

Book Reviews

Edna Aizenberg. *Parricide on the Pampa? A New Study and Translation of Alberto Gerchunoff's "Los gauchos judíos."* Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2000. 189 pp.

It could be said that there is no work more central (or more controversial in the view of some scholars) for the study and understanding of Jewish Latin-American literature than Alberto Gerchunoff's *Los gauchos judíos*, originally published in 1910 to commemorate Argentina's Centennial. A collection of brief vignettes of Jewish immigrant life on the Pampa around the turn of the century, the slim volume quickly achieved canonical status within Argentine literature, and was even adapted by Juan José Jusid, the Jewish-Argentine director, into a film by the same title in 1975. The stories offer a colorful and frequently lyrical exploration of the contradictions and difficulties inherent in the Jewish-Argentine colonists' struggle to build a new home, adapt to a new way of life, integrate into a new culture and master a new language, without surrendering the fundamental essence of their own ethnic and religious identity under the pressures of the dominant society.

The issues raised in Gerchunoff's text are in many ways highly contemporary, as he gives voice to the minority experience and creates a unique expression of the process of negotiation of ethnic identity through literature. In the almost one hundred years since its original publication, *Los gauchos judíos* has provoked intensely antithetical emotional reactions, but seldom neutrality. It has been both lauded and criticized, emulated and rejected by a wide variety of authors and critics, some of whom view it as the ultimate expression of a desire to assimilate completely into the new society, while others regard it as a glorification of the Jewish struggle to survive. Edna Aizenberg's recent publication of *Parricide on the Pampa? A New Study and Translation of Alberto Gerchunoff's "Los gauchos judíos"* proposes not only to

offer a complete contemporary translation of the original Spanish manuscript, but also to reconcile the opposing critical perspectives that it has inspired, and thereby provide fresh insights into the text. As such, it is an important and valuable addition to the ongoing debates, and simultaneously broadens the prospective audience for Gerchunoff's work by bringing it to the attention of the English-speaking world.

This current translation replaces an earlier one by Prudencio de Pereda (London & New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959, recently re-released in 1999 by the University of New Mexico Press with a foreword by noted author and critic, Ilan Stavans), based on Gerchunoff's 1936 revised edition of his original text. Where de Pereda's version is at times a free, highly poeticized recreation, characterized by a highly stylized and frequently overly flowery language, Aizenberg's translation strives to reproduce the direct, simple tone and succinct discursive style of the original. At the same time, following recent trends in genetic criticism and translation theories, Professor Aizenberg collapses together the 1910 and 1936 editions of the short stories by indicating and thereby rendering transparent those elements that have been eliminated, changed or added in the second version so that the reader can have a greater understanding of the development of the text through an awareness of Gerchunoff's own emendations and corrections.

Aizenberg's introductory essay, while somewhat brief and at times overly general, clearly outlines the debate with respect to the validity of Gerchunoff's work and essential project, and lays bare the ideological structures that give rise to the extreme negative and positive evaluations. Her argument is especially enlightening when she proposes that the reality of Gerchunoff's text resides in a third possibility somewhere in between the traditional stances. As she rightly affirms, *Los gauchos judíos* is considerably more complex than critics have assumed in the past. By foregrounding in particular the opening chapter, "Genesis," in which the author makes explicit reference to the talmudic form of debate through the presentation of contrary points of view, she demonstrates quite clearly Gerchunoff's own awareness of, and desire to represent, the tension between the contradictory poles of assimilation and preservation. She thereby offers the reader an alternative means of interpreting the stories that make up the collection.

Nevertheless, there are two fundamental drawbacks to the translation and introductory essay that need to be mentioned. In the first place, Aizenberg makes no reference whatsoever to the earlier, well-known translation by de Pereda (and especially its re-edition in 1999 by the University of New Mexico Press). While she does refer to other translations in general, it seems to be a curious omission not to mention this specific text, and to explain in what way her project is novel and why it is necessary at this time. Secondly, although she claims that it is important for the reader to understand the differences between the original edition and Gerchunoff's revised second edition, it is clear that there are rarely more than one or two variations in a given story, and many have no indicated changes. Furthermore, in many cases the variations seem minor and even insignificant. A close examination of the fragments in parentheses that represent modifications reveals emendations that are not immediately recognizable as consequential, since they involve the addition or subtraction of a single word or short phrase that does not visibly alter in essence the overall intent or significance of the text. Many of the highlighted changes appear to be little more than typical editorial revisions that any author might make to a text after twenty-six years. Indeed, there is only one substantially different section, which involves the addition of a short paragraph at the end of the chapter entitled "The Poet," that inserts a more dramatic tone of celebration and jubilation, but adds little, in reality, to the story related. On the other hand, a close comparison of the 1936 original version and Aizenberg's translation indicates (to this reader at least) a good number of other noteworthy changes not indicated in her transcription. One obvious alteration in particular that is not addressed is the difference in perspective of the opening chapter. In the 1936 version (and in de Pereda's 1959 translation) the discursive subject is a third person, referring to Jacobo's perception of events, while in Aizenberg's document, there is a distinctive first person narrator who claims to have witnessed the scene. It would seem that this is the kind of modification that deserves careful attention and explanation, and which is, unfortunately, missing from *Parricide on the Pampa*.

