

BOOK REVIEWS

Barry Jordan. *Writers and Politics in Franco's Spain*. Routledge: London and New York, 1990. xiii + 213p.

This book examines the origins and development of what has come to be known as the “novela social” or social-realistic novel (also labelled “novela testimonial” and “novela objetivista”), a trend that reached its peak of critical and popular acclaim in Spain during the late '50s. It is the best treatment so far of this topic: Jordan's views on the period's cultural and political climate are at once sensible and acute. In support of these views he brings to bear an impressive amount of information, garnered from a wide array of sources. His assessment of the theoretical background available to the young “social” novelists is cogent and clear-headed as well.

Like nature, literary historians abhor a vacuum. Thus historians of the twentieth century Spanish novel have struggled to bridge the gap left by the Civil War in the development of contemporary Peninsular fiction, particularly insofar as “social realism” is concerned. Trying to locate novels of the '50s along a nicely satisfying curve that would rise undisturbed since the 30s, critics such as Nora, Gil Casado, Sanz Villanueva, Soldevila Durante, have sought in the pre-war years early models for the testimonial fiction of the '50s. In this scenario, the revolutionary writers of the '30s (Arconada, Sender, Arderfús, Díaz Fernández, and others) become a link that joins the socially concerned novelists of the Franco years to the hallowed tradition of Spanish “realism.” Here, of course, we meet with another received notion in need of revision: that is whether, in fact, realism is the characteristic mode of Peninsular fiction (or literature) in general.

In the first chapter of his book, Jordan questions the arguments that retroactively locate the ancestry of the '50s' testimonial fiction in the pre-Civil War years. Leaving aside the fact that, as Jordan reminds us, such teleological reconstructions are methodologically unsound, all evidence shows that the writers of the '50s had no knowledge of the earlier, committed fiction of Sender, Díaz Fernández, and others. Jordan also rejects the notion that “tremendismo”—with its frequently sardonic emphasis on the most unpleasant and brutal realities of existence—may have represented an earlier avatar of '50s' realistic fiction, noting that the context, style and intent of the “tremendista” novel were different from those of social realism. This bleak view of human nature predominantly offered by “tremendismo” is not the same as the dehumanizing social context that we can find in *El Jarama*, for instance, or *Central eléctrica*. In fact, that negative view of human nature was part of official doctrine in the Franco years and is constitutive of right wing politics.

According to Jordan, a few earlier novels did feature the lower classes: *La noria* (Luis Romero), *Las últimas horas* (José Suárez Carreño), *La*

colmena (Camilo José Cela). These works could be considered transitional with respect to social realism, were it not for the fact that younger writers did not acknowledge the first two and that the last, actually written in 1945, belongs properly to "tremendismo." Jordan sees no actual stimulus from *La colmena* in the early works of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Jesús Fernández Santos, Juan Goytisolo, or any of the other socially committed writers of the '50s and '60s. For Jordan, the fiction that formed the nucleus of what we consider today "realismo social" developed under the impact of Sartrean *engagement*, Italian neo-realism, and the political realities of the '50s; these are the phenomena that he sets out to elucidate.

One of the book's great strengths is its understanding of the "novela social" as a process with evolving centers of gravity. There were in fact various attempts to construct a committed novel according to political possibilities, the writer's perception of his relationship to his audience, the form of rebellion from bourgeois tradition that the individual writer chose to underline (the majority of the trend's practitioners *were* the disillusioned children of the bourgeoisie).

Once he has identified process as the developmental characteristic of the social novel, Jordan analyzes the oppositional movements or platforms that sustained its political commitments. The economic stagnation and repressive climate of the '50s generated an opposition within the very classes that had supported Franco's rebellion. While many prominent "falangistas" (such as Sánchez Mazas, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's father) were thoroughly disenchanted with the regime, officially sanctioned and falangist-supported organizations (Sindicato Español Universitario, for instance) and publications (for example, the Barcelona journal *Laye*) offered possible outlets for cautiously worded social criticism. A number of committed writers belonged to S.E.U. (it was an obligatory organization for university students) and published with *Laye*. The traditional bourgeois family, with its strict, obscurantist catholic atmosphere, also provided fertile soil for youthful disaffection. Both *Laye* and *Revista española* (Madrid) offered early outlets for the socially oriented fiction of such writers as Ignacio Aldecoa, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Jesús López Pacheco, Jesús Fernández Santos, and others. Jordan's reading of these reviews shows the formation of compact groups of writers who would try to promote the development of committed fiction.

