

# Dissidences

Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism

---

Volume 9 | Issue 14

Article 1

---

2-25-2019

**Ros, Ofelia. Lo siniestro se sigue riendo en la literatura de Lamborghini, Aira y Carrera, y en la producción cultural poscrisis 2001. University of Pittsburgh/Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2016. ISBN: 1-930744-75-7.**

Micah McKay  
*University of Alabama*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dissidences>



Part of the [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Latin American Literature Commons](#), and the [Spanish Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

McKay, Micah (2019) "Ros, Ofelia. Lo siniestro se sigue riendo en la literatura de Lamborghini, Aira y Carrera, y en la producción cultural poscrisis 2001. University of Pittsburgh/Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2016. ISBN: 1-930744-75-7.," *Dissidences*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 14 , Article 1. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dissidences/vol9/iss14/1>

This Review / Reseña is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissidences by an authorized editor of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [mdoyle@bowdoin.edu](mailto:mdoyle@bowdoin.edu).

---

Ros, Ofelia. Lo siniestro se sigue riendo en la literatura de Lamborghini, Aira y Carrera, y en la producción cultural poscrisis 2001. University of Pittsburgh/ Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2016. ISBN: 1-930744-75-7.

Ros, Ofelia. *Lo siniestro se sigue riendo en la literatura de Lamborghini, Aira y Carrera, y en la producción cultural poscrisis 2001*. University of Pittsburgh/Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2016. ISBN: 1-930744-75-7.

Micah McKay  
University of Alabama, mdmckay1@ua.edu

What is the critical potential of laughter? How does humor open a space of reflection on the normalization of injustice, exclusion, and violence? These are the questions that animate Ofelia Ros's book *Lo siniestro se sigue riendo en la literatura de Lamborghini, Aira y Carrera, y en la producción cultural poscrisis 2001*, a theoretically-sophisticated and enlightening study of a significant strain of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Argentine literary and cultural production that takes seriously the revelatory power of seemingly benign phenomena like jokes, wordplay, and childish leaps of logic. As the book's title indicates, Ros focuses on a triad of authors—Osvaldo Lamborghini, César Aira, and Arturo Carrera—whose work exhibits a common aesthetic sensibility related to a suspicion of the ability of literary discourse to provide a transparent, unproblematic representation of reality while still attempting to engage with issues of social, political, and economic import, especially as they relate to subject formation. In addition to those three authors, Ros dedicates a chapter to the relationship between culture and trash in the wake of Argentina's 2001 financial crisis by examining documentary films that portray poverty in Buenos Aires, as well as the publishing cooperative Eloísa Cartonera and the literary project of one of its cofounders, Washington Cucurto.

Also evident from the title is the main theoretical tool Ros employs in her analysis: Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, those elements that we experience as both familiar and strange at the same time and therefore manage to disturb us in the realms in which we feel most at home. In her introduction, Ros deftly elaborates on Freud's theorization of the uncanny by putting it in dialogue with Slavoj Žižek's critique of the idea that ideology is "false consciousness." Ros adopts Žižek's view that, as opposed to being a delusion, ideology is what mediates the relationship between what is seen and unseen, or imaginable and unimaginable. In this sense, ideology constitutes the "home" that the uncanny inhabits and in which it produces disquiet. In other words, the humor in the works that Ros analyzes simultaneously reproduces and unmasks social practices and attitudes that normalize xenophobia, racism, homophobia, and economic inequality.

The book's first chapter examines the presence of the uncanny in a number of César Aira's novels. As a point of departure, Ros uses a suggestion that Aira himself makes in one of his novels about his need for laughable, illogical ideas as narrative catalysts in order to theorize what she calls "la idea siniestra" or "uncanny idea" as a motif throughout Aira's ever-expanding body of work. While Ros examines instances of the *idea siniestra* from several of Aira's novels, perhaps one example that she cites from *La villa* (2001) will suffice to give a sense of the analytical power of this concept. The novel's protagonist, Maxi, is a young, middle-class bodybuilder who uses his extraordinary strength to help *cartoneros* transport the items they scavenge from the garbage in the streets of Buenos Aires. Ros argues that what strikes the reader as strange is the figure of Maxi and his relationship with the cartoneros, not the fact that a segment of the population must find subsistence in the things that more privileged residents of

the city throw in the trash. Maxi's uncanniness, then, serves to draw attention to the normalization of poverty and exclusion. Ros delves into other interesting elements of Aira's oeuvre, like its complex relationship with both literary realism and the avant-garde, but to my mind, her reading of the way that the excessive, seemingly senseless elements of his novels disrupt the normalization of practices and attitudes related to social exclusion and domination is one of the most valuable critical insights in her study.

