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DOI:10.17951/lsmll.2025.49.3.1-7

## Critical Epistemologies from Latin America and Spain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

According to sociocritical theories, every cultural text – including literary texts – functions as a site of social inscription. Literature, in this sense, is not merely a “reflection” of the social but a space in which social discourses are negotiated, transformed, and refracted. And yet, the relationship between the literary text and its extratextual world, i.e. its social, historical, and ideological “outside”, is anything but linear, seamless, or innocent. As early as 1970, Mikhail Bakhtin formulated a crucial distinction between what is “given” (*dannoe*) and what is “created” (*sozdannoe*), drawing attention to the complex negotiations that unfold at the border between the self and the other. This threshold – the locus of the *dialogic* – is where meaning is not simply transmitted, but made, unmade, and remade. It is precisely within this dynamic that M.-Pierrette Malcuzyński extends Bakhtin’s model by introducing the notion of the “projected” (*zadannoe*), a concept that draws attention to the anticipatory and constructive force of discourse. Resonating with Bakhtin’s own emphasis on the dialogical and the heteroglossic, the “projected” elucidates the epistemological and ideological conditions that shape the literary field. In this way, the text becomes not only a receptacle of the social but a volatile site of epistemic possibility and contestation.

Following these conceptual frameworks, this special issue on “Critical Epistemologies from Latin America and Spain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” aims to examine the modalities through which the “given” is inscribed in the “created” and “projected”. We explore how sociality enters into, is mediated by, and is reconfigured within artistic texts, and, equally crucially, how the “created” reshapes the social field. The literary text, in this view, is not a passive reflection of reality but an active, if unstable, agent in its very transformation.

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From this sociocritical perspective, literary analysis becomes the labour of restoring literature's social intelligibility. This entails tracing the discourses—political, ideological, affective – that constitute the text and its conditions of emergence. In doing so, the contributors to this dossier affirm the literary text's autonomy, not in the sense of isolation from the world, but as a site of singular articulation: a space in which social antagonisms are reworked, contested, and reframed.

At the same time, we insist upon the reciprocal movement between text and world. The text bears the marks of the world it inhabits, just as it intervenes in, refracts, and reconfigures that world. Social discourses do not arrive in the text in a pure or unmediated form; rather, it is shaped by the singular crises of the producing subject and by the broader structures of antagonism that traverse any given society. At this critical juncture, we must, following Marc Angenot (1998), resist the temptation to speak of “social discourse” in the singular. The notion of “the social discourse” implies a coherence and unity that does not hold. Polyphony and heteroglossia are not inherently democratic or inclusive. On the contrary, the concept itself – the social discourse – produces the illusion of a unified field, masking the antagonistic and contingent nature of discursive hegemony. What we encounter, in reality, is a temporary sedimentation of power: a dominant formation arising from the conflictual struggle among competing social discourses for symbolic legitimacy.

Central to this process is the inscription of ideology in literature and the implicated positionality of critics, scholars, and readers. As sociocritical thinkers such as Cros, Duchet, Maluczynski, Chicharro Chamorro, Gómez Moriana, and Angenot – drawing on Bakhtin, Althusser, Kristeva, and Foucault – have argued, no utterance is ideologically neutral. The “said” is never innocent; it is always enmeshed in power. Even the writer who imagines themselves secluded in an “ivory tower” is always already entangled in matrices of meaning, cultural imaginaries, and representational codes (Bourdieu, 1998; Cros, 2002). The subject is not a free-floating agent of discourse but a product of it. This is the foundation of Edmond Cros's theory of the “cultural subject” (2002), conceived as an ideological mechanism through which individuals are interpellated into the symbolic order. Subjectivity, here, is not anterior to ideology but produced through it. The cultural subject thus designates both an “I” as discursive instance and a collective historical formation. Its visibility is most marked in its reliance on *doxa*: stereotypes, clichés, and socially sanctioned commonplaces. The subject does not choose identification; rather, it is the cultural model that positions the subject, that constitutes it through repetition and recognition. As Cros (2002) observes, the “I” cedes its place to the “they”, and in doing so, identity is reconfigured, displaced and masked through subjectivity.

