

**Álvarez-Blanco, Palmar and Toni Dorca, eds. *Contornos de la narrativa española actual (2000-2010). Un diálogo entre creadores y críticos.* Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2011. Print. 318 pages.**

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The borders of Spanish literature over the course of the last decade have exploded, allowing several traditionally marginalized texts, authors, and cultures to become major contributors to the literary field. *Contornos de la narrativa española actual (2000-2010): Un diálogo entre creadores y críticos* capably redefines the boundaries of Spanish writing by sweeping over the first ten years of 21st-century literature, mingling several different languages - Arabic, Basque, Castilian, Catalan, Galician, and Haketia, to name a few - from many unique locales - the Maghreb, the Canary Islands, and key territories within the Iberian Peninsula, such as Barcelona, Basque Country, Castile, and Galicia - into a rich cornucopia of modern Spanish narrative. By blending insights from writers (or “creadores”) with analyses by literary scholars (or “críticos”), *Contornos* bridges the gap between author and audience, shedding light on the most recent manifestations of Spanish literature.

As Toni Dorca makes abundantly clear, the term “española,” when applied to the 21st-century literary form, comprises of “cada una de las cuatro lenguas oficiales” (13). Undoubtedly referring to the Castilian, Catalan, Galician, and Basque languages, Dorca further extends the scope of significance into various genres, including “las literaturas poscoloniales” the “memoria histórica,” “autoficción,” “la novela femenina,” and “best sellers” (14-17). This apparently inexhaustible list could also extend into the fringe categories of comics and graphic novels, as Óscar Aibar implies in his article “Los metalibros y yo,” and, as Gonzalo Navajas proposes, encompass “las relaciones entre la narratividad escrita y la visual y plástica” (299). Architecture, painting, film; when taking into consideration the leaps and bounds made in modern multimedia, there is virtually no defining limit in assembling the modern narrative.

The ample geographic distribution of the Spanish literary form plays a primary role in the development of *Contornos*. Each critic takes into consideration different texts, crossing cartographic borders and weaving in and out of dialects in order to provide a comprehensive view of the modern model of Spanish narrative. Adolfo Campoy, in his “La literatura poscolonial española del Magreb,” explores several different authors, some writing in Berber, others in Haketia, and another group in Catalan. In spite of their apparent linguistic differences, all contribute to the field of Spanish narrative and, as Campoy argues, open the mouth of “el otro donde esperábamos inconscientemente encontrarnos a nosotros mismos” (73). It is the voice of this traditionally ignored and apparently silent “otro” that *Contornos* strives to vindicate. In so doing, it not only bolsters the literary field, spreading a textual net widely over many lands and languages, but also breaks the silence, sharing the stage with heretofore unrecognized yet vitally important contributors to Spanish narrative.

For instance, consider Margarita Casacuberta’s article, “La novela catalana a principios del siglo XXI,” in which she introduces over thirty Catalan authors, ranging from

Ferran Torrent to Lolita Bosch. Each writer belongs to a different style that Casacuberta precisely describes, creating a coherent dialogue between the various genres. For example, Emili Teixidor's historical memoir, *Pa negre*, connects to Joan-Francesc Mira's fantastic text based on the Hercules legend, *Els treballs perduts*, in the sense that both look to the past for their subject matter (Teixidor recurs to the narrator's infancy whereas Mira draws from the mythic hero) and seek to imbue the present with the essence of history, opting for a "vertiente vitalista de la realidad, la renovación de la vida entendida como continuidad y síntesis de contrarios" (81). Casacuberta proposes that the forgotten voice in Catalan literature is none other than the past itself. Remembrance causes pieces of this past to resonate with the present moment, forming a temporal bridge between memory and actuality.