At the theoretical level the tendencies of the trend evolved according to the impetus of Sartrean *engagement*, mainly through José María Castellet, at the time Sartre's principal Spanish interpreter. Formally, the stylistic emphases and social vision of Italian neo-realism, and of the American novel (U.S.) exerted noticeable influence. In the latter instance, two phenomena are of particular interest: first, although a number of American writers (Hemingway, Dos Passos) were seen as enemies of the state because of their professed or implicit sympathy with the Republican cause, their titles were translated and published in Spain in the '40s, along with those of the realists Sinclair Lewis,

Faulkner, or Steinbeck. Second, the hard-boiled, impersonal genre favored by such writers as Dashiell Hammett, Erskine Caldwell, and Hemingway as well, was acquiring new impetus in France through Claude Edmonde Magny's widely read *L'âge du roman américain*. As Mme Magny analyzed them, among the most attractive features of these novels for Castellet and Juan Goytisolo—who introduced the book to the Spanish intellectual scene—were their attention to external detail and the objective technique that increased the reader's role. As for Italian neo-realism, its impact was exerted principally through film. The documentary-style presentation and grainy objectivism of Zavattini's, Rosellini's and De Sica's movies, their attention to quotidian events, suggested a direction for writers who wanted their prose to be transparent to reality as they saw it.

For Jordan the committed novel evolved in response to a series of attempts to incorporate variously perceived requirements or structures. Thus he finds it useful to address Goytisolo's and Aldecoa's early efforts. Goytisolo's *Juegos de manos* and *Duelo en el Paraíso* represent an early fictionalization of Sartrean *engagement*. Esthetically the effort fails because commitment remains an intellectual attitude assumed by unconvincing protagonists, rather than a necessary "prise de conscience." Only later, as he moves toward Marxism and adopts more objective modes of presentation, does his attack on bourgeois mores become truly effective. The inclusion of Aldecoa is somewhat more difficult to justify. For one thing Aldecoa disagreed with the movement since he did not think that literature should be used for political ends. Yet, as Jordan points out, Aldecoa was part of the *Revista española* group; he was interested in the lower classes and planned to do a trilogy on the Civil Guard, gypsies and bullfighters. Later, under the impact of Sánchez Ferlosio's *El Jarama*, he left the trilogy incomplete—abandoning his project on bullfighters—and moved toward the more objective, testimonial realism of *Gran sol*. For Jordan Ignacio Aldecoa and Juan Goytisolo illustrate the dynamic, contradictory development of the "novela social."

The most important event in the development of the "novela social" was undoubtedly the appearance of *El Jarama* (1956) with the Nadal publishing house. Its great success established the commercial viability of the trend. The novel offered formal guidelines and was a stylistic model for objective realism. It also legitimized class consciousness and proletarian concerns as topics for fiction. The novel produced a bandwagon effect, helping to generate institutional platforms such as prizes and colloquia. Jordan sees *Los bravos* (1954), by Jesús Fernández Santos, as the other paradigmatic novel, though one that was only included into the trend after the success of *El Jarama*.

With *El Jarama* and *Los bravos*, the committed novel becomes a broadly definable socio-literary reality that exerts a discernible influence and produces a degree of literary hegemony. As the '50s come to an end, and in the early sixties, the trend was reinflated toward an explicit critique of the bourgeoisie and politicized references. In retrospect the distanced, reportorial style of *Los*

bravos and *El Jarama* seems more in line with Sartre's notion of *engagement* and of the function of literature than do the later, openly critical works.

