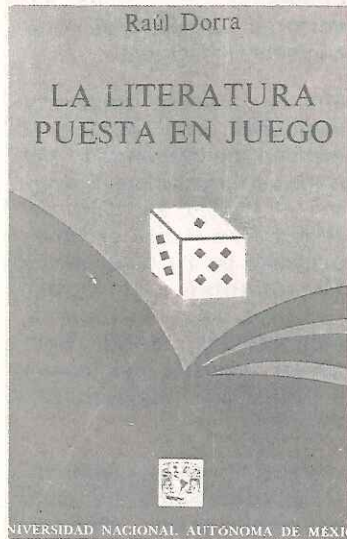


Books

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Unraveling the Novel's Mystery

La literatura puesta en juego (Literature Called into Question) Raúl Dorra, Ediciones de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México, 1986.

In his new book, Raúl Dorra applies a structuralist analysis to *Morirás lejos* (*You Will Die Far Away*), the great novel by distinguished Mexican author, José Emilio Pacheco, recently elected to the National Academy, an honor reserved for the country's most outstanding intellectuals.

The 320-page essay is divided into three major parts. In the chapter entitled "Literature Called into Question," the author attempts to untangle the question of how literature is created, from a theoretical perspective, without entering yet into a textual analysis of Pacheco's novel. According to Dorra, his work will "attempt to situate itself in the dialectics of search and negation; the objective is to analyze this book (*Morirás lejos*)... and through this analysis

be able, then, to reflect on literary discourse... Nonetheless, I want to make it clear from the very beginning that our work will really be nothing more than *one reading*."

The book provides a rich reflection on the fictional and the testimonial in *Morirás lejos*, but also in literature in general. And it also examines the question of the limits of language, an imprecise and conflictive issue.

"Because everything is unreal in this story. Nothing happened as it was told. Events and places have been deformed in the effort to find truth through fiction, a lie." (*Morirás lejos*, p.157).

This could well be the essential point in both Pacheco's novel, as well as in Dorra's study.

In the first chapter we confront the question, "What is literature?" The author tries to respond from the point of view of a literary critic who tries to define the undefinable. He claims that it is necessary to continue to question literature, free from the useless pretense of seeking an exhaustive response, but rather, in an effort to outline some of the elements of an answer, those which make sense in relation to the text under study.

Drawing on the work of Tzvetan Todorov, noted Bulgarian literary critic now living in Paris, Dorra explains the "functionalist" and the "structuralist" approaches to literature. The "functionalist" response to the question, "What is literature?" tries to define art, and in this case literature, in terms of what it *does*, or at least what it *seeks to do*. Therefore, it does not attempt to characterize that which is intrinsic to the esthetic discourse, as such. Rather it tells how this discourse goes on to form part of a much larger set or system of discourses. The "structuralist" response delves into the question of what art *is*, into its specific system of organization, into its internal processes and proceedings.

Raúl Dorra is an adherent of this second approach, and he applies its method with great skill. His analysis is rigorous and well-documented, convincing even to those who are not experts in matters of literary theory and demonstrating his

deep understanding of the theoretical elements that he has chosen to use.

The second part of the essay, entitled "The Dialectic of Literature-Testimony," is subdivided into three sections: "The Testimony of Writing," "Fiction" and "History." Here the author undertakes a closer analysis of *Morirás lejos*, touching on themes such as the fable and discourse, with their respective characteristics and differences, and explaining how the novel brings that distinction into crisis. The writing in *Morirás lejos* is, in the first instance, a testimony unto itself, asserting its own material nature, its significant graphic presence on the page, as if it were a pageant. A number of pages are dedicated to the careful examination of the writing's material nature, before the author goes on to analyze the writing on the writing, that is, the writing which constantly reflects on itself.

The study of the fiction in the novel proceeds through an analysis of the characters in the work and of the imaginative activity. Through this analysis, Dorra reaches the conclusion that in *Morirás lejos*, "if the fiction is the desire to live, the testimony is the presence of death; the presence, then, of that end which cannot be narrated. Once again, 'testimony is shown to be in opposition to literature, 'while at the same time, complementing it.'"

The second part of the book ends with "history," analyzed from the point of view of the unity "testimony-literature." The author insists here on the fact that the "literary" and the "testimonial" are united into one, as dialectical opposites; he explains this, showing both why and how. The analysis rests on a microscopic view into Pacheco's novel, which deals with the Second World War, Hitler, the holocaust and the martyrdom of the Jews.

