

Studies in 20th Century Literature

Volume 19
Issue 1 *Special Issue on The Post-Boom in
Spanish American Fiction*

Article 2

1-1-1995

Introduction to the special issue

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Recommended Citation

Shaw, Donald L. (1995) "Introduction to the special issue," *Studies in 20th Century Literature*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1358>

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Abstract

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Keywords

Post-boom, exile fiction, collection, revision

Introduction

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Any description of the Post-Boom in Spanish American fiction at the present time fits only where it touches, as the essays collected here suggest. Clearly, after the mid-seventies, the creative impulse of the Boom was largely spent, even if some Boom writers still continue to publish. There is no clear consensus about what happened afterwards. Some features of the Post-Boom, as I have tried to show below, can be tentatively identified. But they require adjustment in regard to individual writers and their representative works. Valenzuela and Sainz seem to stand in a different relationship to the Post-Boom from Allende and Skármeta, to quote prominent examples. We need more surveys like J. Ann Duncan's *Voices, Visions and a New Reality*, Elzbieta Sklodowska's *La Parodia en la nueva novela hispanoamericana* and Seymour Menton's *Latin America's New Historical Novel* as well as more full-scale studies of individual writers like Sharon Magnarelli's *Reflections/Refractions. Reading Luisa Valenzuela*, Kenton Stone's *Utopia Undone* (on Martinez Moreno) and my own *Antonio Skarmeta and the Post-Boom*. Exile fiction deserves more systematic investigation, as do the Post-Boom outside the Southern Cone countries and the survival of the experimental novel which seems at times like an attempt to prolong the Boom. Meantime, twenty years after the Boom began to run out of steam, all conclusions about the Post-Boom remain provisional.

We must proceed by short steps; it is hoped that this handful of essays will constitute one of them. There are contributions on authors from Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Cuba all of whom are candidates for inclusion in the Post-Boom, but, as will be seen, the works chosen for comment do not necessarily conform to any clear pattern. There may be a reason for this. At the beginning of the Boom we observe a

certain tendency, visible in early criticism of works like Cortázar's *Rayuela* or Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* to try to go on applying a critical approach suitable for the earlier Regional Novel. The results now seem wrong-headed. Similarly, there may be a natural tendency now to look at the Post-Boom with eyes that have become adjusted to the Boom. However, it may equally well turn out that the Post-Boom stands in a highly ambiguous relationship with the Boom, never completely pulling away from it, but rather revealing a complex pattern of divergences and convergences, sometimes in the same work.

Thus, Gustavo Pellón's essay on Giardinelli's *Santo oficio de la memoria* emphasizes primarily the author's debt to Faulkner, who, with Joyce, was one of two major Anglo-Saxon influences on the Boom. But his conclusion that the novel breaks with the earlier movement's pessimism and incorporates hope for the democratic process in Argentina stamps it as a Post-Boom product. Similarly Sharon Magnarelli tends to see in Valenzuela's work a certain balance between "metaphoric virtuosity" and "social criticism." If the former possibly owes something to the Boom's concept of the novel as primarily a verbal artefact, the latter illustrates the renewed interest in the here and now of Spanish America we associate with some areas of the Post-Boom. Philip Swanson, for his part, begins by presenting Sainz's *La princesa del Palacio de Hierro* as a seemingly typical Post-Boom novel on account of its humor, youth-culture and "pop" elements, but subsequently indicates that the incorporation of these elements is "highly problematic." In the case of Isabel Allende, we seem to be in the presence of an obviously more committed writer, at least up to *Cuentos de Eva Luna* (1911), than any of the others so far mentioned. But Lynne Diamond-Nigh reminds us that *Eva Luna* is very much a "writerly" novel, a self-reflexive fiction, involving an "aesthetic quest," despite the Post-Boom radicalism of some of its ideas. Elzbieta Sklodowska's essay on Benítez Rojo's *El mar de las lentejas* is no exception to the pattern established by the others: "social experience and historical facticity" are set against a "non-traditional" form of narrative discourse in such a way as to distance the novel from any (perhaps over-) simple categories, such as those which I have tried to define in my own contribution. Finally, Gerald Martin's essay on Alvaro Mutis in turn incorporates the concept of Postmodernism into the debate (as is inevitable), only to emphasize that it complicates the issue even more.

What the essays presented here tend to show, therefore, is that it is currently hazardous to generalize, as I have rashly tried to do, about the Post-Boom. We are faced with a movement that is complex both in itself and in relation to the Boom. But in the end, if only for pedagogical purposes, some central trends and tendencies will have to be identified and accepted. I remain convinced that the best way forward is not to attempt to work downwards from concepts like Postmodernism or Post-colonialism, but outwards from the study of individual authors and texts. The essays that follow (except mine) seem to me to be excellent models.