

UCLA

Mester

Title

LÓPEZ-CALVO, IGNACIO. *Written in Exile. Chilean Fiction from 1973-Present*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 232 pp.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4dc5c5nt>

Journal

Mester, 32(1)

Author

Manrique, Pila Asensio

Publication Date

2003

DOI

10.5070/M3321014598

Copyright Information

Copyright 2003 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

LÓPEZ-CALVO, IGNACIO. *Written in Exile. Chilean Fiction from 1973-Present*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 232 pp.

The radical changes that took place in Chile after Salvador Allende's rise to power, along with the military coup carried out by General Augusto Pinochet had an undeniable impact on the collective conscience of Latin America. In fact, Pinochet's dictatorship caused the exile or inner exile of a great number of writers and intellectuals. In *Written in Exile. Chilean Fiction from 1973-Present*, Ignacio López-Calvo studies "the novelistic representation of Chilean reality" (6) during the last thirty years of the twentieth century. The theoretical approach of the book takes into account both the discourse of exile and "the interconnection between the Chilean novel and the liberation thought" (4), conceived as a dialectic alternative that confronts the hegemonic official discourse.

The first chapter points out the limited number of critical studies that have analyzed the influence of Liberation Theology on Latin American literature. As López-Calvo explains, liberation thought is a phenomenon that emerged in the sixties in Latin America and was endorsed by Pablo Richards, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Paulo Freire, and Leopoldo Zea, among others. Notwithstanding the reprimands, censorship, and excommunications exercised by the Vatican, the work of these thinkers was fruitful and had important religious and sociopolitical implications. As the author maintains, "in the same manner that Erasmus' books generated an important literary reaction, the texts by liberation thinkers stimulated an important cultural production in Latin America" (37). In his extensive analysis López-Calvo compares novels originated in exile, including some works written abroad after the electoral defeat of General Pinochet in the plebiscite of October 5, 1988, with those created in Chile during the same dictatorial period. Ultimately, the contrast between Chilean testimonial and liberationist texts with the more reflective and self-critical demythologizing novels demonstrates "the progressive change of mentality and sensitivity in the creators" (8).

The second chapter contains a source of information essential for establishing the social and historical parameters that determined the dialectics between socialism and Christianity in Chile. It also considers the causes that unleashed the military coup on September 11, 1973, as well as the role of the progressive priests as active agents

in the revolutionary cause and, especially, in the defense of the poor and oppressed in Chile. These “new priests” focused primarily on consciousness-raising (“concientización”) and the elimination of poverty by means that reject paternalism and charity. Some novels, for example, project the historical figure of Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez as a symbol of the fight for justice against the constant violations of human rights carried out by the military government. In the third chapter López-Calvo determines the basic theoretical premises of Latin American liberation thought and argues that “Liberation Theology, perhaps the most important Christian movement since the Protestant Reformation, emerged as a logical reaction to what the New Priests considered a Eurocentric and reactionary Catholic Church that had abandoned the poor sectors of Latin American societies” (35). As he states, the dialogic relationship between Latin American novels and liberation theology can be traced back to the texts written by liberation thinkers, which included quotes by such writers as José María Arguedas, José Martí and Alejo Carpentier. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the causes and effects of exile, thus complementing the theoretical framework of this book. López-Calvo considers both the literature *about* exile and literature written *in* exile, although there is a special emphasis on the latter.

The title of the fourth chapter, “Tension Among Social Classes: Preliminaries of the Disaster,” presents the constant friction among social groups as providing the perfect cultural conditions for the development of the coup. This section focuses on two novels published in 1978, *Casa de campo* by José Donoso and *Los convidados de piedra* by Jorge Edwards, which examine the class struggle, “as well as the decadence and lack of integrity” (49) of the authors’ social group.

The following chapters correspond to an exhaustive classification of the novels in three different groups: *testimonios*, liberationist and demythologizing novels (chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively). Within the liberationist novels — in which, according to López-Calvo, the literary discourse becomes a subversive weapon for the victims of repression — some texts focus on class struggle or political animosity while others concentrate on inner exile as a consequence of discrimination for sexual orientation and ethnic background. Actually, it deals with lesbian and gay issues and Jewish Chilean writing. The seventh chapter concludes with what the author terms “demythologizing novels,” a category that includes a series of works

ironically questioning the true nature of the Chilean resistance and exile, and maintaining the revisionist attitude typical of postmodern literature. These writings, characterized by their self-reflective and meditative approach about the consequences of the institutional crisis, mark a new stage in the Chilean exile narrative. In fact, this literary corpus “complements — and frequently corrects — the denunciatory and testimonial works” (10) of the beginning period. The anti-heroes of these novels are dramatically different from the idealized protagonists typical of testimonial and liberationist novels: “The heroic types, as well as the New Priests, Men, and Women, characteristic of the liberationist novel, now become anti-heroes. They are personified in various layers of Chilean society: the middle-class man, the militant, the exiled, and even the president” (153). Hence the utopian dream of achieving a more humanized society strays toward a “dystopian self-criticism, or the simple inventory of the different paths of the Chilean diaspora” (11) that exposes selfishness, disillusionment, and lack of motivation as recurrent features.

After the seven chapters, the book also provides a chronological list of the sixty-seven novels analyzed, including works by the following authors: Augusto D’Halmar, Efraín Szmulewicz, José Donoso, Fernando Alegría, Ianos Magallanes, Hernán Valdés, Matilde Ladrón de Guevara, Alejandro Witker, Antonio Skármeta, Aníbal Quijada Cerda, Ilario Da, Poli Délano, Ana Vásquez, Jorge Edwards, Guillermo Atías, Volodia Teitelboim, Mauricio Wácquez, Isabel Allende, Ariel Dorfman, Juan Villegas, Lucía Guerra, Sonia Guralnik, Patricio Manns, Silverio Muñoz, Gabriel García Márquez, Fernando Jerez, Teresa Hamel, Luis Domínguez Vial, Marjorie Agosín, and Pedro Lemebel.

In conclusion, although some of the works had been previously analyzed elsewhere, *Written in Exile* provides new approaches to the cycle by articulating the connections between Chilean exile narrative and liberation thought and considering Jewish, lesbian, and gay issues in the Chilean literature of exile and inner exile. It also reveals the rarely mentioned desacralization of iconic figures, for instance that of President Salvador Allende, reflects upon concepts such as the “new priest” (a version of the “new man”), and exposes the way in which the daily or domestic behavior of the militant and the middle-class man is often presented as a synecdoche of the coup in this literary corpus. Overall, it is a complex study that proposes readings of internationally acclaimed novels in conjunction with less

recognized works, insisting upon the social role of literature, particularly in its confrontation with the official history. The historical content provided in the first chapters serves to acquaint the initiated student with Chilean history and literature. At the same time, the multiple dimensions of textual analysis (which I found quite challenging) and profuse critical references covered by this ambitious book in the final chapters represent a contribution to the study of Chilean literature.

Pilar Asensio Manrique
University of California, Los Angeles