

RESEÑAS

CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

Johnson, Roberta. *Crossfire: Philosophy and the Novel in Spain, 1900-1934*. Lexington, Kentucky UP, 1993, 234 pp.

Roberta Johnson's *Crossfire* is a welcome addition to the growing list of critical works focusing on the Spanish novel of the first third of the twentieth century. Pre-civil war fiction has been rather neglected by Hispanists in recent decades; those interested in the chronological period seemed to prefer its poetry or drama, and those taken with narrative have chosen to concentrate on the novel written after the war. *Crossfire's* predecessors in this important and overdue reevaluation of fiction written before the Spanish cataclysm are Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Idle Fictions: The Hispanic Vanguard Novel, 1926-1934* (1982), Robert Spires' *Transparent Simulacra: Spanish Fiction, 1902-1926* (1988), and, to a more limited extent, Susan Nagel's *The Influence of the Novels of Jean Giraudoux on the Hispanic vanguard Novels of the 1920s-1930s* (1991). [While not limited to fiction, José-Carlos Mainer's *La Edad de Plata (1902-1939): Ensayo de interpretación de un proceso cultural* (1983) provides an exhaustive analysis of the philosophical and cultural skirmishes of the period in Spain, and its absence from Johnson's bibliography is inexplicable.] While many of the same canonic authors are considered in these monographs, Johnson has wisely mapped out such a specific terrain—the presence, influence, and function of diverse European philosophers in the fiction of two generations of writers—that her material never overlaps and is always, in fact, complementary to the earlier studies.

Johnson's thesis is that the founders of the philosophical novel in Spain—Unamuno, Baroja and Azorín—used fiction to wage decorous war on others: «The novel ultimately became... a means of expressing personal and ideological differences without the

unpleasant consequences of open and direct statement» (23). Caught as they were in a «crossfire» between the dramatically conflicting philosophies then being debated in Spain —ranging from the idealist Krausism through materialism, positivism, and Nietzschean individualism— they also employed the novel to clarify and test out their own sometimes contradictory beliefs. Johnson uses Bakhtinian notions of dialogics and multivoicing to demonstrate, in a most convincing way, how the authors presented and often undercut opposing positions through characterization, irony, and form in such early works as *Amor y pedagogía*, *Camino de perfección*, and *La voluntad*. These works drew on but also discredited many narrative conventions of nineteenth-century realism, investing «alternate narrative forms which are not wholly successful as fiction», in Johnson's opinion, although they did «help catapult Spanish fiction into the experimental mode a good ten years before the rest of Europe broke with realistic fiction» (8; 9).

The authors of the Generation of '98 were stimulated to return to the philosophical novel by the appearance on the scene of the brilliant and polemical Ortega y Gasset, freshly back in 1908 from two years studying philosophy in Germany. Johnson shows how *Niebla* and *El árbol de la ciencia* can be read as responses to the rationalism Ortega defended in his early writings. Nor did the dialogue end there; Johnson conjectures that Ortega's ratio-vitalism evolved «as much through his interaction with the Spanish 'vitalists' of the '98 as through his contacts with German phenomenology in Marburg» (90).

Chapters 7-10 deal, in briefer fashion, with those writers of the Generation of '14 who also wrote philosophical novels: Ramón Pérez de Ayala, Juan Ramón Jiménez and Gabriel Miró, Pedro Salinas, Rosa Chacel, and Benjamín Jarnés. Centering on questions of aesthetics and epistemology rather than the metaphysics that absorbed the previous generation, the fiction of this group seems to Johnson to be «philosophical in a more integrated way; literature more clearly prevails» (121). The «crossfire» continued, with the older generation now being fired upon —mostly through parody— by the younger, whose very identity «coalesced in its awareness of and distancing from the Generation of '98» (121).

Roberta Johnson's *Crossfire* has numerous merits to recommend it, not the least of which is its meticulous organization and its seemingly effortless yet cogent prose. (The University Press of Ken-

tucky let far too many errata slip by to deserve equal praise, although the book is handsomely formatted.) One admires as well Johnson's unwavering focus on the way philosophical issues and debates (in)formed the work of these writers, many of whom — especially in the Generation of 1914— are not conventionally identified with the philosophical novel. The same clarity of purpose must have guided her research, to judge from the impressive variety of sources she employs to trace, in a most readable way, the development of the writers' ideas. Throughout *Crossfire*, Johnson's skills as a literary critic are evident in her discussion of elements of form and literary techniques that serve in the individual novels to refract and comment on the ideas presented. It is this perspicuous analysis which, in the end, makes *Crossfire* far more than a «simple» history of philosophical currents and polemics in Spanish fiction of the first third of the twentieth century.

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GERALDINE CLEARY NICHOLS

Gullón, Germán. *La novela moderna en España (1885-1902); los albores de la modernidad*. Madrid, Taurus, 1992, 217 pp.

This is the first in a projected series of four volumes on the evolution of the modern novel in Spain. Essentially, it is a student manual or guidebook whose purpose is to provide a summary of *fin de siglo* narrative through an analysis of several key works. Starting with an initial chapter on the idea of the modern in literature, Gullón describes what he considers the founding or beginning phase of the modern Spanish novel, a process he presents in three moments or stages. First, there was a so called dawning or precursor phase in the mid-1880s; then came a second moment of affirmation during the 1890s; and finally there was a breakthrough or triumph during the «miracle year» of 1902, which is where the volume ends. The argument is developed almost exclusively through a detailed analysis of eight representative works: *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887) and *La Regenta* (1885) for the moment of inception; *Paz en la guerra* (1897) and *Los trabajos del infatigable creador Pío Cid* (1898) for the 1890s; and for 1902, the four classical novels so often identified with *modernismo* and