

**Lupi, Juan P. *Reading Anew: José Lezama Lima's Rhetorical Investigations*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2012. 265 pp.**

It is difficult to say anything meaningful about Lezama without deep engagement with his work. His work demands it. Casual reading is not an option. Inevitably, therefore, studies of Lezama generally demand a similar degree of close engagement. Little of the critical scholarship is untouched by the intricate language and complex interplay of concepts, images, and ideas of Lezama's works. This book is no exception. Casual reading of *Reading Anew* is not an option.

Bravely setting out to explore some of Lezama's more idiosyncratic and mysterious ideas, in particular the conceptual schema of *el sistema poético*, *Las eras imaginarias* and *La expresión americana*, the author has by necessity entered and inhabited similar puzzling intellectual landscapes. He does so keenly, and whilst the reader may at times struggle to keep up during the moments of deepest reflection, the exercise is a challenging and rewarding one.

The book is based on certain principles that are central to all critical readings of Lezama, most importantly the tension between poetic expression and explanatory exegesis. Lezama explained in interview: "cuando me sentía claro escribía prosa y cuando me sentía oscuro escribía poesía" (Fossey 17), and from there the reader may consider his critical essays, spanning four decades, to be the elaboration of hermeneutic strategies for understanding his poetry—the oft-declared "sistema poético del mundo."<sup>1</sup> However, as Lupi poignantly identifies, there is a beguiling circularity in this, as the essays are written with the same mystifying language and style as his poetry. As such, the reader grapples with the articulation of a poetic system in order to understand the very articulation of the poetic system. "The authority of the *sistema poético*," Lupi suggests, "partly rests on the assumption that it can be an explanatory key or justification for Lezama's obscurity. But on the other hand the *sistema's* very formulation rests on a highly idiosyncratic use of the figural and of strange modes of discourse—neologisms, bizarre analogies, erudite extravagance, false attributions, anachronisms, etc." (38). In this respect, Lezama's critical essays are distinguished from his poetry not so much through form as through the presence of reflective clarity between the ever-present tumult of *imágenes*. This, of course, is Lezama's appeal; the reader becomes lost in the enchanted spectacle of images, stories, and exuberant language.

Fortunately for the reader, Lupi makes no pretence of tidying up Lezama and providing a methodical explanation of the "sistema". On the contrary, this stated tension serves as motivation for profound analytical immersion into his work in order not to explain it, but to ask, how might we read it? "What strategies," he asks, "exist for reading texts like Lezama's that have been qualified as "hermetic," "obscure," and "impenetrable"? Does Lezama's verse admit something like "explanation"? What is at stake in attempting to derive meaning from these *cuerpos resistentes*?" (70). In order to address these, and other, questions, Lupi has left no stone unturned, appraising Lezama's theory and practice of metaphor in its location within Aristotelian poetics, considering Lezama's creative inventiveness regarding his dialogues with Juan Ramón Jiménez, and examining lucidly the mystifying poem "Dador."

In this theoretical analysis, there are moments of great clarity, where the development of the argument is refreshingly apparent; and yet, as with Lezama, the sheer weight of the prose is, at times, exhausting. This is partly because of the intricate and complex interplay of concepts, ideas, and biographical data that leave little daylight through the cracks, and partly because of the pressure of citations, mostly from Lezama himself. As I have come to understand over fifteen years of immersion in Lezama, hauling hefty quotes on board can overload the vessel and risk swamping. It is no easy task for the eye and the mind to glide from dense analysis in English (with the occasional French citation) to an image-laden syntactically and lexically-challenging quote from Lezama. Perhaps they are best left in the sea, and the reader encouraged to explore them in their full context.

But there is another consequence of this density. The reader plunges into the heavy analysis, grasping ideas about Lezama's use of metaphor, his poetic craft, and his imaginative response to the poets, philosophers, and theologians he read so avidly, but rarely does the reader meet the author of this analysis. He remains a distant voice juggling these bulky issues. As such, there is a general trend towards abstraction. It is not that autobiography is desired (although why not?) but a more personal reflection on the issues raised. What fascinates Lupi about Lezama? How is this critical study contributing to assisting new generations of readers? Beyond intricate academic analysis, what other responses are there to Lezama's poetics? Are there, in effect, strategies for clarifying Lezama's complexity?

