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J. Andrew Brown

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# Sampling and Remixing in Recent Latin American Narrative

J. ANDREW BROWN

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS



*Juan de los muertos* (2011), Cuba's self-proclaimed first horror film, gained international acclaim when it won Spain's Goya award for best Spanish-language foreign film on February 17, 2013. The film is an able zombie movie improved by its Cuban context, with survivors wrestling with new reasons to go to Miami as they weigh the abandonment of their country that the trip has always signified. On the less serious side, the film plays with the representation of Cuban media, with official television reports referring to the zombies as political dissidents trained by the CIA as part of a US imperialist plot. The protagonist is Juan, a forty-something slacker on the outs with a beloved daughter, who finds a business opportunity in the apocalypse disposing of people's infected loved ones—a running joke has Juan answering the phone with: “Matamos a sus seres queridos, ¿en qué puedo servirle?” While the film has been criticized for its somewhat clunky special effects (by critics assessing it from a Hollywood perspective), it has also been widely celebrated for its combination of horror, humor, and cultural insight.

On the back of the DVD case for *Juan of the Dead*, we find the following blurb for those who had not already perceived the reference: “From the studio that brought you *Shaun of the Dead*.” The blurb is intriguing, because on its face, it serves as an attempt to attract a particular market of horror fans—Simon Pegg fans—and those of the burgeoning horror/humor genre generally, a combination that George Romero generally found unpalatable. This is more than a marketing ploy, as the film is indeed intimately linked with its British predecessor. The title is just a couple of letters off once you translate it to English (ironically, the Spanish translation of *Shaun of the Dead* was *Muertos de risa*). But more than that, director Alejandro Brugués hangs his film on the narrative framework of the earlier film: a story with a slacker protagonist whose surprising courage in outlandish situations, accompanied by ridiculous comrades, helps him find himself and salvage an important relationship. And yet, as many Internet reviewers and horror fans have noted, this is not a remake of the Edgar Wright film. Cuba makes everything different, and what comes through is a markedly original piece of work, even if its English title makes the connection to *Shaun* inescapable.

What Brugués is doing in this film, among other things, is participating in a creative process that recently has become pronounced in both global and Latin

American cultural production—he is creating a kind of mashup of global pop culture on the one hand and Latin American lived reality on the other. We can appreciate this phenomenon most clearly in two scenes, one from each film. In *Shaun of the Dead*, we have the moment when Shaun and his friends embrace their new roles as fighters of zombies, and in a medium long shot, the new heroes line up with their weapons. Shaun has a cricket bat, his embattled girlfriend carries a field hockey stick, and the two supporting friends flank the couple, one with an umbrella and the other with a piece of wood. Brugués creates a similar shot at an equally important moment of his film where Juan and his friends also embrace their roles as zombie exterminators. In that still, again in a medium long shot, we see Juan to the center right, with his embattled daughter to the left and with the two flanked by supporting friends. In this case, Juan has an oar as a weapon; his daughter, dressed a bit like Lara Croft, carries axes that resemble a hammer and sickle; and the two friends carry a baseball bat and a spear gun, respectively.

Some have noticed the similarity between the two protagonists' choice of weapons, Shaun's cricket bat and Juan's oar, but have not taken the analysis any further ("*Juan of the Dead (Juan de los Muertos)*"). The weapon creates a match cut between the two stills, strengthening the idea of Shaun as a source for Juan and focusing our eyes on the similarities of the rest of the group, with the four in similar placement and at similar heights. Beyond the shared visuals, the bat and the oar are important cultural objects, with the cricket bat evoking Britishness as an essential part of the film and a recognition that, while the film is participating in what has been a principally US genre (the title *Shaun of the Dead* is a reference to Romero's 1985 film *Dawn of the Dead*), this is an English film. In fact, the other weapons are similarly invested with cultural significance—an umbrella, a field hockey stick, objects that firmly ground the action in a British milieu (and, indeed, the required final stand against the zombie attack is not made at an American mall as in the Romero source, but at a British pub). Brugués very specifically recreates Wright's shot, matching sizes, positioning Juan in Shaun's place, and replacing the British weapons with Cuban ones—the oar and the baseball bat representing two *palos* that promise a way off the island even as they are ubiquitous parts of Cuban living. What we see is a kind of mashup of the British film and Cuban social and cultural realities. The resulting piece is a comment on Cuban reality, a loving parody of Cuban culture, and an incisive examination of why people choose to leave or stay.

