

R E S E Ñ A S

CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

Cecilia Castro Lee, ed., *The Literature of Democratic Spain: 1975-1992*. Special issue of *The Literary Review* 36, 3 (1993), 432 pp.

The reviewer starts out with the best good will, happy to read this presentation of Spanish authors for an American public, promising himself, like a kid in Halloween, that he will take what he gets and enjoy it. There is such a stunning number of excellent authors today in Spain that no selection could ever be even moderately representative of the richness and quality of the literature and the arts of this new democratic period. The introduction, by the editor of the special issue, does an excellent job of synthesis and brings out the bustling and variegated creative energy and accomplishments of an impressive array of authors, pointing out the importance of the refined tensions present in the contemporary Peninsular culture between openness and regionalism, light and profound, and tradition and innovation. Then the selections begin with a fine piece by Rafael Argullol, describing a melancholic outing of two physicians who are shaken by the recent revelation that one of them is seriously ill. The reviewer cannot but wonder, though, if this is the first text he wants his friends to read. Then he realizes that the order of the book is straightforward and systematic: the book is divided into sections devoted to the novel, poetry, drama, and the essay, and within each section the authors are distributed by alphabetical order: Argullol, Benet, Castillo-Puche, Cela, etc. This is an order like any other, but perplexing. No matter: the reading is good. Benet's Numa ponders his fate, Castillo-Puche recollects beautifully somber images of his fabled Hécuba, Cela mesmerizes with the singsong of his folksy chatter, Fernández Cubas conjures an

evanescent but striking story about a woman's fascinating downfall, Landero spins his magic, Marsé impresses with his narrative mastery—a cunning blend of cinematographic glamour and down-to-earth observation— Carmen Martín Gaité presents a letter that cannot fail to move the heart and impress the mind by the way in which she makes sentiment profoundly intelligent, Eduardo Mendoza shows narrative slides of a grand and past Barcelona, José María Merino weaves metafiction, suspense, and literary criticism without loosing for a moment the thread of his compelling narrative, Rosa Montero creates an unforgettable world of frail and threatened magic, Muñoz Molina is a master who cannot misplace a word but creates a world hauntingly dislocated, Soledad Puértolas observes with dispassionate wisdom a conversation between two sisters, Carlos Rojas imagines a moving, graceful, and learned conversation between a disillusioned Cervantes and a young admirer, Torrente Ballester zips through a gripping adventure, and Vázquez Montalbán has his detective Carvalho dissect with elegant melancholy the life of the rich. All of this must be read, it is splendid material.

The reviewer then reads the biographical and bibliographical descriptions, written by the translator of each selection, and is struck by their variety. Most provide the dates of the works mentioned, but there are no dates for Argullol. Only a couple tell us when there is an English translation available, a curious editorial decision in a book destined for an English-Speaking audience. The eye stumbles upon the date 1962 for Carmen Martín Gaité's *Ritmo lento*; the reviewer remembers 1963. And again in Puértolas *Una enfermedad moral*, given as 1988, the date of the second edition, instead of the first in 1982. But for a reviewer who has decided not to question why neither Juan nor Luis Goytisolo have been selected, nor Julián Marías, nor Juan José Millás, picking of a few dates seems petty, until he notices that two dates are incorrect in the entry for Carlos Rojas, 1990 for 1988, and 1991 for 1990. Moving into the poetry section, the reviewer has become distrustful and begins to grumble at just two brief poems for Rafael Alberti, whose alphabetic luck has him go at the head of this group. He is described as «the oldest poet in this anthology and the oldest living poet in Spain today.» Good grief! Better go to the next page: a poem from Blanca Andreu's *De una niña de provincias que se vino a vivir en un Chagall*. We are told that «for this