The third and final part of the essay, "The theme of the subject and the theme of the tale," is subdivided into "Who tells..." and "this story." By comparing the two versions of *Morirás lejos*, written in 1967 and in 1977, the author was able to carry out a truly exemplary study of the text in question. Through theoretical considerations applied to the issues of

the "narrator-all-seeing," of the narrator and his parody, of the protagonism of the discourse, of the coexistence of discourse and fable, etc....the critic leads us down winding paths of literary analysis without tiring us, boring us, or leaving us behind.

And this is precisely one of the most positive things about the book. Despite the fact that a theoretic analysis of a literary work could easily make arid reading, Raúl Dorra manages to catch our interest and to hold it throughout the entire book. Three factors seem to explain this fact. First, despite his use of specialized vocabulary, the book is accessible, even to readers with limited experience in literary theory because it is written with pedagogical criteria that emphasize the desire to explain and to convince. At the same time, Dorra demonstrates tremendous command of his field; his work is erudite, totally professional and solidly based in theory. Finally, through the analysis *Moriras lejos* is shown to be what the Mexican public already knew; it is a magnum work in contemporary Latin American literature.

We regret the exclusively structuralist focus of Raúl Dorra's analysis. While structuralist categories are necessary for literary theory, in and of themselves, they are not sufficient. Without a doubt the analysis would have been enriched had it incorporated methodological contributions from other currents. For example, the writing of Russian critic, Mikhail Bakhtine, increasingly influential even on Todorov's thinking, could help greatly to define the work's context and the relationship of that context to its structure.

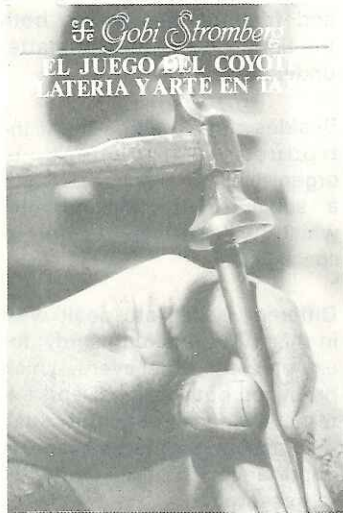
Nonetheless, and despite these details, we would like to congratulate the author of *La literatura puesta en juego*, and we recommend that it be read by anyone interested in literature and its theoretical study. ★

Pantxika Cazaux

For Whom Does Silver Shine?

The Coyote's Game: Silverworks and Art in Mexico Gobi Stromberg Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986.

Gobi Stromberg's rigor and insight shine through in her new book, *The Coyote's Game: Silverworks and Art in Mexico* (*El Juego del Coyote. Platería y Arte en México*), making it of



interest for both the amateur and the initiated on the subject. Her contribution is to examine a commercial phenomenon—artisan production in Taxco—within an anthropological framework. She delves into the evolution of an industry that was quite marginal 50 years ago, but now employs some ten thousand silversmiths, who transform close to four tons of silver every month into jewelry and other objects.

As the 1930s drew to a close, the town of Taxco had fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. Mining was virtually a lost tradition, and silverworks were an insignificant factor in the local economy. The Mexican Revolution, the decay of the old economic and social order and the development of new structures, more appropriate to the industrialized society that was emerging from those changes all contributed to the destruction of the town's traditional crafts production. Even in the best of times, however, silver-smithing had been limited to

*In Mexico the term "coyote" refers to middle-men or scalpers, who monopolize the marketing of a given item, buying cheap and selling high.

the production of religious pieces for churches and the adornments used on the leather goods and clothing associated with cattle ranching.

Within this context, the efforts of a few "pioneer's" in the field and the fortunate discovery of new veins of silver, served as the basis for the development of an industry which is now the driving-force for a city of 60,000. Thus, a "tradition", aimed at reaching a broad and diverse market, was born and grew at a dizzying pace, within a society with deeply rooted cultural characteristics. "It was soon necessary to undertake the search for esthetic elements and to develop a style that would be unequivocally *taxqueño*. In order to do that, prehispanic popular art motifs were incorporated, as well as esthetic concepts from both Mexican and international contemporary art," explains Ms. Stromberg in her book.

