

desplazamiento de la doctrina religiosa y de la voluntad del padre, la manipulación del hijo y el dominio administrativo de un imperio en decadencia donde pretende seguir manteniendo el orden, la represión y el castigo” (131).

Habiendo establecido que en *La Regenta* existe un “masoquismo transgresor”, en el segundo capítulo (“Yo tu esclava y tú mi amo”), Godón fija su mirada crítica en los dos modernos tipos de contratos matrimoniales enarbolados por la Iglesia y la filosofía krausista basados en un supuesto compañerismo y propone que la alianza de esclavitud que la protagonista establece con el Magistral por medio de una serie de cartas funciona a modo de “contratos masoquistas” que explotan “la farsa de la nueva concepción del matrimonio burgués” (55). Al igual que los otros capítulos éste está ampliamente documentado y contextualizado por medio de los discursos dominantes de la época acerca del matrimonio, entre los cuales incluye acertadamente *El contrato social* de Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

No me cabe la menor duda que *La pasión esclava* es un libro importante. Godón no solo cumple con su cometido de abrir un espacio de reflexión en torno a la dialéctica masoquista en la novela de Alas, sino que la reflexión que nos brinda es rica, compleja y sumamente sugerente también para aquellos que se dedican a explorar la narrativa decimonónica realista y doméstica del medio siglo, repleta, como lo está, de figuras femeninas que con su propio consentimiento son esclavas en la dinámica del masoquismo. El convincente argumento acerca de la centralidad del masoquismo en el texto de Alas se fundamenta en un amplio conocimiento teórico junto con un sólido entendimiento de la formación discursiva del siglo XX y de sus prácticas culturales. Resta decir que da gusto leer *La pasión esclava* cuya prosa es sumamente lúcida y clara, lo cual no siempre es el caso en textos que manejan la compleja teoría de nuestros tiempos.

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ANÍBAL GONZÁLEZ. *In Search of the Sacred Book: Religion and the Contemporary Latin American Novel*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018. 244 pp.

At its core, Aníbal González's *In Search of the Sacred Book* is a masterly study of the presence and effect of religious discursive mechanisms within Latin American narrative artistic technique. This study works against the idea that the novel is simply the genre of secularization; that is, against the idea that the novel, unlike the “romantics' ambitious theologico-poetic project”

(15), is founded on unbelief and disillusionment, to the point where it leaves us with nothing but a vacuum of “nihilism and platitudes,” as González warns by way of Octavio Paz’s pronouncements on modernity in *El arco y la lira* (1956). *In Search of the Sacred Book* seeks to destabilize Lukács’s claim (cited in the opening lines of the book) that “The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God.” If the book were to be reduced to a single proposal it would be that, against the dismantling of foundations and the experience of the abyss that European literature offers, Latin American writers have sought to avoid modern nihilism by infusing a sense of the numinous into works that ultimately give shape to a Latin American idea of community and identity. For González, the sacralization of the novel allowed Latin American authors to strengthen “its cultural prestige in societies where religion was still dominant” in order to make “it capable of more effectively intervening in critical debates about the nation and its issues;” and he adds: “Infusing these texts about worldly matters ... with a sense of the holy gave their portraits of Latin American life and culture an added dimension and deeper resonance” (186-87).

González knows that the sacred, even when presented as the secularized sacred without transcendence seen in the modernist novel (as in Joyce’s epiphanies), is not foreign to the genre. What he wants to underscore is that in Latin America there are what he considers “more urgent impulses” shaping the destiny of the genre’s incorporation of the holy (26). Not so much the anxiety caused by the death of God, and not so much the substitution of nationalism for the decline of religious feeling – what distinguishes certain important examples of the Latin American novel is the investment in working against the forces conspiring to weaken “the feelings of collective identity” (26). It is in this context that we should understand the title of the introduction, “A Literary Trinity: The Novel, the Sacred, and the Nation.” For González, “religion and nationalism come together in a series of key works of the Latin American novel in which the nation becomes the transcendent ‘secular sacred’ of which the novel becomes the holy vessel, its sacred scripture” (27). With that aim, the book moves from the naturalist novel (Federico Gamboa and Manuel Zeno Gandía) to the post-boom texts of Elena Poniatowska, Fernando Vallejo, and Roberto Bolaño, by way of the “literary theology” at work in Jorge Luis Borges, María Luisa Bombal, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and José Lezama Lima.

Space limitations do not allow me to summarize the insights that the book offers regarding such a vast collection of texts. That the book does justice to the work of all of these authors while at the same time outlining a different reading of the development of the novel as a genre is only one of its achievements. Without minimizing that achievement, however, it is

possible to see a deep ambivalence in González's proposal, which touches on the very question of literary faith that underwrites much of what is of interest in this book. As a literary critic, González seems to be constrained in his affirmation of a need for (literary) faith; however, it is too timid in that regard, for what is at stake is nothing less than the stability of the social. On one hand, religious discourse is decoded to the point where it is shown as a mere textual effect, an artistic technique, which reveals the "transcendental" as a form of fiction, thereby robbing it of its status as absolute; on the other, that fictional faith is presented as absolutely necessary if we are to steer clear of the growing desert of fragmentation and senselessness. It is not that González is not clear about his position, stated most visibly in the section on Borges while commenting on Flaubert. There he claims that, after modern literature has managed to show us the ultimate emptiness that lies where the foundations were supposed to stand, the philosophical and political consequences seem obvious and go without saying. Flaubert's "literary theology" results in a concept of the novel that is "fundamentally nihilistic" and which "tended toward quietism" to which González only adds a rhetorical question: "What else could be done after contemplating emptiness?" (57). The specificity of Latin American fiction lies in the alternative it proposes to this Flaubertian result—and that alternative is the novel's knotting with the nation and the sacred, the holy trinity already mentioned. If it is true that nothing religious can be destroyed simply by the work of logic, science, philology, or literary criticism, perhaps it is because it is our religious archive itself which brings to light that it is the withdrawal of God that takes the grounding out from under all human institutions. That God is not here is what makes religion possible in the first place, but it is also what prevents the religious from ever being fulfilled. It is possible to read, even if against the grain of some of González's insights, some of the political consequences of contemplating that absence in the texts studied here as most certainly not leading to quietism. But this is a tack that is set aside in the name of the sacrosanctity of Latin American identity – perhaps a necessary fiction, but a fiction first and last.

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JOSÉ EDUARDO GONZÁLEZ. *Appropriating Theory: Ángel Rama's Critical Work*. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2017. 232 pp.

Ángel Rama (1926-83) is known in North American academic circles for research on Spanish American *modernismo*, conceptualizations of narrative