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This is a monumental task and a monumental volume: entries on sixty-nine authors from Mexico, Central America, the Hispanophone Caribbean, the Greater Andean Region, the Southern Cone, and U.S. Latino novelists. That the book is in English is significant in several ways, beginning with the idea of English as a lingua franca. That is, despite the fact that the literature in question (setting aside Latino authors) is in Spanish, the editors assume, quite rightly, that, if someone in Europe, Asia, or North America learns about a Spanish American author whose work has just been translated or finds a reference to a potentially interesting Spanish American writer in an article in *TLS* or *Le Monde*, there is a good possibility that that person reads English. This in no way argues against a Spanish-language edition of the book (there should certainly be one), but it does take one of today's linguistic realities into account.

Suppose a reader finds tantalizing references to the Chilean writer Diamela Eltit (Chile, 1949), finds the Wikipedia entry inadequate, and turns to Michael J. Lazzara's article (320-327). Lazzara first locates Eltit in a Chilean context: "the 1980s—during which the Pinochet regime (1973-90) consolidated its project of extermination, censorship, and neoliberal shock therapy." He then defines Eltit as a writer who confronts and criticizes her immediate context: "Her books . . . offer a searing reflection on the ways in which individual bodies and the social body have suffered and resisted the pressures of dictatorship, colonialism, imperialism, and the imposition of neoliberal economic policy." Taken at face value, this statement paints Eltit as a Chilean muckraker. This is true, but Lazzara might have added that Eltit's writing is extremely challenging, often impossible for the ordinary reader to follow.

Lazzara, importantly, connects Eltit to other forms of artistic expression, especially to the Chilean avant-garde *Avanzada* group, which included the important "mail-art" creator Eugenio Dittborn and the poet Raúl Zurita, and, later, with CADA (Art Actions Collective). This gives

Lazzara the opportunity to talk about Eltit's work as a performance artist, in particular about *Maipú* (1980) "in which she cut and burned herself in a brothel on Maipú street while reading fragments of *Lumpérica*, still a work-in-progress." This important dimension of Eltit's career is often overlooked in academic discussions of her writing.

Inevitably, Lazzara falls back on cliché: "*Lumpérica* challenges the form of the novel itself insofar as it has no plot in a traditional sense" (321). The novel as a genre has no discernable form, and what a traditional plot might be is anyone's guess. On thin ice, Lazzarra tries to encapsulate *Lumpérica*: "Eltit, throughout this and other novels, seems to be hyper-conscious of the post-structuralist paradigm that it is impossible to exist outside the body and of [sic] language" (321). This is a bit cryptic, because it leaves readers in a no-man's-land wondering if making sense of Eltit is worthwhile. But despite these quibbles, Lazzara's informative entry on Diamela Eltit is an excellent point of departure for anyone interested in Eltit's career.

Jorge Volpi (Mexico, 1968) is a widely read novelist whose social concerns, while perhaps less passionately expressed than Eltit's, are just as strong. Tomás Regalado López introduces Volpi much in the way Lazzara presents Eltit, that is, by locating Volpi in a Mexican context. He points out that Volpi's first major publication was a novella, *A pesar del oscuro silencio* (1992), whose subject is the poet Jorge Cuesta (1903-1942), a founding member of the *Contemporáneos* group. Regalado López does not dwell on the fact that Volpi began his career with a novella, but with the fact that the novella is an idea-centered genre sets the stage for Volpi's later works, which are all novels of ideas.

An important parallel between Volpi and Eltit is Volpi's participation in the Crack movement. As Regalado López observes, "In 1996 he [Volpi] wrote the 'Crack Manifesto' along with Ricardo Chávez Castañeda, Ignacio Padilla, Pedro Ángel Palou, and Eloy Urroz" (100). The term "Crack" refers not to drugs but to economic collapse, the opposite of the Boom of the 1960s Spanish American novel. The manifesto, following Regalado López, is a double rejection, of magical realism (i.e., García Márquez) and of the non-experimental narratives of the Post-Boom. Volpi would not only advocate a return to intellectually charged authors such as Cervantes, Lawrence Sterne, or Julio Cortázar, but would put his ideas into practice.

Volpi achieved star status with *En busca de Klingsor* (1999), as Regalado López notes: "*Klingsor* is surely one of the novels that helped to define that era [the end of the 20th-century] in the region's narrative, and may be one of the last great Latin American novels of the twentieth century" (100). A large claim, justified by the novel's intellectual rigor: "The novel's main contribution lies in its narrative technique, a discourse structured to reflect the paradigm shift from Newtonian to quantum

physics” (101). Some critics expressed outrage at Volpi’s non-Mexican focus, but Regalado López points out that lurking behind Volpi are figures like Borges and, of course, Roberto Bolaño (Chile, 1953-2003).

Since the name Bolaño appears in the volume’s title, one might expect the entry on him to be longer than others. But an egalitarian spirit prevails, so Carlos Burgos’s entry on Bolaño is roughly the same size as all the others. His task, therefore, is more difficult because any discussion of Bolaño demands delving into the author’s biography. Burgos points out that Bolaño contributed to his self-mythification, especially in his account of his time in Chile during the 1973 coup and his subsequent escape. As Burgos notes, “These Chilean and Salvadoran experiences have been belied by some of his acquaintances from those years, although both inform several of his poems, short stories, and novels” (302).

Again, as with Eltit and Volpi, we must come to grips with Bolaño’s relationship to his immediate literary context, which in his case was the Mexico of the 1970s. The “Infrarealist” movement Bolaño invented with poet Mario Santiago Papasquiaro is a kind of performance: Bolaño and his friends would disrupt poetry readings or lectures with an eye to deflating the preeminent figures in contemporary Mexican literature, especially Octavio Paz. As Burgos points out, “the spirit of that time is significantly captured in *Los detectives salvajes*, one of his major works” (302). *Los detectives salvajes* [SD] is certainly a point of departure for many Bolaño readers, so Burgos’s presentation is essential for anyone trying to grasp Bolaño’s *oeuvre*.

SD constitutes a paradigm that we see enacted or considered in the work of Eltit and Volpi. As Burgos says, “The novel then gives way to a series of voices and fragments that are multiplied in space and time (125-523). These microstories or vignettes are not gathered in ascending order but discontinuously, full of multiple directions” (302). Bolaño, therefore, begins with a narrative order that he subverts, allowing chaos to encroach on the artificial utopia of literary totality. Bolaño’s acceptance of disorder recalls Volpi’s presentation of the triumph of quantum over Newtonian physics or Eltit’s embrace of self-destructive violence, so despite his grand-master status, Bolaño remains firmly anchored in a Spanish American context. Burgos’s presentation is excellent.

The Contemporary Spanish-American Novel: Bolaño and After is an important contribution to our knowledge of fiction in Spanish America today. The three entries discussed here, in no way a valid sample, constitute merely a hint of the riches it contains. Congratulations are due to Will H. Corral, Juan E. de Castro, and Nicholas Birns for bringing this seemingly impossible project to fruition.