

Introduction to the Monograph

In Search of the North

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With the title “Northern Winds: A Dialogue between the Nordic and the Hispanic”, this monograph of *Impossibilia. Revista Internacional de Estudios Literarios* offers a collection of articles analysing some examples of cultural, historical, and literary encounters between Nordic and Hispanic cultures.

The central issue of the monograph hence stems from a new iteration of the North-South divide, “one of the most long-standing distinctions in European cultural history” (Arndt 2007: 387). The North, despite its apparent geographical specificity, remains a relative concept within Cultural Studies inasmuch as its meaning depends on where we locate its opposite, the South, which in the Western world has usually been associated to Latin cultures, and particularly the Hispanic one, a key axis of the Global South. Fin-de-siècle Hispanic intellectuals, still yearning for the long extinct Roman Empire, considered “Nordic” (remote, cold, exotic) any culture that developed beyond the invisible line of the Pyrenees, or, if anything, beyond the world’s cultural capital, Paris (Casanova 1999: 49). This cultural Nordic included relatively close regions such as England or Germany that shared with Spain centuries of cultural exchanges and even common history, such as the reigns of Charles V and Philip II. It also served to encompass in a single concept, despite the many differences, the cultures of countries as diverse as Russia, Norway, and Poland.

Nowadays, however, it is widely accepted that the European Nordic refers to the so-called Nordic countries, those politically organized in the Nordic Council (*Nordiska rådet*): Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark (and their dependent territories, Greenland, Åland, Svalbard or the Faroe Islands). We place these countries, in dichotomy with the Hispanic world, in the focus of this monograph, exploring the cultural dialogue between both geographical poles with a range of papers delving into various examples of reception and mutual influence between Nordic and Hispanic cultures, a fairly disregarded research field.

This monographic dossier is headed by Sylvain Briens' theoretical article which proposes how Borealism, the imaginary of the North, generated by both the North and South, can be utilised as an analytical tool for Hispanic texts thematised within Arctic discourse. The other articles, chronologically organized in terms of their subject, are case studies that examine various aspects of the Nordic-Hispanic dialogue, circumscribed to the two historical moments in which this flow of ideas, frequently of people as well, we suggest was strongest: the Middle Ages and the transitional period between the 20th and 21st centuries.

The golden era of the Nordic is undoubtedly the Viking age, whose milestones, a mixture of reality and fiction, have reached us in the form of their suggestive sagas, which are therefore not surprisingly referred to in most of the first six articles. Edel Porter opens this thematic axis with a case study on the challenges of translating ancient Norse culture and language into contemporary Spanish, highlighting thus the work of veteran translator Enrique Bernárdez.

Victor Manuel Bañuelos Aquino continues with a comparison between the rituals of sovereignty associated with the tree and the sword in Germanic and Iberian cultures, made explicit in various medieval literary, artistic and historiographical testimonies.

Pedro Álvarez Cifuentes rescues the episode of the Spanish wedding of the Viking princess Kristín Hákonardóttir, re-poetized in the Baroque by the Luso-Hispanic writer Bernarda Ferreira de Lacerda.

Teodoro Manrique has traced, in the paratexts to the Spanish translations of Danish historian Carl Christian Rafn, a controversy that arose as the Viking discovery of America, centuries before Columbus' arrival, was first known in the Hispanic world.

Presenting the other viewpoint, a Nordic perspective of the Hispanic, Wladimir Chávez Vaca exemplifies with his study of the intertextuality between the *exemplum* xxxii of

Libro del Conde Lucanor, by Don Juan Manuel, and the well-known short story “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, by Hans Christian Andersen, the fascination European folklorist writers had for Spanish medieval literature and history, through a Romantic filter.

A second identified axis is constituted by the transition period between the 20th and 21st centuries which, in an increasingly globalized world, where people and cultural products are connected in the aftermath of national and social crises, cultural exiles and international circulation markets, we encounter, first, the phenomenon of Hispanic immigration to Scandinavian countries started with political exiles and continued with economic exiles, which has generated a fruitful meeting locus for multicultural dialogue: on the one hand, Hispanic second-generation writers who write in Scandinavian languages, and on the other hand, Scandinavian writers fascinated by the Hispanic.

Rosa Schioppa and Luca Gendolavigna present an interesting study on the role exile trauma and historical memory have in the work of the Chilean-Swedish writer Alejandro Leiva.

For his part, Richard Ángelo Leonardo-Loayza introduces to the Hispanic public Kjartan Fløgstad, creator of Arctic magical realism and great ambassador of Hispanic literature in Norway, through an analysis of Nordic and Hispanic stereotypes in one of his novels.

In addition, one last important cultural encounter is framed in the growing success of the so-called Nordic Noir in the global publishing market of the last decades, and the article by Ingela Johansson and Marianna Smaragdi examines how the book covers of Swedish crime novels in Spanish and Greek translation represent certain cultural stereotypes associated with images and colours perceived as Nordic by the surveyed public.

Music constitutes another playfield for intercultural dialogue in the global market. We close the monograph with an article by Iram Isaí Evangelista Ávila on the intertextuality

between the lyrics of a Swedish heavy metal band, At the Gates, and the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges.

In short, we hope that these articles signify an introductory slice to the complexity and variety of the cultural encounters between the Nordic and the Hispanic, allowing the Hispanic reader in turn to better understand and assess the permeability of present and past international relations around the North-South divide which arose from the Middle Ages and continued to our current global world.

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