In sum, Barry Jordan's *Writers and Politics in Franco's Spain* is the best book to date on the Spanish committed novel of the '50s. It examines the trend as a literary, social, political, and publishing phenomenon. It gives a suggestive analysis of the form's theoretical and structural characteristics and provides, at the same time, a vivid picture of Spain's intellectual climate during the first Franco decades. I do have some small quarrel with the book's title which leads one to expect a wider ranging study than is offered. In particular one hoped to find some mention of parallel developments in poetry. What is needed now is precisely the same type of careful study of "poesia social," an area where, in spite of the laudable efforts of García de la Concha and others, much serious work remains to be done. I would consider Jordan's book a most useful model for such a study.

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Lindenberger, Herbert. *The History in Literature: On Value, Genre, Institutions*. New York, Oxford: University of Columbia Press, 1990. Pp. 269. \$37.50.

At a critical distance from the academic institution with which his own life as a Professor of English is enmeshed, Lindenberger's book turns towards two vital current questions posed by the professing of literature. These are the questions of the historicity (historical embeddedness) of literary theories and productions and of the character of the material processes that create and sustain literary values. Lindenberger's essays on cultural styles and periods, romanticism in particular, are informed by the central intellectual and political recognition that "the ways we [in the academic institution] judge and experience literature, as well as the ways we organize, articulate, and disseminate our judgement and experience, result from institutional mediations that seek to obliterate their own traces" (p.19). The objects of his analysis thus include the present structures of the literary institution as these arose historically from specific cultural conditions (from the establishment of national identity in Germany in the Nineteenth Century or from European-centered colonialism, for example) to separate the study of literature (the creative and eternal) from the study of history (the real and contingent) and organize the former into national literatures, literary periods, and genres. Lindenberger's text discusses the ways the emerging literary institution used organic or evolutionary frames to set these historically contingent categories up as natural. It suggests the ways the academy continues to frame and regulate literary productions to secure the survival of its structures.

The chapters on the "romantics," probing the historical processes and vicissitudes of the ascribing of value—to Wordsworth's canonical "Resolution

romanticism and the survival of a given corpus of romantic texts as a privileged field of the literary canon as evidence of a generalized institutional process of dehistoricization. This is the process that endows historically produced literary works, often selected for ideological reasons, with the prestige of universality. Genre, too, is situated by Lindenberger within a literary History which has ordered cultural artifacts as timeless art objects of value. While opera has been placed eternally between the categories of music and literature, for example, Lindenberger discusses operas that are closer to historical drama (to a specific "real") than to an aesthetic, universal, and fictional art object.

The History in Literature argues that the institutionalization of romantic and operatic genres and historical/textual artifacts derives from specific vested interests and struggles for recognition, survival, and power. An intelligent balanced study of the controversy surrounding the Western Culture requirement at Stanford University, where Lindenberger teaches, illuminates the new cultural styles battling for a place in the Institution and currently enlarging the established canon to make it more open to inter-generic, cross-national, non-Western, and non-literary analytical categories (Marxism, Colonialism, Psychoanalysis, Women's Studies, Technology Studies). Any rapid or dramatic overthrow of the "great books" of the past and the divisions and hierarchies in/of power is, however, claims Lindenberger, made highly improbable by the weight of the self-defensive mechanisms intrinsic to the organization of any institution.

After the textuality of the seventies and the new historicism of the eighties (when history must be both that which was in the past and that which recounts the past in the present), after the Foucaultian inspired discontinuities between ages that suggested an alternative to binarism and continuity, and entering upon what Lindenberger would call the new "cultural styles" approach of the nineties, we still remain in the age of suspicion. Within this historical frame, it does appear that it is predominantly the (textual) processes by which we construct the past and literary value along with the various framing devices used by institutions (the labels they ascribe) that give continuing life to cultural artifacts. It is similarly clear that these processes are ideological and institutional, tied up with the Institution's survival.