Overall, however, this new translation and study is carefully done, accurate and extremely fluid, and will offer English-speaking readers valuable insight into a key text of Latin American literature. At the same time, Aizenberg's *Parricide on the Pampa? A New Study and Translation of Alberto Gerchunoff's "Los gauchos judíos"* will be ex-

tremely useful for broadening the general study of Jewish literature of the diaspora, a field that, due to linguistic limitations is, as yet, relatively unaware of the unique and fascinating contributions of Latin American Jewish authors.

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Caryl Emerson, ed. *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin*. New York: G.K. Hall, 1999. 418 pp.

Caryl Emerson provides in this collection an almost-representative sampling of the most prominent American students of Bakhtin and of Bakhtin's Russian colleagues and students as well. Despite some difficult essays, this collection is an appropriate introduction to Bakhtin; it provides an excellent sense of how Bakhtin has been received as a literary critic and as a philosopher. Admittedly, there are missing perspectives: a sampling of the literary critics and poststructuralists who see in Bakhtin an ally in their opposition to universalism and metaphysics (Kristeva and Irigaray are cited but not represented in essay form, for instance). I also have some other reservations. Long essays in this book by Natalia Reed, Jay Ladin, Charles Lock, and Vitaly Makhlin are not particularly worthwhile for most scholars of Bakhtin, as they worry unnecessarily over fine points of terminology (the muddled closing essay by Makhlin on Bakhtin's paradoxical collectivist ethics is the only one of these that will actually do you harm to read).

As you might guess, all of the essayists represented here have some trouble squaring an intention of putting forth a unified and systematic essay with a *suspicion* of unity. Like Bakhtin, that is, they distrust that which is static or finalized—in this context, a monologism. Clearly, most have made their peace with these paradoxes, and so Emerson is able to collect certain ideas, such as dialogism, carnival, and genre theory, under the heading “core polemics.” There is, after all, an accumulation of contested but identifiable ideas around this “author.”

First, dialogism. Emerson reproduces Chapter 2 of Michael Holquist's *Bakhtin and His World*, in which Holquist argues that

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dialogism unites Bakhtin's whole body of work. This dialogism, Holquist says, grows itself out of dialogue with the philosophical currents of Bakhtin's day. All of the essays in this collection, to some degree, argue for the historical situatedness of literary texts—and of the texts of Bakhtin's philosophy and criticism. Thus they take on the difficult task of identifying one or another burning polemical purpose that an argument is serving. For Holquist, dialogism participates in a rejection of Hegelian idealism and a newfound late nineteenth century interest in neo-Kantianism. Neo-Kantianism, in turn, succeeds at this time in Germany because of its relevance to scientific experimentation and theory. This science, while it approached questions systematically, was modeling a universe that no longer necessarily featured humans or God at its center. Moreover, it had begun to discover the “noncoincidence of the sign to its referent” and of the subject to itself, says Holquist. In short, science was discovering relativity. Holquist identifies as a chief contribution of Bakhtin's thought the relational definition of the self. According to Holquist, the epistemological uncertainty that brings about the death of the “subject,” or the privileged consciousness in scientific or philosophical inquiry, is part of the broader uncertainty that questions the existence of God and that heralds the death of the author and the very questioning of the core self. For Bakhtin, the construction of the self is a process that involves centripetal and centrifugal motion, language from another that approaches and adheres to the self, language from the self that is set forth into the dialogue with its intentional and personal spin now inflecting it. Holquist thus calls attention to the figure of the *center* in Bakhtin's thought. But it is not a fixed nor a privileged center. Just as a fact is nothing in isolation from the dialogical background against which it is relevant (“nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else” [101]), so a self, one's very consciousness, does not exist except in relation and in interaction with others. While there may be a protagonist, he or she always plays in a “drama containing more than one actor” (98).

