

With few exceptions among contemporary authors, Spanish and Spanish-American literary works are not readily available in English. It is not surprising, then, that works by women novelists are even more difficult to find in English translation. For example, Carmen Laforet's *Nada*, one of the most significant post-Civil War Spanish novels, winner of the Eugenio Nadal prize in 1944, has not yet appeared in translation. Nevertheless, there is hope the tide is turning, evident by the present anthology and by the recent publication of an excellent translation by Richard and Lucía Cunningham of a collection of short stories by the Chilean María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980), *New Islands and Other Stories*.

In the last two decades throughout Latin America there has been an enormous increment of writing by women, especially in Mexico and Argentina that, for many reasons, have witnessed a flourishing activity among women authors. It is all the more important, then, to make them known beyond the boundaries of their homeland, not only to show that women are not silent in Latin America, but rather to publicize these writers and make their work known and available. *The Web* includes short stories by twelve authors, from Luisa Mercedes Levinson, born in 1914, who started publishing in the early fifties, to a young writer, Reina Roffé, who began her career in the seventies. Thus, the collection covers three generations of women and shows how their preoccupations, techniques, style, and political consciousness have evolved through the decades. Although these authors are better known for their novels, their selection was based on their short stories, and for that reason it is not surprising that novelists like Marta Traba, Sara Gallardo, and others were not included. The editor has focused his selection on one topic, the portrayal of the female-male relationship in an urban society. This, however, does not preclude the fact that these women have also written on a variety of subjects including social and political issues. By limiting the collection to one topic, the editor gives it cohesion and provides the reader with the possibility of tracing its development and evolution through the short stories.

The introduction and the biographical presentations of the individual authors are very useful, although at times one wishes the critic had discussed the stories in greater detail in order to provide the foreign reader with a better insight into the literary and cultural backgrounds. The editor should be commended for including recent and unpublished stories by young writers, such as Reina Roffé and Luisa Valenzuela (whose "Change of Guard" has, in the meantime, appeared in Spanish in the United States in a volume entitled *Cambio de armas* [Hanover, N.H.: Ediciones del Norte, 1982]). Although *The Web* is a fine collection of representative works by Argentine women, there are some aspects that could be improved for later editions. Inasmuch as the anthology follows a chronological order, it is not clear why the editor chose to alter this in the case of the first two entries. Luisa Mercedes Levinson (b. 1914) precedes Silvina Ocampo although the latter was born in 1906, and, what is most significant, she began publishing in 1937, while Levinson did not do so until the early fifties. The individual bibliographies included after each introduction are very useful, but, unfortunately, these are not always accurate or complete. For example, Silvina Bullrich's *Bodas de cristal* was not her first publication; she had written *Su vida y yo* (1941), *La redoma del primer angel* (1943, and not 1967), and *La tercera versión* (1944), before *Bodas de cristal* in 1951, and not 1953 as it is listed. Another example is the omission of Luisa Valenzuela's *Como en la guerra* (1977) and *Libro que no muerde* (1980); and no source reference is given for "El que busca." Another suggestion regarding bibliographical information would be to include the source of each of the selections in the introductions. This information, to be sure, is provided sometimes in the introduction, however, that is not always the case. Thus, one must resort to finding it among the list of acknowledgments that, incidentally, do not follow any order. Moreover, there are also a few typographical errors, and several accents missing from titles and names.

In conclusion, *The Web* will draw much-needed attention to the work of Latin-American women writers, and provide material for those college courses that deal with the literature of Latin America in translation, which for the most part have concentrated only on male authors.

