

## R E S E Ñ A S

### CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

Gonzalo Navajas. *La modernidad como crisis. Los clásicos modernos ante el siglo XXI*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2004. 184 pp.

For most literary scholars in recent years, literature is not studied as literature *per se*, but rather as literature «in the context of,» or «literature in relation to» other texts and forms of cultural expression. Literary history itself has grown increasingly difficult to pin down, as have aesthetic norms, cultural certainties, and canonical values rooted in traditions of exclusion and permanence. Gonzalo Navajas has thoughtfully studied these matters in many essays and books on both the modern and post-modern condition, and he continues this exploration in *La modernidad como crisis*, a collection of articles published over the past decade.

The essays of this book in many ways exemplify Navajas's larger body of work on twentieth-century Spain. He draws upon a wide range of literary and cultural theorists and uses them creatively to discuss texts and ideas within Hispanic Studies; he focuses on the modern and postmodern as complimentary but also distinct modes of perception and narration; and he is less interested in the close scrutiny of individual texts than in sweeping ideas in which texts become primarily illustrative. Navajas also has a firm sense of the contingency that lies at the root of literary history.

Navajas's focus in his book turns primarily upon a re-reading of modern classics (using works by the Generation of 98 as well as Ortega y Gasset, Torres Villarroel, Juan Goytisolo, and Cela). He proposes to reinsert these authors and works into contemporary life with the belief that their importance remains strong and with the hope that their message will not be discarded in favor of new discourses competing with them for attention and intellectual standing. In this way the crisis of modernity that forms the title of the book envisions the modern as an opportunity: for change, for progress, for seeing the world (and its texts) anew. Navajas's work is thus linked to a sense that once preeminent texts of the past must be made «relevant» (the word is mine) to today's culture, or most surely they will be diminished. As he puts it, «Sin olvidar el enmarcamento histórico concreto, se pone a esos textos en relación con el

paradigma cognitivo de su época y se establecen las conexiones entre ese paradigma y el actual» (14).

Navajas does not rely upon a single approach to establish the connections between past and present, but his interest in literary history gives substance to the core essays of the book on writers of turn-of-the-century Spain. In each of these pieces Navajas demonstrates not only a sophisticated awareness of literary history and the literary canon, but also inserts the principal writers of the time into current thinking on history, philosophy, and culture. For example, his essay «El 98 para un español de veinte años» is strikingly useful in the way in which it links the concept of time (through sequence and continuity) to objects and structures that bear upon our understanding of the present. Similarly in «La modernidad como crisis,» with an emphasis on Azorín, Baroja, and Unamuno, Navajas traces intellectual history to show how these writers (especially Unamuno) identified the deficiencies of Spanish culture not only in political or economic matters, but also in the national failure to articulate a shared project through which the country might construct a sense of unity. Navajas then traces this idea to contemporary Spain and the work of Antonio Muñoz Molina. Navajas's insightful theoretical comments in «Un (98) antigeneracional» on the generational approach to literary history (Navajas is not opposed to it, but is wary of its insidious reductivism) helps to define how categorization produces exclusions in literary history and closes texts to broader meanings while confining them to narrower ones (e.g., nationalism and its corollary, insularity).

Navajas also shows himself to be particularly adept at drawing Ortega y Gasset into the twenty-first century. While Ortega is often dismissed today as a conservative thinker whose writings put him at odds with liberal principles and democratization, favoring instead traditional social and political norms that maintain an elitist structure of power, Navajas brings to the fore aspects of Ortega's thinking that have become highly pertinent to concepts of European unity and community identity. In «Ortega y Gasset y la nueva Europa,» for example, Navajas recognizes the author's unfruitful nostalgia for a more noble and ordered past, but also culls from his writing the foundational idea that Spain can (and must) be defined by what is not yet Spanish.

Navajas also includes in the volume individual essays devoted to Torres Villarroel, Goytisolo, and Cela. For the two postwar novelists, Spain stands as an oddly defined, troubled nation and thus emerges as a central component of their writing much as it does for the writers of 98. Navajas is able to establish in each case how disparate discourses nurture modernity and the creation of identity. In particular, Navajas shows how the reach of Goytisolo's own texts into carefully chosen previous texts (e.g., those of Blanco White and Cernuda) allows him to project his personal sense of marginalization dialogically and thus create the possibility of re-imagining his own and the nation's identity. In Torres Villarroel's

*Vida*, the writer's self likewise plays a critical role in the shaping of modern concepts of time, nature, ontological slipperiness, and the utter contingency of narrative meaning.

Navajas is a first-rate critic, and he demonstrates it in this fine book of essays. The quibble that I have with the volume, however, falls largely outside of its content *per se* and centers on its form. The book consists of ten essays written over a period of ten years and prefaced with a short introductory piece. It thus lacks the structural coherence and overarching critical thesis that otherwise would give it greater resonance in the field. The essays also occasionally seem out of phase with current realities that post-date their original publication but pre-date their re-publication here. A passing reference in the book to electronic communication, for example, could easily have been elaborated on to draw out what Navajas refers to in the prologue as «la irrupción de otros lenguajes más ágiles y atractivos que han surgido de manera acelerada en los últimos años» (15). The rapid transaction of narratives, the instant communication that creates ephemeral discourses capable of changing the course of history, and the broad access to culture by millions of more consumers—these issues are highly pertinent to interactions with readers today, but do not appear prominently as thematic components of Navajas's critical discourse that could have provided his book with a firmer sense of unity. For this reason, the individual parts of the volume can generally be perceived as more valuable than the whole. In each case, these parts are foundationally solid, coherently structured, and creatively argued—valued traits of literary criticism that make Navajas's work usable as well as useful.

University of California, Riverside

DAVID K. HERZBERGER

David Henn. *Old Spain and New Spain. The Travel Narratives of Camilo José Cela*. Madison/Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2004. 265 pp.

British Hispanist David Henn's recent study of Cela's six books of prose which deal with Spain's variegated geography and cultures fills a significant void. Concisely framed within a discourse of pertinent theory on travel writing (Butor, Fussell, Cocker, Kowalewski, Adams, etc.), Henn's scholarship is grounded in first-hand knowledge of nineteenth as well as twentieth-century Spain and Spanish (and European) letters, and Cela's published essays (and pronouncements) on the subject. The close reading of the various editions and formats of Cela's travel pieces is well synchronized with corresponding critical commentary (Kirsner, McPheeters, Martínez Cachero, Pozuelo Yvancos, Butt, etc.). By also making use of the findings of important historians of twentieth-century Spain's post-Civil War recovery (Tamames, Carr, Preston, Fusi Aizpurua, etc.), Henn confers upon his work an unflinching sense of balance. In addition, valid empirical evidence is offered by way of well-chosen (line-by-line) comparisons with