Chapter two is a detailed analysis of Osvaldo Lamborghini's 1982 novel *La causa justa*. For Ros, this novel, which was written during and obliquely draws on the context of the most recent Argentine civic-military dictatorship, is suffused with the kind of humor that arises from situations that occur in daily life, like conversations between a teacher and his students, interactions among passersby on the street, or soccer games played by groups of coworkers. She argues that Lamborghini parodies these seemingly innocuous social situations by taking humorous encounters that arise in these contexts—misunderstandings, crude jokes used as a form of social bonding, and the like—to an extreme that lays bare the racism, xenophobia, and homophobia that lie at the core of hegemonic articulations of Argentine masculinity and national identity. For instance, one of the novel's episodes deals with a prank played by two coworkers, Jansky (a Polish man) and Tokuro (a Japanese man): the two men stage an argument on a street corner, each of them shouting vehemently in his native language. This incongruous and comedically jarring scene unleashes a string of discursively and physically violent reactions tinged with racism from both passersby and the police officers who are tasked with restoring order. In another episode, after a company soccer match, Jansky and Tokuro's coworkers make a series of aggressive, homophobic jokes about the kinds of sexual behaviors they would or would not engage in with each other, and Tokuro, as a foreigner who does not understand the jocular nature of these exchanges, challenges the others' masculinity on the grounds that by not engaging in the acts about which they joked, they have failed to keep their word. Despite the situation's absurdity, it leads to brutal violence and once again exposes how everyday language is shot through with prejudice. By focusing on these types of episodes, Ros manages to show not only the way that violence against the Other is normalized in mundane social interactions, but also how what is seen as Lamborghini's strange, ugly, violent use of language constitutes a critique of literary and social norms alike.

The book's third chapter examines social discourses surrounding money through a reading of Arturo Carrera's 2004 book of poetry *Potlatch*. On the one hand, she considers how certain beliefs about money (exchange value and saving for the future, for instance) are normalized and perpetuated by virtue of a number of discursive apparatuses aimed at children, like the fantastical figure Ratoncito Pérez or a state-sponsored bank program in which children collect stamps in a booklet in order to receive validation from the bank and encourage the habit of saving, both of which Carrera thematizes in *Potlatch*. On the other hand, Ros shows how Carrera uses the humorous perspective of children as an uncanny element that disrupts the normalization of these beliefs and behaviors. A child, for instance, is puzzled by what Ratoncito Pérez must want with all the teeth he collects from children, which obviously misses the point of the ritual. But in missing the point, Ros argues, the child hints at something more profound: that money as an instrument of capital is not the natural order of things, but rather the result of very specific historical and social configurations. Another of this chapter's strengths is the way that Ros tracks this gesture of denaturalization at the formal level of Carrera's work, arguing that he

uses enjambment, contradictions, shifts in perspective, and the like in order to inscribe the uncanny in the very language of his poetry. Toward the end of the chapter, Ros considers the import of the practices of potlatch (an opulent ceremonial feast in which valuable possessions are given away or destroyed) and gift-giving as they relate to neoliberal capitalism in Carrera's poems, concluding that both practices signal the limits of the logic that regulates capitalism by showing how certain economic activities fail to adhere to the rules of economic exchange.

Chapter four undertakes a reading of Argentina's 2001 financial crisis as an uncanny event that disturbed normal ways of relating to money, politics, and culture by making poverty and trash visible in the public sphere. Ros mentions two documentary films—Fernando Solanas's *La dignidad de los nadies* (2005) and Ernesto Livon-Grosman's *Cartoneros* (2006)—as examples of cultural products that buck the tendency to frame the crisis as a singular event and instead do the work of showing the historical roots of the poverty they portray. While she provides an excellent explanation of the complex economic disputes surrounding the labor of the cartoneros portrayed in Livon-Grosman's film, I would have liked to see a more sustained engagement with the representational strategies of both films. Instead, the bulk of the book's final chapter is dedicated to the literary project of Washington Cucurto and Eloísa Cartonera, the publishing cooperative he helped found in the wake of the crisis. For Ros, Cucurto provides the ideal opportunity to analyze the reconfiguration of the Argentine cultural field in the new century due to both his thematic concerns (his works tend to portray the life and experience of Argentina's working class, ethnic minorities, and immigrants) and the formal characteristics of his prose and poetry, which exhibit marks of excess, caricature, a tense relationship with historical reality, and self-referentiality. These are all characteristics, Ros notes, that align him with writers like Aira, Lamborghini, and Carrera, but she is cautious in her appraisal of Cucurto because she senses that his work lacks the strange and uncanny relationship with language and social reality that they exhibit. This chapter ends with a reflection on Eloísa Cartonera, a cooperative venture that publishes books made with cardboard covers sourced from cartoneros (a model that began in Buenos Aires and has spread throughout Latin America and beyond in the last fifteen years). Ros convincingly posits cartonera books as uncanny elements in the realm of the publishing industry (they do not follow the logic of profit or supply and demand) and in the normalized hierarchy between management and workers (they are produced in the context of a collective of cartoneros, writers, students, graphic designers, etc.). While she admits the possibility that a venture like Eloísa Cartonera is susceptible to cooptation by traditional arbiters of literary and cultural taste, like academics and university libraries, she ends on the hopeful note that to assume that the success and visibility of Eloísa Cartonera depends on legitimation from cultural elites is to underestimate the complex relationship between the parties involved and the economic and cultural reality in which they operate.

*Lo siniestro se sigue riendo* is a well-argued, intelligent analysis of the way that literary texts can lay bare aspects of social, economic, and political life that hide in plain sight. The theoretical framework that Ros develops, drawing mainly on psychoanalytical and deconstructionist approaches, is wholly appropriate for the corpus she works with and largely productive in illuminating it, although there are moments when she allows the framework to get in the way of the development of her arguments by unpacking what seem to be relatively tangential theoretical debates in great detail (e.g., the discussion of Aira's engagement with Lukács's theorization of realism in chapter 1 and the explanation of the difference between

Freudian and Lacanian conceptualizations of disavowal in chapter 2). Nevertheless, Ros's book is full of thought-provoking critical insights, and it is a valuable contribution to scholarship on Aira, Lamborghini, and Carrera, as well as Argentine cultural criticism in general.