

Reviews



BARTOW, JOANNA R. *Subject to Change: The Lessons of Latin American Women's Testimonio for Truth, Fiction, and Theory*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2005. 252 pages

Joanna R. Bartow ends her book *Subject to Change: The Lessons of Latin American Women's Testimonio for Truth, Fiction, & Theory* (2005) with a reference to the testimony of a Mapuche Indian woman. What makes this testimonial narrative noteworthy for Bartow is that it closes with the transcription of a conversation between the *testigo* and her transcriber. In this exchange, the *testigo*, Mapuche feminist activist Rosa Isolde Reuque Paillalef, both acknowledges the desire of the Mapuche to preserve their own culture and "places herself as an actor at the present turn of the century" (238). For Bartow, this uncommon fusion of twenty-first-century activism with indigenous traditions marks a significant moment in the evolution of the genre of *testimonio* because it denotes a shift in the agency of the testimonial subject. Paillalef's position, Bartow asserts, does not have to be analyzed or justified by an "expert" in this context. We are instead presented with "a demystified, truthful representation of the testimonial subject's evolving agency" (238). Here we have the underlying interest that fuels Bartow's book, which asserts that as "[t]estimonial subjects evolve [. . .] they shift strategies and negotiate their identity in context. Therefore, those who listen will also have to allow their theories and ideologies to be subject to change" (238). Thus, those who listen to the *testigo* must transform as the *testigo* transforms. Those who wish to take part in the process of *testimonio* in the twenty-first century must acknowledge that as the *testigo* evolves, the transcriber/listener must also evolve with him or her.

The subject of the "subject" is in crisis in Bartow's book, which is in itself nothing new, and has been at the center of debate on *testimonio* since its induction into the academy as a topic worthy of study. Yet it was particularly after the publication of Georg M. Gugelberger's *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (1996), which included such fundamental essays as "The Aura of Testimonio" by Alberto Moreiras and Doris Sommer's "Rigoberta's Secrets," that the shift from first wave to second wave criticism finally made its indelible mark. Accordingly, in the mid-1990s the crisis of the testimonial subject in Latin America was brought into the limelight of the critical stage. Though now, ten years later, the spotlight seems to have dimmed a bit on the "aura," and the genre and its controversial "subject" still remain to be defined. Nonetheless, there is certainly no lack of new scholars attempting to "name the nameless" and negotiate what exactly is that slippery relationship, associated with testimonial literature, between the *testigo* and the transcriber.

In Bartow's critical study, which focuses on women's writing and woman as a subject, the author uses a mere 230 pages to make her way through an assortment of readings of well-known narratives of *testimonio* and the now commonly known "anti-testimonio." Paying due attention to the balance between *testimonio* and subject, Bartow emphasizes that *Subject to Change* offers a reading of "mediated *testimonios*" alongside both "narrative and theoretical texts" that either "reflect or should see themselves reflected in testimonial narrators' negotiations of the testimonial process and consequent critique of its efforts to cede authority to its narrators" (16). In saying this, Bartow calls attention to how she does not read *testimonio* as a one-sided discussion, but rather as a reciprocal dialogue between the narrators of the testimonial and the relevant theoretical texts.

In particular, Bartow aims to respond to North American and European feminist theory's history of "homogenizing women's experience" and turns to Latin American feminism, which she maintains "has from early on been divided along class lines between grassroots *movimientos de mujeres* and middle and upper-class feminism" (17). Although it has been a ground-breaking movement, *testimonio* is still unable to escape the societal structures that constrain it and still "carefully reinforce[s] control on female sexuality, even as the women who tell their stories depart from other aspects of traditional female roles" (17). This leads her to the compelling question: "How do differences in privilege produce the need for legitimation by both sides?" (17). As a rule, *testimonio* and its critical discourse have raised questions for feminism, but Bartow asks: what if this was turned around? That is to say, what if we look instead at the questions that contemporary feminist theory might raise for *testimonio*? What might this say about the "subject" in the contemporary moment and how might this shift our vision of the genre?

With this task in mind, Bartow then covers quite a bit of territory in her book. It stretches from a discussion on the struggle for authority and legitimation in works such as Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* and Carolina Maria de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo* to Derridean readings of women's writings to better aid a discussion about feminism and *testimonio*. Although broad, she is able to focus on specific and timely issues relevant to the relation between *testimonio*, the "subject" and feminism, and draw the reader into her arguments.

Her close reading is notable in Chapter 2, for example, in which Bartow considers the relationship between feminism and *testimonio* in an already complex web of testimonial studies. Entitled "Fictions of Testimony: Essentialized Identities and the Other in Oneself in Two Works by Clarice Lispector," Bartow addresses the various issues at hand. She considers legitimation and essentialism in the work of Clarice Lispector's works *Paixão segundo G.H.* and *A hora da estrela*. Here she makes the essential point that again and again the testimonial ends up saying that the "subaltern are not conscious of their status" as subjects. This is typified by a reading of the main character in *A hora da estrela*, Macabéa, who Bartow notes "is truly the subaltern in a silent life" because she is written as a woman who is "unaware of herself" (121). Thus, in Lispector, we have a character who is unaware of her position in society. Bartow points to the fact that this only underscores Christopher L. Miller's statement from a 1993 article in *Diacritics*: "one of the most questionable tactics of colonial anthropology [is] that of

attributing to natives preconscious thoughts that the Western interpreter makes explicit" (qtd. in Bartow, 121). Thus, Macabéa's character acts as a parody of the "process by which we speak for the testimonial subject" (121). This is only one more example of the violence done to the "subject" in the process of the creation of a testimonial narrative.

