Review Of "Historia Y Ficción En La Narrativa Hispanoamericana" By R. G. Echevarría

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comparative allusions clutter the analysis and seem to belong in a different type of study, such as a typology of narrative structures.

The section on style is unduly diffuse, tending to descriptive characterization rather than to the establishment of a critical argument about Arlt’s language. The discussion of Arlt’s work in relation to the reader gains more of a purpose and is as interesting as the section on narrative arrangements, though quite brief. “La recepción de la obra de Arlt” is disappointingly conventional. Most of this section is a review of Arlt criticism, emphasizing the lack of structural studies and the need for the current volume to correct shortcomings of the standing critical literature. It would have been more productive to consider the many approaches critics have taken to structural and semiotic questions in Arlt, including provocative commentary by Jitrik, Gaspar Pío del Corro, David Viñas, and others. Here, the prevalence of structural discussion is understated. D. W. Foster’s work is oddly identified as thematic; there is confusion about new-critical readings like Aden Hayes’, whose purpose is not to argue about what Arlt intended but to account for features of his work through a unifying textual explanation. A more generous and meditative survey of Arltian criticism is still a topic awaiting duly imaginative treatment.

Gnutzmann’s study is carefully executed, but sometimes purposelessly descriptive and somewhat given to overvigorous symbolic explication. Though cluttered and uneven, it is worthwhile to students of Arlt’s work, who will probably find its most significant contribution in the above-mentioned sections on structural analysis.

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My feelings regarding this text are somewhat mixed. This reaction is due more to the structure of the text and its misleading title than to the quality of the essays that it contains.

The essays are the product of a colloquium held at Yale University in March of 1979. As Roberto González Echevarría, the compiler of this volume, states in his prologue, the purpose of the colloquium was twofold: 1) to examine the relationship between Spanish-American history and its narrative from the colonial period up to the present time, and 2) to render homage to one of Spanish America’s most gifted men of letters, the late Alejo Carpentier. The dual nature of this focus is ambitious and perhaps therein lie both the strengths and weaknesses of the text itself.
According to González Echevarría there are three essential statements that can be made about Spanish-American fiction: 1) it often seeks its origins and even creates them through the chronicles of the Conquest; 2) beginning with the nineteenth century and due principally to the fact that political independence had become a reality for most of Spanish America, the fiction of the area became less an imaginative and fantastic response to the period of Discovery and Conquest and more an instrument for criticizing current reality; and 3) since the period of vanguardism one observes a rejection of the scientific posture of the nineteenth-century novel and the use of narrative as an instrument of philosophy and mythmaking, which allows the writer to examine the present on the same level as the historical past.

González Echevarría's comments are insightful, and if the content of the essays that follow his prologue reflected or examined the validity of these statements, then we would have confronted quite a different book. The essays, however, tend to stand more by themselves than they do as part of a greater whole or unifying theme. The text is divided into six distinct sections: an Introduction, which includes a thought-provoking and witty address by Carpentier; a series of articles dedicated exclusively to the narrative of the colonial period; an examination of the fiction of the nineteenth century as well as that of the regionalist novel; a fourth division that treats the narrative of Alejo Carpentier followed by a section entitled “La nueva novela hispanoamericana” and, finally, a group of essays whose principal concern is the Cuban novel written after the Revolution.

In the case of a good number of these essays, the connection between their content and the title of the text, Historia y ficción en la narrativa hispanoamericana, is not always apparent. For the reader seeking a significant study of the relationship between history and fiction in Spanish-American narrative this, then, is unfortunately not the book. However, the reader will find some perceptive and well written essays on the chronicles and their authors as well as on the fiction of Alejo Carpentier, Severo Sarduy, Edmundo Desnoes, and Reinaldo Arenas.

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These essays on Spanish-American fiction are the product of a scholar obviously well versed in Latin-American literature and criticism. Professor Rodríguez-Luis discusses a broad range of literary topics, from Esteban