

RESEÑAS

CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

Matthew J. Marr. *Postmodern Metapoetry and the Replenishment of the Spanish Lyrical Genre, 1980-2000*. Fife, Scotland: La Sirena, 2007. 138 pp.

In a splendid study of Spanish poetry from the last two decades of the twentieth century (the post-modern divide in Peninsular letters), Matthew Marr gives priority to the metapoem, a space in which the lyric theorizes itself and engages in polemics with competing and worn-out poetic forms. In the transition from the aestheticism of the *novísimo* group, who appeared on the scene in Castellet's famous anthology, *Nueve novísimos* (1970), to the so-called «poetry of experience», a group of young poets found it necessary to escape the spell of their seniors in typically post-structuralist fashion, i.e., by deploying *novísimo* poetics against itself. The result was a decentering of the elegant conventions crafted by Pere Gimferrer, Guillermo Carnero, Jenaro Talens and others but with no desire to establish a new, hegemonic school. Rather, Javier Salvago, Luis Gacía Montero, Vicente Gallego, Felipe Benítez Reyes, Carlos Marzal, Roger Wolfe and other young poets crafted a creative space of their own wherein to *perform* a «willing adoption, adaptation, and playful manipulation of the rhetoric, techniques, and tropes of those discourses they simultaneously struggle[d] to neutralize» (30). Or, as Marr puts it in his merry critical lingo, «The *postnovísimos*' hijacking of metapoetry is precisely this—both an enterprise and a contradiction, or perhaps more aptly: an inside job» (30).

The metapoem suited the unassuming, critical temperament of the consciously «post» poets of the 80s and 90s, and gave them a means by which to distance themselves from the immediate literary past. But in Marr's narrative what begins as a playfully serious reaction to «tired *preciosista-culturalista*» clichés (46) becomes a quest of its own, «an affirmative poetics of replenishment» that embraces «the marvels of everyday human interaction, the wonders of the experience of emotion, and the jubilation of simply being alive» (47). Mapping that quotidian field, the author visits well-chosen outcroppings of the metapoem in search of the postmodern principles that underlie Spain's contemporary poetry.

How did the *postnovísimos* distinguish themselves from their seniors by cultivating (of all things) metapoetry—a standard showpiece in the *novísimos*' poetic gallery? Marr's answer is that whereas the *novísimos* agonized over «the collapse of the sign» and the ensuing epistemological disorder (53), the young poets evince a «relaxed, ironic, and often benignly parodic sensibility» toward such grave concerns, a tonal shift whose signature effects he identifies: the postmodern metapoem «shows dramatically where the metapoetry of the *novísimos* had stated theoretically; it privileges *dynamics* over *thematics*; it is an *actualized* phenomenon, rather than a thematized idea» (55). In other words, postmodern metapoetry invites the reader to participate in «the fictional text's own fabrication» (56). That is the prime *experience* in the «poetry of experience.» «It is a participatory process which—rather than departing from a 'known' truth—invites the reader to venture on a somewhat unsure course in a 'hands-on' endeavor which seeks to propel the reader toward an epistemological end» (76). This amusing, often exhilarating, experience releases the reader from the *novísimos*' mournful anguish at the nothingness of language and the resulting hollowness of poetry. In their place Marr underscores the playful deployment of «non-teleological, suspensive irony» (61) and the performative inclusion of the reader in the process of the poem's creation (more often than not, its self-deflation)—innovations that distinguish the poets writing in the 80s and 90s from their *novísimo* predecessors.

Marr's analysis challenges Jonathan Mayhew's claim, in *The Poetics of Self-Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Spanish Poetry* (1994), that poets of the 80s drew away from metapoetry, signaling a «waning of the intellectually rigorous self-consciousness» that enriched much of Spain's 20th-century lyric (29). Just the contrary occurred, Marr asserts, as *postnovísimos* exploited «the metapoem's potential as a type of critical forum in which authors strive to rechart the contemporary poetic map through the very medium of poetry itself» (15). His book substantiates this claim as it surveys the «manufacture» and consecration of the *novísimos*, the rise of the *postnovísimo* «counter-critical' project», and the dynamics of performative lyric self-awareness. Postmodern theory provides a happy lens through which to appreciate the intergenerational struggle and the central role of the metapoem in adapting the lyric to contemporary skepticism of long-accepted assumptions, such as «the place of truth in the lyrical genre» (77). Brilliant close readings of Salvago, García Montero, Galleo, Benítez Reyes, and Marzal complement an adroit deployment of theoretical frames drawn from Pierre Bourdieu, Linda Hutcheon, Jean-François Lyotard and Jerome Rothenberg. In close dialogue with other critics (Jonathan Mayhew, Miguel Galanes, José Olivio Jiménez, Margaret Persin, etc.), Marr writes with uncommon brio and discern-

ment. Though he gives excessive space to Roger Wolfe's comic self-derision, his study is otherwise an habile introduction to contemporary Spanish poetry, an ingenious wedding of postmodern and *postnovísimo*, and a probing investigation of the metapoem's central role in contemporary lyric. For anyone teaching or researching Spain's contemporary poets, this book is required reading.

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José Francisco Ruiz Casanova. *Anthologos: Poética de la antología poética*. Madrid: Cátedra 2007. 346 pp.

En las dos últimas décadas, las aportaciones teóricas sobre el canon literario han sido numerosas y en no pocos casos de elevada enjundia. La obra de mayor recepción fue *El canon occidental* (1993), de Harold Bloom, que figuró incluso varias semanas en la lista de los superventas norteamericanos. Objetivo capital del estudioso era la reivindicación del valor estético de la literatura, que a su juicio debería primar siempre sobre los aspectos ideológicos, políticos, económicos o sociales. Pero también era una defensa incondicional de la enseñanza humanista y un grito de alarma contra lo que él consideraba la pérdida de las capacidades que permiten llevar a cabo una lectura cuidadosa de los clásicos. Y era asimismo un ataque feroz a un supuesto monstruo de seis cabezas que Bloom bautizó con la malintencionada etiqueta de «Escuela del Resentimiento», integrada, a su modo de ver, por feministas, marxistas, lacanianos, semióticos, nuevos historicistas y deconstruccionistas. La «Escuela del Resentimiento» era una bestia apocalíptica que pretendía arrancar de cuajo la posibilidad de evaluar la calidad de una obra literaria en sintonía con su valor estético. En suma: Bloom reivindicaba a los autores canónicos y condenaba a los críticos y teóricos de la literatura que se dejaban llevar por las modas de turno.

Por el contrario, en los últimos lustros las discusiones teóricas en torno al concepto de antología *sensu lato* fueron mucho más modestas, pese a la frecuencia con que se editan compendios de poesía y a los comentarios y críticas que suelen generar, debido a que el lector de antologías poéticas es con frecuencia un antólogo virtual que compara la selección que tiene en sus manos con la que él prepararía si tuviera el encargo de una editorial. Si además la antología es de poesía contemporánea, puede —y suele— ser juzgada por los poetas excluidos, con lo que la crítica airada e incluso la polémica tienen ciertas posibilidades de cuajar. Y sin embargo, pese a las críticas, a las buenas antologías el paso del tiempo les suele sentar bien, y en no pocos casos convertirlas en testimonios de la evolución poética. En lo que se refiere a la poesía española del siglo XX, la mera mención de