This type of visual reference and borrowing is common to cinema generally and to the horror genre specifically. As we see in the title's referential play, Juan takes us all the way back to *Dawn*, the work of another Cuba-linked artist. At the same time, it appears as one of the most recent of a series of Latin American cultural products that create through sampling, that find originality in the mashup, the remix, of global popular culture and Latin American reality. By thinking about these references in terms of mashup and remix, I consciously evoke strategies more commonly associated with music and digital culture, wherein artists, usually DJs, borrow elements of musical recordings in the construction of their own pieces. Mashups are sampling strategies in which two or more sources provide significant parts in the elaboration of a song that is at once

both familiar and original. In this article, we will examine three writers who have similarly sampled and remixed both popular and underground culture in their recent literary production. We will begin with the Bolivian writer Edmundo Paz Soldán, focusing our attention specifically on his novel *Norte*. Paz Soldán's stature as Bolivia's best-known living writer and as a central figure in contemporary Latin American narrative, both thanks to his connections with McOndo in the 1990s and his subsequent work, help us appreciate the ways in which these narrative strategies have taken hold. We will then turn to two writers who have taken Chilean narrative of the 2000s in important new directions, Mike Wilson, an Argentine/American who lives and writes in Chile, and Álvaro Bisama, a Chilean writer, journalist, and professor. Both writers are part of the Narrativa Weird movement that emerged in Chile during the late 2000s, and both still contribute materially to contemporary Chilean and Latin American narrative.

The Bolivian writer Edmundo Paz Soldán has devoted a significant amount of energy to explorations of remixing and sampling, with mashup stories that combine Cortázar with, in various instances, alt-country singer Ryan Adams, science fiction writer Philip Dick and the Road Runner.<sup>1</sup> These stories range from textual combinations of lyrics and story in "Casa tomada" to a hidden remix of Philip Dick's "The Father Thing" and Cortázar's "Instrucciones para John Howell" in his recent "Los otros." Taken together, they form a part of an ongoing project Paz Soldán has undertaken on the nature of creativity, originality, and writing. His earlier work also evinces this interest, from the "seres digitales" that occupy the center of his early novel *Sueños digitales* to the dizzying mashup of Borges, Neal Stephenson, and Philip Dick in the ramblings of his Nazi character Albert in *El delirio de Turing* (2003).<sup>2</sup> The subjects of samples, mashups, and remixes have obsessed the Bolivian writer, up to and including his recent novel *Norte*, a narrative that is a far cry from the techno-fiction that he wrote in the early 2000s. This novel, a combination of true crime and fiction in a markedly realist vein, provides another context in which to study the remixing and sampling phenomenon.

*Norte* presents a story of three Latin Americans adrift in the North (that is, the US) at different times. In one narrative, set in 1930s and 40s California, we encounter Martín, a Mexican who is institutionalized and whose drawings are encouraged and then exhibited by an American professor. In the second, set in the 1980s and 90s, we find Jesús, an unstable young man from near Ciudad Juárez who passes back and forth between the US and Mexico hitching rides on empty boxcars and committing various murders in both countries. These two characters are based on historical figures, Martín is the schizophrenic artist Martín Ramírez whose work was recently exhibited in the New York Folk Museum and Jesús is the notorious "railroad killer" from the 1990s, Ángel Maturino Reséndez. The novel focuses on Jesús, recounting crimes that, for the most part,

<sup>1</sup> See Brown, "Parques tomados" for an analysis of Paz Soldán's use of mashups in his recent stories.

<sup>2</sup> See Brown, "Edmundo Paz Soldán and his Precursors" and *Cyborgs in Latin America* for further discussion of these and related themes in *Sueños digitales* and *El delirio de Turing*.

recreate the historical murders committed by Maturino Reséndez with alternating chapters that recount Martín's development as an artist in the asylum and the work of the completely fictional Michelle, a Bolivian working in the present.

Michelle is an ex-graduate student who has quit her literary studies and now writes graphic novels while living in Texas. As she processes her affair with an Argentine professor, Fabián, who is slowly losing his mind, she works on her latest piece, a narrative that uses the figure of the zombie as both monster and metaphor.<sup>3</sup> Michelle reflects:

El título no era original: *Los muertos vivos*. Una historia de zombis: adultos que se convierten en muertos vivientes cuando pierden su capacidad de rebeldía, se adaptan al sistema, se casan, tienen hijos, un trabajo de ocho a cinco. Un mundo de muertos vivientes: eran pocos los que se salvaban. Mi heroína, Samanta, se enfrentaba a los zombis. Se infiltraba en sus guaridas y los mataba con una daga de plata. El problema era que los zombis siempre resucitaban; por algo eran zombis. (25)

Paz Soldán nests a work of speculative fiction within the realistic narrative that then provides a central metaphor that unites the otherwise unrelated characters. But it is more complex than that. Our writer of graphic novels begins to sample popular science fiction. As she creates her character, she muses: "Ése era el mito de origen de mi personaje. Neil Gaiman vía los Transformers. Un comic meta, además. La clase de comic que podía dibujar una ex estudiante de doctorado" (63). With the reference to the acclaimed British writer of speculative fiction novels like *Neverwhere* or *American Gods* and of the landmark series of graphic novels *The Sandman*, Paz Soldán has his character create the kind of cultural mashup in her work that he is simultaneously creating in his own novel. Michelle's comic book serves as the character's work of art even as it becomes a reflection of the zombie-like existences of the lost Latin Americans that extend from the living death of Martín's life in the asylum to Fabián's slow descent into madness to the zombie monster that is Jesús, the Railroad Killer.

