

Oscar Guardiola-Rivera

Forensic Procedure/Fantastic Critique

When I was child during the years of the apotheosis of war in Colombia, my parents and their kin would sit around a barbacoa meal after long hard-work days, tell each other stories, exchange sound-system secrets, dance moves, beats and other gifts. They went backwards, crossing a threshold in memory and timespace, like the tricksters of their stories or the animals of the Magdalena River who back into crevices to look out for enemies, or for the new day.

It was how they sought to cleanse the atmosphere from constant news of violence and despair. Cleansing, or *limpieza*, had come to mean the killing of defenceless people – a purge of the unclean. But the word was also used in a far older life history for healing a person or place from spirit attack. As writerly poets, we can draw in and out the inner life of words like these. They're alive in the stories we hear, the songs we sing, the moves we make when we dance. They enable a fantastic critique. Moving backwards, looking forwards, like wave or weave in a pendular dance between memory and the plague of erasure, healing each other from despair about the present-future and re-envisioning what's to come.

In such poetry and story there's a sense of recognition – of each other as equals, of the passing of old positions and the creation of new ones. Seeing and hearing them as children, a dream appeared before us: an/other position. One in which we could appreciate the different hues and nuances of the wider world, without forgetting the tree, the trunk, and the roots of our local world – one able, in the words of Costa Rican-Puerto Rican writer Carlos Fonseca, 'to inscribe itself within Latin American coordinates.'

This *WritersMosaic* edition of UK-based Latinx writers comes from that recognition. It asks, 'what would our world look like if, through this capacity for differentiation, something different emerged?' My father, a black man from the Caribbean, called that capacity 'the vision of the Nohor.' A Nohor is a semi-sorcerer in Africa, meaning a sorcerer through his father; he can see with forensic precision the inner worlds of others and project them in fantastic dream-cinemas. The UK-based Latino/a writers included in this collection find themselves in the same position. They now live in the world of the Nohor, dwelling within and without, in between two lands: the one we call Britain and the other our ancestors called Abya Yala, 'the flourishing land', now known as the Americas.

That position emerges when peoples are forced to mark out their meaning amid a stream of changing signs and orientations. You know the feeling: the horizon quivers while crossing the threshold, and you lose any sense of above and below, before and after. That hallucinatory, 'metamorphic sublime' characterises our current outlook as thinkers, artists and creators – as storytellers. Our becoming 'mimetic beings in wonderlands of what until recently was pure make believe.'ⁱ

That's what it is to be in *la condición de la frontera*, the state of being at the border. It's what migrants feel – a churning sense of contingency, chance, impermanence. It's also a common theme of the poetry and non-fiction and philosophical essays coming in the wake of the novel's high point during Latin America's literary Boom of the 1960s and '70s. Together with a continuing trend of brilliant novels published by authors in and from the region (Carlos Fonseca in the UK being an exemplary instance), there's an ongoing 'golden age' of Latin American non-fiction, including critical and philosophical literature. The latter tends to be ignored and remains undervalued in the West, despite its worldwide impact in debates around 'the decolonial turn', decentring Western forms of knowledge, or 'the ontological turn', positing different ways of being in our different worlds. Here, we call for recognition of the alterity of that literature. We invite you to imagine what literature and science might look like if we were to take up the fantastic principle of chance as the flip side of fate – and to run with it!

Our proposition is simple: the forces that pulled and pushed our ancestors – which still pull and push all of us – shatter any linear perspective, instead turning our stories into an emerging web that enlaces the thorn trees, the trunk and the roots of our world. And then, just as happened when we saw and heard our parents singing verses and telling stories, that other land of our childhood emerges. Not a place, but a living, breathing network of communicating vessels. No longer the place of magical realism, we see and hear in retrospect what our parents were doing: creating for us a space to see the forest. The world. The planet.

Kicking off this *WritersMosaic* guest edition, my poem/manifesto 'Future Imperfect' explores our migrant/borderline condition, seeing living words and their alteration of perception as both forensic and fantastic. In conversation with Gerald Martin, the biographer of Gabriel García Márquez, we look back at the impact of 'magical realism' through newly published letters between three members of the so-called Latin American literary Boom – García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar and Carlos Fuentes.

The London-based writer and editor Juan Toledo celebrates of the active presence of UK-based Latinx literature today. And a constellation of five Latina poets – Ana María Reyes Barrios, Gaby Sambuccetti, Isabel del Rio, Juana Adcock, and Xaviera Ringeling – guide us through its polyphonic diversity.

These alternate voices resonate in counterpoint with sound and graphic artist Carolina Alonso Bejarano who reminds us of the premise on which Western literature has stood for too long: that literature begins with letters rather than voices. It does not. Together with the writerly poetry of Lester Gómez, she and the other writers in this collection help us to circle back through new alignments of the forensic and the fantastic. Obscured by a cultural logic of the present that sees and hears only itself – as if that were our final resting place – they rekindle an ongoing poetics of signs coming from elsewhere and elsewhere. We move in active presence.

ⁱ Michael Taussig, *Mastery of Non-Mastery in the Age of Meltdown* (Chicago University Press, 2020) p.7: ‘Running through all of this is a colonial endowment of mimicry miming itself – what I call mimetic excess.’ Taussig conceived of the ‘metamorphic sublime’ as the outcome of mimetic excess while studying oil palm plantations in the Colombian Caribbean with law professor and anthropologist Juan Felipe García. Together, Taussig, García and I have been accompanying and learning from a native peasant community of dwellers in that part of Latin America for over twenty years. See, Juan Felipe García, *El exterminio de la isla de Papayal* (Editorial Universidad Javeriana, 2019). Also, Juan Felipe García & Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, *A Journal of the Twenty-First Century Years of Plague*, forthcoming.

Oscar Guardiola-Rivera is a writerly poet and award-winning author who teaches philosophy & human rights in London. He is being educated by his kin – wordsmiths among the native peasant community of Las Pavas in northern Colombia, people whom he has accompanied for twenty years. His further visionary writing in *Night of the World. Book Two* is forthcoming in 2024 (the87press), as is his experimental essay *This Will Make You Makeful* (Rowman & Littlefield), and, in late 2023, a wide-ranging Beyond Borders podcast in conversation with Aminatta Forna and Mark Muller Stuart.

A recording of this interview can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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