Thus, the case of Taxco's silver industry poses a series of problems from an anthropological point of view, which range from the transformation of social structures, relationships, kinship, etc. in a community that grew from 2,000 inhabitants to several tens of thousands in a very short period of time, to a variety of issues related to the question of what is "popular" in Mexican society, to the changes in an artisan-type activity that has seen its market, horizons and objectives expand so dramatically.

According to the author's prologue, research for the book was actually begun in 1972 and originally presented as a doctoral dissertation for the anthropology department at the University of California at Berkeley in 1976. The material was brought up-to-date during a second period of field research in 1979. The study had two objectives: to analyze the factors that influence artisan production processes and to develop a protocol for research on artisanry.

In order to determine the effects of the market on the popular art studied, the author used the following questions as the starting point for her investigation:

1. What are the dynamics of the relationship between the organization of production and commerce? What are the role

- and function of design and innovation in this context?
2. What conditions encourage the rise of specific forms of marketing, and what factors determine the ways in which intermediaries and marketers operate?
 3. In what way are consumer tastes communicated to the artisan and how are they manifested in production?
 4. What is the role of intermediaries and wholesalers in this process? To what degree do they really transmit consumer tastes, or to what degree are their requests for certain kinds of production modified by priorities based on price and volume?
 5. What role does the silversmith play in the process; is he an innovator or a mass producer?
 6. What are the conditions that encourage or inhibit the growth and expansion of artisan industries?

The book has an Introduction and five chapters that deal with the following: I. The Origins of Silversmithing in Taxco; II. The Transformation of Production and the Family Workshop; III. The Commercial Market and Scalpers; IV. Market vs. Art: Creativity and Market Demands; V. Artisan Policy: Development Economy or Hangman's Trap? Thus, Stromberg successively analyzes the rise of large workshops, changes in the relations of production, repercussions on the family and women's situation, the growing importance of marketing and financial factors on artisan-type production, the influence of a market that reaches beyond local limits and the importance of tourism, technical and esthetic aspects, new forms of collective organization related to the experienced changes and the fluctuating relationship of artisans to official institutions.

A section of Conclusions, a Methodological Appendix with the main questionnaire used in the study and the responses obtained, a Bibliography, a set of sixteen photos illustrating different aspects of silverwork production and two maps showing the location of Taxco and nearby villages in the state of Guerrero complete the book.

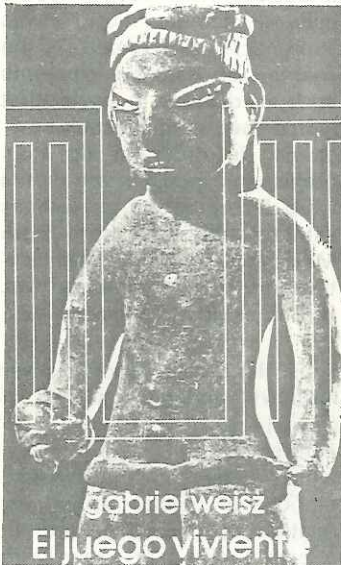
Written with reason and passion for Taxco's silver work, the book provides a detailed examination of the diverse conditions that influence the quality

of silver products, and of the changes in those conditions through time, in relation to distinct economic, political and cultural moments in Mexican history.

The author, Gobi Stromberg-Pellizi, resides in Mexico.★

Pedro Sondereguer

Fun and Games as Ritual



El juego viviente (Living Games)Gabriel Weisz, Siglo XXI, 1986.

This book resulted from a project developed by the Center for Social and Ethnodramatic Research. The first part of the project dealt with pre-hispanic games, and the second with their biological and representational aspects.

One of the research project's most important aspects was its multi-disciplinary character, involving specialists in psychiatry and biomedical science, in anthropology (basically the Náhuatl culture), in philology and in cell physiology. This approach was in response to the study material's nature, and was necessary in order to work with broader criteria and to fully cover their hypotheses.

Nonetheless, as the author point out in his introduction, "The multi-disciplinary approach is extraordinarily complex because each discipline operates with its own methods and models, and each has demands and regulations that define specific ways in which to

deal with the subject matter. In organizing our material we did not presume to unify methodology and systems, as it is virtually impossible to be a specialist in every field."

Despite the author's warning, we believe the multi-disciplinary approach in this rare and valuable study is one of its richest and most meaningful aspects. The end result is proof that when different fields of knowledge are applied to a common objective, rather than produce infighting and friction, they enrich both the field and the subject matter under study.

Besides the preface and introduction, the book is organized into six chapters and a subject-matter bibliography which will be very useful to specialists.

