

GONZÁLEZ-MANDRI, FLORA. *José Donoso's House of Fiction. A Dramatic Construction of Time and Place*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995. 199 pp.

Flora González-Mandri, Associate Professor at Emerson College, offers an extraordinary comprehensive and critical overview of José Donoso's works from *Coronación* (1958) [*Coronation*] to *Taratuta* (1990) [*Taratuta*] (1990). González-Mandri assigns the appropriate value to José Donoso, Chile's most prominent novelist and an admirable member of the Latin American "Boom" in *José Donoso's House of Fiction. A Dramatic Construction of Time and Place* (1995).

González-Mandri skillfully summarizes significant positions Donoso takes in his prominent novels analyzing the social, political, critical and psychological outlooks from the point of view of the reader and a unique esthetic, proper of Donoso's work.

*José Donoso's House of Fiction* discusses Donoso's intentions, narrative strategies, metaphors, allegories and voices in his novels up to 1990. González-Mandri explains how Donoso's novelistic world revolves around a theater in which the 'house' is the space that accomodates both the stage and the audience. The former will participate in the melodramatic experience. Thus, González-Mandri thoroughly illustrates in every chapter correspondent to each novel, how Donoso is a writer who observes and creates a production. In other words, his novels are akin to theatrical productions where the good observer "sees" through the many windows of the house of fiction.

To clarify her considerations on Donoso's style, Flora González-Mandri contrasts José Donoso with other Latin American authors like Gabriel García Marquez (among others) and also other writers that

seem to have influenced him like Henry James and Honoré de Balzac. Thus, González-Mandri recognizes in Donoso's works the artistic and epic narrative style a novel can have which Henry James discusses in *The Art of the Novel* (1984). Furthermore, the author observes the detailed description of the settings found in Donoso's novels and considers it comparable to Honoré de Balzac's.

Additionally, González-Mandri elucidates the class struggle and the psychological games characters play in a classist society, all implicit in the language of Donoso's novels. González-Mandri analyses adeptly every novel from 1958 to 1990 focusing on the ambivalences and melodrama of the theatrical language with which Donoso works on the narratives and consequently in his "houses," which are seen as microcosms of the universe. Hence, Donoso portrays the house as an enclosed privileged space for the enjoyment of the bourgeoisie. After all, the historic flow of events is represented in the novel with a theatrical discourse that falls from the operatic to the melodramatic mode.

In *Surrealismo y Rebelión de los Instintos* (1972) [*Surrealism and Rebellion of the Instincts*], Hernán Vidal evaluates Donoso's novels as anarchical and psychoanalytical responses to reality. Others, like Myrna Solotorevsky in *José Donoso: Incursiones en su producción novelesca* (1983) [*Incursions on his Novelistic Production*], observe the post-structural linguistic characteristics of Donoso's narratives. González-Mandri comprehensively examines Donoso's works including the aforementioned aspects explored by Hernán Vidal and Myrna Solotorevsky and also correlates them with politics and theater.

González-Mandri moves from stylistic issues to questions of social-political oppression and its psychological impact on people. It is important to inform the readers that *José Donoso's House of Fiction. A Dramatic*

*Construction of Time and Place* highlights the Latin American bourgeoisie's mentality and life style.

Cronologically, González-Mandri expresses the value Donoso's novels have to the world's literature stressing the relevancy of the linguistic richness and disenchantment with the ways of the bourgeois that Donoso frequently approaches. In Chapters One and Two González-Mandri points out the full range of aspects Donoso's reader can identify in his intertextual and metalinguistic novels. She cautiously discusses the role of the characters of *Coronación* (1958) [*Coronation*], *Este domingo* (1966) [*This Sunday*] and *El lugar sin límites* (1967) [*Hell has no Limits*] beginning from the definition of the idiom of Donoso's drama of domesticity, and finishing with interpretations of several discourses juxtaposed in these novels up to *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* (1970) [*The Obscene Bird of the Night*]. Also in Chapter Two, she illustrates the battle between oral tradition and the theatrical representation in *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* describing how "La casa de los ejercicios espirituales" [The House of Spiritual Exercises] constitutes a chaotic space wherein characters forge their lives by telling stories that constantly discredit each other.

The following chapters demonstrate how Donoso responds to Chile's political tragedy in the seventies and eighties with *Casa de campo* (1978) [*A House in the Country*]. Moreover, she elaborates how Donoso's devices of a theatrical language are shown and calls attention to *Casa de campos*'s narrative's melodramatic enterprise safely divorced from reality. In regards to Chile's political conjecture during the dictatorship, González-Mandri approaches the novels *El jardín de al lado* (1981) [*The Garden Next Door*] and *La desesperanza* (1986) [*The Curfew*] where Donoso reconsiders the role that language plays in his

production. In terms of the use of political allegories and theatrical panels, the author points out the mask Donoso inserts in History in the aforementioned novels and also in *Taratuta* (1990) [*Taratuta*]. Here, González-Mandri compares the way Donoso does this masking to the way Jorge Luis Borges does it in *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (1944) [*The Garden of Forking Paths*] in the book of *Ficciones* [*Labyrinths*]. Therefore, in the aforementioned creations by Donoso, theatricality, history, and legend are the forces that bring characters into motion as they step out of the *tableaux vivants* according to González-Mandri.

As Flora González-Mandri differentiates Donoso's work labeling each one according to its style and defining the dimensions of space and time, her book is extremely helpful to the studious reader of Donoso. Indeed, it is an essential reading to anybody who intends to understand, study or write about José Donoso. The sensitivity of professor González-Mandri as a reader is astonishing. She presents her impressions as a critic, as a literature *connaissanceuse* and as a very knowledgeable twentieth century Latin American literature professor. *José Donoso's House of Fiction. A Dramatic Construction of Time and Place* helps not only the first-time reader of José Donoso, but also provides all readers with the author's points of view on gender, genre, social, political and psychological issues. In addition, this excellent piece of research is a contribution to literary theory and criticism to the extent of being a compilation of twentieth century "New World's" literature as a unique type of literature from José Donoso's multi-faceted perspective.

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