On this matter of reflection, I found the first three chapters to be cumbersome at times, the last two the most exciting. In these final chapters the figure of Lezama is considered in relation to defining historical episodes: the failed Cuban republic, the Revolution, and the Latin American Boom. There is brilliant analysis of how Lezama and his fellow *origenistas* understood the importance of *la imagen* in the collective vision of history, and their solemn duty as *belle lettrists* of contributing to this cultural image: "The totality of Lezama's intellectual career was guided by the belief, inherited from Romanticism, that the poet occupies a privileged position not only with respect to language, but also with respect to *history*" (25). This concern drove Lezama's 1957 conference essays of *La expresión americana*, and his later essays of *Las eras imaginarias*, and it was a vision fully commensurate with the widespread discontent of the 1930s-50s that paved the way for the Revolution. Likewise, the author argues compellingly why Lezama is neither insular nor *merely* nationalistic in his poetic-historic outlook, nor can he be considered typical of the Boom. Lastly, Lezama's problematic relationship with the Cuban Revolution draws the analysis to a close.

The issue of *Reading Anew* is interesting, as often the analysis tallies harmoniously with the many other critics cited, such as Cruz-Malavé, Levinson, Livon-Grossman, Ortega, Pellón, and Pérez Firmat. It is a fresh and necessary investigation, and well situated within a lively scholarship. *Reading Anew* is thus not so much about revising the scholarship as approaching these essential questions relating to Lezama with fresh eyes—a new link in the chain. It is an exemplary piece of scholarship, demonstrating patient, measured, and profound consideration of

Lezama's texts, the historical context, and the wider scholarship. Important questions are presented and addressed and compelling arguments are put forward. Thus the book contributes, although a little drily at times, to the ongoing process of keeping alive the poetic beauty of Lezama.

<sup>1</sup> Fossey, Jean-Michel. "Entrevista con Lezama Lima." *Imagen* 46 (April 1969): 8–17.

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**Moore, Melisa.** *José Carlos Mariátegui's Unfinished Revolution*. Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell UP, 2014. 259 pp.

Melisa Moore's *José Carlos Mariátegui's Unfinished Revolution* is a thorough and well-researched study into the titular intellectual's management and theorization of the vanguard cultural milieu in 1920s Peru. The study provides a fresh look at a period and figure about which a great deal of scholarship has been written since the 1960s. It does so by refocusing Mariátegui in relationship to his intellectual and cultural management as seen primarily through *Amauta*, the premier Andean vanguard journal that was published from 1926–30; through scrutiny of how his influence was exercised in, for example, the publishing of Martín Adán's prose-poetic work *La casa de cartón*; as well as, naturally, through the many writings in which he conceptualized cultural practices and addressed contemporary politics. Moore's dexterity with the materials as well as her careful understandings of them greatly enrich the study.

The book is composed of six chapters as well as an Introduction and Conclusion. Of the six central chapters, one provides a historical contextualization of the Oncenio (1919–30) or eleven-year period in which Augusto Leguía was last in power as president, two focus centrally on Mariátegui's thought as expressed in his essays, and the remaining three focus on cultural practices that include poetry, narrative, and, unusually, visual art. While the readings of poetry are much more detailed and enriching than those of visual cultural artifacts produced by artists, this is understandable given that no reproductions of the visual works discussed are provided. This is disappointing, as surely it would have greatly enriched the study and would have allowed Moore's keen critical eye a wider field in which to operate.

A notable and praiseworthy aspect of the study is the focus on women's agency as cultural producers during the period. In all, four grossly understudied women (with the notable exceptions of scholarship by Unruh, Reedy, Gonzales Smith, and a few others) begin to get their due in Moore's study. These include: Magda Portal, Ángela Ramos, Julia Codesido, and Elena Izcue. Moore's probing readings of Ramos's fiction and Portal's poetry stand out in particular. In both cases, Moore convincingly reads the diversity of political affiliations and positions in the poetry itself, and moreover she buttresses these interpretations with ample and revealing biographical and historical information. Indeed, Mariátegui's influence here seems to be less ideological and more managerial and it is perhaps not as necessary