Neil Gaiman surfaces again later on:

Releí el primer volumen de *The Sandman*; de esos capítulos me seguían impresionando el azul de «Sleep of the Just», el ambiente pesadillesco de «Imperfect Hosts», una frase de «Dream a Little Dream of Me» —Dream dream dreeeeam . . . whenever I want to . . . All I have to do . . . is . . . dreeeeam . . .—, los colores oscuros y el encuadramiento de las viñetas en «A Hope in Hell». (151–52)

With the previous introduction of Gaiman as an inspiration for her work, this reference to *The Sandman* strengthens that as a theme as it introduces a kind of repetitive structure of references and lifted quotes, a sort of Neil Gaiman beat

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<sup>3</sup> I briefly discuss these moments in the context of Edmundo Paz Soldán's general work in "Edmundo Paz Soldán."

that reverberates through the novel. Paz Soldán imbues Michelle as a character and *Norte* as a novel with both the language and the feel of Gaiman's graphic novel.

The final reference to Gaiman appears in a different font from the rest of the novel as Michelle writes the script for her comic book. "Imagino a esta novela gráfica cómodamente situada en el territorio de la literatura fantástica, con elementos de horror y de superhéroes. Como en *The Sandman*, su éxito depende de la combinación fantasía/horror/superhéroes" (258). Here, the novel shifts font to Courier, a change that accentuates the sample, the introduction of an outside element into the flow of the text, an element whose own sampled nature is highlighted in its act of combination. In so doing, Paz Soldán has narrated the creation of a sample based work, even as that narrativization converts his own novel into a similar piece.

What we are seeing here is what has been referred to as the "fantasy of the writer as a hip-hop DJ" (Marco Roth, qtd. in Lethem, 123). The phrase was used as a critique of Jonathan Lethem's wonderfully plagiarizing essay "The Ecstasy of Influence," in which the New York novelist mashes up a series of other people's reflections on imitation and originality in a skewering of the ASCAP and copyright. In a section combined from several sources, he rewrites:

It's not a surprise that some of today's most ambitious art is going about trying to make the familiar strange. In so doing, in reimagining what human life might truly be like over there across the chasms of illusion, mediation, demographics, marketing, imago, and appearance, artists are paradoxically trying to restore what's taken for "real" to three whole dimensions, to reconstruct a univocally round world out of disparate streams of flat sights. . . . We're surrounded by signs; our imperative is to ignore none of them. (100)

The artist's role, in Lethem's view, is that of original organizer, or, to wrest the criticism from Roth, that of DJ whose digging in the crates of culture produces a stream of sounds and sights that afford the opportunity for recombination.

The fantasy of writer as DJ is helpful for understanding what is going on in this view of artistic creation generally and what's happening specifically in Paz Soldán's text. In hip-hop, the digital sample is the centerpiece of the musical genre, if we focus on the instrumentation of the genre rather than on rap. Joseph Schloss in his anthropological study of hip-hop culture explains it this way:

Virtually all hip-hop music is based on a cyclic form. . . . [T]his form is derived from the approach of early hip-hop deejays, who used turntables to repeat drum breaks from funk and soul records. When sampling became the tool of choice in the mid-eighties, the process became more complex as these drum loops were augmented with nonpercussive musical material. Soon both percussion and melody were being pieced together from ever-smaller samples, often a single note or drum beat. But the formal characteristics remained the same—the loop continued to reign. (136)

As we look to narrative, the idea of the sampled note—its repetition and its combination with other samples in the construction of a song—allows us to conceptualize the onslaught of pop culture references that we see in novels like *Norte* and explains why I would conceive of a Gaiman-beat in the text. One might extend this image to absurdity in *Juan de los muertos*, with the oar-thumping-on-zombie sound providing percussion to the film’s remix.