Gary Saul Morson, another prominent American Bakhtin critic whose work is anthologized here, has similar interests to those of Holquist. He is intent, for instance, on differentiating unfinalizable dialogue from the sort of closure that he says is implied by dialectical reasoning. But I will limit myself to his remarks on genre. Genre is a way of approaching life, Morson says, drawing on *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*. No single genre can be defined by a set of rules,

but the literary genres are derived from the “countless” numbers of speech genres. Since genre is a set of expectations that we bring to dialogic exchange, its study takes into account both individual agency and historical force. According importance to speech genres properly shows how everyday interaction contributes to our changing selves. It also properly respects tradition, since each genre contains its past, in ways participants may be unaware of. Morson uses the duration of the past in a literary genre to then show by analogy how an author like Dostoevsky can structure a work so that it retains great potential for yielding rich meanings in the future. This kind of not-too-specific intentionality on the part of an author is a great concern of Bakhtin’s, the very reason we should respect the works of great writers of the past. The fact that the novel makes such varied use of speech genres, and the fact that certain novelists leave such room for creativity and for potential meanings in their work—these make the novel the favorite genre for Bakhtin.

This collection also attends to the political implications of the carnival. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White praise Bakhtin’s carnival vision because of its collectivist rather than privatist definition of the person. (Later in the book, Graham Pechey will carefully distinguish Bakhtin’s version of personality from the enlightenment view of an individual who owns property and can be counted by the state.) Even if it is not necessarily a revolutionary activity, Stallybrass and White believe that carnival can be the site of struggle, especially at moments when authorities feel the need to reign in its fertile potential. Michael Gardiner argues that the image of carnival is Bakhtin’s version of utopia, a utopia that is, like Habermas’s ideal speech space, more about the discursive practices that make a free, egalitarian, and abundant life possible than it is about some outcome, enforced by an authority. Gardiner is attracted to Bakhtin’s social theory because it is so clearly materialist rather than idealist, and thus “lived by the whole man,” body as well as mind. Yet the absence of a predetermined outcome does not betoken, for Gardiner, any less criticism of the status quo. The “making strange” of “hegemonic ideologies” is the first of several criteria Gardiner outlines for a “critical utopia,” others of which include an acknowledgment of the open-endedness of history, and thus a suspicion of utopias that have an aura of nostalgia about them.

Most of the voices in this collection are opposed to what they define as relativism of an ethical, religious, or literary-critical kind—

and to a poststructuralism that they take to be the current fashion. For Gardiner, this opposition means that Bakhtin's utopianism contrasts with a sort of fatalism practiced by poststructuralists. For Vadim Kozhinov, one of the founders of Bakhtin studies that is saluted by this book (but whose essay is rather self-incriminating in its defensiveness about Russian nationalism), the anti-relativism takes the form of stressing Bakhtin's belief that great thinkers were of necessity religious, and his guiding principle that man needs God. Moreover, Kozhinov says that one should not disregard authorial intention when studying literature, for Dostoevsky the author-that-appears-in-the-novels is not Dostoevsky the real author, whose views should inform our readings (58). For Morson, Bakhtin leaves enough "surplus" to the author so that we won't make the mistake of letting some associate professor treat great authors too lightly. For Natalia Reed, it is Bakhtin, not his opponents or misreaders, who is too much the relativist. His open-endedness prevents him from seeing that there is a "moral truth and cognitive wisdom" in Dostoevsky: it is nonviolence, and opposition to self-sacrifice as well (137). In my reading, many of these writers, in saying effectively that relativism, if preached, is self-contradictory, or if practiced, lets exist the most horrible of atrocities, give too little thought to the paradoxes and blind spots of many presumably non-relative large systems of thought.

The first essay by Graham Pechey, entitled "Boundaries Versus Binaries," is my favorite essay in the book (it is only a little less suspicious of poststructuralism) because it acknowledges the complexity of a politics that truly leaves room for many voices. Pechey praises Bakhtin's body of work for combining some of the best aspects of Marxist materialism, including its historical situatedness, with what has come to be known as poststructuralism. He carefully distinguishes between work done during the 1920s, when Bakhtin felt it to be wise to challenge Russian formalists by emphasizing the contexts that complicate structural explanations, from that done during the 1930s. In the 1930s, Bakhtin, perhaps tempted to move back toward formalism now that Stalinism had a perverse hold on all analyses that prized situatedness and social context, *textualized* the subject, made the self an object for formal analysis. Like Gardiner and others, Pechey says that Bakhtin will, by virtue of his devotion to opening dialogue to all voices, always offer an alternative to the purportedly universal rhetoric of empire. But he acknowledges that this may include some ideas that appear parochial. Nationalisms, spiritualities, and prescientific

discourses are very apt to be deployed in struggles for popular liberation.

