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Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza. *This Ghostly Poetry: History and Memory of Exiled Spanish Republican Poets*. U of Toronto P, 2020.

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Abstract

Review of Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza, *This Ghostly Poetry: History and Memory of Exiled Spanish Republican Poets*. U of Toronto P, 2020. xii + 369 pp.

Keywords

Spanish Poetry, Exile, Memory, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Luis Cernuda, Max Aub, Tomás Segovia, Antonio Machado

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By focusing on poets whose connections to Spain reveal varying degrees of complexity and teasing out what is at stake in efforts to tie them and their work more tightly to dominant narratives of Spanish national and literary identity, *This Ghostly Poetry* represents a significant contribution to the field of modern Spanish poetry and historical memory studies in Spain. Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza's study looks at canonical figures whose legacies are to this day still contested and misunderstood, like Antonio Machado (1875-1939), Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), and Luis Cernuda (1902-1963), as well as figures like Max Aub (1903-1972) and Tomás Segovia (1927-2011), whose complex biographical circumstances make them even harder to fit into dominant critical narratives.

The key question this book addresses is the wide range of ways in which the work of exiled Spanish Republican poets disrupts traditional narratives of national identity and belonging during the post-Civil War era. Aguirre-Oteiza's readings frame exile in both concrete thematic terms as well as in a larger conceptual sense and construct a nuanced understanding of exile that encompasses both inner exile and the multiple geographical inflections of Spanish Republican exile in places like France, North Africa, England, the United States, and Latin America. Key theoretical sources that anchor *This Ghostly Poetry* come from the field of literary—and specifically lyric—theory, including work by Jonathan Culler, Barbara Johnson, David Nowell Smith, and Jahan Ramazani, as well as work from the field of memory studies. The study also establishes a thorough dialogue with the work of important scholars in the field of Spanish studies like Sebastiaan Faber and Jo Labanyi.

Following the introduction—"On Forewords and Historical Ghosts"—the book is divided into two parts. The first part, "Exiles in Literary History," lays the groundwork for readings of individual authors by fleshing out the dominant trends and tensions related to the question of writing itself and the ways writing is framed by literary history as a larger institution. The two chapters that make up this part, "Re-Engaging with Ghosts in the Poetic Machine" and "Writing the War, Re-Writing the Nation, Embodying the Voice of the People" look at larger critical discussions of exile and the role poets played in conceptions of Spanish identity both during and after the Spanish Civil War. The latter chapter addresses important poems by César Vallejo, Miguel Hernández, León Felipe, and Pablo Neruda.

The book's second part, "Exiles in Poetic Memory," explores case studies in the form of readings of the work of Juan Ramón Jiménez (*Guerra en España* 'War in Spain'), Luis Cernuda ("1936"), Max Aub (*Antología traducida* 'Translated Anthology'), and Tomás Segovia. Although this study's focus is

poetry, it engages very effectively with key examples of the dominant texts associated with memory studies in Spain today. A discussion of Javier Cercas's novel *Soldados de Salamina* (*Soldiers of Salamis*) and its engagement with poetry anchors the context established in Part One of Aguirre-Oteiza's study, while an insightful engagement with and critique of Antonio Muñoz Molina's novel *Sefarad* (*Sepharad*) occupies the second half of the chapter dedicated to Max Aub's work and legacy.

As the title of the "coda" with which *This Ghostly Poetry* ends indicates ("Antonio Machado's Afterlives and Memories of Spanish Literary History"), Machado is a key figure running throughout Aguirre-Oteiza's book. This book looks at Machado's life, death, and work, paying special attention to his enigmatic and oft-examined last verse/poem ("Estos días azules y este sol de la infancia" 'These blue days and this sun of childhood'). Another intriguing thread that runs throughout the chapters in this book is the articulation of how a concern with each author's own legacy and posterity accompanies the more visible purported focus on remembering another figure, whether it be another poet or an unnamed, unknown individual (as is the case with Cernuda's "1936").

This book strikes a good balance between tracing the artistic, social, and theoretical contexts with which these works engage and exploring the formal complexity of the work of these poets through excellent close readings that engage deeply with poetic form. The English translations of Spanish texts are also excellent, and the book's index is especially thorough and useful. Especially noteworthy sections of Aguirre-Oteiza's study include its discussion of Juan Ramón's *Guerra en España* and the nuanced approach employed to explore both the content and form of this text as well as the chapters dedicated to the work of Luis Cernuda and Tomás Segovia.

As a general phenomenon, the chapters in *This Ghostly Poetry* employ expansive views of authors' work to establish and signal connections between Aguirre-Oteiza's objects of study and each poet's work more broadly. While this approach generally yields great results—in particular in the case of an especially multi-faceted writer like Aub—it can also be a double-edged sword. In the case of Cernuda's poetry, for example, where Aguirre-Oteiza draws parallels between poems from earlier collections like *Un río, un amor* ('A River, a Love') and *Los placeres prohibidos* ('Forbidden Pleasures') and texts from later collections like *Como quien espera el alba* ('Like Someone Awaiting Dawn') and *Desolación de la Quimera* ('Desolation of the Chimera'), there could have been a greater recognition of the implications of drawing such parallels. Some areas of this study could also have been explored further, including a discussion of the use of popular forms of poetry during the pre-Civil War era in the form of *neopopularismo* 'neopopularism.' Aub's *Antología traducida* could have been situated in a series of larger contexts, including other books by Aub like *Lamento del Sinaí* ('Lament

of the Sinai Desert'), work by later Spanish poets like Felipe Benítez Reyes (*Vidas probables, Probable Lives*) and that of other European poets like Fernando Pessoa.

Taken as a whole, *This Ghostly Poetry* will be a valuable resource for scholars, graduate students, and advanced undergraduate students of modern Spanish literature interested in poetry, as well as those interested in how poetry engages with and interrogates the field of historical memory studies in Spain. This book could also be of interest to those whose work focuses on writers linked to other national traditions, who, like Aub and Segovia, exceed the traditional boundaries of national belonging and interrogate the assumptions applied to work and writers like this. Above all, though, Aguirre-Oteiza's study represents a fine example of the ways in which studies of poetry can effectively employ a focus on context, content, and form, and situate poets and poetry vis-à-vis the different texts and discourses that make up the national traditions they are associated with.

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