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Book Review: Composición y Práctica

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Book Review: Composición y Práctica

Comments

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Composición práctica* by Trinidad González and Joseph Farrell

Review by: Lina Lee

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basic distinctions, such as author/narrator(s) and reader/narratee(s). The Segunda Parte, "El comentario de textos literarios" (chapters 4–7), introduces more complex methods of textual commentary based on recognition of connotation and figurative meaning, and on the application of the traditional categories of rhetorical analysis of *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*. In the Tercera Parte, "Texto y contexto" (chapters 8–10), Camarero moves beyond strict hermeneutics to cultural, historical, ideological, and social contexts and gives examples of how to integrate the extratextual backdrop into textual analysis.

Camarero is a clear writer and a skilled explicator of texts. His analyses are interesting exegetical exercises that offer fine insights into the complexities and subtleties of the selected texts. However, a misgiving I felt at every turn as I read and thought about *Introducción* relates to the gap between the assumed level of knowledge of the student audience to which the text is ostensibly aimed, and the sophisticated analyses offered as examples. Students who need to be told repeatedly to read the text more than once, to break it into sentences or other small syntactical units, to separate out and look up words with which they are unfamiliar, etc., will no doubt be prepared, if they follow that advice, to undertake textual analyses at their own level of competency. However, it is unlikely that any such student will produce textual commentary comparable to that of Camarero, who uses advanced methods of analysis and an extensive technical vocabulary related to traditional rhetorical analysis and the explication of lyrical poetry in the Hispanic tradition. I think that a clear statement to the effect that the development of sophisticated analytical skills is an ongoing, evolutionary process and that analyses such as the examples given in *Introducción* are the product of a mature critical perspective and many years of experience in textual analysis would have diminished my concerns.

The ten chapters of *Introducción* are followed by an appendix, a glossary of literary terms, and a bibliography. The appendix contains two outlines that summarize the principal elements of analysis for narrative and dramatic texts. I find it somewhat odd that the appendix omits outlines for analyses of poetic and essayistic texts which, along with narrative texts, are well represented as examples for textual analysis in *Introducción*, but includes an outline for analysis of dramatic texts, none of which appears in *Introducción*. The seventeen-page glossary of literary terms contains clear definitions and ef-

fective examples of a nice range of modern and traditional terminology. It is a useful reference tool for students of literature at any level. The bibliography also offers a good selection of sources, primarily dictionaries and manuals by Spanish critics, on a variety of topics related to rhetorical analysis, Spanish metrics, and textual commentary. However, the last section, "Para saber más," points students in the direction of some of the twentieth century's most important theoretical works by a variety of internationally renowned critics, including Bakhtin, Wellek, Barthes, Iser, Eco, and others.

Introducción is a clean, clearly written, and carefully edited text. The specific audience for which it is apparently written, peninsular Spanish students, can certainly benefit from Camarero's step-by-step, practical approach to textual commentary, though the analyses that illustrate the different facets of textual commentary are undoubtedly beyond the abilities of all but a handful of the most advanced students. If these analyses are understood as advanced models, *Introducción* may find its niche as an introductory manual for textual analysis in university-level literature courses in Spain.

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González, Trinidad, and Joseph Farrell.
Composición práctica. York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999. ISBN 0471239690 (pbk). 285 pp.

Composición práctica is designed to help students develop practical writing skills for their everyday personal, social, and professional needs. The authors claim that their approach is communicative and functional, rather than traditional and literary. The book contains authentic texts taken from actual notes, ads, newspapers, and magazines. In this second edition, "Vocabulary," "Grammar," and "Readings" sections have been updated, and more relevant information has been added to the context, with Internet activities and an appendix on documentation and bibliography. The text is written primarily in Spanish and offers practical exercises and models to demonstrate specific writing techniques. Grammatical structures are presented with concise examples of Spanish and English to highlight explanations and interpretations, followed by several form-focused drills. Occasionally, the activities require real exchange of information, using pair or group work.

