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Nicolás Campisi's *The Return of the Contemporary: The Latin American Novel in the End Times* opens with a massive and catastrophic weather event, the kind of event to which our world is increasingly growing accustomed. The scene described comes from Pedro Mairal's 2005 novel *El año del desierto* (a book which is then analyzed in-depth in chapter 1, and it is a scene that, for Campisi, indexes how the various social, economic, political, and environmental crises that we experience in contemporary life "cannot be considered isolated phenomena" (3). The weather event – *la intemperie* – that serves as a narrative motor for the novel causes time to move backward and thus serves as the first example of the various literary reflections on what Campisi terms "the contemporary," a temporality that is fundamentally paradoxical. Already in the opening paragraphs, with the cluster of questions surrounding *la intemperie* to which Campisi draws our attention, attentive readers will understand that this important book is ambitious in its scope. It is a book that is simultaneously sharply attuned to questions of aesthetics and literary form, social, and political concerns like the Anthropocene and neoliberalism, as well as theoretical considerations on history and time.

Composed of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion, *The Return of the Contemporary* surveys novels from several Latin American nations, including Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, in each case analyzing two novels side by side to consider various themes (crisis, ecohorror, memory, post memory, history) or more precisely, literature after the end of history and more. The choice to structure the book around the analysis of pairs of novels from different countries signals Campisi's interest in thinking beyond the scope of the nation-state. He chooses this broader frame because "the contemporary is a battle over this century's historical identity, which becomes visible when the voices of a multiplicity of actors are heard on a global scale or, in this case, on a hemispheric one" (6).

In the book's introduction, Campisi offers several comments about how he conceives of "the contemporary," a term that we intuitively understand as meaning either "now" or "at the same time as," but whose field of meaning is broadened and used in specific ways for this book. Drawing inspiration from thinkers like Paolo Virno, Hannah Arendt, and Georges Didi-Huberman, Campisi conceives of the contemporary as "a renewed inclination toward the present, a need to reformulate

the question about what it means to live under conditions of global emergency at a time when humanity has jeopardized its survival as a species" (4). Later in the introduction he adds that the contemporary is "a notion that questions the uniformity of temporal becoming under capitalist conditions, emphasizing the anachronisms and counter rhythms that detach us from the perpetual present of neoliberal politics" (21). The notion of a non-uniform temporality lies at the heart of what Campisi points us to in the novels that he reads in the book's five chapters.

It is clear from the start that Campisi views the 21st-century world as one marked by overlapping crises, so we can begin by noting a couple of things about the very notion of crisis. The ubiquity of the term "crisis" begs for critical thought about the extent to which it holds much explanatory power for the present. There are different ways to come to this. For example, we might think of crisis as a protracted state of affairs for the world today such that "crisis" no longer indicates a moment of rupture but rather a long-term state – crisis as condition – or we could also call into question the implicit teleology of crisis or related terms (a crisis is an opening up of a moment that would, presumably, close), which would lead us to conclude that we are in a world historical situation that gives no indication of closing. Neither of these are directions that Campisi takes the reader in, and so I mention them not to criticize the book for not being what I or someone else might have written, but rather to note part of what makes *The Return of the Contemporary* a unique and important contribution. This book draws our attention to how Latin American novelists "create aesthetic devices to capture the present and open future horizons when causal relations between temporal orders have become excessively blurred" (7). Without saying it explicitly, Campisi is at least partially aligned with thinkers who question the utility of the term crisis since, for Campisi, a result of what he calls the contemporary is a non-coincidence with the present. Our relationship to time (and this is shown in the novels he reads) is more than just out of joint; following Walter Benjamin, Campisi emphasizes again that "the connections between past, present, and future are *blurred*" (24, my emphasis). Having captured how this plays out aesthetically in turn-of-the-century novels is one of the book's most important contributions. Campisi is able to do this thanks to having "sharpen[ed] [his] ear so that the novels themselves dictate the terms of the debate…" (23).

