

narratives by Spanish women authors. Clearly, it is through laudable studies such as this one that reevaluate the texts of Spanish women novelists in their own context that a clearer, less-biased understanding of the value of this body of work will emerge.

University of Toledo

KATHLEEN THOMPSON-CASADO

Judith Nantell. *The Poetry of Francisco Brines: The Deconstructive Effects of Language*. Lewisburg PA, Bucknell University Press, 1994, 122 pp.

At various points throughout this study, Judith Nantell comments that she used to believe that her task as a critic was to attain knowledge by clarifying the meaning of poetic texts. Over time, however, she has come to think that poets such as Francisco Brines really explore the impossibility of achieving knowledge because of the groundlessness of existence and the instability of language. This has led her to prefer deconstruction as a method for reading because it sensitizes one to the discontinuities, aporias, and unexpected associations generated by non-being and language in the work of such poets. At the same time, deconstruction opens us to a new idea of criticism, one in which the goal of the critic is not to master the meaning of texts but to explore perplexity and uncertainty. As a result, she tells us, her study does not try to offer a full interpretation of Brines. Rather, it seeks to ponder the play of *différance* in his work as an unfolding of incoherence and insufficiency.

Nantell raises these issues by studying three main themes in Brines's poetry: knowledge, time, and non-being. In the first chapter concerning knowledge, the critic comments on three poems, one each by Claudio Rodríguez, José Ángel Valente, and Brines. The goal is to establish a method based on detecting contradictions and double entendres that generate counter-meanings, excess or supplementarity, and finally, uncertainty. Unfortunately, I found the reading of both Rodríguez and Valente somewhat extraneous to the whole, possibly because the absence of attention to their other work made it difficult to contextualize what was being said. My sense is that it would have been better to leave these two poets for another occasion so as to concentrate more thoroughly on Brines, whose approach to knowledge is explained through reference to only one poem.

This is all the more clear when we consider the text that Nantell does analyze in the chapter, «Esplendor negro» from *Insistencias en Luzbel*. Here, the poet seems to say that recognition of nothingness at the origin of existence makes knowledge impossible and language contradictory, although this is affirmed as a coherent —albeit illogical— statement of knowledge. Nantell recognizes this contradiction and concludes that the «black splendor» possesses the quality of supplementarity, that is, it is unnecessary or in excess. Here is where a consideration of additional texts by Brines might have helped explain or illuminate her ideas, although I recognize that to seek more commentary may be little more than my version of a metaphysics of presence. What is meant by supplementary in Nantell's explanation, and can the same tendency be found in other texts? Does the poet really point to a theory of signs, *différance*, and the displacement of presence, or might he be offering a traditional ontology of contradiction? Obviously, I am uncertain that deconstruction has made much difference here except as a way of encouraging the critic to avoid determinate interpretations, and I would have wished for more explanation of her ideas.

A not dissimilar problem appears in the second chapter on time, although this is the strongest section of the volume because it develops clear arguments supported by sustained reference to texts. The critic tells us that though Brines returns over and over to the problem of time, he does not seem to possess a consistent vision of it. She then analyzes his persistent concern for what she calls the «present instant» so as to show time is always an absence in his work, a slipping into a ceasing-to-be. Love is essential to this as part of a failed resistance to time's passing, a situation Nantell explores through a very perceptive reading of the poem «Un olor de azahar» from *El otoño de las rosas*.

On the other hand, it is my sense that this very thorough discussion ends up showing that the supposed inconsistencies in Brines are not that at all. The perpetual movement toward nothingness emerges as a stable meaning which, though elusive and contradictory because founded in absence, does stand as a coherent core of (non)sense around which the poetry circles. This in turn raises the question of whether deconstruction is pertinent to his work or our understanding of it. I am not saying it is not pertinent, but I am uncertain that it is.

The last chapter concerns Brines's obsession for finding ever

new ways to name nothingness. Nantell argues that in his early work, the poet was haunted by death as a kind of existential void. As he has grown older, however, he has become drawn to the idea of substituting signs of nothingness in a kind of endless postponing of decidability. In other words, the poet is not searching for the apt way to express nothingness, but is rather exploring the slipperiness of meaning as one world slides into another. Each sign is replaced and displaced by another in a perpetual game of *différance*.

Such an understanding may be possible, but as with other concepts, I believe it needs more exploration of its importance and consequences. Displacement of signification could lead to a questioning of language and logocentrism. It could decenter the subject and ask about new ways of understanding individual or collective being. Such issues are not discussed by Nantell, who simply leaves the matter at the level of a generally unexplained naming or misnaming. Again, I am not saying that she is off target; on the contrary, her readings do often seem quite insightful. But I wish she would help me understand more clearly the significance and consequence of what she is telling me.

Ultimately, then, I believe the critic's intelligence and sensitivity make many aspects of this book quite insightful, but that the whole would have benefitted from a more thorough explanation of its deconstructionist dimension. On the other hand, Brines is a poet who has long deserved more attention. Judith Nantell has done a fine service by calling our attention to the subtlety and complexity of his vision.

The Ohio State University

STEPHEN J. SUMMERHILL

Laureano Bonet. *El jardín quebrado. La Escuela de Barcelona y la cultura del medio siglo*. Barcelona, Ediciones 62, 1994, 364 pp.

En este estudio, tan interesante como profundo, el profesor Laureano Bonet desarrolla un atento análisis del mundo intelectual barcelonés de mediados de siglo. No obstante, el análisis no se limita únicamente a la llamada «Escuela de Barcelona», sino que amplía su marco para abarcar las circunstancias que rodearon el nacimiento y existencia de dicho núcleo intelectual. Así, la obra ahonda en los aspectos sociales, políticos y culturales de la España