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9-1-1989

### Review: Narcís Oller, *La fiebre del oro* by Camilo José Cela; Narcís Oller

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#### Recommended Citation

Marti-Olivella, J. (1989). "Narcís Oller, Víctor Català and Joan Perucho or the Upsurge of Modern Catalan Fiction." *Hispanic Review* 57: 537-539.

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Narcís Oller, *La fiebre del oro* by Camilo José Cela and Narcís Oller; Víctor Català, *Soledad* by Baltasar Porcel and Víctor Català; Joan Perucho, *Libro de caballerías* by Pere Gimferrer and Joan Perucho

Review by: Jaume Martí-Olivella

Source: *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 537-539

Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/473778>

Accessed: 09-06-2017 14:07 UTC

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cosmetics" can form an integral part of filmmaking, and for that reason the reader may at times find the book lacking.

The work is also plagued by poor editing. Factual errors such as incorrect dates and misidentification of cast members are not infrequent. Actors and actresses names are used interchangeably with those of the characters they portray, creating a possible source of confusion. And, although they appear much less often, apparent misinterpretations are even more troubling. In her description of Bardem's *Muerte de un ciclista*, for example, Higginbotham relates Juan's death as his lover María José accidentally "loses control" over her car (36). Yet Bardem is careful to show us, in an agonizingly lengthy close up, María José's cold and calculated decision to kill the unsuspecting Juan—a fact which does not escape other critics.

Higginbotham notes in the Preface that her book was devised in part as an English-language resource to the student of Spanish film. Unfortunately, due to its lack of precision, *Spanish Film under Franco* is not an ideal manual, and the reader may wish to supplement his or her research with studies by Peter Besas, Ronald Schwartz and John Hopewell. What Higginbotham's work does offer, however, is a useful focus on the relationship between social and political reality and film—a perspective which produces some interesting contributions to the study of the cinematic art of Spain's repressive Francoist period.

SUSAN L. MARTIN-MÁRQUEZ

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**Narcís Oller, *La fiebre del oro*.** Prólogo de Camilo José Cela. Madrid: Alianza Editorial/Enciclopedia Catalana, 1986. 389 pages.

**Víctor Català, *Soledad*.** Prólogo de Baltasar Porcel. Madrid: Alianza Editorial/Enciclopedia Catalana, 1986. 194 pages.

**Joan Perucho, *Libro de caballerías*.** Prólogo de Pere Gimferrer. Madrid: Alianza Editorial/Enciclopedia Catalana, 1986. 142 pages.

Brought together under the "Biblioteca de Cultura Catalana," the new series published by Alianza, these three authors exemplify the upsurge of Catalan fiction in its variety and strength during the twentieth century. They not only represent exceptional individual achievement but also mark the three major traits in contemporary Catalan prose: social documentary, introspective analysis, and imaginative fiction. With Narcís Oller, the Catalan novel was finally projected into the mainstream, thanks in part to the recognition given to him by Emile Zola, who wrote a prologue to the

French edition of Oller's first novel: *La Papallona* ("The Butterfly"). Despite Zola's reservations towards Oller's naturalistic approach, his attention brought Oller unprecedented acclaim and respect among his contemporaries, both Castilian and Catalan. Altogether, his role in the nineteenth-century Catalan Renaissance ("Renaixença") is akin to that of Jacint Verdaguer in poetry and Angel Guimerà in drama. Oller, more than any of the other two precursors, is the transitional figure that made Modernism possible for Catalan fiction.