Paz Soldán is not the only recent Latin American writer to work through these themes and approaches to literature. We will now turn our attention to others that develop this idea and add some key images to an understanding of the phenomenon, this time in Chile. Mike Wilson’s *El púgil* (2008) displays one of the most extensive uses of sampling in recent memory. The novel is a tour-de-force of pop culture remixing. Wilson himself has a kind of mashed-up biography. He is the son of an American father and an Argentine mother, raised in Argentina, Paraguay, and Chile, educated in the US (he took his PhD at Cornell), and he now lives and writes in Santiago, Chile. Wilson formed part of a group of writers including Jorge Baradit, Álvaro Bisama, and Francisco Ortega, who were proclaimed in the popular Chilean press as Freak Power and have jointly cultivated a genre that has been called Nueva Narrativa Weird in which the four writers worked between 2006 and 2011. In terms of narrative production, he has published *El púgil* (2008), *Zombie* (2010), *Rockabilly* (2011), and his most recent (and reportedly last) *Leñador* (2013). While the first three novels construct reality as weird (the fourth novel is in a world all its own), they do so from a wide variety of perspectives and with a wide variety of samples, from suburbs after a nuclear holocaust where teenagers worship H. P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu and smoke meth in *Zombie*, to a man with a living tattoo who decides to dig a hole while a goth girl, an encephalitic man, and a dog watch him intently in *Rockabilly*.<sup>4</sup> *El Púgil* relates the story of Roque Art, a boxer who breaks down in tears in the middle of a match in the Luna Park arena, in Buenos Aires. His career over—one does not cry in the ring—Art returns to his home, dejected, only to have his refrigerator gain consciousness, start talking to him, name itself Hal after Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and take him on a tour of a Buenos Aires filled with cyborgs, a clone of Orson Welles, and an Obelisco that has moved from its usual spot at Corrientes and 9 de Julio so that it can wander around San Telmo. I have written elsewhere about the novel’s implicit soundtrack of postpunk music and its development of a digital aesthetic in which the reader is invited to read the novel in conjunction with a search engine.<sup>5</sup> We will expand on this analysis to explore how the patterns of pop culture references function according to an aesthetics of sampling and remixing—or, in effect, how Mike Wilson constructs himself as an authorial DJ.

The novel is based on samples on top of samples, with epigraphs from Joy Division combined with a series of references to music, film, and narrative that

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<sup>4</sup> David Laraway has also linked Wilson and Paz Soldán in their treatment of popular culture. See his 2012 article “Teenage Zombie Wasteland.” See also Becky Bolling, who focuses on Wilson’s later novel *Zombie*.

<sup>5</sup> “Estéticas digitales en *El púgil* de Mike Wilson Reginato.” I have also written about the concept of “reading with Internet” in “Googling McOndo.”

include *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, 2001, *Donnie Darko*, Echo & the Bunnymen, Billie Holiday, Radiohead, and *El eternoauta*, to name a brief selection. As samples, these are more than just quick references; they appear repeatedly in specific narrative structures that build the novel.

In one particular case, Art remembers his service in the Malvinas War, and one moment in particular between him and his lieutenant:

el pobre, pasaba días sin decir nada, pero esa mañana se me acercó y me susurró al oído . . . me dijo . . .  
 Chino, escucháme . . . Uno. Había una vez un hombre que reparaba compactadores de basuras, porque le gustaba hacer eso más que cualquier otra cosa en este mundo. Dos. Había una vez un hombre que reparaba compactadores de basuras en una sociedad donde escaseaban materiales para la construcción. La basura debidamente compactada se utilizaba para formar cimientos arquitectónicos.  
 Tres. Había una vez un hombre que odiaba los compactadores de basuras, sin embargo, los reparaba para poder comprarle sedantes a su esposa.  
 Cuatro. Había una vez un hombre que, al rearticular los compactadores de basuras que tanto odiaba, creó una máquina que . . . Dardo no terminó la frase, una bala inglesa le perforó la tráquea. (38)

It is an odd story, to be sure, one that is clearly out of place given the context of the war. In fact, the story, or stories, is a translation of the first part of the introduction that Roger Zelazny did for Philip Dick's landmark novel, *Do Android's Dream of Electric Sheep?* In Zelazny's introduction, we move through the various stories of trash compactor repairmen and we stop at the same point, though Zelazny stops because, as he notes, the only person who can tell this story well is Philip K. Dick (Dick vii). Wilson's inclusion of the text, with only a vague attribution suggested at a different point, forges a connection with Dick's novel about the uncertain lines that separate human and machine. And yet, this connection starts to fill the novel. We see the story repeated verbatim over the course of the narrative, though the subsequent times it is the refrigerator taking the place of Dardo in recounting the story to Art (67, 83). In that sense, the story can be seen to anchor the novel, providing a repeating structure that frames the rest of the action. In effect, Wilson samples and then loops the passage, using it for its rhythmic effect as much as for its thematic contribution, which is not easily appreciable beyond the way that it endows Wilson's novel with a Dickian air.

In another case, we find a direct reference to Steven Spielberg's film *A.I.* at the beginning of chapter five. In this case, we have the introduction of the film's protagonist David, a child robot made for a family whose "real" child is terminally ill and cryogenically frozen to keep him from dying. Monica, the mother, activates a protocol that causes David to imprint himself on her and then, when her son recovers, she abandons the robot. The film follows David's attempts to regain his mother and his status as a "real" boy. As the chapter begins, the film character appears in the novel, identifying himself as a version of David, an electronic Pinocchio. The narrative then switches to a translated scene from the film

in which David's human protocol is activated by Monica, as we can see on these pages where Monica speaks the string of words ("Cirrus. . . . Sócrates. . . . Partícula. . . . Decibel. . . . Huracán. . . . Delfín. . . . Tulipán. . . . Mónica. . . . David. . . . Mónica" [35]) that causes David to imprint on her. As *El púgil* progresses, David becomes a character whose story informs the other attempts of machines to become real (like Hal). This story of the activation of the protocol begins to repeat, and we find the narrative return to the script, or scenes based on the script, several more times both in story and script form (e.g., 74, 131). The novel ends with the enactment of David's protocol in Spanish, the words that are designed to make David human (131). The steady return to the script, to an inserted section of a separate piece of popular culture, creates a rhythm in the novel, one that is complemented by other repeated references mentioned earlier.

