

character in the work of José Luis Zárate, in which the prior knowledge of the reader and his or her ability to construct the past and future of seemingly minimal characters leads to the seemingly paradoxical humanization of characters undergoing monstrous transformations. Laura Elisa Vizcaíno Mosqueda and Alejandra Piña offer essays on the work Luis Felipe Hernández and Guillermo Samperio, respectively.

Despite the diversity of the authors and critical approaches offered by *Estética de lo mínimo*, certain common ideas about the genre of the *microrrelato* in Mexico can be extrapolated from this collective effort. Instead of focusing on a minimum or maximum word length, or other technical elements of the form, most authors attempt to describe the discourse of the *microrrelato* in its relation to the experience and collaboration of the reader. Thus in addition to the requisite “briefness,” the characteristics of “intensity,” “enigma,” “metaphor,” “intertextuality,” “fragmentation,” “parody,” “ellipsis,” and “polysemy” are consistently used to describe the form and its relationship to the cognitive effort of its readers. More than perhaps any other literary genre, the *microrrelato* invites and requires the reader to participate in the language game of inference, metaphor, and allusion, and in all these articles, the importance of the reader as co-conspirator and co-creator is underscored and celebrated.

*La estética de lo mínimo* offers both an enlightening introduction to the genre of microfiction and many outstanding examples of in-depth and insightful studies of specific authors and texts in the genre, and is a truly welcome addition to scholarship on a textual form that resonates strongly with our contemporary lived experience.

Cheyly Samuelson

San José State University

**Bush, Matthew. *Pragmatic Passions: Melodrama and Latin American Social Narrative*. Madrid; Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2014. 222 pp.**

In *Pragmatic Passions, Melodrama and Latin American Social Narrative*, Matthew Bush seeks to vindicate melodrama as the object of serious scholarly inquiry in the context of Latin Americanist criticism. Bush does not situate his study of the melodramatic mode in Latin American narrative where one might expect—*telenovelas* and other such instances of low mass-media popular cultural production—but rather anchors it firmly within the domain of high literature that indisputably forms part of the Latin American literary canon, corresponding, moreover, not to the nineteenth-century sentimentality, but to the masculinist modernism of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, Bush presents five engaging case studies of melodrama that treat, respectively, the regional novel, *indigenismo*, the Argentine Vanguard, Brazilian modernism, and the Boom, thus giving a sweeping and representative reconstruction of the established topography of early-to-mid-twentieth-century Latin American novelistic narrative, but surveying it through the uncommon interpretive optic of melodramatic analysis.

In framing his study, Bush draws productive parallels within Hispanist criticism between his work and that of Doris Sommer (nineteenth-century Latin American romance), Annabel Martín (melodrama under Franco), and Aníbal González (thematic resurgence of love in post-Boom/post-revolutionary Latin American narrative). Bush also gives a theoretical overview of affective performativity (Austin, Derrida, Iser) and of emotional figures and amorous speech (Barthes, Williams, Berlant), all of which serve to advance Bush's understanding of how melodrama communicates social message, for Bush most centrally argues throughout that "melodrama is the dominant narrative mode when Latin American literature speaks about politics and development" (22).

To the end of asserting this fundamental position in regard to the status of melodrama as a "basic paradigm of the Latin American literary and social imagination" (198), the most conceptually powerful connection that Bush presents in his intellectual genealogy is to Peter Brooks, whose influential thought conceives of melodrama as a narrative modality central to modernity itself, and coeval with the French Revolution. On the strength of Brooks's ideas, Bush boldly claims that melodrama should be recognized as the "first narrative mode through which the tales of the new Latin American nations are told," and, therefore, viewed "not as the exception, but as the rule of Latin American literature" (22) that has "bolstered more than two centuries' worth of Latin America's literary production" (23). Moving decisively away from any stereotypical or pigeon-holing association of melodrama with the low-brow or the feminine, Bush recommends a far broader big-picture view, positing that "[i]n the Latin American context, [...] melodrama may be understood as a brand of 'hyper-realism,' an intense, emotionally charged focus on the quotidian 'real' event, which invariably dialogues with [...] deep philosophical and ideological concerns" across the full range of the political spectrum: "the tales of Latin American melodrama draw attention to the very postcolonial conundrums that beset Latin American societies: innovation versus tradition, the local versus the global, revolution versus conservatism" (34, 30).

Bush is careful to acknowledge that, for all its continental significance, melodrama does not come "from an autochthonous wellspring, but from a foreign context" (18). Yet in Bush's estimation, Latin American melodrama is markedly distinct from its seminal French counterpart and other regional expressions in that it is internally conflictive in both form and content:

[T]he recurring feature uncovered in Latin American social melodrama is its refusal to neatly tie up the loose ends of its narratives and present an entirely happy ending, or to present a cohesive representation of glorified suffering. Latin American social melodrama seems to be in a constant battle with its very narrative mode, causing structural fissures that often diverge from standard definitions of melodrama in the United States and Europe. Twentieth century Latin American melodrama [...] is much more complex in that our heroes are flawed, society is flawed, and the resounding dénouement so necessary to melodrama in the Latin American case frequently serves as much to reveal problems and unresolved conflicts as it does to put a positive spin on the tale. (30)

Despite this formalistic and thematic propensity toward the representation of conflict, Bush nevertheless discovers in Latin American melodrama a certain persistent optimism: "Unlike tragedy, which assumes that there is no escape from a catastrophic fate, the protagonists of Latin American melodrama continue to fight the good fight, attempting to change society even when their prospects are grim" (30).