The dilemma, then, for a reviewer, is whether to show skepticism towards the rhetoric that, according to Lindenberger, teachers and critics use to persuade others to join with them in revering a canonical figure, and eschew any institutionalized evaluative gesture. Should this reviewer add weight to a book that is itself potentially canonizable by means of the authority granted by its prestigious academic press, the status of its author in the academy, and the quality of its reviews? As a member of one of the emerging groups described so lucidly by Lindenberger as currently engaging in power struggles to transfer canonical status to texts identified with their gender or ethnic origins, should I not clamor here against the relatively meager attention the writer gives in his text to major feminist concerns with the canon and literary institutions? As a

member of a smaller, less ivy-beleaguered, women's college which has for some time now been offering courses that traverse traditional genres, periods, and national literatures and practice extra-canoncity, could I not boast our own advances and advantages of relative lightness of being over theory and institutional heaviness?

My response is rather to see Lindenberger's project as of value for the Institution both in its deconstructions and in its (contradictory) affirmation of the validity of the critical/creative genre in which he seeks after (impossible) truth, (ironic) objectivity, and (relative) political efficacy. With reserves, however. This erudite collection of essays leaves me outside the sanctuary door, in the cold, observing, but still confined within the established literary City. The somewhat archaic title of the work self-consciously announces its own troubling contradictions. In the more "postmodern" self-interview of the epilogue, Lindenberger himself defines the transparent and jargon-free style as belonging to the earlier critical tradition which formed him and comments on his own refusal of the institutional demand that the critic identify (without irony) with a particular position. But, to whom, then, is this scholar speaking, and from what place? Where are the boundaries and the interconnections between the public history of critical theory and institutions, and personal history? The writer's own gender and situatedness in the institutional power and ideologies he is critiquing, the "interpretive communities" (homage to Fish) which have traversed his life, like the intellectual integrity or hidden drives that motivate him to challenge the very structures that constitute him are underrepresented. These alone would put the history into the literature that he reads and writes. In the final instance, it is perhaps the failure of the attempt from inside the institution to see it, ironically, from the outside, the intimations of the limitations of the lucidity and irony employed, and the blurring of the clear boundaries between inner and outer history that give Lindenberger's studies of the history in literature value. Perhaps insufficient to institutionalize a *History in Literature* but enough to recommend its reading and commend its writing for the serious intellectual and political purposes it serves.

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Frieda S. Brown, Malcolm Alan Compitello, etc., eds. *Rewriting the Good Fight: Critical Essays on the Literature of the Spanish Civil War* (E. Lansing, Michigan, Michigan State U. Press: 1989), 259 pages.

Erik Nakjavani, in his essay on 'Intellectuals as Militants' included in this collection, states rightly that the Spanish Civil War is one of the most 'textualized' wars in history and that, as a result, its historical reality has been enlarged, enriched or distorted by a massive infusion of literary myths (p.200). The purpose of this volume is three-fold: to explore the reasons for the fascination with this war, still vivid today especially in Spain: to compare history, myth, and

the process of demythification now underway; and to examine the conditions which made the war so appealing to non-Spanish intellectuals in the 1930s.

The essays are the edited papers presented at the conference on 'International Literature of the Spanish Civil War' held at Michigan State in November, 1987. The volume has two main sections: I The Spanish Response, II: The International Response.

Part I includes works written during the war. Mary S. Vásquez deals with Ramón J. Sender's *Contraataque* (1938) from the standpoint of the interplay and purpose of its three narrative voices. The work, first published in English, is not generally considered fiction (Library of Congress classifies it as history), but this essay illuminates its literary value. Antonio Varela's compelling study of Agustín de Foxá's *Madrid, de corte a checa* (1938) uses Northrop Frye's definition of a Romance to show the mythical structure of Foxá's fascist work: "the sort of drama associated with the Grail legend . . . of the triumph of light over darkness and of the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall (p. 96)." This model, I believe, might well be extended to many other works from the right and the left, written inside and outside Spain during the same period.

