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*Estructura y técnicas de la novela sentimental y caballeresca.* By Armando Durán. Gredos, Madrid, 1973. 182 pages.

This book is an attempt to apply structuralism critical techniques to selected Spanish narrative forms, and Durán deserves credit for employing innovative methods not often used by Hispanists. In his introduction, he says that his intent is to study the constituent narrative elements of “un grupo de novelas” in order to define them and the genres to which they belong (p. 11). As his models, he cites, among others, Lévi-Strauss and Chomsky. The techniques of these scholars, however, were derived from the study of popular or oral literature, or of non-literary materials, and they cannot be legitimately applied to very small and somewhat arbitrary groups of “culto” works. Or, if they are, the conclusions reached will not have the sweeping validity that Durán claims for his.

Durán's goals are most clearly seen in his first section, which deals with the *novela sentimental*. He examines six works (*Estoria de dos amadores*, *Cárcel de amor*, *Grisel y Mirabella*, *Siervo libre de amor*, *Arnalte y Lucenda*, and *Grimalte y Gradissa*), which he divides into two groups. The first three are examples of a new genre, the “novela erótica,” which is characterized by first-person narration, middle-class setting, absence of royal intervention, and “amor erótico.” The second three constitute the “novela propiamente sentimental” and feature third-person narration, upper-class setting with royal intervention, and “amor sentimental.” This is a helpful distinction. But when Durán describes this division, he claims to have established “reglas” for these genres. He further states that a work which does not fit precisely into his classifications will not “invalidate” these rules, but will itself be “invalidated” (p. 63).

Rules for some genres, such as the epic poem, did and do exist. But these were genres with a long tradition and, with the exception of the *libros de caballerías*, all of the terms Durán applies to his genres and subgenres were established by critics writing later—sometimes much later—than the works he discusses. It is not impossible for authors to be influenced by factors of which they themselves are unaware: traditional poetry offers some examples. But one needs more than three examples to determine inductively the existence of “reglas” in conscious literary compositions.

In the same way, Durán attaches too much importance to anachronical genre groupings in his chapter on the *novela de aventuras*. He begins by quoting Menéndez Pelayo's statement that the *novelas de aventuras* "marcan un intento de renovación en... la novela sentimental" (p. 162). Confusing the genre with the authors, he later transforms this statement into "la novela de aventuras intenta rescatar a la novela sentimental" (p. 168). Menéndez Pelayo's statement, he proceeds to demonstrate, is false, because the *novela de aventuras* did not exist until the *Peregrino* and the *Persiles*. Neither of the two works he discusses, *Selva de aventuras* or *Clareo y Florisea*, is a *novela de aventuras*. The first, Durán says, is a "novela sentimental vuelta a lo divino" (p. 172); the second, as Menéndez Pelayo knew, is partly a translation and partly a *libro de caballerías* (pp. 171–72). What has been seen as innovation in each of these works is really "una indiscutible degeneración" of their respective genres (p. 175).

I cannot see more in this than a rectification of Menéndez Pelayo, whose *Orígenes de la novela*, a work containing many doubtful classifications, we all know to be outdated. It tells us little about either the *Selva de aventuras* or *Clareo y Florisea*, whose authors could not have understood this classification of their works, because the terms used did not then exist.

In the section on *novela caballeresca* Durán examines only three works in detail (*Amadís*, *Cifar*, and *Tirant*) and, since they are quite dissimilar, he does not draw generalizations but instead compares them at some length. His primary source of information and bibliography—quite spottily updated—is Bohigas, whom he tacitly paraphrases at several points (cf. Durán, p. 163, and *Historia general de las literaturas hispánicas*, II, 231, noting that Durán three times cites Heliodorus' work as *Teágenes y Claricea*, rather than *Cariclea*). From a paraphrase we find that the *Caballero del Cisne* has become a prosified "cantar de gesta." A glance at Bohigas also explains why Durán begins this section with a long discussion of Chrétien de Troyes, without telling us why he belongs in this study "formas narrativas españolas" (p. 9), or why his poems are repeatedly called "novelas." All this could be overlooked if Durán had given us a valuable contribution to the understanding of the romances of chivalry. As with the *novela sentimental*, his discussions of specific works are not objectionable in themselves. But especially in the case of the romances of chivalry, he uses his discussions to reach certain conclusions which I cannot share; and because the works he studies are not representative ones, the validity of his other conclusions is limited to these specific works.

