

Letras Hispanas

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TITLE: *Contra las Musas de la Ira. El Materialismo Filosófico como Teoría de la Literatura*

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Maestro's book offers an impressive attempt at a really comprehensive philosophy of literature based on the *Materialismo Filosófico* of the Asturian philosopher Gustavo Bueno. Broadly speaking, according to this theory, literary inquiry must be informed by (if not considered a subfield of) the theory of knowledge—Maestro prefers the term *gnoseología*, perhaps because of its hermeneutic undertones, to the more common term *epistemología*. He also criticizes bitterly almost all existing literary theories and approaches, as mere ideologies or superstitions that refuse to treat literature as fundamentally understandable (*inteligible*). Maestro's acrimonious critique begins in the book's introduction, and really doesn't let up for the first half of the book. But the system presented in the later chapters is of great interest, being both coherent and developed from a really global philosophical and literary background.

Maestro insists that literary inquiry must engage with "literary materials"—that is, literary texts—and the "forms" that are added to these raw materials by literary artists. Maestro sketches a complex and panoptic classificatory system for encountering literature and understanding it in this scientific fashion. The reader might wonder if Maestro is, in effect, fashioning a new structuralism, but as structuralism was one of the "merely rhetorical" ways of reading that he argued so strongly against in the first chapters, that can't

be right. To concentrate too much on one aspect of literary objects would be to break down the necessary *symploké* or unity of qualities that make up such objects. Rather, Maestro's book offers an account of the "genealogy" of literature as "an expression of human Rationalism," a genealogy which places the roots of literary expression in humanity's rational processes, and which therefore insists that literature is fundamentally intelligible, because at the most basic level it "makes sense;" an account of the "ontology" of literary Texts (the capitalization is from the original) as originated by a Writer, read by a Reader, and mediated by a *Transductor*, a fraught space in the literary universe occupied by professional interpreters of texts who attempt more-or-less sacerdotally to influence how Readers read; an account of the theory of literary knowledge; and finally accounts of how this underlying philosophy of literature help us understand the existence and nature of literary genres, of the concept of fiction itself, and how a true, scientific "comparative literature" is possible.

Although it clearly represents a daunting amount of work on Maestro's part, and is probably the most plausible attempt to insist that the study of literature can be more properly scientific since the twentieth-century heyday of narratology, Maestro's boiling hostility to other forms of literary inquiry can be tiresome. This book is biting critical of

other literary theories, or even of the possibility that other literary theories could exist: as Maestro himself proudly asserts, Philosophical Materialism is not one alternative among others, it is one alternative *against all others* (44). The first two chapters of *Contra las Musas* are a gall-bitter harangue against almost any kind of motivated reading, whether motivated by gender or race, by the investigation of ideology, by economic matters, or anything else. For Maestro, it appears, motivated readings of this kind represent a betrayal of the fundamental purposes of literary inquiry, which should be to understand literature *como tal* in the way that the natural sciences understand their respective subject matters. Maestro's perspective on anything that smacks

of postmodernism is even more condemnatory, since he sees his new system as fundamentally *rational* and postmodernism's happy acceptance of fragmentation as fundamentally *anti-rational*.

The worry for Maestro's book in fomenting a theoretic revolution, then, is that of the (optimistically) several hundred Spanish-reading literary theorists on the planet who would possibly pick up the book, many of them be put off by the caustic tone of Maestro's unremitting, angry critique. But that would be a shame, since the positive arguments Maestro makes in the introductory chapters as well as the elaborate and intriguing "rational" system that he proposes in the later chapters are well worth pondering.