Katerina Clark

*THE SOVIET NOVEL: HISTORY AS RITUAL*

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981. Pp.

xvi + 293

Reviewed by Victor Terras

Lazar Fleishman's recent books, *Pasternak in the 1920s* (1981) and *Pasternak in the 1930s* (1984) deal, like Professor Clark's excellent study, with the functioning of the literary process under the peculiar conditions prevailing in the Soviet Union. The detailed account given by him (over 400 pages for a single decade, dealing with a single writer) shows how this process

involves the interaction of individuals and groups possessing the most heterogeneous interests, concerns, and beliefs, as well as the interaction of styles, genres, structures, motifs, and other "literary" entities. Reading Fleishman's account, one is barely aware that one is witnessing the progress and ascendancy of Socialist Realism. Obviously, this is a matter of "forest" vs. "trees," of perspective, that is. Clark's study, done from a perspective not quite that close, still leaves the impression that one faces the literary process as it really happened, but at a distance, not as it appeared to the people directly involved in it, but as it appears to a well informed literary scholar.

To be sure, Clark's approach is basically phenomenological (rather than pragmatic, like Fleishman's), but she is aware of the pragmatic historical context, too, pointing out, for example, the direct influence of *Pravda* (p. 74), the origin and function of specific ideological formulae (e. g., "spontaneity" vs. "consciousness," pp. 15 ff.), the importance of the Gorky Literary Institute, where a surprisingly large proportion of Soviet writers learned their craft (p. 69), and the role played by individual initiative and example, Stalin's in particular. Connections between changes in Soviet society at large and changes in the Socialist Realist novel after World War II are duly registered. Most commendably, Clark seeks to be concrete and to avoid generalizations which cannot be backed up by plausible facts. The writer's lack of autonomous control over his texts is such a concrete fact (p. 159).

Clark's phenomenological description of the Socialist Realist novel is incisive, though it leaves some questions open, perhaps wisely. Her central thesis is that the Socialist Realist novel is "ritualized" and follows a "master plot." As regards the former, I suggest that speaking of a Socialist Realist "canon" (in the sense one speaks of a canon of the classicist drama) and a Socialist Realist "mythology" might be a better label for Clark's correct observations. She shrewdly likens the Socialist Realist novelist to a medieval chronicler, a "teller of tales already prefigured in Party lore" (p. 159). Actually, D. S. Likhachev's observation, to the effect that the medieval chronicler suppresses the person of his subject, foregrounding his function (as prince, as Christian warrior, etc.), accurately describes Socialist Realist practice. It may be appropriate to recall Mayakovsky's response to his critics who found fault with his gross misrepresentation of well-known Western political figures (e. g., Woodrow Wilson as enormously fat): "I don't care about their looks, I'm interested only in their deeds." It is precisely this trait which may account for the absence of erotic love in the Socialist Realist novel (p. 182): it is functionless. By the same token, the fact, also pointed out by Clark, that villains have more of a "psychology" than positive characters (p. 185), is consistent with their having less of a definite function.

As regards Clark's conception of a "master plot" (along the lines of V. Ya. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*), it is certainly applicable to many Socialist Realist novels, specifically the so-called "production novel," but it does not embrace all Socialist Realist novels. Even if one looks at the novels of a single author, say, L. M. Leonov, one must admit that, while they all meet the requirements of the Socialist Realist canon, their plots are quite different—much as the plots of different tragedies by Racine are very different, though they are all within the classicist canon. On the other hand, Clark is quite right in pointing out that the Socialist Realist master plot may be used to express quite different political attitudes. Thus, V. D. Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone* is a perfect example of the Socialist Realist "master plot," yet has a "dissident" message (pp. 217-20).

Clark justifiably asks the question: "How do Soviet novelists manage to use 'realism' in what is essentially a rhetorical rather than a fictive narrative? This is the defining paradox of the Socialist Realist novel . . ." (pp. 35-36). The answer at which she ultimately arrives is, I believe, correct, though not very clearly stated: The Socialist Realist aesthetic essentially continues the Neoplatonist tradition which took hold of Russian literary theory when it embraced the philosophy of Schelling and Hegel in the 1830s and 1840s. The *ideal* truth of Russia's advance toward communism enters into a dialectic relation with historical *reality*. The catch is, of course, that the "ideal" is a false one, or worse yet, one in which fewer and fewer serious writers believe—after the initial period of revolutionary fervor in the 1920s.

Altogether, Clark's book is a significant contribution, rich in excellent observations and judicious conclusions. It will be a great help in understanding Soviet literature better.