

Introduction: Market Matters

Christine Henseler, Associate Professor of Spanish (Union College), and Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola, Associate Professor of Spanish, (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) are the guest editors of this special section, Market Matters. Their respective research investigates the significance of the book market and the commodity exchanges that govern it. In this collection they present a gamut of perspectives to examine Hispanic publishing inside and outside the literary as the intertwined manifestation of both commercial and aesthetic values.

Why does the market occupy such a prominent position in literary and cultural studies? Is it possible to talk about literary production today without addressing the market forces in our global economy? This collection throws light on these questions by offering a wide-ranging reflection on the market in Spanish and Latin American literature from the turn of the twentieth century onwards. It is a timely topic particularly if we take into account that mega-mergers like the mighty Bertelsmann media group (which comprises publishing firms such as Random House, Knopf, Sudamericana, Planeta, and Seix Barral, to name a few) have reshaped the world of publishing and transformed it to meet the expansionary practices that are now commonplace in our global economy. In recent years, several works have looked into the cultural market's economic forces in an effort to explain how new literary trends come about and establish and impose "new" literary canons in the book market. It is worth mentioning André Schiffrin's critically acclaimed *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (2000), which also appeared in Spanish translation as *La edición sin editores* (2000). Schiffrin argues that in this age of mass media consumerism publishers worldwide have succumbed to the demands of the global market and thus abandoned the loftier goals of traditional publishers as guarantors of cultural production. His dire predictions for the global book market are particularly troubling for small presses that compete with media conglomerates like the Bertelsmann group. In the field of Hispanism scholarly works have recently picked up some

of the questions raised by Schiffrin's book. In 2001 *Revista iberoamericana* published a special issue entitled *Mercados, editoriales y difusión de discursos culturales en América Latina* (Daroqui and Cróquer). This collection examines the expansion of mass-marketed media products in Latin America and its consequences for the publishing industry, the literary market, and the political and cultural discourses in the region. Similarly, the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* published in 2003 a special issue on the economies of cultural production which addresses not only the questions raised by the global cultural market but also by the abundance of economic terms in the field of literary studies (Highfill).

The essays in this special issue of *AJHCS*, while they touch upon some of the questions brought forward in previous scholarship, do take the market a step further. Our contributors propose (albeit from different theoretical approaches) that the market *does* matter not only for the commercial distribution of literature but also for its ramifications in the literary realm. It is often the case that scholarly works on the broad topic of the book market look to provide figures and statistics on revenues, but forget that the literary realm—particularly when driven by an aggressive market—“takes over” the market by representing fictional (and not so fictional) cultural producers such as editors, prize organizers, agents, and the like. Without setting aside the importance of economics or aesthetic agendas that control a specific literary field, *Market Matters* examines both the exchanges among cultural producers and the exchanges portrayed in literary works that define the economic processes leading to a work of literature, thus looking at the internal and external forces that define the literary market and its economic exchanges.

In mapping out these exchanges, our contributors examine the literary market in its many facets: authorship, copyright, commerce, promotion, finance, taste, distribution, inventories, stocks, postcolonial enterprise, ownership, and material culture. In sum, this collection investigates the inner workings of the Hispanic book trade and its literary ramifications in an attempt to historicize “market matters” in the context of today's global Hispanic publishing.

In order to provide a historical development of the market on both sides of the Atlantic we include eight essays, each presenting a significant case study of the market. Following a chronology of the market (or a brief history of the market in Hispanic literatures), our collection starts off with the 1920s and 1930s, a period that saw the foundation of *Sur* in Argentina (Majstorovic) and the market-propelled *vanguardista* period in Spain (Highfill); it continues with the successful international career of the Boom writers in the 1960s and 1970s in Spain and Latin America (Herrero-Olaizola, Mudrovic); and it closes off with several studies on the new literary and market trends in Spain and Latin America that began in the 1990s which several contributors illustrate through a detailed analysis of “commercial contamination” (Henseler), the literary “supermarkets” (O'Donnell), the new media-driven cultural field (Richardson), and the *mercantilismo light* of the new Chilean narrative (Decante).

