction, *María la noche* experiments with shifting narrative perspectives: Antonio, the initial narrator in the novel and a student at the London School of Economics, is seeking to mix a bit of pleasure into his regimented academic existence. One night, at a pub, he admires from a distance a young woman named Mariestela. Shortly thereafter, the narrative transitions to her perspective. The dialogue between these two characters is interspersed with English phrases, which is, in effect, a preview of the bilingualism of Rossi's later fiction, given its emphasis on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, where English is spoken along with Spanish. The dialogue, moreover, and the perspectival shifts, reveal the difficulties these two characters have in communicating,

in understanding the other, and in being understood by the other. These difficulties in communication are rooted in gender differences. Mariestela, for instance, critiques Antonio's manner of touching her: "It's not anyone's fault, you simply don't know how to touch a woman. Maybe that's because for a man to learn how to touch a woman involves discovering his own feminine side."³ Knowledge of others—of the opposite gender, at least—requires, according to Mariestela, an unusual and profound knowledge of oneself in all the facets a given self may have.

La loca de Gandoca: Environmentalism and "Development"

Rossi's masterpiece may be *La loca de Gandoca*, a slim novel published in 1992 and written urgently during a four-month span stemming from the author's involvement in environmental activism (Kearns 1). While *La loca de Gandoca* may be more plot-driven and politically engaged than *María la noche*, it maintains nonetheless an interest in processes of self-discovery. The title speaks volumes: *La loca* here means a madwoman, rather than a flamboyant homosexual, which is occasionally how the word is understood in the Spanish-speaking world. Daniela Zermat is the passionate protagonist. It remains to be seen, however, in what way we are to understand her supposed madness; after all, madness can be understood in relative terms. In other words, who considers her mad and for what reasons? Perhaps others are mad and she is sane (i.e., only "mad" in a figurative sense). Meanwhile, the word *Gandoca* in the title is more straightforward: it is the name of a nature reserve on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica; more precisely, the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge, in a region long inhabited by the country's indigenous and Afro-Costa Rican populations. This reserve, as the story commences, has long been neglected because it is not on the country's Pacific coast, which—as Zermat herself recognizes—has bluer water, a sunnier climate, and is more frequently visited by foreign tourists. Gandoca does, however, possess spectacular biodiversity; in addition, because it has been relatively neglected, it is pristine. Now, the foreign developers and corrupt elements of the Costa Rican government want to carve up Gandoca for their

own gain by turning it not only into a tourist resort but also into a veritable tourist town, as has already occurred on the Pacific coast of the country. Can Zermat stop them?

La loca de Gandoca is often considered part of Latin America's tradition of testimonial literature inasmuch as it details many real-life events in which the author took part and about which—through thinly veiled changes to personal names—she furnishes testimony. Such testimonial literature stands in contrast to an understanding of literature as mere entertainment or escapism; testimonial literature is understood through its political commitment (as in the French notion of *littérature engagée*), a commitment capable of effecting real change in a given society. As Sofia Kearns outlines in her introduction to the English translation of the novel, many of the events in the storyline actually occurred: Ecodólares, the predatory foreign developer in the novel, for example, was in reality a firm named the Eurocaribeña Hotel Company (Kearns 6). The novel's corresponding impact on Costa Rican political discourses was similarly extraordinary: Rossi herself was the author of a formal complaint against the Costa Rican government's dubious measures to compromise the reserve, and although faced with death threats (Kearns 6), she succeeded in bringing about governmental legislation designed to truly protect the reserve.