In chapter 1, "The Return of Nature: The Novel of the Crisis," Campisi looks to the Argentinian economic collapse of 2001 "as a perfect example of how history, after the turn of the century, started to move backward" (30). He reads two novels that take 2001 as their jumping off point: Pedro Mairal's *El año del desierto* (2005) and Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé* (2015). He argues that both authors "conceive of the writer as a pirate who introduces new frameworks and

protocols to revisit cultural and literary traditions, casting the contemporary as the time of repetitions…" (31). In *El año del desierto*, the 21st-century economic collapse sends historical time moving backward, as the Argentine national imaginary is reversed and "the nation becomes an obsolete symbolic structure…" (36). This inversion is metaphorized in other elements of the novel as well, for example a dress purchased by the novel's protagonist, María, which goes from being a fetishized object of desire to mere protection from the harsh environment. In Campisi's view, in *El año del desierto* Mairal "conceives of time as a dialectical image" (44), and "conjures the literary tradition in order to free himself from it…" (43).

The reading of *El año del desierto* is paired with an analysis of Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé*. Whereas in Mairal time moves simultaneously forward and backward, in Indiana "time is a tentacular entity…part of 'an erratic system' that presupposes neither beginnings nor endings" (44). Like *El año del desierto*, *La mucama de Omicunlé* moves between multiple temporal planes that are linked, in this case, to different epochs of Dominican national history, but central to Campisi's reading are two symbols from the natural world that represent different relationships to historical time: a sea anemone and a ceiba tree. Campisi's reading of this novel draw's inspiration from Donna Haraway, given that the sea anemone's tentacles point to "relational, trans-historical, and multi-species thinking" (47) and the ceiba tree "suggest[s] rootedness to the national soil" (51). For Campisi, taken together, these symbols reveal Indiana's insistence on the need to "establish long-term alliances with the nonhuman forces that populate the planet…" (50).

One of *The Return of the Contemporary*'s best chapters is chapter 2, "A Toxic History of the Present: The Novel of Ecohorror." This chapter pairs a reading of Argentine novelist Samanta Schweblin's *Distancia de rescate* (2014) with Mexican novelist Guadalupe Nettel's *El huésped* (2006). In this chapter, Campisi asks how these novels stage the existential threat of the Anthropocene and the attendant toxicity, contamination, and risk that either contribute to or are results of this planetary problem. Following Sianne Ngai's work on "ugly feelings," Campisi categorizes these novels as "ecohorror," which he describes as "works that inspire negative emotions such as anxiety, disgust, and uncertainty in order to delineate landscapes of contagion and toxicity and convey the urgency of determining the origins of bodily and environmental illness" (63). In Campisi's reading, part of what unites these two novels is their insistence on the "invisible and omnipresent" nature of the Anthropocene threat, drawing on long histories of natural resource extraction in Argentina and Mexico (64). In *El huésped*, the deep time of Mexican history is evoked through the novel's setting in the capital city's underground. Drawing on work by Ivonne del Valle and Mark Anderson, Campisi

points us to the ways that, since the colonial period, the logics of extractivism have positioned the underground as little more than a site of future surplus value, an instrumentalization of the natural world that has led to the not yet formalized but still very real Anthropocene era. Campisi argues that The Thing that takes hold in the protagonist's body "becomes a temporal device corresponding to the neoliberal paradigm because it undermines people's bodies like an internal parasite, even those who take refuge in the underground to fight the extractive model that has invaded most spheres of contemporary life" (75). The space of the underground comes to stand simultaneously for the past (a non-place awaiting capitalist extraction), the present (where Mexico City's waste is relegated to), and the future (ground zero for ecological disasters to come). The astute conclusion to which Campisi arrives about *El huésped* is that Nettel shows us how, ultimately, "the distinctions between production and waste have become inoperative" (78).

