

## RESEÑAS

### CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

David Herzberger. *Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain*. Durham, Duke UP, 1995, 182 pp.

Critics and scholars in the field of contemporary Spanish literature have looked forward to the publication of this book since Herzberger's 1991 articles on the topic of history and fiction in postwar Spain. They will not be disappointed, for the book expands on the stimulating theses presented in the articles and broadens their scope by including more authors and works. At the same time, the book format provides Herzberger with the space necessary to adumbrate his complex notion of the intermingling of history, fiction, historiography and dissent in several types of novels written between 1951 and 1983.

In choosing to examine «the relationship between historiography and fiction in Franco's Spain» (3), *Narrating the Past* stakes out a very particular vantage point from which to scrutinize canonical novels or authors of the period. It considers in turn social realist fiction (early 1950s to early 1960s); novels of memory (late 1960s to early 1980s). The results of this carefully canted analysis are highly original, providing unexpected insights into texts about which it might have seemed nothing new could be said, including *La colmena*, *El cuarto de atrás*, *La reivindicación del Conde Don Julián*, and *Los bravos*. The study is enriched by Herzberger's familiarity with historiographic theory, his training as a comparatist, and by his notable knowledge of Spanish postwar history and narrative.

Herzberger posits that juxtaposing historiographical and fictional texts of the Francoist period reveals «new meanings,» «historical filiations,» and «structural similarities» in the two discourses. When read against contemporary historiography, the fiction may be seen to offer a counter-discourse to official history. It becomes «narration that affirms is authority over time,» surreptitiously attacking «the narrative principles upon which the telling of [official] history is premised» (3). In a gesture whose punctiliousness is typical of the study, Herzberger states that it is he, not the novelists, who has effected a relationship between the two forms of narration. He wants there to be no doubt that the authors may rarely

have thought about history, official or otherwise. In fact, when queried about the ties between their fiction and history, most «could not pin down how their works might be viewed as “historical”» (x).

The book's organization is eminently logical. After an introduction outlining the points of contact and divergence between history and fiction, with ample reference to Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur, the reader is presented an overview of Spanish historiography under Franco. Herzberger emphasizes certain tendencies in the writing of postwar history that contemporaneous fiction may plausibly be seen to dispute, including its monologism and its exaltation of the heroic individual. Official historians presented (parts of) Spain's past as ineluctable prelude to the Francoist present, which was in turn portrayed as fulfilling the nation's historical destiny and embodying her essence. Everything in the present is «as it must be» (34). Alternative versions of the past were silenced or discredited; the official story, «what in reality was a cultural and political proposition about the past,» was thus converted «into what appeared to be a wholly natural *fact*» (17).

Chapter II commences the crossreading of literary texts a brilliant analysis of the ways in which the social realists contested the historians' rosy yet coercive picture of Spain. Herzberger asserts repeatedly, if not altogether convincingly, that social realism was an «intentional mode of writing,» by which he means that its authors self-consciously intended to portray contemporary history in Spain. By so doing they hoped to improve the lot of those Spaniards who were suffering in spite of living in a Spain which had just fulfilled her historical destiny, and where everything was «as it must be.» While not easy to follow, Herzberg's analysis of the social realists' manipulation of time, causality, characterization, and language is path-breaking.

Advancing chronologically, Chapter 3 considers the novel of memory, defined as «those fictions in which past time is evoked through subjective remembering, most often by means of first-person narration» (66): *El cuarto de atrás*, *Recuento*, *Señas de identidad* and *La cólera de Aquiles*. It argues that the use of a remembering subject to evoke past moments effectively contests the notion of a single, static past, because it shows that «the meaning of the past (and present) is ... not 'given' within a perceived natural flow of events (as asserted by historians of the Regime), but rather is wholly constructed» (78).

Chapter 4 breaks the paradigm established in previous chapters to deal exclusively with the novels and essays of a single writer, Juan Benet. Herzberger finds that Benet's writings «forge a unique narrative intimacy between history and fiction» (13), achieving a «liquefying amorphousness» which fuses «referential illusion and enigmatic contingency» (87). Throughout the chapter, Benet's fiction is contrasted to that of the social realists and the narrators of memory. Like the former, Benet trusts language to convey reality; in his novels he attempts to present «not the

object per se, but the most accurate possible symbol of it within the human capacity to understand the world» (103). Benet's characters, like those of the novels of memory, frequently ponder the past, searching for illumination about the present. Yet his characters are never successful: «there are no epiphanies in Benet's narrative» (105).

Chapter 5 and 6 focus on postmodern novels by Torrente Ballester, Juan Goytisolo, and Camilo José Cela. If practitioners of the previous narrative modes believed in the possibility of history and that of «writing about history,» the fiction of postmodernists «makes no such claim to the real» (117). Language itself is understood to be unstable and wholly constructed, so history and fiction constitute similarly futile attempts at representation. In the context of Francoist Spain, such nihilism was dissident, because it stood in direct opposition to postwar historiographic discourse, whose truth claims were unambiguous. The final chapter considers postmodern novels which verge into the apocalyptic, suggesting not only the destruction of the world as it has existed but also revelation and eventually transformation. It is «the end of the postapocalyptic Francoist order and its paradigm of truthmaking» (149) which is asserted, clearing the way for profound change in the future.

In a Postscript, Herzberger comments briefly on the role of history in the Spanish novels since Franco's death. No longer written in opposition, these texts are free to manipulate history to their own imaginative ends.

*Narrating the Past* significantly advances our knowledge about the fiction written in Spain between the early 1950s and the early 1980s. It is particularly to be commended for blending respectful citation of the standard works in the field, insights drawn from theoretical critics, and apt comparison with fiction in English. The book's unwavering focus on history in postwar fiction might once have resulted in a very narrow monograph, but in the wake of deconstruction and poststructuralism, history is no longer seen as a monolith, a solid objective correlative. History, as *Narrating the Past* reiterates, is now understood to be a process, involving slippery words and the construction of meaning. It is a stimulating fellow traveller to works of fiction.

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Carlos Javier García. *Metanovela: Luis Goytisolo, Azorín y Unamuno*. Madrid, Júcar, 1994, 159 pp.

«...la metanovela es la novela de la novela: la novela misma, su construcción, es objeto de novelización» (13). With these words, Carlos Javier García begins a short volume on metafiction that mostly covers well worn territory, but does offer a clear and accessible overview that