In other respects, however, *La loca de Gandoca* is fictional rather than testimonial. Let us begin with a look at the narrative, which is bifurcated in structure: on the one hand, it details Zermat's efforts to stop the ravaging of Gandoca. These efforts expose the Orwellian nature of Costa Rican government: a labyrinth structured to protect the interests of the ruling classes; just when Zermat thinks she is in the correct government bureau in order to file a complaint regarding abuses to Gandoca, she is told she is in the wrong bureau, or that she needs to present a new environmental impact study because the first one is outdated. In an aside reminiscent of Orwellian doublespeak, Zermat laments, "Latin America is a land of tyrants. The tyrants characteristically say, for instance, that a green object is blue and that anyone who doesn't see the color gets punished" (40).⁴ She falls victim to governmental obfuscation repeatedly: the many obstacles

she encounters and her many frustrations bestow on the narrative the quick pace of a thriller; eventually she goes so far as to dress like a man (“big-nosed, moustached, and bespectacled” 86)⁵ in order to overhear high-level conversations involving the nature reserve. Who knew that an environmentalist novel could be such a page-turner! Through her actions, moreover, Zermat (and Rossi, by extension) holds a very unflattering mirror up to Costa Rican society, a society, led by corrupt officials, willing to disregard or misinterpret existing environmental regulations in order to sell its natural bounty for a quick profit. Rossi admits that she too, in real life, had to resort to wearing a disguise in her battles against corruption: a disguise she still owns! (Polsgrove n.p.)

On the other hand, the novel is a love story: Zermat’s love interest is a murky, shadowy man named Carlos Manuel, who says very little when he is present in the narrative, and then exits the narrative abruptly. *La loca de Gandoca*, however, can in many ways be described as lyrical because the narrative in general and certainly several discrete portions of it are addressed toward a largely absent Carlos Manuel: by all accounts a brilliant man, presumably from the Costa Rican central valley, who went to the country’s Caribbean region to conduct anthropological fieldwork. Although Zermat and Carlos Manuel tried to make a life together in Gandoca, he succumbed to despair and alcoholism. Because of this, one could argue, Zermat’s mission to save Gandoca is informed by a more intimate narrative characterized by personal tragedy.

One could ask, with plenty of justification, whether or not the dual political and personal dimensions of the novel comprise a coherent narrative. Are there, in effect, two disparate narrative threads in search of a novel? In response to this question, I point to a moment in the narrative where we see the clearest expression of why the novel could be seen as unified precisely in the way that Zermat’s sadness over Carlos Manuel’s death led to clear political convictions, particularly as the so-called development or destruction of Gandoca shifted to a higher gear, despite her prayers to the gods of the African pantheon: “Then my sadness turned to rage, I stopped thinking about Carlos Manuel’s death, and instead of complaining

to Oxum, I decided to complain to the Wildlife Office” (61).⁶ As such, the message of the novel comes into focus: Zermat’s zeal is not only political and environmental, but also involves significant personal sacrifice. In addition, far from being solely a nature reserve for the protection of animal and marine life, Gandoca is also a place where people have led full lives for generations, with all the joy and suffering that full lives entail.

Meanwhile, there are other elements in the narrative that reflect Zermat’s own eclecticism and that could, in the presence of an unsympathetic reader, truly call her sanity into question. As a white Costa Rican, Zermat is predictably Roman Catholic; in the novel there are several allusions to Catholicism, not the least of which is the mention of her preparations for her son’s First Communion (61). In addition, Zermat, as we saw above, not only prays to African gods but is also in veritable dialogue with them: it is the goddess Yemanyá, for instance, who instructs Zermat to speak to Oxum (58). Eventually, Catholicism and Santería yield in the novel to a different kind of force: if Zermat requires reassurance in her risky political convictions, there is an appeal within *La loca de Gandoca* to magical realism, a narrative technique often associated with Latin American exceptionalism. We see this appeal during a tranquil moment before the novel approaches its climax: Zermat has gone into the woods to contemplate and to try to find peace in the midst of the political scandal she is stoking; as she stands near a lagoon, an unusual flying insect approaches her and eventually reassures her by saying, in plain Spanish, that she has allies in the natural world in her battles against the forces of governmental corruption. The insect does so, however, only after asking her to make clear to her readers “that I am neither a metaphor nor a stylistic device, nor is this an instance of magical realism. My presence is authentic” (78).⁷ Against allies like that, not to speak of Zermat’s inherent pluck, the Costa Rican government and its foreign backers never stood a chance. Given that Rossi claims that the novel is 99.9 percent reality (Polsgrove n.p.), the talking insect—one would presume—inhabits the solitary tenth of one percent that is completely invented.

