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Review Of "A Companion To Modern Spanish American Fiction" By D. L. Shaw

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donde la obra de Avellaneda presenta simultáneamente la irrupción y reflexión necesarias para dar paso al nuevo *ethos* finisecular.

El Romanticismo es un período histórico que a la vez funciona como una práctica estética, una política, una ideología y una conciencia y la mismísima posibilidad de lo histórico. Puede entenderse el Romanticismo como un conjunto de ideologemas persistentes a pesar o gracias a múltiples cambios producto de contradicciones generativas en las fronteras mismas de lo que está y lo que no está. Estamos ante un proceso de variación inmanente, continuo y regulado, como proponen Deleuze y Guattari. La persistencia de las unidades generativas del Romanticismo se explica por su extensión y saturación al participar en la formación y formulación del capitalismo y las disciplinas académicas. Selimov insunúa en su título una aproximación historicista al Romanticismo particularizando la obra de Avellaneda, el problema reside en la manera en que se imbrica la periodización de los géneros y estilos literarios en la figura del Romanticismo.

Selimov particulariza la obra de Avellaneda; para él existe una aberración disciplinaria en la recepción crítica de ella al querer leer su obra con su correspondencia privada o contra ésta. La vida privada de la autora se opone así a la labor "artística" disciplinada de su oficio de escritora, la esfera pública de su vida. Lo público y lo privado son dos áreas que Selimov quiere o reclama mantener aparte y ensambla en sus argumentos lo que sólo podemos leer como una angustia por la frontera al reclamar a la crítica que mantenga puras lo que Selimov entiende como dos esferas distintas de la producción y la vida de la autora. De cierta manera Selimov heroiza a la autora y le reclama a la recepción de ésta lo que él califica de "morbosidad" en la lectura de la correspondencia de Avellaneda que hace que su poesía se lea como subproducto de su carácter femenino (13). La obra, y en particular la poesía de Avellaneda, son, de acuerdo a la lectura que Selimov hace de la crítica, un síntoma de ser mujer de modo que en la oposición entre su obra y su correspondencia desluce y se devalúa la primera. Para contrarrestar esta tendencia Selimov busca leer y rescatar en la obra de Avellaneda lo que el crítico considera el valor artístico de ésta: "por medio de su arte, Avellaneda despierta un vendaval de emociones en el corazón del lector, y esparce el atormentado sentir romántico que ella misma tal vez haya experimentado con más fuerza que nunca en aquel éxtasis de la creación literaria, siendo la primera catadora de los efluvios de genio artístico" (40). El problema es un punto ciego de Selimov que lo hace partícipe de la misma creación de disciplinas y sus bordes que realiza el Romanticismo, su lenguaje y por supuesto su nada inocente ideología.

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Jacinto Fombona

Shaw, Donald L. *A Companion to Modern Spanish American Fiction*. London: Tamesis, 2002. 258 pp.

Those already acquainted with Shaw's earlier books, *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana*, *Borges' Narrative Strategy*, *Antonio Skármeta and the Post-Boom*, and *The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction*, have come to rely on this critic for studies that are analytically profound, devoid of critical jargon, composed in clear, precise prose, and always impeccably researched. The author's latest contribution to our understanding of the Spanish American novel only reconfirms the attributes of his previous scholarship.

In the hands of others a book such as *A Companion to Modern Spanish American Fiction* could have easily become a mere catalogue containing an endless array of names, titles, dates, and bio-bibliographical data. Happily, this is not the case here. Shaw traces admirably the broad outline of literary tendencies he perceives throughout the development of the novel in Spanish America. Underlying his critical view of this evolutionary process is a conviction that all creative writers possess a specific view of reality and the human condition that will be largely expressed by how they view the function of language and the question of its referential capabilities. As reality changes, the attitude of writers must necessarily change, obliging them to develop and implement new narrative strategies to capture a world that is always in flux. For Shaw, then, at the heart of the novel's evolutionary process are forces both extra-literary and literary in nature that drive the permutations occurring within the genre.

In this book the author proposes to track such permutations over time, and while he recognizes that such an approach may run the risk of producing little more than a history of ideas, his reader, both specialist and non-specialist, recognizes that this never becomes the case since Shaw is always sensitive to the novel's uniqueness as a linguistic entity. He divides Spanish American fiction after the colonial period into four clearly defined periods: 1) from Fernando de Lizardi's *El periquillo sarniento* (1816) to Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (1916); 2) from 1916 to Juan Carlos Onetti's *La vida breve* (1950), or the beginning of what can be called the Boom; 3) from 1950 to approximately 1975, which is recognized as the great experimental period of the Boom; and 4) from approximately 1975 to the present, the period known as the Post-Boom and Post-Modernism.