This Spanish composition book consists of

one introductory lesson, twelve chapters, and six appendices. The introductory chapter deals with the use of the dictionary, and gives a list of suggested Spanish/Spanish and bilingual dictionaries. Each of the twelve chapters that follow begins with a theme dealing with everyday activities and cultural events, such as “La familia,” “La rutina diaria,” “La comida,” “El mundo de los negocios,” and “Artistas del mundo hispano.” Each chapter also focuses on a particular writing technique. For instance, chapter 6 deals with the techniques of writing a summary, and chapter 11 teaches students how to write descriptive essays. The first eleven chapters follow the sequence: *Objetivos*, *Para hablar del tema*, *Análisis*, *Para escribir mejor*, *Estructuras en acción*, *Manos a la obra*, *Para los internautas* and *Querido diario*. The final chapter provides information on how to write a research paper.

The “*Vocabulario Clave*” section that follows *Vocabulario Esencial* illustrates idiomatic expressions and the use of connectors in Spanish. A reading in the *Vocabulary* section leads to a set of questions that check reading comprehension and offer practice with the vocabulary. Both the “*Análisis de oraciones*” and “*Estructuras en acción*” sections offer enough explanation to clarify meanings or avoid misinterpretation. In addition, boxes, underlining, and bolded words are used to illustrate and highlight language use. Exercises addressing the corresponding grammar points reinforce concepts. Although most of the grammar exercises are effective in drilling grammar rules, some are not presented in context, and the use of English and Spanish translation does not encourage learners to use the language in a meaningful and communicative way.

This book is a fine option for use with learners who need basic practice in writing skills in Spanish. One of the positive attributes of the text is the abundance of open-ended exercises that provide sufficient practice in each chapter to reinforce language use and concepts, while allowing learners to create their own ideas of writing. However, if this book is to be used in an advanced course, teachers will have to find supplementary materials in order to develop students’ oral skills. The authors, however, have done a good job of incorporating a variety of exercises into each chapter. The exercises are generally engaging and will encourage students to practice vocabulary, grammar points, and writing. Overall, *Composición práctica* has the notable strength of emphasizing the integration of vocabulary, reading, grammar points, and

writing through a variety of exercises, and it is flexible enough for its sections to be used out of sequence.

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Knorre, Marty, Thalia Dorwick, Ana María Pérez-Gironés, William R. Glass, and Hildebrando Villarreal. *Puntos de Partida*. 5th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997. ISBN 0-07-038226-3 (student edition), 0-07-038227-1 (instructor’s edition). 610 pp.

Since its first edition in 1981, *Puntos de Partida* has become one of the most widely adopted textbooks in the country. Notable among its objectives are skills development over knowledge of grammar, cyclical organization to reinforce and review what has been covered, and the conviction that language, culture, and society are inextricably linked.

New to the fifth edition of *Puntos* is a two-hour video, filmed in Mexico, Ecuador, Spain, and the United States. It features the same cast of characters as in the text, and each vignette is introduced by a Hispanic professor who prepares students for what follows. Part of each scene is found in the *Situaciones* section of the text, but the video supplies a more complete context. Supplementary information on using the video in the classroom, as well as pre- and post-viewing activities and the videoscript itself, is included in the instructor’s manual.

Inside the front covers of *Puntos* are reference tables of common classroom expressions and common irregular verbs. The back cover lists the twenty Spanish-speaking countries (including Puerto Rico) with their capitals, populations, and currency. Nearly every page of the text is graced with colorful and eye-catching headings, boxed explanations, and icons. This edition has more realia, including Mafalda cartoon strips, sketches, charts, photographs of cityscapes, and artworks than previous editions.

Although the authors have made a conscientious effort to incorporate vocabulary from the realia into the textual dictionary they provide, words such as *alce*, *brevas*, *boquerones*, *cotillón*, and *escabeche* displayed in the charts and graphics can not be identified from the dictionary. In a housing advertisement, the abbreviation “*marq.*” remains an unglossed mystery. Apparently it stands for *marquesina* but students will not get any help figuring it out from the *Puntos de Partida* dictionary.

The authors of *Puntos* caution against over-