Different issues are dealt with in this 173 page long study; for example, the ritual event, which produces both internal and external changes in the individual. This aspect is of interest for its importance in the study of representation.

The chapter covering pre-hispanic games deals with the sacred game, which in Mesoamerica was closely bound to a cosmic view. The Ball Game constitutes a dramatic representation of the struggle between day and night in which the Sun is the central motif.

There is also an interesting reflection on the subject of playthings or, to be precise, on the toy-ritual object dichotomy. This in turn leads to a new set of problems concerning sports and games in relation to ritual, but now examined as contrasting or supplementary activities.

The points of contact established in the book between body, instrument and game-related activity, the vital link between playful and sacred events, bring to mind certain questions. Do these relationships exist in modern-day electronic games? What types of representational structures can be drawn from computer games? *Games* deals with these questions, and offers some tantalizing answers.

Finally, the book deals with the unchanging relations between game-related and sacred

events, those which involve the individual in physical activities, and modern playthings that produce an overall change in the person's world-view.

The point the author tries to make is that the cognitive structures, innate to all representational activity, originate in and are ruled by biological processes, and that there is a vital connection between the body and its habitat. Thus, changes in the habitat imply changes in the body. This allows an insight into why and how sudden transitions in our environment affect the somatic constitution of human beings, and consequently, our emotional balance. This is why the author's conceptual framework is influenced by his readings in neurophysiology.

The concept of games isn't enclosed in a rigid, absolute category. Rather, Weisz' definition in *Living Games* is one of a system in perpetual motion. Its broad, though exacting scientific approach, is another noteworthy aspect of the study.

Today's games seem to respond to the type of material comforts that surround us. New trends include the game that plays itself, and the seemingly quick, efficient and comfortable modern playthings which, according to the author, dull the senses and inhibit the body's inborn movement. A further dilemma between the traditional toy and the electronic one lies in the different emotional relationship between game-material and participants.

Thus, according to Weisz, we are currently in a kind of void of emotional attachment to playthings as well as in our game and play interrelationships. Although this idea is not considered an absolute truth, the author does point to how this is hardly a coincidence, given modern society's critical situation in terms of the difficulties in interpersonal, emotional relationships. We agree with the author when he insists that it would be self-deluding to think that games and playthings can escape the prevailing environment.

Professor Weisz's *Living Games* is no doubt a deep and serious study on the subject. Games are important for both animals

and human beings for what they symbolize and represent in our development. The book, though, makes for difficult reading, and is by no means within the grasp of common mortals. Above and beyond conceptual sophistication, the language is excessively intellectual, and detracts rather than adds to the content. This may be an important contribution to specialists, but its hyper-intellectualism makes it accessible only to an elite.

It could be said it was impossible to do differently, which would mean agreeing with the idea that the harder the better. Yet from Socrates and Plato, on through Descartes and others, the history of ideas shows how the most complex concepts can—and should, in pedagogical terms—be clearly stated. The difficulty seems to reside in the concept itself, rather than in the way it's stated. Unfortunately, this same trait is common to many contemporary scientific and intellectual works. It also calls to mind the urgent and complex task of broadening people's access to knowledge, one with which many of those who yield power through knowledge, disagree.

Living Games is full of wealth and insight on the subject of games, if we can overcome the difficult reading and manage to get into the book. ★

Pantxika Cazaux

Hot Off the Press: the New and the Noteworthy in Mexican Publishing

Fuentes para la historia de la crisis agrícola, 1809-1811, (Sources on the Agrarian Crisis, 1809-1811) by Enrique Florescano and Victoria San Vicente; UNAM.

A collection of documents concerning the Mexican agrarian crisis of 1809-1811; includes an introduction by the authors. Recent research has demonstrated the great economic and social importance during the viceroyship of agrarian crises, which caused

constant price increases for basic food products. They also contributed to the conditions that eventually led to the rebellion headed by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (September 16, 1810, still celebrated as a national holiday) and the Independence War. The introduction defines the geographical area affected by the crisis, the implications of the measures adopted by the authorities to confront it and its principal social and economic effects. The authors focus their analysis from the perspective of similar phenomena affecting Mexico today, in such a way that the past is not recounted as arid history, but rather as a means to enlighten our understanding of the present and of the possible future.



Apuntes de sociología médica (Notes on Medical Sociology) by Imelda Ana Rodríguez Ortiz, UNAM.