Caryl Emerson's collection features essays that agree with her own work and disagree with it, essays that show admiration for Bakhtin and suspicion. And in this respect, readers get a true dialogue of voices while reading the collection. Of course, the dialogue is framed by Emerson, its editor, and so everything we read if we confine ourselves to this book has been already filtered. It's a small booth in the marketplace of ideas.

Michael Barry
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Gail Finney. *Christa Wolf*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999. xiv + 146 pp.

This book, part of Twayne's World Authors Series, is a useful introduction to the life and work of Christa Wolf. It includes an overview of Christa Wolf's biography and then addresses Wolf's major works from *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963) to *Medea: Stimmen* (1996).

Finney's basic premise is that Wolf's career has been a continuing process of decoupling from the tenets of socialist realism. In Finney's account, *Moskauer Novelle* (1961), essentially "fulfills the program of socialist realism as handed down from the Soviet Union" (18), although the author contends that in its subjectivism even this early novella prefigures Wolf's subsequent break with Soviet and East German literary dogmatism. With *Der geteilte Himmel* Wolf strayed even further from official prescriptions, Finney believes, because of a further intensification of subjective elements in the novel and the attempted suicide of the novel's main character—a negative element frowned upon by socialist doctrine. With the subsequent works of the 1960s, including "Junianach miattag" (1967) and especially the pathbreaking *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968-69), which largely established Wolf's literary reputation outside East Germany, Wolf's break with official literary doctrine had become virtually complete: in its radical critique of conformism, its insistence on personal fulfillment, and the death of its main character, *Nachdenken* represented a dramatic new development, fundamentally contradicting official literary doctrine. With her other works of the 1970s and 1980s, includ-

ing *Kindheitsmuster* (1976), *Kein Ort, Nirgends* (1979), *Kassandra* (1983), *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages* (1987), and *Sommerstück* (1989), Wolf continued this process, exploring elements of subjectivity, feminism, technological pessimism, Romanticism, and literary modernism outside the scope of socialist ideology.

This book is written in clear language and should be accessible to those who are unfamiliar with Wolf's work and the debates surrounding her writing and her life. Occasionally explanations for a non-specialist audience are repeated unnecessarily—for example, when the Stasi is repeatedly identified as the "State Security Service or Secret Police" (see 9, 46, 103, 109). But although such aids are sometimes overdone, they do contribute to making the book readable for non-experts. Finney's literary analyses are skillful, and she is able to establish revealing interconnections among Wolf's own works and between Wolf and Anna Seghers and Ingeborg Bachmann. In sum, this book is a good introduction to one of the most important German writers of the twentieth century, as well as a crucial voice of literary feminism.

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Jerry Hoeg. *Science, Technology, and Latin American Narrative in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*. Bethlehem: Lehigh UP, 2000. 139 pp.

With this intriguing book, Jerry Hoeg makes a strong case for directing more attention to the portrayal of science and technology in Latin America creative expression. Despite the impact that science and technology have had on the region, says Hoeg, mainstream criticism has distanced itself from the subject. He holds that such a critical posture ignores the responsibility society has in mediating the role of science, and urges critics to analyze that mediation. Ultimately, he aims "to shed light on the possibility of constructing alternative codes or mediations which will produce sociotechnical messages of empowerment rather than domination" (10). Hoeg then analyzes novels, films, and electronic media to consider not only what these works say about current codes of domination, but also what they do to influence the impact of those codes in the region.

After a brief introduction, in the first chapter Hoeg lays the philosophical groundwork for linking science and literature as discourses. Using Martin Heidegger and José Ortega y Gasset as points of reference, he maintains that a society negotiates its necessities and its technological repertoire interdependently. Western instrumental reason, he holds, has placed society and nature in binary competition, which has led to unfortunate outcomes for humans and the environment, especially in the Third World. Cultural criticism that rejects the role of science and technology dooms itself to repeat that competitive opposition, but rethinking societal necessities or shifting technologies toward sustainable well-being may alter this present framing.

