

MICHELLE CLAYTON. *Poetry in Pieces: César Vallejo and Lyric Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2011. 329 pp.

Through insightful close readings, extensive research into the artistic and political contexts framing Vallejo's work, and attentive consideration of criticism preceding her own, Michelle Clayton's *Poetry in Pieces: César Vallejo and Lyric Modernity* offers a compelling new look at one of Latin America's most celebrated and perplexing poets. While addressing key differences between Vallejo's four collections, written in equal parts in Peru and Paris, Clayton's analysis transcends a conventional plotting of Vallejo's poetry along indigenist, avant-garde, and socialist lines. She characterizes his work as consistently fueled by "body language" – a conjoined semiotics of word and gesture that develops and takes different forms over the course of his work, but which always foregrounds the activity of bodies attempting to articulate themselves in a shattered context" (2). Her six chapters cogently demonstrate how fragments of shifting modes and positions, informed by the poet's variable and often peripherally experienced affiliations, constitute a common denominator of Vallejo's work while making it difficult to pin down.

Clayton's first chapter outlines key intellectual debates framing the emergence of Vallejo's poetry, thus laying critical groundwork for her ensuing chronological discussion of his collections. A brief assessment of the genre of poetry vis-à-vis history is followed by an appraisal of the lyric in turn-of-the-century Peru and the more general displacement of *modernismo* by avant-garde experimentation to chart "Latin American poetry's shift early in the century from anachronism or timelessness toward a committed contemporaneity" (17). Here Clayton begins to articulate a vision of Vallejo's poetry as a space of constant movement "that attempts to connect lyric poetry and the modern subject with their momentary backdrops, exploring the effects of the latter on the former" (25).

In her second chapter, Clayton examines *Los heraldos negros* and *Trilce* side-by-side to examine "the corrosion of the lyric by a growing sense of linguistic estrangement and its invasion by the heterogeneous voices and discourses of modernity" (17). She highlights in particular Vallejo's progressive dismantling of language and heightened incorporation of sensorial, oral, and corporal materiality in these works. To some extent, criticism imitates art in this chapter, as Clayton's back-and-forth movement between Vallejo's first two collections may occasionally disorient the reader. Yet this technique effectively illuminates the germination of *Trilce*'s radical voice in *Los heraldos negros* and sets the stage for her next chapter.

Clayton zooms in on *Trilce* in her third chapter, analyzing three predominant and interrelated modes by which Vallejo's second collection overhauls the poetics of representation: an attack on symbolism that privileges a material and sometimes abrasive metonymy over metaphor; the elaboration of a "poetics of the

oblique, the mixed, and the fragmentary” (18) in place of easily consumable regional imagery; and “the incorporation of waste, of absence, of nonvalue and negativity into a lyrical rethinking of presence and potentiality” (18). Clayton proposes that *guano* – a waste material that simultaneously evokes bodily shame, exploitation, wealth, collapse, and potential regeneration – constitutes a key image through which Vallejo implicitly comments on history and suggests the possibility of “turning absence into presence, negatives into positives, and deriving a future (poetic, national, continental) from a fertile past and a fallow present” (133).

The fourth chapter demonstrates Vallejo’s disinclination to tie his poetry to either *indigenista* or avant-garde polemics by examining his rare theoretical writings against those of José Carlos Mariátegui, who called for a radical modernization of the lyric, yet narrowly read Vallejo as an indigenist poet. Clayton argues that Vallejo implicitly redirected limited approaches to his poetry to address broader cultural debates and advocate “a full concordance between personal sensibility, poetic technique, and revolutionary commitment” (144–45). She concludes that Vallejo most clearly articulated this technique not in theory, but through the practice of “an exploratory spontaneity, in the sense of a continual expressive and physical adaptation to the changing circumstances of modernity” (150).

Clayton’s fifth chapter examines the journalism Vallejo crafted in Paris, which she sees as “a crucial hinge between his early and late poetry and ... indispensable for understanding his parallel aesthetic and political development” (152). She details how Vallejo’s linguistic and economic marginality placed him on the fringes of cosmopolitan Parisian culture and fed into his “parodic ethnographic reports on international modernity, revealing the pressures placed on both bodies and languages by interwar geopolitics and by cultural and social striation” (20). She convincingly suggests that, among other influences, film – and particularly Chaplin, whose reach across social classes Vallejo admired – stimulated his journalistic montage.

In her final chapter, Clayton questions reductive readings of the more overt political engagement expressed in *Poemas humanos* and *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*, demonstrating how they reveal anxieties over the place of the individual within the collective and lyric voice amid social crisis. She suggests that the wit, formal complexity, and variable tone of these works, alongside their inconsistent depictions of subjects, complicate their interpretation; she further proposes that, for Vallejo, “this complicated intentionality ... is the only way for this poetry to rescue subjectivity: as an excess that cannot be neatly co-opted by economics, politics, sociology, bureaucracy, or lyric poetry” (193). Vallejo’s final poetry, Clayton concludes, leaves an image of the poet and his verse in a state of self-critical motion and demands that his readers likewise “stay shifting, contingent, measured, and always out of place” (249).

This last observation underscores one of the virtues of Clayton's book: she does not presume to completely iron out Vallejo's oft-noted difficulty. Her expansive research and comparative analyses frequently illuminate what the poet's imprecise writing and biography leave obscure, but at times she encourages us to hear what the gaps in meaning themselves say, particularly within the shifting contexts in which Vallejo wrote. In tackling Vallejo's complexities, Clayton herself writes with sophistication yet utter clarity. *Poetry in Pieces* is an outstanding study that enriches not only our understanding of Vallejo, but also the broader fields of Latin American literature, international avant-garde culture, and modern poetry.

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ROBERT R. ELLIS. *They Need Nothing: Hispanic-Asian Encounters of the Colonial Period*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2012. x+241 pp.

El libro de Robert R. Ellis es una muestra del renovado interés que existe por los viajes de exploración y proyectos de colonización que las potencias europeas, y en especial España, desarrollaron en Asia. En este sentido, su libro continúa una línea abierta por textos como el de William L. Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (1959), o el de Pierre Chaunu, *Las Filipinas y el Pacífico de los ibéricos: siglos XVII-XVIII-XIX* (1976), y más recientemente por los estudios de Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (1988), y Linda A. Newson, *Conquest and Pestilence in the Early Spanish Philippines* (2009). Su aportación fundamental es la de presentar una visión coherente y bien entrelazada de las crónicas que constituyen el corpus fundamental que documenta la presencia hispánica en esta parte del mundo teniendo en cuenta las múltiples claves interpretativas que los estudios coloniales han proporcionado a la crítica en los últimos veinte años. Así, *They Need Nothing: Hispanic-Asian Encounters of the Colonial Period* es sobre todo un libro de interpretación y síntesis, más que un intento por hacer aflorar textos o documentos previamente desconocidos.

La primera parte del título del libro – “They Need Nothing” – pone de relevancia una de las observaciones fundamentales de los cronistas hispánicos en Asia. A diferencia de lo que ocurría en América, donde la necesidad de “civilizar” a los indígenas y sacarles de su aparente atraso era una razón frecuentemente ofrecida como justificación del proyecto colonial, en Asia el desarrollo de sociedades como la china o la japonesa hizo de ese argumento una alternativa inviable como justificación de la presencia europea. Por el contrario, ya desde los tiempos de Marco Polo distintas sociedades asiáticas, y en especial la China, se