Also of note is Chapter 4, "Beyond *Testimonio* in Two Works by Diamela Eltit." Here Bartow takes on two of this Chilean writer's most discussed texts, *El padre mío* (1989) and *Lumpérica* (1983), and posits them as narratives that push the borders of the current shape of *testimonio*. This in itself is not particularly innovative if one reviews the numerous examinations of Eltit's work by her critics, such as Nelly Richard, Julio Ortega, and Mary Beth Tierney-Tello. Aiming to substantially add to the conversation, however, Bartow quickly moves from her review of former readings of Eltit to an examination of gender through the writing of Judith Butler crossed with an examination of Diana Taylor's theories of performance.

Bartow also shows her astute and close reading of Eltit's complex work as she discusses *Lumpérica* as a critique of the dictatorship period under Chile's Pinochet, and how the text dialogues with the issues of hidden surveillance in a police state. She warns her readers not to make a direct parallel between a police state and the genre of *testimonio*, but points out that "Under the dictatorship everyone and everything is under scrutiny, and yet those who were seen are disappeared, detentions in broad daylight are invisible, the agents of repression cannot be seen: L. Iluminada makes visible the invisible" (214). The main character, L. Iluminada, is a parody of the laws and censorship of the dictatorship, and Eltit's book exposes what was supposed to be hidden and includes that which was to be excluded, such as the body of the woman who was necessarily supposed to remain at home, in the private realm. Most important perhaps is that *Lumpérica* is a critique of "gendered subalternity" that simultaneously "attempts that task of portraying the enormity of violence and marginality under authoritarianism" (228).

Thus, it seems that the role of the subject in *testimonio* is ever-changing and somewhat elusive, but the answer to the question of whether Bartow adds something new to the testimonial debate with her reading of gender and the subject is clear. Although her insistence that there exists an "evolving agency" of the testimonial subject does open up more questions about what it means to "evolve," she confronts her own question and teases out important and relevant moments in the narratives she has chosen to validate her arguments. Bartow perhaps passes too quickly through the theoretical relationships between *testimonio* and the critical theory that she attempts to develop in her third chapter, "Reading *Testimonio* with Theory: Violence, Sacrifice, Displacement," yet overall her book is an important and timely contribution to the continuing discussion about *testimonio*. Moreover, it is well-written and her critical points are clearly stated. She shows us that "*testimonio* and the subject" is still a relevant topic about which the conversation is far from over.

Perhaps this is most evident in her conclusion, in which Bartow asserts that "[...] to ignore gender is to incompletely investigate the hierarchies testimonial writing strives to undermine and the conditions under which the speaker can

narrate her story" (230). One must look at how gender informs *testimonio*, rather than the other way around, to better comprehend the possibilities for a more "truthful representation" of the real agency of a testimonial subject, and how that subject evolves and changes with the times (238). We must acknowledge the role of feminism in *testimonio*, and that the discourse of testimonial's "own subjectivity" has now changed and still "has lessons to teach" to us as readers and scholars (235).

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CAMACHO, JORGE. *José Martí: las máscaras del escritor*. Boulder, CO: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 2006. 250 pages.

"Sería difícil citar otro caso de identificación de un país con un hombre, que alcance la magnitud de la encarnación de Cuba en la persona y la obra de José Martí", escribe Cintio Vitier en la introducción a la serie de estudios que publica en 1981, con Fina García Marruz, con el título de *Temas martianos*. Al comentario de Vitier podría oponerse la célebre frase de Jacques Vachè a André Breton, citada por Cortázar al comienzo de *Rayuela*: "rien ne vous tue un homme comme d'être obligé de représenter un pays" ("nada mata a un hombre como el verse obligado a representar un país"). De diversas maneras, en los últimos veinticinco años, las mejores relecturas de Martí y su obra han expresado la tensión entre los dos polos sugeridos por estas citas: las repercusiones diversas de "la encarnación de Cuba" en Martí y su obra por una parte; por otra parte, la relectura de la obra martiana como texto fundador de nuestra modernidad y Martí como cosmopolita y visionario, incluso deconstructor profético de los límites, más violentos cuánto más asediados, del nacionalismo.

El subtítulo del libro de Jorge Camacho, "las máscaras del escritor", anuncia la lectura de las representaciones del sujeto martiano en algunas de sus obras: el poeta viril transformado a través de la experiencia ambigua del amor al hijo-musa, el "gacetero de crímenes", el sujeto ambivalente frente a las "formas genéricas abyectas" que a veces parece rechazar e incorporar en un mismo gesto.

No es necesario repetir la gama de actividades a las que se dedicó Martí, ni es el libro de Camacho otra versión del consabido tema. Camacho sitúa sus lecturas en un contexto histórico y aprovecha el material biográfico cuando viene al caso, pero su enfoque es textual. Su libro trata de la máscara textual, en el sentido de "persona literaria" como figura proteica representada a través de la escritura.

A pesar de que su tono no es polémico sino más bien conciliador y discreto, la relectura que hace Camacho es implícitamente antihagiográfica. Al Martí monolítico de la historia oficial opone una figura (o una serie de figuras) representada a través de la escritura. Las máscaras martianas vinculan al escritor y su obra a los procesos complejos y contradictorios de la modernidad. Si las definiciones más divulgadas del modernismo reprodujeron tautológicamente los temas más obvios de su producción—la noción del arte por el arte por ejemplo—las lecturas que se podrían agrupar en torno a la noción más amplia y más generadora de modernidad literaria han reconocido en la explosión creadora de finales del