Shaw views the first of these dividing lines as one that is essentially dominated by European models. For him only Sarmiento's *Facundo* establishes a new view of reality and sets in motion a search for national identity. The second period, influenced by Sarmiento's work, is seen as one that strives to interpret the Latin American continent, its peoples, languages, and surrounding landscape, a tendency that will come to be designated as Regionalism and Indigenism. Shaw is quick to point out, however, that while these two predominate during these years, one can already detect the beginnings of Modernism, in the Anglo-Saxon sense, which will continue through Borges and into the Boom. The third period signals essentially the flowering of Modernism and the origins of Post-Modernism. Yet even during this moment Shaw emphasizes the presence of writers who steadfastly hold on to the Realist tradition and who will pass it on in a modified form to the writers of the Post-Boom. Several aspects characterize the fourth period for him and among them are included a noticeable increase in the number of women novelists, and the hostility expressed towards the Boom's experimentalism and its continued questioning of the referential role of language. However, within this period Shaw draws attention to another tendency that seems to go in the opposite direction, reinforcing the Boom's disdain for the Realist tradition and intensifying its experimentalism. It is what he alludes to tentatively as an example of what could be called Post-Modernism in Spanish America.

Shaw's principal contribution to our understanding of the Spanish American novel derives not so much in this case from the four broad periods he has isolated in his study but rather from what he sees lying between the cracks of these junctures. Two

critical questions are of utmost concern to him: one, the origins of Modernism in Latin American fiction (again in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word) and whether the term Post-Modernism can be appropriately and meaningfully applied to the fiction produced after the Boom. The first of these concerns leads him to take a long look at the *vanguardista* novel of the 1920s and 1930s. Here he offers superb critical commentary on a much too neglected period of Spanish American fiction with a detailed analysis of the contributions of such writers as Pedro Prado, Jaime Torres Bodet, Felisberto Hernández, Eduardo Mallea, and in particular Eduardo Barrios, María Luisa Bombal, and Roberto Arlt. For Shaw *vanguardista* fiction is crucial to any understanding we may hope to achieve of the Boom itself.

Finally, in a similar fashion he explores the nature of the Boom in the hope of understanding whether some novels written during this phenomenon reflect a peak in Spanish American Modernism, while others pave the way for what has been called Post-Modernism. Shaw concludes that it is incorrect to accept, unquestioningly, the term Post-Modern to describe the transition from the Boom to what follows. In making such distinctions, it is for him a question of how the writer views language and the question of its referentiality. The more a text alludes to a Spanish American context, the less it can be considered Post-Modernist, understanding by this term a skepticism for all ideology, a world engulfed in chaos and ambiguity, and a substitution of parody for social commitment. Texts that continue the tradition of the socially committed writer who is more interested in creating a reader friendly narrative world would fall under the umbrella of the Post-Boom. Those who continue with the experimentalism and ambiguity associated with the Boom might be considered part of what critics have called Post-Modernism. In the Spanish American context some of these writers might include Néstor Sánchez, Salvador Elizondo, Severo Sarduy, and Diamela Eltit. The word "might" is important here because, as Shaw stresses continually, unless we have a more exact idea of what Modernism was in Spanish America, any continued use of the term Post-Modern will lead not to clarity but to ever-increasing frustration and contradiction.

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White, Steven F. *El mundo más que humano en la poesía de Pablo Antonio Cuadra: un estudio ecocrítico*. Managua: Asociación Pablo Antonio Cuadra, 2002. 290 pp.

Besides simply providing a critique of humankind's exploitation of natural resources and sins of pollution, ecocriticism equips readers with a wide array of perspectives from which to view art's place in the world. Criticism that focuses on the contact points between humans and the natural world provides insight into our rampant anthropocentric blindness and investigates familiar subjects of poststructuralist or more socially oriented theories in refreshingly broad terms. Language, for example, is studied as an intermediary between God and the earth, or through its creative relationship to the songs of birds. Such comparisons, in turn, serve to remind us that in the age of globalization, linguistic diversity is sharing the same fate of many endangered plants and animals.