Our first stop in the trans-Atlantic journey to the market takes us to an important milestone in the publishing history of Latin America, the creation of the Argentinean literary journal *Sur* which was founded in 1931 and financed by the emblematic Victoria Ocampo, a key figure in the internalization of the Latin American literary field from the early 1930s onwards.

Gorica Majstorovic's essay "An American Place" revisits Ocampo's venture into the literary and publishing market of the time period. It was indeed a daring move on Ocampo's part. Using her family fortune to launch a literary journal and later collaborating with the prestigious publishing firm Sudamericana, Ocampo became one of the first cultural producers in Latin America to have a significant impact on the literary scene overseas. Majstorovic argues that Ocampo, guided by her desire to include Latin American literature in the so-called *literatura universal* (or World literature), launched *Sur* in an effort to promote a cosmopolitan view of the Americas emerging from the South. This was indeed the first step in the marketing of contemporary Latin American literature and its successful internationalization in the decades to come. Ocampo teamed up with North American writer Waldo Frank to produce a journal that resulted in the promotion and marketing of a Pan-American literary scene thanks to her "translation machine." Thus *Sur* managed to establish a new literary market for Latin America, Majstorovic suggests, a market that was driven by Ocampo's Americanism and by her entrepreneurial experience and literary taste.

While Ocampo's venture was indeed an effort to establish a viable market for Latin American writers, on the other side of the Atlantic the economic boom of 1920s Spain resulted in a different type of market incursion in literary matters. Spanish *vanguardistas* like Ramón Gómez de la Serna replicated in their writing the market culture that was so dominant in a society that was technologically obsessed and eager to modernize itself. Juli Highfill's essay "Metaphoric Commerce" examines precisely the market value of Ramón's *greguerías* within the expansion of market culture in

Spanish society during the 1920s. Highfill proposes that Ramón's hyper-productivity of metaphoric exchanges in his more than 2,500 *greguerías* is indicative of his fervor for mass-production at a time when *vanguardistas* like Ramón "surrendered to the logic of exchange value." In Highfill's view this pervasive mass-production in Spain's consumer economy of the period is responsible for Ramón's "greedy desire to incorporate everything into his works" and more importantly for "his inability to prune and polish his exuberant prose." The market Highfill envisions in Ramón's *greguerías* is the place for "metaphoric commerce" within the commodity aesthetics that allows for a "policy of free trade in metaphor." It is through "metaphoric commerce" that Ramón excels as a hyper-productive author of *greguerías*, and gets punished for "engaging in literary mass-production" at a time when literary prestige and mass-production in the marketplace were incompatible.

Making a historical leap into the market-dominated *desarrollismo* of 1960's Spanish society, Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola's essay "Publishing Matters" offers a close reading of the publishing industry under the Franco dictatorship at a time when the regime promoted the publishing and the tourist industries in its plans for economic expansion. This time coincided with the regime's overhaul of the rigid censorship system that was in place and that hindered Spain's economic interests in the Latin American book market. Taking the case of Barcelona's publishing house Seix Barral, and examining the relationship between the editor Carlos Barral, the Spanish censors and the Latin American Boom writers, Herrero-Olaizola reflects on the economic and ideological tensions that made the publishing of the Boom writers in Spain possible. The Latin American book market,

he argues, became a “shared” target for the marketing strategies of Seix Barral and the Spanish Francoist government. For publishers and government officials alike, Latin America became both a commodity market (goods market) and a cultural market where ideologies were set aside in the name of profit and record book sales figures. Given that the Boom writers achieved a degree of recognition in part due to these government policies, their success in Latin America was not free of polemics. Not only because left-wing intellectuals looked suspiciously (and rightly so) on the Spanish publishing industry’s dealings with the Franco regime, but also because many Boom writers had to accept the regime’s censors’ recommendations to have their works published in Spain. Herrero-Olaizola closely reads Seix Barral’s catalogue as a case study of the conflicting market forces that intervened in the publication of Boom authors in Spain. More often than not these writers engaged in legal appeals with the Franco authorities to gain clearance for the publication and distribution of their works, which in effect altered the market rules previously in place before the Spanish *apertura* of the early 1960s.

