

RESEÑAS

CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

Roberto C. Manteiga, Carolyn Galerstein and Kathleen Mc Nerney, eds. *Feminine Concerns in Contemporary Spanish Fiction by Women*, Potomac, MD, Scripta Humanistica, 1988, 186 pp.

Problems of nomenclature are extensive and quite complex a number of fields of literary critical inquiry. Among such fields can be those of women writers, women's studies, and feminist scholarship. While the definition of women authors, protagonists, and groups of characters is clear-cut, a discussion of «women's themes» or «women's topics» requires a working definition of those terms. Such a definition would be welcome by means of introduction to the essay collection *Feminine Concerns in Contemporary Spanish Fiction by Women*. In their preface the volume's three editors, each of whom has also contributed an essay to the book, discuss the proliferation of women's writing in Spain since the death of Franco. «Treating the literary text as more than a mere social document (these writers), speak to women's issues as they relate to other overriding textual concerns» (2), the editors note, citing the need for a major study which would deal «specifically with the concerns of women as presented in the works of a particular group of Hispanic women writers» (3). Such is the intent of the present volume, though a definition of those concerns would be helpful in a consideration of the volume's essays as a unit of scholarship.

Each of the volume's essays is a well-thought, substantive contribution to critical inquiry of narrative fiction by women in contemporary Spain — an emphasis which might well have been sufficient in the book's title — by a respected scholar in the

field. A total of fifteen women writers is encompassed: Eulalia Galvarriato, Carmen Gómez Ojea, Carmen Laforet, Carmen Martín Gaité, Ana María Matute, Dolores Medio, Rosa Montero, Lourdes Ortiz, Elena Quiroga, Carme Riera, Mercè Rodoreda, Montserrat Roig, Elena Soriano, Esther Tusquets, Helena Valentí. The fiction studied was published between 1945 and 1982. The predominance of Catalan writers in the volume reflects that of the Spanish publishing scene in narrative during recent decades.

Three of the essays are of a panoramic nature. In her «A Feminist Literary Renaissance in Catalonia», Kathleen Mc Nerney treats the proliferation of feminine, and feminist, narrative texts in a region whose political consciousness was honed by regionalist suppression during the Franco years. The female Bildungsroman, erotic short stories, and tales of psychological development are examined, with the isolated female protagonist seen to appear more frequently than the woman character blessed with a context of female solidarity. In «Rewriting Myth and History: Three Recent Novels by Women», Elizabeth J. Ordóñez builds on her much-consulted 1982 article «Reading Contemporary Spanish Narrative by Women», in which she argued persuasively for the development of a new way of reading, one «which might unveil silences and establish a complicity between writer and reader or among women» (7). With the rigorous scholarship and articulate expression which have become the hallmark of her critical work, Ordóñez here extends her analysis of demythification of repressive patriarchal modes in contemporary women's literature, using as examples novels by Carme Riera, Carmen Gómez Ojea, and Lourdes Ortiz.

Janet Pérez in her «Portraits of the *Femme Seule* by Laforet, Matute, Soriano, Martín Gaité, Galvarriato, Quiroga and Medio» finds that the happily independent, fulfilled single woman or woman otherwise living alone is a rarity in the wide selection of examples studied in this carefully researched chapter. Most often, in Pérez' findings, the single woman is portrayed as being seriously flawed and, at worst, a caricature; societal marginalization of such women is reproduced literarily.

In her «Personal and public History in Laforet's Long Novels» Roberta Johnson draws upon her recognized expertise in Laforet scholarship to study the depiction of everyday, intimate history

by this pioneering post-Civil War Spanish novelist as opposed to the more public parade of events portrayed by numerous male novelist of the period. This chapter is particularly pertinent in view of the current, and overdue, examination of women's role in and experience of Spain's war years and the Franco era.

Studying a writers of Laforet's generation is Carolyn Galerstein in «Self-Discovery in Quiroga's *Presente profundo*». Taking issue with Phyllis Zatlin's reading of the novel, Galerstein argues for a view of the protagonist's suicide as a positive and successful self-realization — an exegesis which, in this writer's opinion, requires a distortion of the Quiroga text. Whatever one's moral or religious views on suicide, the critical slanting of a text in defense of the sometimes trendy affirmation that suicide can represent a creative solution, a true becoming and attainment of personhood, is a practice which in the view of the present writer should not go unchallenged.

