

Review of Jordi Bonells (ed.), *Dictionnaire des littératures hispaniques: Espagne et Amérique Latine* (Paris: Laffont, Collection Bouquins, 2009, xii + 1636 pp., ISBN 978-2-221-10141-4)

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Mario Vargas Llosa's 2010 Nobel prize has once again focused literary attention worldwide on Spanish-language writing, and for those who read French, Jordi Bonells' *Dictionnaire des littératures hispaniques*, published a year before the award, is a timely and useful volume which has been there on the market waiting to come into its own. If I have delayed reviewing this volume for a year after acquiring it, that is also a reflection of the sheer bulk and range of Bonells' tome and the need for an owner interested in Hispanophone letters to learn to live with it. Over that year, it has won its spurs as a remarkably useful, indeed essential, guide to that vast field.

Jordi Bonells is a professor at the Université du Sud Toulon-Var in southern France, and a recognised expert in Hispanic literatures (he is of Catalan origin). For this volume, he has assembled an army of scholars, mostly French, while stressing in his introduction that this is a work of passion as well as knowledge: 'Ce Dictionnaire a été écrit par des amoureux de la littérature, et s'adresse, en premier lieu, aux lecteurs' ('This Dictionary has been written by lovers of literature, and is addressed in the first place to readers' – xi).

The entries, arranged alphabetically, are devoted variously to authors, individual works, and more general themes such as literary movements, genres or particular countries. The targeting of French-language readers is reflected in the fact that the works given individual entries are listed under their titles in French translation, with the original Spanish title in brackets. The author entries cite their subjects' works under their French titles where they exist, with the original titles in brackets, and the Spanish titles only where no French version exists. Most are followed by a brief bibliography of criticism, referring to works generally in Spanish but in some cases in French or English. At the end, a long appendix also lists the same authors (plus some who did not get individual entries), works and topics in a roughly chronological order, for the most part broken down by country.

The volume is thus organised in eminently systematic fashion, and beyond that it is quite enormously informative. One may, of course cavil at the omission of this or that writer, work or topic, and indeed I am about to do so, but considering the bulk of the project as a whole any such demurrals will represent a drop in the ocean.

The rubric « Spain and Latin America » excludes Hispanic writing in the US, while for some reason embracing the Philippines but not Equatorial Guinea (surely an inconsistency). Writers in Catalan, Basque and Galician are not included, though Galicia's national poet Rosalía de Castro gets in by reason of her writings in Spanish. The range of writers and works included is impressive, and, in particular, the selection of individual works given entry ranges widely enough to include both the obvious (*Lazarillo de Tormes* or *Cien años de soledad*) to less well-known titles such as the novels *Aves sin nido* by Peru's Clorinda Matto de Turner or *Balún Canán* by the Mexican Rosario Castellanos. Inevitably, there will be quibbles over writers excluded or not given their own entry (Spain's best-selling Lucía Extebarría is relegated to the appendix), but far more names are « in » than « out », and it is

gratifying to find entries for lesser-known talents such as Uruguay's Cristina Peri Rossi or the Chilean poet Jorge Teillier. The range of general topics includes, for instance, Spain's Generation of 27, Madrid and Barcelona as cultural capitals or the essay in Latin America, but for some unknown reason there is no entry on the literature of the Spanish civil war, though there are on 'fascism and literature' and Republican writers in exile. Quantitatively and for what it is worth, the main entry on Cervantes occupies under 3 (double-column) pages, while García Lorca gets 4, Borges 5, Cortázar just over 2, Vargas Llosa 3, Carlos Fuentes 2, Neruda 2, Elena Poniatowska and Gabriela Mistral both just over one and Laura Esquivel less than one (less, it seems then, for the women, though to draw any useful conclusions from such figures one would also, obviously, have to count up the pages devoted to the authors' individual works).

The quality of the individual entries is generally high: most are lively and informative and avoid impressionistic subjectivism. One could quarrel with the entry on Cortázar for referring to the author as the translator of Edgar Allan Poe's 'stories' when he also translated the American's other major works; or with that on the Chilean Antonio Skármeta for not mentioning the film *Il Postino*, based on his novel *Ardiente paciencia*, which made his name known internationally; or with the survey article on Peruvian literature for saying remarkably little about either César Vallejo or Vargas Llosa, the country's two international standard-bearer.

Such cavils, however, are minor: anyone reading French wanting to find out, or find out more, about an enormous range of topics of Hispanophone literature – for Spain, from San Juan de la Cruz to the novels of José María Merino, for Mexico from Sor Juana de la Cruz to the fiction of Ángeles Mastretta, and so on ad infinitum – should discover what they are looking for in these pages. There are still reference books in this world which no internet site and no wiki can fully substitute. Such works continue to deserve their place on the reader's and scholar's bookshelf, and Jordi Bonells' remarkable volume is beyond any doubt one of them.