Hegemony, in this view, “makes” the world, but always from within a particular worldview. It represents only that which it already recognises as legitimate:

the epistemic coordinates of the dominant group, the “legitimate” language, the normative subject, the culturally sanctioned pathos. Thus, hegemony is not a possession of dominant groups, nor is it a synonym for ideology. Rather, it is a performative structure of dominance that privileges those with access to the means of mediation, allowing their discourses to circulate more widely and to sediment more powerfully. Hegemony, as the principle dictates, generates hegemony. Hegemonic formations function as tacit apparatuses that delineate the limits of the sayable and the thinkable. This is, in Foucauldian terms, the operation of the archive: that which structures the epistemic conditions of visibility, intelligibility, and articulation. Within this horizon, the literary text can be conceived as a counter-archive, one that exposes the conditions of its own production while simultaneously displacing, reframing, and destabilising them.

In this sense, representation operates not merely as visibility, but as erasure. As with the centre/periphery dichotomy, the monopoly of representational legitimacy within a cultural system occludes what lies beyond its sanctioned horizon. What remains outside – the “remainder,” that is, the discourses of the “other,” of linguistic, ethnic, sexual, or racial minorities, of non-Eurocentric perspectives, of ex-canonical or subaltern forms – is not simply overlooked but actively marginalised, silenced, or rendered unintelligible. The struggle for epistemic centrality is thus a constitutive feature of cultural production.

In this vein, M.-Pierrette Malcuzyński emphasizes the inevitable positionality that writers, readers, and critics adopt in relation to social discourses: “[o]n the very terrain of negotiation, neutrality is an incongruent sophism; there exist only positions taken and socialized genres, in the plural [...] the subject itself is the product of interaction with other sociocultural subjects” (Malcuzyński, 1991, p. 157)<sup>1</sup>. Far from any form of scientific relativism, but simultaneously aware of her own “position-taking” as a woman scholar, Malcuzyński argues that by acknowledging the inevitably ideological nature of every word, one can express a form of social commitment and a will to analyse and intervene in discursive practices from a feminist perspective: “Rather than vainly attempting to forge a *new* language, I refer to a sociocritical politics that engages a responsible hermeneutics of cultural mediation [...] capable of *decolonizing* [...] the gender problematic imposed by patriarchy, in order to *de-marginalize* the feminine subject without neutralizing her position-taking” (Malcuzyński, 1995, p. 128).

From this position, social discourse is not a stable field but a dynamic, polyphonic space that Angenot (1998), Cros (2002), and Malcuzyński (2006, 2009) identify as a space of semio-ideological flux. Here, discourses shift, alternate, and displace one another. This is the ensemble in which not only the said, but the unsaid, the silenced, and the not-yet-sayable are determined. The

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from Spanish are by the authors.

social murmur, then, is never entirely absent. Even in its faintest form, it remains traceable in the interstices of the text: in its silences, its hesitations, its margins.

In moments of crisis – what Becerra Mayor terms *events* (2013) – this murmur becomes more pronounced. Whether in times of socio-political economic collapse, political upheaval, or environmental catastrophe, the transition from one discursive order to another intensifies contradiction. In Bakhtinian terms, the border becomes more porous, and polyphony asserts itself more loudly. Indeed, as Becerra Mayor argues, the social murmur of the twenty-first century is not only audible but transformative. These *events*, understood as irruptions in the symbolic order, open new epistemic horizons and inaugurate new forms of collective and individual subjectivity. Emerging from this rupture is a new political literature, one that decisively distances itself from the postmodern “novel of non-ideology” (Becerra Mayor, 2013), which had been concerned largely with private dilemmas and severed from structural critique. This new literature is, by contrast, explicitly “critical and dissident”. It asks how we come to be what we are – how our subjectivities, our imaginaries, and even our desires are formed. (Becerra Mayor, 2015, p. 14). Following Becerra Mayor’s (2013, 2015) lead, we believe that recent social mobilisations across Latin America and Spain have precipitated a rupture in prevailing cultural paradigms.