Consequently, the chapters that follow examine Latin American images of science and technology and discuss the possibilities for change presented by the new electronic media. To sketch an overview of recurrent images, chapter two focuses on Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, and Jorge Amado's *Gabriela, Clove, and Cinnamon*. A more thorough reading in Chapter 3 treats how Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* inflects science and progress with gendered and foreign characteristics. By contrast, the fourth chapter centers on the way the ecologically-themed novel *Única mirando al mar* (*Única Watching the Sea*), by Fernando Contreras Castro, foregrounds the significant role the discourses of science play in Latin America culture and in integrating the region into a global culture. The following chapter discusses the use of scientific theories to characterize Caribbean racial and ethnic relations in Antonio Benítez Rojo's essay collection, *Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Chapter 6 considers whether Walter Lima Junior's film, *Ele, o boto* (*The Dolphin*), produces a liberatory discourse or merely a crisis of distinctions as it employs science as only one discourse among many. The seventh chapter turns to newer technologies and examines the potential for social recodification in web sites such as "Navegador Poético" ('Poetic Navigator') and "Árbol velóz" ('Swift Tree'), as well as CD-ROMs, and virtual realities. The eighth and final chapter reviews the diverse Latin American perspectives on science and technology by presenting readings of three other representative texts: another novel by Contreras Castro, *Los Peor* (*The Worst Family*), Carlos Diegues's film, *Bye Bye Brazil*, and the poems of Rafael Catalá from his collection, *Cienciapoesía* (*Science Poetry*). The chapter concludes by underscoring the idea that further study of the interrelation be-

tween literature and science could provide increased awareness critical to achieving social change.

The particular thematic focus plays a significant role in the strengths and the weaknesses of the book. The text addresses a critical dearth in treating this subject matter, of increasing importance in this increasingly technologically complex world. In that Hoeg rejects conceiving of science as only a foreign import to Latin America or as solely a means of mastering nature, he takes a refreshingly constructive critical stance that calls for considering alternatives. Each chapter employs a different theoretical approach and shows a different facet of the topic, offering thoughtful material for Hispanists and those working in comparative literature. On the negative side, while concentrating so heavily on technological discourse as a theme, the book liberally mixes different genres and contexts—it considers novels, films, essays, and poetry from across Latin American (and from Spain)—without giving much consideration to the possible significance of such differences. The emphasis on the larger thematic and theoretic arguments supporting this new perspective also occasionally seems to come at the cost of more subtle sustained readings that would more clearly establish the prevalence of the discourses critiqued.

Yet rather than detract from Hoeg's principal argument calling for more analysis of the relationship between science and literature, such difficulties underscore the importance of further study. Few have examined the images of science and technology in Latin American creative expression. Thus, if at times new investigations gloss over nuances in the examined works, this only signals more clearly the need for conceptual tools to be developed further. In criticizing present social conceptions of science and technology, Hoeg holds that "[t]he first step in a turning away from our enframing is to know the nature of that enframing" (13). The analysis he offers in this text represents a significant and worthy effort toward that first step, with many more steps still to be taken.

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Hugo Méndez-Ramírez. *Neruda's Ekphrastic Experience: Mural Art and Canto general*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999. 244 pp.

As Roberto González Echevarría pointed out in the Introduction to Schmitt's English translation, *Canto general* continues to be one of the highest poetic achievements of the twentieth Century. The book under review here bears witness to the excellence and variety of critical approaches that Pablo Neruda's work continues to elicit. *Neruda's Ekphrastic Experience* is a well-argued and engaging study of the interartistic relationship between *Canto* and the Mexican muralist movement. Méndez-Ramírez skillfully covers the stated objectives and, overall, his book is a welcome addition to the growing field of studies that puts forth a reading of "cultural artifacts" within the broader ideological and artistic background in which they were produced and circulated.

That there are affinities between Neruda's monumental poem and the murals of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros is, of course, nothing new. Méndez-Ramírez's meticulous and thorough documentation tracks the ubiquitousness of that belief. It continues to be, however, a relationship that has been kept on the realm of overboard generalizations. The ties between the poetic and the visual programs are close: identical epic and mythical scope of both projects, coincidence of Americanist goals, shared commitment to leftist utopias, the Poet's close personal and party ties to the artists during his stay in Mexico as Chilean consul, etc. Rivera and Siqueiros, in fact, illustrated the first edition of *Canto*. To my knowledge, none of these "Mexican connections" has ever been questioned or disregarded, least of all by Neruda himself. Some overzealousness in order to lay down the foundation of a thesis on the Mexican influence—as point of departure—is not harmful, but we should not lose sight of two major facts: *Canto general* is above all a monumental Adamic or naming construction, the creation of a verbal universe of mythic proportions founded on the logos, not particularly on the visual image; and secondly, that it is the epic of all Latin America, but very much so of Chile and of Neruda's own personal involvement with the González Videla's regime. By bounding his study to a close reading of Cantos I (*La lámpara de la tierra*), III (*Conquistadores*), IV (*Los libertadores*), V (*La arena traicionada*), and, summarily, VIII (*La tierra se llama Juan*), Méndez-Ramírez's study imposes a one-sided perspective that

unfortunately ignores the larger scope of *Canto*. His embracement of the opinion that *Canto* is in fact two books in one volume—the first half: an independent complete book which follows closely Diego Rivera's monumental murals—is buttressed on the fact that there is at least another half of the book that he chose to disregard. This, however, is a minor point here, and Méndez-Ramírez makes up for it with a solid, meticulous scholarship, with many valuable insights both on the paintings and the poems, and with a clearly articulated and well argued account of one important and fascinating aspect of *Canto general*.

