



Forth and Back: Translation, Dirty Realism, and the Spanish Novel (1975–1995)

By Cintia Santana

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Forth and Back broadens the scope of Hispanic trans-Atlantic studies by shifting its focus to Spain's trans-literary exchange with the United States at the end of the twentieth century. Santana analyzes the translation "boom" of U.S. literature that marked literary production in Spain after Franco's death, and the central position that U.S. writing came to occupy within the Spanish literary system. Santana examines the economic and literary motives that underlay the phenomenon, as well as the particular socio-cultural appeal that U.S. "dirty realist" writers—which in Spain included authors as diverse as Charles Bukowski, Raymond Carver, and Bret Easton Ellis—held for Spaniards in the 1980s. Santana also studies the subsequent appropriation of this writing by a polemic group of young Spanish writers in the 1990s who self-consciously and insistently associated themselves with the U.S..

Forth and Back illustrates that literary movements do not unilaterally spread; rather, those that flourish take root in fertile soil and are transformed in their travel by the desires, creative choices, and practical constraints of their differing producers and consumers. It is precisely in the crossing of these currents that plots thicken. The translation of dirty realism, its reception in Spain, and its cultural legacy as appropriated by the young Spanish writers, serve to interrogate a perceived U.S. hegemony. If Spanish *realismo sucio* has been said to be symptomatic of the globalization of literature, *Forth and Back* argues that the Spanish works in question posed a subtle reaffirmation of Spanish literature's strong ties to realist fiction, a gesture of continuity in a decade that seemed to presage the undoing of much of Spain's "Spanish-ness." Ultimately, this project asks an ambitious pair of questions at the heart of human culture: how do we "read" each other, quite literally, across geography and language? How do we construct others and ourselves vis-à-vis those readings?

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Bibliography

- Rank: #7765673 in Books
- Published on: 2015-02-25
- Released on: 2015-02-25
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.94" h x .57" w x 6.02" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 192 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Focusing on postdictatorship Spain, transition to democracy, and the meaning of 'nation-ness,' Santana (Stanford Univ.) takes a welcome look at the effervescent translations of US literature in Spain, in particular of 'dirty realism.' The sociopolitical and economic context the author provides affords the reader a thorough understanding of the reception of translated US dirty realism in the Spanish literary market and of the remarkable influence of Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, and Richard Ford on young Spanish novelists in the 1990s. In looking at American culture, dirty realism exposed a latent private interior behind the external images exported from the US by Hollywood and politicians. The genre appealed to Spanish readers and writers not simply as a reflection of anti-American sentiment—given the ambivalence of Spain's government toward the US during this twenty year period—but because Spanish dirty realism narrative provided the means to express *desencanto* (disillusion) at Spain's politics, economy, and role in a globalized world while questioning the Spanish novel at the end of the twentieth century. Expertly documented and soundly written, this book challenges how one reads across languages and how 'nation-ness' is constructed vis-à-vis those readings. Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students, researchers, faculty. (*CHOICE*)

About the Author

Cintia Santana is a lecturer at Stanford University.

Users Review

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Carmel Smith:

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