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# Wojciech Tokarz, *The Faces of Inclusion : Historical Fiction in Post-Dictatorship Argentina*

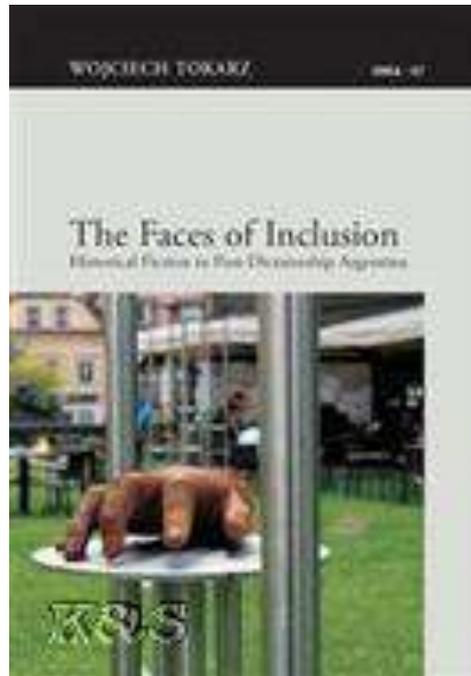
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Tokarz, Wojciech. *The Faces of Inclusion : Historical Fiction in Post-Dictatorship Argentina*. Maribor, Slovenia : Mednarodna založba Oddelka za slovanske jezike in književnosti, Filozofska fakulteta (Zora 87), 2012. 194 p. ISBN : 978-961-6656-84-9.

1 Tokarz's *The Faces of Inclusion : Historical Fiction in Post-Dictatorship Argentina* is an extremely well-written, succinct study of three facets of Argentina's contemporary narrative that attempt to recuperate the past : Sylvia Iparraguirre's *La tierra del fuego* (1998), Andrés Rivera's *Ese manco Paz* (2003), and Abel Posse's *La pasión según Eva* (1995). Tokarz' original study (based on his doctoral thesis, defended in 2008) is quite innovative. While both Iparraguirre's and Posse's novels had previously been studied, few articles have been written on Rivera's more recent, dense, novel.



- 2 In his introduction, Tokarz lays out his thesis concisely, although calling the novels he has chosen the “light’ (superficial) version of historical novel” (13) might be a bit skewed. Both Riveras’ and Posse’s texts are decidedly complicated narratives that make use of non-chronological polyphonic narrations despite their apparent thematic shallowness (as defined by Reati, quoted by Tokarz). *The Faces of Inclusion* is divided into five chapters followed by an eight-page bibliography and an index. Each author gets his own chapter and Tokarz uses the first two chapters to contextualize his study.
- 3 In Chapter one, Tokarz looks at the historical context and the subsequent effect of the lack of a unifying narrative on Argentina’s collective psyche. This lack of results, especially in creating a coherent vision of the past and bringing to justice of the actors of the Dirty War (including responsibility for its “desaparecidos” or disappeared victims), results from political discord. The ensuing construction of the past found its precarious balance in the country’s ambiguous modernity.
- 4 In his second chapter, Tokarz turns to a description of the political and social contexts leading to the emergence of the historical novel in Argentina. This 33-page panorama runs from the country’s independence to contemporary times and details most of the cultural exclusion that has taken place since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Tokarz details two types of historical novels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century : a revisionist conceptualization of the past that chooses to vindicate heroes like Juan Manuel de Rosas, and a valuing of Spanish heritage designed to counter (culturally) the country’s waves of immigration, a view that is contrary to those held about Spain at the time of the Independence movement. At the end of the twentieth century, Argentinian historical novels begin to propose the existence of a distinct past, paralleling more traditional forms of the historical novel. Tokarz shows remarkable breadth in the examples pulled from Argentinean literary history, going beyond the oft-cited novels.
- 5 In Chapter three, Tokarz delves into the literary analysis of the novels with his study of *La tierra del fuego* by Sylvia Iparraguirre. Unlike for the other authors studied (and perhaps because it is only Iparraguirre’s second novel), Tokarz chooses not to contextualize the production of this novel. It might have been relevant to include some

information since Iparraguirre has published amply on Argentinean literature and culture. However, despite this absence, in terms of content this chapter shines, since it examines the inclusion of Indigenous people in Argentinean narrative, one of Argentina's "Absent Nations" as Tokarz titles the first section of the chapter. In this case, Iparraguirre includes Indigenous Yamana characters (Fuegian or Yahgan, as they are also known) from the Southern Cone. She narrates their voyage to England on the legendary HMS Beagle's first voyage. Tokarz' (albeit brief) analysis of the presence and absence of Native peoples in Argentinean narrative is ground-breaking. This research will surely lead to a larger project on the topic, which should go beyond the well-worn comparisons to *The Tempest* in Latin American literature, as found in the last part of this chapter.