In both cases, we have sampled culture as a strategy for dealing with loss. The refrigerator Hal is desperate to become human and so looks to science fiction for a way to find his absent humanity. (Hal is also looking to Pinocchio, and A.I. is yet another remix.) The Dick sample also helps think through trauma. It functions as another A.I. story of sorts, an ambiguous reaction to the confusions of human and machine embodied in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Zelazny's trash compactor repairman story is also a remixed story, with Dick being positioned as the master of the form that Wilson is sampling. But at the human heart of it, we have Art using the story to process the trauma he experienced as a war veteran of the ridiculous war that was the invasion of the Malvinas. Art tells himself the story repeatedly as a way to remember his lieutenant and as a way to remember the loss of his humanity he experienced in the war (hence his need, with Hal, to use science fiction to recoup that humanity).

Wilson suggests an image with which one can theorize these connections in a scene that appears later in the book, where we learn about Hal's backstory as a young refrigerator:

Dos días después el aparato fue embalado y exportado al exterior —junto a cientos de clones— para su comercialización. Aguardó en una bodega bonaerense por seis meses hasta ser despachado a una tienda en el barrio de Abasto. Ahí esperó, exhibido en una vidriera, el calor del sol comenzó a deteriorarlo, la gente que pasaba por la calle no se fijaba. En frente de la tienda había un cine. De noche las luces de la cartelera se reflejaban en la puerta del refrigerador. Durante los primeros años de su estadía el cine gozó de un buen público, pero el país se estaba extraviando, los rostros de los peatones se ensombrecieron, el cine se dilapidó, la cartelera reestrenaba muchas películas de años pasados. Los espectadores dejaron de comprar entradas, solo iban unos pocos cinéfilos fieles.

El chico no tendría más de dieciséis años, aparecía todos los sábados, compraba su entrada y se perdía en las salas de proyección por un par de horas. A veces veía una película varias veces; *Tron*, *2001 Odisea del espacio*, *Blade Runner*, *The Black Hole*, *Logan's Run*, *Star Wars*,

*Metrópolis, Apocalypse Now, El planeta de los simios, The Shining* . . . Llegó el año 1982, el joven dejó de ir. (108)

Wilson comes up with a complex image that serves as a neatly constructed metaphor for the novel itself wherein identity and nature emerge from the reflection of quotidian popular culture. Hal's door becomes a secondary movie screen for the film posters as it mixes in Art's comings and goings, his adolescent movie-watching, and the decay of Buenos Aires during the dictatorship. Hal's later awakening and its/his obsession with gaining humanity through science fiction film stem from his days serving as a movie screen, as a place for reflection where passive and active movie-going are combined. Furthermore, the highlighting of the end of the youth's film attendance becomes a transformational moment for the refrigerator, further connecting the experience of these films with the processing of traumatic events.

This dynamic of active and passive seems particularly important to understanding the relationship between the artist as creative force and the artist as a sampling DJ—and Hal's work as a movie screen that actively absorbs what is reflected on it helps conceptualize the dynamic. At first glance, Hal is a refrigerator and, hence, completely passive. Even so, his experience of popular culture lies outside established modes of global cultural consumption: he is reflecting films shown at a theater frequented by cinephiles—by those who actively avoid those popular distribution channels and he's reflecting the classic science fiction films (mostly) that drew connoisseurs rather than the flocks of movie-going fans. His door becomes the pages of the novel that similarly reflect these films while it describes the readers of *El púgil* as consumers of underground culture, CULTure one might say, as we mix and reflect back the films that we absorb.

Another Chilean writer who not only engages in sampling but also provides some exceptional images by which to think through this dynamic is Álvaro Bisama. Bisama is Mike Wilson's more famous brother-in-arms and fellow member of the Freak Power group. He is one of the Bogotá 39 and the most internationally recognized and renowned of the four writers. Bisama has written several novels and chronicles that reconstruct Chilean life in the 1980s and 90s as an experience of modes of popular culture as they grapple with issues of memory of life under dictatorship. While his first novel, *Caja negra* (2006), is a dizzying collection of Chilean and global comic culture in an apocalyptic setting, more recent novels like *Estrellas muertas* (2010) and *Ruido* (2012) show how Bisama combines this encyclopedic knowledge of underground and trash culture, film, music, and comic books with meditations on surviving and navigating the end of the Pinochet dictatorship and the complexities of the Chilean postdictatorship. In between those most recent novels, he published a series of related short stories in a collection called *Death metal* (2010) that came out in Peru.

