Book Review

Nuevas subjetividades/sexualidades literarias edited by María Teresa Vera Rojas, Barcelona–Madrid, Egales Editorial, 2012, 212pp, €20 (paperback), ISBN 978-84-15574-72-9

An academic conference which took place in the University of Barcelona in November 2010, gave rise to this same-titled collection of essays, which have as a main objective the examination of a subject's identity construction outside of the normative paradigm. This type of subject/body is represented in its resistance from various fronts, from literary and theoretical works to cultural devices such as photographs, television series, and even music videos.

The idea that certain representations of non-constrained bodies can be read as political practices of resistance to a heterosexist normative discourse is directly related to the concept of desire. To analyse desire from a bodily perspective is to identify it as progression, to recognize it as a movement in transit and not as a certainty, to locate it symbolically away from a fixed origin and destination.

There is no possible truce; the body is a junction of power discourses, it is the source itself of the constitutive struggle for its representation. To understand the body as a text, as a meaningful materialization that demands interpretation, implies to recognize a very particular relationship with its representation. The body cannot be understood merely as a result of paradigms, but also as a producer of these power structures, which is why, if considered as a text, the body can be defined as an intertextual simultaneity that will affirm and deny the norms that regulate its representation. Following this line of thought, the body is, at the same time, more and less than the representation of the body. We only come to know the body through its representations, and the body only becomes visible when it resists to be read in an imposed normative way. A docile and obedient body does not question the codes, but legitimates its requests; it is submitted to

an interiorized discipline of silence and numbness. It is precisely when the body cannot be read, that is, when it becomes *agrammatical*, that the codes are questioned and even overturned. Untamed bodies and stray desires become producers of subjectivities, which are in permanent construction and promote new ways of resistance and dispute. Forces going in antagonistic directions pierce the body, while it is still the creative generator of new subjectivities, which are pulled into bias by desire.

The resistance of the body from being read in a single direction is the axis of this collection of academic essays, working with various subjectivities that promote alternative interpretations of what sexuality and erotic desire should be. Following the four themes that are proposed in the introduction, the book begins by reviewing mechanisms of sexual representation in popular culture. More specifically, sexual dissidence in nineteenth-century Spanish magazines is explored in Isabel Clua's article about the ambiguity of the female figure and its power to unstabilize the expectations of its domesticated and submitted state. Alberto Mira continues by analysing the portrayal of the lesbian character through three different television series, merging these impressions with a very interesting discussion of the historic implications and interpretations of the terms *gay* and *queer*. The last article in this section is Jessica Faciabén's examination of the concept of norm as a dynamic structure that allows subversion and support simultaneously, from contemporary music videos to a drama series, and finally in two illustrations, exploring the complexity of clichés and their possibilities of subversion.

The second thematic part of the book is focused on literary narratives; poetic, for instance, as in Noemi Alonso's interpretation of the works of Concha García, which skilfully interweaves proximity with Monique Wittig's concerns in terms of the body, an enterprise that clearly achieves its purpose. The literary theme continues into the following article, written by Leyre López Marco, which works with Helene Cixous's approach to alterity as a new and more ethical mechanism to construct oneself. Diego Falconí participates in this section by presenting a text that explores the various identities of Julieta Paredes as a theorist, but also, as a producer of poetry. This second thematic block ends with Ibai Atutxa and his integrating perspective of the concepts of nation and sexuality as identity constructors.

The book then continues by offering two essays on the representation of queer identity. The first one, written by Juan Antonio Suárez, focuses on the relationships that can be built between surrealism and certain American experimental films as spaces that can play with – and reinvent – desire. Rafael Manuel Mérida, on the other hand, analyses the works of Nazario, the iconic graphic novel writer, focusing on his representation and vision of Barcelona at the end of the 90s, which results in an understanding of the leading role of current images, and in this context, the obvious protagonism of graphic novels.

The last part of the book deals with contemporary feminist theoretical debates, combining them with the recent and ongoing discussion on how self representation or the construction of a self narrative impacts in alternative identities' visibility, alongside with the political implications that these kinds of narrations provide. In particular, Ester Pino and Maider Tornos work with the idea of an absent body that makes itself visible by representing itself outside legible hegemonic codes, a strategy that clearly denotes resistance, in this case by the resources that photography provides. Following this tenor, Annalisa Mirizio works with self in fiction or narrative's contradictions as a way of conveying contemporary debates on the definition of the subject of feminism into a more complex and multi-signifying problem that needs to expose the antagonism between experience and theory. Jordi Medel-Bao, in the following article of this final section, goes over the subjectivity proposal of Shangay Lily, which is interpreted as beyond and/or against categorization, constructing an identity that is closer to political activism and further away from an external artificiality, which is evidently imposed on the subject. María Castrejón writes the final essay of this anthology, examining the possibilities and implications of the manifestation as a literary genre and how pure categories, which refer to identities or to name genres, have become obsolete in today's theoretical inquiries. Resistance shows itself in the fusion and intermingling of absolutes, making alternative identities liveable and charging them with a political drive.

Maria Teresa Vera Rojas has clearly understood the importance of the body as the centre of desire/body contemporary theoretical debate. On the one hand, because of her restless quest to make subversive representations the fundamental arguments in the discussion in terms of bodily expressions, and, on the other hand, because of her selection of the texts included in this book, which very clearly portray the acuteness of her richly detailed compromise on the subject, she thus delivers an extraordinary approach to the (very political) subject in hand. This commitment has been acknowledged with the 2012 *Desayunos en Urano* Essay Prize, awarded to *Nuevas subjetividades/sexualidades literarias* by the Spanish LGBT website Dosmanzanas.com.

The result of this journey is clearly the enterprise of thinking of the body outside its cultural constraints and questioning the parameters by which these bodies are constructed, regulated, and built (or not) as recognizable. The sexualized body, a *corpus delicti*, remains as an interdiscursive artefact where distinct and antagonistic codes are inhabited and created, our own identities being the crucial cornerstone.

Meri Torras

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)

E-mail: meri.torras@uab.cat

Michelle Gama

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)

E-mail: michgama@gmail.com