Nostalgia and recollection as exemplified by the historical memoir or testimonial have enjoyed immense success in Spanish narrative during the last decade. Encouraged by the 2007 *Ley de Memoria Histórica*, writers recount the stories of voices reduced to whispers by the brutality of the Civil War. As authors struggle to ethically relate genuine memories from both personal and collective experiences, the memoir and nostalgic novel create the demand for new, rigorous standards of historical responsibility. The ever-present danger of idealizing the past and embellishing an already hazy memory becomes a very real possibility. Germán Labrador Méndez, in his essay, "Historia y decoro. Éticas en la forma en las narrativas de memoria histórica," warns of "la posibilidad de la naturalización contemporánea de ese pasado," where "los relatos superadores de un eventual *olvido histórico* fuesen a acabar borrando justamente aquellas experiencias de dolor y violencia sobre las que habría debido edificarse el debate público y los relatos institucionales asociados" (124). Care must be taken when recounting the past; as Labrador points out, powerful "relatos superadores" have established themselves as apparently official versions of history. These "relatos," however, do not take into account the silenced voices, alluded to by Campoy, be it by violence or otherwise, that have been historically marginalized for speaking out. According to Labrador, the current "relatos superadores" must be done away with, and in their place a new "consenso narrativo sobre ese tiempo" needs to be reached (124). How this is to be done remains a mystery, even in the present moment. Labrador does provide some direction: "el tono o la voz, o las fuentes documentales de una ficción son, en régimen de la memoria histórica, tomas de decisión éticas y políticas" (124). As Labrador makes clear, necessary ethical and political considerations must be taken before attempting to accurately recount history.

As an example of national recollection, Cristina Moreiras-Menor, in her essay "Narrativa gallega contemporánea y memoria cultural," reflects not only on the difficulty of remembering national history, particularly under the shadow of Franco, but on doing so from a Galician perspective, from "una identidad nacional diferenciada" (152). According to Moreiras-Menor, Galician writers, from a national point of view, possess a uniquely ubiquitous geographical heritage. Due in part to its volatile relationship with twentieth-century political affairs, Moreiras-Menor proposes that Galicia is "una localización dislocada o mejor, localizaciones siempre dislocadas, inevitablemente desplazadas" (154). Of course, she refers to the ever-present sense of *morriña*, a constant yearning to become part of a national whole, experienced by the myriad of Galician authors who were exiled or otherwise excluded during Franco's rule. Drawing from the writings of Méndez Ferrín, Suso de Toro, and Manuel Rivas, Moreiras-Menor reveals a literature that, due to its historical sense of estrangement, creates a national model of diversity and difference. With renewed sensibility,

Galician authors find a place in the expansive form of Spanish narrative that *Contornos* proposes for the 21st-century.

The writings by female authors generate an essential undercurrent in this type of modernized narrative. In the collection of “críticos,” Carmen de Urioste and Dolores Vilavedra provide a basic sketch of these important feminine histories. While Urioste broadly covers the expansive forms of Spanish female authorship, Vilavedra hones in more specifically on Galician female writers, whose works are traditionally relegated solely to the poetic genre. “[E]scribir en gallego para una mujer,” stresses Vilavedra, “era sinónimo de escribir poesía” (229). Vilavedra affirms that Rosalía de Castro’s prolific poetic contributions cast a long shadow that both categorizes and limits the expression of female Galician authors. Admittedly, during the early twentieth-century, few writers resist this stereotype, with Úrsula Heinze (1941-) and Marina Mayoral (1942-) as the only exceptions. Vilavedra explains, “el gran empujón al género narrativo se lo darán por una parte las escritoras nacidas en la década de los cuarenta o primeros cincuenta” (231). Authors such as María Xosé Queizán, Margarita Ledo, and more recently, Teresa Moure have all, to one degree or another, managed to escape the narrow poetic label. A principal member of the first Galician feminist organizations, Queizán paved the way for Ledo, whose writings, in spite of her historical and cultural limitations, include progressive forms--“revalorización del lenguaje, hibridación de géneros, ambigüedad simántica, *collage*, rechazo de la anécdota y de la trama como soportes de la narración”--that, as Vilavedra elaborates, preempt postmodern writing styles (235). With the publication of Moure’s *Herba moura* in 2005, Vilavedra feels that Galician feminine literature has finally found a place within the literary canon.

