

Rebecca Seewald

University of Cologne; University of Bonn

Bonn, Germany

Travelling both ways: Cultural imaginations crossing frontiers in Roberto Bolaños *2666*

The US – American/Mexican frontier is a space where transnational myths and dreams collide – those of the ‘Wild, Wild West’ with its expansionist endeavour of the early colonial years and of the ‘American Virgin Land’ with the imaginary ‘Gate to a better Life’, which the *frontera* represents for mainly Hispanic immigrants. Still, it is also a place that is usually not centrally perceived but negotiated as a borderland, as Heike Paul claims in her monography *The Myths that made America*, where she adds: “The American West is constructed as a site of individual and collective quests for land and dominance”¹ and has become “a preeminent symbol of exceptionalist ‘Americanness’ around the world.”²

While US – American dreams are promised to become reality, “[h]atred, anger and exploitation are [also] prominent features of this landscape”,³ nowadays dominated by narratives of violence and drug smuggling. Roberto Bolaño, who sets the centre of his global novel *2666* in this supposed edge of civilization, creates “a literary space with a particular suggestion of profound connections between relatively isolated events in Mexico and the best and worst of European history.”⁴

The novel challenges the concepts of ‘Western’ hegemony and Latin American liminality, puts the notion of “World literature” up for discussion, and shall be examined as a laboratory for cultural exchange.

1 Heike Paul: *The Myths that made America*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2014, p. 314.

2 Ibid., p. 315.

3 Gloria Anzaldú a: *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012, p. 19.

4 Mads Rosendahl Thomsen: “Getting beyond the Exotic: Transnational Politics and Secular Re-enchantment in the Works of Junot Díaz and Roberto Bolaño”, in: Gesine Müller and Dunia Gras Miravet (Eds.): *América Latina y la literatura mundial: mercado editorial, redes globales y la invención de un continente*, Madrid/Frankfurt 2015, p. 67-80, p.75.