Continuing with the Boom writers and the legal hurdles they had to face with the publication of their works, María Eugenia Mudrovic’s essay “Nombres en litigio” revisits the lawsuit filed by Luis Alejandro Velasco, the shipwrecked sailor whose survival account is told in Gabriel García’s Márquez’s *Relato de un naufrago*. Mudrovic points out that while the Colombian author had given more than 25,000 dollars in copyright royalties to Velasco since the testimonial first appeared in 1970, in 1983 Velasco filed a suit seeking to be recognized as co-author of *Relato* in order to obtain royalties from worldwide sales and reprints. Mudrovic uses this legal case to closely

examine the value of the name and of the signature in the book market while delving into the question of who owns a *testimonio*, the surviving victim or the author who puts it into writing. Drawing on Foucault’s theory of authorship, Mudrovic suggests that the legal discourse of copyright in Latin America is directly tied to a market that “fetishizes” the author’s signature and thus implicitly favors the consecrated name or signature. The awarding of the sole authorship of Velasco’s story to García Márquez after an 11-year legal battle that reached the Colombian Supreme Court can be read as the victory of the brand name “GGM,” a signature that has been enthroned in the market as the most successful of his generation.

No doubt the success of the Boom writers opened up the marketing of Latin American literature, and, in part, demarginalized it by making it available for the kind of larger worldwide readership Ocampo had envisioned in the early 1930s. As a direct result of the internationalization that Latin American literature has undergone since the Boom, once marginalized literatures (i.e., Latino/a) have become more visible in the market to the point that the notion of margins and center has been, in a sense, redrawn. The current media-driven market embraces this new canon, because it is replete with media icons, popular forms, and a taste for the marginal that appeals to a wide readership.

A cogent example of the market tensions that arise from mass-produced literary works can be seen in one of the newcomers of the *Nueva Narrativa Chilena*, Alberto Fuguet. These tensions, says Stéphanie Decante Araya in “Del valor material al valor simbólico,” envelop a reflection concerning aesthetics and genre. At stake, although sometimes erratic and veiled, is the definition of a

poetics in which a new disorder manifests itself as dynamic tension between material and symbolic value. The *Nueva Narrativa Chilena*, for Decante, was, from the very beginning, branded with the adjective *vendido* and considered incompatible with the moral standards of its opponents who questioned any group of authors who enjoyed close ties with the commercial industry. The commercial attractiveness of this group therefore implied “un valor intelectual dudoso, no desprovisto de peligros ideológicos.” Decante Araya studies the works of Fuguet (*Sobredosis*, *Mala onda*, *Por favor, rebobinar*, and *Tinta roja*) in relation to their critical reception and their “horizon of expectations” in the market. She concludes that these works present a provocative reflection and actualization of a personal poetics that schematizes the complex relationship between the commercial and the literary, or what she calls a *mercantilismo light*. The poetics of Fuguet, she concludes, cannot be reduced to the purely commercial, but interacts with literary tradition in search of a new aesthetic definition.

The new Spanish narrative, as Christine Henseler points out in her essay “Commercial Contamination,” faces similar market tensions. New Spanish literature (yet another canon for the global book market) is the focus of a bitter debate between those who see it as purely commercial and those who defend its mass-media appeal. In her essay, Henseler revisits some of the questions addressed in her book *Contemporary Spanish Women Writers and the Publishing Industry* (2003) and takes readers on a historical exploration of the economic developments of the Spanish book market at the end of the twentieth century. Henseler gives voice to the many scholars, writers, and publishers who are concerned with the status of contemporary literature in relation to the development of the culture industry

