

Review

Reviewed Work(s):

Ángel Rama y los estudios latinoamericanos
by Mabel Moraña

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poetry—a trope that figures poetic practice both as giving a face and as defacement. The adequacy of cannibalistic metaphors in accounting for Lezama's complex relationship with metropolitan cultural "influences" is explored in an analysis of the author's most sustained meditation on American cultural identity, *La expresión americana* (1957), and representative poems from *La fijeza* (1949), and *Dador* (1960). And finally, Lezama's attempt to go beyond a poetics of response to one of generation and resurrection in his posthumous *Fragmentos a su imán* is insightfully read in light of the author's assimilation of translation to resurrection in his poetics and of contemporary translation theory.

An epilogue on the multiple uses to which Lezama's writings have been put by poets and critics alike in revolutionary Cuba closes Ben A. Heller's splendid book. Placed at the end of his study, this meditation on conflicting interpretations of Lezama's oeuvre during the revolutionary period seems to underscore the polysemous, open-ended quality of Lezama's writing, a quality which makes it generative of further writing. And in similar fashion, upon finishing Heller's meticulously-crafted study, one feels yet that he has suggested more than said, that, in the present context of closure of Lezama's controversial oeuvre, we may once again ponder the multiple interpretative avenues available to us for pursuing.

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Ángel Rama y los estudios latinoamericanos. Ed. Mabel Moraña. Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 1997. 349 pages.

There have been, and there are still today, outstanding Latin American critics, but the great mass of what appears tends to consist of unsystematic, under-researched *belleslettrism* at one end, and at the other, often naive ideological criticism alternating with lemming rushes in the direction of new critical fads (the latest is postcolonialism). The object of this book is to suggest that Rama is the great recent exception. It contains, besides the editor's Introduction and a most quotable interview with Rama himself from just before his death, five sections: "El lugar del saber. Espacio urbano, letrados e instituciones culturales"; "Ciudad letrada: territorio, frontera, memoria"; "Debates de la transculturación"; "Escritura, poder y espacios discursivos: colonia y modernidad"; and "Ángel Rama y América Latina." Unfortunately, there is no check-list of Rama's major publications, which would have helped to evaluate the degree to which the various contributions relate to the development of his critical

ideas and methodology. Actually, only one essay points in such a direction—Horacio Machín's "Ángel Rama y La lección intelectual de *Marcha*"—and it fails to define clearly what *Marcha* stood for and how it impacted on Rama's own work. The other contributors include old hands like Fernández Retamar and Darío Puccini, but for the most part they are younger, not very highly visible scholars. Interestingly, there are no items by members of the "Anglo" Establishment in the field.

The key phrase in Moraña's Introduction is the one which alludes to "las formas que asume su [i.e., Rama's] método crítico" (7). For virtually all the contributors, this comes down to the forms it assumed in *Transculturación y narrativa en América Latina* (1981) and *La ciudad letrada* (1984), titles which recur obsessively in the bibliographies of their essays. In her own contribution, "Ideología de la transculturación," Moraña presents the notion of transculturation as a means of getting beyond what were probably the prevailing critical vogues up to the late sixties: "el sociologismo lukacsiano" and sundry varieties of "formalismo ahistoricista." In one of the shortest and clearest essays in the collection, she explains Rama's attempt to mediate between the alleged neo-regionalism of writers like Rulfo and Arguedas and the more cosmopolitan thrust of, for instance, Borges, as well as his desire to define the role of the intellectual/critic who is involved in the process of cultural modernization in Latin America. In her analysis there are hints of a critique, which emerges afresh in one of the most closely-argued contributions, that of Alberto Moreiras: "José María Arguedas y el fin de la transculturación." With a refreshing readiness to tie the concept down to a specific case, Moreiras indicates some of the presuppositions which underlie the idea of transculturation, pointing out that "la noción ramiana de que la transculturación es necesariamente transculturación exitosa" gets into difficulties when we take into account a work so central to Rama's argument as *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*. At a more abstract level, Abril Trigo goes somewhat further and, after discussing at length more recent theoretical approaches by García Canclini, Cornejo Polar, and others, concludes that the whole concept of transculturation, if not obsolete, is in need of reformulation, in terms which he suggests. Much the same stance is adopted by Gustavo Verdesio in the fourth section of the book. His contribution discusses Rama's ideas not so much theoretically or in relation to a modern author, as in relation to colonial literature. His view is that Rama made an important contribution but that colonialists have to read *La ciudad letrada* to some extent "a contrapelo" to make the best use of it.

Most of the contributors here are concerned with examining critically what the real possibilities are today of interpreting Latin American (chiefly literary) culture in Rama's terms of "un híbrido capaz de seguir

trasmitiendo la herencia recibida." At the same time, as "cultural" critics, they are plainly seeking an icon-figure with the prestige to legitimize their movement. The result is a certain ambivalence. While Rama's approaches are useful in the struggle against what these critics regard as "a-historic" formalism, his two major works being in many ways foundational for cultural criticism, that particular kind of criticism has moved on since their publication, revealing some of his positions as slightly threadbare. This is, in other words, happily by no means, the collection of hagiographical pieces one feared it might be.

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La novela de autoformación. Una aproximación teórica e histórica al "Bildungsroman" desde la narrativa hispánica. Por María de los Ángeles Rodríguez Fontela. Kassel: Reichenberger, 1996. 498 páginas.

El libro de Rodríguez Fontela es un proyecto que conjuga la tarea de la delimitación teórica del género del *Bildungsroman* con una descripción de su trayectoria en la novelística hispánica. Trata, pues, de dar una introducción teórica de los géneros literarios, en concreto la novela de autoformación, y su compleja estructura antropológico-mítica. Sin embargo, plantea en la Introducción un proyecto cuestionable: "veremos que la historia de la novela es al mismo tiempo la historia de la autoformación humana" (26). La autora hace esta afirmación porque considera que la novela de autoformación evoluciona hacia una novela en la que la conciencia del individuo es plena, desde sus parámetros particulares, e identifica la novela lírica del siglo xx con la madurez, el último estadio de la autoformación de la humanidad como entidad histórica. Escribe Rodríguez Fontela en la Conclusión: "hemos tenido ocasión de revalidar la hipótesis de Ricoeur según la cual la Humanidad descubre su identidad en las narraciones que se cuenta a sí misma" (467). La autora está malinterpretando el concepto de narratividad que Ricoeur considera como centro de la formación cultural del individuo, al aplicarlo de esta manera esencialista a la historia del ser humano, esencialismo sorprendente a estas alturas del siglo xx.

Comienza el trabajo con una Introducción de unas veinte páginas a la problemática de los géneros literarios, para concentrarse posteriormente en la novela, primero, y en la novela de autoformación después. En el segundo capítulo, hace una revisión del término *Bildungsroman*, al que finalmente traduce como "novela de autoformación," y trasciende lo germánico del término considerando su pertinencia como categoría nove-