Hence the high level of socio-discursive conflict. All social actors struggle to bring their experiences, values, and axioms – their worldview – to the centre of the epistemological horizon. Despite its categorisation as “the sublime”, literature partakes in this conflict as a discursive practice that follows after all others. As Angenot (2015) affirms, “literature is that discourse which, present in the world, comes to take the floor and to work with *the words of the tribe* after the other discourses have said what they had to say, above all the discourses of certainty and identity” (pp. 270–271). Malcuzyński (1997–1998) even goes so far as to assert the indissolubility of the dual vector text/discourse, neither of which can be reduced (or rendered synonymous) to the other (p. 190). This nature of literary discourse leads it to inevitably reproduce discursive hegemony: every literary text – it has been said – is immersed in it and operates in relation to it. Yet it is precisely this conflictivity at both the personal (of the producing subject) and collective levels that makes literature, in addition to being a “supplement”, a spoilsport (Angenot, 2015). The way in which sociality materialises in and through the literary text – that is, everything that is said, what is not said but can be said (the unsaid, the rejected), or what is said even though it exceeds the limits of discourse (the unsayable, such as archaisms or neologisms, to give an immediate example) – transfigures the discursivity on which it operates and – transfigured –reintroduces it into circulation within the given social discursive space (Malcuzyński, 2006). Was the shift to the grand modern paradigm not first gestated in the pages of books? (Rodríguez, 1974/1990).

In this evolving intellectual landscape, the literary field has undergone a significant discursive diversification. Anticapitalist, anti-modernist, and posthumanist paradigms have increasingly come to the fore, actively contesting the Eurocentric, masculine, and rationalist subject inherited from Enlightenment modernity. At the heart of this emergent discursivity lies the concept of *crisis*—not merely understood as a moment of breakdown, but rather as rupture, as epistemological aperture, as an occasion for unsettling the canonical and gesturing toward other ways of knowing and narrating. In this sense, *crisis* becomes a productive mode: a condition that enables the re-imagination of subjectivity, history, and cultural belonging.

The publishing industry plays a dual role in this transformation: it not only reproduces but also actively produces this discursive shift. There is a growing receptiveness to texts aligned with the frameworks of decolonial theory, fourth-wave feminism, ecocriticism, posthumanism, the affective turn, and postmemory studies. The thematic concerns of these works – developed in critical dialogue with contemporary socio-political movements – span a broad array of urgent issues: ecological devastation, economic precarity, Indigenous epistemologies, experiences of illness and maternity, gendered and racialised exclusions, and the reconfiguration of subjectivities beyond liberal individualism.

The contributions gathered in this dossier – “Critical Epistemologies from Latin America and Spain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” – engage precisely with such configurations of knowledge and power. They interrogate literature not as a closed system of aesthetic self-reference but as a privileged site for the production of counter-discourses, alternative archives, and epistemic dissent. These texts trace the ways in which literature participates in redefining the boundaries of the sayable and the thinkable, especially in the face of planetary crises, colonial legacies, and the violence of neoliberal modernity.

As M.-Pierrette Malcuzyński (2006) argues, any attempt to conceptualise transformation cannot rely on a reductive binary between power and knowledge. Rather, she writes:

We all know that change cannot be approached in terms of a division between power and knowledge, but through a perspective that relates specifically the exercise of power to the acquisition of knowledge. This entails confronting the view that change is only visible *a posteriori*, once it has already occurred. Now, while it may be true that change can only be fully grasped through retrospective framing, I nevertheless believe that we must not only identify the factors that potentiate transformation, but also affirm that change itself can be recognised as such in the immediacy of its manifestation. It is only at this ethical level of cognitive ‘responsibility’ that a reterritorialisation becomes possible. (p. 36)

Malcuzyński’s formulation is crucial to understanding the methodological commitments of the essays assembled here. Her insistence on the *immediacy* of

change – on its recognisability not only in hindsight but as it unfolds – foregrounds an ethics of attentiveness. This *cognitive responsibility* involves more than scholarly vigilance; it signals a theoretical and ethical imperative to respond to literary and discursive ruptures as they emerge, rather than merely historicising them retrospectively. The concept of *reterritorialisation* – evocative of Deleuzian philosophy – is thus reimagined as an ethical and politically situated act: one that engages literature as a vector for intervention, critique, and cultural re-inscription.

This special issue sets out to explore the epistemic and discursive reconfigurations currently underway in Spanish-speaking literary cultures. What does literature in the twenty-first century encode? Which marginalised voices are gaining traction at the centre? What are the new coordinates of hegemonic legitimacy? And how do these new forms reproduce or reshape the sociohistorical conditions from which they emerge? The contributions assembled here approach these questions from a variety of critical positions, grounded in their own situated conditions of production of meaning. Through our engagement with contemporary texts from across Latin America and Spain, we collectively seek to illuminate the contours of a field in transformation: one shaped by crisis, by resistance, and by the urgent need for new epistemologies.

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Lublin, Warsaw,  
September, 2025