

contemporáneo, y la atención preferente a lo actual nos dice que mucho aquí desaparecerá pronto. Pero Luis Antonio de Villena es un testigo y portavoz importante de los gustos de hoy, y admiramos su capacidad de hablar al lector con claridad y convicción. Decididamente, *Decadencias* es un libro que merece la pena.

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## CREACIÓN

D'Ors, Pablo. *Lecciones de ilusión*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2008. 680 pp.

In the late nineteen-sixties, there began a constant theme in Spanish literature, which was the need to surpass social and socialist realism, to break away from the ever present sociopolitical referent, and universalize the Spanish novel. This led to new sub-genres, to what Gonzalo Sobejano classified as «la novela ensimismada» of the nineteen-eighties in an article in this journal, and to other experiments, for instance those the so-called «Generación X,» who strove to remove themselves from any traditional dependency upon contemporary peninsular culture. If we can categorize this as a long but ongoing trend, Pablo d'Ors's *Lecciones de ilusión* may be considered that trend's culmination. In one review he has been described as «el más alemán y europeo de todos los escritores españoles» (Diego Medrano, *El Comercio*), and in another we read that «desde la irrupción del apátrida Bolaño [perhaps d'Ors favorite author] hace algunos años, no ha habido mayor novedad en la narrativa española, ni un planteamiento literario más original» (Mihály Dés, *Lateral*). Without doubt, the reception of d'Ors's works has been exceptionally positive, and this, his latest novel may be considered—as the author himself has suggested—the culmination of a literary experiment that began with his collection of short stories, *El estreno* (in the same year his novel *Las ideas puras* was a finalist for the Heralde prize), in 2000, and was followed by a series of novels published while he was simultaneously, over a period of six years, writing *Lecciones de ilusión*.

The originality of this author derives from his non-Spanish intellectual development and from his broad knowledge of other literatures. *Las ideas puras*, for example, finds its point of departure in the ideas of Stein, Husserl, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. Each story of *El estreno* is dedicated, in one way or another, to a well-known writer, starting with Thomas Bernhard. And at the beginning of this last novel, the young protagonist, Lorenzo Bellini, travels to a sanitarium, in order to study the relationship between madness and creativity, with the works of Strindberg, Hölderlin, and Walser in his suitcase. And while with respect to this particular text our first thoughts turn to Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, it

is difficult not to think also of the early pages of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* as possible sources for the fantastic developments we find in all of d'Ors's works. (In *Andanzas del impresor Zollinger*, the protagonist's falling in love with a woman over the telephone is strikingly similar to Rushdie's doctor's falling in love with a patient by seeing the various parts of her body, one by one, through holes in a bed sheet.)

A major difference, however, is that Rushdie's fantasies are actually to be understood as realities that reflect the world of India and Pakistan, while d'Ors creates a world, generally with little or no description, that is truly fantastic. What d'Ors presents to the reader in *Lecciones...* is a fantasy world that draws the reader into a lengthy discussion, in one way or another, of the concept of literature, of fiction, of the role of the writer and the reader. And while there are constant references to Europe's famous authors, and a few ironic tongue-in-cheek chapter titles, such as «El discurso del método» and «Contra la interpretación», the novel is based almost entirely on the imaginary world that d'Ors creates in the sanitarium and the effects that each patient's eccentricity has upon the young student, who will slowly succumb to his own version of madness, that of creativity, just as we, the readers, will become gradually absorbed by the fantasies that abound in each chapter.

Chapter is actually not the term that d'Ors prefers to use for the five sections of this novel, but rather novellas, titled lessons, preceded and followed by an inaugural and final lesson. Given that the entire text is devoted to the creation of fiction, whether it be the patients' fantasies or the protagonist's slow route toward novel writing, one could term this a work of metafiction, although the language and style are still secondary to the eccentricities of the plot. One wonders if Lorenzo's captivation at the hands of the residents is a metafictional definition of the fate of any reader as s/he is slowly absorbed by the text s/he is reading. As with Ruiz Zafón's *La sombra del viento*, the reader, at some point, may cease to make judgments as to the meaning or transcendence, literary or otherwise, of the text, and is gradually absorbed, taken in, much as Lorenzo slowly participates in the madness of the patients who surround him. D'Ors attempts to say something similar at the conclusion of *Andanzas del impresor Zollinger*, when he writes that August Zollinger «es, en cierto sentido, cada uno de nosotros» (135). And what the text—all his texts—purports to offer to the reader, as well as to the writer, is an understanding of one's inner self as a means to find happiness: «El hombre que es feliz siempre crea un espacio: una casa, un libro, un horizonte nuevo al que viajar y en donde hincar, aunque sea metafóricamente, una bandera» (588). But, d'Ors tells us in Hegelian fashion, it is the *process* of the reading and writing that creates that happiness: «Que la felicidad está en viajar para hincar una bandera, en escribir para ofrecer un libro y en construir una casa para que otros la habiten mientras que él, ese hombre feliz, construye otras casas, hinca otras banderas y escribe otros libros

que tratarán —es lo más probable— sobre como se fraguan las historias, se hincan las banderas o se construyen las casas» (588). His understanding of writing, he tells us, in the final pages, is similar to Machado's phrase «se hace el camino al andar.» Similar to what Machado writes, Lorenzo's alter ego states «que no se escribe sobre lo que se vive (como suelen pensar los que no escriben), sino que más bien se vive lo que se escribe» (676). This novel of novellas is, thus, if successful, a prolonged investigation into one's —the protagonist's, the author's, and, if willing, the reader's— understanding of one's purpose in life.

I write «if willing» because the reading of this text can become a task. One uses the term «good read» in literary criticism to denote those texts that hold our attention but may not rise to the level of a classical text (in the sense of a text that is taught in class). *Lecciones...* most definitely will hold the reader's attention, but to go past the level of a good read here calls for a definite suspension of disbelief, a willingness on the part of the reader to read metaphorically, to see the fantasies and eccentricities of the plot and its characters as part of a larger story, a story with philosophical transcendence. Much as Pablo d'Ors would expect, that level of reading will depend very much on the individual reader's ability to become one with the text (perhaps better stated as the *inability* to avoid doing so), much as Lorenzo Bellini became part of the population he originally meant to study.

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Vila-Matas, Enrique. *Dublinesca*. Barcelona, Seix Barral, 2010. 327 pp.

Como nos tiene acostumbrados en sus anteriores novelas, en *Dublinesca* Enrique Vila-Matas hace un homenaje a la literatura por medio del humor y la ironía. *Dublinesca* es una paródica reflexión sobre el fin de una época, sobre la muerte de la noble rama del oficio de editor. El protagonista de la novela, Riba, un prestigioso editor barcelonés, se encuentra sumido en un profundo vacío existencial tras cerrar la editorial a la que ha dedicado toda su vida. Desde ese momento pasa sus días como en una pesadilla, sentado frente al ordenador sin ningún propósito. Un día tiene un sueño premonitorio que le indica que el sentido de su vida pasa por Dublín, y entonces comienza a planear el viaje para conjurar en una extraña tristeza ese vacío, para celebrar allí el funeral por la muerte de la literatura en su forma culta, tradicional, de la que la novela de Joyce representó uno de sus momentos estelares. ¿Por qué Dublín? Porque Riba admira la capacidad narrativa de los irlandeses y asegura: «es como si los dublinese tuvieran el don de la literatura» (132).

Se vive en el texto una atmosfera de presente fúnebre, un ambiente