Bush is persuasive in his argument that Rómulo Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara*, César Vallejo's *El tungsteno*, Roberto Arlt's *El amor brujo*, Jorge Amado's *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela*, and Carlos Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* all evince melodramatic characteristics, and in this particularly conflictive Latin American manner. This sampling of novels otherwise diverse of literary movement and circumstance, yet all unquestionably representative of Latin Americanist canonicity, thus becomes a convincing corpus of evidence for Bush's claims that Latin American melodrama is pervasive in its very "inconclusive nature" in that it works against its own resolution (185). In *Doña Bárbara*, "[m]odern capitalist practices and the established Venezuelan agrarian economy meet in a violent confrontation from which neither emerges unscathed" (74); this social irresolution is mirrored by a melodramatic mode in which the "dynamic conflict between good and evil shows that the supposed polarities of modernity and backwardness, of civilization and barbarism, are in constant flux" (75). *El tungsteno* "affirm[s] [...] [indigenous] humanity against the dehumanization of international capitalism," though its use of melodrama as a galvanizing force of revolutionary discourses falls short of reconciling their "potentially conflicting" heterogeneity (94). Levying a critique against the Argentine middle-class status quo through the topic of marriage, thus "cypher[ing] all of [its] commentary against the hegemonic values of the middle class through that particular social affiliation (116), *El amor brujo* nevertheless presents a protagonist who is "more a conformist than an antihero, [...] caught in a double movement in which he seeks a new form of social existence while still clinging to the social protocol of the bourgeoisie [...] [in a novel that] at once criticizes melodramatic sentimentality and relies on the sentimental format to convey its tale" (126), with this internal contradiction serving as a metacritique of the limits of melodramatic sentimentality, and simultaneously revealing the impossibility of critiquing the status quo through its use. *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela* stages the struggle between capitalist progress and violent political hierarchy in the contest for control of the Brazilian cacao trade, where as in *Doña Bárbara*, "melodrama no longer paints a dramatically contrasted view of virtue and villainy" (138), thus, like *El amor brujo*, "manifest[ing] a critical perspective on the limited scope of possibility for social change" (139). Finally, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* represents the "continuation—if not the very culmination—of the project of melodramatically framing national social strife in Latin American narrative" (158) in which the eponymous protagonist's "[frustrated] romances [...] function as indicators of the path of both national development and dysfunction" (164n11), his "exclu[sion] from the work's happy ending" being constitutive of a "vengeful melodramatic impulse" that punishes morally gray (164)—and even overwhelmingly contemptible—behavior in romance as an analog for like behavior in the political domain where the novel decries the downward spiral of idealistic revolution into terminal dystopia.

In the aggregate, these analyses effectively demonstrate that melodrama is indeed operative in the heretofore unexpected sphere of high modernist literature, in each case invested with a power of representation moving beyond the particular and the romantic and into the general and political, patently evidencing as a commonality “[Latin American] melodrama’s intention to make sense of abstract historical processes” (197). As with most interventions of such breadth of scope and potential impact, Bush’s study raises many questions, perhaps—to its credit—even more than it answers. If, following Peter Brooks’s thought, melodrama originates with the French Revolution as a narrative mode to represent a new morality for a new bourgeois state, then what more may we learn about the path melodrama takes to Latin America and, specifically, to the juncture of the Latin American wars of independence, where Bush locates its arrival (15)? What could a cultural archaeology of this narrative path tell us about the relationship between the French Revolution and the wars of Latin American independence as historical, political, social, and even economic processes? Simply put, if we accept Bush’s characterization of melodrama as playing an “essential role” (15) in Latin American narrative from independence forward, how do we explain, in the Latin American case, the cultural forces that govern this rise of affective narrative? Bush intimates that the prevalence of melodrama in its specifically Latin American form of internal formalistic and thematic conflict is correlated to the “stark social contrasts [that] dominate the everyday [Latin American] experience” (185). Can we make more of this relationship between literary form and cultural reality? Is there any kind of pattern to be detected, either ideological or structural, if Latin American melodrama is read diachronically and interregionally? If Bush’s characterizations of Latin American melodrama hold true—e.g., as lacking uncomplicated happy endings yet evincing social optimism, as being connected to chronic social inequality—then how may we understand these structural narrative constants as an extended metaphor for Latin American society, politics, economics? Bush’s intervention raises many intriguing and important questions, and, in its embrace of affective narrativity as an object of study both valuable and necessary, it also represents a significant step in the salutary expansion of Latin Americanism’s theoretical and hermeneutical terms of engagement and possibilities of interpretive play.

Dierdra Reber

**Castañeda, Luis H. *Comunidades efímeras: Grupos de vanguardia y neovanguardia en la novela hispanoamericana del siglo XX*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2015. 259 pp.**

En los debates actuales de la filosofía política contemporáneos la cuestión de la comunidad es uno de los ejes alrededor del cual se organizan las posturas más relevantes del pensamiento político de nuestra época. Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben y Roberto Esposito, entre otros pensadores europeos, han retomado la pregunta acerca de la noción de comunidad como una clave para trazar un nuevo