Durán examines, from several points of view, the question of the

unity and the logical progression of the narration in *Amadís*, *Cifar*, and *Tirant*. *Amadís* comes off the worst of the three and *Tirant* the best. According to Durán, the adventures in *Amadís* are not clearly justified by the structure of the book; the novel “could have” ended in Book I. On the other hand, the resolution of the *Tirant* does not come until the end; consequently, he sees it as more unified, and also, implicitly, as a better work of art. Not only that, but the *Tirant*, though not a psychological novel, does break new ground in centering on the character rather than on the action (p. 146) and, adding a much repeated irrelevant comment, the *Tirant* contains more sensual elements. All of this would seem to imply a rather subjective application of nineteenth- and twentieth-century criteria to authors of earlier centuries who had no reason to follow them and every reason not to. The reader of the romances of chivalry was interested in precisely that part of the romances which we find least appealing—the duels and battles—and would have been only too glad to have even more of them, however flimsy the pretext. He would have judged the unity of a romance of chivalry, if he thought of it at all, by standards which today would seem incredibly lenient. (Cervantes’ *canónigo* was not a typical reader; one will look in vain in Riquer’s collection of criticisms of romances of chivalry for any other opinion concerning their narrative structure.) That the characters were secondary to the action was taken for granted. The proof of this is that *Amadís*, *Tirant*, and *Cifar* all appeared in Castilian within a few years of each other, but, whereas the *Amadís* found immediate popularity, was often reprinted, and moved four different authors to write continuations, the *Cifar* and *Tirant* remained little known, were never reprinted, and never continued.

By this I do not mean to deny that *Tirant* is, by modern standards, far the better novel. (It is, after all, based on a source which itself possesses some unity and which concerns a historical person, whereas *Amadís* is completely fictional.) In comparison with *Amadís*, *Tirant* is also certainly a much more enjoyable work for the modern non-scholarly reader. But is this of concern to the literary historian, and is it a point which needs to be made yet again?

As already stated, Durán’s choice of the works he has studied has determined his conclusions. He has chosen these works, I fear, simply because they happen to be found in the Aguilar volume of *Libros de caballerías españolas*. This volume is indeed a useful one, as Durán points out (p. 101, n. 6). But for serious research it has little, if any value and to rely on Felicidad Buendía’s plagiarized texts or to allow her conception of what to include under the heading of *libros de caballerías* to have any influence is to invite trouble. Durán has taken a brief look at Gayangos’ BAE edition of the *Sergas de Esplandián*.

He should at least also have looked at the NBAE volumes and the *Claribalte* facsimile. He is unaware of the new critical edition of *Palmerín de Olivia* (Pisa, 1967) and of the fact that Place's edition of the *Amadís* was completed in 1969 (see p. 101, n. 6). But aside from this, to draw conclusions valid for the Spanish romances of chivalry as a whole—which I understand to be his goal—it is necessary to supplement the use of modern editions with direct consultation of sixteenth-century texts which have not been reedited in modern times. I hope I will not be thought unfair if I point out that the only American copy of one of these (Feliciano de Silva's *Amadís de Grecia*) is in the library of the University of Michigan, where Durán teaches.

This is more than just quibbling, for I think that, with a little more exposure to the texts, Durán might find that the romances of chivalry are far more sophisticated and unified works than can be seen from these early examples. Indeed, along with the inevitable potboilers, there are works which are just as realistic and more unified than the sometimes disjointed *Tirant*. In any event, before dismissing with scorn all the romances later than the *Sergas*, Durán should know more about them than the hasty notes of Henry Thomas and the criticisms of the Toledo canon.

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