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Reviews of Books

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JOAQUÍN RUBINAT PARELLADA, *Crítica de la obra literaria de Javier Cercas: una execración de la figura del intelectual*. Vigo: Academia del Hispanismo. 2014. 250 pp.

This study of both the fictional and journalistic writings of Javier Cercas makes for a sobering read. In a nutshell, it undertakes a demolition of Cercas' credentials as a novelist and thinker so compelling and comprehensive that any future scholar who wishes to argue for the value of his work will first have to address the catalogue of concerns its author raises. Ramón Rubinat Parellada appears to write from outside the academy and his book exemplifies the clarity of vision that perspective can at times give. In that sense, his work is a wake-up call to the culture industry, of which academic criticism is, for good or ill, a significant part. What Rubinat Parellada has done is examine, in fine detail and with forensic skill, the myriad pronouncements Cercas has made in newspaper columns, interviews and fictional works on among other things aesthetics, ethics, morality, politics, heroism or the nature of the novel. The self-contradictions, obfuscations and mystifications Rubinat Parellada finds within them are so many and varied that it would be impossible to list them all here. And yet, his is the first study or review to take Cercas to task for those inconsistencies. There are two honourable exceptions: Alexis Grohmann has suggested the unacknowledged indebtedness of Cercas' most celebrated novel *Soldados de Salamina* (2001) to the autofictional projects of Javier Marías but is too polite to call him a plagiarist (see Alexis Grohmann, 'La configuración de *Soldados de Salamina* o la negra espalda de Javier Cercas', *Letras Peninsulares*, 17:2–3 [2004–2005], 297–320). Andrew Anderson, in his study of the narrative voice in that same novel ('The Idiosyncratic Narrator in Javier Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina*', *Neophilologus*, 98 [2014], 599–615) has likewise pointed out a number of the jarring inconsistencies that make the narrator difficult to pin down; he leaves delicately balanced the issue of whether that ambiguity is a cultivated effect or down to sheer sloppiness. Cercas' work has gone otherwise unchallenged by a cultural community that, on the evidence presented by Rubinat Parellada, has been disappointingly quiescent in allowing him an easy ride. Perhaps it should be said that the process started early: *Soldados de Salamina* was met with the endorsement, after all, of two of the more respected commentators in the English- and Spanish-speaking worlds—George Steiner and Mario Vargas Llosa. One wonders whether they would have been quite as eager with their praise if they had read Rubinat Parellada's book.

Perhaps the principal characteristic of Cercas' writing identified here is the repeated sense that it is highly improvised—and not in the inspired sense. Both *Soldados de Salamina* and the two substantial novels written either side of it—*El vientre de la ballena* (1997) and *La velocidad de la luz* (2005)—adopt the voice of washed-up middle-aged men whose literary career has stalled. Each novel thus performs an apparently guileless exercise in showing us a portrait of the artist rediscovering his vocation and hence reaffirming the value of literature more widely. And, while his narrators are finding their feet again, Cercas implicitly asks us to indulge their penchant for gnomic or faintly pretentious pronouncements, oddly journalistic verbal ticks, or depressing misogyny. What Rubinat Parellada suggests is that the improvisation is in fact more pervasive, finding examples in Cercas' articles, novels and interview transcripts. And so it is that precisely what the author understands or means by his celebrated term 'relato real' shifts depending on which text one reads. The same goes for what the author understands by heroism, truth, ethics, politics and the relationship of literature to each of these things. The compendious and abundant direct quotations set out in this volume present a compelling case for Cercas being not just an improviser but inconsistent and superficial in his thinking on all of these matters.

Rubinát Parellada reaches the conclusion that Cercas has benefited from the dangerously uncritical tendency to turn successful creative writers into author-god figures whose assertions do not meet with the same scrutiny as those of, say, an academic philosopher, and the cogency of which remain largely unexamined. On the basis of the evidence presented in this volume, that

profoundly troubling claim proves difficult to rebut. It would also go some way to explain why Cercas' penultimate novel, the almost unreadable and yet inexplicably lauded *Las leyes de la frontera* (2012), made it into Spanish bookshops at all, when it might have been kinder to its author—and certainly to the reading public—to ask the former to go back to the drawing board and think again. Rubinat Parellada deserves to be read and not simply by scholars of Cercas. As an indictment of a culture industry that too often assumes all that glitters is gold, this book is a refreshingly robust reminder that some of it is iron pyrites.

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LORRAINE RYAN, *Memory and Spatiality in Post-Millennial Spanish Narrative*. Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate. 2014. 240 pp.

In *Memory and Spatiality in Post-Millennial Spanish Narrative*, Lorraine Ryan offers a series of shrewd and compelling readings of recent literary texts that demonstrate the dynamic, transformative and periodically antagonistic imbrication of memory and spatiality. The book is eminently commendable for its deft application of recent innovations in memory studies to offer refreshing perspectives on literary texts that are relatively well known and have already been objects of serious scholarship, despite their recent publication. Against dominant understandings of memory posed by theorists such as Maurice Halbwachs, Ryan's analysis earnestly propounds the stature of individual agency, in a dialectic encounter with social mores, in the construction of an historically-conditioned identity. For these reasons amongst others, *Memory and Spatiality in Post-Millennial Spanish Narrative* will resonate with a growing readership and have broad applications in undergraduate and graduate classroom settings.

Ryan founds the originality of her study on the premise that 'the interconnection between space and memory has been overlooked in contemporary Spanish memory studies' (1), with present scholarship bestowing an inordinate weight to the attachment of memory to temporality with exiguous attention given to space. The author's introduction expertly outlines the political relevance of cultural memory in post-millennial Spain, the generational and thematic striations of the *boom de memoria* in recent cultural production, as well as the theoretical evolution of memory studies. At the same time, an acute interrogation of the intellectual canon dedicated to memory in Iberian cultural studies is conspicuously lacking and relegated to a pithy footnote at the outset of the introduction that enumerates prominent scholars who have explored the topic, presumably overlooking the importance of spatiality. A more nuanced explanation of the preference for temporality, in lieu of space, within this archaeology of knowledge would have framed the book's theoretical departure more trenchantly and also, perhaps, have led the author to the handful of scholars that have endeavoured to conceptualize *les lieux de mémoire* in Spain. Though not dedicated to post-millennial writers, Ofelia Ferrán's *Working through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative* (Lewisburg: Bucknell U. P., 2007), for example, applies Pierre Nora's theoretical construct—which Ryan often invokes—to the work of Jorge Semprún and Juan Benet. Additionally, Joan Ramon Resina and Ulrich Winter analysed the confluence of memory and space in the edited volume *Casa encantada: lugares de la memoria en la España constitucional (1978–2004)* (Madrid: Iberoamericana/Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2005) and, more recently, Nathan Richardson contributed the monograph *Constructing Spain: The Re-imagination of Space and Place in Narrative and Film 1953–2003* (Lewisburg: Bucknell U. P./Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012) though the latter is