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Review Of "Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction" By N. Lindstrom

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In short, *Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, like *Gay and Lesbian Themes in Latin American Writing*, represents a major contribution to the study of the subject of homosexuality in Latin American literature. It offers scholars in the field and other interested persons a wealth of information on a large number of individual writers, some of whom have been and still are neglected because they have dared to treat this controversial subject. Also it opens the discussion on same-sex issues in the work of a few major writers.

As in my review of Foster's earlier book published in *Chasqui* 23.1 (1994), I will emphasize that this sourcebook does not pretend to offer a definitive judgment on any of the writers studied. Its very inclusion of controversial analyses of canon authors invites discussion and suggests that much more work needs to be done in this area. The bibliographies included for each writer also indicate the same.

I am very pleased to observe that considerable progress in the general field has been accomplished through the creation of this volume. Not only have many more Latin American writers and countries been examined using new and interesting approaches, but also the literary frame of reference has become greatly expanded. Taking advantage of the vast knowledge of its many contributors, this sourcebook has been able to point out at least some of the connections that exist between the treatment of homosexuality in Latin American literature and its treatment in other literatures, including French and even Japanese, but most especially North American. This offers testimony to the dialogue that has taken place between writers interested in gay and lesbian themes everywhere, but it also demonstrates the increasing maturity of scholarship in this field.

Herbert E. Craig, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Lindstrom, Naomi. *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994. 246 pp.

The author's intention in writing this book was to offer the nonspecialized reader of Spanish American fiction an overview of the trends and patterns that characterize the evolution of this literature in the twentieth century. As she explains in her introduction, this overview seeks not only to enlighten an English speaking audience but also to help eliminate any distortions that may have accrued about this literature due to the marketability of a particular writer or to the whims of the publishing and translation industries. In this context the author contends that prose fiction from Spanish America has undergone significant literary change and innovation throughout this century and not only during a specific period known as the "boom" when writers from this region were able to attract an international public.

The organization of this literary survey reflects what Lindstrom sees as a constant ingredient in this literature. Rather than grouping works by chronology or geography, she has divided the early chapters into a competitive interplay between two distinct literary tendencies: one that stresses the esthetic issues of the text, the other, which emphasizes its social implications. In chapter one, "Twentieth Century Modernist Prose, 1900-1920," she demonstrates how prose, particularly by the modernists, displays a predominant interest in artistic stylization and imaginative freedom. However, she is quick to point out that in such works, despite the emphasis upon

esthetic qualities, such stylization often disguises a no less serious concern with society's ills. Counterposed to the esthetic tendency is a type of writing that she takes up in chapter two, "Realism and Naturalism, 1900-1930," in which the place of honor is occupied by the writer's depiction of social realities. Lindstrom recognizes the potential "arbitrariness" and "fragility" (her words) on which such a dichotomy is based. Her rationale, however, is to show how these two tendencies embody an essential characteristic of the prose fiction written in the early decades of this century. While this polarity is not always verified by every text of the period, it nonetheless enjoyed, she reasons, an undeniable existence within the literary culture reflected in the endless debates between esthetes and social realists.

The book's third chapter "Avant-Garde, Imaginative and Fantastic Modes, 1920-1950" examines how Spanish American narrative pursued to different degrees these two predominantly contrastive modes of writing. At the heart of this section is a desire to show how exaggerated the traditional separation of the esthetic approach from realist writing really was. Works presented in this chapter exhibit to varying degrees discontinuous structures, experiments with space and time as well as an interest in social realities. In defending her point Lindstrom includes works as apparently dissimilar as Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara* and Bombal's *La última niebla* and makes a convincing case for their inclusion as she examines insightfully how characters and events in novels traditionally labeled regionalist realism often lose their realist profile to become non-mimetic allegories of regional dilemmas. Likewise, texts viewed initially as fantastic or imaginative, as in the case of Bombal, reveal a profound concern with questions of social injustice and inequality.

In keeping with the logic of the book's presentation, chapter four reflects the growing conscious abandonment by Spanish American intellectuals of the notion that imagination and social realism are noncompatible categories. Entitled "Realism and Beyond, 1930-1960," this section analyzes how writers interested in portraying the indigenous population of their respective countries became less and less inhibited in their use of devices previously associated with fantastic literature.

