

BOOK REVIEWS

Jordan, B. (ed.) (2002). *Spanish Culture and Society: The Essential Glossary*. London: Arnold. 255 pages

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This book is the second in Arnold's 'The Essential Glossary' series (the first was on French culture and society) and is a worthwhile addition to Arnold's list of publications about contemporary Spain and Spanish, a list that includes John Butt and Carmen Benjamin's *A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish* and Christopher J. Ross's *Contemporary Spain: A Handbook*. Future titles in the series cover subjects as diverse as German culture and society, Francophone studies, Romanticism, and sexuality and will be worth keeping an eye out for.

In the 'Preface', *Spanish Culture and Society: The Essential Glossary* is presented as a response to the 'growing desire to learn more about Spain' that seeks to go beyond the media's stereotyped portrayals in order to 'discover how the people and the society actually tick'. To achieve its aim, the book provides 'relevant and concise information on a wide range of topics' as well as 'guidance for further study' (p.vii). The topics chosen almost entirely focus on the period between the end of the Civil War in 1939 and the present, with an emphasis on Spanish culture and society since the death of Franco in 1975. The range of topics the book deals with is as broad as its title suggests and includes entries on seventeen areas of Spanish society and culture: architecture; cinema; cultural life; education; fashion and design; language and nationhood; leisure, consumption and food; literature; media and communications; music and dance; political life; religion; social issues; sport; trade, commerce and industry; visual and performing arts; and writers and intellectuals. The book has two types of entry: entries on more important figures or issues occupy between half a page and a page, while less significant individuals or topics are introduced in entries of up to half a page. The entries are arranged in alphabetical order and are frequently followed by references to other headings in the glossary. This means that the book can be read either alphabetically as a reference dictionary or by following the pathway outlined by the cross-references. The book is rounded off by a lengthy bibliography of further reading that provides interested readers ample opportunity to follow up in more detail topics and figures of particular interest to them. The vast majority of the texts in the bibliography are in English, with the remainder generally in Spanish.

The fact that this glossary brings together so much information in one place – it contains approximately 450 entries – and that it is available in both paperback and hardback means that there is little doubt that it will be a very useful reference work for

the undergraduate humanities and social sciences students for whom it has primarily been designed. However, for the same reasons, it will also hopefully prove popular with a wider audience. Indeed, its coverage is broad enough that there is something of interest in it for anyone who cares to look.

Given that the book is aimed explicitly at a general audience and assumes a non-specialist's knowledge of Spanish society and culture, its content could have been made more accessible. The use of acronyms in the list of thematic categories and entries, while perhaps desirable as a means of saving space, requires a prior knowledge of Spain that a general readership is unlikely to possess. Examples would be CAP and LOGSE under 'Education', GAL under 'Political Life', and CEOE in 'Trade, Commerce and Industry'. Also in this connection, English translations or explanations of Spanish terms are used inconsistently. For example, ESO is explained as 'secondary education' and 'reconversión industrial' as 'industrial restructuring' but 'el tejeraço' and 'lehendakari' are left unexplained.

At times, the distribution of entries under categories is puzzling and could have been more consistent and systematic. For example, 'theatre' appears under 'Cultural Life' but not under 'Literature' nor under 'Visual and Performing Arts', while 'feminism', 'penal code' and 'pornography' are considered aspects of literature, politics and cultural life respectively but none is included in the list of social issues. Perhaps more importantly, Spain's governing party, the Partido Popular, has been omitted altogether from the category of 'Political Life' even though it has own entry in the body of the book. Two final areas that would have benefited from closer attention are the bibliography, which contains numerous unexplained abbreviations, and the Preface's opening paragraph, which is addressed overwhelmingly to a British audience despite the publisher's desire to promote the book in North America and Australia. The glossary's effectiveness and appeal can only be enhanced by consideration of these issues in subsequent editions.

Despite these editorial shortcomings, this is a book to be welcomed; it is interesting, varied and, above all, useful and fulfils its stated aims. For all these reasons, it deserves to become part of institutional collections and reading lists as well as to find a home on the bookshelves of specialist and general readers alike.