

Introduction

On behalf of the *Mester* Editorial Board and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California, Los Angeles, it is my honor to introduce this forty-seventh volume of *Mester*. For our focal theme, we invited submissions that considered literature, culture, and linguistics in the fields of Iberian, Latin American, Brazilian, Lusophone African, Latinx, and Chicanx studies, especially those investigating issues in gender, sex, and sexuality increasingly central to the discussion and understanding of the aforementioned fields. The authors included in this issue cover a diverse range of responses to the theme, emphasizing the interconnections of gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and other power relations. Furthermore, multiple articles reflect innovative interdisciplinary approaches to literary studies, engaging with perspectives that further complicate our understandings of gender and sexuality, such as anthropology, art history, masculinities studies, queer studies, and urban studies. Several others consider the role of literary texts as critical sites of ideology and identity formation, given their representation of non-normative sexualities, defamiliarization of traditional understandings of violence, and mobilization of social awareness. As a result, this volume of *Mester* includes five articles that represent a wide panorama of critical approaches with a shared focus on the theme of “Gender and Sexuality.”

Mônica Carvalho Gimenes analyzes two short stories from contemporary Brazilian authors Amílcar Bettega Barbosa and Marcelino Freire with specific attention to the representation of crime and violence in the literature of the early 2000s. Engaging with anthropologist Teresa Caldeira’s concept of the “talk of crime,” Carvalho Gimenes argues for the inclusion of contemporary crime fiction in discussions of the “talk of crime,” demonstrating the unique contributions of Barbosa and Freire as authors who understand present-day manifestations of crime not as an issue unique to the contemporary city, but rather as the legacy of forms of violence, specifically, patriarchal and racially-motivated violence, dating back to the colonial era. Jorge Sánchez Cruz draws on the work of queer theory scholar Eve K. Sedgwick in order to challenge dominant readings of Roberto

Bolaño's seminal novel *Los detectives salvajes*. Sánchez Cruz contends that the novel's representation of relationships between men reveals a nuanced sexual continuum, which in turn challenges binary understandings of sexuality, gender, and acceptability. In a similar exercise, Eduardo Díaz engages with the field of masculinities studies in order to revisit Jorge Isaacs's *María* with a keen attention to the construction of a monolithic, ideal male citizen in recently independent Latin American nations in the 19th century, such as Colombia. Díaz further complicates this reading through a study of the novel's treatment of Jewish religious heritage, which along with the values of Old World aristocracy, come to represent antiquated models of masculinity due to the burgeoning influence of capitalism, which privileges action and self-sufficiency.

Returning to the contemporary moment, Sara Losada Coca and Emilio Ramón García turn their attention to the increasingly popular genre of flash fiction, or the *microrrelato*, in Latin America, and Catalan author Carme Riera's innovative fusion of the female police procedural and allusions to early modern German still lifes, respectively. Losada Coca studies the flash fiction collection *¡Basta!*, a recent series of anthologies denouncing gender-based violence, with publications throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Her analysis of the *¡Basta!* series effectively outlines the publication's unique position within the Latin American tradition of short fiction, as well as the significance of the series's aim to generate social awareness through a literary platform with strong ties to the rise of digital activism. Drawing on the field of art history, specifically the relationship between medieval philosophy and the Western still life genre, Ramón García interprets the symbolism inherent to the works of Georg Flegel, which factor heavily into the criminal plot of Carme Riera's *Naturaleza casi muerta*. Through a thorough analysis of such imagery, Ramón García connects the moral symbolism of the early modern still life genre to the problems and deficiencies plaguing contemporary society, which are effectively left unresolved despite the resolution of the novel's crime drama.

The four interviews included in this issue address a variety of topics within the broad fields of Latin American, Iberian, and Brazilian literary and cultural studies. In an interview with Cuban poet, writer, playwright, translator, director, producer, and scholar Susannah Rodríguez Drissi with questions by Allison Carlisle and Verónica

García Moreno, Rodríguez Drissi discusses her recent work *Houses Without Walls* and elaborates on her personal relationship to Cuba, the United States, and the ongoing legacy of the Cuban Revolution. Ana Gallego Cuiñas interviews Spanish authors Juan Bonilla, Andrés Neuman, and Marta Sanz on the current state of the Spanish-language novel, the role and significance of the *Quijote* in contemporary literary production, the problem of engaging readers in the 21st century, as well as the Spanish-language novel as Pan-Hispanic cultural patrimony. Verónica García Moreno interviews Spanish-born Islamic studies scholar Emilio González Ferrín, who offers perspectives on the Arab/Muslim presence in Europe and the emergence of a specifically European Islam, especially in the Mediterranean, and the enduring influence of Al-Andalus on contemporary Arabic literature. In an interview with Brazilian poet Sônia Marques with questions by Isaac Giménez, Marques elaborates on her personal relationship to language and the medium of poetry, literary influences, and her own unique position within the Brazilian literary landscape as a Pernambucan author. Lastly, our volume concludes with four book reviews covering books on love, sexuality, and politics in contemporary Cuba, 21st-century Chilean film, the oeuvre of Chilean-born director Raúl Ruiz and the global importance of Chilean cinema, and a translation of the work of ten Arab women poets into Spanish by Jaafar Al Aluni.

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Renee P. Rivera
 Editor-in-Chief, *Mester* XLVII
 University of California, Los Angeles

