

3-2012

Review of: From the Outside Looking in: Narrative Frames and Narrative Spaces in the Short Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán

Joan M. Hoffman

Western Washington University, joan.hoffman@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hoffman, Joan M., "Review of: From the Outside Looking in: Narrative Frames and Narrative Spaces in the Short Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán" (2012). *Modern & Classical Languages*. 1.
https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs/1

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern & Classical Languages by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

Walter, Susan. *From the Outside Looking In: Narrative Frames and Narrative Spaces in the Short Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán.* Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2010. Pp. 177. ISBN 978-1-58871-178-6.

In a nicely bound volume of the sort for which Juan de la Cuesta is well-known, Susan Walter undertakes the study of thirteen of Emilia Pardo Bazán's short stories published between 1892 and 1909. All of these tales have in common two narrative levels—an introduction presented by one framing narrator and a central narration as told by a second, internal, narrator—thus allowing Walter to “untangle the distinct voices of narrative authority in the texts in order to uncover the ideological positioning of the tale” (22). Also, the author views such stories as “an ideal place to look for an engagement with the theme[s] of gender ideology” and gender dynamics so prevalent in Pardo Bazán's work (20).

The first chapter of Walter's study seeks to familiarize her readers with narratological frame theory and feminist narratological approaches. She takes a structuralist approach to narratology and cites such scholars as John Barth, Gérard Genette, Susan Lanser, Nilli Diengott, Robyn Warhol, and Kathy Mezei. In this introductory chapter, the author discusses structural patterns of narrative embedding, the relationships between narrative levels, textual point of view, the role of the narratee, and the use of direct address. The second chapter examines four tales—“*Champagne*,” “*Paria*,” “*El encaje roto*,” and “*El revólver*”—all narrated by female protagonists who are reluctant to tell their stories. The third chapter, from which the title of the book derives, studies “*Afra*,” “*Madre*,” “*Los ramilletes*,” “*Sor Aparición*,” and “*Los buenos tiempos*”—tales about women but narrated by men. In chapter 4, Walter examines male narrators who are, for the most part, protagonists in their own tales in “*Delincuente honrado*,” “*Remordimiento*,” “*Banquete de boda*,” and “*Feminista*.” As is evident in Walter's selection from Pardo Bazán's vast production, some of these stories—“*Champagne*,” “*Sor Aparición*,” “*El encaje roto*,” “*El revólver*,” and “*Feminista*” come to mind—have been extensively studied in other venues as well; others, such as “*Los buenos tiempos*,” “*Delincuente honrado*,” and “*Remordimiento*,” have not enjoyed the same level of scrutiny.

Walter's book is well-documented and makes an original contribution to an understudied area of Pardo Bazán scholarship, especially with respect to the stories included here that have not been previously studied. In addition to her reliance on the distinguished narratological scholars mentioned above, the author consults recognized Pardo Bazán specialists, such as Joyce Tolliver, Maryellen Bieder, and Susan McKenna, in this well-researched study. Despite areas of inevitable overlap—all deal with issues of gender and authority in Doña Emilia's short fiction, for example—she makes fine use of these critics, often couching their findings in terms of narratological framing, thus providing one more perspective from which to approach Pardo Bazán's complex work.

That is not to say, however, that this investigation is free of flaws. Foremost among them, in my estimation, is a marked and unfortunate delay or omission on the part of the author in defining technical terminology. This tendency is evident in her use of the terms “homodiegetic” and “heterodiegetic,” for example. These terms, crucial as they are to any discussion of structural narratology, are used a handful of times, on pages 23 and 42, before the author defines them, telling her readers, on pages 43–44, that they “will be employed regularly in this study.” In addition, even a brief reminder of the definition of “free indirect discourse” would be helpful; the term is used three times, on pages 128, 152, and 153, with absolutely no reference to its meaning.

A further example of imprecision on the part of the author also compels comment; this involves unfortunate repetitions in close proximity to one another. For example, the last sentence of the second paragraph on page 17 repeats almost verbatim the first sentence of that same paragraph, with just three intervening sentences. An even more blatant case of this sort is found in chapter 3. On page 114, Walter cites Joyce Tolliver's article about “*Sor Aparición*” for the first time: “As Tolliver suggests in her insightful article. . . .” Then, on page 116, our

author introduces that same article again, as if for the first time: “Joyce Tolliver has written an insightful article. . . .” Not only is the phrase “insightful article” repeated, but so are the terms “Romantic,” “tendency,” and “female characters.”

This type of inattention is disruptive to the reading process and tarnishes an otherwise commendable analysis. These flaws notwithstanding, however, with *From the Outside Looking in*, Susan Walter endeavors, mostly successfully, to advance our understanding of Pardo Bazán’s short fiction with respect to narratological framing and its role in the communication of and commentary on gender issues.

Joan Hoffman

Western Washington University, USA

Willingham, Elizabeth Moore, ed. *Laura Esquivel’s Mexican Fictions: Like Water for Chocolate, The Law of Love, Swift as Desire, Malinche: A Novel*. Eastbourne: Sussex, 2010. Pp. 282. ISBN 978-1-84519-410-9.

Laura Esquivel’s Mexican Fictions brings together insightful, significant essays on Esquivel’s works. The book’s preliminary section describes each of the essays, enabling the reader to focus on those that pertain to his/her interest. The work is truly a pleasure to read from beginning to end; it avoids an overly specialized jargon and provides a glossary of terms and abbreviations related, for the most part, to vocabulary present in the works analyzed.

The first essay in the collection, a forty-five page historiographical presentation of relevant criticism of Esquivel’s works by Elizabeth Willingham, provides a wealth of reference material for scholars. Equally important, the second essay—Elena Poniatowska’s—focuses on *Como agua para chocolate* (1989) and highlights how the work is based on family traditions and how these traditions are often intertwined with food. The next essay, written by Patrick Duffey, provides a reading of *Como agua para chocolate* as a subversion of domination and traditional gender roles in cinematic melodrama produced during the 40s and 50s. Duffey successfully supports his thesis by exposing that only female characters are main protagonists of the novel and that the text portrays a postmodern perspective of the character of the prostitute.

Also analyzing *Como agua para chocolate*, Jeffrey Oxford theorizes that the active roles of female characters are consistent representations of the matriarchy that is actually predominant in Mexican society. From a distinct analytical approach, Stephen Murray asserts that, for the reader interested in theological issues, *Como agua para chocolate* portrays a family’s life in the absence of God and how the presence of ancestors in the novel fills the void.

On the other hand, María Christie’s essay differentiates itself from other essays in this collection, not only by providing photos that illustrate parallels between the lives of real women in Xochimilco and the lives of the fictitious characters represented in the novel, but also because of the variety of related subjects her essay explores, which include gendered spaces and ecology. The last analysis of *Como agua para chocolate* is provided by Debra Andrist, who examines how Alicia Ostriker’s model concerning women’s writing manifests itself in the novel.

The next two essays analyze Esquivel’s *La ley del amor* (1995). Elizabeth Martínez reads this novel as a continuation of the search for understanding Mexican identity. Martínez highlights the author’s innovative techniques and compares her with Julio Cortázar in terms of the originality of her writing; she goes as far as to describe the novel as the beginning of a new genre, one which unites ancient indigenous cosmology with modern culture. Martínez’s essay includes a variety of critical approaches that range from genre theory to an examination of the representations of nature present in the text. The paper is useful to the researcher interested in Esquivel’s works as it provides questions that require further analysis, questions such as determining the particular philosophical views that the text supports and inquiries related to nature. While Martínez suggests that *La ley del amor* is the beginning of a new genre, Lydia Rodríguez