In the eponymous story about a wannabe death metal group from Valparaíso, we find a series of reflections on how the band members built their metal credibility in the narrator's description of a friend:

A él lo conocíamos de esa época, de cuando escuchábamos a Kreator. Era más bien pavo, huevoncito. Pendejo. . . . Él era chico. Tenía a lo

más quince. Siempre andaba con una polera de Iron Maiden. Hablaba de los cuentos de Lovecraft. Yo le dije que conocía a un tipo que tenía el *Necronomicón* fotocopiado. Se lo había vendido un librero de Valparaíso. Estaba en inglés. Nadie leía inglés. Lo leímos igual. Fingimos que lo leíamos, pero nadie lo entendía. Las bandas del pueblo escribían sus canciones satánicas con un diccionario de inglés-español en la mano. Nadie se preocupaba de la gramática. (11)

What we see here is the step that takes us from the experience of CULTURE to artistic production, a fascinating series of reflections on a creative process that includes the processing and sampling of other texts. The friends are situated chronologically by their consumption of music, the speed metal band Kreator acting as a temporal anchor for the story as well as a way to identify the group as one determined by musical tastes. This group uses underground culture as currency, with H. P. Lovecraft functioning as a kind of calling card, proof that the friend is in touch with the forces of darkness so central to the horror writer. The exchange between friends is a negotiation of their own connoisseurship—*You read Lovecraft? I have the Necronomicon*—though it also shows a certain level of naïveté; the *Necronomicon*, certainly a creation of Lovecraft, does not actually exist. Lovecraft only described it as part of his Cthulhu mythology (and placed a copy in nearby Buenos Aires) but never actually wrote it. The *Necronomicon* that they spend time reading is a remix in and of itself, an original piece of work that grows out of extant material and whose reproduced quality bestows cultural prestige on its readers. Indeed, Bisama's description of the reading of the English-language *Necronomicon* by those unable to read English becomes a neat image of a cross-cultural consumption of material as a kind of creative act. If Wilson and Paz Soldán are knowledgeable DJs, Bisama describes artists who employ material they do not understand as they create music that they do.

The final image of the lyricists with their dictionaries is especially useful in thinking this through. Bisama creates an idea of cultural production and translation whereby these Chilean artists reverse-engineer English language death metal as a part of their remix project. If their experience of Kreator is one in which they listen to the music without understanding the lyrics and then engage the lyrics in written form as they use their dictionaries to translate, they then build their songs in reverse order. They capture the essence of the song in a kind of Lovecraftian ritual and then use their dictionaries to translate Spanish into the English that is the medium of death metal lyrics. That Bisama is speaking from his own experiences as a teenager in the outskirts of 1980s Valparaíso makes this scene an especially illuminating one of Chilean cultural production.

Bisama practices what he preaches, so to speak, and we conclude the discussion of Bisama with a true remix that he included in the book *CHIL3*, a collection of alternate history stories that he edited with Wilson, Baradit, and Ortega on the occasion of the bicentenary of the Independence. The book is a lot of fun and includes narratives about the mystical foundation of La Moneda, time-traveling sailors from nineteenth-century Valparaíso, steampunk versions of Chile, and Godzilla attacks on Santiago, among various other stories written by some twenty different writers, mostly Chilean. One of the texts that Bisama

includes is an unpublished poem attributed to Gabriela Mistral titled “Hermana, soy una poeta,” supposedly written at the end of Mistral’s life while she was in New York. The poem is unremarkable in a text so full of fantasy and science fiction and could easily be skipped as one continues on to encounter Boris Karloff in the Santiago Metro in a subsequent short story. If one pauses to consider the poem, however, it is an odd attribution to Mistral, though one that can be rationalized with a little work. The poem begins with the stanza:

Sí, una leve brisa  
 sopla en el pueblo  
 y yo puedo ver a través de las ropas  
 de toda la gente.  
 No hay razón alguna  
 para esconder estas palabras que vengo sintiendo,  
 ni hay excusa para comentar  
 los libros que he venido leyendo.  
 Pero sigo.  
 Lo hago.  
 La razón, es que soy una poeta.  
 Hermana, soy una poeta. (153)

The poem goes on to speak of Mistral’s fascination with “novelas de crímenes” and of her time in Long Island surrounded by “camionetas de Citroen” smelling of “pastillas de menta” (153–54). It seems to center on the construction of Mistral as a spokeswoman for the sisterhood of poets. It plays on her own international status, locating her expression of solidarity in Long Island where she spent the final years of her life. It is odd, though, as Mistral is not a poet famous for holding forth on seeing through people’s clothes and obsessing about crime novels. For good reason, as this is Bisama’s example of the artist and his dictionary. The poem is not Mistral’s at all, it is the song “Sister, I’m a Poet” that the British songwriter Morrissey wrote in 1989, around the time that the band The Smiths broke up and he went solo. You can appreciate the failure of the dictionary, at certain points, where Bisama forgets that Citroëns, while common to both Manchester and Santiago in the 1980s, were not nearly so visible in 1950s New York. Bisama goes beyond some mistranslations, though, filling in the space that Morrissey leaves in the song, having Mistral declare that she is a poet while Morrissey leaves us hanging. (The original song has Morrissey failing to say the “poet” of the title, the chorus runs “Sister, I’m a . . .”) In that sense, the song seems to invite Bisama to do what he did, the gap prompting the listener to fill in the “poet” from the title.