Chapter 1 (*Image and Text*) lays down the theoretical framework chosen to probe Neruda's "ekphrastic experience." The chapter painstakingly goes over most of what has been said on ekphrasis since the term appeared in Lessing's *Laocoön*. Building on Jean H. Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts*, the author updates the spatial/temporal dichotomy debate in the arts with the contributions of Joseph Frank, W. J. T. Mitchell, Martin Jay, and in particular, Murray Krieger. This theoretical framework is ambitious, but adequate for the intended goals. However what Méndez-Ramírez eventually turns out doing is to rely mainly on the list of sixteen types of interrelations between the arts put together by Ulrich Weisstein in his article, "Literature and the Visual Arts" (published in one of Barricelli & Gibaldi's MLA sponsored volumes intended for an "audience of nonspecialists, particularly students . . ."). From Weisstein's list, Méndez-Ramírez selects what he considers the seven "most pertinent categories" to prove that "Neruda closely followed the techniques, style, themes, and motifs of Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco." *Canto* is therefore considered among the group of literary works that: "share themes or motifs with works of art," "that are linked with each other through manifestos and programmatic statements," "works so designed as to stimulate the reader's visual sense," or seek "to reproduce movement styles in the visual arts," etc. This is, of course, a good assortment to explore interartistic relationships, but it has very little to do with ekphrasis, and the term loses whatever meaning it might have had for the reader. The "Neruda's ekphrastic experience" of the title, for example, reappears in just one page (99), under the guise of "ekphrastic effort," "ekphrastic encounter," "the artist approaches the ekphrastic occurrence," and "a sort of fictive ekphrastic," "yet this does not mean that an 'actual' form of ekphrasis is necessarily at work," and, but "Of course, in some instances, Neruda has also engaged in a more 'direct' form of ekphrastic encounter". At this point the term has no meaning at all.

Chapters 3 (The Indigenous Theme and the Search for Roots), 4 (The Panoramic View), and 5 (The Poet and the People) constitute the core of Méndez-Ramírez's arguments. This is a scheme that closely follows the order of the cantos discussed and that looks too much like a resuffling of Frank Riess's, *The Word and the Stone. Language and Imagery in Neruda's "Canto General."*

The first chapter of this core discusses how both painters and poet depict in mythical terms the idyllic and uncorrupted pre-Columbian world destroyed by the arrival of the Spaniards. The author's thesis is that Neruda appropriated the idealized imagery of the "telluric bond between man and earth" painted by Rivera in murals like *The Creation for the National Preparatory School*. According to the author, this "interartistic association" is best seen in *Amor América* where Neruda's unified artistic vision is seen as proof that Rivera's mural functioned as the Poet's "source for ekphrastic desire" (70).

The following chapter deals with the use that murals and poems make of history, and the historical figures of Conquistadors and Liberators. The author's argument is that Mexican muralism's panoramic and synchronic view of history supplied "the structural foundation of *Canto general*." Finally, Chapter 5 purports to be the conclusive argument of the strong relationship of Neruda with the muralist movement. According to the author, Neruda attempted to incorporate in *Canto* the same collective program launched by Vasconcelos for the arts: the communion of the artist with the masses, the concept of "poeta del pueblo," and the insertion of the artist in his own art object as a means of communion with the masses; all coincide with what the mural paintings had already accomplished. Mexican mural art was, according to the author, the cornerstone for Neruda's new vision, the visual impulse he had needed to accomplish the transformational process of his new poetry.

Regardless of how true this fundamental debt of *Canto general* to the Mexican murals might be, *Neruda's Ekphrastic Experience* puts forward a convincing and well-argued opinion. The book makes accessible to the reader many important historical, literary, and artistic issues, and should become an essential reading for anyone interested in exploring the relationship between poetry and mural painting. The edition is impeccable, well printed, and virtually free of typographical errors. The reproductions—several in color—of all the paintings

mentioned constitute an added asset, as do the extensive notes, brief historical appendix, and excellent bibliography.

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Chris Perriam, Michael Thompson, Susan Frenk, and Vanessa Knights. *A New History of Spanish Writing: 1939 to the 1990s*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. 241 pp.

