La nueva novela española en la última década del siglo XX
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SUMMARY

This study focuses on one of the Spanish narrative tendencies written by young authors, which emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century. This kind of literature was referred to by many names, such as Dirty Realism or Generation X (due to North American literary influences). This stream was characterized by breaking with traditional literary models and its opposition to most Spanish contemporary novels. Their most significant characteristics were: the introduction of colloquial language and, mainly, the introduction and influence of audiovisual culture (film and television) and pop music.

This new novel became successful amongst the public, editors and it found support in the mass media. However, this new form of writing novels was much criticized by a great part of literary world. The cause of such rejection was that critics considered this kind of novel—even the word ‘novel’ was not afforded—as being a total market product, which was created and oriented, by marketing strategies but was literary worthless.

Thus, when we studied these novels, we found, first of all, a great discrepancy between critics defending above all a good writing style, and a type of narrative work showing a lot of characteristics of present-day society. Existing critical concepts, criteria and terminology seem to be insufficient to approach this actual tendency. We think the problem could arise from a lack of understanding of a fundamental fact: these novels have been created in an age that registers cultural and social changes and processes of unprecedented magnitude and importance, due to the explosion of the mass- and audiovisual media and their radical consequences on life in twentieth century societies. Furthermore, in the Spanish case, these phenomena took place in a very short period, just when these writers had entered adulthood: the beginning of democracy, the opening of the borders and the influx of ideas, modes, news, thought, etc., which already were present outside Spain.

The main idea of our thesis is that these novels are the expression of these international changes, together with the specifically Spanish historical, cultural and social circumstances; that is to say, they are the product, the reflection and the consequence of a new global situation.

From these ideas and questions, the research goals were the following:

1. To analyse the influence of audiovisual culture on the novels—as a reflection of contemporary reality or as an instrument in the composition of narrative discourse.
2. To give this kind of narrative the right social and cultural frame.
3. To define its contribution to Spanish literature by introducing elements which already existed or were simultaneously emerging—in other countries.
4. To offer a wider critical contribution, which is in accordance with a new era.

To conduct our research we considered the theories of Germán Gullón found in La novela en libertad, which present literature as a social product, totally influenced by the reality in which it is created. We think that every literary work is a net of relationships among different literary and artistic genres and other non-artistic elements, like society, politics, ideology, etcetera.
We consider the following points to be most important:
1. The use of language and style.
2. The impact of pop music, film and television.
3. The most relevant social circumstances.

Our method of study consisted of analysing the development of these elements both in reality and in the novels. Alongside these points we have presented some brief social-cultural and literary contexts. After the textual analysis we have dedicated our attention to Spanish editorials and critiques of the nineties and their positions towards these novels.

Of all Spanish writers included (by literary critics) in this group, we have chosen the following names: José Ángel Mañas, Ray Loriga, Benjamin Prado, Pedro Maestre, Roger Wolfe, Lucía Etxebarria, Gabriela Bustelo, Care Santos, Caimán Montalbán and Ismael Grasa. More attention has been paid to José Ángel Mañas and Ray Loriga because they are considered the most representative of this new style and also we think that they made a deeper exploration into the research fields of our thesis.

The use of language and style

One of the most important elements is the vocabulary, composed of colloquial language, argot, neologisms and publicity marks. The use of a very visual language is also emphasised.

These characteristics were considered something new in Spain, but they had already been developed earlier by other literary streams both in the United States and Europe (for example, the Beat Generation). We think that the introduction of colloquial language and foreign influences serves to extend the expressive possibilities of the novel. We defend that it is in this field where the richness and evolution of every language can be seen.

The impact of pop music, film and television

Although criticism has largely insisted on the linguistic aspects as the most outstanding, we think that what is really new in this literature is the introduction and treatment of three of the most important cultural expressions in the Twentieth century: film, television and pop-rock music.

Film appears in two forms in these books: as subject and technical resource. With regard to the first form, the main characters in these stories consider film an inseparable form of daily life. Film forms the conscience of people because it has been an essential part of their learning about the world from childhood. From this perspective, movies and their characters, stories and scenarios become lifelike. A lot of film genres appear in these novels, but two of them stand out: horror and road-movies. They both appear frequently and exercise a big influence on the literary composition.

As regards technique, we can find a lot of film resources. Although the interrelation between film and literature is not new, it is carried to a large extent in these works. Using film techniques and genres, the possibilities of the novel construction are explored.

Television is introduced as a subject and a part of the story, used by narrators to reflect about it's relevance in modern societies. Like film, television appears in the novels as an essential part in the characters' lifes; as a fundamental space in their existence and a central inspiration source for conversations and reflections. This medium becomes almost the only objective to look at the outside world. In this sense, narrators admit that television images
largely form our connection with reality, but also that this reality can be easily manipulated when it becomes just a visual show.

Most of the authors, especially Ray Loriga, José Mañas and Roger Wolfe, consider that the impact of television marks a frontier between now and before, not only in social life but also in the way of creating, understanding and valueing art and culture, also particularly literature.