The remix of a Morrissey song is not a fluke, either, nor is it merely taking advantage of the song’s invitation to fill in the blank. Morrissey’s outspoken criticism of Margaret Thatcher has made him a hero in anti-Pinochet circles with his song “Margaret on the Guillotine,” which can be repurposed (or expanded) to include the unholy trio of Thatcher, Pinochet, and Reagan.<sup>6</sup> Bisama writes the

<sup>6</sup> See Morrissey’s “Thatcher.”

following about Morrissey in a review he wrote of a 2012 concert the singer gave in Santiago:

Pero eso es solo un momento porque hay de todo; las 21 canciones, las poleras de la banda que dicen 'We hate William & Kate', mientras cada persona repite, de memoria, los temas que suenan acá, esas canciones hablan de desamor, de pueblos abandonados, de camiones que chocan en la oscuridad con gente que escapa de sus casas, de amigos que dejan de ser tales. Esas canciones parecen poemas, son poemas.

Hay algo irreal acá porque no sabemos en realidad quién es Morrissey.

O, mejor dicho, viéndolo en vivo sabemos que es un espejo, que parte de Morrissey somos nosotros.

Porque el sujeto es complejo, anacrónico, irreal. Pero ahora está acá.

The translation and attribution game that Bisama plays is, then, a game of mirroring, of the sampling of previously produced, foreign material in the building of a Chilean experience. We see in this way the power of the remix as it crosses boundaries of genre and nation. While the techniques of hip-hop and sampling are fully apparent, we also see how the combination of disparate and anachronistic cultural traditions suggests ways in which we can theorize cultural hybridization. It also speaks to the idea that art becomes culturally grounded at the point of its consumption as much as at its point of production. The cross-cultural consumption of art invests it with a national identity that is at once extraneous to its conception and essential to its particular and localized experience. In one of Bisama's earlier novels, *Caja negra*, a character asks: "¿Ha escrito Borges algún episodio de *Buffy La Cazavampiros*?" (210). The question goes to the heart of the creative act of sampling, wherein we as consumers of popular culture, even global popular culture, creatively reflect and absorb that culture. By so doing, we engage with it in our own contexts and use the mashup of our own lived reality with the cultural text in the production of something that is both original and reminiscent. And, of course, the question is a quote from a Warren Ellis graphic novel.

Craig Epplin has written engagingly about the book and particularly about the book as database, using Pablo Katchadjian's remixes of *Martín Fierro* and Jorge Luis Borges as examples of this kind of tendency. What we see in the works examined in this essay is a related but not identical phenomenon. Epplin emphasizes Kenneth Goldsmith's concept of uncreative writing, in which "uncreative works . . . are avowedly not original; rather they appropriate, transform, or reframe texts that already exist" (107). While the appropriations, transformations and reframings are certainly there and apparent, these texts move beyond the conceptual to a continuing engagement with reference and a deployment of intertext that creates these hip-hop beats within the narratives. In that sense, these texts remind us that the book is not merely a database of other books but also a creative cultural space in which musical, cinematic, and literary strategies merge in a cultural sample.

The works we have considered here also highlight the fact that much of the remix and sampling theory has ignored the book as a space for its practice, with the majority of that theory focusing on other modes of cultural production. One assumes that this neglect comes from a need to theorize “new” manners of expression that have moved beyond the book. Lev Manovich’s description of the focus of his study in his pioneering *The Language of New Media* is telling: “today we are in the middle of a new media revolution—the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication” (19). While he does not explore sampling directly, Manovich privileges as new media those cultural expressions that allow for variability, modularity, and cultural transcoding, and subsequent theorists of remixing and sampling have followed suit (20). David Laderman and Laurel Westrup’s anthology on sampling media focuses on all media save the literary text. Their reference to the book is fleeting as they position it as part of the “roots” of sampling belonging to “collage and quotation practices across visual art, film and literature” (3). The rest of their very good book is devoted to the practices of digital sampling in what would fit in Manovich’s idea of new media. Eduardo Navas’s *Remix Theory* focuses on the postmodern nature of sampling and remixing as it applies, again, to music. Unfortunately, a consequence of ignoring the book is a tendency to repeat theoretical moves common to literary theory. Navas, for example, insists on Remix as a “meta” project in which representation emerges from representation in what has become a very familiar notion of the postmodern (4).

