

## R E S E Ñ A S

### CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

David T. Gies, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1999, 327 pp.

*Modern Spanish Culture* is a compilation of twenty-three essays penned by renowned hispanists who endeavor to synthesize for an uninitiated readership the essence of Spain's history and artistic output from 1868 through the end of the twentieth century. This beautifully produced volume (complete with a calendar of events, glossary and many illustrations) is divided into seven sections: six under the general heading «Culture», the first entitled «Culture: center and periphery», followed by five others titled, «Culture and History», «Culture and Prose», «...Poetry», «...Theater», and «...the Arts». They are encompassed by editor David T. Gies' introduction and a final section on the «Media». In his preface, Gies explains that 1868, the year of the «Glorious Revolution», was chosen as a point of departure since it «...signaled the passage from one political world-view to another» (3). This key event and time frame lead, inevitably, to a repetition of historical background in the essays as they delve into «the intellectual side of civilization» (4) in Spain.

The compendium opens with Stephanie Siebruth's essay staking out the parameters of the term «culture» as it will be used in *Modern Spanish Culture*. It is followed by three others delineating Spain's political geography. E. Inman Fox elucidates the evolution of Castillian cultural hegemony and the historiographical tendencies which have sustained Castillian identity. Teresa M. Vilarós' poignant, if not militant, cultural mapping of Catalonia also reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of this collection. On one hand, there is an excellent mixture of hispanophone and anglophone specialists whose opinions both coincide and clash, therefore leading the attentive reader to a more profound understanding and appreciation of the complexity of modern Spain. On the other, by trying to do justice to their specific topics, many authors (Vilarós is the first) condemn themselves to cataloguing sometimes unfamiliar artists, writers, works and sociopolitical events, a strategy destined, unfortunately, to originate tedium. This brevity is another drawback. Philip Silver's piece on the Basque Country, for example, focuses almost entirely on the

region's political situation, while culture (according to Siebruth), is relegated to the last few pages. Also, the reader would have benefitted from essays on Spain's other «historical autonomous regions», most especially Galicia and its cultural achievements.

Section II summarizes Spanish history since 1868 and dovetails nicely with the previous studies on nationalism and geopolitics. All three authors give succinct and coherent accounts of Spain's past. Of particular interest is Santos Juliá's exuberant article, «History, politics, and culture, 1975-1996», which exudes the pride Spaniards feel for having peacefully dismantled the Franco dictatorship and reinstated democracy.

Sections III-V treat Spanish letters, each one —narrative and essay (III), poetry (IV), and theater (V)— giving a high-density survey that strives to pique the reader's interest in a particular genre, period, or author. Indeed, Dru Dougherty's essay, «Theater and Culture: 1868-1936», demonstrates how both high and mass culture fused on the Spanish stage to produce works, «...so richly involved with a society that paid so dearly to see itself both praised and reviled» (220). The most analytically challenged of the essayists are those who examine Spanish poetry. Richard A. Cadwell distils —as marvellously as obtusely— Juan Ramón Jiménez's later poetry thusly: «...a metonymic style seeking in symbols of decay and death the truly eternal essence within temporality, creating a paradox in which anguish becomes exultant affirmation» (182). Nonetheless, Thomas Mermall's study of the Spanish essay reaches the conclusion all of the authors of *Modern Spanish Culture* point to, that today's Spain, «...can now boast of having arrived where her artists and intellectuals have long sought so fervently to be —integrally in Europe». (172).

Section VI steers the reader toward mass culture and is without question the most interesting and enlightening. José Martín Martínez defends the «rich continuity» of Spanish visual arts during the last century by enumerating the Spanish artists (Sorolla, Picasso, Dalí, Chillida, etc.) who, «became figures of international standing in their own right» (239), during this «Silver Age». Kathleen M. Vernon deftly analyzes early Spanish cinematography via explanations of the *españolada* (a filmic folkloric musical) of the 1930s and 40s, realism in the 1950s and the New Spanish Cinema of the 1960s and 70s. Peter Evans offers a fascinating exegesis of Spanish cinematography since the «official abolition of censorship in 1977» (267) and its radical transformation in regard to national identity, sexuality and gender relations. The final triad of studies in this section examine Spanish architecture, music and dance, offering concise accounts of these art forms and their creators.

Philip Deacon's discussion of «The Media in Modern Spanish Culture» closes *Modern Spanish Culture*. He begins by tracing the rise of journalism at the turn of the century, its fall during the dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Franco, and its subsequent renaissance after the latter's death. The role played by radio in Spain is also adroitly handled: its value as «an

essential vehicle of mass communication for news and entertainment» (310) in the 1920s and 1930s, its difficulties during the dark ages of Francoism, and, finally, its popularity under «the basic liberties (expression, pluralism, regionalism, secularization)» (314) as guaranteed by the 1978 constitution. Deacon crowns his description of the «exuberant media world of democratic Spain» (317) by chronicling the evolution of television and its assimilation by a globalized economy.

A perusal of *Modern Spanish Culture* will provide a feast of information and opinions on Spain, thus preparing the reader to understand the nation and its future as it surges into the twenty-first century.

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Fernández, J. Benito. *El contorno del abismo; Vida y leyenda de Leopoldo María Panero*. Barcelona, Tusquets, 1999, 404 pp.

Como indica el título de esta biografía, J. Benito Fernández, periodista y redactor en Televisión Española, está menos interesado en la poesía de Leopoldo María Panero que en la leyenda de su vida. Sabido es que desde hace más de treinta años, Panero tiene fama de ser uno de los seres más extravagantes y locos del panorama literario contemporáneo, un verdadero «niño malo» o «maldito» de las letras españolas. El biógrafo narra la historia de esta fama a base de cartas, documentos, y una gran cantidad de entrevistas hechas a amigos y enemigos de Panero, sin excluir al poeta mismo, quien parece haber cooperado mucho en la preparación del libro. El resultado no echa mucha luz sobre la obra del poeta, pero sí nos permite ver el curso de su vida tumultuosa e inquietante.

Es probable que la gran cantidad de documentación de este libro significa que el autor no quiere limitarse a la leyenda de Panero, sino que se propone mostrar la realidad detrás del velo. Sin embargo, no es fácil saber si logra su propósito porque en todo momento el poeta parece tan consciente de la teatralidad de su vida que resulta imposible distinguir entre la sinceridad y el espectáculo. Incluso, cuanto más escandaloso es el poeta, más parece comunicar su sentido de lo performativo, como cuando orina delante del público en los restaurantes, o deja abiertos los grifos para inundar las casas de sus amigos. Juego o malicia —no hay manera de distinguir entre las posturas de su vida porque todo es lo mismo y termina en el gesto provocador de la locura.

El biógrafo comienza su narración con la familia del poeta, concretamente el padre, Leopoldo Panero, poeta religioso, franquista reconocido, y hombre aparentemente frío, poco comunicativo, que murió prematuramente en 1962. El padre es importante para establecer las bases de una familia problemática, pero la gran sorpresa de este libro es la madre Felicidad Blanc, una persona excéntrica que es casi tan interesante como su