

Gustavo Pérez Firmat

IDLE FICTIONS: THE HISPANIC VANGUARD NOVEL, 1926-1934.

Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982. Pp. 174.

\$25.75.

Reviewed by Jerry Phillips Winfield

With this study, Pérez Firmat provides a penetrating and intellectually rigorous examination of the Hispanic vanguard novel and the critical tension it generated. Undertaking a study of the relationship between language and metalanguage, or fiction and criticism, he organizes his work into two parts: "Criticism" and "Novels." While the first part provides a reception study of the vanguard novel for the years between 1926 and 1934, the second part develops a critical reading of these novels contextually based on this reception. In his search for a new hermeneutical perspective, Pérez Firmat views the avant-garde movement in Hispanic fiction both "as an on-going critical debate that sought to redefine the novel, and as a group of novels that ostensibly embodied the new definition" (p. xi).

The "idle fictions" of the vanguard novel represented an interlude or literary parenthesis—a vacation—from the traditional novel. Pérez Firmat interprets such representative works as Salinas's *Víspera del gozo*, Torres-Bodet's *Margarita de Niebla*, and Benjamín Jarnés's *Locura y muerte de Nadie* and *El profesor inútil*, of which the latter's first and second editions bracket the beginning and end of vanguard fiction. Self-conscious of its subordinate nature, vanguard fiction created a world closed upon itself, yet constantly impelled by the opposing forces of literary tradition and rebellion. The critical problem of definition is centered in the complex interrelationship of the vanguard novel with the "canonical" novel of the nineteenth century.

The *novela nueva*, typified by a deconstructive characterization, a seemingly meaningless plot, and an intrusive author represented a moment of vertigo in its confrontation with traditional fiction. Pérez Firmat offers unique and provocative critical strategies in his study of a "forgotten past." For while avant-garde Hispanic poetry—that of Lorca, Guillén, Alexandre and others—has received considerable attention, avant-garde fiction has been critically neglected. Particularly revealing is the consideration of literary influence, notably that of José Ortega y Gasset in *La deshumanización del arte y Ideas sobre la novela*.

The notes and bibliography of the work are models of precision and thoroughness. Occasionally Pérez Firmat, in his search for *le mot juste*, obscures the reader's vision with such technical renderings as "pneumatic aesthetics" (p. 40) "the palimpsest effect" (p. 70), and "the novel as mattress." Conceptually the work is difficult reading yet clearly deserving of the effort. Pérez Firmat has exceeded an attempt of mere labeling in his successful explication of the contextual nature of the movement. With fresh insight and sound scholarship, he has made a valuable critical contribution to an intriguing area of twentieth-century Hispanic fiction.

Chester L. Wolford

THE ANGER OF STEPHEN CRANE: FICTION AND THE EPIC TRADITION

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Pp. xvi + 148.

Reviewed by Richard A. Cassell

Chester L. Wolford's *The Anger of Stephen Crane* offers another rescuing of Crane from the constrictive level of naturalist and determinist. He shows us that Crane's creative imagination has a larger scope and makes deeper soundings than such recognized, or at least observed, currents as Naturalism, Symbolism, Impressionism, Existentialism, Nihilism, and