



A. Garrido Ardila, ed. *A History of the Spanish Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. xii, 404p. ISBN 9780199641925. £65.00 (hardcover).

This multi-authored volume, edited by J. A. Garrido Ardila, is conceived of as a “reference history of the Spanish novel for students and scholars of Spanish literature, and more generally, of Western literatures” (vi). The apologetic tone of the preface and the editor’s grievance at the supposed ignorance of Spanish letters in the English-speaking world indicate that the target audience is primarily readers not familiar with Spanish literature.

In the first chapter, Garrido Ardila supplies “A Concise Introduction to the History of the Spanish Novel,” which is, as a matter of fact, a concise history of the Spanish novel in fifty-five pages. After some brief reflections on the generic status of the novel, the author identifies the Spanish picaresque novel and Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* as the essence of Spanish literature, which provided the vital models and patterns for later novelists. For Garrido Ardila, the novel is characterized by “realism” and psychological depth. This projection of an essentially nineteenth-century notion of the novel produces a story of this Spanish literary genre with a strong teleological inflection. It is based on works that were “important” for the “development of Spanish literature” (vi). The criteria for importance are nowhere explained; it can be inferred that aesthetic value translates into canonicity. Garrido Ardila’s presentation of the Spanish literature during the Franco regime has a decidedly revisionist bent: we read that the aesthetic qualities of the literature of the time have been ignored for political reasons; under “Nationalist” rule, the 1950s are an age of regeneration after a decline in the 1930s and a Golden Age of sorts for Spanish literary criticism. Recent literature is largely dismissed for its lack of imagination and aesthetic value.

This first chapter has not only the function of providing a story line, but is also an ersatz for a chapter on the Spanish novel after the Civil War. In the last chapter, Germán Gullón reflects critically on cultural and editorial politics in relation to contemporary literature and the reason for what he perceives as the lamentable state of the Spanish novel, but essentially this *History of the Spanish Novel* ends in the 1930s with the avant-gardes. The open disdain expressed by Garrido Ardila and Gullón for the recent contemporary Spanish novel will hardly win readers over to the Spanish novel in general.

The sixteen chapters on different aspects in the history of the Spanish novel are authored by internationally renowned scholars, all but two currently working in British and US-American universities. These chapters are highly recommendable for the reader interested in the



particular topic; however, I fail to understand the overall concept. We find chapters on periods, on genres, and on individual authors (of the life-and-works type), as well as case studies. While it is easy to see why there is a chapter on the *Don Quixote*, there is no explanation for why Pío Baroja is the only twentieth-century author who deserves his own chapter. This approach also produces some redundancy and, more importantly, gaps. E. Michael Gerli, for instance, writes about the “Novel before the Novel,” that is, the rich tradition of Spanish romance (chivalric romance has a separate chapter, supposedly because it was more important to Cervantes); Howard Mancing summarizes this in his description of “Spanish Fiction of the Seventeenth Century.” There is a whole chapter on María de Zayas, a fascinating seventeenth-century writer of novellas — who has never authored a novel. At the same time, Fernando de Rojas’s *La Celestina*, a “dialogued novel” of monumental importance for the development of the genre, is only mentioned in passing.

The reader of *A History of the Spanish Novel* will certainly benefit from the excellent articles it contains, but as a whole it is marred by its lack of a coherent concept.

Robert Folger  
*Universität Heidelberg*