

Castro-Klarén, Sara (2011) *The Narrow Pass of Our Nerves: Writing, Coloniality and Postcolonial Theory*, Iberoamericana/Vervuert (Madrid and Frankfurt), 532 pp. €36.00 pbk.

Sara Castro-Klarén's collection of essays is a diverse and thorough study that ambitiously analyses a broad corpus of Latin American writers. Engaging directly with the process of writing, the author illustrates the constant negotiation of discourses that colonial and post-colonial intellectuals employed in order to articulate their experience of coloniality. Using Walter Mignolo's concept of the coloniality of power, the essays mainly focus on Andean society during and after the Spanish conquest. As such, the volume is an important contribution to literary scholarship on Peru, although the themes considered range far beyond this, and any scholar interested in Latin American history or culture is likely to find this book truly stimulating. Castro-Klarén uses the image of the *desfiladero* or 'narrow pass', borrowed from Vallejo, to position herself at the interface between literary studies, history and cultural theory; it is precisely this confluence of perspectives that makes this collection so engaging and important a contribution to Latin American scholarship.

Drawing on essays published over the last twenty years, *The Narrow Pass of Our Nerves* is divided into two parts. In the first part, the author takes us on a journey through colonial Peru, focusing at length on Guamán Poma's *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*. Castro-Klarén takes a particular interest in the dialogic nature of the colonial subject and describes Guamán Poma as 'a dishevelled subject struggling to wrest order out of his own conflicts, discursive, and historical positions'

Book Reviews

(p. 69). Guamán Poma's is by no means a unified voice enunciating constantly from the same position and therefore his text simultaneously resembles and ruptures the discourse with which it engages. Chapter 4 stands out as one of the most comprehensive essays of the collection. The chapter is remarkable for the way in which Castro-Klarén condenses and clearly portrays the complex mechanisms of thought production during the colonial period, presenting a thorough, yet succinct, overview of the main figures, theories and historical records. For this reason, it would serve newcomers to the field particularly well. Expanding her focus to consider the figure of Garcilaso de la Vega, Inca, the author convincingly argues that the *mestizaje*, or double-voicedness, in his writing is a facet of the Andean concept of duality, also evident in Guamán Poma's text. Chapter 6 is another impressive essay, as it considers the place of postcolonial theory in a Latin American context. Addressing the discomfort with which the Latin American scholar approaches the domain of English-speaking postcoloniality which 'writes the world and itself without awareness of a previous, major, if not modular, colonial period and postcolonial experience which is enormously relevant to many of its concerns' (p. 193), Castro-Klarén refers us to Bill Ashcroft's assertion that 'post-colonialism does not mean "after colonialism", that it begins with the moment of colonisation' (p. 194). Compounding this, she posits that we approach theory not as an abstracted system of rules or philosophy but rather as a position from which a questioning of the discourses of knowledge and power in the humanities is undertaken. Using this perspective she considers the positions of both Guamán Poma and Garcilaso, Inca, arguing that both men understood that culture involved representation and enunciation and that ultimately, as subaltern subjects, they manage to speak, despite the theoretical impossibility of their positions.

Castro-Klarén continues her postcolonial focus in the second part of the collection, providing a succinct synopsis of the key thinkers and perspectives within Latin American scholarship. She consistently engages with Latin American intellectuals such as Mignolo and Dussel, while simultaneously questioning what the work of Bhabha, Said, Spivak and Guha can contribute to Latin American postcolonial studies. Chapter 7 is the strongest chapter in this section, examining the intersections and paradoxes within postcolonial theory in Latin America vis-à-vis Mariátegui's investigations into the mechanisms of colonialism, thereby demonstrating a separation of postcolonial theory from postmodern thought through the example of Mariátegui's writing.

There are indeed exemplary essays in this volume; however, the second part was disjointed, with the placement of Chapters 4 and 6 disrupting the flow of thought, and I felt the collection would have benefited from a conclusion. Another notable, albeit minor, concern was the high incidence of typographical errors, occurring at least once in every chapter. Notwithstanding these concerns, *The Narrow Pass of Our Nerves* is an excellent book. Through her engagement with the Latin American authors who pioneered thinking about the locus of enunciation and the colonality of power, Castro-Klarén's collection of essays constitutes a very valuable contribution to contemporary Latin American scholarship, opening up the complex debates within postcolonial theory and integrating analysis of literary, cultural and historical studies in a truly insightful manner.

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