



The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning (Post-Contemporary Interventions)

By Idelber Avelar

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The Untimely Present examines the fiction produced in the aftermath of the recent Latin American dictatorships, particularly those in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Idelber Avelar argues that through their legacy of social trauma and obliteration of history, these military regimes gave rise to unique and revealing practices of mourning that pervade the literature of this region. The theory of postdictatorial writing developed here is informed by a rereading of the links between mourning and mimesis in Plato, Nietzsche's notion of the untimely, Benjamin's theory of allegory, and psychoanalytic / deconstructive conceptions of mourning.

Avelar starts by offering new readings of works produced before the dictatorship era, in what is often considered the boom of Latin American fiction. Distancing himself from previous celebratory interpretations, he understands the boom as a manifestation of mourning for literature's declining aura. Against this background, Avelar offers a reassessment of testimonial forms, social scientific theories of authoritarianism, current transformations undergone by the university, and an analysis of a number of novels by some of today's foremost Latin American writers—such as Ricardo Piglia, Silviano Santiago, Diamela Eltit, João Gilberto Noll, and Tununa Mercado. Avelar shows how the 'untimely' quality of these narratives is related to the position of literature itself, a mode of expression threatened with obsolescence.

This book will appeal to scholars and students of Latin American literature and politics, cultural studies, and comparative literature, as well as to all those interested in the role of literature in postmodernity.

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Editorial Review

Review

“[A]n ambitious and formidably intelligent study of the overlapping of the literary and the political in recent Southern Cone literature.” - G. Gómez, *Choice*

“Avelar conjugates an impeccably researched and wide-ranging historical sensibility with a philosophically engaged approach to literary texts produced in the aftermath of the recent dictatorships in the Southern Cone of Latin America. . . . [T]he great strengths of this book include its uncompromising attention to cultural history, its complex yet elegant arguments, its fine, philosophically inflected and well contextualized readings of individual texts, and its intelligent contributions regarding allegory theory.” - Mary Beth Tierney-Tello, *Modern Language Notes*

“Challenging many commonly held assumptions, deploying a complex theoretical framework, and displaying his vast knowledge of Latin American literature and culture, Avelar’s book promises to spark much discussion on the nature of the postdictatorial predicament and establish itself as one of the key texts in a growing field of study.” - Alessandro Fornazzari, *Nepantla: Views from South*

“*The Untimely Present* convincingly argues that the distinctive feature of South American fiction in the aftermath of military regimes, a horizon marked by a sense of defeat, loss, and the impossibility of writing itself, lies in its efforts to insert the untimely. . . . [A] brilliant analysis of contemporary Southern Cone fiction.” - Laura García-Moreno, *Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature*

“[A] remarkable project *The Untimely Present* offers compelling readings of some of the most sophisticated narratives to have emerged in the Southern Cone in recent years [Avelar has an] unerring sense of the ways in which the text may interact with its moment to bring culture and politics into complex and crucially intimate relationships.” - Joanna Page, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*

“Avelar delivers a complex account of postdictatorship society, culture, thought, and literature in a lucidly clear prose and an eloquent style.”— George Yudice, New York University

“This is a book of superior scholarship, providing an original reading of texts that are of increasing interest to students and critics.”—Jean Franco, Columbia University

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From the Back Cover

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