Taken in a historical sequence, Oller, Català, and Perucho comprise the entire evolution of the novelistic genre from Naturalism and Realism through the Neo-Romantic stance of Modernism and into the metafictional quality of today's prose. Joan Perucho, together with Pere Calders and the late works of Mercè Rodoreda, offer indeed the Catalan counterpart to works such as Jorge Luis Borges or Italo Calvino. Víctor Català, pseudonym for Catarina Albert, on the other hand, stands as the most prominent voice in Catalan modernist narrative as well as the first major writer in the fruitful tradition of Catalan women writers. Catarina Albert's powerful voice shattered the still waters of the patriarchal urban intelligentsia in Barcelona, both with her rural and aggressive idiom and with the discovery that she was a woman. *Solitud* (*Soledad*), her masterpiece, constitutes an extraordinary amalgam of the romantic tradition of legends and folktales and the most insightful analysis of the female soul that anticipated the psychological novel to come. Mercè Rodoreda, Llorenç Villalonga, and Maria Aurèlia Campmany owe a great deal to Víctor Català's pioneering role. To understand the status of Víctor Català's achievement, it would be useful to compare her works to those of Emily Bronte, Willa Cather, and Virginia Woolf. Like Bronte, she captures a powerful rural dialect; like Cather, she uses natural symbolism to the utmost and like Woolf, she portrays the most subtle aspects of a feminine perception of reality amidst a male and violent world.

There is also a common thematic characteristic in Oller's *La fiebre del oro*, Víctor Català's *Soledad* and Perucho's *Libro de caballerías*. It is a characteristic that defines their modernity. All three books explore histories of desire and/or the desire for historical protagonism. History is indeed the main protagonist in Perucho's fantastic itinerary through the Mediterranean, African and Middle Eastern empire of the Crown of Aragon. Tomàs Safont and his faithful crew undergo an extraordinary journey that includes the discovery of oil, "the water of fire," the arrival to the remote "Kingdom of Triple Virtue," a kind of Eldorado for Christian crusaders and the avenging of Dimas' betrayal of the Great Catalan Company in favor of the kingdom of Venice. Such deeds are doubly heroic if one takes into account that Tomàs is actually a Catalan playboy dragging his ennui in the French Riviera of the twentieth century. Perucho's book is about desire precisely inasmuch as it portrays the desire of a whole people

to recover their historical identity as a leading force among the Mediterranean nations.

Narcís Oller's novel, on the other hand, is a historically rich and accurate account of the desire for money and power. With the figure of Gil Foix and his rise and fall amidst the turmoil of the "gold fever" that characterized the emerging Catalan bourgeoisie of the turn of the century, Oller achieved perhaps the best synthesis of his two leitmotifs: desire and madness. Individually epitomized in his two short masterpieces: *La bogeria* ("Insanity") and *L'escanyapobres* ("The Strangler of the Poor"), these thematic axes appear together from the very beginning of *La fiebre del oro*: "Parece que los locos andan sueltos—decía Jeroni. Esos deben ser peces gordos—añadía Rodón contemplando con envidia a aquellos señores de negro" (15). The Stock Exchange appears both as the palace of the golden dreams and the ultimate example of a madhouse.

If Gil Foix embodies the patriarchal desire for the *libido dominandi*, Mila, the exceptional protagonist of *Soledad*, becomes the most powerful literary metaphor for libido "tout court" in the whole of Catalan fiction. Oller himself had shown in *Pilar Prim* how women were prisoners of patriarchal laws that always interfered in the fulfilment of their desires. *Soledad* takes that statement a step forward to show the absolute vulnerability of women whose only escape from the patriarchal institutions of family and church is sought in the dream of a prelapsarian state of nature: Mila's sensuous dreams for the legendary figure of the shepherd clash against the brutal and cruel reality of her rape at the claws of Anima, the beast-man who culminates the "natural" aggression between the sexes.

I cannot end this review without congratulating Alianza Editorial and Enciclopedia Catalana for their shared effort in making Catalan narrative accessible to the Spanish speaking world. Each of the volumes reviewed contains a foreword, specifically by such noted writers as Cela, Gimferrer, and Porcel, who not only know extensively but admire the authors they introduce. The translations, on the other hand, are accurate both in style and idiom and add a great deal to the overall quality of this new series.

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***Light and Longing: Silva and Darío. Modernism and Religious Heterodoxy.*** By Sonya A. Ingwersen. New York: Peter Lang, 1986. 326 pages.

The central theme of this book is one of great importance for the understanding of *modernista* thought and poetry: the relationship of the