Only two essays in the volume are devoted wholly to the same writer: «The Feminist Message: Propaganda and/or Art? A Study of Two Novels by Rosa Montero» by Eunice Myers and the Roberto Manteiga study «The Dilemma of the Modern Woman: A Study of the Female Characters in Rosa Montero's Novels». Myers' engaging and well-written piece relates Montero's novelistic advocacy of views on previously taboo sexual topics to the novelist's successful journalistic career and the chronological positioning on the growing edge of social change in Spain of the two novels studied: *Crónica del desamor* (1979) and *La función delta* (1981). Myers finds the latter novel superior literarily, her chapter joining with Kathleen Glenn's fine 1988 article on *La función delta* to constitute a developing corpus of criticism on this under-rated Montero novel.

Unlike Myers, Manteiga does not view Montero as a feminist writer, finding in his analysis of the female protagonists of *Crónica del desamor*, *La función delta*, and the 1983 *Te trataré como a una reina* evidence that, despite tacit Montero approval of some feminist gains, these female characters «who not only have dared to question traditional values, but have purposely acted in a nonconformist manner because the new social codes for women have demanded it, have not found happiness ei-

ther» (121). Manteiga sees the act of writing, the search for communication, as a positive force in itself.

In her graceful and convincing essay «The Challenge of Martín Gaité's Woman Hero», Joan Lipman Brown undertakes «to examine the lives of women characters... in order to more fully understand the changing circumstances of women in Spain, as perceived by this premiere writer» (87). Brown discerns two periods of Martín Gaité female heroes: those of the Fifties and Sixties, for whom the struggle for independence was lonely and monumental, and those of the late Sixties and the Seventies, whose efforts to achieve autonomy were easier, if true emotional communication was not.

Biruté Ciplijauskaitė opens her «Historical Novel from a Feminine Perspective with an especially lengthy consideration of French and German historical fiction before turning her attention to the 1982 Lourdes Ortiz novel. In her analysis of *Urraca* she argues effectively for the presence of a concentrically circular pattern in the three parts of this self-conscious narrative.

With her «The Renewal of the Quest in Esther Tusquets' *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*» Lucy Lee-Bonanno adds to her substantive work on Tusquets, as well as to the body of scholarship on mythic themes in Tusquets' first novel. Lee-Bonanno traces the female protagonist's return to her childhood home, fulfillment in a lesbian relationship, and ultimate surrender once again to the nearly irresistible force of class and patriarchy, all from the perspective of a quest to regain «the green world of youth» (138).

Catherine Bellver in «Montserrat Roig: A Feminine Perspective and a Journalistic Slant» finds in the fiction of this young Catalan writer the marks of her journalistic activity, in internationality, style, theme, and effect.

The volume which is almost totally error-free, is clearly designed for accessibility to the non-Hispanist, with all quotations given both in the original Spanish or Catalan and in English translation. A bibliography of fiction by contemporary Spanish women writers — including several not treated in the volume's essays — should prove helpful to the non-specialist, while a second bibliographical section offers a representative sample of critical scholarship on this body of narrative. The bibliography's

third portion, a collection of entries for secondary and tertiary sources to which allusion is made in the essays, only partially offsets the need for a well-done index to the volume.

The collection should prove to be a highly useful source on its subject.

Michigan State University

MARY S. VÁSQUEZ

Cecilia Belchi Arévalo y María Martínez del Portal, eds. *Estudios sobre José Luis Castillo-Puche*, Murcia, Academia Alfonso X El Sabio, 1988, 165 pp.

Es ésta una colección de ensayos leídos en 1987 en el Ateneo Literario de Yecla —la ciudad natal de Castillo-Puche— con motivo de un homenaje dedicado al insigne novelista. Un artículo escrito en otra ocasión de Francisco Javier Díez de Revenga, prologuista del libro, completa el volumen. Como se puede esperar en *festschrifts* de este tipo, los estudios varían mucho en su acercamiento y profundidad.

A modo de introducción, unas palabras de Castillo-Puche, «En torno a mis novelas», elucidan sobre lo que es la creación literaria para él: la vida misma proyectada a un plano creativo donde la realidad es algo nuevo. La novela —continúa— representa una «búsqueda» e «indagación», «una marcha sin retroceso hacia lo más profundo del conocimiento de uno mismo y de los otros», corroborando la definición ya hecha de su obra como existencial.

El estudio de María Martínez del Portal, «Una realidad literaria: la Hécula de Castillo-Puche», es uno de los más significativos y rigurosos en su enfoque. Además, Martínez del Portal toma el toro por los cuernos al entrar en la polémica de la relación entre Yecla y Hécula en la obra de Castillo-Puche, puesto que el novelista fue considerado persona *non grata* por muchos años en su ciudad natal a consecuencia de su representación en novelas como *Con la muerte al hombro* (1954) y, otra vez en 1977, con *El libro de las visiones y de las apariciones*. Su conclusión es que la Hécula de Castillo-Puche, al igual que la