

JULIO PRIETO, *La escritura errante: ilegibilidad y políticas del estilo en Latinoamérica*. Madrid: Iberoamericana/Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert. 2016. 372 pp.

This ambitious and impressive book traces an alternative literary history of modern Latin America. Prieto connects authors who, unlike those famed for elegant style—say Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez or Rubén Darío—cultivate *bad* writing. This is not the lachrymose melodrama or pseudo-intellectualism of many bestsellers. Rather, Prieto traces a history of artists who deliberately eschew or contravene literary norms, transgress generic boundaries and place high art into contact with popular culture or everyday speech.

Prieto's most obvious intellectual interlocutor is Ángel Rama. The Uruguayan analysed the relationship between writing and power in the founding of Latin America's nations, and those instances in which processes of acculturation were countered by the disturbing presence of colonized voices within the colonizer's language. Prieto coins instead the term 'devenir iletrado' (305) to summarize two movements of escape, one social, one literary, and both linked to what the Argentine poet and anthropologist Néstor Perlongher called the 'salida de sí'. These 'escrituras "malas"' (13), Prieto states in the Introduction, desire to be something more than writing.

The first chapter is on Roberto Arlt. As Ricardo Piglia noted, Arlt is Argentina's great writer who writes badly—or, better said, its great writer *because* he writes badly. Prieto opens with an example from Arlt's (in)famous career as an inventor, the vulcanized stocking for women. This demonstrates the twin forces in his work: the desire for (literary) fame and fortune; and an inventive delirium, in which the idea, no matter how absurd, is what counts. Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Prieto reads Arlt, as has been fashionable for some years now, as an avatar of 'minor literature'. More innovative is an analysis of ghosts and visions in Arlt, and an assessment of his 'messianic realism'. Prieto sees a link between Arlt and fellow modern *maudit*, the Peruvian César Vallejo. This second chapter has two notable strengths: firstly, attention to the rhythms and cadences of Vallejo's poetry, the musicality of which is not often appreciated. And, secondly, an analysis, via Erich Auerbach, of Vallejo as an example of the 'emergencia de lo bajo' in the Western tradition. Prieto looks at the presence of music and poverty in Vallejo, and contrasts his work to contemporary *indigenismo* and Pablo Neruda, with a further comparison to Carlos Oquendo de Amat's *Cinco metros de poesía*. The third chapter is on José María Arguedas, especially his final, posthumously published novel *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*. This novel is troubling not only for its hybrid style, mixing social realism, fables and diary entries, but also the tragedy of its conclusion, as Arguedas took his own life. How then, Prieto asks, can we analyse a work of creative destruction, whose first victim is its own creator? With energetic critiques of Antonio Cornejo Polar and Mario Vargas Llosa's simplistic notion of the 'utopía arcaica' in Arguedas' work, Prieto offers a nuanced reading of the encounter between popular culture and political revolution in the Peruvian's last novel.

Chapter IV, the longest, assesses the Brazilian film-maker Glauber Rocha. For much of the chapter Prieto is as interested in Rocha as a theorist of film as he is in his work as a cineaste. The author links Rocha to his political context and also cultural developments at home—*concretismo* in particular—and abroad—including the *nouvelle vague* in France. He analyses Rocha's engagement with literary works, by Euclides da Cunha, Guimarães Rosa and Graciliano Ramos (the spelling of whose name varies). Rocha's work is summarized as a form of (purposefully) 'bad translation' (247) in which the literary canon is put into cinematic dialogue with popular traditions—*romances*, songs and festivals.

The final chapter, on Néstor Perlongher, assesses the encounter between frivolity, high literature and 'bajura' (257) in the Argentine's work. Although much of the ground covered—the 'neobarroco' *versus* 'neobarroso' split, or the reading of Perlongher's poetry as more minor literature—is not new, later sections offer a useful comparison with the work of the Cuban Severo Sarduy. Oddly, over several pages Perlongher's surname alternates between having

an 'h' and a 'u'. Absent is an assessment of Perlongher's engagement with contemporary politics (other than the Malvinas/Falklands War), especially Peronism and the figure of Evita Perón. Here I should declare an interest, as my own book on Perlongher is dispatched in a footnote.

In his conclusion, Prieto identifies a number of 'poéticas de lo ilegible' (308) in literature of the 2000s, a possibly paradoxical tradition for these pioneering and often iconoclastic authors to found. The second paradox is that his corpus contains some of the most aesthetically stimulating and intellectually compelling works that Latin America has produced. Yet it is an entirely male corpus, and one wonders why space beyond the most fleeting reference could not be found for the likes of Silvina Ocampo, Alejandra Pizarnik, Susana Thénon, Griselda Gambaro, Diamela Eltit or many other (coincidentally female) practitioners of the bad writing Prieto so admirably analyses. While some of the claims made for the book on its blurb may be a mite bullish, this is a virtuoso study, well-informed and finely appreciative of the shapes and forms of literary works, and one which serious scholars of Latin-American literature should take into account.

BEN BOLLIG

*St Catherine's College, Oxford.*



CARA LEVEY, *Fragile Memory, Shifting Impunity: Commemoration and Contestation in Post-Dictatorship Argentina and Uruguay*. Oxford/Bern: Peter Lang. 2016. xi + 295 pp.

Cara Levey's book is a valuable contribution to politics of memory debates both within and beyond transitional justice policy frameworks. As a comparative politics scholar, Levey offers in-depth comparison of both a well-studied and a less well-studied case—Argentina and Uruguay—with suggestive indications for why the cases converge and diverge regarding key human rights policies and praxis.

Levey covers a lot of ground—from an overview of post-dictatorship ebbs and flows regarding the prosecution of human rights violators, to distinct commemorative practices and generational shifts regarding the pursuit of truth, justice and accountability. Levey is especially instructive on the role of local and national-level government in relation to grassroots struggles for accountability, and she provides innovative interpretations, particularly regarding Uruguay's Punta Carretas as a commemorative site and regarding younger generations' memory activism.

It is important to note that while the title of the book implies it will largely be about the fraught nature of commemoration, much of the work delves elsewhere as well. This includes a strong defence about why a memory conceptual lens matters for the study of politics; a thorough grounding in the changing terrains of the formal-legal contexts of Argentina and Uruguay; and an account of the formation and ongoing evolution of the organizations H.I.J.O.S. (Argentina) and HIJOS (Uruguay). As she moves along, Levey makes clearer the links among grass roots demands for prosecution and commemorative initiatives, particularly when she discusses the direct actions of H.I.J.O.S. and HIJOS in targeting individual military and civilians who were complicit in heinous human rights violations.

At the start, Levey demonstrates how, these many years later, commemorative sites continue to open up new moments for contestation and reflection, sometimes rejuvenating what can be quiet or relatively unknown memorial spaces for broader publics. Her study then teases out the complex 'micropolitics' of commemoration for both the more volatile national political landscape of Argentina and the comparatively more stable but arguably more counterintuitive memory politics of Uruguay amidst what she terms the two countries' 'shifting terrain of impunity' (6). It is also a reminder of how holding the state accountable