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Under Construction: The Body in Spanish Novels (Feminist Issues)

Elizabeth A. Scarlett

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Our bodies constitute the most tangible link between who we are and what we experience in the world; for this reason a large corpus of literary and cultural studies has turned to the human body as a point of reference in the last few years. As Elizabeth Scarlett points out, "Modern Spanish literature is fertile terrain for the exploration of the body as textual marker." Using modern feminist and narratological tools of analysis, Scarlett offers illuminating insights into the terms of embodiment in novels by Emilia Pardo Bazan, Rosa Chacal, and Merce Rodoreda, Carmen Martin Gaite, Soledad Puertolas, Camilo Jose Cela, Luis Martin Santos, Julio Llamazares, and Antonio Munoz Molina. Scarlett reveals significant correlations between gender and figurations of the female (and male) body and traces a history of the mind-body connection in Spanish novels from the late nineteenth century to the present. In the time-honored hierarchy that pits mind against body and privileges the more intangible of the two, woman is typically associated with the flesh and man with transcendence. Perhaps this is why, Scarlett observes, the body-as-text begins to make its most dynamic appearances in novels written by female authors. As one draws closer to the present, however, she notes that male as well as female writers problematize and protagonize the dichotomy of mind and body, constructing the body as situation or process rather than as object. Under Construction is the first sustained study of its kind. It provides original and compelling readings of Spanish novels, and it grounds theory in the changing specificities of literary movements, generational rivalries, and historical turmoil.

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