The remaining works dealt with in this section are contemporary, written by authors who were not participants in the conflict or who witnessed it as children. The best known is Juan Benet, whose fictional world of *Región* (comparable to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha) "props fiction and history against life in order to reveal the elusiveness of all narrative endeavors (p.33)," and shows as far as the Spanish Civil War is concerned, "a reality that is hidden behind events, behind words, and behind reason (p.32)." David K. Hersherberger, from whom these quotes are borrowed, shows that Benet questions all historiography by spurning any clearly delineated beginning, middle, end, or analysis of intentionality in his discourse. Nelson R. Orringer, also dealing with Benet, shows that *Saúl ante Samuel* forms an ironic and elaborate stylization of a biblical allegory in which the two Spains' self-deluding strife, still continuing as an 'armed peace' according to Benet, is devoid of any real ethical framework on either side. Interestingly, Benet himself acts as military historian in this volume's well-documented preface, exploding the myth of a well-planned rebellion and campaign which in reality, at least in the early stages of the Spanish Civil War, was conducted largely by improvisation and almost total lack of military science.

William R. Risley provides an informative analysis of recent novels by José Luis Olaizola and Vicente Soto. Their respective works, *La guerra del general Escobar*, and *Tres pesetas de historia*, both published in 1983, are historical reconstructions and condemnations of "the great Iberian bull of intolerance . . . that carries hatred beyond the tomb and makes life nourish itself on death (p.77)." William M. Sherzer's essay on Juan Marsé is a commentary on that writer's technique of intertextuality which unites all his novels with self-crossreferences. Section I, in a way, completes and extends beyond 1975 Gareth

crossreferences. Section I, in a way, completes and extends beyond 1975 Gareth Thomas's recent study on *The Novels of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge U. Press, 1990).

In Part II, Barbara Brothers comments on the little known Spanish Civil War poetry of Sylvia Townsend Warner (mostly uncollected, from British and American publications of the '30s), showing that a woman could indeed write of war and politics with a power and sensivity which she finds superior to that of Stephen Spender writing on the same subject. This section also shows unmistakably the equivocal relationship between historiography and fiction. In Claude Simon's *La corde raide* and *Le palace*, Mark W. Andrews finds a "refusal to impose an artificial order of intelligibility upon the past—representing a welter of associations and memories in narrative discontinuity (p. 153)." Simon finds this approach more honest than Malraux's simplified version of the war ("a bit like Tintin carrying out the revolution . . . [p.151]."). Allen Josephs shows that Hemingway, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, also simplified facts to invent his own war in which a hero could remain pure of political taint—good fiction, but bad history. By contrast, John Dos Passos, in *Adventures of a Young Man* (1938) is, according to John Rohkemper, overwhelmed by disillusion with the politics and the hopes for social change present in his previous works. The result is inner contradiction and a rather static work which repudiates "the dialogic possibilities of fiction" present in his best novels.

Two essays are essential in explaining the leftist intellectual's dilemma in confronting the Spanish situation. Erik Nakjavani sees in Hemingway and Malraux the clash between the classic intellectual, "given to nuances, searching for absolute truths, and struck by the complexity of political reality," and the intellectual militant who must coolly assess "what can be done," even if it is a far cry of "what ought to be done." This results in the Manichean view which Simon criticized in Malraux, inevitable because "all action is by necessity Manichean (p. 207)." Robert Sullivan, dealing with Auden and Caldwell, focuses on the committed writer's other dilemma: how can the creative endeavor of literature have any effect on social change? Did anyone really believe in Auden's claim that "poetry could make action urgent and its nature clear?" Or was the literature of the '30s a mere "narrative of desire", and Spain the "arid square" upon which individual psychic dramas of illusions, fears, and aspirations were being played? Caldwell believes that the poet's stress on individual consciousness, which he imagines to be free, was an imposture: "Poetry can be revitalized only by a change of the economic relations on which it rests and a corresponding change and synthesis of the dissolving culture of today (p. 218)."