Aside from audiovisual media, music is one of the most important aspects in the novel. We encounter different styles of late twentieth century pop music: from rock and punk to grunge and techno. After offering an introduction on pop music, we have developed the chapter according to five functions that musical elements play in the books.

- First of all, we think that an interesting function of music here is as the novel's background sounds; so in this way, it plays a roll like it does in film. It can be said that authors – by means of the musical references they give – create novels with soundtrack.

- Secondly, music plays a very important roll as a thematic or technical resource. Thematically, because it is itself the center of some stories and because the songs mentioned and groups lend subjects and other different elements to novels. The technical role music plays is also fundamental; that is to say that the authors borrow musical compositions forms, or songs schemes, to create paragraphs, chapters and, sometimes, the whole book.

- In other cases, music is brought into the narrative as an ideological basis and creation model. That is to say writers take any musical stream applying its ideas to literature. Notably José Angel Mañas' work and his elaboration of the concept of Punk Literature illustrates this.

- Furthermore, authors use song lyrics to substitute the characters' expressions or thoughts and also for describing both persons and situations.

- Finally, admiration for music's myths and rock stars is one of the more remarkable aspects. In this section, we have analysed the meaning of some rock myths both into the novels and in society at the time these novels were written. The characters consider musicians as divine beings. Pop stars are the substitute of old religions' gods as well as politicians and other ideological heroes. Among the many musical leaders who appear in these books, Kurt Cobain, the singer of the grunge group Nirvana, is the most outstanding figure. His personality and his music had great impact on the nineties' youth. Next to him, image, lyrics and symbols of David Bowie, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed or Jim Morrison, for example, are frequently present.

The most relevant social circumstances

The last chapter of textual analysis is dedicated to some notable social aspects introduced in the novels. It treats the world of bars, nightlife and urban tribes, violence as a social problem, the generation gap, protests against institutions and society. The personalities suffer from typical symptoms like apathy and banalisation.

Above all these novels reflect on a generation which, due to historical circumstances, clashes with the past. Youngsters have been educated to a certain extent with traditional values, but live in a completely new reality, which requires new attitudes and ideas. This not only leads to conflicts with their parents, but also within themselves.
Promotion and reception of the novels

The last part of this research looks at the novels' margins: its promotion and reception. In this chapter we have offered an ensemble of both criticism and editors' opinions, obtained from newspapers, cultural journals and literary reviews.

The opinions of the critics, especially journalists, are generally negative. Many even refuse to call them novels. They negatively criticise the style of these writers because they do not respect traditional composition forms and also because they have a lot of influences from other arts or expression media. Critics base their argument on the absence of Spanish literary influences and, on the contrary, they find too many literary and cultural Anglo-Saxon influences in these novels.

Finally, they accuse editors of placing commercial interests in front of literary quality. Countering these positions, editors argue that, although they yield to the demands of today's market, their goal is always to publish books with significant cultural value, according to the era in which they have been created.

Our conclusions in this field are that, as we had noticed at the beginning of our research, critics still do not sufficiently take into account new social and cultural elements that are present in the literary work. In the case of the current age, events without precedents can be found; therefore critical criteria should change in order to judge all complexity of any contemporary artistic creation.

Final conclusions

Finally, we have reached the following conclusions:

- The introduction of television, film and music (especially their technical resources) allows us to see the great influence these media have in our societies. They signify a change not only in entertainment but also in the forms of expression, artistic creation and in the way of seeing the world. We think the introduction of these elements means that it is capable of adapting itself to every age.

- We see Anglo-Saxon influence (in language, style and subject) as a consequence of the aforementioned point. That is to say, due to great presence of Anglo-Saxon film and pop music in the rest of the world. The role of foreign literature is also important.

- With regard to style, these novels reflect many different sentiments of Spanish society in the nineties. It is not our job to discuss their literary quality, which is a very complex thing. These novels are good examples of the idea that "anything can be art" and "everybody can do it", which was proclaimed by punk rock and pop art: two of the outstanding artistic movements of the twentieth century, which are fundamentals of this literature. These novels are an example of the democratisation of art, which has been already alluded to by many intellectuals in the recent years. This seems to show how difficult it actually is to distinguish between good or bad art. Thus traditional criteria to approach a novel with these characteristics are insufficient if we take this context in account.

- The literary boom was induced by market forces. However, the fact that these works successfully reached a large and largely young audience, notwithstanding the overwhelming supply of all kinds of entertainment forms, shows in our opinion that many readers could identify themselves with recognizable stories about their own world.

- The appearance of these books and the polemic surrounding them were useful to initiate interesting discussions on some aspects of literature (as style and influences), as
well as on the role of writers and their works in present-day society. They have largely
demythologized the image of the author and of literature.

- The new Spanish novel at the end of the twentieth century should not be classified as a
  "generation", as such a term suggests more homogeneity than actually exists. In our
  opinion it would be better to speak of a trend, partly in the use of certain new technical
  resources, but above all in the way to interpret literature: as an artistic expression
  capable to bring people closer to their world.