Histories of what was referred to as the postwar novel, most but not all of them found in the bibliography of this study, abounded in the 1960s, reaching a high point with Gonzalo Sobejano's *Novela de nuestro tiempo* (1970) and then again in Francisco Rico's volumes 7 and 8 of *Historia y crítica de la literatura española* (1980). The appearance of Perriam et al's text makes the reader wonder what innovations will be found here that might add to the wealth of information that has long been produced, especially given the word "new" in the title. The authors' involvement in cultural studies leads one to think that there will be a new theoretical approach.

The title and preface create a promising view of what's to come. The authors' explanation is that the approach will be thematic and not chronological, which is innovative. They begin, however, and necessarily, with a historical vision of Spain in the Franco era. The problem is, though, that many of the practitioners of cultural studies delve into historical and sociological matters as if they were the first people to discover that information. This is the case here, where the writers fill many pages with information that has been found in history books for years and was the experience of the majority of the Spanish readers of this text and of anybody else who had any meaningful contact with Spain during the postwar years.

The second chapter, "Rewriting History," is somewhat more profound as far as offering information is concerned. One finds a careful description of the ideology of the educational system. The chapter is carefully thought out, and there are many details that are not typically common knowledge for the average student of Spanish literature. The concentration on children's education leads to an interesting discussion of children's literature, and a study of how these works played a part in rewriting Spanish history.

In sum, the second chapter presents an acceptable view of how cultural production is utilized to rewrite history, even up to contemporary times. If there is a problem with the chapter, it is that there may be an exaggeration of conservative literature's impact on ideological viewpoints in contemporary Spain. The importance given to the reediting of *Madrid de corte a checa*, for example, is questionable, in spite of the fact that the edition was reprinted twice. It is difficult to see Foxa's work as an influential novel in late twentieth-century Spain.

The third chapter, "Reclaiming History," continues along the line of the previous chapter, analyzing those works that attempted to counter the official view of history. As is to be expected, the key year in the chronology of works studied is 1975, and the sixty-year trajectory from censorship to freedom of expression forms the basis for the analysis of most of the prose, poetry, and theater of the entire study. The section on drama is much more thorough than the section on poetry, and the section on the novel appears somewhat eclectic. The authors begin their treatment with the work of Sender and Aldecoa, and then move on to a later group of demythologizing writers, centering on Benet and Martín Gaité (particularly the latter writer's *El cuarto de atrás*), but these authors are then linked together with Fernández Santos, Pérez Reverte, and Antonio Gala. Leguina, Gómez Ojea, and Díaz-Mas are the final essential references in this chapter that has represented writers in search of a reformulation of history. The difference, at this point in time, between the canonical reception of these authors, is what leads to this reviewer's use of the term "eclectic," but that is precisely the challenge Perriam et al. have put before themselves: does a new, cultural, approach to the novel cause a definitive change in the canon?

Similar to the third, the fourth chapter, which deals with the influence of the family and the role of patriarchal structures in the Franco regime, traces the role of literature as it calls for an alternative social structure. While the purpose of the chapter is to present historical data as a means to create innovative analysis, this simply does not take place. The texts are barely analyzed, and they seem rather to be mentioned as justification for the retelling of Spanish history. A glaring example of this is the treatment of *La familia de Pascual Duarte*, a two-page commentary that adds nothing to our knowledge of the text.

The following three chapters are entitled respectively "Power and Disempowerment," "Languages of Silence," and "A Sense of Reality."

These chapters move more concretely towards a redefinition of the canon, dealing more with the contribution of female writers, creators of science fiction and the fantastic, and less traditional writing, such as graffiti. "Languages of Silence" may be considered the most valuable chapter of the three, due to its careful analysis of the divisions between socially connected and disconnected literature, and the following chapter may be the most original, as it traces the history of those works that contest traditional history in the three basic periods under analysis: the postwar, the transition and the post-transition.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 reach further into the realm of cultural studies, touching on the newest and yet to be consecrated writers, as well as on those themes—mostly gender related—that have constantly struggled to be part of mainstream criticism. Chapter 8 purports to describe new writing ("New Writing; New Spain?"). It is very complete in its treatment of the three main genres, but it is rarely analytical and admittedly repetitive, as in the case of their return to a discussion of the theater of José Ruibal. If there is an important aspect to be highlighted, it is once more the chapter's emphasis on women's writing, in this case those of the 1950s and 1960s; Elena Quiroga serves as a prime example. Chapters 9 and 10 deal with more recent and more marginal writing as far as traditional criticism is concerned, and, once more, only history will decide whether those marginal discourses (works from the "Generación X" for example) will be seen as mainstream by future histories of Spanish literature.