Spanish Constitutional Justice Luis López Guerra's concluding essay on "The Legacy of the Spanish Civil War today" may explain why, well into the '80s, the Spanish Civil War is still a central theme in Spanish fiction. Although on balance the post-Franco democratic experiment has been positive, the consensus achieved may stem from purely practical considerations rather than from

is still a dangerous tendency to avoid serious analysis of the moral significance of the war. It still has not been exorcised from Spain's collective consciousness.

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Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Steven Connor's remarkably accessible and intelligent study, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, focusses on Beckett's work in the context of "twentieth-century reimaginings of repetition" exemplified by Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze's elaborations of the logic operating between repetition and difference. In its aims and effects, the book continues the work of poststructuralist readings of Beckett such as Angela Moorjani's *Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), and Peter Gidal's *Understanding Beckett: Monologue and Gesture in the works of Samuel Beckett* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). Like theirs, his project is distinct from the type of Beckett criticism that remains metaphysical in its double devalorization of repetition and difference, which it resolves into a unity of the work as idea, identity, and presence. Providing insightful readings not only of Beckett's major fiction (*Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Meurt*, *L'Innommable*) but also of the later novellas and theater, Connor's analyses intervene in timely fashion in current debates on critical theories and their relation to the work of a particular author. The final chapter treats the function of repetition and reproduction in Beckett criticism in such a way as to challenge its modes of cultural (re)production of "Beckett."

Specifically, Connor takes up repetition as the problematic ground of difference itself though Deleuze's distinction between 'naked' and 'clothed' repetition and Derrida's deconstruction of original and copy. His project may be compared with Leslie Hill's study, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), in which the loss of a stable identity, universal idiom or authorized term of reference erupts into an uncontrollable movement of (in)difference that is indeterminate and aporetic. Connor's study has the advantage of not treating difference as a finality in itself, seeking instead to account for the effects of difference in Beckett by referring them to the interpretive framework of repetition itself.

Connor's readings are especially instructive in the way they are themselves internally divided, radically split from/by their stated goal, what one of the chapters in the first half of the book calls "economies of repetition" in Beckett's novels. The middle chapter on translation marks a fold on the other side of which 'material' concepts such as those of the body, gender, and power are allowed to emerge. Paradoxically, these concepts work to exceed radically the strictly controlled logic of the opening chapters where repetition is powerfully

(re)contained as both timeless and immaterial. Connor's analyses of performance in relation to the gendered body and the text are extremely fine. But by limiting the 'return' of the body and gender to Beckett's theater and the later writing alone, he accepts too readily, I believe, the prevailing view that these questions emerge in these texts alone. In so doing, he reproduces one of the most tenacious doctrines of Beckett criticism, the notion that "Beckett progressively flays away from the narrating 'I' everything material that surrounds and confirms it" (p. 49). Although he situates this Cartesian notion in relation to the logic of repetition, this interpretive move is not enough to prevent the difference of body, gender, and power from being kept in check by, as well as exceeding, that very logic.

Elsewhere, though, Connor argues forcefully against interpretations of Beckett which overlook his work as such in their drive to appropriate the originality of the author's presence and authorship to legitimate their own readings. Yet by restricting the body, gender, and power to the later work alone, he seems to underestimate the pervasiveness of the metaphysical oppositions on which the idea of "Beckett" rests: the separation of body from spirit, the material from the intelligible, "woman" from "man," writing from meaning. When the material effects of specific differences (body, gender, power) are relegated to the non-canonical margins of literature (theater, performance, short stories, etc.), these return to challenge the formal limits placed on difference in repetition. Thus, whereas he later reintroduces power and gender into the relation of self and non-self, Connor does not re-examine the sites of the body, woman, and power that problematize Derrida and Deleuze's philosophies of difference. In Beckett's writing these 'other' spaces—performance, body, woman, and power—inhabit and undo the limits of any formal logic from which they have been (even temporarily or strategically) excluded.

Paradoxically, it is the very clarity and brilliance of Steven Connor's arguments that serve to recapitulate in their contradictory movement the central thesis of the book. Illuminating yet another dimension of the constitutive function of difference in repetition that it elaborates, this study thus opens productively onto further readings of Beckett's work.

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