and its dependence on the mass media. Because market consumption has become a determining factor in the evaluation of authors and texts, it must be considered a historically viable agent in the construction of today’s literary canon. Henseler examines whether the commercial contamination of the book market must be viewed as a form of market censorship that threatens literary quality, or whether it can be seen as a space of new opportunities that may allow previously censored authors (those that remained “in the margins”) to claim new positions. Henseler believes that the so-called crisis of the publishing industry that some believe Spain is experiencing is one in which the authority of master narratives is made “to come out of the closet,” so to speak, and to confront the constructedness of its identity. She believes that the demands of the commercial industry may help open up spaces for new voices to enter the literary scene and allow for a challenge of established authorities to occur, thus promoting the creation of artistically avant-garde productions determined by a varied, yet increasingly real, set of coordinates.

The commercialization and mass-media exposure of Spanish literature is likewise the focus of O’Donnell’s essay, “Lost in the Supermarxist.” In it, he examines the popular Pepe Carvalho detective series written by Spanish novelist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. O’Donnell accounts for some of the extra-literary factors that contributed to Carvalho’s commercial success and reflects on the book series’ ideological function as a consumer product. Taking into consideration Grupo Planeta’s aggressive marketing campaigns, the political left-wing profile of the novel’s author, and the TV series based on his books, O’Donnell argues that the Carvalho novels exemplify the “Culture-trust” provided by the corporate world of

culture, and asks to what extent did Vázquez Montalbán, the engaged intellectual, use the publishing giant for his own subversive political purposes. Why, he asks, did Grupo Planeta publish a writer like Vázquez Montalbán when his book series exemplified the Gramscian idea that intellectuals should employ popular culture to undermine the bourgeois-controlled media and promote revolutionary ideas among the proletariat? The Carvalho series is a perfect example of how the market tolerated (and perhaps encouraged) an author who appropriated the mass media for political left-wing purposes as long as the broad market appeal of his works remained strong and competitive.

Pursuing the question of the mass media appeal of literary products in contemporary Spain, our collection closes with an essay devoted to the economic, social and cultural climate of the 1990s in Spain. This new era allowed for the rise of what Nathan Richardson, in his essay “The Art of Being Forgettable”, calls a culture of the unremarkable. The success of the reality show *Gran Hermano* provides a point of departure for an examination of the *Generación X* writers within a larger cultural context. This context allows often-unremarkable texts to be viewed as part of larger narrative strategies that are fueled by the very lack of literary value, the potential anonymity of the literature they give rise to. Richardson argues that the success of the *Generación X* authors is not “merely a marketing phenomenon” but the direct result of the changes in the “macro fields of economic and political power” in

Spain. This new “macro-economic field” is embodied in mega-bookstores like FNAC or El Corte Inglés, where “book buying, and more importantly, book reading” have found a “setting for commodification.” Through a close reading of Ray Loriga’s *Lo peor de todo*, Richardson highlights the misconception that *Generación X* authors solely portray and celebrate the reality of today’s Spanish youth. In fact, he finds that in this cultural field “reading has expanded beyond the text,” and celebrity and literary styles “not only work together but also converge.” Thus a space is carved out for the *Generación X* culture in which celebrity is self-valorizing and the “story within the text is not separate from the story without.” In essence, Ray Loriga exemplifies a mode of cultural production that moves beyond its bookshelf value and takes part in what Richardson calls a post-literary age.

Works Cited

- Daroqui, María Julia, and Eleonora Cróquer, eds. *Mercado, editoriales y difusión de discursos culturales en América Latina*. Spec. issue of *Revista iberoamericana* 197 (2001): 635-793.
- Henseler, Christine. *Contemporary Spanish Women’s Narrative and the Publishing Industry*. U of Illinois P, 2003.
- Highfill, Juli, ed. *Economies of Cultural Production*. Spec. issue of *Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 9.1-2 (2003): 1-132.
- Schiffirin, André. *The Business of Books*. London: Verso, 2000.
- . *La edición sin editores*. Trans. Gonzalo Navarro. Barcelona: Destino, 2000.