

Lisa Surwillo. *Monsters by Trade: Slave Traffickers in Modern Spanish Literature and Culture*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014. 241 pp. ISBN 978-0-8047-9183-0.

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According to Lisa Surwillo of Stanford University, the 2010 petition for the removal of Antonio López's statue from a plaza in Barcelona because of his alleged dealings in the Slave Trade is but one example of how imperial practices have and continue effecting Spanish culture and society. These effects are the premise of Surwillo's book, *Monsters by trade: Slave Traffickers in Modern Spanish Literature and Culture*; a text that follows with vivid detail the history, literary representations, sociopolitical influence and contemporary implications of the Spanish Slave Traders and their legacies. Inspired by Walter Mignolo's view of coloniality as inseparable from Modernity, Surwillo sets out to prove that the Slave Trade and Trader played key roles in the construction of Modern Spain, while the legacy of this history -many would rather forget than face again- is being revived in the present day because of the journalist treatment of African immigration and several Catalanian writers who are reviving the theme of slavocracy in their fictional works. Her hypothesis, then, is that many aspects of Spanish society spanning from the XIX to the XXI century might be understood differently if coloniality were the favored term of analysis.

In terms of subject matter, this study rationally begins in the middle of the nineteenth century for three reasons: a) The independence of various Latin American Countries from colonial rule. b) The Spanish American war of 1898. c) The abolition of the slave trade. These historical events are central to chapters one through three, respectively titled: "Negro Tomás and the Trader", "The Colony in the Capital: "El amigo Manso and Lo prohibido", and "Baroja's Atlantic, Beyond Slavery" because they all center on the increasing centrality of the slave trader in Spanish Society. Therefore, she depicts the literary imaging of this figure as one in constant evolution following a traceable pattern (in literature) of increasing visibility and "Spanishness". For example, in chapter 1, "Negro Tomás and the Trader", she focuses on the work of publisher, novelist and translator Wenceslao Ayguals de Izco. By way of data concerning the Spanish public's reception of his translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and a detailed textual analysis of his own controversial, yet best-selling series, *María, hija de un jornalero* (1857) Surwillo supports her argument that the

dominating image of the slave trader during the early years of the second half of the nineteenth century generally followed an Anglo-American Model. Although Spaniards of the metropolis were curious enough to read about the slave trader, he still wasn't exactly "Spanish." That is, in metropolitan culture he was still represented as foreign, different, distant from completely infiltrating "their" world.

However, in chapter II *El amigo manso y lo prohibido*, Surwillo demonstrates how the author of these novels, Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) brings the slave trader closer to home than Ayguals or even outspoken early abolitionist, Blanco White, who based his fundamental text against the trade, *Bosquexo del comercio en esclavos* (1814) on an English Model. Using Jo Labanyi's theoretical framework of *Gender in the Spanish Realist Novel*, Surwillo suggests that the realist style allowed Galdós to represent with more detail than his predecessors the extent of empire's control over daily life in Madrid. In this regard, the slave traders in Galdós' novels, she argues, were sly capitalists who disrupted family life upon their return to Spain as key investors whose blood-stained wealth compromised Spanish morality. The presence of the trader as a central player in the restoration economics of the metropolis transforms the Madrid of these two novels into yet another piece of empire being controlled by Cuban wealth as exemplified by the narrational detail that the slave trader is detested by other characters, but never completely denounced for his crimes.

In terms of the trader's evolution in Spanish Literature it is not until Surwillo's analysis of Pío Barojas' often overlooked nautical novels, *Los pilotos de altura* and *La estrella del capitán Chimista* (written 25 years after the abolishment of slavery) that the slave trader's story becomes "fundamentally Spanish" (12). In this case, the trader is painted not as the unavoidable capitalist of Galdós but as a normal hard-working Basque sailor. Central to Surwillo's argument in this chapter is that Baroja pursues the memory of the slaver both romantically and realistically in accordance with Denise Dupont's theory. Dupont's theory suggests that the *Barojan* novel's structure oscillates between how things are and how we would like them to be. This literary style results in two very different slavers depicted, for instance, in *La estrella del capitán Chimista*: one who is cruel, money hungry and mundane while the other is adventurous, dashing and irresistible; the very glamorization of violence. This duality of what it meant and means to make oneself in the Americas as written into the fabric of these novels foregrounds the resurfacing of the "Monsters by trade" in contemporary literature, society and tourism in Spain; innovative material for Surwillo's final reflections.

Consequently, chapters 4 and 5 illustrate how in contemporary Spain the image of the slave trader (by trade or association) is revamped yet again in three significant ways: 1) Through tourism of "indiano" palaces in Northern Asturias. 2) By the journalistic treatment of boats transporting Africans illegally to Spain as "slave ships." 3) In the emergence of Catalanian novelists like Carmen Riera, Xavi Casino and Rafael Escolá Tarrida who recast the character of the slave trader in their confessional styled novels as pioneered by Juan Goytisolo in *Señas de identidad* (1966). These novel's

common purpose is to link Catalunya's legacy of imperial capitalism to its wealth and hidden histories. The value of these chapters is they show how the slave trader reemerges not just in literature but in the reader's world. This makes *Monsters by Trade* relevant not just for the literary scholar of nineteenth century looking to deepen his/her expertise, but for the non-expert who is curious about how coloniality and empire continues effecting Spain today. Another notable value of these chapter's is that Surwillo shows how the different attitudes of the nineteenth century presented in previous chapters (as reflected in their novels) reemerge as often opposing processes of commemoration in contemporary Spanish society. In this respect, she contends that these processes present both the public remembrance and the "moving on" from the memory of the Spanish Slave Trade that had influenced so many centuries of life in the Península.

Engaging, contemporary and controversial, *Monsters by Trade: Slave Traffickers in Modern Spanish Literature and Culture* concludes by inviting readers to consider the historical trajectory of Spanish culture and societies' ambiguity, uneasiness, denouncement, and relative "comforts" with imperial practices from the XIX to the XX century. In this way, her book may leave readers asking themselves a question that goes beyond Spain to any other powerful nation who has used violence in the name of economic gain, "Which aspects of a former global power's history can be silenced and 'contained' within a current understanding of the place of violence in capitalism" (198). The answer to this question might tell us if it is indeed possible to forget violence inflicted in the name of progress. Maybe for this reason the slave trader, the trader, and the trafficker as such; a man who triumphs with the sword does not die. He only evolves with the times and with the times he is called by new names. The contribution of Surwillo's text, then, is not only the story she analyzes but the uncomfortable questions it inevitably asks us.