
This thought-provoking volume contains a collection of fifteen essays, whose unifying thread is the comparative approach applied to Hispanic texts. Most of them were written by Hispanists; in some cases the comparisons are between two Hispanic works or Hispanic periods.

The essay of most general interest is the opening one, by the comparatist Walter Cohen, on “The Uniqueness of Spain.” He endorses what he calls “the Semitic hypothesis,” by which he means the Arabic and Hebrew influence as set forth by Américo Castro, and defends and links to the converso class the rise of the novel in Spain. He reminds us that Castro is part of the line of German (Spitzer, Auerbach) and Eastern European (Bakhtin and Lukács) philologist scholars who “were marked in one way or another by the twin catastrophes of Stalinism and fascism.” In the process he calls Curtius
“morally obtuse” for, in the late 1940s, defining European unity in terms of medieval Christianity, with no reference to the slaughter of millions of non-Christians by the leader of his own country (26).

On Spain’s alleged uniqueness, the traditional poles are “a Spain that is unique because of the Islamic conquest,” and “Spain that is a typical European country” (p. 26). Cohen points out that other European countries besides Spain dealt with “other” religions - Islam and Eastern Christianity. All the new national literatures of the early modern period had to both absorb and suppress regional literatures and foreign influences. Thus he finds false the opposition between a Christian Spain and a Spain influenced by Judaism and Islam. Spanish literature is thus not unique, but “the most typical literature in Europe” (p. 28). Little evidence is presented for these positions, which call for a more complete treatment.


There is a short analytical index to the volume as a whole.

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