Further Reading

- 1980** *Respiración artificial* Ricardo Piglia (Argentina)
La misteriosa desaparición de la marquesita de Loria
José Donoso (Chile)
Sólo cenizas hallarás Pedro Vergés (Dominican
Republic)
La biografía difusa de Sombra Castañeda Marcio
Veloz Maggiolo (Dominican Republic)
-
- 1981** *La guerra del fin del mundo* Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru)
La vida exagerada de Martín Romaña Alfredo Bryce
Echenique (Peru)
-
- 1982** *La casa de los espíritus* Isabel Allende (Chile)
La tejedora de coronas German Espinosa (Colombia)
La insurrección Antonio Skármeta (Chile)
La última canción de Manuel Sendero Ariel Dorfman
(Chile)
-
- 1983** *Lumpérica* Diamela Eltit (Chile)
Luna caliente Mempo Giardinelli (Argentina)
El entenado Juan José Saer (Argentina)
-
- 1984** *Sin remedio* Antonio Caballero (Colombia)
Arturo, la estrella más brillante Reinaldo Arenas
(Cuba)
Colibrí Severo Sarduy (Cuba)
-
- 1985** *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* Gabriel García
Márquez (Colombia)
Frente a un hombre armado (Cacerías de 1848)
Mauricio Wácquez (Chile)
El desfile del amor Sergio Pitol (Mexico)
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About the Editor

Ignacio López-Calvo is Professor of Latin American literature at the University of California, Merced. He is the author of more than seventy articles and book chapters, as well as eight books on Latin American and US Latino literature and culture: *Saudades of Japan and Brazil: Contested Modernities in Lusophone Nikkei Cultural Production* (U of Colorado P, forthcoming), *Dragons in the Land of the Condor: Tusán Literature and Knowledge in Peru* (Arizona UP, 2014), *The Affinity of the Eye: Writing Nikkei in Peru* (U of Arizona P, 2013), *Latino Los Angeles in Film and Fiction: The Cultural Production of Social Anxiety* (U of Arizona P, 2011), *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (UP of Florida, 2007), *“Trujillo and God”: Literary and Cultural Representations of the Dominican Dictator* (UP of Florida, 2005), *Religión y militarismo en la obra de Marcos Aguinis 1963-2000* (Mellen, 2002), and *Written in Exile. Chilean Fiction from 1973-Present* (Routledge, 2001). He has also edited the books *Latinx Writing Los Angeles: Nonfiction Dispatches from a Decolonial Rebellion* (U of Nebraska P, forthcoming), *The Humanities in the Age of Information and Post-Truth*, coedited with Christina Lux (Northwestern UP, forthcoming Spring 2018), *The Humanities in a World Upside Down* (Cambridge Scholars, forthcoming), *Critical Insights: Roberto Bolaño* (Salem, 2015), *Roberto Bolaño, A Less Distant Star: Critical Essays* (Palgrave, 2015), *Critical Insights: Magical Realism* (Salem, 2014), *Peripheral Transmodernities: South-to-South Dialogues between the Luso-Hispanic World and “the Orient”* (Cambridge Scholars, 2012), *Alternative Orientalisms in Latin America and Beyond* (Cambridge Scholars, 2007), and *One World Periphery Reads the Other: Knowing the “Oriental” in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula* (Cambridge Scholars, 2009), and coedited *Caminos para la paz: literatura israelí y árabe en castellano* (2008). He is the coexecutive director of the academic journal *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* and the coexecutive director of the Palgrave Macmillan Book series “Historical and Cultural Interconnections between Latin America and Asia.”