- 6 In his fourth chapter, Tokarz thoroughly analyses Andrés Rivera's novel *Ese manco Paz*. Like Iparraguirre's novel, Rivera's takes place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; he chooses to fictionalize some of the most important figures of Argentinean history, humanizing the General José María Paz (from the book's title, a bitter handicapped old man who had fought during the wars of Independence) and Juan Manuel de Rosas, the country's first dictator, who was mythologized negatively in his own lifetime by Domingo Sarmiento in *Facundo* (1845).
- 7 Much as it was done in the revisionist histories from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rivera chooses to return to the mythologized characters who are viewed "from the perspective of personal experiences of common individuals" (112), as was the project of the French Annales School of History, as Tokarz points out. Tokarz' conclusion is that the "human physiology" (131) is "worth more" than traditional historiography (138), but the ideological divide between civilization and barbarism only concerns the dominant mythologized characters.
- 8 Notwithstanding the "chaotic structure" (124) of Rivera's novel, Tokarz' analysis is thorough and enlightening (129-130); his remark that the novel "retrieves the past in a way similar to how it is registered and recalled by memory" (129) is quite accurate. However, Tokarz' description of the historical figures is (intentionally?) puzzling: is he describing Paz and Rosas through historiography or the novel? The term "history books" is ambiguous (120). Despite its innovative narrative structure, the novel remains concerned with the (admittedly diminished) traditional patriarchal heroes of independence. The nation, which Tokarz considers united by Rivera, is traditionally conceived at the cost of the exclusion of "others", like the Indigenous peoples. Argentina's heroes, Paz and Rosas, cannot be considered a "community of people" (138).
- 9 In Chapter five, Tokarz examines an even more iconic historical figure, Eva Perón, in *La pasión según Eva* by Abel Posse. Again, the novel's form provides the fodder for Tokarz' thesis about the inclusive historical novel since it is a "temporally fragmented" (152) polyphonic narrative that includes many "versions" (141) of Perón's life, including flashbacks and testimonies. Tokarz' review of the (auto)creation of Evita (141-148) and the cultural reinterpretations (153-156), although detailed, could have been left out; Eva Perón is much-studied and, surprisingly, perhaps the best known study of the myth, anthropologist Julie Taylor's *Eva Perón: The Myths of a Woman* (1981), is not cited.
- 10 Tokarz' analysis of the "biografía coral" (choral biography, 160), "creating space [in dominant discourse] for individual voices" (161) is problematic since Posse necessarily chooses whose voices to include in the novel. Thus, although it is true that "virtually

anybody can have an opinion that can be recorded and integrated into historical discourse” (162), exactly which voices are heard is still a factor of their resonance. The author decides which characters to feature in telling Perón’s story, as Tokarz confirms : “Posse makes sure (...) to emphasize the destructive side of Eva Perón’s political passion” (170).

- 11 Unfortunately, the inclusion Tokarz mentions in his title is still only partial in Posse’s novel, as it was in previous novels studied. Neither the Indigenous person in Iparraguirre’s novel, nor the woman in Posse’s novel, is allowed to tell his/her story. Posse’s seemingly inclusionary history fits well into the ‘mythification’ of Perón, and is consistent with the previous cultural representations, where only two women fictionalize Perón while many men do, as is evident in Tokarz’ detail on Viviana Plotnik’s study of the literary representation of Eva Perón, *Cuerpo femenino, duelo y nación* (153-154). Tokarz’ claims of Posse’s novel having “greater authenticity” (169, 172) than Perón’s own biography are problematic since they play into patriarchal discourse which tends to lend greater value to men’s voices.
- 12 Tokarz’ study could never claim to give a thorough picture of inclusiveness in all of historical fiction in post-dictatorship Argentina. As a matter of fact, such a study would need to include some of the more recent narratives that have emerged by, for example, the children of the disappeared, as they reconstruct their own family history (such as *La casa de los conejos* by Laura Alcoba, from 2008). Perhaps this will be another avenue for expanding his study. However, Tokarz’ scholarship does much to underline the collective construction of memory that is taking place in the country, in the absence of, or against, dominant narratives.

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