While the first half of the text, “Críticos,” carefully dissects and reassembles the various languages, locales, and genders placed within the Spanish narrative category, the second half, “Creadores,” entails personal vignettes from the authors themselves, allowing a penetrating glimpse into their artistic styles and literary philosophies. Several authors, such as Óscar Aibar and Miquel M. Gibert, provide brief autobiographical accounts; others, such as Juan Cobos Wilkins and Belén Gopegui, present simple directions to produce engaging literature; a few, like José María Merino and Rosa Montero, reflect on the effect that best-sellers have on literary sensibilities; and one, Gonzalo Navajas, urges readers to resist nationally restrictive paradigms in favor of a strong focus on the individual, whose historical and cultural circumstances, however unpredictable, shape and give meaning to personal character.

Navajas proposes that the nation in and of itself is but a small part of a larger global configuration. Countries, in the grand scheme of history, are self-imposed limits that should not determine “los componentes temáticos y artísticos de la textualidad” (298). Going beyond the national characteristics of literature, he proposes that each individual identity is in danger of dissolution within the universal panorama of shifting meanings and oblique ethnicities. His writing is “una respuesta al desafío más apremiante que plantea la condición contemporánea: ensay[a] e investig[a] posibles modos de inserción dentro del marco de los movimientos migratorios masivos y del lenguaje global y mediático” (298). With the unprecedented explosion of modern technology and information (what Navajas refers to as “trash culture”), societal categories trump individual characteristics, compartmentalizing personalities and traits into single media-approved qualities (298). According to Navajas, literature’s prerogative is to authenticate personal existence by situating the protagonist not only nationally, but also historically and culturally. Such an exercise both resists modernity’s corrosive effect on identity and enables the individual to generate a sense of self that breaches ethnic, temporal, and societal moorings. Part and parcel of the expansive narrative

project carried out by *Contornos*, Navajas strives to retextualize the individual in an impersonalized environment. Even as *Contornos* thrusts open the borders of Spanish narrative in favor of a multicultural, plurilingual, and malleable form of literature, Navajas implies that by resisting stereotypical notions of being (as presupposed by national, cultural, and/or ethnic backgrounds), a fresh, accurate, and authentic version of self can be realized.

The closing article in the collection, “El final abierto,” by José Ovejero, underscores the recurring theme of extension and inclusion developed throughout *Contornos*. As an author dedicated to revealing the uncertain and abstract nature of reality, Ovejero’s texts seem to lack any apparent conclusion. Summarizing the remarks of one of his readers, Ovejero recounts, “que le ha gustado mucho el libro pero que me he olvidado de enviarle las últimas páginas” (310). In his defense, Ovejero argues that “el final abierto [es] expresión de la inseguridad de nuestros tiempos; [. . .] nada es definitivo, nada es seguro, nada es sólo de una manera, todo fin es una forma de interpretar lo anterior” (310). The focus should not be on how cleanly the denouement draws to a close, but rather how effectively each moment builds off of what precedes it. “No escribo desde el desenlace,” writes Ovejero, “empiezo a narrar sin tener esa perspectiva desde fuera, sin poder observar cómo desde el punto alfa llego al punto omega” (311). Considered within the context of the *Contornos* project--i.e., a remapping of the traditionally canonical boundaries of Spanish narrative--Ovejero’s writing style echoes what the *creadores* and *críticos* have done for the genre, leaving narrative form open to new contributors from a myriad of sources.

Over the last four centuries, special examples of Spanish narrative - the *Quijote*, Galdós’s *Fortunata y Jacinta*, and Cela’s *La familia de Pascual Duarte*, to name only a few of many - stand as hallmarks within the genre. As time marches on, these texts become canonized, gaining a revered place in the upper echelons of Spanish narrative. While celebratory in tone, literary canonization can lead to categorical ossification. Admitting more books into the pantheon becomes painstakingly difficult as the new arrivals oftentimes do not intimately correspond with the already canonized texts. The question changes from one of quality and technique into one of imitation and similarity - how close do the new texts assimilate the style of their precursors? When such simulation is lacking, a new sub-genre is frequently created, serving only to increase the preferential distance between the canonical texts and the new literary works. Clearly, subversive genres exist (e.g., the picaresque) that attack claims to canonicity, and yet a sense of favoritism still seems to remain, particularly in academic circles. *Contornos* takes into account this mentality of literary segregation and aims to disturb and destroy the hierarchical structures that it has generated.