It is important to remember that this study belongs to the field of literary *history* and not literary criticism, for while there are many incisive statements made throughout the text, as literary analysis it is weak, concentrating largely on historical relevance and plot description. Its value lies in its global approach, which constantly incorporates prose, poetry, and theater into each of the thematic sections, and its highlighting of certain authors and texts who have not received their fair share of attention (Jesús Fernández Santos's *Los bravos* and Elena Quiroga's *Algo pasa en la calle*, for example). Its general shortcomings have been mentioned at different points in this review. More specifically, one might mention the lack of certain specific writers and literary historians: Juan García Hortelano and José Jiménez Lozano in the first group; in the second, Gonzalo Sobejano, Santiago Sanz Villanueva, Pablo Gil Casado, and most notably, Ramón Buckley, who has written three books on the subject at hand. There are also minor errors in translation. *Letras protestadas* (Gil de Biedma) are

not protest petitions; “chicos” (Fuertes) most probably refers to children, and not boys. These mistakes and others are not serious, but they get in the way, as do the incessant translations throughout the book, especially when they are questionable.

To repeat, the overall presentation of the book is valuable, especially if the reader is a neophyte in the field of contemporary Spanish literature, and many of the questions that this reader has about the approach taken by these four authors may well have to do with a difference of opinion about how to go about writing literary history. At times it seems that the authors do not follow through on their promise to revise Spanish literary history, but they definitely do provide a global vision of the creation of texts and their relationship to history, politics, and culture from 1939 to the present.

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Francisco Soto. *Reinaldo Arenas*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998. xx + 188 pp.

Francisco Soto’s critical study of the literary corpus of Reinaldo Arenas traces, as Soto puts it in his preface, “the articulation of homoerotic themes and issues in the Cuban writer’s œuvre” (ix). This articulation is central in the six chapters into which the book is divided. The first five chapters analyze, respectively, *Before Night Falls*, the novels of the *Pentagonía*, the short novels “Old Rosa” and “The Brightest Star,” the three stories of *Viaje a la Habana*, and Arenas’s poetry work. In the concluding chapter, Soto points out how Arenas’s life and literary corpus intertwined with the Cuban revolution and its view of homosexuality. The volume includes the already mentioned Preface, a complete Chronology, a section of notes and references, a carefully selected bibliography, and a helpful index.

The articulation of homoerotic themes is not only the central theme but the most important strength of this study. In the first chapter, Soto, keeping in mind his Anglo-American audience, explains how the concepts of masculinity and femininity are constructed in Hispanic societies in order to give a glimpse of how homosexuality is understood in Latin America. Since the term “gay” does not have the same political meaning in Latin America that it has in North America,

Soto avoids identifying Arenas as a gay writer, focusing instead “on underscoring the homosexual themes and issues in Arena’s major works, carefully tracing the development of a homoerotic sensibility that becomes more progressively daring” (xii).

Soto compellingly emphasizes the development of a homoerotic sensibility against all odds, showing how Arenas suffered persecution and censorship for being a homosexual in Cuba, where “policies on homosexuality have been and continue to be the focus of long-standing debates” (ix). Soto’s main task in each chapter involves highlighting how all of Arenas’s texts “turn his condition of ‘otherness’ into a dynamic position of difference” (32). Especially noteworthy is how Arenas’s *œuvre* defends “human dignity and the individual’s freedom to choose who he or she is or wishes to be, even in the face of humankind’s propensity to discriminate against and maliciously persecute individual expression” (93). What lies at the center of Soto’s excellent analysis of Arenas’s work is “deep compassion and commitment to human dignity and acceptance” (123), a commitment found in each of the literary pieces under study. Soto’s writing, in other words, becomes as passionate and provocative as the works he is analyzing.

Reinaldo Arenas is a well-written and extremely well-researched work. In addition to exploring in depth how the development of a homoerotic sensibility interweaves with the development of the Cuban revolution, the book also raises a crucial question about the possible use of a non-hispanic theoretical framework, in this case Queer theory, in the analysis of Arenas’s texts. Soto states that some Spanish scholars and gay activists have proposed that Anglo-American and European paradigms of gay and even queer sexuality offer only problematic interpretative grids for understanding Latin American homosexual experiences. But with the explanation of how homosexuality is typically understood in Latin America in mind, any number of theoretical frameworks might be usefully applied, and further analysis and explanation of queering desire—following, for example, the conceptual advances of theorists such as Jonathan Dollimore, Elizabeth Grosz, Linda Anderson, Andrew Moor, and David Alderson—might have enriched significantly Soto’s discussion of Arenas’s *œuvre*. Despite this small lacuna, however, Soto’s chosen theoretical underpinnings and historical context are well-defined, and he provides a thorough discussion of the complete literary work of an important figure in modern Cuban culture. One hopes that he and others will expand

even further the already significant implications of his excellent analysis.

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