My argument is that while sampling and remix theories have their basis in new media and especially in hip-hop and digital music, they have become so pervasive in our culture (as all of these theorists so convincingly argue) that they are useful as theoretical categories for understanding the strategies and approaches we see in contemporary narrative. This argument is positioned between two points of view that ultimately collapse into one. On the one hand, we see the book discarded as a place for contemporary cultural practice as it applies to new media. David Damrosch, while arguing for a place for the traditional book of literature, focuses on video games and rap lyrics as sites for literary analysis (78–83). In that sense, the book is portrayed, much as we saw earlier, as part of a cultural genealogy for contemporary artistic expression. Furthermore, because it occupies that ancestral place, the textual dynamics that occur therein are better described by “collage and quotation” than by sampling and remixing. The other argument is that, while the book is absolutely contemporary, these categories of collage and quotation—of intertextuality—not only adequately describe reference but are supple enough to theorize what we see happen in new media as well. There is no need, according to this viewpoint, to characterize as remix or sample what is, after all, just intertextuality. Relegating the book to history fails to appreciate the ways in which book writing continues to engage contemporary cultural practices, even as new media profoundly transform artistic and cultural experiences. At the same time, a dismissal of new theoretical categories as the mere repackaging of earlier concepts misses the ways in which contemporary culture reuses and remixes those very cultural concepts and denies the literary scholar the opportunity to understand more fully how remixing and sampling as cultural

phenomena have not only transformed musical practice but have also interacted with all forms of cultural expression.

What I think we see in the novels and stories that I have studied here is the additional recognition of the sample beyond a merely intertextual game or post-modern reference. In the books and films we have explored in this essay, sampling constructs narrative worlds and serves as a survival strategy for the characters that inhabit those worlds. Fantastic worlds like the one we see in *El púgil* are made real by the real-world samples that cohabit with the talking refrigerators. Art makes sense of his own PTSD as a veteran using the science fiction narratives with which he is familiar. Bisama's play with Lovecraft and Morrissey show Chileans' sampling of global underground culture as survival and resistance strategies in dictatorship and postdictatorship Chile. Paz Soldán in *Norte* explores the ways in which the reading and processing of the literary becomes an essential aspect of the construction of both literary and personal realities. And these thematic representations of the sample act as a key to understanding the sustained dialogues that these texts elaborate with all forms of media, each novel or story issuing an implicit invitation to read with reference, to experience the novel as multimedia. The referenced films, music, graphic novels, and other cultural expressions create webs of new and old media in the experience of the traditional print book.

The Mexican novelist and public intellectual Jorge Volpi concludes his long literary essay "América latina, holograma" with the following remark about Mike Wilson and his cohort:

Educados en la estética de los dibujos animados, de *Star Trek* y el Cyberpunk, y fascinados con la escritura de autores como Haruki Murakami y Neal Stephenson, y de series televisivas como *Lost*, comienzan ya a producir textos extraños e inclasificables que escapan del severo realismo —a veces naturalismo o costumbrismo— que prevaleció en la última década. (204)

Volpi's characterization emphasizes the ways in which popular culture provides the pieces for our writers' narratives, Volpi himself selecting a series of references to old and new science fiction in print and television media as well as Japanese magical realism in the case of Murakami. Volpi's declaration also marks an important move in the characterization of contemporary Latin American literature: the Mexican writer saves this example for the end of the essay, leaving the reader with Wilson's *El púgil* as the most recent example of Latin American narrative. While appreciating Volpi's move, we can take it even further. By including the more established writer Edmundo Paz Soldán, we see that this approach extends beyond a group of young writers in Chile. Indeed, where Volpi opposes their approach to the "severo realismo" that has reigned in recent Latin American narrative, Paz Soldán shows that those particular interests inform his own realistically-grounded writing.

The sampling aesthetic also situates itself within contemporary debates on culture and hybridity. Nestor García Canclini, in the 2001 introduction to his classic *Culturas híbridas* makes the following, somewhat pessimistic warning:

La innovación estética interesa cada vez menos en los museos, en las editoriales y en el cine; se ha desplazado a las tecnologías electrónicas, al entretenimiento musical y la moda. Donde había pintores o músicos, hay diseñadores y *discjockeys*. La hibridación en cierto modo se ha vuelto más fácil y se ha multiplicado cuando no depende de los tiempos largos, de la paciencia artesanal o erudita, sino de la habilidad para generar hipertextos y rápidas ediciones audiovisuales o electrónicas. (xviii)

One thing that the work of the writers and filmmakers studied here shows is how this divide between art that takes a while to construct and the digital expressions that happen in the moment is closing and is, perhaps, artificial. That is, with the advent of these possibilities that Canclini speaks of, we see a kind of cultural convergence in which digital and hip-hop sampling practices work their way back into print, and by so doing they construct forms of artistic expressions that bridge the gaps between media and genre.<sup>7</sup> The fact that science fiction and other minor genres have become the chosen currency and material of this bridge further suggests the ways in which narrative genre, global popular culture, print, and the digital have begun to converge in contemporary Latin American literary practice and in the construction of the book.

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Jenkins was the first to use the phrase “cultural convergence,” though he uses it to speak more specifically about marketing practices in the combination of cultural modes of production, like tie-ins between film, videogames, and books.

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