

When the novel *La saga/fuga de J.B.* (*The Saga/Fugue of J.B.*) came out in 1972, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (1910-1999) had a long and extensive literary career behind him, but one which was marked by failures and the indifference of readers and critics. This novel, however, caused a sensation and was highlighted as Spain's answer to the Latin American "boom", as a proof that resourcefulness and unfettered imagination have their place in the Old World too...

So although this was the author's magnum opus, which has naturally been the subject of a wide variety of studies and analyses, I think it has not been completely exhausted as a theme.

In my work I attempt to perceive it not as a unique work of artistic creation by the author but also as the logical outcome of previous writing – it is this perception that I find lacking in the literature available on the novel and its author. For *La Saga/fuga de J.B.* contains constants in it which appear in a different form in Torrente Ballester's work from 1943, when he made his debut as a novelist with his book *Javier Mario. Historia de una conversión/Javier Mario*. The story of a conversion.

And it also represents not only the result of many years of practical experience in writing novels but also the product of deep theoretical reflection on the genre. Torrente combines in himself two roles – novelist and also literary theoretician and critic; this combination can be seen as mutually very enriching. Gonzalo Torrente Ballester is a writer who in theory and also in practice asserts the right to enjoyment of story-telling, to a smile on the face of the author, of his characters and of his readers. He conceived literary creation as an activity of importance and responsibility, in which the writer is entrusted with the task of creator of new worlds; but he also never ceased to emphasise that it is a ludic activity, that literature is play...