

Postmodernism of Resistance in Bolaño's Fiction and Poetry

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reseñado por

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Roberto Bolaño's presence in US scholarly production continues to grow as we progress deeper into the second decade of the 21st century. After Jonathan B. Monroe's edited volume *Framing Roberto Bolaño: poetry, fiction, literary history, politics* (2019), the time seems to be ripe for over-arching views of the author's oeuvre. This is the case of J. Agustín Pastén B.'s monograph, a thoroughly researched study of Bolaño's complete works from the perspective of postmodern theory. Pastén's goal is twofold: one the one hand, his book strives to offer a complete reading of the Chilean writer's output -albeit from a specific theoretical and political vantage point-, as well as to provide a broad examination of existing critical theory. The second objective has clearly been achieved, as this monograph provides ample proof of Pastén's incorporation of multiple sources in different languages. Another strength in this study has to do with its geopolitical stance. Far from viewing the creator of *The Savage Detectives* as a deterritorialized globalist, it grounds his ethos in Latin American history: in particular, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Revolution and the death of the socialist dream as they were experienced from a Chilean outlook.

With regard to the main goal, *Postmodernism of Resistance* does delve into almost everything Bolaño wrote, thus bringing together a comprehensive assessment of both narrative and poetry -a gap that most studies don't bridge. As we know, the connections between Bolaño's poems, short stories and novels are multiple, so Pastén's endeavor is evidently laudable. However, the theoretical framework chosen in this case -postmodernism- seems to evince certain problems and contradictions. The book's structure demonstrates the critic's all-encompassing approach: starting with a review of postmodern theories, it then moves into the literature: from early poetic examples to the towering 2666, most known -and published- aspects of the work are covered. These chapters, when taken separately and as profound explorations of specific texts, contain valuable insights. Any

reader looking for a systematic understanding of Bolaño's key tropes will surely appreciate this. Despite these indisputable merits, a reader seeking a sound theoretical basis might find the monograph lacking.

The first chapter, "Introduction and Theoretical Background," aims to map most influential definitions of postmodernism in Euro-American and Latin American settings, but only manages to do so in a cursory and superficial manner. The field is vast and diverse, which is precisely why the introduction might have profited from a more focused look at relevant ideas. After all, as Pastén himself acknowledges, Bolaño does not espouse the hallmark textual features of postmodern writing -depthlessness and pastiche being two central ones-, while at the same time stubbornly adhering to the Latin American socialist utopia even after the demise of continental hopes in the Cuban Revolution. If postmodernism is characterized by a dearth of metanarratives and by certain aesthetic consequences of that hollow zeitgeist, why even bring that label into the discussion when studying an author who seems to reject postmodernism at every level of analysis -and even at his core as an artist? The answer seems to be that, even though Bolaño never explicitly embraced postmodernism, his biography and bibliography are inevitably marked by the historical transformations addressed by postmodern explorations.

Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that he ever saw postmodernism as an answer -nor, to be frank, that postmodernism was even in his radar. Pastén recognizes this when he states that Bolaño "was a committed author who resisted the playful, apolitical nature of postmodernism at every stretch" (11-12). That is apparently the reason why he titles his study *Postmodernism of resistance*, though one wonders, wouldn't it be more precise to entertain an actual *resistance to postmodernism*? Additionally, one of the main obstacles to reading Bolaño within the tenets of postmodernism is precisely the real presence of the *sacred* in his work. It is challenging to decipher *2666*, Bolaño's masterpiece, without a metaphysical consideration of Evil and, for that matter, of what theologian Rudolf Otto would deem *the holy* -that radical otherness that haunts secular life. Bolaño was keenly aware of the various historical incarnations of the *mysterium iniquitatis* -from Nazism to Pinochet-, and deftly weaved the into his literature; however, this whole dimension doesn't find its way into Pastén's thinking. In any regard, *Postmodernism of Resistance in Bolaño's Fiction and Poetry* has many qualities that make it an important read for Bolaño critics.