Campisi's discussion of *Distancia de rescate* is similarly incisive. Again turning to national literary and cultural history, he notes how Schweblin's narrative strategy of never mentioning the words pesticides or glyphosate mirrors the invisible nature of agro-toxins, especially important given that the novel takes place in the Argentine interior. Going back at least as far as the early 19th century, the Argentine social imaginary has been shaped by "the fantasies of boundless wealth…a wealth that is currently symbolized by the genetically modified crop of the soybean" (83). Whereas 19th-century Argentinian thinkers promoted the population of the pampas as a path to national bounty (Alberdi's famous "gobernar es poblar"), Schweblin instead presents the problem of "sick bodies of children who cannot inhabit even their most immediate present" (84). The reading of Schweblin is expansive; Campisi covers agro-toxins, the neoliberal drive for short-term profitability, narratives of failed motherhood, the zombification of children, the logics of calculation, and the aesthetics of gothic literature in a chapter that is certain to become an obligatory reference for future studies on *Distancia de rescate* and other work by Schweblin.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to narratives of memory and post memory, respectively. In "The Contemporary Plantation: Memories of Slavery and the Oral History Novel," Campisi studies Colombian author Juan Cárdenas's *Elástico de sombra* (2020) and Brazilian author Itamar Vieira Junior's *Torto arado* (2019). Campisi reads these as "novels about the silent witnesses erased by modern technologies of archiving and cataloging," and argues that "both authors invert the logic of the first-person account characteristic of the neoliberal era and the autobiographical slave narrative through the use of free indirect style, which reproduces syncretic religious practices…and gives way to the collective formation of meaning" (94). In "The Children Return: The Novel of Postmemory," Campisi

analyzes *A resistência* (2015) by Brazilian writer Julián Fuks and *Conjunto vacío* (2015) by Mexican writer Verónica Gerber Bicecci. Campisi argues that "Fuks and Gerber Bicecci question literature's capacity to transmit empathy and its complicity in perpetuating the pain of others…" and he highlights "the opacity of meaning experienced by the generation who grew up during or shortly after the dictatorial period" (124).

In chapter 5, "Ways of Being Contemporary: The Novel After the End of History," Campisi reads Mexican writer Valeria Luiselli's *Los ingrávidos* (2011) alongside Chilean writer Alejandro Zambra's *Bonsái* (2006), both novels being texts that "revolve around the secondary actors of history…to politicize the present and create new starting points for literature written after the turn of the millenium" (157). Additionally, both novels make use of the tree as a symbol – in Luiselli we have a dying plant that must be nurtured by new generations (new literature must care for and make space for the past) and in Zambra we have, obviously, the bonsai tree, a tree that must be carefully managed for something new to emerge (or, in Zambra's own words: "to write is to read an unwritten text"). This closing chapter to *The Return of the Contemporary* does the best job of homing in on the book's central thesis. Here we have two novels that, as Campisi convincingly argues, exist in a present moment structured by the enigmas of history – the fuzzy archives and often incomplete memories that inform the present, making the experience of the secondary characters a non-teleological experience. *The Return of the Contemporary* thus closes with a compelling and interesting reading of "the historicity of the literatures of the present [that is] found in anachronisms and nonlinear temporalities" (11).

That this book is not bound by national literary cultures (indeed, it is not even bound to a single linguistic community, in that Campisi studies novels in Spanish, Portuguese, and, in the short conclusion "History in the Present Tense," English) means that it will find a home in several different sub-fields of Latin American literary and cultural studies. There are national literatures in the Latin American continent that the book does not directly consider, but the scope of Campisi's approach positions this book as a Latin American generalist critique that should and certainly will be read in language departments across the US. Additionally, a planned translation into Spanish means that this book will soon be even more readily accessible to students and scholars of Latin American literature in Spanish-speaking contexts. The readability of the book makes it appropriate for advanced undergraduate students, while its rigor and theoretical sophistication mean it will also be intellectually productive for graduate students and professors at various career stages.

Finally, while I am tempted to close this review by highlighting the timeliness of the work given the increasingly widespread attention arts and humanities research of all stripes is giving to question of endings, the Anthropocene, the uncertain status (at best) of the future, and related topics, to follow *The Return of the Contemporary*'s argument, it would be equally appropriate to highlight the fact that the book is concerned with topics that have, in one way or another, been part of our critical lexicon for a long time. We come back to the questions that Campisi asks over and over again, because they are questions that are simultaneously urgent for attempting to understand the contemporary while also casting new light on both the past and potential futures. The delicate weaving of the multiple temporalities at stake in these novels makes of *The Return of the Contemporary* an important work that is certain to influence future scholarship for many years.