According to the author, the idea for this book emerged from the questions raised by medical students about the possible contributions of sociology to the understanding of the relationship, health-illness. The students, themselves, began to systematize a multi-disciplinary method to study the phenomenon, drawing on both the natural and social sciences. Certain aspects of the relationship between medicine and social structure are examined, before the author moves on to analyze private medicine, institutional medicine and in particular, community medicine, which demonstrated a liberating potential in relation to some of the problems that confront marginal populations.



Juan Correa, su vida y su obra (Juan Correa, His Life and His Work) by Elisa Vargas Lugo and José Guadalupe Victoria; UNAM.

The product of nine years of research, this catalog presents the entire work of Juan Correa, the most prolific painter of religious themes during the colonial period. The vast majority of the artist's work is still to be found in churches that date from that period, in both Mexico and Antigua Guatemala. The catalog is divided into fifteen chapters according to the themes developed in Correa's paintings. Each chapter is preceded by

odds and ends

an introduction, and photographs and notes are provided for all of the works. A bibliography to support the notes rounds out the volume.



Instrucciones de la fábrica y del ajuar aclesiásticos (Church Vestments and their Fabrication) Carlos Borromeo; UNAM.

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A book for specialists on the colonial period. The Institute for Esthetics Research and the Institute for Philological Research prepared the work, unpublished in Spanish until now. The original was written in Latin by the famous Tridentine reformer, Carlos Borromeo (1538-1584), Bishop and later, Cardinal who took a major interest in the development of sacred art, and of culture in general. The work was translated to the Spanish by noted Latinist, Bulmaro Reyes Coria of the Institute for Philological Research. It is accompanied by a study written by Elena Isabel Estrada de Gerlero, professor at the School of Arts and Letters, and a specialist in Spanish colonial iconology.



El pensamiento histórico: ayer y hoy (Historical Thinking: Yesterday and Today), by Pilar Barroso Acosta, Ricardo Martínez Lacy, Ma. Cristina Montoya Rivero and Rosalía Velásquez Estrada; UNAM.

Finally, the third volume of this very complete collection is being published. The entire anthology presents a critical view of the diverse schools of thought and reflections regarding historical science, which have been developed through the centuries. This new volume is subtitled "From Marxism to Contemporary Currents." It includes writings from such diverse thinkers as Karl Marx, Wilhelm Dilthey, Benedetto Croce, Oswald Spengler, José Ortega y Gasset and Jean Paul Sartre. The underlying premise for the entire collection is that history is not a simple reflexion on the past, nor is it a consciousness of the passage of time. Rather, it demands a consciousness of the fact that the present, past and future are interrelated and interacting.



Food

Huichos, Aztecs, Mayas, Zapotecs, Toltecs and Totonacas. Consequently, each had their own culture of nourishment.

"It was the same type of situation as when you travel from one country to another, where you find a great variety of foods," says Tovar y de Teresa.

The wealth and variety of the nation's culinary art led another Mexico City Historian, Salvador Novo, to write a 350-page book, *Mexican Cookery, or Gastronomic History of Mexico*. In his introduction, Novo—who was also a member of the Mexican Language Academy, and received the National Award for Journalism in 1976—provides valuable insights on the topic:

"The verb *cua*, used by one of the main pre-hispanic cultural groups, the Nahuas, means to eat. The adjective *cualli* means both the beautiful and the good, which is to say, that which is edible, that which is digestible, that which is pleasing to our sight and to our hearts, to the spirit and to the flesh."

A verb or an adjective-noun, —*cua* or *cualli*—, define or qualify the subject that receives them, and allow for the composition of words and phrases with which this admirable, many-hued tongue expresses its people:

Cla-cua-ni, he who eats things;

Gastronomy as a Cultural Tradition

Do hot peppers and tortillas, both native staples, constitute the basis of Mexican's food-intake?

"No, definitely not," says Guillermo Tovar y de Teresa, the Official Historian of Mexico City. "These are merely complements." And he adds, "What's more, I believe that in terms of variety and tastiness, Mexican food is comparable to the most important cuisines in the world, such as the Chinese and Japanese, the Italian and the French."

Tovar explains that each of the pre-hispanic peoples had their own culture, among them the Quichés, Tzetzals, Mixes, Zapotecas, Tarahumaras,



Mexican kitchen in the 19th century as painted by A. Serrano (Nat. Museum of History).