The final two chapters, "The Boom and Its Antecedents, 1950-1970" and "The Postboom: New Voices and Belated Discoveries, 1968-1990," are separated only by chronology and not by the types of texts discussed. Lindstrom contends that by the 1960s a unanimous acceptance in Spanish American literary circles prevailed that viewed the fantastic and the mythic as appropriate and necessary literary instruments for social criticism. She correctly underscores the "boom" as a continuation of experimental tendencies that characterized the avant-garde period of the 1920s, and in her discussion of the major texts of the period she offers the non-specialist reader invaluable analyses of works by Carpentier, Cortázar, Donoso, and García Márquez. Somewhat less insightful are her readings of Rulfo, Fuentes, and Vargas Llosa. In addition, she is to be congratulated for including some mention of Elena Garro's fiction since even specialists have for too long neglected the quality of this writer's texts and the importance of her contribution to the "boom".

Of the six chapters that make up this study the final one on the Postboom is a bit disappointing and lacks the coherence of the previous sections. This, no doubt, is due in part to the multifaceted nature of this period and the fact that it continues to elude facile critical categorization. In trying to organize critically the past twenty-five years of Spanish American fiction, Lindstrom divides the chapter into the following components: 1) Manuel Puig's narrative and his importance

as a seminal figure of the Postboom; 2) Mexico's "Onda" writers; 3) testimonial literature; 4) Cuban exile writers in the U.S.; 5) women's writing; 6) recent Puerto Rican fiction and 7) the narrative of writers overshadowed by the "boom." Notwithstanding the excellent critical commentary on Puig's novels, the remaining sections of the chapter and the transitions between them are not always clearly structured nor is the rationale for a particular component readily apparent. Why, for example, is there a specific section on Cuban exile fiction and nothing on either Chilean or Argentine writing in exile? What is also puzzling is the relatively little space occupied by the fiction of Isabel Allende and Luisa Valenzuela, unquestionably two of the most prominent women writing in Spanish America today. And, finally, can one exclude from any discussion of the period the fiction of Antonio Skármeta, long considered by Latin American specialists one of the principal figures of Postboom writing.

But aside from these few criticisms, this book fulfills beautifully its intended purpose: to acquaint international readers with some of the most important works of Spanish American fiction and the manner in which this writing has evolved over the course of almost a century. While the book is intended for the non-specialist, it will, nonetheless, be an invaluable resource for the specialist, particularly in the design and organization of survey courses of twentieth century Spanish American fiction.

John J. Hassett, Swarthmore College

Augusto Monterroso. *Los buscadores de oro*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1993. 110 pp.

La publicación de este libro de memorias de Augusto Monterroso viene a sumarse a una larga lista de autobiografías, memorias y diarios íntimos que, de un tiempo a esta parte, renuevan el interés por la escritura del "yo" en la literatura latinoamericana. Señalo algunos títulos recientes a manera de recordatorio: *Antes que anochezca* (1992), el duro libro escrito al borde de la muerte por Reinaldo Arenas; *El pez en el agua* (1993), las polémicas memorias políticas de Mario Vargas Llosa; el escéptico diario íntimo de Julio Ramón Ribeyro, *La tentación del fracaso* (1993); y los recuerdos de infancia y adolescencia en las *Memorias* (1994) de Adolfo Bioy Casares, entre muchos títulos más.

A menudo se especula sobre la limitada tradición que el género autobiográfico tiene en nuestras letras. Cierto o no, ahora podría argüirse que todo este nuevo caudal memorioso, nostálgico y revisionista tiene como punto de partida la mayoría de edad alcanzada por la novela latinoamericana a partir del "boom". A este hecho se suma el protagonismo internacional alcanzado por muchos escritores latinoamericanos, convirtiéndolos en figuras culturales cuyas vidas personales, tanto como sus obras de ficción, son materia de curiosidad para los lectores.

Los buscadores de oro es un producto de este fenómeno literario. Es ya un lugar común decir que Monterroso es autor de los libros más breves de la literatura latinoamericana. Junto con ello, es también cultivador de una prosa concisa y escueta, que se deleita en el juego verbal y la exaltación de la frase justa. Artesano del lenguaje en libros como *Obras completas y otros cuentos* (1959), *La oveja negra y demás fábulas* (1969), *Movimiento perpetuo* (1972) y *La palabra mágica* (1983), Monterroso problematiza los límites genéricos de la fábula, el aforismo,