work, she was awarded the 1982 Adonais Prize.» The reviewer looks with puzzlement at the strip of paper across his edition of the book, «Premio Adonais 1980». He rereads the whole book, savoring the poetry and looking for the Spanish original of the selected poem. He does not find it. He reads the book again. No luck. Concludes that it must be a poem added to a subsequent edition. He looks in the acknowledgments: no, the reference is to 1981. He reads the translation again, Andreu's book again. Is this a Borges story? The reviewer has lost all confidence in himself. Better move on to Atencia, and Brines. *El otoño de las rosas* is given as 1987. By now the reviewer is connected to the OCLOC: the computer screen reads 1986. Move on to Luisa Castro. *Los versos del eunuco* are of course *del eunuco*. Colinas, *Noche más allá de la Noche*, given as 1983, published in 1982. (Colinas's are stunningly beautiful poems, dedicately textured, musical, and with the grace and serenity of Leopardi.) By now the reviewer has lost track of the poems, he only concentrates on dates: Ángel González's *Prosemas o menos* is given as 1988, the OCLC transmits 1985; Julio Llamazares is attributed *Memorial de la nieve*, instead of *Memoria de la nieve*, Manuel Mantero's *Ya quiere amanecer* is truncated to *Quiere amanecer*. Ana Rossetti, one of the reviewer's favorite poets, is variously mishandled: *Los devaneos de Erato* becomes *Devaneos de Erato* and the date of the prize she received for *Indicios vehementes* is changed from 1985 to 1986. Julia Uceda's *Campanas en Sansueña* becomes *Campanas de Sansuela*. Luis Antonio de Villena's *El viaje a Bizancio* is given as published in 1976, instead of 1978 that I find in the edition I own. (And his two poems translated here are wonderful, as most of his poetry is. A pity that the translators do not mention that the title «Four Roses» is in English in the original Spanish poem, and a pity too that the splendid first verse «¡Abandonarse al fin, ceder a la caída!» is translated as «To surrender to the end, to give in to the fall!» missing the more colloquial and appropriate «At last to surrender».

The two plays that follow in the drama section are thoroughly entertaining and engaging, Paloma Pedrero's *The Voucher* and Jaime Salóm's selections from *Behind the Scenes in Eden*. The concluding essays by Celia Amorós, Miguel Morey, and Ciriaco Morón Arroyo, are good selections, yet the receiver—who has not asked why Guillermo Carnero was not included among the poets—misses here Eugenio Trías, Sánchez Ferlosio, María Zambrano, or

Fernando Savater. By now, though, it is clear that this is an enjoyable book to read but not to review. The collection is splendid in content but carelessly edited. The potential was there: some contributions from individual scholars, among others Alma Amell's and Phyllis Zatlin's, could have served as models of excellence for the whole book. The reviewer knows it is his job to report what he sees, but delays writing these lines and decides, uncharacteristically, to write in the third person, hoping the praise will be remembered and the errors will be corrected in subsequent editions, and hoping also, especially, that his observations do not prevent readers from enjoying the many fine selections of this anthology.

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RANDOLPH D. POPE

Josep Maria Sala Valldaura. *La fotografía de una sombra. Instantáneas de la generación poética de los cincuenta*. Barcelona, Anthropos, 1993, 216 pp.

Es difícil determinar qué sería peor: si decidir que los editores de Anthropos carecen de criterio selectivo o suponer que han publicado este estudio sin haberlo revisado ni editado. En cualquiera de los dos casos cuesta aceptar que un libro como éste llegue a publicarse. Quien lo escribió tiene, sin duda, gran interés y sobrados conocimientos sobre la materia que comenta; carece, sin embargo, de las condiciones más deseables en un crítico: ideas originales, lecturas iluminadoras, rigor intelectual y claridad de exposición. En su estudio de algunos poetas del cincuenta entrega muy poco material crítico que merezca la molestia de leer las páginas con que pretende ofrecer —«con el ánimo de resumir las principales contribuciones críticas» al tema y «con la esperanza de aclarar algunos conceptos e incluso complicar algunas de las ideas que empiezan ya a solidificar» (11). No se busque relación entre estas proposiciones iniciales y el texto que pretende cumplirlas.

El título del libro, de pretenciosa imprecisión, y su relación con los títulos de las secciones, es ejemplar de la principal deficiencia de este estudio: el estilo, que bien merece el viejo calificativo de ripioso, por lo abundante en expresiones metafóricas, frases, oraciones y párrafos que están de más y que sugieren fallas de metodología y falta de rigor crítico. El último párrafo de la «Nota limi-